

## Article

# COP and the Cloth: Quantitatively and Normatively Assessing Religious NGO Participation at the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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**Abstract:** How much is religion quantitatively involved in global climate politics? After assessing the role of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change from a normative perspective, this descriptive, transdisciplinary and unconventional study offers the first comprehensive quantitative examination of religious nongovernmental organizations that formally participate in its annual meetings, the largest attempts to solve the climate crisis through global governance. This study finds that although their numbers are growing, only about 3 percent of registered nongovernmental organizations accredited to participate in the conference are overtly religious in nature — and that more than 80 percent of those faith-based groups are Christian. Additionally, this study finds that religious nongovernmental organizations that participate in the conference are mostly from the Global North. The results call for greater participation of religious institutions in the international climate negotiations in order for society to address the planetary emergency of climate change.

**Keywords:** Civil Society; Climate Politics; Environmental Governance; Faith-Based Environmentalism; Faith-Based Nonprofits; Global Governance; International Relations; Religion and Ecology; Religion and Society; Sustainability

**Abbreviations:** CMP: Conference of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol; CMA: Conference of the Parties to the Paris Agreement; COP: Conference of Parties; DPI: United Nations Department of Public Information; ECOSOC: United Nations Economic and Social Council; IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; NGO: nongovernmental organization; UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

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## 1. Introduction

The United Nations has built the annual meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP)<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)<sup>iv</sup> into the preeminent international arena for addressing climate change and its related problems through global climate politics. Although one previous study, as will be discussed later in this paper, researched quantitative participation of religious groups at the COP [1], this new study constitutes the first comprehensive attempt to determine the religious constituency of UNFCCC-accredited nongovernmental organizations (also known as NGOs). Given both their reach as well as their status as ethical authorities, re-

religious institutions — and their leaders as people of the cloth, which I use here as a generic representative of a vestment of faith — are in a strong (and at this point largely unexercised) position to lead the world in environmental action [2]. The 2015 papal encyclical on climate change, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home* [3], brought renewed attention to the potential of religion to impact global climate-change policy, but this paper asks: In what numbers do religious organizations participate in the COP?

My research question invites several critiques: (i) Why include a normative perspective? (ii) Why is the COP important? (iii) Why is it important for religion to be involved in policy? (iv) Is not religion anti-environmental and therefore worthy of blame [4]? (v) And lastly, would not the qualitative aspects of the role of religion at the COP be more important and potentially more interesting than the quantitative aspects? In other words, why does this study matter?

As far as normativity, since we all have our own unique backgrounds and implicit and explicit biases, the ideal of objectivity may be unachievable, attempting but ultimately failing to hide our normative perspectives [5]. Accordingly, I see explicitly normative perspectives as more transparent, and I recognize that others have different points of view on this and virtually anything else [6]. Preference for or against normativity is subjective. Moreover, normative scholarship is becoming increasingly common in some fields such as international relations [7-12], particularly when the object of inquiry relates to morals and ethics [7] — and some newer fields, such as sustainability, which “requires both a descriptive knowledge and a normative approach” [13], place normativity at the heart of their *raison d’être*.

In terms of the COP’s importance, I offer in section 2 a normative assessment of the role of the COP. And I address the role of religion in policy in section 3 as part of my discussion of existing thoughts and literature on the participation of religious NGOs in the political realm of the United Nations.

The perception of religion as anti-environmental stems from historian Lynn White Jr.’s prominent narrative of religion as the root cause of the ecological crisis [4]. However, White provided little to no empirical evidence for his charge against religion. Studying the numeric participation of religious NGOs at the COP may provide quantitative evidence to either support or rebuke White’s claim.

As far as the final concern, there are several reasons that this study’s quantitative approach matters. The first is that quantitative data are specific, replicable and comparable. This study continues a body of quantitative scholarship examining the numeric participation of NGOs in U.N. bodies [1,14-17] by providing the first comprehensive attempt to quantitatively determine the number of religious NGOs in the UNFCCC and at the COP. And as others have argued in studying the numeric participation of religious groups at the ECOSOC, the United Nations Economic and Social Council — the focus of previous quantitative studies on religious NGOs at the United Nations — understanding the quantitative aspects of participation can lay the groundwork for later qualitative research [14,15]. Further, understanding the scope of interaction between international institutions may be key to understanding globalization, or the new world order [18]. In other words, quantitative research can help provide the basis for future qualitative research — and combined together, quantitative and qualitative research offer a more holistic understanding of an issue. Subjects for future research include why NGO participation has changed over time, the role of religious doctrine in that change, the corresponding political and social implications and impacts of their participation, if and how they work with secular NGOs, and how and why their activities, motivations and goals differ from secular NGOs.

This paper is the first in a series of two studies. The second, currently under peer review as part of a book on faith-based environmentalism, takes a qualitative approach to examine the methods and goals of religious NGOs at the COP. Together these two studies help illustrate the role of religion at the COP. How exactly this study’s quantita-

tive work is undertaken is described in section 4, with results detailed in section 5. Most significantly, this study finds that:

- Only about 3 percent of UNFCCC-accredited NGOs are religious in nature;
- More than 80 percent of those faith-based groups are Christian;
- Most are from the Global North;
- And religious NGOs participate in the UNFCCC at a much lower rate than in the ECOSOC.

After a discussion (section 6), I will conclude (section 7) with a moral call to action for more religious NGOs to participate in the COP in order for society to help address the planetary emergency of climate change.

## 2. The COP and the UNFCCC: A Normative Assessment

At the dawn of the anthropocene, the epoch in which humans have become the most impactful force shaping the Earth [19-21], anthropogenic climate change and other forms of environmental destruction may be the biggest challenge ever faced by humanity — a “planetary emergency” [22-26]. Every year since the first COP in 1995, politicians and other representatives from world governments have gathered annually with the goal of addressing climate change, caused predominantly through excessive carbon emissions from human society. After a week or two of talking about how to address a global problem requiring unprecedented urgency, world leaders return home and, for the most part<sup>vi</sup>, continue discussions at the COP the following year. In essence, glacial politics abets glacial melt. The COP proves that the “Madhouse Effect” — where the “very language of science itself, of ‘skepticism’ and ‘evidence,’ is used in a way opposite of how science really employs it” [27] — can extend even to those who supposedly accept the science of climate change and are supposedly meeting explicitly to remedy it<sup>vii</sup>.

In addressing the United Nations, teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg offered a succinct critique not of the COP specifically but of world leadership’s absence of action on the issue: “People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction. And all you can talk about is money and fairytales of eternal economic growth” [28].

Thunberg may be quite effective at motivating the public [29], but governments at the COP seem to be immune to the “Greta Effect” that inspires others to action. The prevailing sentiment of nations at the COP may be best embodied by the so-called “anti-Greta” — Naomi Seibt, the German teenager working for the Heartland Institute, a U.S.-based libertarian think tank notorious for climate denialism — who has described the thinking of those like Thunberg as “despicably anti-human” [30]. Seibt essentially says that she does not want people to stop believing in anthropogenic climate change, she simply wants people to stop thinking that they actually should do anything about it [31]. Or, in the parlance of supporters of the James Partnership’s Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation — the libertarian and evangelical Christian group whose members believe that Earth stewardship requires exploitation of fossil fuels, and which is funded by Chevron, ExxonMobil, the Koch brothers and the Scaife family, the heirs to Gulf Oil — Seibt and the climate delayers at the COP are “resisting the green dragon” [32-34]. Their climate delayism constitutes a form of normalcy bias<sup>viii</sup>, the belief that everything will be fine in the future as it is perceived to be in the present, despite facts to the contrary, leading to inadequate and inappropriate response to a hazard.

The COP — which also includes corporations, educational institutions and other NGOs, that together constitute civil society — has resulted in slow, incremental shifts toward reining in carbon emissions, including, most notably, the Kyoto Protocol in 1992 and the Paris Agreement in 2015. However, the COP clearly has failed to date in leading to the type of substantial reductions in carbon emissions that will be necessary to avert climate change [35-44]. Indeed, as of this writing, global carbon emissions have been climbing steadily and have nearly doubled since COP 1 in Berlin [45] and at least 148 countries, including China, India and the United States, are not even on target to meet

the modest carbon-reduction goals set by the Paris Agreement [46]. The result is that the COP has the effectiveness of Keystone Cops<sup>ix</sup>. Instead of taking action to drastically reduce emissions, we have been throwing more coal into the fire that our increasingly off-kilter climate is becoming — or as my former teacher Wallace Broecker, among the first to warn of global warming and climate change [47], famously quipped, “the climate system is an angry beast and we are poking it with sticks” [48].

The COP is also a behemoth — dense and difficult to penetrate with tens of thousands of people with competing interests in attendance [49], including negotiators from every country in the world. That makes the COP, however ineffective, the most significant global effort for countries to address climate change on an international level.

In summary, the COP has been ineffective to date, but it represents a complex solution to a complex problem. And solutions to the problems of the anthropocene, such as climate change, are likely as complex and multifaceted as the problems themselves. Of the many angles, religion may be a significantly underutilized leverage point [50] in developing sustainable solutions [51-56].

### 3. Religious NGOs at the United Nations

Academics have many names for religious organizations. Katharina Glaab uses the term faith-based actors, or FBAs [57], Jeffrey Haynes uses the term faith-based organizations, or FBOs [58], and others have called these RNGOs [15,59,60], mimicking the naming pattern used in U.N. proceedings. I prefer the term religious groups or religious NGOs [16,18,61] because it closely mirrors official UNFCCC terminology while eschewing the abbreviation RNGOs because RNGOs also has been used to refer to regional NGOs, and to avoid confusion with RINGOs, the UNFCCC constituency group of researchers. Still, I use all these terms and others interchangeably as they all represent the same categorical grouping.

One might argue that this research views religion and religious NGOs as instrumental to a different cause (in this case, addressing climate change) rather than religion being instrumental to its own stated purposes, such as spiritual ascent, enlightenment or serving one or more deities (the Divine). From my perspective, the purpose of religion, or at least prosocial religion, whether developed by humans or the Divine, is to make better humans [62,63] (although of course religion is not the only path to human betterment) — and thereby thrive as a species [64-67]. Therefore I see religion as inherently instrumental (as designed by humans or the Divine), and to the extent that its practice leads to better humans it succeeds<sup>x</sup>, and to the extent that its practice leads to worse (or antisocial) human behavior (such as by instigating violence on fellow humans and/or nature) it fails.

To those who ask if “the movement of religious organizations into a secular field constitute[s] an increase in the public exercise of religious authority or, instead, the secularization of religious NGOs” [68], I note that religions always have encompassed both the overtly religious and the seemingly secular, in that they seek to instruct their practitioners how to live. Correspondingly, religious laws and edicts typically are not restricted to overt religious practice — the activities that help differentiate one religion from another and from secular society — and include seemingly secular laws. For example, in Abrahamic faith traditions the Hebrew Bible prohibits murder (Gen. 9:6, Ex. 20:13), imposes empathy (Lev. 19:18), and commands stewardship of the Earth (Gen. 2:15). As the list of religious laws governing the seemingly secular can be even longer than the list of laws that govern the overtly religious, it can be argued “that all acts dictated or inspired by religion — not just those that seem overtly religious, such as attending religious services or observing religious dietary laws — are religious acts using religious methods by virtue of their religious origin” [69]. And acts that do not overtly seem religious still can be sacred because they are part of the religion’s mores [70]. Therefore an act can be religious by virtue of its inspiration, regardless of whether or not it may seem like an overtly religious act to others. Essentially, while not every religious

NGO necessarily would self-describe it this way [71], this study covers overtly religious NGOs performing seemingly non-overtly religious practice.

Religious NGOs that participate in secular political systems, such as the UNFCCC, are not “water[ing] down” their religions [72], since the seemingly secular issues on which they remark are part of their own faith traditions. Religious NGOs also need not be doing so as either a “public exercise of religious authority” [68] or as a “secularization of religious NGOs” [68] but rather as an inclusion — not assertion — of religious mores into larger discussions that affect their adherents. In essence, church and state can remain separate — church (used here as a historic reference to religion in general) can operate independently outside of the state while providing counsel to the state. This perspective perhaps is best voiced by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who said that the church “is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state” [73]. One cannot be the conscience of the state through standing by idly; being the conscience of the state requires active engagement with the state. Likewise, being the conscience of the UNFCCC requires active engagement with it, which in turn requires formal accreditation.

Many of the arms of the United Nations maintain their own separate accreditations. Even though the UNFCCC allows for nine constituency groups<sup>xi</sup> to provide input into COP negotiations, not one of the nine — agricultural, business, environmental, indigenous, local governmental, researcher (higher education), trade union, women and gender, and youth [74] — represents religion. Determining a de-facto UNFCCC constituency group for religion requires digging into UNFCCC accreditation and registration numbers.

#### 4. Methods

In designing this study to examine the religious makeup of UNFCCC-accredited NGOs, I adapted the methods of those such as Ann-Kristin Beinlich and Clara Braungart who examined the religious makeup of ECOSOC-accredited NGOs [14], and I have noted the instances of where and why my methodology differed from theirs.

Using publicly available data provided by the UNFCCC [75], this study analyzed all UNFCCC-accredited nongovernmental organizations as of May 1, 2019<sup>xii</sup> to determine how many are overtly of a religious nature and of which religion, using Beinlich and Braungart’s definition of religious groups — as described in their 2019 study using 2012 data on groups accredited by the ECOSOC — as those that “evoke, implicitly or explicitly, religious, spiritual, or faith-based symbology” [14].

The UNFCCC, like other arms of the United Nations, does not publish the religious affiliation of accredited NGOs. Because of that, my study classified UNFCCC-accredited NGOs as religious only by their overtness. Whereas Beinlich and Braungart determined a group’s religiosity through review of its mission statement and website, my study relied nearly exclusively upon a group’s name. Those NGOs that are religious but operate under seemingly secular names were classified by my study as secular and not religious. I made this choice partly because many of the groups do not have operational websites, and because I found that Beinlich and Braungart’s method led to some fuzzy classifications, such as determining that a religious group was religious because of usage of the word “Creator” at the end of a long and otherwise secular about-us website statement [14,76]. However using the same standard, the U.S. Department of the Treasury would be a religious group through its emblazoning of “In God We Trust” on all American currency. And while one could make an argument that the United States, despite its promise of separation of church and state, is indeed a religious institution, as U.S. Supreme Court Justice David Josiah Brewer famously did at the turn of the 20th century<sup>xiii</sup> [77], fuzzy grey areas do not lend themselves well to consistent and replicable classification. By choosing to focus on those groups that are overtly religious in nature — those that self-identify themselves as a religious/faith-based/spiritual institution rather than those who may simply utilize religion tangentially — I removed much of the potential



ambiguity in categorical classification<sup>xiv</sup>, and although the result may be more minimalist than maximalist, it also may be more consistent, replicable and unambiguous.

Alternatively, a survey of the thousands of UNFCCC-accredited NGOs may have resulted in some groups without overtly religious names reporting themselves as religious organizations, but a survey most likely would yield a sample rather than the entire population, since assuredly many groups would not reply to the survey. And that sample may contain bad data as questions asked later in a survey are susceptible to misclassification and other reporting errors due to response fatigue [78]. Additionally, those who do respond may represent only a small percentage of the population thanks to survey fatigue [79]. For example, in 2011 a team based at the University of Kent attempted a survey of 3,275 NGOs at the U.N. Department of Global Communications<sup>xv</sup>, then known as the U.N. Department of Public Information, or the DPI. However only 192 — a non-randomized sample of less than 6 percent of DPI-accredited NGOs — responded to their survey [80]. The result was unrepresentative of the population<sup>xvi</sup> and, by the team's own admission, skewed even more Christian than more representative studies indicate.

Additionally, a survey on religious groups in particular can yield different results because of different understandings of the term “religious.” For example, while used here as meaning of or pertaining to religion, the term to others can convey a fervency associated with the most orthodox of a religion's practitioners. So a religious NGO may be of or pertaining to a specific religion and not consider itself religious [15]<sup>xvii</sup>, per se, because the group represents a progressive, pluralistic and/or nonsectarian faction of the faith.

Eschewing a survey and using Beinlich and Braungart's method instead, I built a database of a group's name, city, country, type of religious orientation, religious denomination (if applicable and discernable), website (if available), whether or not it is an institution of higher learning, and contact information (if available). Like Beinlich and Braungart, I excluded governmental and quasi-governmental religious institutions such as Keren Kayamet L'Yisrael<sup>xviii</sup> and secular groups from countries such as Cambodia, Iran, Israel and the Vatican that are defined by their religion. I also excluded intergovernmental organizations<sup>xix</sup>, such as the European Investment Bank, because they do not represent civil society. My study has made no distinction between faith traditions, religions and spiritual movements (such as the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University — henceforth simply Brahma Kumaris — which does not self-identify as a religion). When determining the continental status of NGOs, my study used the location of the country's capital city<sup>xx,xxi,xxii</sup>.

Lastly, just because a group becomes accredited with the DPI, ECOSOC or the UNFCCC does not mean that it actually engages with the work of the accrediting agency; accreditation simply makes the group *eligible* to engage. In other words, just because an NGO is accredited by the UNFCCC does not mean that it actually sends representatives to the COP. Prior studies of ECOSOC-accredited NGOs relied on U.N.-agency accreditation lists, meaning that they really only measured eligibility to participate, rather than actual participation. My study of UNFCCC-accredited NGOs looks deeper to also examine the affiliation of individuals who registered to attend the COP.

Using publicly available data provided by the UNFCCC [81], I built a second database of all individuals who registered to participate in COP 24 held in Katowice, Poland, in December 2018. I chose COP 24 instead of COP 25 because the latter's location, which originally was Brazil, moved at first to Chile<sup>xxiii</sup> and, a mere few weeks before the conference's start, moved once again to Spain, making COP 25 representation a less reliable proxy for religious participation since many organizations — particularly small groups — with flights and lodging already arranged for Chile, may not have been able to quickly adjust plans for Spain instead.

From my second database, I selected for individuals who were registered as representatives of religious NGOs and developed a spreadsheet of formal religious organizational involvement at COP 24. The database excludes individuals who represented reli-

gious NGOs at COP 24 but who did not register for COP 24 as the representative of a religious NGO. Also, although it is likely that some people registered for COP 24 but did not actually attend the event, a list of individuals who picked up their badges at COP 24 is not publicly available. Additionally, it is worth noting that most COPs have two security-separated zones — one for registered attendees representing UNFCCC-accredited institutions, and one for the general public. While historically the public zone has not required registration, it has recently, and those registration lists are not publicly available and therefore are excluded from this study.

5. Results

This study found that as of May 2019, there are 2,222 UNFCCC-accredited NGOs, 57 of which, or about 3 percent, are overtly religious<sup>xxiv</sup>. Of those, as shown in Table 1, this study found that 47, or about 82 percent, are Christian; four, or about 7 percent, are interfaith/multifaith; two, or about 4 percent, are Bahá'í; two, or about 4 percent, are Buddhist; one, or about 2 percent, is Brahma Kumaris; and one, or about 2 percent, is indigenous spiritual. Completely absent are major world religions such as Daoism/Taoism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shintoism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism<sup>xxv</sup>.

Table 1. UNFCCC-accredited religious NGOs.

Faith	Number of Accredited NGOs	Percentage of Religious NGOs	Percentage of All NGOs
Bahá'í	2	3.51%	0.09%
Brahma Kumaris	1	1.75%	0.05%
Buddhism	2	3.51%	0.09%
Christian	47	82.46%	2.12%
Daoism/Taosim	0	0%	0%
Hinduism	0	0%	0%
Interfaith/ multifaith	4	7.02%	0.18%
Indigenous spiritual	1	1.75%	0.05%
Islam	0	0%	0%
Jainism	0	0%	0%
Judaism	0	0%	0%
Shintoism	0	0%	0%
Sikhism	0	0%	0%
Zoroastrianism	0	0%	0%
Total	57	100%	2.57% <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Numbers do not equal total due to rounding.

Examining the organizational affiliation of COP 24 registrants may offer a more accurate understanding of which religious groups participate at the COP. This study found that 22,770<sup>xxvi</sup> individuals registered to participate from 2,168 groups, including:

- 13,890 individuals from 197 registered parties, aka world governments;
- 6,046 individuals from 1,120 registered NGOs;
- 1,541 individuals from 726 registered media organizations;
- 791 individuals from 80 registered intergovernmental organizations, such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Renewable Energy Agency, as well as some that one might not expect, such as the International Potato Center, and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (aka OPEC);

- 267 individuals from 19 registered specialized agencies, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund;
- 227 individuals from 25 U.N. groups;
- And eight individuals from one observer state, the Holy See, aka the Vatican.

Within the NGO numbers, my study found that there were 220 individuals representing 42 religious NGOs. While religious NGOs only make up about 3 percent of all UNFCCC-accredited NGOs, they represent about 4 percent of UNFCCC-accredited NGOs who registered for COP 24. (The 220 individuals also represent about 4 percent of all NGO-registered individuals at COP 24.) The religious-NGO participation rate increases because about three quarters of the UNFCCC-accredited religious NGOs actually sent representatives to COP 24. Yet the participation rate of religious NGOs among all NGOs still remains in the low single digits.

Additionally, my study found another 29 individuals representing religious NGOs who registered under a different NGO than their own. Twenty-one of those registered under a fellow religious NGO, and eight of those registered under a secular NGO.

**Table 2.** Religious NGOs at COP 24.

Faith	Number of Registered NGOs	Percentage of Religious NGOs	Percentage of All NGOs <sup>1</sup>
Bahá'í	0	0%	0%
Brahma Kumaris	1	1.72%	0.09%
Buddhism	3	5.17%	0.27%
Christian	47	81.03%	4.20%
Daoism/Taosim	0	0%	0%
Hinduism	0	0%	0%
Interfaith/ multifaith	6	10.34%	0.54%
Indigenous spiritual	1	1.72%	0.09%
Islam	0	0%	0%
Jainism	0	0%	0%
Judaism	0	0%	0%
Shintoism	0	0%	0%
Sikhism	0	0%	0%
Zoroastrianism	0	0%	0%
Total	58	100% <sup>2</sup>	5.18% <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Compares the numbers of religious NGOs including those who registered under the auspices of other NGOs to the total number of registered NGOs (1,120), excluding those secular groups that registered under the auspices of other NGOs.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers do not equal total due to rounding.

Those 29 registered as representatives of 25 NGOs, nine of which already were registered on their own, effectively adding 16 to the tally of religious NGOs formally registered to participate in COP 24. As shown in Table 2, counting those religious NGOs that registered under the auspices of another NGO brings the total number of different religious NGOS at COP 24 to 58, of which 47, or about 81 percent, are Christian; six, or about 10 percent are interfaith/multifaith; three, or about 5 percent, are Buddhist; one, or about 2 percent, is Brahma Kumaris; and one, or about 2 percent, is indigenous spiritual.

However different groups brought different numbers of representatives to COP 24. For example, while the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations registered



16, Micah Zambia registered only one, and that was through its fellow Christian organization Tearfund, since Micah Zambia is not accredited by the UNFCCC.

**Table 3.** Individuals representing religious NGOs at COP 24.

<b>Faith</b>	<b>Number of Registered Individuals</b>	<b>Percentage of Religious-NGO Individuals</b>	<b>Percentage of All NGO Individuals</b>
Bahá'í	0	0%	0%
Brahma Kumaris	7	2.81%	0.12%
Buddhism	18	7.23%	0.30%
Christian	205	82.33%	3.39%
Daoism/Taosim	0	0%	0%
Hinduism	0	0%	0%
Interfaith/ multifaith	16	6.43%	0.26%
Indigenous spiritual	3	1.20%	0.05%
Islam	0	0%	0%
Jainism	0	0%	0%
Judaism	0	0%	0%
Shintoism	0	0%	0%
Sikhism	0	0%	0%
Zoroastrianism	0	0%	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>4.12% <sup>1</sup></b>

<sup>1</sup> Numbers do not equal total due to rounding.

As shown in Table 3, of the total of 249 individuals representing religious NGOs, 205, or about 82 percent were representing Christian groups; 18, or about 7 percent, were representing Buddhist groups; 16, or about 6 percent, were representing inter-faith/multifaith groups; seven, or about 3 percent, were representing Brahma Kumaris groups; and three, or about 1 percent, were representing indigenous-spiritual groups. Groups from other faith traditions did not formally register representatives to attend COP 24.

In total the 249 individuals representing religious NGOs also constituted about 4 percent of all NGO-registered individuals at COP 24. These percentages are close to the representation of faiths among UNFCCC-accredited religious NGOs, with a few notable exceptions. While Buddhist groups make up only about 4 percent of UNFCCC-accredited religious NGOs, about 7 percent of individuals representing religious NGOs at COP 24 were affiliated with Buddhist groups. And while about 4 percent of UNFCCC-accredited NGOs are Bahá'í, they did not register any representatives for COP 24. Still, those differences are not that large, and even though some organizations brought many more representatives to COP 24 than others, and even though more religious NGOs were represented at COP 24 than are accredited by the UNFCCC, the overall distribution of different faith groups that registered to attend remained, with exceptions noted, relatively unchanged as compared to the distribution of faith groups accredited by the UNFCCC.

**Table 4.** Geography of UNFCCC-accredited NGOs.

Continent	Total Accredited NGOs	Percentage of Total	Number of Accredited Religious NGOs	Percentage of Religious NGOs <sup>1</sup>
Africa	192	8.64%	6	10.53%
Antarctica	0	0%	0	0%
Asia	331	14.90%	5	8.77%
Australia & Oceania	71	3.20%	0	0%
Europe	895	40.28%	26	45.61%
North America	612	27.54%	20	35.09%
South America	121	5.45%	0	0%
Total	2,222	100% <sup>1</sup>	57	100%

<sup>1</sup> Numbers do not equal total due to rounding.

In terms of geography, as shown in Table 4, my study found that 895, or about 40 percent, of UNFCCC-accredited NGOs — both religious and secular — are based in Europe; 612, or about 28 percent, are based in North America; 331, or about 15 percent are based in Asia; 192, or about 9 percent, are based in Africa; 121, or about 5 percent, are based in South America; and 71, or about 3 percent, are based in Australia and Oceania.

Of the 57 UNFCCC-accredited religious NGOs, 26, or about 46 percent, are based in Europe; 20, or about 35 percent, are based in North America; six, or about 11 percent, are based in Africa; five, or about 9 percent, are based in Asia; and none are based in South America and Australia and Oceania. UNFCCC-accredited religious NGOs are more heavily concentrated in the Global North than UNFCCC-accredited NGOs at large.

## 6. Discussion

The results of this study compare interestingly to previous studies on religious participation in the ECOSOC as well as to the one previous, but limited, quantitative study on religious participation in the UNFCCC.

After COP 15 in Copenhagen in 2009, Miquel Muñoz Cabré researched all UNFCCC-accredited NGOs that participated in the COPs from 1995 to 2009 and classified them into 22 categories that basically expanded upon the nine categories employed by the UNFCCC. One of those 22 was religion. Cabré identified 1,322 UNFCCC-accredited NGOs, of which he classified 25 (or about 2 percent) as religious [1]. He did not break down those 25 by type of religious group or by geography. Further, he did not allow for groups to exist in more than one category. For example, he would classify a religious NGO that works on human rights under the human-rights category and not under the religion category, resulting in what could have been an undercount of religious NGOs.

Glaab, et al., argue that the number of religious groups participating in the UNFCCC is inconsequential since it does not account for the size and influence of individual groups, in that a single group may be far larger and therefore more influential than dozens of groups combined. They point to the World Council of Churches, which claims to represent more than 500 million people through 350 Christian denominations, but counts as one organization [59,82]. However the size of the World Council of Churches is an outlier, and there are similar secular umbrella groups of substantial influence that are accredited by the UNFCCC, such as the International Association of Oil and Gas Producers<sup>xvii</sup>, a trade group whose membership includes scores of the largest petroleum companies in the world, including BP, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, Hess, Petrobras and Saudi Aramco [83].

The number of religious groups participating in the UNFCCC matters because it provides a proxy for diversity of involved religions and a proxy for level of involve-

ment. Further, Glaab, et al., report that the Interfaith Liaison Committee — an informal group that operates in place of a formal UNFCCC constituency for religion — self-identifies 50 member groups but by the calculations of Glaab and her colleagues there are only around 30 member groups [59]. My study was designed to assess the involvement of religious NGOs at the COP outside of and including those who participate in the activities of the Interfaith Liaison Committee.

The number of UNFCCC-accredited religious NGOs (57) in my study increased by about 128 percent from the 25 that Cabré found in his study of 1995-2009 data. The total number of UNFCCC-accredited NGOs grew as well, just not as drastically, increasing by about 68 percent from 1,322 to 2,222. That finding differs from the conclusion of Beinlich and Braungart, who determined that ECOSOC-accredited religious groups grew at about the same rate as ECOSOC-accredited secular groups, contrary to conventional opinion that religion is on the rise [14].

However the 2,222 includes 247 universities and other institutions of higher learning. It may not be fair to include those since, even if there were religious universities (and indeed there is one such institution accredited), one would not reasonably expect the universities to potentially promote a cause or participate for any other reason than for allowing an avenue for its professors and students to conduct research. While all individuals who participate in the COP through UNFCCC-accredited NGOs are termed “observers,” the higher-education affiliated researchers may be the only ones whose participation is mostly limited to observation. Removing the institutions of higher learning, however, leaves the percentages virtually unchanged: 1,975 NGOs, 56 of which, or still about 3 percent, are overtly religious.

**Table 5.** NGO accreditation at the DPI, the ECOSOC and the UNFCCC over time.

U.N. Entity	Number of Accredited NGOs	Number of Accredited Religious NGOs	Religious NGOs as Percentage of Total
ECOSOC (2000) <sup>1</sup>	2,000	180	9.00%
ECOSOC (2003) <sup>2</sup>	2,060	175	8.50%
DPI (2003) <sup>2</sup>	1,460	184	12.60%
ECOSOC (2010) <sup>3</sup>	3,183	320	10.05%
ECOSOC (2012) <sup>4</sup>	3,937	339	8.61%
UNFCCC (2009) <sup>5</sup>	1,322	25	1.89%
UNFCCC (2019)	2,222	57	2.57%
UNFCCC (2019) <sup>6</sup>	1,975	56	2.84%

<sup>1</sup> Source: [17]

<sup>2</sup> Source: [15]

<sup>3</sup> Source: [16]

<sup>4</sup> Source: [14]

<sup>5</sup> Source: [1]

<sup>6</sup> Excluding institutions of higher learning.

**Table 6.** Representation of religious NGOs at the DPI, the ECOSOC and the UNFCCC over time.

<b>Faith</b>	<b>ECOSOC (2000) <sup>1,5</sup></b>	<b>ECOSOC &amp; DPI (2003) <sup>2,5</sup></b>	<b>ECOSOC (2010) <sup>3,5</sup></b>	<b>ECOSOC (2012) <sup>4,5</sup></b>	<b>UNFCCC (2019) <sup>5</sup></b>
Bahá'í	0%	1%	0%	0.3%	4%
Brahma Kumaris	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Buddhism	0%	4%	4%	4%	4%
Christian	61%	57%	58%	59%	82%
Daoism/Taosim	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Hinduism	0%	0.4%	1%	3%	0%
Interfaith/ multifaith	8%	5%	3%	6%	7%
Indigenous spiritual	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Islam	15%	12%	16%	13%	0%
Jainism	0%	0.4%	0%	1%	0%
Judaism	7%	11%	7%	7%	0%
"Other" & "Spiritual"	9%	0%	10%	7%	0%
Shintoism	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sikhism	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Zoroastrianism	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

<sup>1</sup> Source: [17]<sup>2</sup> Source: [15]<sup>3</sup> Source: [16]<sup>4</sup> Source: [14]<sup>5</sup> Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

By comparison, multiple studies have examined ECOSOC accreditation of religious NGOs, as shown in Tables 5 and 6. In 2000, Geoffrey Knox headed a team that found 2,000 ECOSOC-accredited NGOs, of which they identified 180, or about 9 percent, as religious. Of those ECOSOC-accredited religious groups, they found that 61 percent were Christian, 15 percent Islamic, 8 percent were interfaith/multifaith, 7 percent were Jewish, and 9 percent were what they labeled as an undefined "other" [17].

In 2003, Julia Berger studied participation of religious NGOs at the ECOSOC and the DPI. Using a combination of a survey and her own interpretation of whether or not an NGO was religious based on its website, she found 2,060 ECOSOC-accredited NGOs, of which she identified 175, or about 8.5 percent, as religious. Additionally, she found 1,460 DPI-accredited NGOs, of which she identified 184, or about 13 percent, as religious. Importantly, that does mean that she found 359 different religious NGOs, as some of the NGOs accredited by the ECOSOC may have been accredited by DPI as well. Between the ECOSOC and the DPI, Berger compiled a sample of 263 religious NGOs, of which she found that about 57 percent were Christian, about 12 percent Islamic, about 11 percent Jewish, about 9 percent spiritual<sup>xxviii</sup>, about 5 percent as "multireligious" or interfaith/multifaith, about 4 percent as Buddhist, about 1 percent as Bahá'í, just under half a percent as Hindu, and just under half a percent as Jain [15].

In 2010, Marie Juul Petersen found 3,183 ECOSOC-accredited NGOs, of which she identified 320, or about 10 percent, as religious. Of those 320, Petersen found that about 58 percent were Christian, about 16 percent Islamic, about 8 percent an undefined "spiritual," about 7 percent Jewish, about 4 percent Buddhist, about 3 percent interfaith/multifaith, about 1 percent Hindu and a combined 2 percent for all other faith traditions [16].

Lastly, Beinlich and Braungart, looking for both overt and non-overt religiosity, found that in 2012 the ECOSOC accredited 3,937 NGOs, of which 339, or about 9 percent, were found to be religious. Of those ECOSOC-accredited religious groups, they found that 59 percent were Christian, 13 percent Islamic, 7 percent Jewish, 6 percent interfaith/multifaith, 4 percent Buddhist, 3 percent Hindu and a combined 8 percent for all other faith traditions [14].

Clearly, while the number of religious NGOs consistently constitutes a small percentage of all ECOSOC-accredited NGOs, it does trend upward over time — and the latest numbers indicate that ECOSOC-accredited religious NGOs make up about three times the representation rate as compared to UNFCCC-accredited religious NGOs.

The denominational distribution of religious NGOs accredited by the UNFCCC provides further evidence for how NGO participation in the COP — and in United Nations agencies overall — is dominated by the Global North and its largest religion, Christianity. This may not be surprising given that the United Nations was founded and remains headquartered in the Global North, but it is a dismal fact to those who would like to see civil-society participation at the United Nations become more representative of the global population.

Non-registered NGOs from other faiths may still participate in the COP through partners or possibly under secular-sounding names that precluded their recognition in this study. For example, many prominent religious NGOs, such as Islamic Relief and GreenFaith, are not accredited by the UNFCCC but find other ways for their leadership to secure badges and participate in the COPs. Still, with UNFCCC-accreditation numbers so heavily Christian, the faith balance at the COP is unlikely to change much from a handful of unaccredited non-Christian NGOs that participate in the COP but fall outside this study.

Comparing UNFCCC-accredited religious NGOs to ECOSOC-accredited religious NGOs yields more insights. Whereas Beinlich and Braungart found that Buddhist groups are quite active in peace and reconciliation at the ECOSOC, Islamic groups are quite active in development at the ECOSOC, and Jewish groups are quite active in human rights at the ECOSOC [14], all three major faiths are relatively absent from the UNFCCC, where there are only two accredited Buddhist groups and none from Islam or Judaism.

Indeed, there are more than 500 million Buddhists in the world; yet my research indicates that only about 4 percent of UNFCCC-accredited religious NGOs are Buddhist (matching the 4 percent of ECOSOC-accredited religious NGOs that are Buddhist as found by Beinlich and Braungart [14]).

With more than a billion Hindus in the world and not a single UNFCCC-accredited Hindu group — even less representation than the 3 percent of ECOSOC-accredited Hindu NGOs reported by Beinlich and Braungart [14] — Hinduism is greatly and mysteriously under-represented at the COP.

While Beinlich and Braungart found that 13 percent of ECOSOC-accredited religious NGOs were Islamic [14], there are no UNFCCC-accredited Islamic groups, although recently Islamic Relief has been sending representatives to the COP [84,85] under other groups' accreditations. Still, with nearly two billion Muslims in the world, Islam is greatly and perplexingly underrepresented at the COP.

Like the Brahma Kumaris, Jewish groups tend to have a disproportionate involvement in U.N. agencies. Beinlich and Braungart found that 7 percent of ECOSOC-accredited religious NGOs were Jewish [14]. In the UNFCCC, Jewish groups make up zero percent of the religious NGOs, because there is not a single one accredited. Given that there are only an estimated 15 million Jews in the world, zero may seem like it is closer to proportional representation, but actually in terms of proportional representation one might expect one Jewish group for about every 500 groups, or at least four Jewish groups in the 2,222 UNFCCC-accredited NGOs. Instead there are none. That does not mean that there are no Jews involved in the faith circles at the COP — for example,



although I registered to attend COP 22 in Marrakech, Morocco, and COP 23, hosted by the Republic of Fiji in Bonn, Germany, under my academic institution's UNFCCC accreditation, I represented the Jewish-environmental nonprofit Aytzim: Ecological Judaism at meetings of the Interfaith Liaison Committee at both COPs. And although Aytzim is not accredited (due to lack of sufficient funds), it has been sending representatives to COPs under the auspices of other organizations since COP 15. Still, since there are no UNFCCC-accredited Jewish organizations, there are very few Jewish NGOs participating in the COPs. During my week at COP 22, I and Rabbi Yonatan Neril of Israel's Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development were the only Jews at meetings of the Interfaith Liaison Committee, and I was the only one representing a Jewish NGO. And during my week at COP 23, I was the only Jewish NGO representative at interfaith/multifaith events, as well as at meetings of the Interfaith Liaison Committee.

Unlike many religions, Judaism does not have a single international organizing institution, which is not, as some think, because it has an associated nation state [86] but rather because of its millennia-old history of a plurality of thought and a decentralization that began no later than the split of the Jewish kingdom into Judah and Israel circa 1000 BCE and throttled after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Since Jewish NGOs need not first gain the blessing of an international hierarchic institution in order to seek accreditation with the UNFCCC, Judaism's decentralized nature should make it easier for Jewish NGOs to participate in the COP. While most Jewish-environmental organizations, such as Aytzim, are reliant on volunteers and may have few financial resources [87], making pursuit of formal UNFCCC accreditation challenging, there are many large NGOs — such as the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith International, Chabad Lubavitch, Hadassah, the European Union of Jewish Students, and the World Union for Progressive Judaism<sup>xxix</sup> — who participate in the ECOSOC and who have the resources to become accredited by the UNFCCC and participate in the COP but have chosen not to do so.

Overall, by comparison to religious NGO participation in the ECOSOC, a much smaller percentage of UNFCCC-accredited NGOs are religious in nature. This may be because the environment draws less attention than other issues — such as peace and conflict, development and human rights — among religious NGOs. It also may provide evidence for those who see the values of environmentalism as in opposition to the values of religion [4,88-91]. In other words, it may provide evidence for White's assertion that religion is anti-environmental. Much work has been done, however, to show how either White was wrong or that religion has changed, perhaps in response to White's critique or perhaps simply in response to changing societal values [51,52,54,55,69,71,92-97] — even spawning the academic subfield of religion and ecology. The question then becomes, why has the work being done by religions to demonstrate their environmental bona fides largely not carried over into participation in the COP? The actual motivations for religious NGOs abstaining from participating in the COP is a subject for future study.

While neither Knox, Berger nor Petersen delineated NGOs geographically, Beinlich and Braungart did. They found that of the ECOSOC-accredited religious groups, 44 percent were based in Europe and in other non-American countries that they defined as "Western;" 38 percent were based in the United States; 10 percent were based in "Asia Pacific;" 5 percent were based in Africa; and 3 percent were based in Latin America and the Caribbean [14].

Although my study divided geography by continent as opposed to the Western/non-Western dichotomy employed by Beinlich and Braungart, my study's numbers are similar to theirs and illustrative of the same result: UNFCCC-accredited religious NGOs, like ECOSOC-accredited religious NGOs, are dominated, at least organizationally, by the Global North. Importantly, however, while the UNFCCC and ECOSOC both accredit NGOs for participation in their U.N. work, organizations self-select to apply for accreditation. My and Beinlich and Braungart's data suggest that religious NGOs are

based primarily in the Global North, or that those in the Global North are most likely to pursue U.N. accreditation, or both — even though countries in the Global South, at least since the 1970s, “are more focused than their larger counterparts on participation in international and regional organizations” [98] such as the United Nations. Organizations from the Global North may be lending their accreditations to register individuals from the Global South, but the under-representation of religious NGOs from the Global South is puzzling, particularly given that it is expected that the Global South will bear the worst negative impacts from climate change [99]. The effect is that the COP may appear to be “an exclusive space bent on reinforcing the capitalist colonial heteropatriarchal norms and systems at the root of [the] climate crisis” [100].

While Beinlich and Braungart speculated that the freedom of religious expression found in much of the Global North may explain why most ECOSOC-accredited religious NGOs are based there [14], my findings show that UNFCCC-accredited NGOs, religious or secular, are both nearly monopolized by the Global North — meaning that religious NGOs are not based in the Global North because of greater religious freedom, but rather that they likely are based in the Global North because they are NGOs involved in the UNFCCC.

Even though North America generally has a more religious population than Europe — the percentage of people who say that religion is very important to their lives is much higher in the most populous North American countries (United States: 53 percent; Mexico: 45 percent; Canada: 27 percent) than it is in the most populous European countries (Germany: 10 percent; France: 11 percent; United Kingdom: 10 percent) [101] — my and Beinlich and Braungart’s studies find that European NGOs make up the largest geographic group of UNFCCC-accredited NGOs. It may be because Europeans are more likely than Americans to want to participate in international political institutions such as the United Nations. And perhaps it may indicate that religious participation in a U.N. system is less driven by religious ideology as it is by the secular values of a region. In other words, there may be more religious groups participating from less-religious Europe than from the more-religious North America because of the former’s European outlook as opposed to its religious mores. Or it may simply be because “most Americans have no interest in imposing their faith on others and, with the exception of policy toward Israel, religion has little bearing on how they think about international affairs” [102] — although Americans do seem comfortable utilizing religion to promote “religious freedom, tolerance, and interfaith dialogue” [103], sometimes even to the arguable detriment of other populations [103-105], a trend manifested most plainly during the administration of U.S. Pres. Donald Trump [104,105].

Especially in countries like the United States, however, religious belief seems to affect (or at least correlate with) one’s belief in climate change. Although there is variance both between faiths and between faith sects, adherence to Buddhism and Judaism, as well as being a Protestant who is Black, seems to lead to higher levels of belief in climate science than the general population. Conversely, membership in many Christian sects, particularly evangelical Protestantism and non-Hispanic Catholicism, seems negatively associated with interest and belief in climate science [55,88,106,107]. Even as the most religious are unlikely to see a conflict between religion and other forms of science, religious Christians still appear to have less faith in climate science than the general population [106]. Further, Christians — and Catholics in particular, since even though acceptance of climate change among the religious seems to have increased, if only in a nuanced way, after *Laudato Si* [108,109], the papal text may have been more impactful for non-Catholics than Catholics — indicate low trust in what their clergy says about climate change [110]. The dominance of Christian NGOs amongst religious NGOs at the COP points to a potential climate disconnect between religious leadership and those in the pews. Clearly, religious adherents could do better at encouraging their NGOs to participate in the UNFCCC. That they do not may help explain why religion has not fully utilized its potential as a leverage point for climate action [2].

Lastly, part of the blame for the religious NGOs' lack of participation in the COP rests with the United Nations itself: The UNFCCC could do better at proactively reaching out to religious NGOs. And the United Nations inadvertently may be making applying to participate in the UNFCCC more onerous by requiring separate accreditation for different U.N. bodies, thereby depressing civil-society participation in niche U.N. processes such as the UNFCCC.

## 7. Conclusions

In the last decade, the number of religious NGOs that participate in the COP has increased dramatically (see Table 5) — and those groups, and the World Council of Churches in particular, deserve plaudits — however, even after the growth, religious NGOs consist of a mere 3 percent of UNFCCC-accredited NGOs and about 4 percent of those registered to attend the COP. Although the scope of individual religiosity varies greatly by region, the vast majority of people on Earth have a religious affiliation [111]. Yet religious institutions — particularly those of Daoism/Taoism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shintoism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism, whose combined adherents make up almost half of the world's population [111] — largely have been absent from the world's preeminent political meetings that are attempting to address the climate emergency, arguably the world's most pressing problem. Their absence may reflect the world's ambivalence toward enacting a climate solution — but their absence also may be a cause for the ongoing crisis: In a world dominated by religion, what faith can we have in a widely adopted climate cure without the support of religious institutions?

Alternatively, if world governments are able to overcome the climate silence of religious institutions to successfully address the climate crisis through major efforts and significant sacrifice, despite a lack of religious engagement<sup>xxx</sup>, will religion become less relevant in adherents' lives? King warned that “[i]f the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority” [73]. If not acting for the preservation of humanity, religious NGOs should at the very least be acting significantly on climate change for the preservation of religion itself.

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- [unfccc.int/process/parties-non-party-stakeholders/non-party-stakeholders/admitted-ngos/list-of-admitted-ngos](https://unfccc.int/process/parties-non-party-stakeholders/non-party-stakeholders/admitted-ngos/list-of-admitted-ngos) [Accessed 1 May 2019].
- [unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/PLOP.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/PLOP.pdf) [Accessed 1 May 2019].

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**Appendix A: UNFCCC-accredited religious NGOs as of May 2019 (including institutions of higher learning), with naming convention according to the UNFCCC**

ACT Alliance - Action by Churches Together (ACT Alliance)

All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU)

Bread for the World (BfdW)

Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

Care of Creation, Inc.

Caritas Internationalis (CI)

Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR)

Catholic Relief Services - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (CRS)

Catholic Rural Youth Movement Germany e.V. (KLJB)

Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESA)

Christian Aid (CA)

Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB)

Church of the Brethren (COB)

Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA)

Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement 13 Terre solidaire (CCFD-Terre Solidaire)

Congregation of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Carmelite NGO)

Cooperation Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité (CIDSE)

Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA)

Diakonia

Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA

Economic Justice Network of the Fellowship of Christian Councils of Southern Africa (EJN)

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA)

Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

Evangelist Professional Training School

Faith Association of the Rehabilitation of Street Children and Orphans (FARSO)

Finn Church Aid Foundation (FCA)

Franciscans International (FI)

Friends World Committee for Consultation

Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU)

Indigenous Education Network of Turtle Island (IENTI/IEN)

Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO)

Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique Internationale (IYCS-JECI)

Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers (CFMSA)  
 Maryknoll Sisters of Saint Dominic Inc.  
 Mercy International Association (MIA)  
 MISEREOR, German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation (MIS-EREOR)  
 National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States (Baha'i International Community)  
 Organisation des Laics Engages du Sacré Coeur pour le Developpement de Kimbondo (OLESDK)  
 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
 Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW)  
 Sjoham Baabaji Mission  
 Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries (SCMM)  
 Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI)  
 Tearfund  
 Texas Impact Education Fund doing business as the Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy (TICPP)  
 The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development (ICSD)  
 Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA)  
 United Church of Canada  
 United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society (UMC-GBCS)  
 World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA)  
 World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP)  
 World Council of Churches (WCC)  
 World Vision International (WVI)  
 World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA)

## **Appendix B: Religious NGOs at COP 24, with naming convention according to the observer-registration forms of accredited NGOs**

ACT Alliance - Action by Churches Together  
 Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University  
 Bread for the World  
 Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation  
 Care of Creation  
 Caritas Internationalis  
 Catholic Fund for Overseas Development  
 Catholic Relief Services - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
 Catholic Rural Youth Movement Germany  
 Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa  
 Christian Aid



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Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh

Church of Sweden

Church's Auxiliary for Social Action

Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement – Terre solidaire

Congregation of Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Cooperation internationale pour le développement et la solidarité

DescriptionDanChurchAid

Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association

Diakonia

Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA

Dominicans for Justice and Peace

Ecological Christian Organisation

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance

Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Faith Association of the Rehabilitation of Street Children and Orphans

Fastenopfer - Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund

Friends World Committee for Consultation

GreenFaith

Indigenous Education Network of Turtle Island

Inter-Religious Climate and Ecology Network

Interfaith Power and Light

Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique Internationale

Lutheran World Federation

Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers

Maryknoll Sisters of Saint Dominic

Mercy International Association

Micah Zambia

MISEREOR, German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation

Norwegian Church Aid

Norwegian Interfaith Climate Network

Organisation des Laïcs Engagés du Sacré Coeur pour le Développement de Kimbondo

Pacific Conference of Churches

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Quaker Earthcare Witness

Secours Catholique  
 Tearfund  
 Texas Impact Education Fund doing business as the  
 Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy  
 The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development  
 Unitarian Universalist Association  
 United Church of Canada  
 United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and  
 Society  
 World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations  
 World Conference of Religions for Peace  
 World Council of Churches  
 World Evangelical Alliance  
 World Vision International

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> The COP is sometimes stylized as "CoP."

<sup>ii</sup> There also are other COPs outside of the UNFCCC. For example, other U.N. treaties — such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora — have their own COPs that are independent from each other and from the UNFCCC's COP. In this paper, the COP refers solely to the UNFCCC's COP.

<sup>iii</sup> The COP also serves as the conference for other subsequent UNFCCC-related agreements, such as the CMP — the Conference of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol — and the CMA — the Conference of the Parties to the Paris Agreement. For example, COP 24 also was CMP 15 and CMA 2. In this paper, the COP refers to the entire conference, complete with its concurrent meetings such as CMPs and CMAs.

<sup>iv</sup> The COP and the UNFCCC operate independently but in concert with the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC. Basically, the IPCC conducts research that it is utilized by the UNFCCC, which is both the name of the international climate-change agreement endorsed by nations as well as the name of the U.N. secretariat, or agency, that assists the work of those who signed the agreement, organizes negotiation meetings and, together with countries, hosts annual conferences, or COPs, of the "Parties to the Convention," or those who signed the UNFCCC treaty. The COP, in turn, serves as the governing body for the UNFCCC.

<sup>v</sup> One of six major U.N. organs, ECOSOC consists of 54 rotating member states tasked with addressing social and economic policy. It operates independently from the COP and the UNFCCC.

<sup>vi</sup> In the time between COPs, the UNFCCC organizes one (and sometimes none, sometimes two) significantly smaller climate-change conference that hosts negotiations and committee meetings for UNFCCC groups such as the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement, the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice, and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation. These groups do important work, of course, but whether the UNFCCC holds meetings once, twice or even thrice annually, the point is the same: Picking up on negotiations six months later or a year later — over what has so far been a quarter century — simply is not adequately addressing the urgent action demanded by the climate crisis.

vii The COP talks of immediacy but actually has the fierce urgency of a sloth — which is simply reflective of (rather than the cause of) global inaction on climate change. It seems that many countries are more interested in filibustering to delay global action — not necessarily out of climate denial as much as out of climate avoidance, arguably in the interest of protecting the short-term monetary interests of those who benefit from the status quo. Those countries officially may recognize climate change as an existential threat but they do not seem particularly interested in taking the significant and urgent action that an existential threat demands.

viii That dovetails with those who espouse inaction on other threats, both preexisting (such as racism and economic inequality) and relatively new (such as the novel coronavirus [SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes the disease COVID-19] and unsustainable consumption that pushes the limits of the Earth's carrying capacity).

ix The famously bumbling, slapstick policemen who cannot get the job done in the Keystone Film Company's early 20th-century silent films.

x Further, it then is through becoming better humans (often through religious practice of universalist prosocial values) that we can ascend spiritually, reach enlightenment and/or serve the Divine.

xi These nine constituency groups were borrowed from those delineated in Agenda 21 as adopted in Rio de Janeiro at the 1992 Earth Summit, officially known as the first U.N. Conference on Environment and Development, at which the UNFCCC was born.

xii Due to the UNFCCC-accreditation timeline, the UNFCCC-accreditation list as of May 1 is the same as the list of NGOs that were eligible to register representatives at the previous year's COP. New applicants from any year are not informed of a decision by UNFCCC until a year or two later, typically depending upon when they apply in relation to Aug. 31. For example, an NGO that applied to the UNFCCC for accreditation on Aug. 31, 2018 would not have been informed of the UNFCCC's decision until June or July of 2019, and an NGO that applied for accreditation on Sept. 1, 2018 would not be informed of the UNFCCC's decision until June or July of 2020. In the case of this study, the accreditation list as of May 1, 2019 mirrors the complete list of those organizations that were eligible to register representatives for COP 24 in December 2018.

xiii A close reading of Brewer, however, reveals a more nuanced stance that when he said that the United States is a Christian nation he noted that it was not officially Christian and that he only meant that it was a country whose populace largely was Christian and whose laws and history had been influenced greatly by Christianity.

xiv It is possible, of course, that an organizational name that may have been overtly religious to its group members may not have seemed overtly religious to me.

xv As its name implies, the U.N. Department of Global Communications, formerly the DPI, focuses on communicating the work of the United Nations to the public. It, like ECOSOC, operates independently from the COP and the UNFCCC.

xvi As such, I have excluded the study's results from comparisons with previous studies.

xvii In response to the hesitancy that representatives from non-sectarian Jewish organizations such as Jewish Women International and the Zionist Organization of America expressed in response to being asked if they were "religious," Berger — who works at the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office — mistakenly concluded that the term religious is "complicated by the ambiguous nature of organizations' religious identity" [15]. However it actually was complicated by a misunderstanding of the nuances of Judaism, where the term "religious" is often interpreted as meaning those who are adherents of the religion's Orthodox sects. While Judaism is indeed complicated by its combination of religion, culture and ethnicity, Jewish non-sectarian groups typically will not define themselves as religious in the Jewish sense of the word; but they are, as Berger noted, aware that their work is of or pertaining to religion, aka religious — even if they define themselves as "secular" — since in Judaism the terms secular and religious usually refer to where one sees one's place on a fictitious spectrum of different Jewish sects. In this model, sects such as Reform or Reconstructionist are falsely but commonly perceived as unreligious, and certainly perceived as less religious than Orthodox sects, with the latter solely serving as "religious" in the minds of many. This is likely a shared issue with

people of other faiths, and it reveals an issue with survey data in that different respondents may have different definitions for selected words. Nonetheless Berger's misunderstanding has been cited and replicated throughout the literature.

<sup>xviii</sup> Jewish National Fund in Israel, alternatively transliterated as Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael and commonly known by the initials KKL-JNF.

<sup>xix</sup> Also known as IGOs.

<sup>xx</sup> Correspondingly, Russia was classified as European; Egypt was classified as African; Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan and Turkey were classified as Asian; Caribbean countries were classified as North American; South American countries with island possessions in the Caribbean or Oceania were classified as South American; the United States, which has territories around the world, was classified as North American; and European colonial powers with territories around the world were classified as European.

<sup>xxi</sup> Beinlich and Braungart geographically grouped NGOs according to the U.N.'s regional groups of member states. I chose continents instead since the U.N. grouping includes a number of "special case" exclusions, such as Israel and Turkey, and some unintuitive classifications, such as the placement of Cyprus in the Asia-Pacific group.

<sup>xxii</sup> Although NGOs based in one place can register representatives from another — for example, an NGO based in Switzerland can register a representative from India — an NGO's location remains important as an indicator of where NGO leadership is based.

<sup>xxiii</sup> While Chile technically remained the host country of COP 25, the conference itself was hosted entirely in Spain. To what degree the last-minute change of venue affected the makeup of NGO participation is unknown.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Statistical analysis allows for estimation of percentages of a population based on a sample. This study, however, covers the entire population rather than a sample, so the reported percentages are actual rather than statistically estimated.

<sup>xxv</sup> Although its adherents only number in the hundreds of thousands, Zoroastrianism is included here because of its age and historic influence.

<sup>xxvi</sup> The UNFCCC document used to build this study's database erroneously reports the total as 22,771.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Yes, fossil-fuel interests are permitted to become accredited by the UNFCCC; UNFCCC-accredited NGOs need not be nonprofits, need not be seriously committed to a drawdown of fossil fuels, and they self-select for consideration of accreditation.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Berger classified Brahma Kumaris as spiritual.

<sup>xxix</sup> The international arm of the Liberal, Progressive, Reconstructionist and Reform sects of Judaism.

<sup>xxx</sup> In the biblical Book of Esther, the prophet Mordechai offers the following advice to his cousin, Queen Esther, as she dithers over whether or not she, at possible personal peril, should use her power to address the dire emergency being faced by her people. "[I]f you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come ... from another quarter," Mordechai says. "And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis" (Esther 4:14). Today one might reasonably question the purpose and integrity of religion if it does not use its royal position to sufficiently address the failing of modernity as well as moral and ethical responsibility that has led to the climate crisis, an existential threat to all humanity. Perhaps religion and its ethics have even been developed, at least in part, to help humanity address just such a crisis.

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