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**Engaging faith for a sustainable urban future**

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Abstract:	Effectively addressing climate change and associated environmental challenges is now chiefly about action, implementation and social change. Global environmental research and policy frameworks have begun to emphasise the importance of culture and multi-sector partnerships for urban sustainability governance. However, there has been little explicit attention paid to religion and belief as ubiquitous urban socio-cultural phenomena. This article outlines literature on the intersection of and climate change in the context of cities, before expanding on key themes presented in the most recent IPCC reports. Religion is shown to offer both opportunities and barriers for effective urban climate adaptation and mitigation. A new model of religious-civic partnership is then offered as a framework for guiding climate policy implementation. This model presents religion as vital to shaping the 'value landscape' of cities and calls for collaborative action based on identifying, enriching and mobilising shared values.

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## 1        **1. Introduction**

2        Despite rapid growth in societal recognition of the urgency of the climate crisis, it has become  
3        acutely evident that existing responses from government policy, business leadership and  
4        technological innovation remain grossly inadequate to keep the earth from tipping into climate  
5        breakdown (Ripple et al., 2023). In response to the yawning gap between current levels of  
6        ambition and necessary climate action, scholars are advancing an agenda of transformation,  
7        which includes practical behaviours and economic patterns, but also institutional structures,  
8        social norms, cultural dynamics and worldviews (Abson et al., 2017; Otto et al., 2020; O'Brien,  
9        2018; Vouvoulis et al., 2022). The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report emphasises the crucial role  
10       cities play in mitigating and adapting to climate change, given they are home to the majority  
11       of humanity and contain a critical mass of resources, investment, culture and ideas that can  
12       be applied to climate justice and transition (see also Solecki et al. 2018, Revi et al. 2014).

13       However, one key dimension of culture currently under-recognised in urban climate change  
14       scholarship and policy is religion. Alternative sources of knowledge, wisdom and direction will  
15       be essential for the move from current (unsustainable) states to desired (sustainable) states  
16       (Vouvoulis and Burgman, 2019). However, religious views are often reduced or publicly  
17       dismissed, thus sidelining of their unique contributions and perspectives on urban  
18       sustainability (Sexton & Pincetl, 2022). This is despite projections that by 2050, 68% of the  
19       world's population will urban, and citizens affiliating with a religious identity will grow even  
20       higher than the current figure of 84% (Pew Research 2022). The invisibilisation of religion in  
21       climate governance is evident even in locations of highest levels of religious affiliation and  
22       climate vulnerability, such as the Pacific Islands, where adaptation initiatives are justified via  
23       rational scientific logic (Luetz & Nunn, 2020) rather than by locally accepted meanings of  
24       climate change shaped strongly by interpretation of Christian myths and narratives (Fair,  
25       2018). Religious identities, structures, trends and dynamics vary greatly between cities as a  
26       result of socio-political-geographical legacies: the main difference being cities in the global  
27       South, where religion is more obviously imbricated in material urban structures and  
28       governance systems than the urban North (Becker et al. 2014). However, the role of religion  
29       in shaping urban environments globally has been distorted and under-reported by a normative  
30       Western colonial and secular gaze predicated on simplistic narratives of modernity and religion  
31       (Yountae, 2020, Ong and Roy, 2011). Whether in the Global North or the Global South, there  
32       is an urgent need for urban climate change discourse and policy to attend to the voices and  
33       experiences of billions of global citizens who identify with a religious affiliation, as well as the  
34       deep meanings, ontological assumptions, existential feelings and moral ideals present within  
35       individuals, groups and broader society (Stacey, 2024).

36 Recent scholarship on the governance of urban climate change identifies the importance of  
37 polycentric structures, multi-actor networks and social relations among state and non-state  
38 actors (Munoz-Erickson et al., 2016; Bulkeley 2010, 2014). Accordingly, cities are imagined  
39 as complex social-ecological-technical systems (Bai et al., 2016; McPhearson et al., 2022),  
40 yet there has been surprisingly little work to conceptualise the place of religion within these  
41 theoretical frameworks. One exception is Koehrsen (2018), who presented the actions of  
42 religious actors through the lens of the multi-level perspective on sustainability transitions  
43 (Geels, 2002, Geels and Schot, 2007), This conceptualises religious agency within institutions  
44 and broader society as experimentation (e.g. eco-theology as experimentation), upscaling  
45 (dissemination of pro-environmental values) and regime support (embracing sustainability-  
46 aligned technologies, practices and worldviews). Civil society is increasingly seen as complex  
47 yet crucial to urban sustainability transitions, potentially operating as a driver of positive  
48 change, a benign influence or a sector at risk of being coopted by powerful incumbent political  
49 interests (Frantzeskaki et al., 2016). However, the features of religious organisations as  
50 distinct components of civil society have received little attention.

51 The picture painted in the literature of the relationship between religion and the wider  
52 environment is a complex one. Some scholars point to pro-environmental teachings within  
53 world religions (Grimm & Tucker 2014), and the visible engagement of religious leaders in  
54 environmental fora (Schaefer, 2016) as evidence of the “greening of religion” and thus the  
55 latent potential for religious action (Hitzhusen & Tucker, 2013; Chaplin, 2016). Others highlight  
56 religious barriers to pro-environmental action, such as apocalyptic or domination beliefs  
57 (Skrimshire, 2014), as part of a complicated milieu of religious responses to the environment  
58 (Veldman et al., 2014; Koehrsen, 2023; Taylor et al., 2016). These include being shaped by  
59 broader social and political pressures (Koehrsen & Huber, 2021) or paradoxical psychosocial  
60 responses such as a positive relationship with environmental interest alongside a negative  
61 relationship with concern with environmental threats (Michaels et al., 2021). Others observe a  
62 polarised response to the combination of scientific information and pro-environmental religious  
63 teaching such as Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si* (Li et al., 2016; Wilkins, 2022). Thus, rather than  
64 sidelining religious actors from climate governance, there is a need to engage this complexity  
65 in developing shared responses to climate mitigation and adaptation challenges.

66 This article addresses this need by tracing the existing contours of the emerging nexus  
67 between religion and belief, the urban and the environment through bringing in perspectives  
68 from social theory, human geography and philosophy. Religion is contested and notoriously  
69 difficult to define. Some scholars take an inclusive approach based on function (e.g. any  
70 systems of beliefs or practices) whilst others adopt more exclusive definitions centred on  
71 precise criteria (e.g. requirements of beliefs in a supernatural being or god) (Aldridge, 2007).

72 Religious affiliation is also highly complex, involving individual beliefs and identities that are  
73 held within aggregated communities, denominations and affiliated organisations (Kidwell,  
74 2020), along with people who identify as religious (or spiritual) but are not associated with a  
75 formal religious organisation. We therefore adopt a pragmatic definition of religion here;  
76 namely those actors (individuals, groups, organisations) who identify as religious in any way,  
77 and typically, but not exclusively, are affiliated with a religious organisation. To advance how  
78 urban climate governance may attend more explicitly to religious groups and individuals the  
79 article then analyses two applied themes of the latest IPCC report: Working Group II (Impacts,  
80 Adaptation and Vulnerability) and Working Group III (Mitigation of Climate Change) through  
81 the lens of O'Brien's (2018) three spheres of transformation.

82 The final section addresses the theme of implementation by means of a new conceptual  
83 framework. Religious actors differ from secular actors in many ways, not least the radically  
84 alternative cosmologies, epistemologies and axiologies they often espouse (Jenkins et al.,  
85 2016). As such, rather than mapping religion onto existing urban sustainability frameworks  
86 (*sensu* Koehrsen 2018) our conceptual framework advanced focusses on values (*c.f.* Ives &  
87 Kidwell, 2019). Additionally, religious actors also have an important role as 'intermediaries',  
88 connecting public authorities, community groups and grassroots assemblages (Hague &  
89 Bomberg, 2022) thus making them indispensable in developing transformative partnerships  
90 for urban climate action. Our framework proposes a practical way forward for both religious  
91 and secular actors to advance urban climate governance, and more strategically leverage the  
92 potential of religion and belief by revealing, working with and enriching shared values through  
93 multi-actor partnership.

94

## 95 **2. Conceptualising the intersection of urbanisation, religion and climate**

96 Sustainable global urban futures will increasingly rely on the extent to which we can  
97 understand what Becker et al. (2014) refer to as the 'urban-religious configuration'. Birgit Meyer  
98 suggests this configuration prompts two key questions: 'how do new religions transform urban  
99 space? And conversely how do "cities generate specific urban forms of religion"...?' (Meyer,  
100 2014: 595). Rapidly expanding geographies of religion and urban sociology disciplines are  
101 responding to these questions (see Kong et al., 2024). Previous understandings of urban-  
102 religious configurations include ideas of the postsecular city (Beaumont and Baker, 2011;  
103 Cloke et al., 2019) which highlights political, activist and ethical rapprochements between faith-  
104 based and secular actors actively discovering in-common values that overcome divides and  
105 sustain shared public engagement. It is most evident in the complex religious landscapes of  
106 the global North, marked by disaffiliation from aspects of organised religion (particularly

107 Christianity), increasing categories of unbelief (Lee, 2015), and growth in spiritual values  
108 among those ‘disenchanted’ with traditional religion (Woodhead and Catto, 2012).

109 A more material concept emerging from global South urbanism is ‘worlding’, (Roy and Ong,  
110 2011). It describes the “heterogeneous spatialising practices” that are created when practices  
111 from the world (global cultural ideas and trends) encounter the city, but then are released back  
112 in altered form, as ‘a non-ideological formulation of worlding as situated in everyday practices  
113 that shape alternative social visions and configurations’ (Becker et al., 2014: 27). These  
114 practices specifically include aspirations and imaginations that are religiously informed, and  
115 which motivate faith groups to create alternative urban ‘worlds’. They achieve this by bringing  
116 into being new structures and experiences of living together in the city that address these  
117 aspirations via ‘urban-religious forms of circulation and community building, modelling  
118 practices...borrowing and appropriating...identities... or as the expansion of religious-political  
119 and economic power’ (Becker et al. 2014: 27-8).

120 In this context of the co-construction of religion and cities (Day & Edwards, 2021), we propose  
121 four ways of conceptualising the interaction between religious and urban systems,  
122 summarised as physicalities, practices, prophetic imagination and policy (Table 1). The first  
123 emphasises how religion and belief shapes the *physical* and material structure and function of  
124 a city (Meyer, 2014). This materiality is expressed in the visible and physical planning of  
125 buildings and spaces of worship and social congregation, as well as the social capital provided  
126 via the physical presence of religious organisations. This may be, for example, in the form of  
127 a small community food project repurposing land use around a church. The second  
128 contribution of religion and belief is the public and outward-facing *practices* of religious groups  
129 within urban society, historically linked to poverty, homelessness, asylum seeker and migrant  
130 support, health and social care, addiction services, and youth and family support. Initiatives  
131 and partnerships focused on environmental issues are now coming to the fore especially in  
132 projects aimed at ‘greening’ religious assets such as buildings, land and financial investments.

133 The third influence is what we term *prophetic imagination*, present in all religious traditions  
134 and which critiques existing socio-economic structures from the perspective of a perceived  
135 divine vantage point, providing an impetus for enacting social justice. There is a clear  
136 genealogy linking for example the intersection of Black identity and religion from the Civil  
137 Rights movement in the 60s to present day global activist movements such as Black Lives  
138 Matter (Johnson, 2021; Gray, 2019). In a similar way, religiously-motivated environmental  
139 activism is increasingly becoming evident. Extinction Rebellion – the first global environmental  
140 protest movement to openly acknowledge the moral power of spiritual and religious  
141 dimensions of protest in its language (Joyce, 2020) – encouraged a “bubbling up” of

142 postsecularity (Cloke et al., 2019: 3) through welcoming practices of meditation and prayer at  
143 its gatherings, and promoting high visibility of faith spaces at its events (such as Faith Bridges),  
144 most notably Christian, Buddhist, Islamic and Jewish support (Skrimshire, 2022). Finally, there  
145 is a growing *policy* discourse around the importance of developing more strategic partnerships  
146 at scale between faith-based and secular actors to deal with existential threats facing urban  
147 communities. Recent UK based research has highlighted effective partnerships across faith-  
148 based and local authority (i.e. secular) actors mobilised in response to the COVID-19  
149 pandemic which eschewed traditional hierarchies of expertise, protocols and technocratic  
150 language (Baker and Timms, 2020, 2022). However scholarship has also revealed the internal  
151 structures of religious groups that can stifle a 'greening' imagination at a grassroots or political  
152 level (Koehrsen et al., 2022).

153 The following sections explore key findings and priorities from the IPCC's Sixth Assessment  
154 Report as they pertain to climate adaptation, mitigation and implementation. The lens of the  
155 Three Spheres of Transformation (O'Brien, 2018) is used to translate the above four models  
156 of religious interactions with cities on climate change. First, the *practical* sphere of  
157 transformation, defined by O'Brien (2018: 155) as "specific actions, interventions, strategies  
158 and behaviours" corresponds to both the materiality of religion in cities and the practices that  
159 stem from religious beliefs, values and worldviews. Second, the *political* sphere, defined as  
160 "systems and structures that facilitate or constrain practical responses to climate change" (p.  
161 156) corresponds to the prophetic imagination that faith groups draw upon in enacting social  
162 and environmental justice. Finally, the deepest and most transformative sphere – the *personal*  
163 – is defined by O'Brien as the "beliefs, values, worldviews and paradigms that influence how  
164 people perceive, define or constitute systems and structures, as well as their behaviours and  
165 practices" (O'Brien, 2018: 156). It is evident therefore that religion represents a distinctly  
166 powerful contribution towards urban transformation through its role in coalescing social  
167 structures and identities and drawing on them to motivate action in political and practical  
168 domains. We now highlight how this framework of transformation might be applied to the  
169 contribution of religious actors to the priorities of the Sixth IPCC Assessment Report.



170 Table 1: Typology of religious responses to climate change in urban contexts.

	Description	Application
<b>Physicalities</b>	<p>Religion and belief interact tangibly with physical urban contexts.</p> <p>Relevant theories include New Materialism (Bennett 2010), Actor Network Theory (Latour 2005) and Assemblage thinking (Delanda, 2006, McFarlane 2011).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious communities' provision of capital for disaster relief following environmental capacity (Pant et al. 2018).</li> <li>• Anchor institutions for local resilience in context of climate disaster in terms of provision of healthcare, shelter, education and mental wellbeing (including recovery from trauma) (Lipsky, 2011, Glaab and Fuchs, 2018).</li> <li>• Notions of sacredness enable protection of eco-sensitive urban areas (Tatay &amp; Merino, 2023, Jaganmohan et al. 2018, Ormsbury, 2021).</li> <li>• Carbon sequestration on land owned by FBOs (De Lacy &amp; Shackleton, 2017; Gopal et al. 2018).</li> </ul>
<b>Practices</b>	<p>Religious individuals and organisations engage in environmentally-relevant behaviours and practices.</p> <p>Theoretical perspectives include sustainability transitions and environmental behaviour theory applied to religious contexts (Koehrsen, 2015, 2018; Gottlieb, 2006; Veldman 2013), as well as sociological perspectives on material practices arising from dispositions of 'faithful' citizens (Bourdieu, 1983, Baker and Power, 2018). Faiths are also effective builders of social capital, 'freighting' moral &amp; spiritual agendas into practical forms of social action (Putnam and Campbell 2012).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faith communities provide networks of care and compassion to reduce food poverty &amp; food waste (Williams and May, 2022).</li> <li>• Low-impact lifestyles based on moral and theological motivations (Ives et al., 2023).</li> <li>• FBO-led Recycling mentoring and communal recycling projects (Mohamad et al. 2012 a)</li> <li>• Adapting religious buildings to climate change (solar panels, community gardens on land surrounding places of worship).</li> <li>• Religious NGOs supporting faith groups to move towards environmental sustainability (e.g. A Rocha UK: <a href="https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/">https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/</a>; Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences: <a href="https://www.ifees.org.uk/">https://www.ifees.org.uk/</a>).</li> </ul>



<p><b>Prophetic imagination</b></p>	<p>Religious actors can provide comment and critique of social conditions or normative visions of sustainable futures.</p> <p>Sociology of religious environmentalism conceptualises “public campaigning” as expression of religious environmental action (Koehrsen, 2015; 2018).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable placemaking around shared values and shared local histories (Cooper et al. 2010, Kong &amp; Woods 2016).</li> <li>• Prominent in environmental activism and protest. For example, Christian &amp; Buddhist XR, Christian Climate Action (Joyce, 2020, Skrimshire 2022).</li> <li>• Public statements and declarations e.g. joint statement on Climate Change by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (2021), or the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 2015).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Policy</b></p>	<p>The inclusion of religious perspectives in environmental policy formulation can offer alternative voices, values, narratives and frameworks for environmental governance.</p> <p>Theoretical perspectives include postsecularity (Beaumont and Baker, 2011; Cloke et al., 2019) which recognises spiritual beliefs and values exist beyond formal religious contexts. Third Way policy response in US, UK, Europe and Australia (Giddens, 2013) conceptualise civil society as important antidote to State or Market control (Putnam, 2000).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal shifts in policy or strategy of religious organisations can represent significant change for sustainability. This includes decarbonised investment strategies (IEMA, 2022).</li> <li>• Integrated policy streams that incorporate both faith-based groups and secular policy actors on issues such as food poverty and environmental sustainability strategies (Baker and Timms 2022). Effective partnerships are marked by shared values across difference; co-creation rather than co-production; and kenotic (or self-emptying) leadership (Baker 2023).</li> <li>• In religious states, religious justifications can be used to bring about policy change. For example, in Indonesia, the Ulama Council of Indonesia (MUI) established Islamic legal edicts (fatwas) against harming endangered species, destructive mining, and slash and burn farming (Harvard Divinity School, 2023).</li> </ul>

172

### 173 **3. Adaptation and vulnerability**

174 The IPCC AR6 WGII (Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability) report emphasised the  
175 importance of practical responses to increased frequency, severity and duration of extreme  
176 events (IPCC, 2022a). The material resources of religious organisations have been widely  
177 documented to be crucial assets in the aftermath of climate disasters. For example, after  
178 Hurricane Katrina, many shelters that offered support for evacuees were run by faith-based  
179 organisations (Pant et al., 2008).

180 In addition to immediate practical responses to extreme events, the AR6 report highlights the  
181 importance of building adaptive capacity within communities by implementing adaptive  
182 strategies (IPCC, 2022a). Climate change impacts the urban poor most severely due to  
183 heightened exposure to natural hazards (e.g. flooding or heat) exacerbated by political,  
184 economic and planning disparities, and reduced capacity to plan for and respond to hazards  
185 due to lack of economic or political power (Leal Filho, 2019; Dodman, 2019). Yet commonly,  
186 religious organisations are anchor institutions within poor and informal settlements, helping to  
187 provide social cohesion and support (Lipsky, 2011; Lunn, 2009; Glaab & Fuchs, 2018). Thus,  
188 religious organisations can be vital in any activities to enhance adaptive capacity in these  
189 settings.

190 Also key to the contribution of religion to the adaptive capacity of cities is the role of culture  
191 and spirituality in place meanings and place-making. A large body of literature is  
192 demonstrating the importance of shared identity and investment in place as integral to creating  
193 and sustaining urban resident localities (Grenni et al., 2020; Horlings, 2016). In many contexts,  
194 spiritual meanings and religious histories are central to an understanding of place (Cooper et  
195 al., 2010; Kong and Woods, 2016). With the IPCC highlighting the importance of “diverse  
196 forms of knowledge...in understanding and evaluating climate adaptation processes and  
197 actions” (IPCC, 2022a: 7), the role of religious beliefs in shaping local perspectives on climate  
198 change and place is vital. This includes notions of sacredness, which can protect ecologically-  
199 valuable areas within cities (Tatay & Merino, 2023; Jaganmohan et al., 2018; Ormsbury,  
200 2021), and religiously shaped understandings of knowledge, especially religious concepts of  
201 future desirable visions (e.g. justice, peace, freedom) which are critical to the effective  
202 formulation of urban climate change adaptive strategies.

203 Finally, religion and spirituality are well known to be important factors that can help trauma  
204 victims cope with and respond to traumatic events (Peres et al., 2007) and for many,  
205 participation in religious communities can enhance personal resilience and psychological  
206 recovery (Pargament, 2001). Given the extensive evidence of the profound psychological

207 damage of climate disasters on victims (see Ferreira, 2020 for recent comprehensive review),  
208 understanding the function of religious organisations in contributing to urban adaptive capacity  
209 is crucial.

210 Some have theorised these enabling resources of faith as “spiritual” or “religious” capital  
211 (Baker & Miles-Watson, 2010; Haar 2011) which should be appreciated alongside built,  
212 financial and natural capitals. However, any reference to social or spiritual capital needs to be  
213 offset with general criticisms, which not only critique its fuzziness and ambiguity (Inaba, 2013)  
214 but also its separation from economic capital. This separation underestimates the ways in  
215 which cultural reproduction always favours existing power structures rather than providing  
216 radical alternatives for the most marginalised in society (for example Bourdieu's  
217 understanding of cultural capital and religious capital) (Bourdieu 1983; DeFilippis 2001).

218

#### 219 **4. Mitigation**

220 The IPCC AR6 WGIII report emphasised the importance of local communities in enabling the  
221 necessary and profound transition towards a low carbon society (IPCC, 2022b). Key mitigation  
222 actions that cities must pursue include the reduction of energy consumption and enhanced  
223 uptake of carbon. Faith-based organisations can significantly assist in *motivating* these  
224 transitions through engaging communities with value-based moral motivations for climate  
225 action, and *mobilising* these changes by directing practical and political resources to this  
226 challenge. Examples of these are presented below using O'Brien's (2018) Three Spheres  
227 framework as an organising tool.

228 Within the *practical* sphere, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian and Hindu communities have  
229 mobilised recycling behaviours in Malaysia, through their implementation of a communal  
230 collection system and ability to reinforce behaviour over time (Mohamad et al., 2012a), thus  
231 representing faith-based niche experiments towards urban sustainability transitions  
232 (Mohamad et al., 2012b). A database of other practical faith-based practical projects on  
233 climate mitigation can be found at the Forum on Religion and Ecology's database (Yale, 2023).  
234 Urban sacred sites are also physically valuable for their urban greening, biodiversity and  
235 carbon mitigation potential (De Lacy & Shackleton, 2017; Gopal et al., 2018).

236 In line with the *political* sphere, faith communities have fostered collaboration towards reducing  
237 carbon emissions through establishment of networks (e.g. Faith for the Climate; Green Faith,  
238 Parliament of World Religions), lobbying for political action on climate, such as participation in  
239 UNFCCC meetings (Glaab, 2017), issuing joint statements on the imperative for climate  
240 action, and participating in non-violent direct action. However, many minority faith

241 communities can be encumbered from taking political action that they feel may compromise  
242 their social acceptability and legal security within society, as has been observed among British  
243 Muslim People of Colour (Tobin et al., 2023).

244 At a deeper level, faith-based action at the *personal* sphere includes interventions or initiatives  
245 that seek to shape and activate the moral commitments and religious values that can motivate  
246 and underpin climate action. Religious traditions are not homogenous and there can be  
247 significant disagreement and conflict within and between religious denominations and  
248 communities (Koehrsen, 2022). However, religious rationalities for addressing climate change,  
249 such as notions of sacredness, stewardship and spiritual relationality between people and  
250 nature, have been captured by many organisations in an attempt to unify and catalyse this  
251 potential(e.g. Faith for the Climate, 2023). There is also evidence that appealing to religious  
252 beliefs, values and rationalities can be a powerful approach to shifting or strengthening  
253 attitudes and behaviours related to climate change among religious believers (Ives et al.,  
254 2023).

255

## 256 5. Implementation

257 Given the polycentric nature of environmental governance (Jordan et al., 2018), multi-actor  
258 partnerships across formal and informal institutions and networks are key to adaptive  
259 responses of cities to climate change (Boyd & Juhola, 2015). Yet, religious actors have often  
260 been marginalised, invisibilised or instrumentalised in formulation of climate policy and  
261 engagement in action initiatives by both state and non-state organisations (Tobin et al., 2023).  
262 This narrative is changing (see 'policy' row of Table 1), but future framing of the relationship  
263 between faith groups and the state or market needs to re-imagined as one of active co-  
264 creators of a common response to a common threat rather than producers of services and  
265 outcomes (Baker 2023; Osborne et al. 2016; Voorberg et al., 2015).

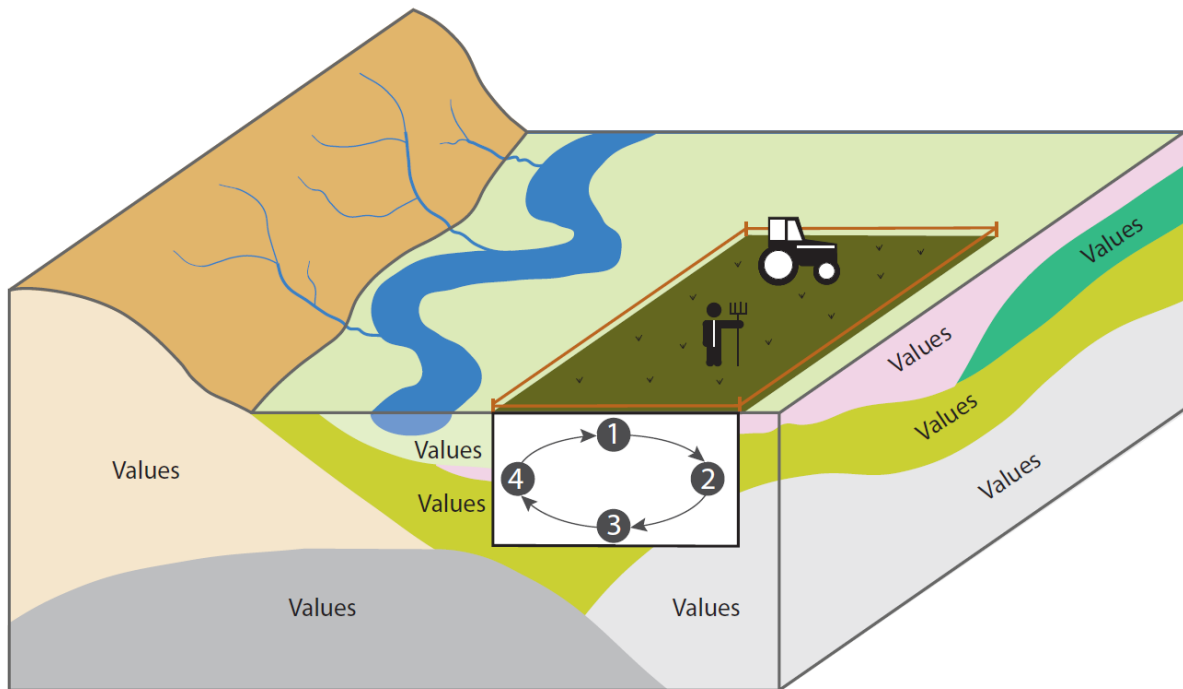
266 The AR6 WGII report emphasises the importance of “[e]ffective partnerships between  
267 governments, civil society, and private sector organizations, [to] enhance the adaptive  
268 capacity of vulnerable people” (IPCC, 2022a: 24). Similarly, the WGIII Mitigation report  
269 emphasised that “[e]ffective and equitable climate governance builds on engagement with civil  
270 society actors” (IPCC, 2022b: 45). It is evident that partnerships between faith-based and  
271 secular actors are integral to more effective climate action and implementation of climate  
272 policy. This resonates with understandings of the ‘post-secular city’, which is marked by ‘a  
273 coming together of citizens who might previously have been divided by differences in  
274 theological, political or moral principles – a willingness to work together to address crucial  
275 social issues in the city, and in doing so put aside other frameworks of difference involving

276 faith and secularism' (Cloke and Beaumont, 2013: 28). There is therefore a need for a deeper  
277 understanding of basis upon which effective partnerships with religious actors can be formed.  
278 Within many contemporary societies, there is a growing emphasis on values as the source of  
279 real change in both individual and corporate life, based on sources of spiritual re-enchantment,  
280 as opposed to disenchantment (Katz et al. 2021, Duffy 2021, Turner, 2022). Thus, there is a  
281 need to develop a theoretical and policy paradigm that harnesses and engages with values  
282 and their intersection with religion and spirituality. Figure 1 presents a pictorial metaphor of  
283 such a paradigm.

284 Values can be understood as subsurface sediments out of which vegetation (social structures,  
285 institutions and lifestyles) grows. Just as sediments carry the marks of the depositional  
286 environments within which they were laid down, values carry the marks of the socio-cultural  
287 contexts they are derived from. Across geographical and historical settings, cities have been  
288 profoundly shaped by religious ideas and practices (Day & Edwards, 2021). After the  
289 Enlightenment and following the industrial revolution, technological and cultural changes  
290 associated with modernity and industrialisation created new cultural environments that  
291 'deposited' a new set of values. These have included human exceptionalism, individualism, a  
292 belief in progress and development, an emphasis on utility and production, and consumerism.  
293 Many of these values are associated with the process of secularisation, which Taylor (2007)  
294 characterises not as a retreat of religion but a philosophical shift in society that legitimises  
295 unbelief, embraces plurality and is grounded in a separation of nature and divinity. More  
296 recently, scholars have begun to explore the entanglement of cultural meanings, values and  
297 scientific understandings of environmental change that define the Anthropocene (Hamilton et  
298 al., 2015). In this context, the 'depositional environment' model proposed therefore recognises  
299 both the importance of religion in shaping the plural sets of values present in contemporary  
300 urban settings, and rejects neat categorisation of values as religious vs. secular or  
301 homogenous within religious traditions.

302 This model has profound implications for how action on urban climate change mitigation and  
303 adaptation can be mobilised. The IPCC concluded that "[m]itigation options that align with  
304 prevalent ideas, values and beliefs are more easily adopted and implemented" (IPCC, 2022b:  
305 46). Similarly, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem  
306 Services calls for actions that help "unleash existing social values of responsibility" for  
307 sustainability transformations (IPBES, 2019, s.33). Horcea-Milcu (2022: 5) argued that for the  
308 transformative potential of values to be unleashed, they must be "activated, negotiated,  
309 consolidated, and mobilized within and across intentional individual or collaborative  
310 processes". Thus, sets of "sustainability-aligned values" proposed by IPBES (2022), namely  
311 values of care, unity, equity and justice, cannot be neatly imported from elsewhere but must

312 be attended to within particular socio-cultural settings. The value stratigraphic model proposed  
 313 here emphasises the need to recognise and work with existing values laid down in cultural  
 314 sediments to plant, germinate and nurture seeds of climate transformations.



315

316 **Figure 1:** A schematic representation of the depositional model of values described above.  
 317 Here, sets of values can be understood as sediments, laid down under particular  
 318 environmental (socio-cultural) conditions through time, often characterised by religious belief  
 319 systems. Therefore, a complex assemblage of values are present beneath the surface. As a  
 320 farmer works with the soils and sediments within a field, the task for developing effective  
 321 partnerships for urban climate action is to develop partnerships across religious and secular  
 322 divides, grounded in shared values. This includes (1) understanding the value context, (2)  
 323 remediating toxic values, (3) mixing and aerating values, and (4) enriching values through  
 324 collaborative processes.

325

326 An understanding of values as cultural sediments has implications for urban climate action.  
 327 First, just as a farmer, gardener or ecological restorationist tests the soil before deciding on  
 328 any action to take, sustainability practitioners must recognise and understand the religious  
 329 landscape and history of a community. This includes understanding key historical moments,  
 330 religious complexity and division, and examples of positive action and flourishing. Second, just  
 331 as sediments can be contaminated by toxins and pollutants, so it may be necessary to  
 332 remediate toxic values, beliefs and attitudes, that lead to the generation of regressive  
 333 outcomes that privilege the few over the many, whether religious or secular in origin.



334 Religiously derived toxins for example could include theological beliefs that see the climate  
335 crisis as a welcomed-end-of times phenomenon, or as divine punishment for human sins  
336 (Koerhsen at al., 2023: 6). These beliefs can generate various forms of climate scepticism,  
337 denialism, fatalism or quietism, and are expressed in bureaucratic structures and institutional  
338 values of religious institutions that inhibit collaborative engagement with secular organisations  
339 and mutual development of coherent policy. Third, just as a horticulturalist can till and prepare  
340 the soil by mixing and aerating the substrate, it is necessary to find shared values across  
341 difference, by effectively ‘mixing’ cultural layers. This can involve establishing contexts where  
342 religious beliefs and values can be offered freely as gifts to society rather than markers of  
343 division. Finally, as soil is enriched through addition of nutrients, climate action can be  
344 enhanced through activities that draw out, support and amplify deep values and motivations  
345 for sustainability.

346 Many of these activities can be seen in a recent example of how resources of UK faith-based  
347 organisations were activated during the pandemic lock downs of 2020 and 2021, and  
348 indispensable to the overall policy responses of local authorities (Baker and Timms, 2020;  
349 Baker and Timms 2022). In terms of the model outlined in Figure 1, the professionalism and  
350 scale of response from faith communities in response to the pandemic favourably reminded  
351 secular agencies of their indispensability (i.e., Action 1: a renewed awareness and  
352 understanding of religious traditions and practices for the current context). Old hierarchies,  
353 bureaucratic protocols and technocratic language, designed to entrench ‘expert’ vs. ‘lay’  
354 identities, were quickly eschewed as wholly inadequate for the scale of the task in hand (i.e.,  
355 Action 2: the removal of toxic assumptions and practices that embed regressive as opposed  
356 to progressive outcomes). Shared values quickly emerged in the context of devising effective  
357 and sustainable responses to human disaster and the realisation of a common and  
358 interdependent humanity (i.e., Action 3: creating the conditions for aerating the policy  
359 landscape by allowing the creative mixing of religious, sacred and secular/scientific substrates  
360 of values and beliefs). These values were articulated as kindness, empathy, compassion,  
361 motivation, hope, friendship and social justice. Such shared values are being reflected upon  
362 by some faith groups and local authorities as the basis for policy formation going forward as a  
363 way of consolidating a new way of partnership working rather than ideological or economic  
364 aims that are often sources of division and siloed thinking (Ramos and Hynes, 2019) (i.e.,  
365 Action 4 – creating an enriched and more fruitful partnership environment that will generate  
366 enhanced communication, innovation, trust and solidarity). That shared values will more  
367 effectively lead to shared outcomes is a vital lesson that has been learned from the pandemic  
368 and can be applied to urban climate challenges.

369



## 370 **6. Conclusion**

371 There is an urgent need to attend more closely to the social and cultural origins of climate  
372 change, contexts that shape how cities experience, and pathways for developing shared  
373 action for climate mitigation and adaptation. As representatives of systems of belief, values  
374 and meaning-making that differ from conventions of rational science-led decision-making  
375 (Gluckman, 2016), there is a need for religious actors to be engaged more explicitly in the  
376 mutual co-creation of urban climate policy through the weaving together of multiple forms of  
377 knowledge (Tengö et al., 2014; Norström et al., 2020). This article has presented a model for  
378 activating partnerships across religious-secular divides through understanding religion as a  
379 key influence on prevailing values within society and working to act from a foundation of  
380 shared values. However, further research is needed into how such partnerships can be  
381 fostered in different geographical contexts and common understandings of climate responses  
382 developed across ontological and epistemological divides.

383

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388

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391

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397 CI and CB declare none.

398

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