

The Mission of Interfaith in Care for Earth:

for Global Interfaith Summit, World Yoga Community, Partner Sponsors

Frank Kaufmann

Twelve Gates Foundation

Author Note

Frank Kaufmann: <https://12gf.org>

No conflict of interest to disclose.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Frank
Kaufmann, Twelve Gates Foundation. Email: fkaufmann@12gf.org

Abstract

Science pursues truth in its way, religion and spirituality in their ways. Interfaith leaders must appreciate how religion and spirituality encourage care for the earth.

Keywords: religion, science, earth, interfaith

The Mission of Interfaith in Care for Earth

Respected guests of the World Yoga Community and all sponsoring organizations. It is my great pleasure to be with such an illustrious group of high-minded friends and colleagues, including some dear friends of many years. I am humbled and grateful to be with you. I honor all you have done and are doing in service for others and our world. As we gather in the premise of interfaith, many here inherited and reflect the special wisdom of their respective faith traditions. I humble myself before your founders and saints.

The special occasion of this particular meeting is Earth Day. Beginning in 1970, it is a young and important part of our evolution as a world family.

The rise of science worship

Developments which began in the 16th and 17th centuries, gained momentum at the end of the 19th century, and continued until today, have led to an era that idolizes science at the expense of the wisdom and aspiration of traditional religion.

Earth Day, and its emphasis on environmental concerns stimulate science idolatry, infected with shallow commercial interests and avaricious media. Religious people must not lose spiritual authority and grace as we work collectively to protect our beloved mother earth.

Care for the health of the earth and as well as the health of people requires religion as much as science. The notion that calling something science means that it is true *prima facie* is ignorance or manipulation. The phrase “follow the science” is used to bludgeon people who are seeking solutions. I felt shame watching shallow, demanding so-called journalists screech at public figures, imagining it possible to produce instant knowledge about a disease never seen in human history. This sort of behavior showed me more than ever how desperately our religious traditions are needed to guide human behavior and interaction, rather than bowing at the vacuous altar of fear and “science.”

Knowledgeable people know that science moves towards its truths by putting forth positions to be proven wrong. Just as religions should move toward our truths by being humble. Science is a humble art that proceeds on the rails of falsifiability. “It’s not a scientific theory unless it can be used to make a prediction and have that prediction turn out

Interfaith

As for interfaith, from its exciting birth in modern times (which I place more or less at the Chicago Parliament, especially the speech of Swami Vivekananda) until our present moment, the movement progressed merrily along through the calm first 90% of our path toward each other, and slammed on the brakes when things got scary and awkward. Instead of summoning the courage to engage at vulnerable levels, we chose instead to address causes and projects) “on which we can all agree.” Let us leave aside discussing irksome religious beliefs like “No man comes to the Father except through me,” and instead all agree to disparage Exxon Mobil.

I am not arguing for or against Exxon Mobil. Plus, I am not saying religious people should not care for the earth, or for any other social cause of the hour, race, gender, immigration and whatever else floods and overwhelms our lives regardless whether we are religious or not. I wish only to offer that caring for these genuine concerns is not religious or even spiritual *an sich*. There are tons of people raging about these causes who despise religion.

If interfaith meetings choose to orient ourselves around popular social causes, we should do so in ways that are unique to our explicit identity as spiritual leaders whose primary mission and concern is to learn ever more deeply from one another the wisdom of our respective traditions, to improve the quality of our relationships with one another, and to grow in our capacity to lead and support our fellow believers on the unnerving path to true interreligious cooperation.

What then would be our unique contribution to this wonderful and urgent work to care about the health of our mother earth. I will offer two.

Spirituality and the Environment

God (by whatever name) created (however that is understood) this earth and us in it. God made us out of basically the same stuff as earth, and God gave us special sensitivities. (Not to be speciesist. Yes, my dog is probably a better being than me, but the flower we just walked past spoke eternity into my heart more than into his.)

Nature is wondrous. If I can get closer to God (by whatever name) and Godliness, my love and appreciation for God’s own masterpiece grows and resonates to magical degrees. Yes, a scientist may be better than me at measuring the rate of oxygen depletion per particle of pollution. But I may be better at helping her learn of water’s inner voice.

¹ Forbes, “3 Vital Rules of Science, In Plain English”, t.ly/YOcj

If we *are* better at something, and we *do* have something important to give, then we should not fight with one another, and not be artificial with one another. Because if we do, no one will want to listen to us. When that happens, no amount of science will be able to rescue our suffering planet. It is the job of religion to create people who so feel God as She is *in Her* planet that no harm could ever come from such a person. When we do our jobs in our respective traditions, and we truly transcend our differences, we are doing our job for the sake of Earth. People blessed by such work become incapable of harming earth because of the pain such carelessness would create. To harm something so good, vulnerable, and trusting as our dear mother earth, would sear our divinity with such torment that harm for selfish gain would be impossible to contemplate.