

Religion and Environmentalism: How have religions influenced our attitudes and relationship with the environment?

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1. Introduction

Often deemed as one of the defining issues of modern times (United Nations, 2022), climate action and sustainability are movements that nations, organisations, and individuals cannot afford to miss. Due to the increasing frequency and severity of climate events, there is a growing urgency amongst countries for the need for collective action. Due to economic reasons, addressing environmental degradation has long been a key priority for the Singapore government. Aware that pollution, improper waste management, resource loss and other challenges posed in the “Brown Agenda” are major contributing factors to stagnating economies (Williams, 1997), Singapore has taken drastic action in recent years to mitigate environmental impacts. The state’s management of the environment is one of “ecological modernisation” (Neo, 2013), with a great emphasis on economic preservation and growth. To the Singapore government, protecting the environment is primarily to extract its utilitarian value for the imperative of economic progress. While this has undeniably allowed Singapore to be lauded as one of the greenest cities in the world (Alonso, 2021), an increase in the popularity of a less-utilitarian perspective of the environment has led to rising contestation against the government’s pragmatic and instrumental use of nature in recent years.

Led by non-governmental organisations and activists, the environment’s intrinsic value and cultural importance are increasingly recognised amongst the Singapore public. Where Nature Society Singapore (NSS) lost the battle for the protection of Senoko Bird Sanctuary in 1993, Chek Jawa and its biodiversity were saved from residential development in 2001 due to pressure by Singaporeans to conduct proper environmental impact assessments (Neo, 2013). More recently, the development of Dover Forest resulted in a heated public debate on the balance between ecological preservation and urban development (Abdullah, 2021). Increasing calls for the conservation of natural habitats and resources on moral, rather than pragmatic grounds provide an opposing voice to the sanitised greening of Singapore in recent years.

However, the changing trends in the views on nature in Singapore continue to lack a religious component despite the highly religious nature of its inhabitants. Religion is an essential component of Singaporean culture; according to a 2020 census, more than 80% of Singaporeans are religious (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2021). There is a high degree of religious

diversity, where ten major religions are recognised by Singapore's Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO). Given its prevalence in Singapore and its influential psychological effects (Cohen, 2015), religion is capable of shaping one's response to sociopolitical issues. Religion affects how one views the world (Greeley, 1993) and behaves (Eom, Kim, and Saad, 2020). A religious backing could be a strong driving force for devotees to oppose destructive, anthropogenic lifestyles, engage in ground-up action with religious non-governmental organisations (RNGOs), and apply pressure for greener policies.

In this paper, a distinction is made between religious institutions and RNGOs. Religious institutions are defined as houses of worship or local affiliates of international religious bodies recognised by the IRO and Singapore government. They often have a physical location that allows devotees to practise their chosen religion. On the other hand, RNGOs seek to champion societal issues through the lenses of faith. In most cases, they do not have a physical location for worship. While RNGOs are prevalent in many religious societies, their presence in Singapore is muted for reasons that will be examined in the latter half of this paper.

This paper will examine how religion has influenced our attitudes and relationship with the environment in Singapore. The target religions for this paper are Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. These religions are selected due to their prominence and influence in Singaporean society. In total, the adherents and followers of the target religions accounted for 79.4% of the country's total population (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2021). It is proposed that the differences in the impact that religion has can be attributed to the following factors:

1. *A Presence of a Central Religious Authority*. The presence of a central guiding religious authority dramatically influences the ability of religious institutions to influence actions amongst devotees.
2. *Degree of Anthropocentric Views*. The degree to which their chosen religion regards humankind as the most important element of existence would affect the religion and devotee's outlook on the environment.

3. *Direction and Stance of the Devout.* The beliefs held by religious leaders and followers have a direct impact on their environmental beliefs and actions.

This essay will explore the conceptual basis of how religion guides environmental beliefs. To determine how this translates to practice in Singapore, efforts initiated by religious organisations and their devotees are examined.

1.1 The Close Link between Religion and Environmentalism

Early environmental protection efforts were largely in response to growing pollution. The Alkali Act of 1863 in the United Kingdom is considered by many as the first-ever large-scale attempt at reducing air pollution (Reed, 2014). However, coordinated attempts and efforts only materialised and gained global traction in the 1970s. Modern-day activists are observed to be increasingly successful in exerting pressure on governments to accede to their demands for greater personal, social and political actions surrounding key environmental issues (Fisher-Ogden, 2009). The Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and the Paris Agreement of 2015 are but a few examples that demonstrate the growing strength and influence that the environmental movement has come to wield on politicians and world leaders in recent years.

On the other hand, the earliest form of religious environmental protection can be traced to Jainism, the world's oldest religion that originated in ancient India more than 2,500 years ago (Jain, 2011). Central to Jainism are the five vows of abstinences: *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Aparigraha* (non-materialism), *Satya* (truthfulness), *Asteya* (non-stealing), and *Brahmacarya* (chaste living). Many of the vows apply directly to resource consumption and the treatment of natural biodiversity. Followers of this religion keep to a vegetarian diet and “avoid doing harm to all forms of life” (Chapple, 2002). Such views are not merely restricted to Jainism. Around the world, many religions and faiths echo a similar ethos of non-aggression and the preservation of the sanctity of natural life. These practices and beliefs align well with increasingly popular ecocentric lifestyles which are greatly beneficial in reducing one's environmental footprint.

Beyond the obvious link of nature-relevant religious traditions such as vegetarianism or retreats in nature, environmentalism and religion are connected on moral grounds. Religion is

largely regarded as a moral authority (Chan and Islam 2015) that acts as a guide that teaches followers the “correct” way to live. While protecting the Earth is often justified through various means, such as simply for the survival of humans, environmentalists generally view conservation as a moral duty. In the post-structuralist discourse (Soper, 2014), nature is viewed as a marginalised, voiceless group that is unjustly exploited and degraded. The inclusion of the environment as a less fortunate group deserving of help into the realm of religion, which often teaches compassion and relief for the suffering, is thus not far-fetched.

Religious teachings have greatly impacted and influenced modern ideologies on religious environmentalism. In a study on the religious dimensions of human and environmental systems, Jenkins and Chapple (2011) established religious environmentalism as three distinct movements:

- “(a) the environmental actions of religious leaders and communities*
- (b) political environmentalism bolstered by religious resources*
- (c) the environmental movement interpreted as a religious movement.”.*

Variations and combinations of these three movements have been observed around the world, where each group serves to put pressure on the wider community in different ways. Religious institutions with significant wealth and resources exert immense political influence on world leaders, while local environmental start-ups seek to modify behaviours from the ground up.

Despite the pro-environmental support that many religions are known for, it is noted that the degree to which the environment is prioritised varies across religions. In the United Kingdom, a study revealed that target Christian and Muslim groups assigned lower priority to environmental issues due to beliefs in the afterlife and divine intervention compared to other religions (Hopes and Jones, 2014). Additionally, the same study determined that Christian participants were more receptive and supportive of efforts to reduce humankind’s impact on the environment via new technological advancements compared to Muslims. Hopes and Jones deduced that the level of support for each religion would vary according to the degree and importance of anthropocentric views (2014).

Localised research into Judaeo-Christian religions in Oklahoma, USA, indicated a negative correlation between levels of environmental concern and biblical literalism (Greeley,

1993). Participants who are Christian and bear a high level of biblical literacy and confidence in the existence of God were the least concerned with climate-related issues. Eom, Kim and Saad further argued this point, positing that religiosity serves to moderate the link between pro-environmental support and religious environmental beliefs (2020). They concluded that the belief in a controlling god reduces the importance and urgency of environmental issues, as everything is going according to God's plan. It thus can be seen that the influence religious beliefs have on environmental actions is not straightforward and varies with the many factors involved with the religion itself and one's lived reality.

1.2 The Holy Green Words: The Steps Each Religion Has Taken to Help The Environment

When it comes to the relationship between religion and the environment, both theologians and religious leaders have had much to say when it comes to humanity's role toward nature for every religion (Gottlieb, 2006). Existing world religions appear to be divided broadly into two categories. On one side are the Western monotheistic religions, which focus more on nature being God's creation, and humans having a special privilege to tap into said resources for our needs. On the other side, Eastern traditions and religions are more likely to view the natural world as full of "sentient beings" that are of similar or equal moral status as human beings (Gottlieb, 2006). In this section, the paper will be exploring what each faith believes about the human relation to nature through a study of key individuals and texts.

1.2.1 Catholicism

In Catholicism, nature is often portrayed as a provider for human needs. Religious followers are often taught that humans hold dominion over all other earthly beings (Hart, 2006). This idea of "subduing" nature is strongly suggested in Genesis 1:28: "God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth". Having been prescribed "dominion" over the earth, and given the divine will to "subdue" it, it can be interpreted that mankind now holds supreme power over all natural resources. This interpretation of the Bible has created an asymmetric relationship between humans and nature, resulting in great exploitation and degradation of resources and biodiversity.

However, this is not to say that the Catholic Church and its religious leaders support the blatant exploitation of nature. The greater attention and societal influence gained by environmental movements in the last few decades has aided revisionist camps amongst Catholics that called for environmental stewardship rather than domination. In the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World's* “Chapter III: Economic and Social Life” (1965), the Second Vatican Council stated: “While an immense number of people still lack the absolute necessities of life, some, even in less advanced areas, live in luxury or squander wealth. Extravagance and wretchedness exist side by side”, suggesting that it was wrong for the fortunate to squander natural resources for their own good while the less-fortunate were unable to even afford the “necessities of life”.

Following the footsteps of the Second Vatican Council, church leaders also began to advocate for some human responsibility relating to the usage of natural resources and urged for a more equitable distribution of what nature provides (Hart, 2006). In 1980, 11 Catholic Bishops from American Midwestern and Plains states issued a statement titled *Strangers and Guests: Toward Community in the Heartland*. Under the “Principles Of Land Stewardship” section, it was stated that “the land should be conserved and restored” and that “land-use planning must consider social and environmental impacts”. More recently, Pope Francis, the current head of the Catholic Church, has placed great emphasis on the importance of the environment. Since his papacy in 2013, he has highlighted in many instances that the multitude of problems we face today are a direct result of ecological issues (Waterman, 2017). In 2021, Pope Francis also encouraged Scotland’s Catholics to pray for the success of the UN Climate Change COP26 conference in Glasgow, urging that the conference should not be a “wasted” opportunity to solve one of the greatest existential threats and moral issues of our time, “the preservation of God’s creation, given to us as a garden to be cultivated and as a common home for our human family” (Lateran, 2021).

1.2.2 Protestantism

Similar to Catholicism, the Bible (albeit with some translation differences and the noninclusion of the seven books of Apocrypha) is the key religious text that religious believers follow in Protestantism. In general, Protestant theology is likely to lead believers to the same

conclusion that nature is created by God chiefly to satisfy the needs of humanity. This idea of ‘subduing over’ or ‘dominating’ nature is a logical conclusion derived from their religious text. In Genesis 2:15, the Bible proclaims that “the Lord took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it”. Such phrases reinforce the idea that man is above all other natural creations and resources, and hence we are allowed to use them as we see fit.

Due to interpretations of Man being in control of or above nature, it is often said that Christianity is the cause of human exploitation of the environment (White, 1967). Such interpretations of religious texts, however, appear to be increasingly challenged in recent years. This revisionist approach adopts the idea of ‘creation care’. They regard this concept as a fundamental tenet of the teachings of the Bible. Relating to the above quote from Genesis, Man is supposed to act as a priest of God, acting under His tutelage and working for His sake. Rather than exploit, Man is given the role of ‘steward’, to maintain the environment in its pristine condition as God created it.

Many in the Protestant community have also claimed to “experience God chiefly in nature” and as such, look to appreciate nature with “its own rich reality in itself” (Santimire and Cobb, 2006). This desire to encourage religious believers to preserve the environment has led to the formation of the National Council of Churches (NCC) Eco-Justice Working Group in 1983. In 2003, the Eco-Justice programme had gained so much traction that it was able to spin off into its own organisation, the Creation Justice Ministries. By expanding upon the idea of social justice to include care for nature, eco-justice is a concept religious leaders and groups used to advocate for environmental conservation (Grizzle and Barrett, 1998).

1.2.3 Islam

In the Islamic faith, the idea that Earth is left for humans by an all-powerful God is weaved into the central religious texts that guide followers of the Islamic faith — the Qur’an. In Al-Mulk, Verse 15, it is stated that: “He is the One Who made the earth tractable for you; so travel the open roads thereof and eat of His provision. And unto Him is the Resurrection.” and in Al-Anbya, Verse 105, this idea that Earth is an inheritance left for humanity by God is underlined again: “And We have indeed written in the Psalms, after the Reminder, that My righteous

servants shall inherit the earth”. These verses clearly indicate that the divine has willed the natural resources on Earth to be humanity’s inheritance. However, interpretations of dominion and exploitation are conspicuously missing from the Islamic faith.

The Qur’an guides the followers to take care of the world by reducing wasteful consumption. In Al-A'raf, Verse 31, wastefulness is condemned: “O Children of Adam! Put on your adornment at every place of worship, and eat and drink, but be not prodigal. Truly He loves not the prodigal.” and in Al-Baqarah, Verse 205, strong disapproval towards the despoiling of the earth is highlighted: “And when he turns away he endeavours on the earth to work corruption therein and to destroy tillage and offspring, but God loves not corruption”. Clear directions are present within the texts to explicitly forbid any forms of environmental degradation and exploitation. Islamic text conveys the divine will that any forms of destruction and wasteful consumption of natural resources will earn divine ire.

Islamic environmental actions continue to grow with current proponents of the movement. In Indonesia, the central organisation of Islamic scholars and clerics, Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), aims to standardise Islamic legal opinions, of which one of their focuses is on environmental action. By issuing *fatwas* (non-binding legal opinions), they make use of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) to instil environmental attitudes and behaviours. For example, MUI and regional councils in Indonesia have issued fatwas declaring environmentally harmful logging and mining as *haram* (forbidden according to Islamic laws) (Mangunjaya and Praharawati, 2019). Research on Muslim climate activism is concentrated on Indonesia and the United Kingdom (Koehrsen, 2021), but the fragmented knowledge of its existence throughout the world points toward its possible extent of influence.

1.2.4 Hinduism

In Hinduism, religious devotees believe that “God is one and is everywhere present” and the religion directs them to respect every element of creation, no matter how big or small (Dwivedi, 2006). This is highlighted in the Srimad Bhagavatam (one of Hinduism’s eighteen great Puranas), which states:

“A devotee should not see anything as being separate from the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa. Ether, fire, air, water, earth, the sun and other

luminaries, all living beings, the directions, trees and other plants, the rivers and oceans – whatever a devotee experiences he should consider to be an expansion of Kṛṣṇa. Thus seeing everything that exists within creation as the body of the Supreme Lord, Hari, the devotee should offer his sincere respects to the entire expansion of the Lord's body.” (Book 11, Chapter 2, Verse 41).

Even though Hinduism recognises an extensive pantheon of divine beings and gods, religious texts convey the teaching that such beings and all of creation are all part of one body. By that logic, any form of harm inflicted upon others, be it humans or animals, is harm that one will inflict upon themselves.

In addition, the key tenets of Hinduism — *Karma* and *Punarjanma* drive the religious followers to treat all life forms with respect (Dwivedi, 2006). *Karma* is the Sanskrit word for “action” and refers to the spiritual cause-and-effect cycle that affects all individuals. With *Karma*, the intent and actions of the individuals will affect one’s future. This ties in with the concept of *Punarjanma*, the Sanskrit word for rebirth. In Hinduism, the followers believe in the concept of reincarnation and the idea that one’s *Karma* will affect future reincarnations. With reincarnation, the death of an individual is often not the end of an individual’s ‘journey’ and the soul will go through multiple cycles of births until the individual is able to attain “true knowledge of the self or soul” (Yadav, 2022). These tenets build upon each other and provide the foundation for the doctrine of *Ahimsa*, a Sanskrit word meaning non-violence.

Additionally, the concepts of *Karma* and *Pynarjanma* weigh heavily on every individual’s life. Hindus are taught to avoid causing harm to any living being, even if it is not a fellow human (Dwivedi, 2006). As a result, the teachings of Hinduism lead the believers to take care of the environment as the blatant exploitation of nature and the harming of other living beings can lead to a ‘punishment’ later on in an individual’s life. This idea is underlined in the Vishnu Purana, which states:

“The supreme Vishṇu is propitiated by a man who observes the institutions of caste, order, and purificatory practices: no other path is the way to please him. He who offers sacrifices, sacrifices to him; he who murmurs prayer, prays to him;

he who injures living creatures, injures him; for Hari is all beings.” (Book 3, Chapter 8).

Similarly, the doctrine of *Ahimsa* is also propagated in Manusmriti, a book that details the Hindu moral code: “As many hairs as the slain beast has, so often indeed will he who killed it without a (lawful) reason suffer a violent death in future births.” (The Laws of Manu V, 38). Such teachings suggest that divine punishment awaits those who kill animals needlessly, demonstrating the sanctity that Hindu texts extend to all living creatures.

1.2.5 Buddhism

Unlike the previous religions in this section, Buddhism stands out as a religion because there isn't a divine or godly figure that the religious believers follow. Instead, these followers look toward the teaching of the Buddha (a prince by the name of Siddhartha Gautama who managed to attain *Nirvana*, a state of enlightenment) (Snellgrove, 2021). As a religion that originated in India, many of the religious teachings in Buddhism carry similarities to Hinduism — Buddhists believe in the concept of *Karma* and reincarnation while subscribing to the concept of *ahimsa* (Nandan, 2013). This suggests that, like Hinduism, Buddhism teaches its devotees to take care of the environment and avoid the exploitation of nature for personal gain. Indeed, many of the central teachings in Buddhism are related to the preservation of the natural environment and many Buddhists today believe that environmental-related work and advocacy is a way to engage in the core Buddhist practices (Kaza, 2006).

Furthermore, the Buddhist teachings on the Four Noble Truths (*Dukkha, Samudāya, Nirodha and Magga*) guide its followers to recognise that suffering is caused by attachment to desire. They believe that it is only through the practice of compassion and loving-kindness can such suffering be lifted. However, these practices are not limited to humans only and should also be extended to other animals and plants (Kaza, 2006). The need to practise compassion towards all life forms in Buddhism is repeatedly highlighted in texts like the Vinaya Pitaka which stipulates that monks should not be travelling in the rainy season as they would end up “crushing the green herbs, hurting vegetable life, and destroying the lives of many small things” (Muller, 1881). The inherent worth in every being, sentient or not, is thus significant in Buddhist thought.

1.2.6 Taoism

Taoism is actually a culmination of various religious and philosophical movements that have come together to create a diverse and complex religion (Miller, 2006). This has resulted in two main forms of Taoism: philosophical Taoism, the form that follows the *Tao Te Ching* written by the philosopher Lao Tzu; and religious Taoism, the form of Taoism that is largely practised today (Keller, 2012). This is often seen as a syncretic Chinese religion developed from elements of Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and ancient Chinese religion. It is here in religious Taoism where elements of gods, divinity and the presence of ancestor souls exist. As religious Taoism is the form that is largely practised, this paper will focus on this particular form and future references to Taoism will refer to religious Taoism. Given the complexity that comes with having different religious movements joining together, religious Taoism is unique and does not contain a single mythical framework that all Taoists come together to believe in. Instead, Taoism is a pluralist theology where a multitude of Gods and divine beings are each prescribed their own religious function and roles.

Taoism has a growing role in environmental awareness in China. The Daoist Ecological Protection Network, founded in 2006 as part of the Qinling Declaration, is an association of over a hundred Taoist temples in China that pledge to protect the environment (Hruby, 2017). Some temples model green behaviour such as using biofuels and solar-powered lighting; others plant trees to prevent erosion and organise volunteers to pick up litter. Posters and signs prominently displayed at the temples remind visitors of the importance of nature. However, a purely Taoist environmental ethic derived from ancient Taoist texts is often criticised as being impractical due to various reasons like the aforementioned complexity of Taoism not being a single accepted theology (Epple, 2009).

1.3 Religion and RNGOs in Singapore

Singaporeans are both highly religious and religiously diverse (Pew Research Centre, 2014). Yet despite enjoying such high levels of religious declarants and followers, RNGOs in Singapore are less prominent and garner fewer participants outside of houses of worship. Unlike other countries with similar levels of religiosity and diversity, RNGOs are conspicuously missing

from the social activism scene in Singapore. This phenomenon must be understood through the tumultuous relationship that religious institutions and RNGOs share with the government.

Since independence, the Singapore government has taken steps to actively curb and restrict religious groups and organisations. Recognising the influence such groups have on individual perceptions of current issues (Chan and Islam, 2015), the government has applied a combination of efforts over the years to restrict their societal influence and ability to champion their stance on social issues. They first applied bans and dissolutions to fringe organisations such as Jehovah's Witnesses, the Unification Church, and the Christian Conference of Asia that espoused conflicting and separatist ideologies (Reuters, 2015). Efforts were also taken to limit the possibility of criticism and political influences of mainstream religious institutions.

In 1987, the Singapore government launched Operation Spectrum, detaining 22 citizens without trial under the Internal Security Act for a "Marxist conspiracy to overthrow the state" (Vadaketh, 2017). One must note that the majority of the detainees were Christian activists whose actions were described as exaggerating poverty levels within Singapore (Tamney, 1992). At no point did the government provide any clear and direct evidence that indicated the detainees were fermenting discord. Instead of combatting communist threats, this operation served to muzzle RNGOs and their ability to champion societal causes (Tamney, 1992), demonstrating the government's willingness to deploy drastic punitive action upon RNGOs that they deem a threat. Even though such actions on the government's part have been greatly reduced by the 21st Century, the tumultuous history still serves as an effective restraint in the local social activism scene amongst RNGOs.

2. Methodology

This paper employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine how religion impacts individual viewpoints on environmentalism. The six target religions were selected as they are the most influential and prominent religions in Singapore (Cultural Atlas, 2022).

2.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Via semi-structured interviews (see appendix A), we engaged various religious leaders and teachers from religious organisations and authorities to gain greater insights into the theoretical and practical application of religion on environmentalism. Due to the complex historical background of religion, we wished to clarify interpretations of religious texts and seek out other prevalent concepts in the religion which relate to how humans perceive and interact with nature. By asking further questions on environmental measures initiated by the organisation or devotees, we probed into the contemporary situation of religion's effect on environmental action in Singapore. These interviews were done through a mixture of in-person and online Zoom channels and the identities of all interviewees will be kept anonymous in the paper due to the sensitive nature of the topic discussed.

We spoke to at least one interviewee per religion of focus in this paper with the exception of Taoism, due to difficulties in securing a connection within the short time frame of this study. As such, evaluations of Taoist teachings will be based largely on secondary research, such as publicly available online resources. Furthermore, Taoism and Buddhism in Singapore are often hard to delineate as the lines between both practices have become blurred over time, leading to a “mixed Eastern religion” that many local followers believe in (Miller, 2006). Understanding this, we will thus rely on anecdotal recounts from Buddhist leaders, although they are not officially Taoist.

2.2 Survey

For the survey, a 5 point Likert Scale (from strongly disagree [1] to strongly agree [5]) was used to measure the attitudes of survey participants towards various issues of interest. In order to capture information effectively, our survey was split into 3 sections: (a) personal information, (b) questions related to religion and, (c) questions related to the environment. A copy of the survey questions has been included in Appendix B.

To collect the data, the survey was distributed through various channels. Mainly, the survey was distributed to the congregations and religious followers whom the interviewed religious leaders have contact with. In order to gain a larger sample size, external religious

Facebook groups and mass communication channels in the university (e.g. Telegram group “Battle Royale” consisting of students from NUS’s University Scholars Programme (USP) and the communication channels of other student-run religious clubs) were also taken advantage of.

3. Findings and Discussion

The insights from our interviewees were key to understanding how the examined relationship between religion and individuals is in fact fluid; not only can religious teachings influence an individual’s worldview on societal issues, but individuals also determine the extent of influence and direction of the religion. This is further examined in detail below.

Table 1: Main ideas synthesised from the interviews.

Main Theme	Religion	Sub-theme
Role in nature	Buddhism, Taoism	Embeddedness
	Hinduism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam	Stewardship
Divergence in direction	Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism	Spirituality and reincarnation
	Protestantism	Salvation
Cohesion amongst religion	Catholicism, Islam	Central religious authority
Authority of religious leaders	Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism	Religious weight of their words
	Hinduism, Buddhism	Religious advice
Practical considerations	Buddhism, Hinduism	Funding
	Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism	Traditions and rituals

The survey produced 83 respondents, of which 34 were non-religious. Amongst the 49 religious respondents, 22 (44%) were Buddhist, 8 (16%) were Protestants, 6 (12%) were Hindus, 6 (12%) were Catholics, 5 (10%) were Muslims and 1 (2%) was Taoist (Fig. 1). 1 respondent was excluded as they identified themselves as a Universalist, which falls outside the target religions.

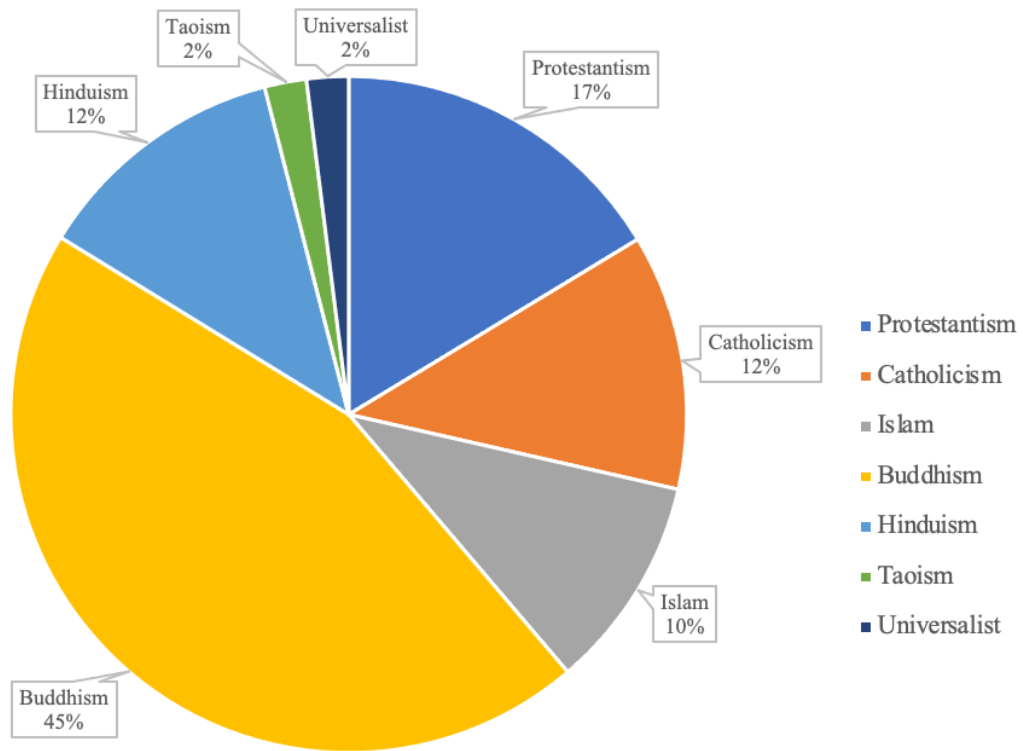


Figure 1: Breakdown of survey respondents according to religion.

3.1 Protection of Earth and its Biodiversity

From the interviews with religious leaders and teachers, it is apparent that every religion has texts and teachings that focus on the importance of environmental care. This view is echoed by the survey respondents (Fig. 2), as more than 60% strongly agree that environmental care is important to their religion.

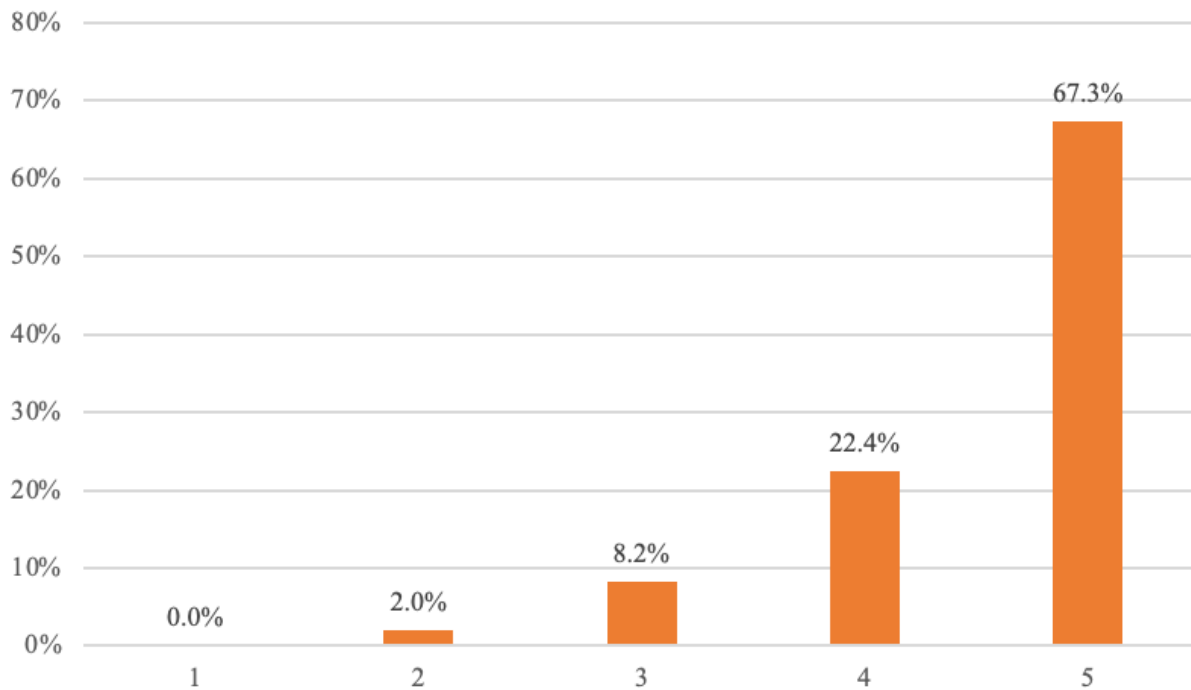


Figure 2: Responses for the question, “my religion teaches that it is important to care for the environment” from strongly disagree [1] to strongly agree [5].

3.1.1 With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility

Through the interviews, most religions addressed here were found to take the angle of encouraging devotees to be stewards of nature. Buddhism, meanwhile, explicitly teaches that humans are not above or superior to the rest of the universe, but are part of the ecosystem. An ecological worldview is taken instead of the ego-logical one, where man is given a special status above non-humans. Buddhism’s ecological view sees humans as deeply embedded in nature, rather than separate. It is due to humans’ “greed, hatred, and delusion” that causes us to, within this ecosystem, currently “act like cancer cells” (Interviewee A). Striving for balance in this ecosystem thus requires “mutual respect between humans and Mother Nature” (Interviewee A). Care and compassion for the environment are thus encouraged in Buddhist devotees from an angle of preservation and believing we are not in a position to alter other entities on Earth.

Taoism similarly does not separate man and nature, in fact, a fundamental principle is *wu-wei* (non-action), taking a natural course without any motives (Taoist Federation Singapore, 2019). As all things in the universe are connected by *dao* (way), “Taoists stress the importance of

harmonising with nature, by balancing *yin* and *yang*” (IRO, 2021). Humans are not bestowed with duty or responsibility over the environment because all things nurture *dao*, it is not for humans to meddle with this “eternal and interminable...life-force of the universe” (Taoist Federation Singapore, 2019). The emphasis on interconnectivity and interrelations between all cycles through the concept of *dao* embeds humans in the natural world where they are also a part of the environment.

Conversely, the interviews revealed that the other religions beyond Buddhism and Taoism accord some form of duty to devotees rather than promote mere coexistence with the environment around them. In Hinduism, humans, with “superior morality and intelligence”, are deemed to be the highest manifestation of God (Interviewees B and C). However, this is not supposed to suggest anthropogenic dominion over the rest of nature. Rather, the Vedas (a large body of religious texts from ancient India said to be revelations of the divine) specifies that “Man is a steward and trustee in relation to the environment” (Interviewee B). It also specifies that “sacrifice for the Earth should be a daily duty for Hindus” (Interviewee B). This is because “nature is a manifestation of the divine. In the sun, moon, oceans or trees, we see God” (Interviewee B). The five elements - *Prithvi* (earth), *Vayu* (air), *Akasha* (space), *Varun* (water), and *Agni* (fire) - are said in Hinduism to constitute everything in the universe. These elements are to be worshipped as divine, as worship is the “maximum respect” humans can show (Interviewee C). An act that harms the environment thus equates to not being a devotee to God, as the divine in it is not recognised and respected.

According to our interviews, Catholicism also puts humans as the “apex” of God’s creation (Interviewee D). God “gave Man the Earth to cultivate” (Interviewee D), granting Man both the power to use and look over nature. When asked about how this is often taken as being given the right to infringe and change the environment, our interviewee clarified that this is theoretically not the case, yet they understand that it does manifest as such in the modern world. The analogy given was that if a choice had to be made between a human life or that of a tree, the human would surely be prioritised, emphasising the separate levels Man and nature are on despite all being created by God (Interviewee D). Historically, the idea that humans are stewards of nature was not explicitly taught and the separation between Man and has been nature more

often empathised. This led to the conception that Catholicism does little to encourage active human protection of the environment. However, the idea of “organic continuity” amongst the Church is the basis for the strong cohesion and continued progression of Catholicism over the centuries (Interviewee D). The call for humans to recognise their responsibility as environmental stewards as concretised in Pope Francis’s second encyclical, *Laudato Si’*(2015), is thus not sudden or out of line with Catholic thought. Rather, it is based on the “past history of the Church”, implying that in the modern-day, Catholic environmental stewardship is highlighted because it had always implicitly existed in Catholic belief (Interviewee D).

The interview with a religious leader of the Protestant faith also suggests that humans have the duty to oversee all of nature, as “the Lord took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it” (Interviewee E). In the Protestant belief, “due to God’s love, God elevated humanity above the rest of creation” and allowed them to be His “partner at work”, His “co-creator” (Interviewee E). God also “shows His care towards his creation” by allowing “us finite creatures” to rule over it (Interviewee E). This implies the handing over of responsibility and approval of humans to tend to God’s creation in a way that aligns with the values and teachings of God. God allows human dominion over nature as He made humans in His image and “purposefully” bestowed us with characteristics He has (Interviewee E). However, it was noted that the dominion is meant to be leadership based on the “rationality, creativity, and compassion” that God has (Interviewee E).

For the Islamic faith, the interview revealed that Mankind has a role of trusteeship and successor in relation to the environment. In fact, the task of protecting and managing the environment is so defined in the religion that it is called *khalifah*, and realising this duty so we can complete it is “the exact thing that Allah wants us to achieve” (Interviewee F). Concomitantly, “He (Allah) made the sun and Earth for the benefit of Mankind” (Interviewee F). Such ideas as taught in Islam are to teach that Allah is generous and loving, and not to endorse dominion over the environment. In fact, the belief that one should not exploit God’s gifts (everything in nature) is a recurrent lesson in Islam. Our interviewee shared that as mentioned in Surah Ar-rum, Verse 41, “the calamities in the oceans and lands are punishments from God for humans’ exploitative and wasteful actions, to teach us to return to the right ways” - the right

ways of being stewards of the Earth (Interviewee F). While humans are “allowed to use the blessings given to us by God, it must not be done to satisfy your own greed” (Interviewee F). This is because as *khalifah*, one must protect and preserve the environment so that there is no destruction. Using resources wastefully even while doing small actions like *Wudhu* (cleansing before prayers) is obscene or sinful in Islam (Interviewee F). Islam thus teaches its followers to “use your brain” to make one’s actions purposeful and proper, in accordance with fulfilling one’s duty as *khalifah*.

3.1.2 In Practice

All religions addressed in this study are found to oppose the degradation and exploitation of nature which inspires environmental action. However, the degree to which they carry out preventive measures and efforts vary. From our interviews, some of these initiatives were shared.

Buddhism

In Buddhism, there exists a belief in the following of natural cycles and reducing mankind’s impact on the natural world. As such, Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery (KMSPKSM), the largest Buddhist temple in Singapore, was built without excessive terraforming of the land, embedding the temple into as much of the natural surroundings as possible. The buildings were built around the existing hills and the original trees were kept where possible. At the same time, in order to encourage sustainable consumption, the temple has allocated space and money for the implementation of food cultivation and related technologies. This allows a proportion of their vegetables and fruits to come from the gardens in the monastery itself (Fig. 3 and 4).



Figure 3: One of the greenhouses in KMSPKSM growing vegetables.



Figure 4: Space set aside within KMSPKSM to grow fruits and vegetables.

To reduce waste, some of the food waste in KMSPKSM is converted to compost through a large composter donated to the temple (Fig. 5).



Figure 5: Compost machine at KMSPKSM.

To combat the air pollution from the ash created during the burning of offerings, a large Eco Burner is in place at the temple. Compared to conventional open burning, Eco Burners have filters that capture ash instead of releasing it into the air. Smaller Eco Burners are also present in other temples of columbariums in Singapore. In addition, to reduce the overall amount of paper burned, joss paper boxes usually burned in large quantities during certain seasons are no longer allowed at KMSPKSM (Fig. 6).



Figure 6: A banner informing visitors on when and what they can burn at the Eco Burner at KMSPKSM.

In the effort to reduce waste and properly use resources, KMSPKSM also collects recyclable or reusable items from visitors to recycle or redistribute (Fig. 7). Examples include books, paper, clothing, and even Buddhist memorabilia which the temple resells for an extremely low price.



Figure 7: Collection area for donated items from KMSPKSM visitors.

Buddhist RNGOs in Singapore, such as Tzu Chi Singapore, often have a mission to focus on environmental issues. Tzu Chi organises recycling drives and created Eco Points around the island which enable the sharing of conservation knowledge with the community. The social work and outreach programmes Buddhist temples and RNGOs conduct is often done without religious backing (Interviewee A). Similarly, non-Buddhists often join the environmental activities held by these groups, simply because these organisations provide a convenient platform for people to partake in such activities.

Hinduism

Through the interview findings, Hinduism (and the other religions) has significantly fewer environmental initiatives currently implemented in Singapore as compared to Buddhism.

Nonetheless, hints of Hindu-led environmental action are taking place. The Ramakrishna Mission Singapore plans to install solar panels in the next five years and implement a machine to convert kitchen and garden waste into fertiliser at their mission (Interviewee C).

Catholicism

According to the insights of our interviewee and further online research, Catholic environmental action in Singapore remains scarce. Young Catholics are generally seen to be more aware and passionate about such issues, but the churches themselves and most of their followers do not bring environmental issues into the religion (Interviewee D). The official social and community arm of the Catholic Church in Singapore called CaritasSG did, however, organise a campaign in 2020 called Heal Our Home, guided by the principles and directives set in 'Laudato Si' (2015) (CaritasSG, 2020). This campaign aimed to encourage greater environmental action on the part of individuals and organisations, but so far it was a one-off event. A recurring environmental-related activity by CaritasSG is to be a Caritas Volunteer Washer. These volunteers help reduce the use of disposables at Caritas events by washing reusable cutlery.

Protestantism

Protestant environmental action appears to be limited to largely individual and bottom-up initiatives, although they are done with religious backing. Much like how the younger generation of Catholics is seen to be more passionate about environmental issues, Protestant youths in Singapore are also more involved in championing environmental action. Creation Care SG is a community started by youths in Singapore to inspire action through a Christian lens (Interviewee G), and Asian Journeys Ltd is a Singapore-based social enterprise that works with Christian youths to conduct conservation and other social work activities (Asian Journeys Ltd, 2021). Beyond these examples, our interviewee mentioned their efforts in encouraging action in their own church, like placing recycling bins around the building or encouraging followers to return unwanted hymn books or programme booklets (Interviewee G). Notable Protestant environmental action thus appears to be limited to individual and bottom-up initiatives.

Islam

Through learning from our interviewee, campaigns are often held in the month of *Ramadan* (month of fasting) as the Islamic community comes together during this period. At the same time, the interviewee brought up the idea that fasting spurs more strength for them to do more for the community (Interviewee F). An environmental initiative held during *Ramadan* at our interviewee's mosque is the use of reusable cutlery instead of disposable ones. Up until a few years ago, the porridge served at the mosque where Muslims gather to break their fast was distributed in disposable plastic containers. In efforts to reduce waste and plastic use, the mosque began encouraging people to bring their own containers instead. This has met with great success, with many families bringing their own bowls or pots to collect the porridge. Our interviewee shared that this green practice, however, is not carried out in other mosques. The distribution of top-down green efforts amongst mosques such as the decision to go paperless or to remind staff to turn off the lights to reduce electricity use is unknown, but at least at the mosque our interviewee was from, such measures were in place.

In terms of ground-up initiatives, the Islamic environmental RNGO in Singapore, FiTree, fills a part of this empty niche. FiTree is a group started by youths, and they run environmental campaigns and programmes with the “intention of reminding the Singapore Muslim community to return to our *fitrah* (natural state) as true *khalifah fil ardh* (stewards of the Earth)” (FiTree, 2013). They conduct natural works to raise awareness on environmental issues and host learning opportunities for participants to “understand and discover what it means for [Muslims] to live...as [the] Creator's [vicegerent of the Earth]” (FiTree, 2022). Beyond this group, other (prominent) efforts were not found during the duration of this study.

3.2 Relationships Between Individuals and the Religion

Religions in Singapore have thus been ascertained to all have attempted to address environmental issues, albeit to varying extents. The difference between the theoretical importance that religions place on environmental protection and the actual message conveyed to the congregations can be attributed to a myriad of factors. From our interviews, some of these factors are the incompatible directions of the religions in modern Singaporean society, the organisational structure of the religion, and the weight that the words of religious leaders hold.

3.2.1 The Religious Direction

As mentioned in section 3.1, the insights from the interviews and surveys strongly suggest that there exist religious teachings that promote care for the environment. However, it was also pointed out to us by Interviewee B that there might be a lack of action due to the main direction that each religious institute or leader decides to take. For example, in many regions, Hinduism has taken a stronger leaning into the spiritual aspect where devotees come to religious leaders expecting guidance on how they can develop stronger links to the divine. This creates the scenario where religious leaders are more inclined to teach followers how they can show respect to the higher powers and break out of the cycle of reincarnation through methods like prayer or the following of rituals. This detaches Hindus from incorporating Hindu-based values in their interactions with the physical world, rather the spiritual, intangible realm is what is seen to matter more.

Similarly, Interviewee E mentioned that the Protestant Church highlighted the fact that even though the key point of spreading the Gospel lies in the education of God's teachings, many Protestants see the church simply as a channel for them to redeem themselves and gain a spot in heaven. Despite the fact that the Protestant heritage was created in order to overcome the hierarchies present in the Catholic Church, he reflected that the direction of many religious believers seems to go towards the idea of a 'spiritual ladder' — an idea that the more 'Christian' an individual is, the better the treatment they will receive in heaven. What being a "good Christian" means, according to Interviewee E, seems to have been distorted in the modern era to simply be fulfilling the ritualistic actions of going to church, joining cell groups, or reading the Bible. With salvation as the key message that believers latch on to, concepts like creation care receive much less attention even though it is one of the Methodist Social Principles of the Methodist Church — "The Sphere of Creation Care" (Interviewee G).

In Buddhism, even though the religion has no concept of an afterlife, the religious devotees in Singapore follow a form of multiple religious belonging (a mix of Taoism and Buddhism). As such, some temples provide an avenue for devotees to burn offerings for their ancestors even though the burning of offerings is not a Buddhist practice (Interviewee A). Taoism in Singapore is also often followed to reach an end goal of immortality through the

cultivation of *Dao* (Taoist Federation Singapore, 2019). The act of doing good deeds and living in harmony with nature thus has more to do with the personal human goal of achieving immortality and accumulating “merits” than it does in recognising the inherent value of the environment. For the majority of Singaporeans of Chinese ethnicity, even if they do not follow the religion, Buddhist and Taoist practices are often used to “remember one's ancestors” (Interviewee A). Buddhism and Taoism in Singapore thus influence people’s actions when they wish to communicate with the heavenly realms, but are often not incorporated into their daily lives.

3.2.2 Cohesion Amongst the Religion

Apart from the direction that believers nudge the religious institutions towards, the religious institutes themselves do also drive the narrative. This is especially so in religions with a centralised, well-defined organisational structure, such as Catholicism and Islam. In Singapore, while the lessons in the Hindu Centre must first be approved before being taught (Interviewee B), the teachings at Hindu temples are not regulated by a central, religious Hindu authority.

In Islam, a central authority decides and writes out the sermons that are preached in all the mosques in Singapore (Interviewee F). Similarly, the directives and principles in Catholicism are set by the higher orders of the Church, after which the local houses of worship follow and execute the principles (Interviewee D). With a singular decision-maker creating the lessons that can be taught and preached to devotees, the religious institutes are able to control the direction that their following focuses on, making it difficult for topics like the environment and its relationship to religion to be taught if there is not enough interest in the topic. The top-down, cohesive nature of these religions prevents drastic changes within individual institutions, even if it is to advance the acceptable mission of environmental conservation. Indeed, Interviewees B, C, and F all reflected that the exploration of this relationship between the environment and religion was new to them and that not enough emphasis has been put on sharing this knowledge with followers before.

3.2.3 The Authority Held By Religious Leaders

Beyond where decision-making authority is placed in the religion's organisational structure, the authority of the priests (or equivalent) also plays a role in the effect that religion has in influencing a devotee's environmental action. The religious leaders who are perceived to have greater religious weight behind their words have more impact on the followers they preach to, compared to those whose words are seen to have less religious command.

For example, during the interview process, it was found that both the Islamic mosque and the Hindu temple have attempted similar 'bring-your-own (BYO)' initiatives that encourage believers to bring their own containers to receive food and cut down on unnecessary plastic wastage. What was interesting was the fact that the mosques were more successful in implementing such a policy than the Hindu temples. This is due to the different religious authority the Muslim Imams have compared to the Hindu temple priests. While Hindu priests are seen as teachers and a 'channel' for communicating with the divine (Interviewee B), the Islamic Imams are seen as religious authorities that have to be listened to. As a result, the difference in authority could lead to a situation where Muslim devotees are more likely to adhere to the recommendations given by the mosque, driving a larger percentage of them to follow these BYO initiatives. Interviewee B confirmed that the pushback by Hindus was strong when the BYO initiatives were pushed. The interviewee mentioned that as the devotees have to pay rather large sums of money for the provision of food by the temple, the devotees were less willing to have to bring their own container as it is seen as a right for them to also retrieve the food conveniently. In this case, the beliefs and the direction the followers have is stronger than the weight of the temple's authority.

Beyond Islam, Protestant and Catholic priests were also found to be perceived by their congregation to have a significant influence on their actions and thinking. Interviewee E shared about the successful efforts made in engaging Protestant youths in creation care, leading them to actively partake in environmental missions such as going overseas to green deserts. This was due to the direct interaction between the priests and the congregation, highlighting the power their words and actions have in moving Protestants to focus on different issues. Furthermore, since priests are meant to "spread the teachings of God", the knowledge and opinions they share are

taken to be closer to the intentions of God (Interviewee E). Their words are thus more trusted to be true to Protestantism.

For Catholicism, the authority to decide the main principles and directives lies in the Catholic Church (Interviewee D). Even though local Catholic communities are able to decide on how they would like to execute initiatives, the religious authority remains with the main Catholic Church and all of these initiatives have to be aligned with the set directive. The strict adherence to these directives by local church communities despite the “minimal involvement” of the central church in terms of execution demonstrates the strong influence that Catholic religious leaders have (Interviewee D). Even though they are not directly involved on the ground, their words are seen as a defining authority and followers would act based on their imperatives.

Similar to Hindu priests, Buddhist monks are also seen more like a medium who conducts and leads rituals as commissioned by devotees. Although their religious understanding is undeniably credible, the effect that Buddhist monks in Singapore have on influencing change in temple-goers remains limited. The monks are approached for advice but rarely are asked to speak on behalf of a “god” (simply because Buddhism does not worship a god) (Interviewee A). Consequently, the Buddhist basis for promoting environmental action is often not conveyed through the monks themselves.

3.3 Practical Considerations

The theoretical values, ideologies, and worldviews that religions supposedly inculcate in their followers as explained in the above sections are not only altered due to the changes brought about in their modern understanding of the religion but also diluted because of the practical considerations religious organisations face, which affect the actual functioning of the religion in Singapore. Beyond the structure of the religion, the realities in funding, traditions, and conventions also affect their efforts in becoming more environmentally friendly.

3.3.1 Funding and Manpower

Financing green initiatives is a common problem when it comes to tackling environmental issues. Religious institutions are by default, not profit-driven, making the

procurement of greener technology or alternatives difficult. This issue is further compounded by the ‘strings’ that may be attached to the financial support that religious institutes receive from their devotees. Donations from devotees might come with stipulations and preconditions (for example, a donor might specify that the donation is only used to provide food and shelter for the needy), making it hard for these donation-dependent religious institutions to run green initiatives unless there are devotees that are invested in climate issues. In the case of KMSPKSM, the investments and steps taken towards becoming more environmentally friendly were only possible as taking care of nature was something that Buddhists see as a priority, both in terms of funding and manpower. Interviewee A mentioned that the temple was only able to obtain a large composting machine as it was generously donated by a devotee who wanted to help the temple become more environmentally friendly. At the same time, the installation of the Eco Burner was a costly endeavour and required a large investment on the temple’s end. Even the growing of food on the temple’s ground requires significant costs and man-hours in order to maintain.

In a similar vein, Interviewee G reflected that in the beginning, the creation of an RNGO focusing on environmental action required substantial effort from the founding members. Even now, many of the initiatives that aid in the reduction of ecological impact and waste produced require volunteers to spend a significant amount of time and effort to execute. As each religious institute has its own key priorities while having to continually fund and run the daily operations of the compounds and religious events, spending the extra money and time on initiatives to help the environment has proven to be difficult in most cases.

The difficulty in putting in place environmental efforts was in fact reflected by Interviewee B. During the interview, Interviewee B talked about how the direction of religious institutions might be affected by funding issues. While Hindu temples would like to provide much more than divine guidance and rituals for devotees, the need for the income that comes from conducting rituals meant that the temples had to prioritise these practices to ensure stable financing to continue running the temple. In some cases, attempts made to convert to environmentally friendly packaging in pre-packaged meals for devotees have been met with resistance due to the higher costs needed. Interviewee B also mentioned an observation that the Hindu devotees with greater financial capabilities generally have an ingrained belief in the caste

system or follow “man-made scriptures”. These ideas revolve around purity and ritualistic methods of achieving it. As such, the Hindu values which would encourage the protection and recognising the worth of everything in nature are not prioritised, as value judgements on purity are constantly made.

3.3.2 The Effect of Religious Practices

As religions, the belief and carrying out of religious practices is something that cannot be ignored in our study. These practices and beliefs drive the daily actions of devotees and can affect their attitudes towards the environment (Figure 8). As mentioned, the deep-rooted respect Buddhism cultivates in devotees and monks has led to positive climate actions being taken by the religious followers. From donating funds and equipment to reduce the temples’ impacts to organising international efforts (the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation comes to mind) to drive environmental action, religious devotees are indeed driven to reduce their own environmental impacts. Similarly, because vegetarianism is encouraged and practised by many Buddhists and Hindus, devotees of these religions are more likely to engage in a meat-free diet that is friendlier to the environment. Interviewee C also brought up a point mentioning that because Hinduism has an aspect of nature worship (e.g. worshipping a river as a ‘Mother’) due to their belief that the divine resides in everything, the devotees have a reason to assimilate friendly actions towards nature in their religious practices. The way of life brought about through following these religions is by default, less environmentally damaging.

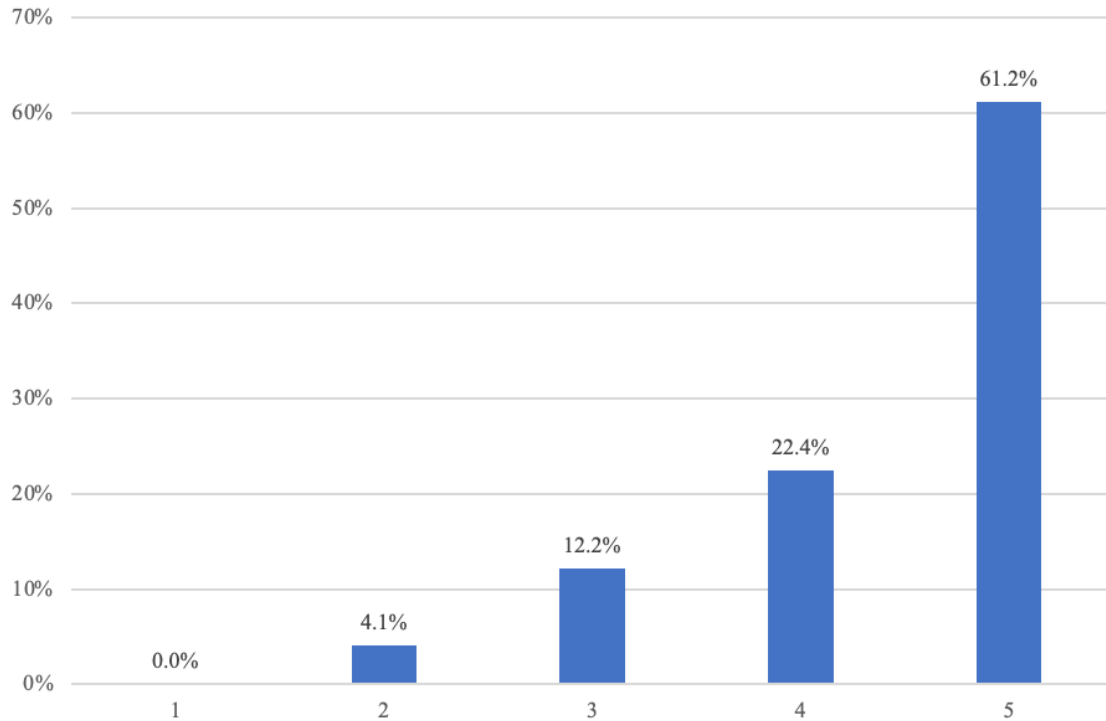


Figure 8: Survey responses to “My religion plays a huge role in shaping the way I live” from strongly disagree [1] to strongly agree [5].

On the flip side, religious practices might also lead to actions that are detrimental to the environment. Interviewee B pointed out that as the Hindus believe that fire has the ability to purify, *Yakna* (fire prayer/ritual) is seen as the highest form of prayer. Such practices require excessive burning and maintenance of fires, resulting in large amounts of carbon emissions and air pollution from Hindu temples. Furthermore, as *Yakna* is a *Vedic* tradition (it is found in the Veda), it is unlikely to be discontinued despite its environmental impacts. Similarly, in the Taoist-Buddhist tradition that Singaporeans follow, the burning of offerings for ancestors is seen as such an important practice that it will likely continue as a religious practice for a long time to come (Taoist Federation Singapore, 2019).

4. Conclusion and Future Studies

Through the course of this study, a clear distinction was found between belief and action. While all religions provide good guiding principles that teach devotees to care for the environment, a myriad of factors – from religious and social direction to practical and historical

reasons have created a scenario where the religious presence is not significantly felt in the Singaporean environmental scene. However, we strongly believe that there is space for religions to start a ground-up movement that can encourage religious devotees to treat the climate emergency with the urgency that it deserves.

Unfortunately, due to the limitations in the time period and reduced willingness for religious and RNGO leaders to commit to interviews due to the constantly evolving Covid-19 situations, this study was unable to provide more definitive evidence in the form of larger survey sample sizes and insights from a larger interviewee pool. As such, future studies might include the confirmation of the conclusions made in this paper through more extensive data collection. At the same time, more research can also go into creating a better understanding of the social push and pull behind the divergence of religious direction from the religious texts and teachings. Apart from these, in-depth literature studies of religious texts should also be done such that the environment-based teachings in each religion can be better understood and communicated to believers.

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Appendix A - Interview Questions for Religious Leaders

1. Do the religious texts convey anything about how humans should treat nature and the environment?
2. Where do humans stand in relation to the natural world, based on religious texts and teachings?
3. Are religious views about humans and the environment conveyed to your followers/congregation? If so, how and when is it conveyed?
4. Do you think religion plays a role in the modern era when it comes to tackling environmental issues? Why or why not?
5. Are members of your religious group passionate about tackling global issues? What are some of them? Are campaigns to tackle these issues initiated with a religious backing?

Appendix B - Survey Questions

Section 1: Personal Data

1. Age
2. Are you religious?
 - a. Yes (go to Section 2)
 - b. No (Go to Section 3)

Section 2: Religious

1. What is your religion?
 - a. Protestantism
 - b. Catholicism
 - c. Islam
 - d. Buddhism
 - e. Hinduism
 - f. Taoism
 - g. Others (state)
2. The things that happen around us mostly occur without heavenly/divine control. (strongly disagree [1] to strongly agree [5])
3. My religion plays a huge role in shaping the way I live. (strongly disagree [1] to strongly agree [5])
4. My religion teaches that it is important to care for the environment. (strongly disagree [1] to strongly agree [5])

Section 3: The Environmental Questions

1. I believe that climate change is largely caused by: (a) mostly human activity, (b) mostly natural causes or (c) equally by both human activity and natural causes
2. Humanity has a right to rule over nature (strongly disagree [1] to strongly agree [5])
3. I am willing to inconvenience myself to protect the environment (strongly disagree [1] to strongly agree [5])
4. I am willing to speak out against groups and companies that harm the environment (strongly disagree [1] to strongly agree [5])