Western religious beliefs and environment: Personal reflections on the religion and environment

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Western Religious Beliefs and Environment: Personal Reflections on the Religion and Environment

by

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presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

The University of Montana

2000

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5-26-2000
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Western Religious Beliefs and Environment: Personal Reflections on the Religion and Environment (50 pages)

Director: Tom Roy

One of the social problems today is the difference between secular and religious beliefs. I grew up in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia. Under the influence of the Soviet Union, religion was not dominant of social life, although people were allowed to go to church. Therefore, I experienced little discrimination between Christianity, Islam and Judaism, but knew little about the dogmas of these religions. I lived my personal ethics established by my family.

After coming to the United States I studied these and other religions and for the first time thought about how religious laws, moral principles, politics and social organization do not protect our earth's limited resources. Attainment of natural riches seems to be the supreme object and the criteria of human success.

The following work reflects my personal religious experience and my awareness of the need for human kind to conserve our environment. I feel a renewed morality and practice, led by religion are needed if we are to sustain all life on the earth.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank a number of people who have contributed in the completion of this work. Many people have influenced my thinking about environment and religion. Many of them "opened the doors" for me to be able to "enter" myself.

I want to thank deeply my parents for giving me a rich understanding of human relationship, non-dogmatic religion, and love to nature, for

My most important debt of appreciation is to Dolores Cederberg. She has provided a great support and encouragement during two years of my graduate school, which would be much harder for me without her help. She opened "the doors" in a different way and enriched my personality. She helped me to better understand American culture and people.

I would like to thank:

Tom Roy for introducing social issues and their relation to environmental problems, for being understanding, supportive and inspiring during these last two years.

Paul Dietrich and Fred Allendorf for their expertise and help, and for introducing me to new aspects of my own religion as well as Buddhism.

I also thank the Environmental Studies faculty, Len Broberg and Vicki Watson in particular, people who agreed to be interviewed for my research, and all
other people who had influence in life in Missoula and in Burlington, VT, by making me think about human behavior, and people’s attitudes toward environment and religion, and the interconnection of all three.

Special thanks to Effie Koehn for her help in my adjustment to the complexities of a new culture.

Mainly I am indebted to the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation) and the University of Montana for making my educational dream possible.
Introduction

Since my childhood I have always been drawn to the environment: animals, plants, mountains, rivers, and people. They all were an essential part of my life. I cared for both nature and people.

When I was a child nature for me was represented by my small garden, where I adored the plants and trees, people – by my family and friends, whom I loved. Later, love and concern grew to the environment and people of my home-country. As I matured I gained the concept that nature that matters to me is everywhere and people I care for are people in the whole world. I found that this understanding is a life long process of discovery and learning.

Two years ago I had a great opportunity to come to the United States – the country with an enormous variety of people with different ethnic, racial, religious background, and the same variety of geology, climate, and plants and animals. In America, I also realized for the first time the interconnection and equal importance of both nature and people in this world. My affection for people and nature grew from regional to the global level. I understood what the goal of my life would be and that I as an environmental activist must do to make my contribution to this world...a world that today has more problems* than ever to solve.

*These problems include environmental ones, such as pollution and destruction of the nature, as well as social ones, such as wars, discrimination, that in turn effect the environment people live in.
I cannot say which is the most important problem, people or nature. Both involve human activities - the ecological destruction- as well as many social issues. Humanity has been and continues to be engaged in numerous wars in which not only the people suffer, but also all aspects of the environment are being ruined or destroyed. The development of the military technology made this destruction faster and deeper.

My stay in the United States gave me a different prospective on the role of social issues in the damage that is done to the environment. I learnt that even those issues that seem to be purely human ones have a cumulative effect on the environment as a whole. One of these issues I became involved in is religion and its influence on human’s lives.

The issue of the role of the religion in human activities and the destruction of the environment will be addressed in this work. Since I grew up among people who represent three major western religions, the research I did is on Judaism, Christianity and Islam and their relation to the environment. The goal of this work was to explore and understand the beliefs and attitudes of these religions. Considered a Christian myself, I devoted most of this work to my experience of being a Christian and the relation of my religious experience to my attitudes towards nature, as well as the lack of coherence I see between theory and practice.
Part I

Seven years ago in my last year at high school, I made a decision to have a professional career that is related to the natural environment. At the university back home in the Republic of Georgia I first encountered English word *environment*. It was just one word that included many different concepts: people, animals, plants, earth and other aspects of the nature. This word opened a new prospect of the world for me. Before the knowledge of this concept, everything, for me and probably for other people in my country, was separate. Some people had a positive relationship with the environment, just because they had natural passion to the nature. Others did not, because of ignorance or unawareness of the needs for the protection of our planet.

The concept of the word *environment* changed my perception and gave me a new insight into the relationship of humans' roles and their responsibility to the earth. As I became more aware of this aspect, it increased my interest in all issues related to the natural world. The issue that I became involved in the most was the issue of religion in relation to the environment.

Before coming to the United States my knowledge about religion was not very profound. Here I had an opportunity to learn more about religion, not just my own, but also others. Since I have never related my religion to my attitudes towards the environment, I began to question myself about my real beliefs, as people have
Human beings are distinctive from other creatures because of our ability to ask questions. Since the time humans asked the first question there was no end to their curiosity, which continues today. We want to know why, when, how and very often are not satisfied by simple and incomplete answers. A long time ago people wanted to know: Why the wind blows? Why is it raining? Why the earth is shaking? Why..? Why..? Why..? Not being able to explain the reason for all these natural events, people referred to spirits and their power. They started to worship these spirits in some cases because of fear (e.g. fearing the earthquake, hurricane, flood, or volcano), in other cases to thank good Spirits and ask for more favors (e.g. good weather, or rain). Soon religion started to dominate people’s lives, as it was the only way people could explain everything unreachable through their knowledge and understanding.

Historically, religion played an important role in the formation of society’s values and beliefs, in the politics and economy of countries. Even though many questions related to religion are still arguable and unanswered, I did this research to understand the role of religion in our current need to protect the earth and to provide a healthy environment to future generations.

To start the discussion of religion, I would like to use the words of Jeseph Gaer, written in the beginning of the last century:
"There are some people who believe that the word “religion” comes from a word in an ancient language meaning Tree. And religions are, in many ways, like trees.

Like trees, religions begin with a seed. Some do not develop at all. Some die young. And some grow into towering heights with many flourishing branches. Some religions are already fully-grown when others are just beginning to sprout. But all religions are related to each other."
Western Religious Beliefs and Environment

The three leading religions of the western world are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Despite their different cultures they all have one thing in common – belief in one God. Both Christianity and Islam were developed from Judaism and use Hebrew Scriptures as a part of their Bible.

Judaism

To pray is to make notice of the wonder, to regain a sense of the mystery that animates all beings, the divine margin in all attainments.

– Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Quest for God

Judaism – is the oldest religion of the western world that is practiced today. It is the first religion to teach monotheism – belief in one God. Judaism is based on the laws and teachings of the Torah and Talmud. Hebrew people have practiced it for thousands of years through good and hard times. Its members have been severely persecuted by both the Christian and the Muslim followers, but it is still
alive and continues to be transferred from one generation to another, by keeping its traditions, beliefs and values.

The founder of Judaism was Abraham, the son of the idol maker. The story of Abraham dates back to the ninth century BC and it represented a new (for those times) concept of one God. Abraham changed the beliefs and religious traditions of his ancestors. A member of the family of idol makers, Abraham realized one day that "idols should not be worshiped." To answer his father’s question about "whom they should worship?", Abraham said:

"Worship the god that made the sun, and the moon, and the stars; worship the god that brings each season in season, and that gives us rain, and that makes the fields rich with pasture, and the sheep heavy with lambs."

Thus, Abraham, the idol breaker, became a father of a group of people united by the same belief – belief in one God, and no others. The words that are faithfully repeated by the Jew in every prayer are: "Shema Yisroel Adonoi Elohenu Adonoi Echod" that means "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

Unlike other religions of those times, the followers of Abraham did not have any image to worship. They believed in God and his creation of the world, and his power over human beings. After that, people, who followed Abraham, were
always distinct from the people they lived among, even though they were not much
different in their speech and appearance.

Judaism considers Abraham not only the founder of its religion, but also the
founder of the Jewish people. First, the Torah refers to *Abram*, which in Hebrew
means father of one people, and then it shifts to *Abraham*, which means father of
many people.⁷

The Hebrew Bible starts from the creation of the world. God created an
earth, plants and animals. This sequence shows the important role of the nature in
the creation of the world. Only after creating the earth, God created Adam – an
earth being (*adamah* means ‘earth’ and thus, Adam can be translated from Hebrew
as ‘the earthly one’⁸). Then he took a side from Adam and created another human.
And there were man and woman. The woman was called Hava [or Eve], ‘which
means mother of all living things’. These ‘earth beings’ God created in his own
image⁹, therefore he wanted all people to be treated with respect and dignity. God
also requires good behavior of his people: “What does the Lord require of thee,
only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.”¹⁰ The first
interest of Jewish religion is ethical behavior in the world.

One of the religious ethics in Judaism is that Jews are tolerant of other
religions and do not convert, though do not forbid conversion to those who are
willing to become the part of their Hebrew religion.
"Whatever God created had a value."11 God created man not only for stewardship of the creatures, but also to learn from them. As Louis Gizberg points out in his book "Legends of the Bible" ‘all things praise the Lord’12 and we can learn from all things, from small to bigger animals, from wild to domestic ones. For example, we can learn from ants to respect other’s property. We also can be forgiving: ‘If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink.’13

The Hebrew Bible from the very beginning involves nature in its context. The story of creation of the world and the first human being involves the nature as equal to God. The Torah teaches that “the kingdom that matters is not in heaven, but the one we find ourselves in now: sustaining life, sanctifying life, in the here and the now of home and family, community and society.”14

Further, the essential aspect of Nature is present throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. It can be found in the psalms and other parts of the Torah. The Famous Song of Songs is the poem based on the comparison of love to the nature, plants, animals.

It is easy to find factors that played an important role in the attitudes of Jewish people towards the environment by reviewing their history. [As with many other nations] from the very beginning the Israeli people were very closely related to the earth. Jews were agricultural people; like most people they depended on the
land as the source of their food. There was respect and love for the earth. The Sabbatical year was for letting the land to rest. Rabbi Winkler emphasized it: “For the protection of their land every seventh year the earth was allowed to rest, just as they [Jews] rested at their Sabbath day.”

Many Jewish holidays are connected with the change of seasons. The perception that the land is God’s property, led to the idea of sharing it with all children of God, no matter what their economic position was.15

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest...but you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Eternal am your God.”16

The people of those times also developed the principle of nondestroying: do not cut down trees for any reason, do not pollute waters or burn crops, in other words avoid making harm to the environment.17

The awareness of the environment is evident in the works of many Jewish Rabbis. For example, the words of Rabbi Shimon Bar “three things are of equal importance, earth, humans, and rain,”18 or “...occupy yourselves first with planting.”19

During the Middle Ages Jews became more urban. In some cases their land was taken away, in others they were forbidden to own the land. Economic pressure, business restrictions and other social factors, mostly because of the
prejudices towards Jews, forced Jews to move to the cities. Despite this many leaders of Jewish communities remained aware of the environment. There was continued awareness of their responsibility to plant trees in the communities.\(^{20}\)

In Jewish literature a number of texts are profound in their sensitivity to the needs of the nature: “it should not be believed that all beings exist for the sake of the existence of humanity.\(^{21}\) Daniel Swartz talking about God’s ownership and the terms of people’s lease says: “Harvest a tree? Not without planting another. Farm the land? Not without allowing it periodic rest and rejuvenation.”\(^{22}\)

The rules that many of the orthodox Jews follow, such as if you are a Jew, you can’t hunt, you eat fruits from the tree only on the third year it was planted, show the respectful relation of their religion to the environment.

Some critics see the opposite side in the Abrahamic faith. They argue that Judaism put the humans on the top of the creation hierarchy. People are above all other creatures. God gave them power and domination over the rest of the natural world. Some people believe that God created the world for humanity, to rule and control other parts of the creation.

Today many Jews, as was noted by Rabbi Winkler, do not know what their religion is and what the requirements are. It is partly because many Jews live in the different countries where they have to adjust to the local culture, but even in Israel, people do not show their awareness of the environment and continue exploiting the
environment, because “the country is still developing and as always “people’s needs come first.”

The words of Professor Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg might help to find a right solution for this misunderstanding of creation and the power and rights of humans:

“The question is not whether we should have such power -- we do -- but what we do with it.”

It is up to people whether they use their power for their own selfish reasons, or for the balance between humanity and nature.

**Christianity**

“*By this shall men know that you are my disciples -- if you have love for one another.*”

The Last Commandment of Jesus

As it was mentioned above, Christianity originated from Judaism. The story of the beginning of Christianity is a part of the history of the Israeli people.

One of the main sides of the Jewish religious attitudes was a strong belief in the coming of a Messiah. It was especially strong during the ruling of Augustus...
Caesar, almost a century before Palestine was conquered by the Roman Empire. It was also a time when the Jewish people had to suffer a lot, as they had never before. They lived with the hope that the Messiah was coming soon and would free them from their difficulties and then Israelis would have a new free life. The only problem was that nobody knew the time of the coming. Just as it happened with us last year with the Y2K belief, at that time there were people who believed that the Anointed One could come any time.

The story of the Messiah tells us about the birth of Jesus unto a virgin in a manger, where arrived three wise man, who were following the star and looking for the baby, who ‘has been born to become the King of Jews.’ They found the baby at the dwelling with his mother Mary and father Joseph and honored him with gifts.

Jesus as a child was very distinct from other children of his age. At the age of twelve Jesus makes his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. That pilgrimage is believed to have changed his life.

There is almost no information on the Jesus’ life from the age twelve until thirty, though today there are different versions about where and how he spent this part of his life. Some even think he might had traveled to India, some to England.

The figure that was one of the most famous figures contemporary to Jesus was John the Baptist, son of Zachariah and Elizabeth, and third cousin of Jesus. He
sanctified people immersing them into the waters of the Jordan and preached about the coming of Messiah. Jesus also went to meet with John and asked to baptize him. To his request John answered: “I have need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?” After this event the prophetic life of Jesus, which lasted only for the three years, began. He spent forty days in the desert where he prayed and discovered his mission.

After that he started to preach to people and share his teaching. He went to Jerusalem for annual Passover pilgrimage. There he rebelled against people in the Temple: money changers, cattle dealers, and merchants. He rose his voice: take these things hence! Make not God’s House a market place!” Soon Jesus became a very famous person, having friends and followers, as well as haters and enemies. He drew his teachings from his knowledge of the past, made miracles and introduced the concept of meekness, forgiveness and love.

At his sermon near Capernaum, which is also known as the Sermon on the Mount, he talked about the most important of his teachings:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

“Think not that I come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to
destroy but to fulfill.

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time: “Thou shall not kill; and
whosoever kill shall be in danger of the judgement’: But I say unto you, that
whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the
judgement.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, ‘An eye for eye, and a tooth for a tooth’:
But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy
right cheek, turn him the other also.”

These and other teachings were renewed for the people of his time in that
part of the world.

_While Judaism taught Law, Jesus taught Love._

At the age of thirty-three Jesus, according to the Bible, was betrayed by one
of his disciples and was crucified by the Roman government on the Mount
Golgotha. At the Passover supper before his death, which is known as Last Supper,
Jesus said his last commandment:

“A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another. As I have
loved you, so you shall love one another.”
On the third day after his death Jesus arose from dead and risen to heaven to rejoin with his Father. The concept of resurrection became the most important part of Christian beliefs.

The relationship of Christianity to the environment is argued by critics and has two sides: one -- that it is harmful for the environment and another, that it is responsible for the environment.

The followers of the former see Christianity as a very anthropocentric religion. It eliminated the spirit, common for paganism, from the rest of the nature and "made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."29 Biblical revolution and demystification of the nature later led to the scientific world view that "sees the nature as completely unsacred and passive."30 Lynn White puts his point this way: "Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen....Man shares, in great measure, God’s transcendence of nature. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia’s religions...not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends."31

The following passage from the Bible

Yet thou hast made him little less than God,

and dost crown him with glory and honor.
Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands;

thou hast put all things under his feet;

all sheep and oxen,

and also the beasts of the field,

the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea.”

is emphasized by critics to show that Bible depicts the world as it is created for humanity only.

Critics also say that such anthropocentric theology of Bible comes from the idea of Neoplatonism*, after the Christianity spread out in the Greco-Roman world. Later some Christian theologians influenced the religion with their interpretation of the nature. According to the theology of Origen, Thomas Aquinas, and then later Luther and Calvin nature is understood as ‘prison for the spirit’...subject to serve man’s needs, or as just a background for human salvation.33

Some critics, though see positive sides of the Bible towards the nature. Most of the passages of the Bible related to the respect of the environment come from the Old Testament:

*The philosopher Plotinus (205-70 CE) developed the thought of the hierarchical nature, which meant division of the nature between spiritual beings (humans) and non-spiritual (everything else). In this hierarchy humans are under the God and angels, but above all other beings.
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;

let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

let the field exult, and everything in it!

Than shall all the trees of the wood sing for joy

before the Lord, for he comes,

for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,

and the peoples with his truth. (Psalm 96:11-13)

In the Christianity spread by Paul and his school the law was considered not important and he emphasized just faith. Therefore, Law that put restriction on the cutting of fruit trees, allowing the land to rest during its seventh year, special painless ways of killing animals, along with circumcision and dietary restriction, were ignored by Christians in the Greco-Roman world and the rest of the Europe. Despite this in the later Christian world there were theologians, who showed their reverence for the nature. The best examples are such people, as Irenaeus, Augustine, and Francis of Assisi. They admired the beauty of creation, nourished by God. St. Francis of Assisi communicated with animals and even plants, and saw the intrinsic value in each of them individually.

Such interconnection can be also felt in the words of Eckhart: “When is a man in mere understanding? I answer, “When a man sees one thing separated from
another.” And when is a man above mere understanding? That I can tell you:

“When a man sees All in all, then a man stands beyond mere understanding.”

Islam

Religion is a candle inside a multicolored lantern. Everyone looks through a particular color, but the candle is always there.

-- Mohammed Naguib

Islam is another religion that takes its roots from Judaism and uses the Jewish Bible as a part of the Muslim Koran. It is the youngest of the great universal religions. Islam, one of the world’s largest religions, is principally concentrated in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Muslims of different countries are united by the faith of Islam.

Islam was founded in the AD 600's by the Prophet Muhammad*, who believed that he was sent to guide his people and to call them to worship one God, or Allah. The followers of Muhammad are called Muslims; that, in Arabic, means

* Muhammad was an Arab, born in Mecca about 570
one who submits (to God). Islam, therefore, in Arabic stands for submission.

One of the main characteristics of Islam that makes it closer to Judaism than Christianity, is that no idol or image is to be worshiped. When, in 630, Muhammad and his followers came back to Mecca and occupied the city, they destroyed all the idols in the Kaaba, the heathen temple. The whole area around was turned into a mosque (in Arabic means *a place of kneeling*).

Muhammad wrote the Koran (Arabic for recitation) during his lifetime. It also contains parts of the Old Testament, the Apocrypha and the Talmud. It contains many stories of prophets from Old Testament, as well as about Jesus from the New Testament, where Jesus is referred to as the *Word of God*.

There are number of the rituals prescribed by Muhammad that are called the Five Pillars of Islam:

1) Announcement of the one God, and thus, believe in “*la ilaha illa’llah; muhammad rasulu’llah*” – “There is no God, but Allah; Mohammed is the Messenger of Allah.”

2) One should pray five times a day, facing Mecca, no matter where one might be; and in the mosque on Fridays

3) Almsgiving, as an offering to Allah and devoutness

4) Fasting on Ramadan

5) Pilgrimage to Mecca
There are other moral and legal directives in Koran, such as dietary rules, rules for marriage and divorce, penalty for crimes, etc.

The ethics of Islam is founded on two main principles: human nature and religious and legal grounds. The relationship of an individual with the environment is guided by certain moral precepts. The earth plays an important role in the Qur'an. As the Prophet Muhammad said: “Act in your life as though you are living forever and act for the Hereafter as if you are dying tomorrow.”

In the Islamic world there are concepts that can be interpreted as rules for the protection of the nature. An example is the concept of *hima* that exists from the time of the Prophet Muhammad. *Hima* means protection of certain zones from grazing or other human activities. The ancient institution *hari'm* refers to a zone that may not be used for development and is protected by the government. It is very similar to what we call now National Parks.

Thus, Islam is a religion that shows awareness of environmental problems and shows tolerance and peace. For example, the following quote from Koran, speaks of the equality of all humans:

“O mankind! We created you from a single soul, male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honored of you in God's sight is the greatest of you in piety. God is All-Knowing, All-Aware.”(Qur'an 49:13)
The word ‘Islam’ itself in Arabic means peace - “peace with God, peace within oneself, and peace with the creations of God through submission to God and commitment to His guidance.

The same theory as in many other religions, and the same practice. The history of Islam, of Christianity and Judaism, is filled with wars. Muslim countries have conquered other countries, they have forced others to change their religion (for example, Georgia was conquered by Turkey numerous times, and people had to change their religion, children were kidnapped and raised in the spirit of the Muslim religion). This is again the example of the inconsistency between religious theology and religious practice.
Personal Reflections on Religion and Environment

Teachers open the door, but you enter yourself.

Chinese Proverb

In the following part of my work, I would like to share my own religious experience and my growing understanding of environmental issues. I will discuss my thoughts about Christianity, the religion, in the spirit of which I was raised.

Before I will share my religious experience, I would like to make a brief introduction about the changes religious belief underwent during the Soviet period and what role religion had to play in people's lives.

In the Republic of Georgia, where I grew up, during the Soviet era the churches were allowed to function, but they were completely separated from the state. Most of the time, religious teachings were apart from the daily lives of people. The understanding of morality, or code of ethics, came from the family, schools and society in whole and these were not directly related to the dogma of the church.

Starting in the 80's many people went to church, practiced the rituals of baptism, wedding ceremonies and more rarely funerals... but most people like
myself, had never read the Bible, and were unaware of the dogmas they must follow to be considered a Christian. This lack of the knowledge of the “demands” of the Bible was due to living in a Communist country, where religion was regarded as “the opium of the people.”

The history of the religion in the former USSR has many sad pages. After the Revolution in 1917, the persecution of the religion began. In the early stages among the most persecuted religions was Christianity, especially the Protestant minorities. In 1917 right after the Revolution, the Soviet government started to eliminate religious organizations. Many groups went underground trying to escape from governmental control. Lots of priests and religious followers were sent to labor camps, prisons or were executed.

In 1929 Iosif Stalin came to the power and the persecution of religion increased. In April 1929 the Law on Religious Associations was enacted. This new wave of the persecution coincided with the program of collective agriculture, which led to new arrests of priests and the closure of many churches. This started in 1930 and reached its height in 1937. This campaign led millions of people of all social, political and religious backgrounds to execution or in a best case to be sent to labor camps, as had been done after the Revolution. In 1937 the census for the first time included questions concerning people’s religious affiliation in the questionnaires. It resulted in the fact that over 56 per cent of the population
declared themselves as believers. The census was cancelled and this question never appeared again.38

In 1941 Stalin ordered to cease the persecution of churches. This was done to help him to win the Great Patriotic War. While Stalin’s government had to openly tolerate the presence of the religious groups, those who were in labor camps still were subject to punishment and stricter rules.

Beginning in 1946 and until the end of Stalin’s rule churches were returned to the believers. But persecution still continued until Stalin’s death.

In 1953 Nikita Khrushev’s era of power started and with it he renewed persecution of religion. One of Krushev’s goals, as a strong believer in the future of communism, was to root out the religious organization. Some of the religious activities, which had been allowed in 1929 legislation, were banned by Khrushev’s order.

In 1964 the anti-religious drive of Khrushev’s policy was replaced by a “more stable system of bureaucratic control” under the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev. A surge of dissident religious activity had begun during Krushchev’s reign. From 1982-85 the next two leaders changed one another, Andropov and Chernenko, continuing the restrictions of human rights.

In 1985 Gorbachev became a new leader, and he brought an openness and reconstruction to the country. The religious prisoners were let out and people
finally obtained freedom to practice their faith. Some critics say that such a freedom was the start of the ethnic wars: first, the Nagorno-Karabakh, and the current Chechnya conflict that involved two opposite sides with different religion.

By 1980s, with the change in the government the practice of religion became more possible. One could go to the church and practice one’s religion without being afraid of being taken to the prison, or even being executed for its practice. However religion still continued to occupy a place in the society very different than it does in most of the Christian world.

The 1980s were also a time when I started to study and learn about my religion. Being a curious child and then teenager, I read an adaptation of the Bible for the first time at the age of thirteen. To me it was more a storybook than a real Holy Bible, with nice colorful pictures. I enjoyed reading it, but I can’t say that the feelings I had reading it, were very different from the feelings I had when I had read “Myths of the Ancient Greece” a couple of years before, and it was the first book about the religion of people. It was so breathtaking and mystical. At the same time I felt that it was just a beautiful fairy story. Reading the Bible I had the same feelings. Everything from the Old Testament to the New Testament seemed to be just again a beautiful fairy story, based on “real” events, that took place a long time before I was born.
Several years later I read a correctly formatted version of the Bible. Frankly, I could not understand most of it. It was so unclear, but at the same time I did not try to find an explanation for the unclear parts of Bible. I liked it the way it was. I interpreted it in my own way. I took out the parts that made sense for me. I always remembered some of the Ten Commandments and the Biblical teachings of Jesus:

1) Love your neighbor (second commandment of Jesus)
2) Respect your parents (OT V)
3) Don't lie (OT IX)
4) Don't steal (OT VIII)
5) Don't kill (OT VI)

If one would ask me: what part do you remember from the Bible, and what part do you like the most, I would always say: the story about the Samaritan. It was the story that spoke to me the most, it just stayed in my mind, and it happened to be the one, that I wanted to apply (and I did) to my everyday life. It taught me that a person, who is not one of “your people”, could be much better than the one from your group. That meant for me, that I must respect a person for what he/she is, no matter, what their educational background, level in the society, color of the skin, or religion was. Therefore, I would say that Bible for me was more a book, from which you can learn rules of law or moral code, and these rules and codes had little to do with my spiritual life, or with my church experience.
This spiritual experience in the church played an important role for me in my personal and religious side of the life. The church has always had a private place in my life. I went to church when I felt I needed to go. It could be any day of the week, any time of the day. I stayed there as long as I felt I wanted to stay and rarely attended regular priest led services. The prayers I used were my own, I never was told what prayer I must know by heart or what I must read at church. It was more like a direct spiritual connection with the God. There was something mystical, that I did not understand, and I did not want to know. That was just for the soul, for the mind and moral behavior I had different sources.

As I grew up, I learnt more and more about my religion or I thought I was. However, I was not aware of the many different religious beliefs. I knew about Judaism and Islam, but not the details of their belief. I also knew that there were some other religions, like Hindu or Confucianism, but that was all. Four years ago I read a book by a Russian priest Andreev “Rose of the World.” He wrote about a united religion for the whole world, and in that very book I read for the first time about the life of Buddha. Andreev compared Buddha to Jesus. I was so awed struck and amazed that some of his teachings were like that of Jesus. I admired Buddha because he could give up all his wealth and power and spend his life teaching other people to escape the pain and sufferings in this world.
During my first year at the University of Montana, I had the opportunity to take a class called “Ecology and Buddhism”. From this experience I discovered more about Buddhism and the concept of living in the present moment, which is one of the main teachings of Buddhism. For other Western people and me the present moment is not often as important as the future. We want to know in advance what is going to happen, we plan everything ahead and we don’t think about or savor what is now. So we lose the present moment of our life, which is very precious and should be enjoyed. According to the fundamental law of Buddhist tradition “all phenomena (that is, all of nature) arise from a complex set of causes and conditions, each set unique to the specific situations of arising.”

There is not just interdependence of natural systems in Buddhism, but also nondualism of nature. Everything is of nature, even those organisms that are unpleasant for humans. All beings are included in the ‘all-inclusive realm of nature’.

As I studied more about Buddhism I realized that there were so many things in this religion that can be applied to the everyday life of a Christian.

The next semester I was able to study my own religion, I took the class “The Legacy of Paul”. Even though I had read the Bible I knew nothing about how and when it was written and by whom. Frankly, while some people criticize Paul for changing Jewish laws, I admire him. He was a mystical powerful man, who was
able to unify Jews and Gentiles into one community by emphasizing the power of faith in Jesus over following the law. His great contribution helped develop the Christian world’s beliefs.

These two classes, as well as people of different religious background I met in the United States changed my attitudes about my religion and contributed to my spiritual growth. In the United States I not only understood the richness of different religions, but also for the first time I was able to connect religion to the environment – this concept that was new to me and it opened a new area to explore.

I wondered what role the religion played in my love of the nature – probably, not a big one. I had heard from my childhood, that plants and animals were called by many people “God’s creatures”, so I just assumed that they are equal to me. An environmental ethic came to me from my parents. My mother taught me not to tear a leaf off a tree, not to harm animals. My father was a role model for me. He spent his weekends working in our garden and I could see his reverence for the trees. When I was old enough I joined him, and always had pleasure working on the land. Even though I did not do too much, feeling the land, being able to touch it gave me the first feelings of the real reverence and respect for the land. As a child I always had a dream of having a pet, starting from domestic animals, such as dog or horse, and ending by wild ones, such as tiger or wolf. I always was pulled to and admired the diverse creatures of the earth.
Partly, because I lived in the big city, I enjoyed every minute I could spend in the quiet place, among trees and singing birds. I experienced the same mystical experience for me, as the one I had in the church. There was the same feeling of not knowing – not knowing how these tiny birds can make such beautiful sounds, find food and live and were able to adjust to the urban environment and people.

Despite my scientific background, I always felt there was some kind of spirit in the environment that is unreachable for people. I believe it comes from God and thus, is beyond our understanding. One cannot deny that there is a Great Spirit present in the Nature, even though for many Christians the Spirit of God is just for humans.

Daily, as I look out the window, I see a beautiful blue sky with light stripes of clouds. I hear the birds singing. I see the top of not a very tall mountain almost touching one of the clouds. I can feel the “energy” and power of this beauty that was not created by man.

This feeling happens every time I look at nature or I am outdoors and able to be a part of nature. I adore the beauty of nature and probably even worship it in my subconscious. I have heard from some people that it is against the Christian religion to have such feelings towards the God’s creation, that “that you should not worship anything else but God”. I do not see this in the words of Eckhart:
"Any flea as it is in God is nobler than the highest of the angels in himself".

We hear beautiful music or voice and we say that it comes from God, we see a breathtaking painting and we say that this great artist was inspired by God, we smell a wonderful perfume and we delight in it. Nature can cause all these feelings at once. Imagine that you are in the forest, or at the ocean. You can hear the mystical sound of trees or waves, you can see this beauty of the nature (colors, sounds, shapes, diversity), you can smell it, all the unusual smells of ocean, forest or soil after the rain. I believe that there is part of God everywhere around us. These sensations are gifts to savor, enjoy and appreciate every minute, and the presence of all natural things.

Again at the University of Montana from classes such as Philosophy of Ecology, I learnt more about Environmental Ethics. I discovered that there were many people like Rachel Carson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold that felt as I do about the wonderful beauty of nature, and many others who made an enormous contribution to the environmental movement. These people worked to protect and celebrate the special place that is called The Earth. Reading their books I gained a deeper understanding of the value of nature (or ecology).

Another big change I had since my arrival to the United States was to clarify my understanding of social problems, which I obtained in the class "Social
Issues and Environment. I realized the role and importance these problems have in their effect to our lives and the environment. Racism, classism or other types of discrimination are still present in our life. I understood how their cumulative effects have been changing the environment.

Even though my understanding of all these problems is not complete yet, I am aware of the interconnection of religion, environment and social issues, just as Buddha felt everything touches everything in the “web of life”.

During the history of the humanity, religion played a very important role in the developing different social issues and in the relationship with the environment. In some cases this role was a positive one, in others it had a negative character. In many cases religion was used more as political tool for controlling people, which I will discuss below.

In the former USSR religion was replaced by a belief in the idea of Communism. In spite of the persecution of the Church discussed formerly, the religion was still used by the government.

Considered a Godless country [former republics of the Soviet Union], there were moral codes, even during the Soviet period. Some of the Ten Commandments were applied to the everyday life of most people (even atheists). The simple rules, such as care for children, respect elders, and respect each other, don’t lie, don’t kill, don’t steal, love your neighbor (no matter what their religion is), were taught
in the family and schools. Then it was up to everyone to apply those to their lives or not to, and some did, some did not. In the same manner the respect and love for nature was taught. It depended on the family values, and some, especially those who had land or lived in the countryside [unlike most people living in the cities] were aware of the environment, some were not.

As the government lifted its restriction on religious belief it seemed religion lost part of its value with the new freedom. Because of the difficult life people faced in Georgia, as well as in the other former Soviet Republics, unemployment and poverty, people automatically turned to the Church in their time of need. I feel that with this change the church lost some of its spiritual character. People made crosses in the streets while passing the Church, in the cars and on public transportation. It seems to me to be so artificial and too casual. It lacked the sacredness and privateness it used to have.

This change was not just in the behavior of people. The government also started to build new Churches (in the city, which already had many churches), this same government that had restricted and spied on church followers twenty years ago. The Church itself added more churches in different districts. Money was spent on the buildings, while 90 per cent of the population in the country were below the poverty line. The people now are poor, but they have new churches. I
just wonder, how come the leaders of the church don’t know, (or maybe they have just forgotten), the words that Jesus said and that are in the Bible in our days:

*For where two or three of you are gathered together in my name,*

*there am I in the midst of them*\(^4^5\)

How could they forget it, and build churches, in some cases destroying nice parks, where children could play safely, and enjoy the nature without going out of the city?! The Bible tells us about Jesus preaching at the sea in the open places, and never in the buildings, which shows how unimportant the need for a physical house of God is to worship.

Another negative outgrowth of the collapse of Soviet Block is that many republics became involved in territorial wars: Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan.... Where was the organized religion at the time when people were killing each other? Innocent people died, countless refugees went through suffering, and the environment was damaged. What was the role of Church at this time? Why didn’t the Church use its power to stop these bloody events? They might say: “We tried!” I don’t believe it, you don’t try - you do it. Religious power can change behavior when it wants to. The wars over the territory and different beliefs still continue as it has been for centuries, only today not only armies fight, but women, children and the land are also heavily destroyed and displaced.
Recently, I watched the film about East Timor. It started with the cemetery where there was an endless number of crosses. The first thought that entered my mind was: "why do they have crosses there?" Then as the film went on, I understood that since it was a Portuguese colony, the Christian Church had converted its conquered people. This is only one of the many examples when Christians did not respect other religions and other people's culture. East Timor was then a new part of the Christian world. They obtained new Christian brothers who they "loved and cared" about, though the leaders of the organized religion did not try to stop Indonesia, when Indonesian troops invaded East Timor and innocent people were killed. Maybe it is true that "Christianity is against war in general and for war in particular"? Where was the Muslim world at that time? Why did not Muslim countries try to stop this bloody action. This fact again shows the real use of Christianity. It is not about the religion, it is about power, colonization and exploitation. We all seem to forget about our religious obligations when we must use them, but we talk and are proud about our religions when they don't conflict with politics or our everyday behavior. Perhaps its because we are taught that we are sinners and cannot be expected to live Jesus' life? And probably wars are fine, if they are considered justified wars?! Usually God is considered to be on the both sides of the conflict, as for example the conflict between Irish Protestants and Catholics.
East Timor is just a small example of lack of understanding and even disrespect that Christians have for non-Christian cultures, not to mention slavery and the genocide Christians inflicted on Indians in both Americas, tribes in Africa, and several countries in Asia. We continue to live daily with these transgressions.

I am saddened by these inconsistencies I have discovered, as my understanding develops and I gain insight. I don’t want to say now what is wrong and what is right, and I don’t have a right to judge, I am not a God. But I do want to say that some representatives of religion, who want to teach us what we should do and how we will be able to get into the paradise, don’t seem to know or follow their own teachings. After this should they teach us, and should we follow their teaching? I don’t know. How can they be considered representatives of God, role models for the common people!

There are some good examples in the history of Christianity. St. Francis of Assisi traveled to the Near East trying to find a peaceful end to the Crusades. The famous prayer\(^47\) in which the peace has a central place belongs to him. George Fox\(^48\), for example, stated that one should not only believe in Jesus as a savior, but also should follow and practice his teachings. The great people such as, Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Susan B. Anthony, Albert Schweitzer and many others set an example for us to follow.
Another reason for caring for our natural world is that the earth is our home. Not many people would want to have their homes destroyed. Even though for Christians the Earth is just a temporary place before they enter the everlasting life, still – can you imagine your guests destroying your home? If we are guests, we should at least respect others, who consider Earth their home. Here again it is appropriate to use one of Ten Commandments of Moses: Love your neighbor; or of the teaching of Jesus from Bible: Love your enemy.

This last principle can be applied to the history of Christianity. The first Christians went through sufferings and died for Christ. They endured all sorts of difficulties and persecutions. Later when Christianity had become a powerful political tool, it changed its beliefs to be able to use its power and wealth. I would say that Church has been and probably still does play more a political role than religious, it is more interested in power than in saving people's souls, teaching reverence for all living creatures, brotherly love, and charity.

The Church often put fear in people's minds, in the way the Bible was interpreted. The people followed church dogmas because they feared being burnt in Hell or not having everlasting life. Those, who contradicted the dogma (e.g. Copernicus, Galileo) were in best cases exiled, if not burnt in the fire, drowned in the lakes, or executed by other means. It was the time when the priests interpreted Bible because most part of population was illiterate.
Even today, when everybody is able to read, there are still people, who follow the old dogmas of church without realizing whether they make sense or not. For example, the Creation Theory, that says that the age of the earth is six thousand years, while it has already been proven by scientists that the earth existed for billions of years.

As part of my research I did interviews with a wide variety of people to gain perspective on what they believed and actually knew and felt about their religion and what relation it had to the environment they live in. After Prof. Upendra Acharya’s talk on International Law and Environmental Policy in Developing countries, I asked him some questions related to religion and environment. In response to my question of how the Buddhist population of Nepal applies their religion to everyday life, he replied that “we worship the sun, we worship the moon, we worship the tree, animals... but... in daily life, no... it’s not followed by people, partly because of poverty, and people’s need for survival.” Therefore, I can conclude that no matter what the region’s requirements are, there are much stronger factors that make people change their behavior, even if it contradicts with their beliefs.

A young man from India, whose religion is Hindu, stated that a “Hindu believes in every aspect of nature, but it is not really practiced in everyday life.
People do follow ceremonies, but that’s all. The most sacred place for Hindus is the river Gang, as which is so polluted that you can’t even go close to it.”

A person from a Western European country answered my question “What is your religion?” by stating: “None, but I was born Catholic.” When I pointed out the positive sides of Christian religion, such as love, patience, and forgiveness, he expressed his disappointment with the Catholic religion and said: “You don’t have to be a Christian to have these qualities.”

Some of those interviewed believe in God, but not in organized religion, as it is interested only in “making money and telling people how to think”. Some of those who were interviewed prefer to call themselves atheists.

After interviewing all these and other people I started to feel that almost none of the religions are working and many people, especially among Christians are getting away from their religion.

Despite my equal reverence and love for the earth and people, I should admit that in many cases people come first. After the crisis I experienced in Georgia, I have a deeper understanding of the importance of people’s needs. When we were cut off from the use of electricity and had no light, hot water or heat, I wanted the ‘modest’ luxury and comfort I had. People used the wealth of the natural world with thoughts only for their survival. People began to cut down the trees to use wood for heating. The problem of deforestation became one of the
most important environmental problems. In the conditions people have lived in for the last eight years, it is almost impossible to think about nature. Despite this, there still is a hope for a better future.

There are also many things that can be learnt from the American experience. For the last 20-30 years some churches in America have been involved in the environmental movement. At the same time many different religions have started to unite. This unification is for both protection of the environment and social justice issues.

Having equal reverence for both people and nature is the goal of my life. I want to make my contribution in finding a balance between two opposite poles: people and nature. I have experienced both ends. We cannot work only on saving the nature, as some extreme environmentalists try to do, and we can’t concentrate only on human needs as religion often does. There should be a middle path, in which I believe and will follow. Since in both religion and social life we depend on laws, I decided to make a legal career and contribute my share to perfect the environmental laws and creating a balance between all living things.
Final Thoughts

These three religions are about ways that we think about life and the concepts we have and the connection we have to God, and how we live by God’s wishes, rules and perform specific ceremonies. No matter how different religions seem to be, they all have some things in common. Each religion, including the ones I have discussed above, believe in one God. Each teaches moral codes of behavior and practice. It might be either patience, forgiveness, love, honesty, reverence for the life and all living creatures, life after death, the understanding of good and evil, and sin. The definition of these beliefs can be relative. For example, as one of the characters in “The Government Inspector” by Nicolai Gogol pointed out: “...there are sins and sins.” For the Christian world (probably as well as in the beliefs of any other religion) killing animals and destroying the environment, as a result of the war, would not be considered a sin. Wars are fought for righteousness and everybody thinks that they are right. I think it is time for religion to interfere and take a stand against all destruction. This will require people to have a deeper understanding and awareness of the results of their actions. That is where we need love, kindness and appreciation of other people, other creatures and the plants, with whom we share the earth.
While I was writing this page, I remembered the cartoon I watched on TV as a child. The main character there was a little racoon, who was sent to a pond by his mother to get some cattails for food. When he looked down at the water he saw a creature there. He started to make angry faces and threaten the creature with the stick. But the angrier the little racoon got, the angrier the creature became. Finally, he ran home in tears and told his mother about the incident, to which she replied: "You go back to that creature and just smile. You will see what will happen." He went back smiling and the creature smiled back to him. The creature in the pond was just a reflection of the little racoon. The moral of this cartoon is that you get what you give. It is applied to people. What did we give to the environment? - Destruction. What did we get back? - Regional, pollution related deceases, radiation and more fear of what will happen in the future, as a result of our activities.

Therefore, the world of the past and present, with its western view of individualism, capitalism and colonialism is and has been a factor in environmental destruction reflecting a lack of a basic understanding of religious morality and virtue. The world we have today has wars in at least fifty countries; other countries support these wars by selling military supplies (see Table 1). These wars have destroyed the environment and people. Hate and prejudice are still present in every part of the world; this is the reflection of the lack of social justice.
in our human society. It is ugly and scary, like the racoon's first reflection. If every individual on the earth would look in the mirror and see the reflection of their actions, perhaps it will help them to analyze their own behavior and maybe even change their attitudes and help them assume responsibility for their behavior.

I believe that religion and environment are inseparable. Religion gives us spiritual wealth, and the spirit is present in environment. If people could just open their hearts and understand the interconnection between humans and nature... I will work to help people to achieve this understanding, before it is too late to correct the environmental and social damages.

I believe that religious leaders can provide leadership in this process by initiating a new understanding of the importance of environment. They have a special approach to people and can change their beliefs. Religion has always had a powerful influence over people. It is time now to use this influence for a reverence for all living things.

My dedication to environment comes from my experience in Georgia, which faces many environmental problems, such as water pollution, deforestation, poor waste management, as well as social justice problems. Some of these conditions are the heritage of the Soviet Union system, some are the result of the collapse of the Soviet block and the general lack of concern of the population. Even now, people are less than ever aware of these problems, partially again due to
the poor economic conditions and the hard daily life, partially due to our western, human centric view of life. Religious leaders of the Georgian Orthodox Church, as well as the leaders of minority religions, could communicate and join together and support the understanding of the interconnection of all religions, help eliminate wars and exploitation of the earth. These religions represent the people and the environment. Since our independence from Russia most of the people in Georgia have returned to the Church seeking support from religion, instead of the government. Religious representatives can use this new need to help local environmentalists in their work to protect the environment and work to eliminate social injustice.

The time for change is now. My experience of being poor, having little electricity, little food, no luxuries, but living in a loving family environment taught me what was important. This was enough. I learnt that the love is more important than material things, which are never enough. This concept of enough and the acceptance of it is what the environmentalists are preaching to save our earth. I have seen the short-sighted mistakes that we have made and I am learning from them. I will dedicate my life to live my religion and to preserve and respect all living things.

I will end with Albert Schweitzer quote:
"If a man loses his reverence for any part of life, he will lose his reverence for all of life."

If every human being understands the words of Doctor Schweitzer and also has a reverence for themselves and other people and future of our planet Earth, that we call our Home, will be saved.
Notes

2. Peg Thompson, *Finding Your Own Spiritual Path*, p.113
9. Genesis 5:1
10. Micah 6:8
11. Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, p. 84
12. Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, p. 84
13. Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, p. 84
14. Jacob Neusner, "A Rabbi Argues With Jesus"; *Newsweek, March 27, 2000* p.57
15. Leviticus 25
16. Leviticus 19:9-20
17. Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, p. 88
18. Genesis Rabbah, 13:3
19. Leviticus Rabbah 25:3
20. Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, p. 92
22. Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, p. 98
25. Among people all over the Asia it was a very common belief in the mystical power of the water. For example, in India people go to bathe in the Ganges to wash their sins away.
29. Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, p. 105
30. Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, p. 105
31. Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, p. 106
32. Psalm 8:5-8
33. Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, p. 108-112
34. The teaching of Paul became the basic root for the Christians. They concentrated only on the faith, and the deeds were not as important. This led to complete ignorance of the environment as well as people.
35. Peg Thompson, *Finding your own spiritual path*, p.45
36. Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, p. 108-112
This Law defines what a religious organization could or could not do


39. *Exodus 20:1-17*

40. Andreev was a Russian priest, who spent most of his life in the prison, during Soviet period. The book "Rose of the World" was written in the prison confidentially, and saved by his sister.

41. See Appendix


44. Institute for War and Peace Reporting, No25

45. Matthew 18:20

46. Henry O. Thompson, *World religions in War and Peace*, p. xiv

47. The prayer of peace that is attributed to Francis of Assisi:

   Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
   Where there is hatred let me sow love;
   Where there is injury, pardon;
   Where there is doubt, faith;
   Where there is despair, hope;
   Where there is darkness, light; and
   Where there is sadness, joy.

   O divine Master, grant that I may not so much
   Seek to be consoled as to console;
   To be understood as to understand
   To be loved as to love;
   For it is in giving that we receive;
   It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and
   It is dying that we are born to eternal life.

48. George Fox – founder of the Friends or Society of Friends (also known as Quakers).

49. Upendra Acharya, Prof. Of Law : Tribhuvan University, Katmandu, Nepal

50. Cathedral of St. John Divine started the first recycling center on Manhattan in 1979

51. Recently, the representatives of different religions demonstrated in Washington DC, for relieving the debts of poor countries.
Bibliography


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<th>Region in Conflict</th>
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<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>US, F, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>12,800+</td>
<td>US, F, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>20,000+</td>
<td>US, F, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>US, F, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>50,000+</td>
<td>C, domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>US, F, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
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<td>US, F, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>US, F, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine (Occup. Terri.)</td>
<td>1,000+</td>
<td>R, US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>2,100+</td>
<td>US, UK, domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>1,000+</td>
<td>US, UK, dom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>20,000+</td>
<td>C, E, S, SA, US</td>
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<td>3,000+</td>
<td>US</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>US, IS, UK, dom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>1,000+</td>
<td>C, US, IS, black market</td>
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<td>Sudan</td>
<td>25,000+</td>
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<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>100+</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>6,000+</td>
<td>US, R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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* 1996 estimate (other figures are for 1998-2000.)

Sources: Amnesty International; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers; Forum for Applied Research and Public Policy; Human Rights Watch; Swedish Children's Fund.