

How the environment is similar to religion

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“ Nature’s Religion”

Environmentalism is popular with many secular people around the world. As demonstrated in Stephen Asma’s “ Green Guilt” article, environmentalism shares many similar characteristics of popular religions. These similarities include rules that members are expected to follow, hierarchy which shows a certain level of devotion, and extremists who revolve their entire lives around their beliefs. Environmentalism is a form of modern-day religion due to the strict guidelines it imposes as well as the guilt and shame it delivers for not following them.

Environmentalism and religion both have guidelines that members are expected to follow. Many people that consider themselves environmentalists make a point to conserve resources, such as water and electricity, whenever possible. Much like a donation to a church, this is a small gesture which can make a great impact. Those who do the gestures may begin to feel superior or more orthodox to those who do not. Those who choose to ignore the guidelines are seen as undesirables. One account of this comes from Asma himself who recalls “ He suddenly became a pariah. A heretic had been detected among the orthodox flock” (25). Those who consider themselves orthodox may look down upon those who do not abide as strictly. They may hope to be recognized by higher authority as being devoted to the belief more than others. As Christianity has the Pope on top, followed by the Cardinals, Archbishops and so on, environmentalism has a theoretical hierarchy. Notable examples would be Al Gore at the top, due to his dedication to the cause, and BP on the bottom, due to their seemingly

indifferent stance. The members of each religion praise those who are at the top, and try to pressure guilt onto those on the bottom.

For those who care for the environment, not following the guidelines can create a sense of guilt. Environmentalists feel guilty for wasting resources much like religious people may feel guilty and repent their sins in confession. Recalling one of his experiences, Asma states “ a friend confessed in a group conversation that he didn’t really recycle. It was as if his casual comment has sucked the air out of the room” (25). Some people feel guilty for not preserving the earth and feel the need to repent. The guilt can make one feel unworthy and thus want to better themselves and make a difference in the world. Such as when people turn to God in order to better their lives. Sometimes that feeling of unworthiness can make them selfless.

Many different groups are created in hopes of recruiting more people to support the cause or to donate money to it. Similar to those who go door to door attempting to convert one to another religion, environmentalist have activist groups that try to convert others around them into being “ green.” Some of the more extreme groups will put their life on the line to protect their beliefs. Such acts can be seen in “ tree huggers” who stand in the way of deforestation, or radical extremists who sometimes sacrifice their lives for their beliefs. Both groups can be noted as potentially lethal.

Environmentalism is very comparable to religions all around the world. It demonstrates similar characteristics to religion despite not being considered, by most, as one. “ Green Guilt” by Stephen Asma does a wonderful job at pointing out the similarities. While they do have similar characteristics, Asma

states very truthfully that “ Environmentalism is a much better hang-up than worrying about the spiritual pitfalls of too much masturbation” (29). It is much easier to worry about how much water one is using or whether the lights are off when not in use, rather than worry about a spiritual being judging a person’s morality and every action. Sometimes the thought of being constantly watched by this is spirit can be offsetting to a lot of people. Those individuals should look into environmentalism if they wish to make an impact on the world without being considered by society as “ religious” or without having the feeling that every action they make is being judged.