

RELIGIOUS VIEWS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON CLEAN WATER LAWS

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Abstract

Religious beliefs and documents have endorsed over the years the idea of morality towards the environment. These religious beliefs have never been part of the environment legislation. Should we understand, accept and publicly discuss the manner through which religious values could become part of decisions regarding the environment it is possible that those rules to benefit from extensive public support, thus providing a more efficient environment protection.

This article will analyze the main religions of the world in order to discover how religious beliefs regarding the human/environment interaction influence environment laws.

Key Words: *environment, religious beliefs, clean water laws, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism.*

JEL Classification: [K32]

1. Introduction

Religion can save the ecology of our planet. Religious values are the fundamental values for many people on this planet and we must talk about them in order to achieve the necessary ethical changes for saving the planet. The legislation enforced to prevent ecological degradation must be created and implemented with the acknowledgment that religious values and traditional analysis cost-benefit (Fisher-Ogden & Saxer, 2006) have an important part facing scientific uncertainties.

Scientific uncertainty is depicted in many of the decisions regarding the environment. Choices must be made with no knowledge of the future consequences. Religious values and others must be considered for an open and honest debate.

Deep fears for the environment degradation in our modern world have not been debated by the public until they were made public by influential writers such as Aldo Leopold, John Muir, Rachel Carson in the 60's resulting in a later flourishing of the environmental legislation in the 70's.

Environmental ethics domain tries to define and incorporate the ethical values within human response to the environmental issues. Aldo Leopold's earth ethics, as expressed in "*A Sand County Almanac*", might be the most famous and known vision on the environment ethics. Quoting Leopold, the earth ethics "reflects the existence of an ecological conscience and this, in turn, reflects the principle of the

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individual liability for the health of the earth” (Aldo, 1987) briefly, the earth ethics changes the role of the homo-sapiens from conqueror of the earth to a simple member and a citizen. This implies respect for the other members and for the community. As Professor Freyfogle pointed out, “Leopold provoked the reader, the individual to develop an ethical attitude for the earth”.

Ever since the beginning of our existence, men have tried to understand their relation with earth and nature. This continuous research gave birth to theological and mythological interpretations as well as religious awakenings while we tried to shape this new relation human, earth, nature. Religious and secular laws defined this relationship differently. With no lucid and universally acceptable understanding of the relation between humans, nature and environment, we can't hope to have global policies for protecting the environment that prevent the growing degradation of the environment and the loss of natural resources. (Bejan, 2013)

The definition of the property is the key to understanding the way a certain culture perceives the relation between humans and land (Freyfogle, 1995). The notions of property and possession are governing legal relations as they were ordered and defining the relation of humans with nature is fundamental in drawing an efficient environmental legislation. (Lazar, 2016)

“Property” is not a contextual concept – it is a built social concept with all the flux and the changes it entails. There's a variety of theories regarding property. A usual, legal understanding of property is that property is the relation among people and things. This definition emphasizes the anthropocentric view on property and it focuses on the way people interact in relation to a resource, instead of the way they interact with the resource itself. *“Western people in particular tend to regard the environment as being separated from them and they regard their moral and ethical responsibilities mainly from the perspective of their relationship with other people”*.

New definitions of property were suggested by different scientists, but the majority are still connected to an anthropocentric view. Professor Margaret Radin proposed a theory for property that regards property as something personal and connects possession to involvement of the liberal thinking of the central ideology, particularly with notions of freedom and individualism.

Our understanding of the relation among property and environment is that “property regards things we can control” while the word environment in common language often regards something beyond someone's control and something that is “given”.

In order to bring this “given” to a conscious level but especially in order to preserve it, states understand their duty to protect it by means of laws imposed on the community's members. (Ghencea, 2013)

One's interest is an important side of property but “property's rhetoric asks for attention, care and maintenance” by incorporating the norms of the communities and the spiritual values in our understanding of the property and our relation with

nature, we can overcome to some extent the anthropocentric ethics and even believe that “the resources of common goods are not for granted or for our pleasure”.

Regarding as a golden rule of the ethics “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”, we can establish a better relation with the environment.

Ethics problems concerning nature, deeply rooted or spiritual allow us to turn towards communities’ rules to prevent degrading the fundamental rights, such as the right to clean water.

2. Religious Views and their Influence on the Legislation Regarding Water

Water is the genesis for all things and the purifying element of the humankind. After Creation of the world by God, water was pure but man’s fall into sin brought along gradual degradation of this element.

Religion offers a special statute for the water, a significant importance because it helped the conceiving of the humankind. It offers the possibility for the man to get rid of the sin through baptism (symbol of the cleansing of the sin) and in the same time, water is the natural element that God used to clean the earth of hatred and violence during Noah’s days.

Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism regards water as a purifying element with the role of “cleaning” the place and the man. The majority of the world religions use water to baptize, similar to the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ and Islam and Judaism use water to clean the body after death. Within the Judaic tradition rain water is kept in all synagogues through a pipe-system that collects the water in a basin to use it for later purification rituals.

Religious beliefs and texts supported the morality of the environment, but these religious views have not been necessarily incorporated in environmental laws. If we understand and discuss publicly the ways for the religious values to be incorporated in making decisions regarding the environment, then these regulations will have better support and involvement from the society, so necessary for protecting the environment.

It is necessary to explore the way the religious context informed environmental legislation and to examine the religious dogma and the cultural adaptations of these major religions in order to understand the connections between the environmental legislation and religion. Each religion dates for hundreds of years and is founded on sacred texts. The modern adaptations of these texts have been influenced by geographical and cultural particularities of the followers. Sometimes these texts are prescriptive tending to lead the followers; in other cases the texts are more descriptive on the followers’ previous approaches. Many of the followers are worried by the menace that the economic development poses to the environment.

2.1. Buddhism

Buddhism followers are found mainly in Asia. Some countries declare Buddhism the state official religion. This religion regards natural resources as part

of the whole life on earth and worships nature the same as different deities. For example, state of Bhutan forbade “hunting, fishing or violation of any form of life”. (Lhundup, 2002)

The sacred text of Buddhism set these concepts in slightly different terms. These sacred texts developed during 2500 years of Buddhism in different places and by different prophets. Certain sections of the Buddhist teachings are educational in understanding Buddhism views on environment.

These teachings condemn cutting the trees and polluting the waters. They come from an agrarian society, but they are used by modern Buddhists for the current ecological issues. “For many Buddhists compassion is about understanding the fact that all forms of life are interconnected”. Some Buddhist countries relied on these ethical principles when dealing with their own environmental issues.

Buddhist belief provides a frame for the environmental legislation that looks for balance. It treasures inherently all living creatures and the sustaining ecosystem. The challenge for the Buddhist nations is to find a balance between economic development, religious dogma and environmental standards enforcement.

2.2. *Hinduism*

Hindu religion is associated with India and with the Indians who immigrated in other countries and kept their religious beliefs. While Hinduism is not India’s official religion, 82% of the population is Hindu. Natural resources are blended with gods and goddesses in the Hindu belief. For example, god Ap is associated with water and Prthivi is associated with earth.

The concepts of reincarnation and karma affect directly the Hindu views on environment and the humankind place in the world. Starting with the sacred Hindu texts, these two concepts lead to encouraging the life that does not pollute the world.

Reincarnation is the rebirth of the soul in another life after it died in the former life. This reincarnation can be higher or lower on the animal totem given the type of life that the soul lived. (Whalen, 1993)

If the soul performed bad deeds, then it will go down several levels. The supreme purpose of life is obtaining a purified mind that shows the unity with the divinity or the supreme god, Brahman.

Building on these notions of reincarnation and karma, the environmental pollution is condemned by Hinduism as an offence to gods.

The water of the sacred river Ganges must not be polluted according to these sacred texts. Performing good deeds for Ganges’s cleanliness are suggested. Unfortunately, these religious commands didn’t prevent Ganges’s pollution and religious belief that throwing the dead people’s ashes in the river will take them to heaven might have contributed to this pollution.

Purity of the water is important in Hinduism and is often praised in hymns that regard rivers as deities. The Hindu deities can be upset because of the pollution and answer by destroying the humankind by use of actions as tsunamis. India, as a

Hindu country, relied on these ethical principles in dealing with its own challenges to protect the environment.

India is a country with over one billion inhabitants in the Indian subcontinent from Asia. There is a powerful involvement concerning the environmental preservation, expressed in legislation, through court decisions protecting the environment. Many of these decisions come from combining Hindu concepts such as compassion for nature with the Western views on sustainable development. The Indian Supreme Court consolidated its decisions by stipulating them in the Indian Constitution: “The right to life is a fundamental right according to article 21 of the Constitution and it regards the right to unpolluted air and water for a happy life. If something endangers this quality of life, a citizen has the right to appeal to article 32 of the Constitution to remove the pollution of the water or the air that might endanger the quality of life.”

However, Hindu belief, dharma, conflicts with implementing the court decisions since it focuses more on internal monitoring of the actions than on external constraints.

The concept of dharma was a major factor in a 1997 study that unveiled “serious problems in the formal system of law enforcement”. The study also discovered that the inspections didn’t have a clear impact on polluting emissions and they were inefficient in changing the polluting behaviors. Apparently the notion of internal obedience or dharma is not observed by the companies polluting the waters in India; they only respond to external constraints.

2.3. Islam

Islam followers, known as Muslims, are the majority in the Middle East countries. In some countries Islam is the official religion. (The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2004)

Within Islam, humankind is regarded as mastering or trusting the environment. Egypt, for example, founds all its environmental legislation on the Islam principle of Sharia from the Koran.

One of the main beliefs in Islam is the concept of stewardship. Starting with the idea that God created the Earth, Koran alleges that Allah takes care of the humankind placing everything in peoples’ service. (Denny, 1998)

The tsunami in December 2004 was regarded by some Muslims as a test of human’s beliefs in the affected countries. The concept of stewardship is so much more enforced by the idea of balance and order found in the Koran. Humankind must follow Allah to maintain the order “Do not bring any disorder on Earth after order was established”. (Quran)

With this meaning of initial order and stewardship, the divinity in Islam requires the humankind to care for the Earth and to preserve the environment.

2.4. The Judeo Christian views

The most spread religion is Christianity, centered in the United States, Europe, sub-Saharan Africa. For some countries, Judeo Christianity was the foundation for certain laws and policies.

By the end of the 60's and beginning 70's along with the increase of environmentalism, accusations have been made that "currently, at least in the Western part, a conclusion can be drawn that nature is dominated by man and this attitude derives from religious traditions originating in Judaism and continuing in Christianity". (Stone 2007)

Thus, it is essential to decipher the main message regarding the relationship between humankind and nature in light of Judeo-Christian beliefs.

The Judeo-Christian tradition began when Judaism was combined with Christian principles pulled out from the Judaic belief and interpreted by Jesus Christ.

God is the One creating them and has the authority over waters and water and earth possess an inherent kindness. God gives the waters and the earth to humankind to have and rule. These two verbs caused many debates in the last 2000 years. The Jew verbs in the text are *rada and kabas*. Rada is translated as "to have" as the head of a family "has" the slaves or a king the enemies conquered. Kabas is translated using the idea of obedience, enslavement, usually in a military circumstance. (Hiebert, 2000)

The first 1700 years of Christianity prove attention for the environment and the relation man-nature. The Enlightenment brought along the development of the anthropocentric point of view. From Professor White accusations, many Christians replied with looking for a theological foundation helping in regarding humanity as part of the Creation and not separated from the earth. Some authors chose extracts from Job and the Psalms to prove the sacred value of the nature; since it was created by God, people should regard it as sacred.

The Eastern Orthodox cults evoke similar views. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew sponsored the yearly symposium, named "Religion, Science and Environment". In June 2003, his discourse evoked the vision of Orthodoxy on waters, stating "we are united by water that represents 70% of our body and 70% of the Earth' surface. The whole life depends on its nurturing force". (Declaration by His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the Eve of World Oceans Day) The Patriarch Bartholomew declared that "we share the miracle of life with the whole community of living creatures", humankind is not separated from other life forms in their need for fresh water.

Conclusions

Indian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jews, Christian's views regarding water are very similar. All of them share the same religious ethics regarding preservation of the nature as they found it on this Earth even when the followers must use these resources, out of necessity. Muslims' stewardship means also that they try to preserve the quality of the water for the future generations. Hindu see water as a

force bringing life into the world. Regardless of the religious background of a country's citizens, there is a spiritual popular support for a better preservation of the quality of the water. In India, the legislator and the personnel enforcing the laws should improve the implementation of the environmental legislation.

The necessary ethics is wide enough to comprise a variety of points of view. Christopher Stone suggested that there is enough room for a pluralist approach where the ethics of ecology might have different points of view with various moral values from other non-ecological areas. Even if several ethic systems might exist within a community, most of the time religious and secular approach of the environmentalism draw the same conclusions: obtaining the best possible quality of the water and in the same time serving people's needs. When a community shares the same values for preserving the water, offenders are easy to identify and stop and the environmentalist volunteering is frequent. Moreover, the ones refusing to observe the rules are banished by the ones whose values, religious or secular, require respect for the nature.

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