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### **Faith in Sustainability**

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**When someone asks me about who I am, or what I believe, I invariably draw upon my affinity for sustainability.** Increasingly just a buzzword, and sometimes out of context, for me the word "sustainable" is a way to describe restorative human social systems and designs. These are systems and designs that create positive impacts on our environment and the well-being of global societies. **Today, our decisions, whether deliberate or not, frequently have negative impacts on the earth and humans in the form of pollution and the loss of cultural and biodiversity.**

**Given that, a sustainable lifestyle embraces what I believe to be a very logical, conscious and fair way to live.** Some of the most fundamental principles in sustainability promote diversity, equality and peace. It is about getting connected with your inner self to explore the role you play in the ecological and social fabric of our time and recognizing the connections between all life forms and the habitats in which they thrive. With this comes a certain humility towards the genius of life, resulting in respect and reverence for Earth.

**The way I live, and every decision I make, is informed by a myriad of environmental and social considerations.** Not only is this consciousness with me at all times and with every breath, but I am continually motivated towards restoring the ecological and improving the social systems that surround me.

These are my deepest beliefs stemming from an understanding of my surroundings and resulting in the conviction that **I need to do more than what would adequately be called "my fair share" to assure my children clean air and water and a just society.** It is widely accepted by my community of friends and colleagues that if we don't promote and diligently act for change now, we will remain on a crash course with no uncertain ecological and societal collapse.

Beliefs in sustainability can be just as consuming, just as invigorating, and just as enduring as any other set of beliefs. **They are unique, however, in that they do not conflict with the practice of any religion that I am aware of.** In fact, many people practicing organized religions around the world also have strong beliefs supporting the stewardship of Earth.

This is nothing new. **The very idea of sustainability was at one time so much a part of cultural consciousness that it was the basis for decisions made by indigenous people everywhere.** The well-known maxim of the Iroquois Confederacy that describes decision making with the next seven generations of children in mind is one example. Humans have always been embedded in an ecological context that was understood to be the biological source of life. Something has happened since, and attention paid to our ecological surroundings has diminished.

We overwhelmingly no longer concern ourselves with environmental issues. **Somewhere along the line, environmental and social justice became "reactionary" issues promoted only by the edge of society.** The apparent bounty of our natural resources was the basis for our complacency to the idea that global environmental and social justice issues will take care of themselves. They won't. It's time that we consider the potential for a healthy community and healthy ecosystems by embracing our beliefs in sustainability as manifested by environmentally and socially responsible practices. In other words, we need to mainstream social and environmental consciousness by embracing sustainability as a spiritual movement.

**What I feel as being profoundly spiritual is undoubtedly so for an increasing number of us in the ever expanding circles of Earth-stewards.** Our contingency is growing, consisting of people across the globe and practitioners of every religion and faith. We are all aligned by the deepest of spiritual beliefs regarding the environment, despite the relatively few of us conveying this message to the general public. Unlike other religions, though, ours hasn't been described in terms that people can embrace and rally for. The potential for our beliefs in sustainability to unite us is at least intriguing in a world continually divided.

**What I propose is for this paper to serve as the seedling to open and grow a dialogue surrounding the relationship of sustainability and spirituality.** This will be a trans-denominational discussion open to people regardless of an individual's set of beliefs. The necessity is obvious and the potential is great. It will be a widespread reminder of our values and how to actively promote and restore the integrity of our guiding principles to include the concept of sustainability, rather than the formula for an entirely new set of beliefs.

**I must make it clear that the idea I propose should not compete with other religions, nor is it intended to replace them.** This is a grassroots and very personal movement based on a guided

self-exploration to discover your core values and help us live happier, healthier and more sustainable lifestyles. As such, there is no prescriptive set of rules or beliefs. This is not about demonstrating how well or poor other religions promote environmental and social justice, nor is it intended to trace the historical roots of environmentalism in religion. This is about openly incorporating our spiritual beliefs rooted in sustainability into our daily lives.

**The idea of a spiritual movement supporting environmental and social justice is a simple one, and to think about and reflect on it may yield surprising results.** We are hoping that the result of this project will be an overwhelming spiritual embrace of environmental and social justice. More than that, we are hoping that there will be a realization in organized religions around the world to rediscover the ecological underpinnings of their faith and to life itself.

*The author is currently a member of the biomimicry community and a research assistant at the Institute for the Built Environment at Colorado State University where his work centers around describing the creative thought processes of designers when applying the concept of biomimicry in our built environment. He has also instructed courses on Biomimicry, Bioneers, Sustainable Business, and Appropriate Technology for Sustainable Living at Colorado State University. He publishes a monthly e-newsletter called BioInspire. BioInspire features inspiring essays addressing the interface of human design, nature and technology. John's spare time is spent outdoors, often playing music.*

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Norbert Hoeller serves as the archivist for BioInspire. Past issues of BioInspire can be found in Thinkspace: BioInspire Monthly Publication at [www.thinkcycle.org/tc-space/tSPACE?tSPACE\\_id=41303](http://www.thinkcycle.org/tc-space/tSPACE?tSPACE_id=41303).

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