Religion and the Science of Environment and Ecology
— How They Were Linked Together?

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Readers of Ishani are familiar with the author of this article who had authored a highly valuable booklet on “Management of India’s Natural Resources”. He has been our esteemed well wisher and we have been benefited by his help of different kinds. In the present article he deals with the subject of, “Religion and Science of Environment and Ecology”.

Among other things Dr P. Basak has also been an outstanding teacher for many years. He has an interesting style of presentation and he deals with the subject in a manner that makes it easy for anyone to understand. In this article too he has dealt with a very important and a serious subject. Dr Basak has identified different questions that generally occur to most of the people on this question of science and religion. He has come out with very interesting and enlightening definitions of the words science and religion. He also has found his answers and he shares them with us. I am sure all our readers will be greatly benefited by this article that is presented in a unique manner.

In this note, the author would like to share his views with the readers on the following main points:

1. God, Science & Religion - the way we look at it
2. What the words “RELIGION” and “SCIENCE” stand for
3. God’s Relationship to the World - The ways in which God is in touch with the world
4. God and His Link Up with Nature in various Scriptures
6. Hindu world view with reference to environment & ecology
7. St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) - the first Christian Eco-Spiritualist
8. What St. Francis Assisi preached and practiced
9. Concluding remarks
10. Science, Environment & Religion - the interconnectivity

1: GOD, Science & Religion - the way
we look at it

As per our belief, God has authored two things and they are

Nature around us (The Earth and the Land, water, greeneries, biological and botanical
species, including human beings who live on the earth)
Our original religious scriptures (The Bible, Koran, Veda, Upanishad, Gita, etc.)

God being the author of both, there is always necessary agreement between them and there are no
controversies between them.

Now the questions are:
Who interprets Nature? and
Who interprets the Scriptures?

Obviously the answer is both of them are interpreted by Human Beings. Nature is interpreted by
scientists and scriptures are interpreted by clergies (Sadhus, Fathers and Saints). Because
different sets of Human beings are involved in those interpretations, there is always possibility of
conflict.

The potential conflicts and the necessary agreements, as explained above is further depicted in
the picture on Page 3 (Fig.1).

2: What the words “RELIGION”
and “SCIENCE” stand for?

Each letter of the word Religion stands for certain values and they are:
R stands for Respect for humanity, environment & the cosmos; “R” also stands for
Respect for alternative view points
E stands for Empowerment for self and oppressed - a continuous affair
L stands for Love for every specie and every object that God created
I stands for In-depth knowledge of scriptures
G stands for God’s creations - respect, nurture and love them
I stands for Inner strength - pray for it
O stands for Over consumption, overuse and over possession - things to avoid and
lead a simple life
N stands for No to
Addictions/Arrogance/Anger/Anxiety,
Lies and deceptions, Religious fundamentalism,
Luxurious life style and
Sexual relations beyond the framework of marriage

Each letter of the word “SCIENCE” stands for certain values and they are:
S stands for Search for truth/new objects/ideas/clues/paths/alternatives
C stands for Concentrate on essentials/Care for the details and accuracies
I stands for Innovate and get better insights
E stands for Evolve methodologies, protocols and prescriptions
N stands for Nature - Observe it and Respect it, Learn from it & interpret it scientifically
C stands for Creativity and cool head are the two hallmarks of science
E stands for Ensure transparency in the investigation and reporting

3: God’s Relationship to the World-
The
ways in which God is in touch with the world

God is in touch with the universe through three creative processes and they are Creation,
Revelation and Incarnation

GOD created the Universe and the world
GOD affects human history through **Revelation**

GOD intervenes in human history through the **Incarnation**

The above three processes are pictorially further explained in Fig.2 (Page 3).

**Religion and the Science of Environment and Ecology**

- How they were linked together?

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**Fig.1**: Potential conflicts and the necessary agreements between Science & Religion

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**Fig.2**: The ways God remains in touch with us

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**Fig.3**: St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) – the first Christian Eco-Spiritualist
4: God and His Link up with Nature in Various Scriptures

Nature displays the attributes of God and the attributes are **glory, beauty, power, extravagance, creativity, faithfulness, intelligence, immensity, intricacy...**

Worship is our most fundamental faith response to God’s creation

Nature proclaims God’s attributes in universal language

Scriptures teach us these attributes, but Nature shows their amazing extent

Science reveals parts of Nature that we cannot detect with our unaided senses


"God saw everything that he had made and behold it, was very good." (Genesis 1:31)

"The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein." (Psalm 24:1)

"I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination." (Jeremiah 2:7-8)

"The land mourns and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air, and even the fish of the sea are taken away." (Hosea 4:3)

"... the religious life consists of the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto" (Wm. James, 1902)

6: Hindu world view with reference to environment & ecology

Hinduism believes in the all-encompassing sovereignty of the divine, manifesting itself in a graded scale of evolution.

The human race, though at the top of the evolutionary pyramid at present, is not seen as something apart from the earth and its multitudinous life forms.

The Divine (God) is not exterior to creation, but expresses itself through natural phenomena. Not only in the Vedas, but in later scriptures, such as the Upanishads, the Puranas and subsequent texts, the Hindu viewpoint on nature has been clearly enunciated.

It is permeated by a reverence for life, and an awareness that the great forces of nature -

The earth, the sky, the air, the water and fire — as well as various orders of life including plants and trees, forests and animals, are all bound to each other within the great rhythms of nature.

According to the Vaishnava tradition of Hinduism,

The evolution of life on this planet is symbolized by a series of divine incarnations beginning with the fish, moving through amphibious forms and mammals, and then onto human incarnations.

This view clearly holds that

man did not spring fully formed to dominate the lesser life-forms, but rather evolved out of these forms himself, and is, therefore, integrally linked to the whole of creation.

7: St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) - the first Christian Eco-Spiritualist

The recognition of Franciscan vision of solidarity and brotherhood with all beings and with all creations of God came very late. This is described in the Pope's document "Inter Sanctos" proclaiming Saint Francis of Assisi "The Heavenly Patron of Ecologists".
8: What St. Francis of Assisi preached and practiced?

Treat all created things with love and respect.

The Earth was entrusted to you as a garden: manage it with wisdom.

Take care of human beings, animals, plants, water and air, in order for the Earth not to be depleted.

Use things with self-restraint: wastefulness has no future.

When you cut a tree down, leave at least one shoot in order for the life not to be broken.

**The central theme of Christianity is unconditional love and service to the poor**

Can we love a poor (without undergoing the pangs of poverty) and provide effective service to the poor? That explains why St. Francis of Assisi chose frugal living and adopted poverty - a central focus point.

Two central points of his life were

- Love all creations of God and not only human beings
- Live the way a poor lives and do not consume more than what one needs - avoid over consumption by all means

It is extremely pleasant to note that almost all religions and faiths have a common stand on Environment & Ecology - only the language and emphasis varies.

9: Science, Environment & Religion - the interconnectivity

**Einstein said** "Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind."

**What makes Religion "Religion"?**

*Re-ligo* - to tie together, reconnect (think of "ligament")

Classically *Religio* = respect or awe for the sacred; proper observance of ceremony (cult = "care" for the deities); conscientiousness

By extension, then, "religion" = tying one’s life together (*hub of a wheel; not a spoke*)

10: Concluding remarks

Science, Environment & Religion are in perfect harmony

Conflict arises only under two circumstances and they are either -

Wrong interpretation of Nature (one of the creation of God)

OR

Wrong interpretation of Scriptures (another creation of God)

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