Faerie Faith in Scotland

Beneath formalized religious structures of many societies rests a bedrock or vestige of nature religion. In Scotland and other Celtic countries, faerielore fulfils this quasi-totemic function. The literary representation of the faeries as winged “little people” is largely a Victorian British development. Kipling’s “Puck of Pook’s Hill” maintains he was the last faerie (or fairy) in England, so a measure of reinvention may have been justified. Nineteenth-century artists like Joseph Noel Paton (National Gallery of Scotland) found inspiration in the “fairy faith” for rich erotic sublimation that might otherwise, with more worldly muses, have shocked Victorian sensibilities.

Traditionally faeries could vary in size from the miniscule to the superhuman. R.H. Cromek, in an ethnographic account, describes those of southwest Scotland as, of small stature, but finely proportioned; of a fair complexion, with long yellow hair hanging over their shoulders and gathered above their heads with combs of gold. They wear a mantle of green cloth, inlaid with wild flowers; green pantaloons, buttoned with bobs of silk; and silver shoon . . . They ride on steeds whose hoofs “would not dash the dew from the cup of a harebell” (Cromek in McNeill: 111).

Irish legends, also influential in Gaelic Scotland, portrayed the faeries as aboriginals who were driven into hollow hills – knowes, raths or forts – when iron-age humankind conquered with tree-felling axes. As such, faerie faith conveys a submerged Arcadian or idyllic green consciousness. Various Scottish tales account for the faeries as those angels who were too good to follow Lucifer all the way to hell, but not good enough to remain in heaven. In The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies (ca. 1690), the Rev. Robert Kirk documented Gaelic beliefs and provided a biblical underpinning. The faeries, Kirk believed, are a species of creation that, like humankind, also await salvation.

Care must be taken not to offend these daoine sìthe – the “people of peace.” They can cause mishaps and even replace healthy human children with sickly, troublesome, faerie “changelings,” thereby perhaps conveniently allowing blame for genetic misfortune or parental neglect to be displaced. This has diminished the esteem in which the “gentle folk” might otherwise be held. But W.B. Yeats in The Celtic Twilight, first published in 1893, makes impassioned “remonstrance with Scotsmen for having soured the disposition of their ghosts and faeries” (Yeats 1990: 92–5). Scots, he says here, have been “too theological, too gloomy.” In contrast, he continues, the Irish “exchange civilities with the world beyond,” and are accordingly more richly blessed.

In recent years some such “Twilightist” sentiments, boosted by New Age and green mystical seeking, have been attacked as inventive romanticism by such “Celto-sceptic” scholars as Professor Donald E. Meek, who holds a chair of Celtic studies at Edinburgh University. Meek’s concern is with cultural appropriation, invasion and distortion, and while anger about this would be shared by many Gaelic thinkers, views of what is genuinely traditional, or authentically evolving, vary, and some thinkers understandably feel divided within themselves on such shifting numinous ground within the cultural psyche. The Faerie Hill is, suggests Gaelic scholar John MacInnes, “a metaphor of the imagination” (personal communication, 1997); a liminal and imaginary realm, where musicians or poets would fall asleep, accepting they would awake either mad, or inspired. As such the faeries may represent the interface of natural and human creativity: nature personified, true nature’s child born to be wild and perhaps being reborn in the nascent green consciousness of our times.

“Yes, about the fairies and all that . . . They say they are here for a century and away for another century. This is their century away.” So said Nan MacKinnon, tradition-bearer of the Hebridean Isle of Vatersay, interviewed for the Scottish studies journal, Tocher (vol. 6–38, 1983: 9). She said it in 1981!

Further Reading

Alastair McIntosh
The Rotting Tree Faerie

What is it that keeps faerie traditions alive? One answer, suggests Alastair McIntosh, is numinous experience. The stories keep reasserting themselves, as he suggests with this account adapted from his article, “Rainforests and High Finance,” in *World Rainforest Report* 26 (October 1993), 18–20.

It was our last day deep in the Australian forest. And there, like out of a child’s picture book, in an arched door-like entrance to this hollow rotting tree, was quite the most exquisitely beautiful mushroom any of us had ever seen.

It had a slightly bulbous, pristine white stem, and a perfectly circular, mottled grey cap with a ring of white spots as crisp and fresh as God in the morning light.

We gazed in wonder. And I said for a laugh – for the kind of laugh that you need when wrestling with the pain of nature undergoing destruction – “What kind of a faerie lives here?”

Everyone smiled. I mean, it’s kind of ridiculous, to be enquiring after . . . faeries!

The other protestors from John Seed’s Rainforest Information Centre gradually move on. But I stay, alone. And again, the question, burning now: “What kind of a faerie lives here?”

In the back of the tree lay some termite-eaten wood. It was annoyingly distracting me, for I could vaguely make out in it the face of a grim old man staring, motionless, down at the soil, like a New Guinea spirit mask. This was not what I was looking for.

Again, my question. But this time, the old man spoke. Yes, he actually spoke! Clearly, subjectively objective in my mind’s ear.

In a big, empowered, booming voice, he spoke. He said: “I am the faerie who lives here.”

“No, no,” I replied, bemused. “You’re just a sour old face I’m imagining in rotting wood. I’m looking for flower faeries. You’re not that!”

“Ah,” he responded, quizically. “But I thought you were the one who’s always going on to your students about radical feminist theology?”

“What’s that got to do with it?”

“Just that you’re always telling them about calling one-anoother into being; that a person becomes a person in community inasmuch as they’re heard, listened to, and allowed to be visible.”

Well! I tell you . . . he had me by my own ideals! To deny his reality would have been to deny one of the insights that I most value.

“Fair enough,” I said to him. “But if I accept that, I’m going to start seeing faeries all over the place!”

He laughed and laughed. He said that faeries are all over the place! God has many masks and I was presently face to face with one of them.

“Tell me then,” I enquired. “What kind of a faerie are you?”

He swelled with pride and delight at being asked. “I,” he said, “am the Rotting Tree Faerie!”


This was the question he’d been waiting for and his voice shook the forest. “Rotting trees give me joy in life! This mushroom,” he said, “is at my door precisely because I AM the Rotting Tree Faerie.”

And as he said it, he let me feel the great processes of death and decay going on in this old tree, indeed, in the whole forest. He let me feel the mushroom’s mycelia reaching from the roots into every part of that dying tree, and beyond. I could even feel the molecular processes of rot taking place, composting what had reached the fullness of its time and had died to create new soil and therefore new life.

The mask and the mushroom were, indeed, his Janus face. One side expressed decay and death. The other, in its beauty, was his veritable flower faerie self.

Alastair McIntosh

See also: Re-Earthing; Seed, John.

The Fall

The Fall story of Genesis 1–11 is not only a theological text. It is also an aetiological narrative (a story about origins) concerning the rise of civilization in the late Neolithic period. Since the mid-nineteenth century the modernist–fundamentalist culture war in North Atlantic Christianity has generated two highly polarized approaches to the biblical creation story: one that insists upon its putative historico-scientific content, and the other that views it as legend/folktale with no historical value. To move beyond this historicist straightjacket we might instead consider this story in terms of myth-as-memory. Might it be similar in character to origins-narratives of indigenous peoples, which postmodern anthropology is finally beginning to appreciate as legitimate “testimony” about prehistoric life?

Until recently there were few anthropological alternatives to post-Enlightenment evolutionary positivism’s perspective on origins. There is no grander narrative in modern culture than the myth of “Progress,” and this
ideology is grounded in the story of humanity’s emergence from the swamp of ignorant Homo erectus to the triumph of increasingly rational, technologically adept and socially complex cultures of Homo sapiens sapiens. Recent revisionist paleoanthropological reconstructions of human “pre-history,” however, are challenging assumptions about the intrinsic nobility (or inevitability) of the so-called “Ascent of Man.”

In particular, the “Neolithic revolution” of ca. 10,000 B.C.E. that led to what the dominant historiography calls the “dawn of civilization” is being reassessed in light of a very different paradigm. It is being argued that human lifeways throughout the Pleistocene – which were universally characterized by a social, environmental and spiritual symbiosis – represented a viable and sustainable cultural model, albeit one that the rise and relentless spread of civilization dramatically and progressively disrupted and destroyed.

Below are three anthropological hypotheses regarding this traumatic transformation during the late Neolithic period:

One interpretive stream pioneered by paleoarcheologist Marija Gimbutas and popularized by Riane Eisler concentrates on gender. It sees widespread goddess-worshipping, egalitarian Neolithic cultures from Sumer to Minoan Crete to Old Europe that were peaceful, horticultural, and symbolically “advanced.” It is argued that these cultures were steadily wiped out by “Kurgan” invasions from the Asian steppes beginning ca. the fifth millennium B.C.E., which imposed iron technology, patriarchal institutions and the politics of war. Cynthia Eller has critiqued this view from a different feminist perspective.

A more widely accepted hypothesis focuses on the eclipse of hunter-gatherer lifeways by the domestication of plants and animals beginning ca. 9000 B.C.E., which led inexorably to the rise of the first cities in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia from 5000 B.C.E. Jared Diamond explores environmental explanations for why domestication arose in the Middle East first, whereas Jacques Cauvin attributes it to symbolic/ideological transformations. Paul Shepard focuses on the reciprocal nature of domestication: the more humans breed out wildness, the more we become “dull and mean” like our cattle. Evan Eisenberg examines how Mesopotamian urban agriculturalists substituted the artificial mountain of the ziggurat for the traditional aris mundi of the mountain wilderness. Daniel Quinn posits an archetypal struggle between “Taker” and “Leaver” cultures, and like Shepard, laments the triumph of the former.

A third hypothesis moves behind agriculture to culture itself, placing the decline of Pleistocene symbiosis further back into the Middle Paleolithic with the rise of symbolic thought. Direct somatic and sensory perception of the world began to atrophy – according to David Abram due to written language, and to John Zerzan because of the power of representation, in which symbols first mediated reality and then replaced it.

These studies differ significantly in methodology, detail and explanation, but all share one crucial perspective with the Genesis account of origins (which they each reference with varying degrees of depth). This is the conviction that there was some sort of epochal “rupture” that signaled the beginning of the end of the widely dispersed, clan-based hunter-gatherer culture that had likely prevailed since “the beginning” of human life on Earth. The implications of this rupture have been devastating not only for the natural world, but also for human social life and spiritual competence.

In the “primeval history” of Gen. 1–11, Israel’s sages – redacting older sources and probably writing in the aftermath of the failed monarchy – also attempt to explain this “rupture.” Eden can be interpreted as a mythic memory of the old symbiotic lifeways: humans, creatures and God dwell intimately and richly together (Gen. 2). In radical contrast to the modern view, but not to other indigenous creation myths, this primal world is described as unqualifiedly “delightful” (Hebrew tov, Gen. 1:31). This ancient equilibrium was/is shattered, however, by the primal human impulse to “reengineer” the world in order to control and “improve” it (Gen. 3).

What follows is a litany of woes: humans are relegated to painful agricultural toil (3:19); the first city is attributed to the murderous farmer Cain (4:17); violence spreads widely and rapidly (6:5ff.). God and nature fight back in the great flood which (temporarily) scuttles civilization (6:9ff.). Could the Flood myth – found in varying forms throughout the great cultures of the Ancient Near East – represent a collective memory of the catastrophic breach of the Bosphorous straights and creation of the Black Sea in the mid-sixth millennium B.C.E., as William Ryan and Walter Pitman have argued?

But civilization prevails again, and a “genealogy” attributes the spread of predatory imperial city-states to Nimrod, the “powerful warrior-hunter” (10:8ff.). The nadir of the “Fall” is thus narrated in the tale of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9). It symbolizes the archetypal project of urbanism, in which human social, political and economic power is concentrated rather than dispersed. The warning fable is a thinly veiled parody of Mesopotamian ziggurats, as Eisenberg points out, in which the making of bricks (11:3) alludes to Israel’s experience of slavery in Pharaoh’s Egypt (Ex. 1). Such “civilizational” projects are thus resolutely “deconstructed” by the divine council in favor of the older vision of a dispersed, tribal humanity living in diverse bioregions (Gen. 11:5–9). The biblical counter-narrative of redemption from the Fall then commences with Abraham’s call to abandon Mesopotamian cities for the new archetypal journey of liberation: following God’s call back to the wilderness (12:1ff.), a pattern that recurs in the
The Family (Children of God)

This international, communal missionary movement emerged in California in the late 1960s, as the family of evangelist David Brandt Berg ministered to the needs of hippies and young people who were on spiritual quests. In consequence, it is a cultural amalgam of the traditional Holiness movement and the radical youth counterculture of the sixties. For example, the Family emphasizes both spiritual communion with Jesus and erotic experimentation. It is oriented toward millenarian biblical prophecy, but it is also interested in astrology.

A journalist called the group The Children of God, and under this name it became famous. Hippies, religious seekers, and disaffected wanderers joined by the hundreds, as Family teams crisscrossed the continent. Calling himself Moses David, Berg led the dispersed group via colloquial scriptures called Mo Letters. A few horrified parents hired deprogrammers to rescue their sons and daughters forcibly, and a national anti-cult movement arose to combat the group. Moses David and most followers went to Europe and then spread out across the globe.

While headquartered in the Canary Islands in 1974, Moses David developed a new form of evangelizing, called flirty fishing or FFing, in which women of the Family offered their sexual love to an estimated 200,000 emotionally needy men, as a sample of God’s love. After a decade, the group abandoned this practice, for a variety of reasons which included health hazards and the vehement opposition of critics in the surrounding societies.

In 1978, police raided a commune in Mexico, and over the following years a series of government raids attacked communes in Argentina, France, Australia, and Spain. Altogether, authorities seized six hundred of the group’s children under the suspicion they were victims of sexual abuse. However, in each case the charges were eventually dropped and they were returned to their parents, after being traumatized by forced physical exams and often weeks of separation from their families.

Today, the group practices a form of open marriage. Married members feel a responsibility to meet the erotic needs of single adult members, and they view sexual intercourse as a sacrament of God’s love. With the permission of the other spouse a husband or wife will have dates with the other spouse a husband or wife will have dates with a member of the opposite sex that involve sexual sharing as well as heart-to-heart conversation and other qualities of enduring friendship. Opposed to artificial birth control, the group has a high fertility rate and considers children to be gifts from God. It raises them communally and educates them within the commune.

The death of Moses David in 1994 brought an end to what members believed was his constant channeling of messages from Jesus and lesser spirits. Therefore they undertook a vigorous campaign to develop the sensitivity of all members, and the overwhelming majority now

Further Reading


See also: Animism – Humanity’s Original Religious World-view; Anarcho-Primitivism and the Bible; Creation Myth of the Ancient World; Creation Story in the Hebrew Bible; Creation’s Fate in the New Testament; Eden’s Ecology; Shepard, Paul.
believe they personally receive messages from the spirit world. In their sexual sharing and spiritual channeling, they seek to integrate the natural and supernatural realms.

William Sims Bainbridge

Further Reading
See also: New Religious Movements.

Fantasy Literature
Modern fantasy describes the predominantly literary/written fiction that grew out of the popular reception of J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings in Britain and the U.S.A. in the 1960s, and has since become a genre in its own right, with fantasy themes and content found in role-playing and computer games, film and television media. The basic narrative and stylistic form of literary fantasy is that of romance: generally heroic, quest-centered stories drawing on Western folk- and fairy-tale traditions, Norse and Celtic myth, Arthurian legend, and medieval romances. Its roots lie in the Romantic revival of interest in the “Gothic” Middle Ages from the second half of the eighteenth century to the Victorian medievalism of William Morris. However, as it is understood here, fantasy as a distinct literary genre is a phenomenon specific to late-twentieth-century Western society. Archetypal fantasy texts often look to a mythical European medieval past, constructed as a time when people lived harmoniously with their environment. This is the inheritance of J.R.R. Tolkien’s medievalist vision; but it also continues, and functions within, a Romanic philosophical and ideological framework where the “medieval” was constructed around a set of oppositions pitting nature and “the primitive” against urban civilization, the supernatural against scientific rationalism.

This Romantic construction of the medieval as iconic “Other” is one of the lasting myths of modernity, and has retained its deep symbolic and cultural value as a medium for social critique. This anti-modern impetus is exploited vigorously in modern fantasy. Sheri S. Tepper’s (1991) novel, Beauty, uses the Sleeping Beauty fairytale as a framework to present the Middle Ages as an idyllic Eden retaining a sense of the sacred and magic which vanishes with the advent of “electric lights” and “science” – industrialization and modernization. The discourses of both environmentalism and religion are invoked in a Romantic aesthetic conflating “beauty,” the medieval, and nature, implicitly critiquing the rational materialism and skepticism of modern capitalist society. “The Creator makes whales who sing in the deep, and men kill them to put their oil in lipsticks” (1991: 438). Progress is assumed to be dependent upon the exploitation of nature, and is regarded as ultimately dehumanizing and destructive.

Concern over the ecological crisis is becoming a much more insistent and common theme in fantasy literature, particularly explicit in Sheri S. Tepper’s works such as Beauty and The Family Tree (1997), also in Stephen R. Donaldson’s Chronicles of Thomas Covenant (1977–83), Ursula K. Le Guin’s Always Coming Home (1985) and Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences (1988) and Alan Aldridge’s The Gnome (1991). However, most fantasy expresses these concerns indirectly through the use of myth and symbol. The creation of coherent alternative worlds such as Tolkien’s Middle-Earth or Ian Irvine’s Three Worlds in The View from the Mirror (1999–2002), is one of the hallmarks of archetypal fantasy which foregrounds to an unusual degree the importance of environment. Even when it is used predominantly as a background for human action, nature or the land in fantasy is always implicitly understood as being alive and meaningful in some way. The land or world thus becomes like a character, intimately connected to the action of the story, and more importantly, exerting a presence or consciousness demanding respect. The influence of James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis can be felt in Sheri S. Tepper’s True Game series (1985–1986), where the magical planet Lom is not only sentient and conscious, but actively incorporates humanity into its unique ecosystem.

Nature in fantasy is imbued with symbolic content, reflecting the emotional or moral charge of the story; a common theme is the Land which may die or thrive according to nature of its people or ruler, as in Patricia McKillip’s Riddle-Master trilogy (1976–1979) which draws upon Robert Graves’ The White Goddess (1948) through the notion of sacral kingship intimately tied to the land. Nature itself becomes inextricable from the ethical dilemmas and characterization presented in the story. Another common motif is the anthropomorphizing of the physical environment through magical beings closely connected with or personifying aspects of nature, such as Tolkien’s Ents, sentient trees, elves, nature spirits and deities (the Green Man, the Goddess). It is notable that fantasy draws on the same corpus of myths and sources used by popular Western esotericism, and that both have their roots in Romanticism.

Fantasy should also be considered a text-centered community of readers, writers, critics, audiences and media producers, which has arisen as a social phenomenon
primarily in highly industrialized, urban environments among a young, socially mobile audience, paralleling the growth and mainstreaming of the New Age movement since the 1960s. Not only do the texts draw upon the same Romantic values and discourses as alternative spirituality and environmentalist movements, but there is also a considerable overlap in community: Margot Adler notes that many Pagans and Witches not only read, but also write fantasy and science fiction (e.g., Marion Zimmer Bradley, Diana Paxson, and Juliet Marillier). Fantasy can thus be understood as participating in or intersecting with the broader social movement of the "New Age" described by Wouter Hanegraaff as an identifiable (though diffuse) cultural group constituting a sub-stratum of alternative values critical of the dominant worldview in contemporary Western societies through an ideological opposition to the two main institutions of knowledge and morality: scientific rationalism and Judeo-Christian (monotheistic) religion. Concurrently, environmentalism has sought to alter humanity's perception of nature as an exploitable resource by raising reverent awareness of human interconnectedness with the environment. Often the behaviors and goals of New Age and environmentalist movements may be indistinguishable, though their motivations may differ.

This shared Romantic ideology and attitude toward nature forms a nexus between fantasy, alternative religiosity and environmentalism. The separations between mind/body and culture/nature are seen as related aspects of the same problem: that of a fundamental duality in Western thinking brought about by the materialism and mechanization of philosophical rationalism (institutionalized in modern science) and the dualism of traditional Christianity. Hence the emphasis on holism and the idea of an organic, interconnected universe is simultaneously a solution to and a critique of these underlying dualities. Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea books (1968–2001) depict a dynamic cosmos where the interconnectedness of all things is maintained through a magical equilibrium or balance. The movement is toward reestablishment of a harmonious state, where not only the individual hero/psyche is made whole, but the imbalances between men and women, humanity and nature are also overcome through the shift toward a more egalitarian and ecologically balanced society. The post-apocalyptic Australian landscape of Sean Williams’s Books of the Change (2001–2002) paradoxically emphasizes these interconnections by exploring the cataclysmic changes wrought on the environment through a massive rupture within the human life and psyche.

Reconnecting with nature and changing humanity's attitude toward the natural world is seen by both environmentalists and alternative spirituality movements as the solution to relieving the existential alienation of modern Western urbanites, which is also regarded as the root of ecological destruction – the mind–body dichotomy.

is echoed in the separation between human culture and nature. Fantasy problematizes this separation. J.R.R. Tolkien ("On Fairy Stories") states that fantasy expresses the desire to communicate with other living things. Humans with “the Wit” in Robin Hobb's The Farseeer Trilogy (1995–1997), for example, have magical telepathic bonds with wild animals, and the dragons of The Liveship Traders (1998–2000) are an endangered species which not only communicate with but cause physical mutations in humans: human and nonhuman blend and merge. The emphasis is on continuity with rather than separation from nature: there are no sharp distinctions; the boundaries are blurred. However, the shapeshifters and werewolves of fantasy, such as the Meta-morphs of Robert Silverberg's Majipoor books (1980–) and Patricia McKillip's Earth–Masters (in Riddle-Master), point to the ambiguities in humanity's relationship to wild, chaotic, dangerous nature. As Verlyn Flieger notes, there is an acknowledgement that nonhuman life has its own agenda and survival at stake that is not necessarily compatible with human society. This uneasy coexistence reflects tensions and contradictions found within the Green Movement and in wider society, and points to the fundamental cultural paradox inherent in the cultural construction of the natural.

By tapping into the emotional and imaginative sub-stratum at the foundation of religious experience, fantasy can express alternate ways of perceiving reality. It is eminently able to express the holistic visions at the heart of New Age and environmentalist critiques centered around altering humanity's relationship to the Other: its estranged self, and nonhuman nature. In so doing, fantasy has become one of the imaginative discourses of "alternative culture," its motifs, symbols and ideological substructure influencing and itself feeding into what Meredith Veldman describes as a sub-current of Romantic anti-modern ideological protest. Fantasy literature can therefore be seen as part of a commercial and creative substructure that plays a part in the dissemination and acceptance of heterodox beliefs and ideas into wider society. However, fantasy is in the end a literary manifestation, not a religious one. This is an important distinction: the focus is on ethical responsibility, the individual, generalized "spirituality" not localized to any particular creed or religion. Fantasy presents internally coherent moral dramas without reference to a formal moral code or to any kind of religious institution. Its characters are faced with existential moral choices of the same quality as those faced by modern Western individuals. It works through constant adaptation to contemporary cultural contexts in order to be acceptable to modern audiences and mentalities – in short, it involves the mainstreaming of countercultural impulses.
Further Reading


See also: Celestine Prophecy; Church of All Worlds; Disney Worlds at War; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Le Guin, Ursula; Middle Earth; New Age.

The Farm

In 1971, a motley caravan of countercultural idealists arrived at a borrowed farm in southern Tennessee to start a commune based on the spiritual teachings of Stephen Gaskin, who had gathered about him hundreds of young seekers in a rambling series of lectures and discussions called Monday Night Class in San Francisco. Settling into their new home, the idealistic hippies began to build a commune that would eventually reach a population of some 1500. Central to their aspirations was the conviction that they could make the world a better place to live by living low-impact, cooperative lives and sharing their surplus with others. In the Farm’s first dozen years its residents ran an extensive agricultural operation, worked to develop innovative kinds of natural foods (many of them based on soybeans), and operated a natural birthing clinic whose services were offered free to the public. Central to it all was a nature-oriented religious spirit drawing on the teachings of the world’s great religions and spiritual masters and articulated by Gaskin, whose Sunday morning services anchored the entire enterprise.

Economic problems led to a shift, in the early 1980s, from a large community with a completely communal economy to a smaller, more decentralized one. However, the environmental and natural commitments of Farm members have remained central. They have developed solar energy and alternative fuels for vehicles. Through Plenty, their charitable foundation, they support grass-roots, low-impact construction and agricultural projects in developing countries. Their Ecovillage Training Center offers instruction in alternative building construction, permaculture, and other such things. They have preserved hundreds of acres of native forest. After three decades they continue to be proudly devoted to natural living.

Timothy Miller

Further Reading


See also: Back to the Land Movements; Beat Generation Writers; Bioregionalism; Hippies; Radical Environmentalism.

**Fascism**

Fascism is a political ideology driven by a vision of the nation’s total rebirth from decadence (its “palingenesis”; see Griffin 1995). In the interwar period it typically assumed a charismatic ritual form of politics that for some scholars is reminiscent of Early Modern millenarian movements, and for others represents an outstanding example of modern “political religion.” Moreover, in some of its manifestations fascism has apparently exhibited a deep concern with nature and even with ecological issues. Both “religion” and “nature,” the principal themes of this encyclopedia, are highly contested terms embracing a vast range of phenomena. This article sets out to convey something of fascism’s complex relationship to both terms by concentrating on the degree to which it took the form of a “religion of nature.” A generalized pronouncement on even this relationship is hazardous, however, since, compared to liberalism and Marxism, fascism is a peculiarly protean force, capable of assuming a wide range of sometimes contradictory forms even within the same
movement. This is because the national revolution envisaged by fascists embraces a wide range of permutations in what constitutes the nation’s indestructible core, in the types and virulence of the racism which it incorporates, and in the temporal and geographical scale of the coming revolution. In the same way its relationship to established or new religions can assume many contradictory guises, as can the degree to which it deliberately seeks to incite a sense of mystic participation or self-transcendence in its followers. Equally, the place which a transformed relationship to nature occupies within the fascist scheme for national regeneration, as well as the role played in it by pagan, “immanenist,” or cultic concepts of nature, can vary enormously depending on which specimen of the genus is considered.

Yet even when a particular example of fascism or moment in the “fascist experience” seems to display a profound religiosity bound up with an all-pervasive cult of nature, closer examination suggests that both are specious when compared to those authentic religions in which a significant role is played by a spontaneous sense of awe (or what is known in German as Ehrfurcht, a synthesis of “veneration” and “fear”) at the unfathomable forces of creation and destruction which are unceasingly at work in shaping the cosmos (Griffin 1998). A true “religion of nature” cultivates a spiritual, metaphysical, and aesthetic awareness of the unimaginable scale, both microscopic and macroscopic, on which nature’s laws have acted in the epic miracle play whose plot has been unfolding since the beginning of life and the universe itself, and perhaps beyond. It is a scale that dwarfs the strivings of the whole of humanity, let alone individual peoples or races, in the total scheme of things, and relegates national history to little more than a footnote in the Book of Life. This perspective shrinks to insignificance the importance of “the new order” which fascists aspire to bring about in the life of their people or race, and reveals the genius of charismatic leaders to be little more than ephemeral displays of mortal hubris. The “thousand year empires” about which their daydreams revolve, and even the realm of “immortality” to which they consign their national heroes, are but a twinkling of the cosmic eye in comparison. A chilling, but unusually lucid glimpse into the abyss which yawns between the religious, genuinely metaphysical, concept of a higher reality and the fascist one is summed up in the following pronouncement reportedly made by Adolf Hitler during one of his interminable “table talks”:

To the Christian doctrine of the infinite significance of the individual human soul . . . I oppose with icy clarity the saving doctrine of the nothingness and insignificance of the individual human being, and of his continued existence in the visible immortality of the nation (in Rhodes 1980: 78).

Conceptual Problems and Premises

The problem inherent in all ex cathedra pronouncements of the sort made above is that their clarity and authority are achieved at the cost of drastically simplifying definitional issues of mind-teasing complexity and subtlety. An article on fascism in the context of this encyclopedia involves juggling conceptually with three terms all of which are so deeply contested that they resemble fluffballs rather than discrete objects. In other words their taxonomic boundaries are not only fuzzy to the point of evanescence but so mobile that, according to which expert is consulted, clear tracts of solid no-man’s-land between “fascism,” “religion” and “nature” can suddenly be engulfed, while equally unpredictably new stretches of common terrain may emerge where they all overlap.

Fortunately, a partial consensus is currently gaining ground about the definitional role played in fascism by the myth of the nation’s rebirth from decadence within historical time and through human agency, the modern variant of an archetypal human preoccupation with accessing a “higher” time and “spiritual” rebirth. This allows it to be dissociated “ideal-typically” from Christianity as a creed postulating the existence of a supra-historical and supra-temporal Being. From this perspective the extensive collusion between the Churches and both Fascist Italy and the Third Reich which came about in the interwar period, and the many fascist movements (e.g., the Falange, the Romanian Iron Guard, the South African AWB) which have sought to exploit Christianity’s mythic power for their own ends, point not to fascism’s deep kinship with religion, but rather to the perpetual propensity of human beings and their political leaders to pervert religion by appropriating it and bending it to strictly temporal and temporary goals. Fascism thus transforms metaphysics into a form of metapolitics, whose horrendous human implications can only be fully grasped when translated into the realm of politics and social engineering.

It is when it comes to the wider question of fascism’s relationship, not to the relatively concrete topic of “established religion,” but to the far more nebulous notion of “a religious apprehension of nature,” that the issue becomes inextricably tangled. For heuristic purposes it might be possible to locate the core of this phenomenon within what has generally been referred to under the heading of “pantheism” or “nature mysticism,” but what one major authority on comparative religion and preternatural experiences, R.C. Zaehner, more precisely identified as “pan-en-henism” (Zaehner 1961). By this he referred to the non-rational, emotionally overwhelming, language-defying sense of “all-in-oneness” encountered in variegated forms in the writings of countless mystics and poets the world over. It is an experience that opens up the intuitive mind ("visionary faculty," “third eye,” “pineal gland,” “four-fold vision,” “soul,” etc.) to the pullulating interconnectedness of all organic and inorganic reality, to the
intrinsic, transcendental beauty of a hypostatized “Life.” It brings human beings in tune with the sacred, numinous quality of organic nature as the manifestation of a single, continually unfolding dynamic act of creation, both material and spiritual, whose origins, mechanisms, and sublime purposes can never be fully divined by the human mind.

Testimonies to such an experience can be found in the context of dualistic religions (e.g., the poetry of St. Francis of Assisi and William Blake), “monistic” or “philosophical” religions (e.g., Daoism, Zen Buddhism), shamanistic religions (e.g., the cosmology of the Navaho or Amazonian Indians), Romanticism (e.g., the poetry of Coleridge or the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich), and the types of ecology informed by “New Age” spirituality (e.g., the books of Fritjof Capra or the courses on “Buddhist ecology” taught at the Schumacher College in Devon, UK). Its hallmark is a feeling of being transfixed by the inscrutable mysteries of the cosmos in a moment when the German poet Goethe called “Ergriffenheit,” a state of being seized by awe, by the realization of Being itself. It is an ecstatic yet terrifying moment of revelation, of anagnorisis, of breaking through the “cloud of unknowing” to be face to face with life and see its immutable laws written on one’s own flesh. It is one which in its purest form acts as an antidote to human vanity, makes the wanton destruction of life in any of its incarnations unthinkable. It is thus the arch-enemy of all forms of anthropocentric, ethnocentric or “race supremacist” mindset, stripping the senses to the point where they become receptive to a bottomless oneness and boundless compassion with all living and mortal creatures. Ecofascism is inevitably a travesty and betrayal of genuinely “green” politics.

It is the (invariably contentious) thesis of this article that once the yardstick for a “genuine” religion of nature is established in these terms then it follows that fascism is incompatible with anything remotely resembling it. When fascism and any other form of organized ultranationalism or politicized racial hatred which is not firmly rooted in an orthodox religious tradition – whether such sentiments are not themselves perversions of religion even when rooted in a religious tradition is a matter for theologians to judge – employ the discourse of a “religion of nature” they do so metaphorically. In other words they create an insidious verbal register which exploits the mythic power of both constituents purely as a source of mystification and legitimation, and thereby guts them of their original or “true” significance. A venerable precedent for this procedure within the liberal tradition is the way the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, despite being purportedly based on “Reason,” invokes “the Laws of Nature and Nature’s God,” “the Creator,” and “the Protection of Divine Providence” (note again the use of hypostatizing capitals) in order to endow the idea of “self-evident truths” and “inalienable rights” with an aura of Higher Authority and Higher Destiny, and thus the American Revolution itself with an incontrovertible legitimacy. In doing so its authors revealed themselves as true children of the Enlightenment, which made extensive use of the concept of “Nature” and the “Supreme Being” to endorse its absolutist claims for the power of rationalism. The systematic elision of “God” with “Country” to create a synthetic mobilizing myth disseminated by the propaganda machines of all the states involved in the First World War provides another instructive example both of how readily genuine religion can be contaminated and how an ersatz religion (in this case hyper-nationalism) can be fabricated in the modern age – though the perversion of religion by secular vested interests is arguably something as old as religion itself. The “higher” purpose which this ideological confabulation served between 1914 and 1918 was anything but divine, but rather the strictly down-to-Earth one of using religion as ideological bellows to sustain the white-hot patriotism vital for turning ordinary men into human weapons of mass slaughter and mutual destruction.

When encountered in the powerful gravitational field of fascist fanaticism, allusions to “the sacred” and to “nature” will generally prove on close inspection to be little more than thinly disguised simulations of a “genuinely” religious appreciation of nature and the laws of life. Wherever history throws up cases of a modern, partially secularized nation that cries out for “redemption” or “renewal” through the revitalization of the healthy forces of nature, then theocentric/metaphysical and ecocentric/biological axioms have been ideologically modified in the pursuit of narrow anthropocentric and ethnocentric ends. Just like some branches of nineteenth-century science (Darwinism, anthropology, genetics) were corrupted into scientism (Social Darwinism, Aryanism, racial hygiene), so the mysterium tremendum of nature mutates within the fascist mentality into a vacuous kitsch filled with sinister intent. A telling example of this is to be found in a pamphlet on the mission of the SS written by its leader, Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, who went on to oversee the setting up and running of the Third Reich’s tentacular system of extermination camps. In it he stresses the supreme importance to the cohesion of the SS of the belief in “the value and holiness of the soil” and “in a God who rules over us, who has created us and our Fatherland, our people and our Earth, and who sent us our leader” (Griffin 1995: 147–8).

**Samples of Fascism’s Specious Affinity with a Religion of Nature**

By now it should be clear that by definition (or rather by the definitions proposed here) fascism precludes a genuinely religious sense of nature. However, it has also been implied that, like an ideological scavenger or vampire, fascism is irresistibly drawn to any vital cultural or...
ideological forces which it can feed on or seduce in order to enhance its revolutionary force as a mobilizing power. On a par with history and the biological sciences, nature and religion readily provide deep reservoirs of such forces.

Thus fascism repeatedly generates images which evoke a specious kinship with a “panenhenistic” communion with nature: the landscapes of woods and lakes so beloved of “Aryan” painters, Blood and Soil visionaries, and the Hitler Youth; the Führer greeting Dirndl-clad peasant-girls or musing on his plans of world conquest against the backdrop of sun-kissed Bavarian mountain crests; the idyllic portraits of rural life cultivated by the "strappaease" current of fascism and the local harvest festivals or "sagre" celebrating the olive or the anchovy promoted by the regime; the South African Ossewabrandwag’s re-enactment of the Great Trek using ox-drawn wagons driven across the veldt in the quest to restore the Boer to his rightful place in God’s own country; the nocturnal initiation ceremonies held deep in the Transylvanian forest by so called “nests” of the Legionaries of the Archangel Michael to forge bonds of Romanian blood brotherhood; the landscapes and wildlife undefiled by the modern metropolis so lovingly described in the novels both of Henry Williamson, author of Tarka the Otter and propagandist for the British Union of Fascists, and Knut Hamsun, Nobel prize winner for literature and supporter of Quisling’s Nasjonal Samling. As for post-war fascism, it is symptomatic of its repeated attempts to cover tracks which lead straight back to the railway sidings of Auschwitz that contemporary Third Positionist (“Strasserite”) groups of national revolutionaries have made links with radical ecology groups such as the “Green Anarchists.” Similarly, the French (and now European) New Right embraces Green politics as part of its bid to bring about a “pagan liberation” of the modern world by reestablishing a pre-Christian cosmology and so restore a healthy “Indo-European” bond with nature.

Nor is there any shortage of texts documenting the place that an ersatz religion of nature has so often played in fascist ideology. Thus one of the many Nazi choral songs celebrating communal devotion to the Third Reich set to solemn, hymn-like music:

Earth creates the new, Earth takes away the old, Holy German Earth, may we alone be saved. It is she who bore us, we belong to her. Eternal loyalty is emblazoned on her banner. We walk on believing, turned towards the sun.

But it is contemporary US fascism in its more overtly pagan neo-Nazi incarnations such as Odinism and in its various hybrids with the racist heterodoxies of Christian Identity which is particularly rich in examples of bastardized fusions of fascism with the imagery of religion and nature.

Thus the tract “Aryan Destiny: Back to the Land” written in the 1970s by Jost, a Vietnam veteran and neo-Nazi, ends with the vision of a new Aryan homeland in the mountains of North Carolina, the Volksberg. There, Whites inspired by “a true idealism and a sound spiritual philosophy” would finally “begin a new life close to nature, and away from the degeneracy of the urban cesspools” (Kaplan 2000: 491). A structurally similar Weltanschauung (worldview) underlies David Lane’s “88 Precepts” (in neo-Nazi contexts the number 88 signifies the letters HH or Heil Hitler). These encapsulated the rationale and “vision” of the notorious US Aryan terrorist group, The Order, which was active in the early 1980s and contained such Mosaic axioms as (3) “God is the personification of Nature proved perfect by the evidence of Natural Law . . .”; (15) “In accordance with Nature’s Laws, nothing is more right than the preservation of one’s own race”; (33) “Inter-specie [sic] compassion is contrary to the Laws of Nature” (Kaplan 2000: 494–6).

To cite another contemporary example from the contemporary British racist right, David Myatt, leader of the Reichsfolk, and one of the influences on David Copeland, the London “Nailbomber,” claims that the movement is fighting in the name of Adolf Hitler himself and for the holiest cause of all . . . that of the Cosmic being itself, manifest to us in Nature, the evolution of nature that is race and the evolution of race that is individual excellence, civilization and enlightenment (in Kaplan 2000: 514).

Elements of a mongrelized “religion of nature” also inform the “Cosmotheism” of the late William Pierce, author of the (since the Oklahoma bombing of 1995) infamous Turner Diaries, as well as Ben Klassen’s Nature’s Eternal Religion (1973). The “Sixteen Commandments” of his Church of the Creator include the injunction: “You shall keep your race pure. Pollution of the White Race is a heinous crime against Nature and your own race;” and “It is our duty and privilege to further Nature’s plan by striving towards the advancement and improvement of our future generations” (in Kaplan 2000: 474).

The Dance of Shiva
This article has adopted a consciously conservative, “purist” position on fascism’s religious credentials. As a result it takes issue with the considered judgment of several academics on this topic. It suggests, for example, that Robert Poir’s interpretation of National Socialism as a “religion of nature,” while impressively scholarly and containing many valid observations, obscures the sinister political and eugenic purposes which informed apparent acts of communion with nature staged by the Third Reich: namely to forge a racially conceived and wholly
imaginary national community or Volksgemeinschaft while mystifying the ritual destruction of humanist ethics and humanitarian reason. The function of Nazi “religion” was to bless and sanctify the categorization of humanity along a sliding scale stretching from the pure, “immortal” Aryan to subhuman levels of existence fit only for extermination. However, the line taken by this article broadly endorses Michael Burleigh’s account of Nazism as a “political religion” (Burleigh 2000a) because of the stress he puts on it being a modern political movement which operated as an ersatz theology, commenting, for example, that the ritual “Commemoration of the Movement’s fallen ‘saturated the proceedings with quasi-religious emotion,’ and must have prompted ‘nausea in any person of genuine religious faith’” (Burleigh 2000b: 264). At the same time, he also suggests that it would have been more fruitful to explore the links between the Nazi vision of the “new order” and the pangenetic myths of other fascist movements rather than suggest direct parallels with the millenarian fantasies of sixteenth-century Anabaptists.

The approach adopted here also rejects as wrong-headed Anna Bramwell’s attempt to portray as a forerunner of contemporary “Green” politics Walter Darré, Hitler’s Reich Farmers’ Leader and Food Minister, who reconciled his commitment to organic farming and the revitalization of the peasantry with his readiness to oversee the Aryanization of Polish farming (Bramwell 1985). It also regards as misguided Daniel Gasman’s thesis (Gasman 1971) that the genesis of Nazism is to be located in Ernst Haeckel’s “Monism” (he later extends this thesis to the whole of fascism). Monism was Haeckel’s name for the overarching “philosophy of life” which resulted from his highly syncretic fusion of Darwinism, Social Darwinism, biologism, vitalism, völkisch Aryanism, and anti-Semitism which became influential at the turn of the nineteenth century. The resulting pseudo-scientific (scientistic) “worldview,” whatever direct impact it had on some contemporaries, was just one of many totalizing cosmologies of decadence and rebirth which helped shape the cultural climate of the fin-de-siècle in which fascism’s pangenetic fantasies first crystallized as a rudimentary political vision. Moreover, though Haeckel apparently coined the neologism “ecology,” his racist brand of nationalism caused him to be unfaithful to any genuinely ecological, and hence “panenhenistic,” moments of epiphany which he might have had in the course of his meditations about the dynamic processes shaping the world.

In this respect Haeckel stayed true to the spirit of his mentor Nietzsche, who, though not a nationalist, had somehow managed to extract from a series of powerful revelations induced by direct contact with unspoiled nature the myth of the Übermensch or “superior man” who would redeem Western civilization from its moral decadence and loss of vision in a spirit far removed from any form of ecological humanism, articulating his vision in texts that readily leant themselves to being appropriated by Nazi propagandists. Thereby he betrayed his fleeting experiences of the interconnectedness and intrinsic beauty which he recorded in his private correspondence and which inspired the section in Thus Spake Zarathustra called At Noontide:

Take care! Hot noontide sleeps upon the fields. Do not sing! Quiet! Quiet! The world is perfect . . . It is the most inconspicuous, softest, lightest thing, the rustling of a lizard in the leaves, a breath, a twinkling of an eye . . . it is the little that makes for the greatest degree of happiness. What has happened to me? Has time flown away? Listen! Did I fall – listen! – into the well of eternity? . . . Did not the world just become perfect? (Nietzsche 1969: 288)

Such epiphonic moments can act as portals leading to the realization – that has a deep resonance both with ancient Hindu cosmology and with modern astrophysics – that the whole of nature, in fact the universe itself, is one vast controlled explosion of amoral cosmic energy performing on every scale of reality the infinitely intricate and aesthetically structured “dance of Shiva” (Capra 1983). It is a vision of the world that reveals a deep structural affinity or symbiosis between the experience of the sacred, mystic religion, and nature. It is one that cannot be grasped by a mindset that finds beauty instead in the choreographed march of uniformed troops or the stage-managed acclamations of the mob celebrating the renewal of an all-too-human history in which even more demonized enemies of the new order will inevitably be persecuted and “sacrificed.”

Roger Griffin

Further Reading

Gentile, Emilio. “The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of
See also: Anarchism; ATWA; Darré, Walther; Devi, Savitri; Haeckel, Ernst; Hegel, G.W. Friedrich; Nietzsche, Friedrich; Radical Environmentalism.

Fauna Cabala

Fauna. n. animal life.
Cabala. n. an esoteric, secret matter or mysterious art.

Science can be a looking-glass into the sacred, a window to a world outside the confines of human perception. It can be a tool to see beauty that would otherwise remain hidden, to uncover rather than explain mystery. For some scientists, the study of nature is a means to spirituality, is delving into the secrets of the sacred, is empowering, sustaining, transformative, infused with a sense of awe. It is a discovery of what is precious and most important in life. To dabble with systems larger than self and witness the interconnectedness of life is an honor, and such research is necessarily respectful, non-invasive, and a reflection of the equality of all living beings.

Animal perceptions, ways of being, decisions in the face of ecological pressures and evolutionary constraints are where I find magic. As a behavioral and molecular ecologist I want to see the world through a beetle’s eyes, I want to know what home means to a wombat. My science trundles along in the footsteps of my childhood, striving to understand questions completely unrelated to humans. I am stunned by the bee’s waggle dance, by snail love darts, by senses foreign to the human experience. Often the biggest secrets, the most important concepts, are most clearly seen in the minutiae. And often they are seen in reproductive biology and mating systems, the evolutionary currency of life. It is on these that I tend to focus in my column Fauna Cabala, an endeavor to convey wonder glimpsed through science.

Aphids
High overhead on cottonwood leaves, pregnant aphids are kickboxing. Springtime on the Colorado Plateau induces aphid females of the genus Pemphigus to emerge from eggs in the bark of cottonwood trees. The insects, who are initially wingless, march up the trunks by the thousands. When an aphid arrives at the top, she wanders about to select the perfect leaf, and when found, prods and sucks along the midrib at the leaf’s base until a gall (a hollow sack of leaf tissue) forms.

Within this protective gall the female births 50 to 100 daughters parthenogenetically (that is, her egg cells do not undergo meiosis, and thus, without mating, she can produce daughters identical to herself) and feeds on phloem sap with them until they burst out at maturity. A female can increase her reproductive success by selecting a large leaf, because leaf size predicts sap content, and by settling near a leaf’s base, the site of nutrient inflow. This creates a stampede for large leaves, and vicious territoriality. If a female comes along while another is forming her gall, they engage in a lethal bout of kicking, which can last for two days.

Among aphids, males are an afterthought. Even before a female is born she has daughters developing within her. Throughout the spring and summer, generations of females, some winged and others not, are cranked out every ten days. It is not until fall, when the drop in temperature prompts meiosis to occur, that females birth sons. The female’s sex chromosomes separate imperfectly, such that some embryos just have one, producing sons. The males then mate with females, who lay eggs in the bark of cottonwood trees. The eggs destined to become males perish, while those that will hatch into females overwinter into spring. Thus, asexual reproduction enables a multitude of females to explode onto the scene, and sexual reproduction results in new gene combinations, some of which may be better adapted to environmental conditions the following year.

Dung Beetles
Dung beetles (superfamily Scarabaeoidea), who rival the entire class of birds in species number, have for 250 million years exploited the nutritionally rich resource that drops from intestinal tracks. Before dung beetles flourished with the radiation of mammals, their ancestors may well have trooped after terrestrial dinosaurs. Modern beetles locate excrement by odor, and for those who eat monkey poo, by that peculiar thud on the forest floor.
Thereafter, beetles eat, bury, steal, and otherwise frolic among the fecal matter according to their specialty. They are of three behavioral types: dwellers, rollers, and tunnelers. Dwellers set up their household in dung, feasting and ovipositing in the fresh globs. Rollers mold fecal balls and roll them away; tunnelers sequester caches of excrement beneath the pat. Both rollers and tunnelers make nests by burying poop for baby food, and can provide elaborate parental care. Other beetles, the kleptoparasites, thrive from these nesters to maintain their coprophagous (feces-eating) lifestyle.

Driven by fierce competition for excrement, some beetles don’t wait for feces to fall. Anus-dwelling dung beetles of monkeys, wallabies and sloths eat dingleberries around the anus, occasionally following the poop earthward to lay eggs in the pat. Some anus-dwellers clutch the perianal hairs of wallabies, stretching to catch that which cannonballs them to the ground. In India, several beetle species forage directly in the human intestine. Another beetle with its own fecal factory is a South American who rides large snails and ups on their slimy dung. This is unusual because most dung beetles prefer the nutritionally superior scat of mammals. In fact, mammalian population declines and extinctions have the potential to kick the crap out of dung beetle diversity.

When not plunging into poo pats for dinner, some beetles are meticulously sculpting dung balls. Males of Kheper nigroaeneus, a large African dung beetle, mold brood balls from carefully selected feces and flaunt them as a sexual display. Once a female is attracted, she climbs aboard the ball and the male rolls both away. At a suitable spot, the male buries himself, the brood ball and his partner, after which they mate and he leaves, closing the hole behind him. The female proceeds to remodel the ball, inserting a bit of her own feces and plastering it over the ball’s exterior to form a layer that decreases desiccation. She then lays a single egg within it, her sole offspring that year.

Upon hatching, the larva munches on its mother’s excrement, thereby inoculating itself with the microbial strains necessary to digest dung. It then begins to mold a puation chamber within the brood ball with its own feces. Mother and offspring spend the next three months eating and excreting, the larva from within and the mother from without. They are able to communicate through a small, unplastered region on the brood ball. A pheromone released by the larva diffuses out of this window and elicits broodcaring behavior from the mother. The solid released by the larva diffuses out of this window and elicits broodcaring behavior from the mother. The solid released by the larva diffuses out of this window and elicits broodcaring behavior from the mother.

Once oriented correctly, the male must decide which penis to use. Most animals tend to favor the use of one hand or paw or hoof over the equivalent one on the other side of the body, and, though limbless, these snakes are no exception. They just favor one penis over the other. Together called hemipenes, each hemipenis is linked to its own testis and kidney. The right unit is bigger, and the one they prefer, particularly when warmer temperatures enable them to maneuver into complex mating positions. However, if they’re lucky enough to mate with a succession of females they will alternate between the two because otherwise they deplete their kidney secretions. These secretions are important because they form a hard copulatory plug that prevents females from remating. Other males find the smell of a plugged female unsexy, and leave her be as she slithers on her way.

These frequently mating males have the largest plug and the shortest copulation among snakes. Instead of trying to prevent females from remating during the fertile period by guarding them or copulating for an extensive amount of time they give them corks, which stay in place for about two days. This red-sided, right-handed, scent-parroting, mate-stopping serpent can thus rapidly re-enter a mating mob.

**Anemonefish**

Some coral reef fish pack a dress in their testes. Anemonefish of the genus *Amphiprion*, who inhabit the tropical and subtropical Indopacific, live out their lives protected by the swaying tentacles of sea anemones. It is thought that the anemones avoid harpooning them to death.
because the fish have somehow smeared themselves with their hosts’ mucus so that they are recognized as just another appendage. Though this world is sheltered from the outside, inside it is a den of aggression. A large female and smaller male form a monogamous unit, the female being older and dominant. Also present are up to eight unrelated sub-adults and juveniles who are constantly attacked by the breeding pair. They are in such a high-stress state from these attacks that their sexual organs remain tiny. The adult male is aggressive to other males because he does not want them to sneak a spawn. The female is aggressive to her partner. Both sexes remain tiny. All males have this ability to change sex thanks to immature eggs hiding in their testes. If the female dies, her mate becomes female and the largest of the males becomes the new female’s mate. It only takes a month for the male to lay an egg.

This pattern of sex change is unusual among fish. It likely evolved because the patchy and unpredictable distribution of the host anemone made it necessary to be monogamous and easier to change sex than to risk predation while searching for an anemone occupied by an unpaired member of the opposite sex. Most sex-changing fish follow the pattern of the polygynous bluehead wrasse, in which there is intense competition for access to females. Males get more matings, as many as 100 per day, as they get larger and more able to defend a territory. Because males have the potential of far greater reproductive success than females, the largest females turn into males when there are few large males and many small females around. The switch is rapid. Upon the death of a dominating male, a large female immediately begins courting smaller females, and in just over a week she sports superb sperm. Thus, though these two species differ in male-to-femaleness and female-to-maleness, their brand of sex change reflects their social system, not ambisexual chaos.

Garden Snails
In a finale of fervent foreplay, brown garden snails (*Helix aspera*) impale each other with love-darts. Being hermaphrodites, these animals sport both male and female tackle and swap sperm in both directions during eight hours of slippery sex. Most sperm are immediately digested by a specialized sperm-destroying gland, although a few sneak past to a storage organ, where they dwell for up to four years. The point of the sharp, calcareous, centimeter-long snail nails is to short-circuit the gland. A swooning snail will aim for the genitals, located to the right of the head, and push the dart out of its body and into its partner. Darts are coated with a slimy cocktail that causes contractions in the female reproductive tract, closing the entrance to the devouring gland and allowing sperm to pass freely into storage. If a snail has a poor aim or is caught empty-handed, which is quite possible since darts take ten days to produce, it compensates by delivering extra sperm to its prickly partner. This species exemplifies a rarity: an intersexual arms race in which individuals are both genders. The male portion has evolved to impart increasingly more sperm while the female portion has evolved to digest it.

Fairy Wrens
Superb fairy wrens (*Malurus cyaneus*) are true blue in color only. These tiny residents of eastern Australia are socially monogamous, meaning that breeding pairs co-habit and raise young, yet enjoy more romances outside this union than any other species. A male will maintain a year-round territory in which he lives either with just his mate or with subordinate males as well who assist with chick-rearing. At the commencement of the five-month breeding season he sheds his drab brown winter feathers and dons brilliant, luxurious, multi-hued blue plumage and flits about to other territories. With a yellow petal in his bill, and crown, cheek and back feather flared, he displays with fervor to all females except for his mate. A female is usually quite unimpressed but occasionally solicits copulations. She finds it particularly endearing when a beau’s blue ‘do is enduring. Because it is extremely costly energy-wise to sport blue feathers (especially in winter), only the most fit males can maintain blueness for a long period of time. The most successful males are those who begin their blue displays at least two months prior to the beginning of the breeding season; only the studliest of the studs can molt directly from old breeding plumage into new come the end of the breeding season in February. A female can thus, by noting how long a male is blue, assess vigor, which translates into genetic quality when making a mating decision. The result of this means that 72 percent of the chicks from her seven or so annual clutches are fathered by males other than her mate. This has, in turn, led to intense sperm competition among males. They lug around huge sperm storage containers called cloacal pro-tuberances which, together with testes, comprise up to 10 percent of their bodyweight. When a male is lucky enough to receive a cloacal kiss, he can release a massive ejaculate, possibly swamping out the sperm of his rivals. These small, libidinal birds thus have the dual honor of being the most polyamorous of socially monogamous vertebrates and having the greatest sperm reserves, relative to weight, of any bird or mammal.

Honeybees
Honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) give precise directions while they sing and dance for a trembling crowd in the dark. After finding a particularly inspiring food source, a nectar-laden bee flies back to the hive where, on the vertical surface of the comb, she dances. Usually this is in the shape of a figure eight, and is called the waggle dance. The angle that the figure eight departs from the vertical...
conveys which direction the food is from the hive. It is the same angle as between the sun and the food, from the hive. For instance, if she dances straight upward, the food is directly toward the sun, straight downward, it is directly away from the sun, and 45 degrees to the right means it is 45 degrees to the right of the sun. The bee communicates distance in addition to direction by speed: the faster she dances, the closer the food source.

As she waggles, a gaggle of her nest-mates observe, but because it is dark in the hive they do this via sound. Her song enables bees to first find her among the masses, and then to interpret the angle of her dance. They can do this because their hearing organs, in antennae, can be moved to and fro to decipher her comings and goings in relation to their position and gravity. Meanwhile, her audience members employ a signal that does not compete with hers: they vibrate the comb with their thoraxes. When there is a whole lot of shaking going on she stops to pass out titbits from the food source. Those who are suitably impressed make a beeline for the food. If these nectar collectors remain impressed they will join in the dance, so that over time many bees in the hive will be singing the same song and dancing the same dance, and the food source will be heavily used.

Potential pitfalls to this system are not problems for these bees: because they are sensitive to the plane of polarized light they can determine sun position even on overcast days, and if inclement weather or nightfall delays return to a food source, dances later compensate for the change in sun position. The refined communicative prowess of honeybees, their ability to convert gravitational information in the dark hive into visual information in the world, is unrivaled among living beings.

**Mongoose/Hornbill**

The dwarf mongoose (*Helogale undulate rufula*) forms a foraging community with yellow-billed (*Tockus flavirostris*) and Von der Decken’s (*Tockus deckeni*) hornbills in the Taru desert of Kenya. This thornscrub habitat has a large termite population, the mounds of which are used as mongoose refuges and foraging group staging areas. The carnivorous dwarf mongoose eats insects (beetles, termites, grasshoppers) and occasionally small vertebrates. When foraging, the mongooses fan out a meter or less apart and generally walk in a straight line, thus covering as much ground as possible. The hornbills (whose diet, except for fruits and herbs, overlaps completely with their companions) follow on foot, eating the jumping and flying insects that the mongooses disturb.

The foraging day begins at a termite mound, where mongooses and hornbills rendezvous. Typically, the hornbills fly to a mound where mongooses are sleeping and wait for them to wake, although if the mongooses emerge with no birds present, the mammals will delay foraging until the birds arrive. A mongoose lookout emerges first, followed by the rest of the group (3–32 animals). After twenty minutes or so of stretching, grooming, sunbathing and playing, the group sets off, with the hornbills in tow. If, however, the hornbills wait extraordinarily long (over an hour) for the mongooses to emerge, they fly to the mound, peek down a ventilation shaft and wake the sleepy mongooses with loud, squawking “wok”s.

The hornbills benefit from this mutualistic relationship by increased foraging efficiency, particularly of prey that would be difficult to find if not flushed out by mongooses. In return, the mongooses benefit because the hornbills are able to detect and warn of predatory raptors earlier than the mongooses are able to. The more birds in a group the fewer mongooses need to take up the dangerous job of lookout. Furthermore, hornbills and mongooses make several concessions to each other. Hornbills warn mongooses about predators even if the particular raptor does not prey on hornbills. Hornbills also refrain from consuming mongoose young, who are the same size as the rats in their diet, even though they have plenty of opportunities to do so. When competing for food, mongooses do not attack the hornbills as they do other species. Instead, they growl and hip-slam, responses normally reserved for fellow mongooses.

In other areas of Africa, the dwarf mongoose and yellow-billed and Von der Decken’s hornbills live without each other’s aid. Their relationship in the Taru desert is the tightest known mutualism between social vertebrates that usually live independently.

The laborious, sometimes high-tech, and often tedious methodology of scientific investigation can yield more than conventional insight. For me, using behavioral and genetic data to witness ecology and evolution in action inspires awe, engenders passion, and enables recognition of the sacred. My hope is that the above wanderings among the intricacies and refined beauty of other systems impart a sense of the magic and mystery inherent to worlds not our own.

*Faith M. Walker*

See also: Animals; Conservation Biology; Dogs (various); Elephants; Hyenas – Spotted; Nile Perch; Primate Spirituality; Serpents and Dragons.

**Feminist Spirituality Movement**

The name “feminist spirituality movement” is something of an “umbrella” term used for many Pagan movements that are specifically feminist in orientation. One of its best-known variants is feminist Wicca, a branch of goddess worshipping paganism that is explicitly feminist, unlike some Pagan groups. The feminist spirituality
movement is part of second-wave feminism and began in the latter third of the twentieth century. It is an Earth-oriented, pro-women spirituality that explicitly rejects male dominance in religion, solely male images of the divine, and the limited value accorded to nature in much conventional Western religion. Furthermore, many of the movement's leading spokespersons argue that male dominance in religion, exclusively male images of the divine, and indifference to the sacredness of nature are three variations on the same theme – parts of a single religious vision.

Like new religious movements throughout history, the feminist spirituality movement has generated its share of controversies. Some of the negative comments made about it are simply part of the general denunciation of pagan religions common among some more fundamentalist members of more established religions. Others, who are feminists themselves, are also unsympathetic to the feminist spirituality movement. Often their criticisms are simply part of the anti-religious sentiments that are part of much of the general feminist movement. Religions have been so bad for women, such critics claim, that spending time creating theology and ritual, a high priority for members of the feminist spirituality movement, simply takes time and energy away from more important political and economic projects.

Depending on the interests and needs of its participants, feminist spirituality can include a number of concerns. Some groups consist primarily of enthusiastic participants in ritual who believe in a matriarchal past and in "the Goddess," generically conceptualized and named. Such practitioners care little for the scholarly and theological controversies in which others are deeply involved.

But whether it is plausible to posit a "matriarchal prehistory" is a matter that learned archeologists and historians must debate, as the work of Cynthia Eller has shown. And exactly how "the Goddess" is connected with the myriad goddesses known to historians of religion, or how naming the divine in feminine terms changes our concepts of the divine are difficult theological issues. Carol Christ, among other feminist theologians, has devoted much of her life to asking such questions.

Though most historians of religions would regard feminist Wicca and the feminist spirituality movement as a new religious movement, its own adherents often claim an ancient "matriarchal" past for it. They claim that before the rise of patriarchy, women participated fully in religion and were religious leaders, that goddesses were worshipped by all members of society, and that people, deeply immersed in natural rhythms and in awe of nature, lived in peace and harmony with each other. This, they would say, is the "old time religion" that existed before Christianity and other monotheistic religions, the "old religion" (another name Wiccans use for themselves) which they seek to recover and restore. In their sacred history, the true "fall" occurred when male dominance came into being, when male deities completely replaced female deities, and when nature was no longer regarded as sacred and divine. Therefore, the feminist spirituality movement gives equal emphasis to women's leadership in religion, the importance of goddesses, and the religious significance of nature.

The theology of the feminist spirituality movement is a theology of immanence. That is to say, in common with many other religions, members of this movement claim that the divine is to be found within the world of nature, including human bodies and spirits, rather than in a transcendent realm separate from the world. The natural world in which we live is alive with spirits and every aspect of nature is divine and sacred. Also in common with many other religions, the feminist spirituality movement claims that it is natural and normal to imagine deity as female. They would also claim that when theologies of immanence are replaced by theologies of transcendence, when deity retreats from nature and the Earth to a transcendent and unknowable heaven and when women's bodies no longer are seen as fitting images of the divine, then human society inevitably degenerates into war, alienation and social oppression. Thus, according to feminist spirituality, questions of the religious status of nature are not merely theoretical; human well-being rides, in part, on recognition of the sacredness of nature. Human well-being also rides on appropriate recognition of the sacredness of femininity, whether divine or human. Many in the feminist spirituality movement would claim that the current difficult world situation is due to centuries and millennia of neglect of the Goddess embodied in the natural world and the oppression of her human counterparts.

The ritual practices of the feminist spirituality movement mirror its immanent theology which, while not ignoring male deities, focuses more on female deities and the natural world than do the religions more familiar to North Americans and Europeans. Ritual is more important to many in the feminist spirituality movement than are theology and other theoretical pursuits. They affirm that ritual "works," that practicing rituals correctly and with the proper attitude does have an effect on the natural world around us. Practitioners of feminist spirituality have a very sophisticated understanding of how and why ritual works.

Proper attention to nature is an important component of the movement's understanding of ritual. The preferred arena for ritual activity is not of doors in nature, even if the only "nature" available is a city park, though a living room will do if need be. Many ritual circles celebrate the human body through ritual nudity. Every ritual opens with casting the sacred circle that honors the four directions and the four basic elements. The ritual cycle of the feminist spirituality movement is grounded in the seasonal...
cycle of nature in the northern hemisphere, which is said to mimic the life of the Goddess and her consort. The major holidays are the four major points in the sun's journey through our Earth atmosphere – the solstices and the equinoxes. The minor holidays are the intermediate points between these holidays. These holidays mirror holidays familiar to many people in the contemporary world – Christmas, Easter, Passover, Halloween, Ground Hog's Day, and Thanksgiving. Wiccans would say that these familiar observances derive from pre-monothestic celebrations characteristic of nature and goddess-centered religion. The sun at its lowest point for the northern hemisphere signals birth, the spring equinox renewal, the summer solstice abundance, and the autumn equinox death leading to renewal, the birth celebrated in winter solstice rituals. However, this basic pattern of birth, death, and rebirth is interpreted in many different ways, depending on the understandings developed by a local group of practitioners or a specific leader or teacher within the feminist spirituality movement. The human life cycle is also celebrated and ritualized. The movement is especially famous for the way in which it honors older women for their maturity and wisdom in a "croning" ritual often performed for a woman to mark her sixtieth birthday.

Both the theology and the ritual practices of the feminist spirituality movement are grounded in a different evaluation of nature and human life than is found in many religions. Its practitioners often accuse other religions of being unduly pessimistic and negative about life. A common analogy is that nature is more like a nurturing, loving mother than like a judging, punishing father. Nature and life are basically trustworthy, not a mistake or a perilous journey on the way to better times in another world. Negative events can be experiences through which valuable lessons are learned, or they can be dispelled ritually. Even death is viewed as simply part of the overall rhythm of life, not a punishment for human errors. Thus, it is not surprising that this religious movement is attractive to many people, especially women, who find more dominant European and American religions to be unsupportive, even oppressive.

Rita M. Gross

Further Reading

See also: Adams, Carol; Christ, Carol; Daly, Mary; Ecofeminism – Historical and International Evolution; Ecofeminism and Biblical Interpretation; Eisler, Riane; Estés, Clarissa Pinkola; Gimbutas, Marija; Goddesses – History of; Griffin, Susan; Merchant, Carolyn; Paganism – Contemporary; Reclaiming; Ruether, Rosemary Radford; Sexuality and Green Consciousness; Shiva, Vandana; Spretnak, Charlene; Starhawk; Theosophy and Ecofeminism; Walker, Alice; Women and Animals; Wicca; Z Budapest.

Fengshui

Fengshui is the common name for various techniques originating in China that bring good fortune to people when the environments in which they reside are properly oriented. Akin to the divinatory arts by which humans seek the assistance of gods or spirits, practitioners of fengshui seek an unseen life-force called qi. In Chinese cosmology, the human anatomy is a microcosm of the Earth, and the blood veins of one correspond to the rivers of the other. When the ground is broken for a new house, or when a grave is excavated, such action taps the qi meridians of the Earth – called dragon veins – just like an acupuncture needle. Regardless of the type of fengshui, all site-orientation methods seek to locate qi in the geophysical plane. When qi is located, in the burial tomb it energizes the bones of the ancestor, who thereby bestows good fortune on the descendents.

Two different procedures for locating qi were developed by the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.). Form School theories are based on the idea that water collects and stores qi, while wind captures and scatters it. Fengshui literally means "wind-water," but the term is shorthand for the principle of "(hindering) wind (and hoarding) water." The landscape features in a given locale that influence the flow of wind and water around a site are the primary arbiters of fortune in this theoretical system. Compass School methods, on the other hand, are based on the theory of the five elements. This correlative system analyzes qi as a force that progresses through five elemental processes. In the yang or productive phase, Earth harbors metal, metal condenses water, water nourishes wood, wood feeds fire, and fire burns to Earth. In the yin or destructive phase, Earth dams water, water quenches fire, fire melts metal, metal cuts wood, and wood saps Earth. These elements are correlated with the eight-directional
trigrams of the Yijing or Book of Changes, while a person’s year of birth also corresponds to a particular trigram. It is thus possible to avoid destructive qi by orienting dwellings or arranging rooms in productive directions vis-à-vis an individual’s natal qi. For example, a woman born in the year 1982 correlates to the element of metal and the trigram, qian (northwest). A productive direction would be southwest, the direction of the element Earth, which harbors metal. A destructive direction would be south, the direction of fire, which melts metal. So the woman in question might place her bedroom or living room in the southwest portion of her house where she spends the majority of her time, and the bathroom or closets in the south.

After the Chinese communist revolution of 1949, fengshui was branded as superstition in the People’s Republic of China. The practice of fengshui was subsequently prohibited, which forced it underground for some fifty years. Although not officially rehabilitated, fengshui is now openly practiced in China and, while still vilified by most intellectuals, it is the subject of some scholarly study. During the half century of prohibition, the practice flourished in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Many of the purported masters in the West were born and trained in these Chinese communities.

Fengshui became accessible to the English-speaking world in the nineteenth century when the British missionary, Ernest Eitel, published his landmark study, Fêng-Shui: Principles of the Natural Science of the Chinese Ecology (1873). But the public at large did not discover this ancient system until the last decades of the twentieth century. One of the earliest proponents in the United States was Thomas Yun Lin who founded a temple for American Black Sect Tantric Buddhism in 1986. Lin’s brand of fengshui largely dispensed with traditional practices and relied instead on intuition and mystical knowledge, thereby transforming an ancient science into a modern religion. Every major city in the Western world now has its own community of fengshui consultants, many of them trained by Lin or his disciples.

Further Reading

See also: Chinese Traditional Concepts of Nature; Confucianism; Daoism; Geomancy.

Ferality

Human ferality – going wild from a domestic or “cultivated” condition – is a transitional theme as deeply rooted as the nature/culture divide. In the late twentieth century, with the raising of ecological consciousness, and the emergence of reenchantment-seeking youth cultures in North America, Europe and Australia, ferality became a radical environmentalist career. As is particularly apparent in settler populations, radicalized youth minorities – heir to the idealism of 1960s counterculturalists, the confrontationalism of punk and the pantheistic sensibility of paganism – have grown conscious of their separation from nature. The eco-radical desire to reconnect, to be absolved from consumerist “needs,” to transgress the nature/culture boundary, represents a deliberate response to the imperatives and consequences of late modernity. Accessing a range of ecosophies (deep ecology, ecofeminism, bioregionalism, social ecology), they expresses outrage over the growing threat to, or “loss” of, nature, sacralized as Mother, with whom intimate connection is acknowledged, and to whom dutiful commitment is owed. While often reflecting a romantic primitivism, contemporary ferality evidences an empathetic post-colonialist sensibility, extending to a raised awareness of the devastating impact of corporate-driven globalization on indigenes – leading eco-radicals to identify with and defend beleaguered native ecology and peoples.

By the late 1980s, “feral” was employed as a self-descriptor by activists within the radical green movement. At the end of that decade of grassroots forest blockades, for US Earth Firsters (who used the rubric in the periodical Live Wild or Die) and their Australian counterparts, it designated an anarcho-primitivist Earth guardianship. Throughout the 1990s, the metaphor came to experience popular application in Australia, as thousands of activists protesting forest and mining industries, combating the loss of species diversity and championing Aboriginal land rights, were designated, or self-identified as, “feral.” For these eco-activist youth minorities, “going feral” amounted to the development of a deep identification with nature under threat. Inhabiting forests for prolonged periods, where affinities with native biota were formed, enabled a strong attachment to place and, furthermore, an uncompromising commitment to its protection. The process was best conveyed by Earth First co-founder Dave Foreman: by “reinhabiting a place, by dwelling in it, we become that place. We are of it. Our most fundamental duty is self-defense. We are the wilderness defending itself” (Foreman in Taylor 1994: 204). Ferality is thus akin to a rite of passage, a process of becoming “closer to nature” from a “cultivated” or...
domestic condition, a kind of eco-radical “conversion.” Mounting “tree-sits” in the canopy of the threatened forests of Australia’s East Gippsland in the late 1990s, the experience of Bandicoot is exemplary. Raised in Melbourne, Bandicoot worked nine-to-five as a timber salesman. His recollections are that of inherent detachment:

My life took me away from the earth. It put me into a four bedroom house, it fed me. You know, meat and three vegetables every night. Showed me a TV. Taught me how to live and how to protect myself... to put a roof over my head, and a doona [quilt] around me. And I wasn’t exposed to the outside. And when we did it was in a car, you know and in a cabin (Interview with the author, April 1998).

Yet, with a “desire to understand more about the earth,” in his mid-twenties Bandicoot shed his suit, grew dreadlocks and gravitated toward the temperate rainforests of East Gippsland. “Out there,” he reveals somewhat skittishly, he found “something magical,” a “specialness.” And, with a realization that we are “of the earth,” he became ensconced in the forest’s defense. Bandicoot’s nascent eco-activism saw him travelling between forest and city on a regular basis to gather support. This movement, from detachment to an awareness that “you’ve gotta live in a nice harmonic balance” with nature, coupled with the constant migration between forest and city, makes for an identity that is liminal and remarkably uncertain.

Like many other conscientious youth in the pursuit of such terra-ist liminality, Bandicoot found a sense of belonging in an anarchic collective formed to combat the loss of national and cultural heritage. Emerging from blockades mounted in East Gippsland’s Goolongook Forest in 1993–1994, and recognizing the prior occupancy of the Bidawal, Geco (Goongerah Environment Centre) represents the last line of defense of remnant high-conservation-value forest in the state of Victoria. Like many other Earth First! affinity groups in Australia, Europe, and America, Geco strives to be a non-hierarchical eco-tribe whose members rally to the defense of local “old-growth,” water catchments and threatened species, all of which constitute sacred terrain. One Geco activist, Belalie, conveys a common perception:

[There is] a really hostile local community [in East Gippsland] ... I mean they’re living on massacre sites. It’s just an area of such dark history. It’s an area where colonization continues. They continue to destroy the sacred things. They continue to wipe out the native species. It’s the same attitude which [early settlers] approached this country with, and it’s just ongoing (Interview with the author, December 1996).

Mobilizing and networking to combat mining, forest and road-building industries, eco-activist collectives like Geco draw on a range of ritual-like tactics. These include consumer boycotts, theatrical media stunts, and acts of civil disobedience such as blockading – where individuals choose to become flesh and blood “bargaining chips.” Usually maintaining the principles of nonviolent direct action (NVDA), common obstructions include “lock ons” (attachment to earth-moving machinery using chains, bike locks and home-made devices), “tree-sits” (occupied platforms built high up in trees marked for felling and usually in the path of access roads) and “tripods” (occupied tall structures straddling machinery and/or blocking access roads). Participation in these and other rites of endurance and dedication (like laying “hair tubes” designed to gauge the prevalence of threatened species) is commonly experienced as something of an induction rite – initiating eco-neophytes into a community of defenders. While the destruction and loss of landscape to which deep attachments have been formed occasions a devastating sense of despair and grief amongst feral eco-defenders, the perpetration of what they view as desecration effectively unites those who have borne witness to it.

The rites and practices outlined here are distinguishable from the nature/culture boundary trangressions promoted by earlier wilderness philosophers. Activists do not seek immediate encounters with remote landscapes for the singular purpose of becoming “recreated,” achieving “harmony” or authenticity, in the mould of a Thoreau or as a “wilderness experience.” Nor is it the case that feral activists necessarily seek the total rejection of “domestication” – the technologies, labor and leisure practices of “civilization” – for a permanent “feral embrace of wildness,” as is advocated by anarcho-primitivist John Zerzan, whose writings are sometimes cited by members of the Earth Liberation Front. Dwelling in threatened landscapes in a labor to protect the Earth, eco-tribes are not only organized social structures, but they adopt, for example, new digital telecommunication technologies used to form and mobilize networks and disseminate information. Furthermore, as new historical and ecological sensibilities have inspired the perception of “humanized” landscapes – that is landscapes recognized to have been occupied, altered and enchanted by First Peoples for millennia – a non-humanized “wilderness” (conceptualized as terra nullius, or a place untrammeled by man) has become a less than desirable theme.

Fertility embodies the desire for “heritage” guardianship in an era of mounting ecological crisis. The process involves detachment from the parent culture, and a becoming closer to, or identification with, beleaguered “country” (nature). Such is a committed practice of (re)connecting with sacralized nature – a passport toward chthonic citizenship. Undertaken by thousands of self-marginal youth over the course of twenty years, this is a contemporary rite...
Fertility and Abortion

It should not be surprising that religions contribute to the desire for large families. The ancient religions were spawned in a world where the problem was depopulation. It is estimated that prehistoric persons, factoring in infant death, lived on average about eighteen years, and in ancient Rome and Greece the average was in the low twenties. The Emperor Augustus penalized bachelors and rewarded families for their fertility. Widowers and divorcees (of both sexes) were expected to remarry within one month. Only those over fifty were allowed to remain unmarried. It was a society where, as historian Peter Brown says, death fell savagely on the young. Only four out of every hundred men – and fewer women – lived beyond their fiftieth birthday. As a species, we formed our fertility habits in worlds that were, in Saint John Chrysostom’s words, “grazed thin by death.”

Such judgments are deep-rooted. If, as Teilhard de Chardin said, nothing is intelligible outside its history, the fertility thrust, especially in stressful conditions, is the defining story of our species. Interestingly, the ancient religions born in these conditions also contain the cure for excess fertility, for they all came to see that fertility, which is a supreme blessing, can also in certain circumstances become a curse. Still, for most of history the concern of religions was for more not for fewer children.

Religion Defined
Religion has to be taken seriously when any social problem is addressed. Two-thirds of the world’s population affiliate with some religion and the other third could not but be affected by the imaginative power of these symbol systems. Religion is difficult to define, so we may not use the term and expect a universally accepted understanding of its meaning. Often, in the social sciences, the term is used descriptively and includes everything that humans label religion, however innocent or guilty, bizarre, magical, or superstitious it may be. The advantage of this is that it allows a consideration of all of the shadow forms of expressed religiosity as well as mainstream manifestations. Many scholars of religion work out of a normative definition: religion is a positive, life-enhancing response to the sacred. By this definition, movements like the peace movement or the green movement can be considered religions since they are responses to the values in life that are so precious as to be called sacred.

The sacred may be interpreted theistically, as in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, or non-theistically as in Buddhism and the Chinese religions. No religion is a pure classic; all are burdened with negative debris from their journeys through time. Good religious studies do not fudge the downside – the sexism and the patriarchy, the authoritarianism, and, at times, the unnuanced pronatalism found in religions. The critical task is to ferret out the good amid the corruption.

The world’s religions are all philosophies of life. As Morton Smith says, in the ancient world there was “no general term for religion.” Thus, as Smith notes, Judaism to the ancient world was a philosophy. It presented itself as a source of wisdom, as seen in Deuteronomy: “You will display your wisdom and understanding to other peoples. When they hear about these statutes, they will say, ‘what a wise and understanding people this great nation is!’ ” (Deut. 4:6). Similarly, other religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Islam were quests for enlightenment and betterment. They contain ore from which rich theories of justice and human rights can be extracted. Often these treasures have not been well applied to issues like sexuality, sexism, family planning, or ecological care, but they all contain wisdom regarding the human right and obligation to bring moral planning to our biological power to reproduce. This would include the right to contraception and to abortion when necessary.
Fertility as Blessing or Blight

It took ten thousand generations to produce the first two and a half billion people simultaneously living on Earth; it took only one generation to double that number. We also have right now the highest number of fertile persons in the history of the Earth, a number equal to the total number of people on Earth in 1960. That there are too many people in too little space with not enough to meet their needs is not a brilliant insight. Three and a half thousand years ago, Babylonian tablets, known as the Atrahasis epic, found in what is now Iraq, gave a history of humankind. The story it told was already old when it got carved on stone. It said that the gods made humans to do work unworthy of the divinities, but huge problems developed when the humans over-reproduced. So the Gods sent plagues to diminish the population and made it a religious obligation for the remaining humans to limit their fertility. Joel Cohen says that this may be the earliest account of human overpopulation and the earliest interpretation of catastrophes as a response to overpopulation. Over two thousand years ago, Aristotle sensibly insisted that the number of people should not exceed the resources needed to provide them with moderate prosperity. Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth-century Catholic saint, agreed with Aristotle that the number of children generated should not exceed the provisions of the community, and he even went so far as to say that this should be insured by law as needed. If more than a certain number of citizens were generated, said Thomas, the result would be poverty, which would breed thievery, sedition, and chaos.

All this was centuries before Thomas Malthus in the eighteenth century proposed that human population is caught in a vicious cycle of population exceeding food supply, leading to famine and disease which would bring population back to a manageable level. Then the process would begin again. Many scholars feel that Malthus underestimated the capacity of the planet to produce food and that he was insufficiently informed on the complex dynamics of fertility increase and decline. There is enough, as Gandhi said, for our need, but not for our greed. The 2.9 million people in Chicago consume more than the more than 100 million people in Bangladesh. If, with an eye on consumption, you compare Germany with a poor African country, Germany consumes roughly the equivalent of one billion people. Around 75 percent of the world’s pollution is caused by the “well salaried and well caloried.” Many earlier commentators on population did not see how the need for children could be changed by technology and by the move to cities. (You don’t need as many children in the city as you did on the farm. As recently as 1800, only 2.5 percent of humans lived in cities. By the 1980s that figure had risen to more than 50 percent.)

Still, numbers do count. Too many overconsuming people on a finite planet create massive problems. We also face the problem that as the poor move toward what we call “the middle class,” their patterns of consumption tend toward mimicking the consumptive patterns of the affluent.

How Many is Too Much?

Professor Joel E. Cohen in his monumental book, How Many People Can the Earth Support?, concluded that this is a questionable question; a question that imports an army of other questions. But it is a question that started teasing the human mind in the seventeenth century when the first estimates were made of the population that the Earth’s “Land If fully Peopled Would Sustain.” The estimate back then that the Earth could support at most 13 billion is not far off from contemporary estimates. Most estimates today range from four to sixteen billion. If we were content to live at the level of Auschwitz or the Arctic Innuit or the Kalahari bushmen, you would get certain numbers. If you face the reality that most people today have rising not lowering expectations, you get other numbers.

Most nations live beyond their means. Take the Netherlands, for example. It is estimated that the Dutch require the equivalent of 14 times as much productive land as is contained within their own borders. To consume the way they consume takes the equivalent of 14 Hollands. Where does it get the other 13 Hollands? It imports from the rest of the world. In a significant misstatement, we refer to the gluttonous nations of the world as “developed” and the poor nations as “developing,” implying they can consume like us and some day will. But if we can return to reality, where is Zimbabwe going to find 13 Zimbabwe’s if it would try to match us in overconsumption.

Professor Cohen concludes sensibly that the Earth has reached, or will reach within half a century, the maximum number the Earth can support in modes of life that we would prefer. Family planning is necessary now lest population momentum carry us into chaos, and it will be necessary when population stabilizes to keep families and overall population at sustainable levels. As biologist Harold Dorn notes with elemental logic: no species can multiply without limit and there are two biological checks to stop that – a high mortality and a low fertility. Only the human species can choose the latter. When it does not do so, the other check kicks in, which has already happened in parts of the world.

Family Planning and Religion

Anrudh Jain, a demographer at The Population Council, notes that most of the world religions originated at a time when the global population was 50 to 450 million people in comparison to the six billion at the beginning of the second millennium. The problem for these religions is to adjust to the new demographic realities and to the new needs for family planning.
Family planning means contraception. Since there is no perfect contraceptive, abortion as a back-up is associated with family planning. Contraception is sometimes rejected on religious grounds, especially in theistic religions where it is seen as a lack of faith in God's Providence. This can be seen, for example, in some forms of Christianity, Islam, and African native religions. Christianity was seriously affected by an anti-contraceptive bias within Stoic philosophy, which championed an emotion-free rationality as the human ideal. Sex, being emotional, had to be justified by some reason and reproduction came to be that reason.

Abortion is more of a tortured issue in religions, as elsewhere. Those religions that believe in reincarnation such as Buddhism and Hinduism would seem to have an insuperable problem with abortion since "the being about to be born" preexisted and brings with it its own distinctive karmic history. Also in Buddhism one of the rules of the Eightfold Path is: "I will not willingly take the life of a living thing." This is found also in religions such as Jainism in which some practitioners will not even swat a fly out of respect for life. How then could such religions justify abortion? Some in these religions do not. Others find ways to do so. William R. LaFleur, in his book Liquid Life: Abortion and Buddhism in Japan, shows how many Buddhists see abortion as deferring birth to another time where the being can be born in better circumstances. Other Buddhists say there is some negative karma from an abortion but that it can be neutralized by positive karma from other good deeds. Still other Buddhists say that abortion is morally abhorrent and they will not seek to justify it. This illustrates a pattern found in all the world religions. A conservative view banning abortion can usually be found coexisting alongside a more liberal view permitting abortion for serious reasons. This is comparable to the pluralism in world religions on issues like war, where some profess an absolute pacifism and others find in the same religion grounds for a just defensive war. Given the complexity and richness of religious moral traditions and the differing perceptions of people in changing conditions, such pluralism is inevitable and worthy of respect.

Not all religions are equally open to change. Hinduism, as some interpret it, has historically shown itself quite malleable in facing new situations. The revelations of the Vedas were not capped as final and binding for all time. The eternal demands of righteousness, dharma, can be seen as a river that is constantly renewed with new sources, changing course as needed while giving the appearance of changelessness. Adaptation is thus at home in the theories born of Hinduism. Even the Hindu and Jain concept of ahimsa, doing no harm, is sometimes interpreted to justify abortion because giving birth to a baby without the means to care for it can be more harmful, more of a violation of ahimsa, than an abortion. Abortion in such cases would be justified. The Hindu openness to family planning (including abortion) translates into policy as seen in the 1971 Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, permitting abortion in India for a variety of reasons. Hindu authorities have been supportive of this and have not opposed extending this right of choice to girls under the age of eighteen. As in other religions, there is no unanimity on the right to an abortion and there are specific prohibitions in the ancient dharma sastras on abortion, even of an illegitimate child. This illustrates again the pluralism in religious ethics on reproductive ethics.

Judaism’s creation myth includes the divine mandate to be fruitful and multiply. However, as Jewish theologian Sharon Levy points out, the fact that there is a command given indicates that reproduction is not genetically controlled in humans. The divine mandate addresses people as reasonable moral agents with moral obligations who must respond reasonably. Thus the command can be understood to dictate reasonable, human self-control in all moral matters such as reproduction. As Professor Laurie Zoloth says, we humans are not the ones who swarm over the Earth like insects. She says that it is particularity, and not abundance, that is stressed in Judaism.

Many rabbis historically justified the use of contraceptives. They said that the mokh, a soft cotton pad worn internally against the cervix, may be worn during coitus or it might be used after intercourse as an absorbent. Various justifications for contraception are given, including the need for young girls to protect themselves from pregnancy since it might harm them physically.

*The Oxford Companion to the Bible* notes that abortion as such is not mentioned in the Bible. However it is clear that the fetus did not have the moral status of a born person. In fact, the lives of children under the age of one month were not accorded moral value, according to Leviticus 27:3–7. The Torah, in Exodus 21, speaks of two men fighting and one causing an accidental abortion. It is not treated as a capital crime as it would be if he had caused the death of the woman. Instead monetary damages are imposed as would be in a property loss. Many Jews hold that a fetus is not a fully-fledged person until the birthing process itself begins. Thus various reasons could justify its termination.

In Islam both restrictive and permissive views are found on contraception and on abortion. There was support for contraception from the beginning in Islam. There are many documents from early Islam that indicate that contraception was practiced at the time of the Prophet, that some of his companions exercised it to prevent pregnancy, and the Prophet said nothing to imply that it was unlawful. Islam stresses that it is the quality of offspring, not the quantity, that is the prime moral concern. Islamic authorities stress that human life should thrive and not merely survive and that having fewer children makes possible the thriving that all children deserve. Only the
Fertility and Abortion

Daniel C. Maguire

Most compelling reasons could justify sterilization in Islam since it forestalls having a child when circumstances permit it at a later time.

Many Islamic authorities also justify abortion for serious reasons. Some Hanafite and Shafiite jurists have allowed abortion within the first 120 days of pregnancy for good reasons, while the Shi’ite Azidiva approve of such early abortions even if there is no serious reason for it. Some jurists in the Malikite and Dhahireya schools would prohibit all abortions. All Islamic jurists consider abortions after four months as justifiable only to save the woman’s life.

Islam illustrates again the divisions within world religions on family planning. Both the conservative and the liberal views have strong authorities supporting them. Thus civil societies that accept religious freedom should allow for both positions (i.e., permitting abortions to those who approve of them on religious grounds and protecting those who disapprove from having to have an abortion or participate in one if they are medical personnel).

The most influential Chinese religions are Daoism and Confucianism. Buddhism is also present in Chinese life. Daoism and Confucianism have been shaping Chinese culture since the Chou Dynasty (1066–256 B.C.E.). Both traditions saw peace and harmony as the ultimate goal of life. This implies the absence of conflict between nature and human beings, between heaven and Earth, and between the individual and society. This led both traditions into the issue of fertility management. The Chinese saw family planning as essential to the preservation of peace and harmony in society. This position coexisted alongside the belief that one of the worst of calamities was not to have any posterity. As in other cultural and religious traditions we can see that fertility was perceived from experience to be both potential blessing or potential blight.

The temporary and sometimes harsh “one child” policy, without which it is estimated there would be some 250 million more Chinese, was broadly accepted by the Chinese. The drop in fertility rate from six children per woman in 1970 to near replacement level in 1990 was uniquely rapid and some scholars attribute half of this to government policies. Its harsher sanctions and abuses that sometimes accompanied this policy have meritied harsh criticism. Still Westerners are surprised at the general cooperation with this policy, a cooperation with deep roots in the cultural commitment to the common good. Thus the Chinese were ready to reproduce in greater numbers when that was thought by national leaders to be good for China. In a similar vein of civic virtue, the Chinese were also generally ready to restrict births by contraception and abortion when that was asked for and seen as needed.

China has been involved in family planning for thousands of years, perhaps longer than any nation in recorded history. Many rules appeared in early China regarding marriage and reproduction, including stipulations on the right age for marriage and the spacing of children. This was seen as a matter of government concern since the government was the prime caretaker of the national family. Chinese culture has had positive attitudes toward sexuality, not seeing sex as dirty or obscene, and thus it was not something that had to be justified by reproduction. Daoism stressed its health-promoting qualities more than its reproductive potential. The influential Confucian writer Han Fei (297–233 B.C.E.) argued that the state would be happier and more prosperous if it maintained a modest population.

In Christianity, Protestantism has long been open to both contraception and abortion, and most of the mainstream Protestant churches have made statements to that effect. Increasingly, fundamentalist Protestants have opposed abortion.

Roman Catholicism is often misrepresented as opposed to both contraception and abortion. Actually, the tradition contains strong views on both sides of the question. Although Pope Paul VI in his 1968 Encyclical Humanae Vitae declared all artificial contraception immoral, a number of Catholic bishops’ conferences offered quiet but noteworthy demurrals. They were supported by the vast majority of Catholic theologians and people, and the ban on contraception is adhered to by only a minority of Catholic people. Regarding abortion there is a long tradition espoused even by one canonized saint, Saint Antoninus, permitting abortion for serious reasons. The Catholic scholars Daniel A. Dombrowski and Robert Delitte in their book A Brief, Liberal Catholic Defense of Abortion demonstrate the permissive view on contraception and abortion that coexisted alongside the non-permissive view with equal credentials. They also show the long Catholic tradition of not according personal moral status to the fetus until some three months into the pregnancy or even as late as quickening. For Sts. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, principal shapers of the Catholic moral tradition, the early fetus had the moral status of a plant or vegetable, not that of a person. It could not, if miscarried or aborted, be baptized or given Christian burial.

Religions are all characterized by their appreciation of life and the need to revere and enhance it. They all also came to recognize that family planning is essential to life. Laws that honor only the conservative religious view are therefore violative of the religious integrity of the world’s major religions. The views for and against choice for abortion and family planning can find warrant in the complex tapestries of world religions.

Daniel C. Maguire

Further Reading
Fertility and Secularization

Religion, which regulates family life and sexuality, would seem to be a powerful social force affecting the propensity of believers to have children. Fully nine times, Genesis reports God’s wish that his creatures “be fruitful and multiply.” However, different religions have different beliefs, and all of them may be fading away in modern secular society. Thus it is difficult to predict the role that religion will play in the future growth or decline of human populations.

This is especially true for new forms of spirituality that celebrate the sacredness of the Earth. If they are rooted in secular environmentalism, then they may promulgate low fertility as a way of preserving the Earth from human pollution. However, if they spring from an awareness that humanity is part of nature, they may sanctify increased fertility.

Secularization

A scholarly debate had raged for years over whether secularization is likely to bring about the demise of religion. Perhaps the most ingenious argument holds that secularization is a real but self-limiting process. Mainstream denominations are under great pressure from secular institutions of modern society to become more worldly. For example, highly educated clergy are trained in the same values of doubt and pluralism that are promoted by the leading secular universities. Therefore, the dominant religions weaken in faith, fail to provide spiritual guidance, and lose membership.

But the collapse of one religion merely leaves room for another to expand. Dissatisfied laity and disaffected clergy in secularizing denominations launch sectarian movements that break away from the original organization. These sects revive faith in the supernatural and are able to resist the secularizing forces for a long time If they do become more worldly, fresh sects will erupt from them as well, continuing a cycle in which the wheel of religion turns, but moves neither forward nor back.

Occasionally, as in the Roman Empire two millennia ago, an entire religious tradition secularizes, and the birth of sects is insufficient to sustain the average level of faith. But this merely opens up opportunities for wholly new religions to arise. Thus, extreme secularization stimulates religious innovation and an increased birth-rate of new religious movements that are significantly different from the surrounding religious tradition. The most successful of these movements become the standard religious traditions of future centuries.

Today, many spiritual movements, both within traditional religions and outside them, are reviving a sense of wonder, awe, and devotion toward nature. To the extent that their beliefs and practices are new, it will be difficult to predict how they will affect the fertility of their adherents. However, if they draw converts back to the conventional denominations, then it will be instructive to see how well-established religions have shaped the birth-rate.

Contrasting Theories

Demographer Nathan Keyfitz has noted that the fertility rate is dropping rapidly in most advanced industrial nations, far below the level required to sustain the population. He attributes the fertility collapse to the increased freedom women enjoy in secular society, and the economic opportunities that entice many of them away from the traditional child-bearing role. In contrast, Islamic societies have retained much higher fertility rates, and may be able to resist secularization. The reason Islamic societies have high fertility, Keyfitz says, is because the religion facilitates male dominance over females. High-fertility societies tend to overwhelm those with low fertility demographically, so male-dominant religions may ultimately conquer the world.

A distinctly different explanation of how religion might promote fertility was offered by sociologist Rodney
Stark in his analysis of the rise of Christianity. In its earliest centuries, Stark maintained, Christianity was especially favorable to women, and most Christians were female. Many of them married non-Christian men, converted them to Christianity, and raised their children in the new faith. Christianity favored nurturance and encouraged its believers to take care of sick and helpless members, thereby improving their health and reducing mortality, including among infants, pregnant women, and mothers. In addition, the relatively restrictive sexual morality Christianity inherited from Judaism discouraged a number of erotic behaviors that do not result in pregnancy, thereby channeling sexuality into fertility.

Thus, Keyfitz says religion can support fertility by suppressing women, whereas Stark claims it can do so by empowering women. One can imagine a third argument, that religion might actually reduce fertility by promulgating puritanical values and conferring spiritual honor upon people who remain celibate or who do not procreate. Thus, it is necessary to look at some empirical evidence to see whether traditional religion is in fact associated with high levels of fertility.

**Empirical Evidence**

The General Social Survey, administered periodically to a random sample of Americans, is ideal for examining the connection between religion and fertility in advanced industrial nations, because it includes many questions about family structure and faith. The table shows a very simple analysis, using two measures of fertility and two of religion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Preference:</th>
<th>Ideal Number of Children is 3 or More</th>
<th>Age 45 and Over: Actual Number of Children is 3 or More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend Religious Services:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than Once a Week</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first column of figures is based on the question, “What do you think is the ideal number of children for a family to have?” Out of 25,385 people who answered this question, the largest number, 52.1 percent, said “two.” A fertility rate of two children per woman is just slightly less than the 2.1 children generally required to sustain the population from generation to generation (more than two because some die in childhood and slightly more boys than girls are born). Another 3.5 percent said “one” child was ideal or “zero” children. Other answers (three or more) would contribute to population growth. The second column of figures looks at how many children the respondent has actually had, considering just people 45 years of age or older, who have probably completed their families.

The top portion of the table reveals that Protestants, Catholics, and Jews tend to want more children than do non-religious people (who say their religion is “none”). The second column of figures confirms that Protestants and Catholics tend to have more children than the non-religious. But Jews tend to have even fewer children than the non-religious, and apparently fewer than they consider ideal. In the United States, this probably reflects a high degree of secularization among those who identify themselves as ethnically Jewish. The bottom of the table shows that people who attend religious services more often than once a week tend to favor bigger families than those who never attend.

Another way of evaluating how religion shapes fertility is to compare across nations. In the late 1990s, a team led by political scientist Ronald Inglehart administered the World Values Survey to citizens of 23 nations, asking how often respondents attended religious services. In 12 of these nations, less than a third of the population attends religious services at least every month: Russia, Sweden, Finland, Japan, Norway, Belarus, Bulgaria, Latvia, Germany, Switzerland, Australia, South Korea. Data from the United Nations show that on average in these 12 low-attendance nations, a woman will have only 1.4 children, far lower than the average 2.1 required to sustain the population.

In six other nations, more than half the population attends religious services at least monthly: Brazil, India, United States, Mexico, South Africa, Nigeria. The average woman in these nations will have 3.2 children, more than twice as high a rate. Thus, secularized nations, many of which are in Europe, seem destined to shrink in population, while more religious nations continue to grow. The statistical correlation between religion and fertility for all 23 nations is very high (0.83 out of a possible 1.00).

United Nations estimates predict that 19 nations of the world will each lose more than a million in population by the year 2050: Russia (loss of 41 million people), Ukraine (20 million), Japan (18), Italy (15), Germany (11), Spain (9), Poland (5), Romania (4), Bulgaria (3), Hungary (2), Georgia (2), Belarus (2), Czech Republic (2), Austria (2), Greece (2), Switzerland (2), Yugoslavia (2), Sweden (1), and Portugal (1 million). The United States has resisted the trend toward secularism experienced by Europe and Japan, and its population has not begun to shrink.
Meanwhile, many other societies continue to grow. The UN report notes that half the world annual population growth occurs in just six nations: India (21 percent of the annual growth), China (12 percent), Pakistan (5), Nigeria (4), Bangladesh (4), and Indonesia (3). All of these except China have the reputation of being religious. Because it has the largest population, China adds a substantial number of people each year, despite having a birth rate far lower than those of the other five countries.

Conclusion

About two-thirds of the way into the twentieth century, a consensus arose among educated people that it was vital to limit population growth. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, there is good reason to reexamine the assumptions of this orthodoxy. In many rich nations, fertility has already dropped far below the replacement level, and as a group (including the relatively fertile United States) the prosperous nations have essentially achieved zero population growth and are poised on the edge of demographic collapse. However, the poorer nations, which may also be described as developing countries or traditional societies, are experiencing population explosion.

Extreme disparities in fertility across societies would seem to be a prescription for war and other forms of conflict. Fertility is affected by secularization as well as by religious revival and innovation. Perhaps revival in the rich nations and secularization in the poor ones will achieve a peaceful balance. Perhaps innovation will create powerful new religions with unique orientations toward fertility.

Ideally, we need a new sensitivity to the human role in nature that will adjust the fertility rate so that population neither explodes nor collapses. Existing social-scientific data, such as from major surveys and government censuses, are not detailed enough to let us measure the birth rates of people who are involved in the various wings of the movement to reunite religion and nature. This is a question of the utmost importance, and new research to answer it would be extremely valuable. The future of humanity and the Earth’s living systems are literally in the balance.

William Sims Bainbridge

Further Reading


See also: Abortion; Breeding and Contraception; Fertility and Abortion; Judaism and the Population Crisis; Population and Consumption – Contemporary Religious Responses; Population, Consumption, and Christian Ethics.

Findhorn Foundation/Community (Scotland)

Founded by Eileen and Peter Caddy and Dorothy Maclean in 1962, the Findhorn Foundation is an international spiritual community of approximately 150. Located in northeast Scotland, the Foundation is near the fishing village of Findhorn and Kinloss Royal Air Force Base. Cluny Hill College, the Foundation’s second “campus,” is in the town of Forres.

The New Findhorn Association (NFA), of which the Foundation is one group member, comprises what is loosely called the wider community. Membership in the NFA includes like-minded groups and individuals within a fifty-mile radius. Some NFA groups support green initiatives (the Eco-Village Project, “Trees for Life,” etc.).

Espousing no formal creed, the Findhorn Foundation today recognizes the essential truths of all religions and spiritual teachings. Fourteen thousand people visit the Findhorn Community per year. Predominating interests at Findhorn since its founding have included: traditional and non-traditional forms of meditation, positive thinking, healing, metaphysics, mediumistic contact, and psychological “growth” activities. Dubbed “the grandmother of the New Age” by the media, the Foundation distances itself from that distinction today. At odds with certain occult ritualizing aspects of the New Age Movement – “Atlantean crystals,” for example – the Foundation prefers “sensible” techniques of spiritual transformation.

A term increasingly used by British religious studies scholars to describe the eclectic, experimental milieu of groups like Findhorn is “alternative spirituality.” Religious studies researchers Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman believe experientially friendly folklore methodologies may prove more successful than traditionalist ones in the area of alternative spirituality. Challenging the notion of
Dorothy Maclean (1920–)

Raised and educated in southern Ontario (Canada), Dorothy Maclean was recruited into the British Secret Intelligence Service after completing University. After working in New York, Panama, and several locations in South America she was posted to London in 1943. During this time she encountered the Sufi movement and throughout the 1940s and early 1950s studied various spiritual traditions – orthodox and otherwise. During a time of personal crisis, she experienced what she refers to as “an inner experience of knowing God.” Shortly thereafter, a repetitive prompting to “stop, listen, write” led to regular periods of meditation and writing.

Her book To Hear the Angels Sing describes her experiences of listening to, and then writing out, what she believes were direct communications from God. She also recounted the events that led to the creation of the Findhorn Foundation Community in northern Scotland. There Maclean experienced what she refers to as “an inner connection with the creative intelligence behind nature,” an intelligence she later named the “Devic/ Angelic presence.” The practice of “listening and writing” continued, the contents providing practical instructions concerning the gardens and offering perspectives on the relationships between human and non-human realms. This connection was a significant factor in creating the extraordinarily lush and productive gardens, which generated much of the early interest in the community. Two tenants lie at the heart of what Ms. Maclean writes and teaches. Those tenets are 1) personal and direct contact with God is possible for everyone/ anyone and 2) nature has an innate intelligence and a willingness to work directly with humanity to address the ecological issues facing the planet.

Judy McAllister

Further Reading


The miraculous story of large vegetables flourishing in poor soil made the Findhorn Community internationally famous in the 1960s. Intuitive messages received during meditation by founder Dorothy Maclean in 1963 suggested that the surprise success of the Caddy vegetable garden was due to the “co-creative activity” of devas (Theosophical Sanskrit for “shining ones”) and the Landscape Angel – each answerable to God or “the Beloved.” Invited to participate in an experiment of “co-operation with Nature,” Findhorn’s three founders agreed to follow practical and spiritual instructions given in the messages. At issue was the growing degradation of the planet. Results exceeded expectation. Drawn to Scotland by rumors of a fabulous garden thriving next to a garbage dump, British Soil Association consultant Professor Lindsay Robb reported: “...the bloom of the plants in this garden at midwinter on land which is almost barren powdery sand cannot be explained by the moderate dressings of compost... There are other factors, and they are vital ones” (in Hawken 1975: 170).

British adult education pioneer Sir George Trevelyan concluded similarly. In a 1968 letter to Peter Caddy, he stated that “Factor X,” the deva/elemental conscious contact, was “the most tremendous step forward, indeed the step which mankind must take” (Caddy 1996: 281).

Some Foundation and community members still engage in the original “work of Findhorn.” Through meditation, they “feel into” contact with nonhuman species believed to “overlight” and inform the spiritual direction of the Foundation. Disinterested in intellectual evaluations of direct experience, most Foundation members do not label their inner experiences as examples of nature mysticism or animism. They prefer to call it “tuning in.”

The greening of Findhorn has been a gradual process. Some members of the community perceive Foundation ecological projects as a complementary expression or “natural outgrowth” of the founders’ early spiritual commitment to God and nature. Some of these eco-initiatives include conferences, workshops on permaculture design, deep ecology (on one occasion taught by Australian deep ecology advocate John Seed), and a month-long eco-village training program offered in partnership with GEN-Europe and the Global Eco-village Network.

Begun in 1981 at Findhorn by John Talbott, the Eco-Village Project is a constantly evolving model and a synthesis of current thinking on sustainable human habitats. United by a common goal, an eco-village is based on shared ecological, social and/or spiritual values. Working with the principle of not taking more than one gives back, Talbott believes eco-villages are potentially...
sustainable. The Findhorn Foundation is a founder member of the Global Eco-Village Network (GEN). In 1998, the Foundation’s Eco-Village Project received the “Best Practice” designation from the United Nations Center for Human Settlements (Habitat).

Although many in the community prefer to accentuate and model “the positive” in all things (sometimes suffering from “the tyranny” of its overemphasis), some acknowledge the planet’s current ecological degradation and work to relieve it. Inspired by Dorothy Maclean’s early experiences with “the intelligence of nature,” former Foundation member Alan Watson Featherstone believes ecological restoration is a natural process. In 1985 he founded the Scottish conservation charity “Trees for Life.” Since then the charity has planted over 420,000 native trees in the Highlands of Scotland. In 2001 Featherstone received the United Kingdom’s Schumacher Award in recognition for his work “conserving and restoring degraded ecosystems.”

The community’s impact on international green organizations continues to grow – Perelandra, a nature research center founded on Findhorn principles in the United States is a notable example. Registered as a Charitable Trust in 1972, the Findhorn Foundation was granted association with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations in December 1997 and received associate-member non-governmental organization (NGO) status in 1999. Since then it has become increasingly involved with various UN environmental initiatives. Recognizing its “green contribution” to Scotland, the Scottish Tourist Board awarded the Findhorn Foundation its highest honor – the Gold Award – in 2001.

Katherine Langton

Further Reading
See also: Deep Ecology; Earth Mysteries; Esalen Institute; New Age; Schumacher, Ernest Friedrich; Scotland; Seed, John.
Ceremonial Fires

Beyond the primordial worship of fire, the use of fire for various sacred rituals and ceremonies is ubiquitous to the point of becoming almost a universal religious practice. These diverse ceremonies and their associated religious institutions can be organized under the categories of the sacred altar fire, perpetual fire, new fire, and sacrificial fire. Sacred altar fires were core elements of some of the earliest monotheistic religions. For example, the ancient Egyptian worship of the sun god, Ra, kindled a sacred fire every day to reenact the rising of the sun, and the fire on the altar represented the omnipotent eye of Ra. Daily ritual lighting of sacred altar fires also played a central role in Zoroastrianism, in which fire was considered to be a visible sign of god’s presence, and a symbol of Truth and Right Order in the cosmos. Among peasants in northern Siberia, all huts included a hearth in one corner for domestic purposes, and in the opposite corner a sacred altar in which the fire provided protection from evil spirits. Over the millennia, fire has played a predominant if not central role in sacred altars for a multitude of religions.

The perpetual fire was another religious institution with ancient roots. The difficulty of kindling fire for early peoples led to the institutionalization of the perpetual fire, and various rites, ceremonies, and temples were constructed around it. The occupation of fire-keeper was one of the earliest specializations in human society, and evolved into an official state function most commonly practiced by priests. The best-known example is the altar of Vesta, the Roman goddess of the hearth, where a perpetual fire was tended by the famous Vestal Virgins whose purity of the flesh symbolized the purity of the flames. The uniquely designed shrine of Vesta was the oldest Roman temple, and its perpetual fire supplied the sacred flames for lighting other temples’ altars. The Olympic Games fire ceremony is a modern-day secular expression of the perpetual fire, vestigial in its essence.

The perpetual fire was sometimes extinguished in order to kindle the new fire, a ritual intended to keep the energy of fire fresh and pure, and to renew the human spirit. For example, every year at Beltane (May 1) the Druids extinguished all fires in their villages, and then lit two new sacred bonfires. Numerous spells were canted, and then their cattle were driven between the two fires in order to purify and protect them from disease. Priests would then take coals and kindle hearth fires in a ritual symbolizing new life. New fires kindled for sustaining new life were especially vital religious ceremonies for northern coastal California Indians, such as the Karuk, Yurok, and Hupa peoples. In the spring and autumn, when the salmon were running and the acorns were ripening, new fires would be lit as part of a rite that the Karuk called the “world renewal ceremony.” The new fire symbolized the regenerative powers of natural fire, and, mirroring the ecological function of renewing the soil, it served a religious purpose in renewing the soul.

The sacrificial fire has deep roots in a number of religions, too, with fire being the prime force used to consume and deliver offerings to the divine. The behavior of the flames or smoke is often believed to be a sign of the divine’s reaction to the burned offerings presented by believers. Gruesome examples of sacrificial fires include ancient Israelites burning their children as sacrifices to the god, Moloch. Human fire sacrifices were also practiced in ancient times by the Druids, Peruvians, and in more recent times by Euro-American Christians as part of the witch craze. The most well-known contemporary religious practice is the Hindu funeral pyre in which the body is cremated as the final sacrifice. The consumption of flesh liberates the spirit and carries it to the divine.

Vestiges of the ancient ceremonial use of fire live on in religious rituals today, such as the Jewish practice of kindling the Sabbath candles and the Chanukah Menorah, and the Buddhist practice of lighting incense. However, the votive candle and incense stick provide a very different human experience than the altar fire. Whereas a candle offers a safe, stable flame, a bonfire continuously changes in a spontaneous, unpredictable, animated dance of forms. It commands attention, and must be carefully attended with proper devotion or else it will die out. Thus, altar fires created sacred ceremonial space with a sense of great drama and potential danger, further embellished by priestly rituals. Either as a ceremonial tool or the object of worship itself, ancient fire-tenders always treated sacred altar fires with great respect and reverence.

Fire as Divine Manifestation

From Zoroastrianism to Judaism and Christianity, fire has often been deemed as a divine manifestation, symbolizing the direct presence if not virtual face of the deity. For example, the Zoroastrian deity, Ahura Mazda, resides in endless light and created fire; the sacred altar fires of the Yasna are regarded as the manifestation on Earth of this divine celestial light. Zoroastrian priests refer to their altar fires as “Avestan” or the son of God. Throughout the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, too, God and Jesus are often depicted with fiery imagery. Perhaps the most famous example is when God appeared before Moses “in the flame of fire in the midst of a bush” atop Mount Sinai, provoking both awe of God and fear in Moses. In the Psalms, “the voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.” Jesus is portrayed with a face “like the sun shining in full splendor” with eyes “like a flame of fire” (Apocalypse 2 and 3). The close presence of the divine can be both a gratifying and terrifying thing to experience. Fire whose heat and light both attracts and repels was a natural symbol to use to graphically depict the presence and experience of the deity.
The Fire of Heaven and Hell
In Judaism and Christianity fire is alternately associated with both heaven and hell. For example, Elijah is taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. Daniel sees God in heaven sitting upon a throne of fiery flames, with streams of fire coming forth. In the Apocalypse, the blessed are seen in heaven as a sea of glass shot through with fire. On the other hand, Mathew associates fire with hell or “hell-fire.” Sinners condemned to hell are cast into eternal flames of many sorts: they are immersed in rivers of fire, boiled in cauldrons of fire, hung by flaming chains, pummeled with fiery stones, and officials who abused their power are forced to sit upon fiery thrones. The vision of hell as an abyss of fire has ancient origins in Gehinnom, a valley near Jerusalem in which Israelites burned their children as sacrifices to the god, Moloch, and garbage was burned by a perpetual fire. The specter of hell-fire was vividly reinforced by burning heretics at the stake during the Christian inquisition. These public executions by fire, often employing other gruesome techniques of torture sanctified by the Church, helped condition a dread fear of hell among the common people. As a precursor to hell, the souls of sinners are believed to burn from the torment of fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh.

The legendary example of Sodom and Gomorrah, destroyed for the sinfulness of their peoples when God rained down brimstone and fire, had origins in the age-old use of fire as a weapon of war and revenge, in which the cities of the vanquished were routinely razed by fire. Fiery punishments also play a role in visions of the Apocalypse where the world ends in a vast conflagration.

The association of fire with purgatory is also prevalent, although purgatory is alternately viewed as a form of both punishment and purification. On the one hand, purgatory is seen as a meeting with the glorified Christ whose eyes are fire, penetrating, searching, and judging the soul for all sin. Woe be to the wicked and sinful who are scorched by the Lord’s fiery gaze, for purgatory as punishment condemns them to eternal damnation in the fires of hell. An alternate view of purgatory sees it as purification and spiritual maturation, a burning away of all egotistical attachments and a cleansing of all past sins as a means of preparing the spirit to be fit to dwell in the eternal light of God’s presence. Given the power of flame to consume matter and convert it into energy, it serves as an apt metaphor to describe the process of purgatory.

Fire and Religion
Among contemporary Earth-based spiritual practitioners, such as Wiccans, Goddess-worshippers, neo-pagans, and spiritual Greens, sacred altar fires and bonfires play a central role in many religious rituals and ceremonies, particularly in outdoor gatherings. Starhawk, for example, has popularized “The Fire Song” as part of a repertoire of neo-pagan rituals for use during nonviolent civil disobedience actions protesting nuclear power and environmental destruction. As well, in the midst of a renaissance of new scientific research and discoveries emerging in the field of fire ecology, the U.S. environmental movement has developed a new-found respect for the role of wildland fire in restoring and sustaining forest and grassland ecosystems. Using assumptions that harken back to physico-theology and the belief that there is a divine design to the Earth, ecologists now consider fire to be a vital, dynamic disturbance process maintaining the diversity and sustainability of healthy forest ecosystems. Thus, against the view of industrial forestry that wildfire is an external agent of tree death and destruction, ecoforestry recognizes wildland fire as an intrinsic element of forest life and regeneration. This is exemplified by the slogan, “Ancient Forests are Born in Fire!”, which is increasingly voiced by eco-activists who articulate both spiritual and scientific discourses in their adulation of wildland fires right alongside their labeling of post-fire “salvage” logging as desecrating acts.

No discussion of religion and nature would be complete without an analysis of the important role of fire. As one of the oldest natural objects of ritual and worship, fire has played a fundamental if not foundational role in religions across the globe. The religious views of primal peoples and prehistoric cultures evolved around sacred altar fires. Embers from ancient ritual fires devoted to the perpetual fire, new fire, and sacrificial fire still glow in religious ceremonies today. Fiery metaphors and ceremonial practices help give vivid expression and somatic experience to religious beliefs. The creative and destructive powers of fire have inspired Western religious visions of both heaven and hell, and myths about the beginning and ending of the world. Although at each and every instant the flames of any given fire are a unique expression of spontaneous combustion, at the same time the flames offer a universal, transcendent form that has made fire an enduring if not eternal source of religious inspiration and meaning throughout the ages.

Timothy Ingalsbee
Fishers

Water is a potent symbol that may trigger nearly universal associations to life and death. All people need sweet water to quench their thirst. Plants need water to grow, but too much water and violent floods threaten to disturb many lifeways, even to extinction.

Fishermen frequent the seas, rivers and lakes to catch fish and marine mammals and to gather various other food objects. Anthropologists view the nature of fishing activities to be similar to hunting and gathering on land. With just a few exceptions, for instance among the seanomads or Bajau People in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, fishing is generally regarded as a typically male occupation. There are often culturally elaborated restrictions to prohibit women from moving freely on board or to enter fishing vessels, even to touch fishing equipment. Women are thus regarded as matter out of place in many fishing contexts. Their presence is at times regarded as polluting and potentially spoiling to the efficiency of fishing boats and gear. Generally women may be seen to threaten the fishermen’s luck. This is still the case, although the assumptions connected to the negative impact of mature women on many fishing activities are somewhat reduced in North Atlantic fishing communities. Thus some few women are allowed as crew, even skippers, for instance on small Norwegian fishing vessels (shark).

Whereas many mysteries of fertility and growth are more or less controlled by the science and technology of modern agriculture, this is not to the same extent the case with fish stock management. Whether agriculture or fishing is in focus, the need for luck in order to succeed is not yet under rational control, and may never be. It is repeatedly documented that luck and luck management has been and still is of central concern for hunters and fishermen across cultures. In spite of modern navigation and fish locating instruments, the success of fishermen, now as before, is regarded by the fishermen themselves and others to depend on their luck.

Supernatural beliefs and reason in the pursuit of fish

Generally speaking, there is a significant difference in the strategies that it is possible to apply in pursuit of land animals that leave tracks and other signs of activity, which hunters can observe, and the fish that leave few observable traces in the water they inhabit. The seas, rivers and lakes are more or less unknown worlds to humans. These worlds are fascinating, unreachable and mysterious. The fish sometimes abound, at other times they disappear or move to unknown depths or locations. To locate the prey, fishermen are helped by their experience, but at times even know-how is not enough to eradicate uncertainties about fish behavior and their whereabouts. It is a general tendency that fishermen, regardless of where they live, tend to compensate for lack of fish prediction with magical spells and rituals. Further, firm beliefs in supernatural intervention causing luck or misfortune, adherence to taboos, and offerings to cultural images of the rulers of the seas and waters are widespread among fishermen and in their communities. Such beliefs are generally operative regardless of the particular religious faith of the fishers.

The maritime activities of the Trobriand Islanders in Melanesia served as empirical inspiration when Bronislaw Malinowski developed his seminal analysis about the social function of ritual and magic. Malinowski observed that when the Trobrianders fished in their home lagoon, where fish were abundant and easily gathered without risk to the fishermen, use of magic was nearly absent.

Further Reading


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See also: Buddhism (various); Christianity (various); Druids and Druidry; Judaism; Paganism – Contemporary; Wicca; Zoroastrianism.
However, when the islanders fished off the northern shore their success to obtain certain species was, according to them, entirely dependent upon strict observance of numerous taboos and selected rituals. Off the northern shore, the outcome of any fishing expedition was far from obvious and elements of chance and risk were prominent in the fishing activities. This observation contributed to Malinowski’s classic statement in which he declared that the rituals surrounding fishing and sailing have the primary function of relieving anxiety and uncertainty. This interpretation has dominated anthropological studies of ritual in maritime settings. For instance, the documented persistence of a considerable amount of magic and ritual activities, also in technologically sophisticated fisheries, has been related to how fishing remains a risky and uncertain economic activity.

Small-scale fishers in Sulawesi, Indonesia firmly believe that all success in life, including fishing activities, is based on combinations of skill, luck, industriousness and cunning. However, no one prospers solely by their own efforts. Everybody needs help or assistance from other people and/or from spirits. Thus when some fishermen make exceptionally good catches or do well for an extended period of time, this is interpreted as a sign of supernatural support. When fish disappear, catches are bad, or accidents during fishing take place, this is usually understood as reproaches or punishments from spirits for neglecting to distribute the right offerings, breaking taboos, or trespassing a spirit-protected location.

That prayers and Christian symbols, such as holy water, crucifixes, and Bibles, are thought to influence the catch and safety among contemporary European, North American and other Protestant and Catholic fishers is well documented. Many Norwegian fishers say they place their faith in the hands of God whose will is believed to determine the fisherman’s safety, catch, and spiritual well-being. Pious fishermen accompanied by close family members always go to church before they set out for an extended expedition. On their return the church is visited again to praise the Lord.

Ethnologists and anthropologists have been more concerned with tracing ancient and pre-Christian influences on the thoughts governing modern fishers than investigating the impact of contemporary religious beliefs. The connections between faith and fishing in any of the world religions should be a topic for future research.

**Resource management, conservation, and fishing**

It is often argued that fishers, hunters and gatherers, and other people who live off the land or sea are resource conscious. This is taken to mean that these people know they must take active measures to secure their own livelihoods and those of the next generation. Some religions are taken to advocate ideologies of community sharing and sustained resource management. For example, it may be argued that the Protestant spirit, confirmed by the church, aims at a rational management of the sea and its resources is deemed as morally unjustifiable greed. There is an inherent plea for the preservation of the natural environment to the benefit of current and future generations. However, it is well known that it is far from the case that behavior coheres with expressed ideologies.

It has also been pointed out that religious ideas and beliefs sometimes have unrecognized consequences. These consequences may serve sustainable resource harvest, for instance by protecting spawning areas for certain fish. James McGoodwin observed, for example, that this can happen when fishing certain seascapes and locations is enjoined by taboos, because they belong to spirits. This was the case at Bonerate in Indonesia, where the islanders refused to fish or collect mollusks along an extensive part of the fringe reef because the location was inhabited by aggressive spirits, some in the shape of white sharks. Near Timpaus Island, also in Indonesia, there were coral reefs located at depths of approximately fifty meters that never were fished. In the old days many fishermen had been lost in these waters and during rough weather sailors made detours to avoid the locations. These reefs, it was believed, were inhabited by a malicious sea devil (hantu laut) by the name of Molokoimbu. Another consequence for fishing from religion on Timpaus Island was observed when foreign fishermen arrived and made good catches at the locations where Molokoimbu previously ruled. Muslim leaders told Timpaus fishermen that they should not pay attention to ancient spirit beliefs. Then the bravest fishermen began to harvest the reefs and important fry and fish refuges were lost.

Fishermen, like most other people, tend to adjust their view on the environment and the robustness of nature in accordance to their own activities in nature. According to Mary Douglas, people live by prototypical myths about nature that contribute to legitimize their use of and value orientation toward nature. One such myth would be that the sea is robust, but only within limits. Many fishermen around the world share this view. In essence the attitude may serve to free protagonists from responsibility for stock depletions. Their own activities are not threatening the environment, but those of others do, it is often believed. Thus small-scale coastal fishers blame the large trawlers for reduced stocks of fish. However, some owners of trawlers blame the coastal fishers for damage because they fish at the spawning grounds of many species.

At the micro level, Indonesian fishermen who fish for domestic and local markets justify their own use of explosives. They say it is impossible for them to deplete fish resources. But they are worried about the behavior of other fishers, especially foreign ones, who are operating from larger vessels when they utilize poison and
bombs. The same local Indonesian fishermen (and many more) apply a different myth when it comes to shark fishing with long lines: the myth of the sea as unpredictable. The fishermen agree that large sharks have become rare where they used to abound. This is not because of overharvesting, but because the sharks have moved somewhere else, the fishermen say.

At the macro level, a myth about the sea as excessively robust seems to apply. Only such a myth can justify local and multinational companies massively polluting rivers, lakes and oceans with chemicals or radioactive materials.

**Harald Beyer Broch**

**Further Reading**


See also: Fly Fishing; Mongolian Buddhism and Taimen Conservation; Nile Perch; Traditional Ecological Knowledge; Water Spirits and Indigenous Ecological Management; Whales and Whaling.

**Fisk, Pliny (1944–)**

Pliny Fisk III’s work in appropriate technology, systems design and sustainability has earned him international recognition and the title “Guru of Green.” After graduating from the University of Pennsylvania with Master’s degrees in Architecture (1970) and Landscape Architecture (1971), and teaching in the School of Architecture at the University of Texas, Fisk’s interest in environmental issues prompted him to co-found the Center for Maximum Potential Building Systems, in Austin, Texas in 1975. His practical engagement with diverse environmental issues had won him earlier the respect of R. Buckminster Fuller, who wrote to him that “your various research and development projects [are] lucid, intelligent, economic and in every way gratifying” (Fuller letter to Fisk, 1973).

Pliny Fisk’s international work, which has brought him to forty states and six foreign nations, is based in the Center, a nonprofit organization engaged in research, education and demonstration projects for sustainable planning and design. Co-directed by Fisk’s wife, Gail Vittori, the Center’s work focuses on four areas: 1) green architecture; 2) ecologically balanced land use planning; 3) sustainable development policy initiatives for local, state, and federal agencies; and 4) tools and methodologies for green development. Fisk’s projects have earned him such honors as the National Center for Appropriate Technology “Distinguished Appropriate Technology Award” for significant work in environmental protection, and the United Nations 1992 Earth Summit “Local Government Honours Programme Award,” shared with the city of Austin, for developing a Green Builder Program and a “GREENRATING GUIDE” for energy, materials, water, wastewater, and solid waste for new residential and commercial construction in the Austin area.

Pliny Fisk’s work links religion and nature. Around the globe, religious concerns about care for God’s creation have become concretized in specific projects and programs as faith communities and environmental organizations – including the Center for Maximum Potential Building Systems – have collaborated to effect an integrated relationship between people and their regional ecosystems. Fisk sees a natural tie between religion and ecology:

Religion, in its ecumenical way of trying to bring people together on significant issues, could be the most powerful tool that we have to win the conceptual space/time race, the competition over which set of ideas will guide human life and activity in the future before nature’s systems begin to fail because we lack an understanding of her needs and thus our own.

The connection that religion has with most humans on Earth is a significant tool for the future. If an environmental ethic could be folded into religious understandings, religion could become the significant tool in the conceptual space/time race, since it can gather and incorporate most of the other
tools used to try to restore ecological balance. If religion does not help the planet and its web of life to recover from current environmental crises, then it is possible that in the future humans would not be included among God’s surviving creatures.

In the biblical story of the Garden of Eden, “God’s garden” is a place with an abundance of resources which are appreciated and used by humans. It would be wonderful if that garden, representing people in past eras living in harmony with nature, could be conceptually restored and concretely realized. People at times are forced to exist on the worst land, in the worst conditions, with the worst water. But sometimes these places of total degradation in the present were once fertile garden areas in the past. People might conceptualize a relationship between past and future gardens, and consider how human behavior might be transformed such that the gardens would exist again and continue into the future (Fisk interviews with Hart, 9 March 2002 and 11 March 2002).

The Center for Maximum Potential Building Systems has numerous programs, and urban and rural projects incorporating them, that are models for responsible linkages of religion and nature and could be incorporated into or adapted to varying natural and social contexts. These include Life Cycle Environmental Design and Balancing of Energy, Water, Waste and Material Systems (Nursing & Biomedical Sciences Center, the University of Texas, Houston); establishing minimum requirements for environmental-economic conditions as the basis for the greening of public facilities using BaselineGreen, a software program CMPBS developed with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funding that has data on more than 12 million businesses and their products, and uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software to link data and digital maps to analyze the impacts of products from source to sink, region by region, throughout the U.S. (City of Seattle Government Center); revision of state Architecture and Engineering guidelines to include recycled content and “green” building material specifications, sustainable architectural practices, energy efficiency, construction site and office recycling systems, and procedures to ensure indoor air quality (State of Texas); and development of an Ecological Footprint game that enables local communities to analyze the extent of their resource use impacts on their local land base.

John Hart

Further Reading


See also: Architecture; Fuller, Buckminster.

*Floresta*

Floresta is an interdenominational Christian agency, based in California, working with local partners in developing countries to reverse deforestation and poverty by transforming the lives of the rural poor. Tom Woodard, an American businessman, founded Floresta in 1984 after working for a Christian relief agency in the Dominican Republic. Woodard, with his Dominican partners, recognized that deforestation was both a root cause of rural poverty and one of its consequences, creating a vicious cycle.

Motivated by hunger and short-term economic necessity, slash-and-burn farmers were cutting trees to clear agricultural land, or to sell as fuel wood. This resulted in catastrophic soil erosion and long-term disaster for these same farmers, who depended on the land for their livelihood. Farmers frequently knew their behavior was destructive, but without access to credit or other alternatives, they were helpless to change.

One of Floresta’s first projects was Los Arbolitos, a large-scale, for-profit tree nursery, with a production capacity of five million seedlings annually, which continues to provide high-quality tree seedlings and jobs for rural Dominicans.

In 1987, Floresta began its Agroforestry Revolving Loan Fund (ARLF) to provide loans, training, and marketing services for poor farmers who wished to start tree-related agroforestry businesses, utilizing fast-growing trees. In 1996 Floresta opened programs with local partners in the state of Oaxaca in Mexico and in Haiti, offering
assistance in community forestry as well as credit for agriculture and small businesses which would help to diversify the rural economy.

Since 1997, Floresta has developed a more holistic approach to its work, recognizing that there are many factors that contribute to deforestation and poverty. In combating deforestation, Floresta uses four principal tools:

1) Community Development – Floresta works to empower the local communities, encouraging them to take responsibility for their own problems and build confidence in their own ability to change their situation. This provides long-term sustainability.

2) Sustainable Agriculture and Forestry – Floresta assists communities in sustainable agriculture, sustainable forest management and reforestation, helping farmers to move away from slash-and-burn agriculture.

3) Microcredit – Floresta provides economic alternatives to destructive forest practices. Loans may be used to implement new agricultural techniques or to diversify fuelwood-based economies.

4) Discipleship – To interested participants, Floresta offers Christian discipleship programs, sharing Christ’s love and developing a biblically-based ethic of stewardship for God’s creation.

As Floresta has grown, an essentially pragmatic concern for the health of forest ecosystems has developed into a better understanding of the role of stewardship and the importance of restored relationships between humankind and creation in God’s ultimate plan.

Floresta has also found that the rural poor have a tremendous amount to offer in solving their own problems. When provided with economic opportunity and agricultural alternatives, subsistence farmers can prosper, live sustainably and contribute to the regeneration of their environment. As of 2003, farmers working with Floresta had planted approximately two million trees, received nearly 2000 small business loans and established ongoing community-based reforestation projects in over seventy villages in Haiti, Mexico and the Dominican Republic.

Further Reading

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See also: Biblical Foundations for Christian Stewardship; Stewardship.

Fly Fishing

In the autobiographical story, turned 1992 Academy Award-winning motion picture, A River Runs Through It, Norman Maclean’s family centered their lives around two sacred practices: religion and fly fishing:

In our family, there was no clear line between fly fishing and religion. We lived at the junction of great trout rivers in western Montana, and our father was a Presbyterian minister and a fly fisherman who tied his own flies and taught others. He told us about Christ’s disciples being fisherman, and we were left to assume, as my brother and I did, that all first-class fishermen on the Sea of Galilee were fly fisherman and that John, the favorite, was a dry-fly fisherman (Maclean 1967: 1).

For many fly fishers, fly fishing itself is a religious practice. Just as any religious person approaches his/her respective tradition, the devout fly fisher approaches fly fishing with the same discipline and respect. It is not unusual to hear people speaking of fly fishing in ways that invoke the religious dimensions of life, as they commonly deploy terms like religious or spiritual, the sacred or divine, ritual, pilgrimage, meditation, priests, community, or notions like the sanctuary of religious space, to describe the experience.

As I reflect more deeply on the fish’s history as a mythic symbol and religious icon, I begin to wonder if having fish shapes around me is a way to stay in touch with the ideas of Jesus without having to go near people who do business in his name (Duncan 2001: 14).

Reflecting on the relationship of his fishing passion to his Christian heritage, Oregon-born author and fly fisher David James Duncan turns to the words of Howell Raines in Fly Fishing Through a Midlife Crisis. These words recall the mysterious and divine symbolism surrounding the fish itself, referencing Jesus’ miraculous act of turning two loaves of bread and two fishes into enough food to feed a large crowd in Matthew 14:17, Luke 9:13, and John 6:9, which made the fish into a divine symbol of God’s provisions for humanity in the natural world. While many fly fishers are not Christian, fly fishing spirituality resonates with the sacredness of the fish in the Christian tradition.

In the quest for experience with the divine, religious persons often embark on a journey or pilgrimage. For the fly fisher this is the journey to a new fishing spot, or an old favorite. The American fly fishing writer Nick Lyons, for example, has written in a way that views the pilgrimage to rivers, streams, and their sources as a quest for life’s deeper meanings.
A lot of people have been tracking rivers to their sources lately; it’s surely a desire to find some further meaning in all this sloshing around in streams. People seem to be saying, “There must be more to it than catching of fish – and perhaps those meanings are to be found in the headwaters” (Lyons 1992: 139).

These words suggest that the pursuit of fish is not the only reason for fishing – that journey or pilgrimage itself can be as powerful an experience as the catching of fish. Indeed, for some fishers, fly fishing facilitates spiritual perception; it is a way to apprehend one’s connections with something greater than one’s self. As David James Duncan put it,

When the trout are happening, I can kneel on merciless stones happily, for hours and hours; I can stare into blinding glare, withstand heat or cold, be chased by bears, cow moose with calves, or redder necks than my own, and still rush gratefully back for more. I don’t understand the why of all this. I don’t try to understand. I just pull on my waders and merge via a spirituality so thrashing, splashing, cursing, casting, and Earth-engaged it doesn’t feel spiritual at all: it just feeds the spirit (Duncan 2002: 303).

There is something about being out on a stream in the mountains or in the plains that draws some people to pursue experiences in such places with great passion, and I think it has something to do with the desire to directly experience and engage the Earth. The solitude and sounds of a stream, the careful turning over of rocks so as to see what bugs the fish are eating, and many other aspects of fly fishing, easily, indeed naturally, seem to foster a sense of connection with and belonging to nature.

Such feelings are not uncommon in nature-oriented religion. They are emphasized, for example, in movements such as deep ecology, as well as in a wide variety of nature-related activities not always recognized as “religious.” Religion scholar Bron Taylor, for example, argues that Earth- and nature-based spiritualities generally involve experiences and perceptions of connection and belonging to a living, sacred Earth. Quoting Alan Drengson, he asserts that people and groups often turn to nature “for wisdom, for strength, for maturation, for spiritual comradeship, and for lessons in devotion and humility,” creating thereby a spirituality or religious practice based upon “being-in-nature” (in Taylor 2001: 181).

Fly fishing is an example of such spirituality, a form of Earth engagement that takes place through a meditative, ritual practice. The sounds of the stream and the rhythmic casting facilitate the meditative experience of the fly fisher. As Norman Maclean put it, fly Fishing “is an art that is performed on a four-count rhythm between ten and two o’clock” (Maclean 1967: 2–3). Maclean’s point is, in part, that like any other form of meditation, fly casting requires discipline and practice. “Fly fishing teaches patience and attentiveness in the most literal way imaginable; without both, you get skunked” (Duncan 2002: 302).

Like other forms of religious and spiritual practice, there is an important material aspect to fly fishing – the “gear” matters. Flies, reels, waders, vests, and ideally, an old, worn oil-cloth raincoat affect the fly fisher sensually – they become more than tools of the art. The sensuality of the experience, in a way, its earthiness, is found in the aroma wafting upward upon the opening of the storage tube to a bamboo cane rod, or in the packing and unpacking of the coat and clothes, as one’s memory recalls moments on the stream in past trips. These smells function similarly to the use of incense in ritual and meditation: they focus the mind on the sacred.

Fly fishers often advise one another, especially novices, to seek out spiritual guides to lead them properly, even reverently, into the practice. Indeed, the best fly fishing guides are ritual specialists who are eagerly sought when learning the art of pilgrimaging to unknown waters. Fly fishers generally believe such guides hold secret knowledge of specific streams and their inhabitants. But beyond this, they are figures with whom they can identify, sharing sacred experiences, and reflecting on life. And this is not only of interest to the one who has sought out the guide. Once on the San Juan River in New Mexico, a guide told me how nice it is to guide someone who already knows the river and how to fish, for “this leaves room for contemplating and discussing life, philosophy, and religion.”

Such activity with guides and other practitioners fosters community in a way similar to most religions. Attending the fly fishing store and patronizing guide- and other fishing-focused businesses provides concrete material support for the religious community, resembling the providing financial support congregants give to a local church or shrine. Local communities arise surrounding the practice, from hanging out at the local fly shop or bar to sharing information or stories of the day. The local fly-tying group is comparable to a Bible study, meeting regularly to sit around, tie flies, and discuss fishing and life’s deeper mysteries.

American author Tom McGuane writes, “If you fish, there is an implied responsibility to care for the environment” (Lyons 1998: 120). Like all religions, there are ethical implications and dimensions to fly fishing, and specific groups have been invented as ethical expressions of them. Trout Unlimited, for example, is one of the most effective conservation and education groups in North America. Their mission is to conserve, protect, and restore North America’s trout and salmon fisheries and their
watersheds. As stated in their literature, Trout Unlimited accomplishes this mission on local, state and national levels with an extensive and dedicated volunteer network. Trout Unlimited’s national office, based just outside of Washington, D.C., and its regional offices employ professionals who testify before Congress, publish a quarterly magazine, intervene in federal legal proceedings, and work with the organization’s 125,000 volunteers in 500 chapters nationwide to keep them active and involved in conservation issues. Groups like Trout Unlimited seek to educate the wider public on conservation and environmental issues at least in part so that generations to come can continue to have the spiritual experiences and perceptions that accompany the practice of fly fishing.

It may be that I can see the religious dimensions of the practice of fly fishing because it has long been my own practice. Like Maclean, I was taught at a very young age the importance of patience, discipline, and respect that are necessary to be a successful fly fisher. My father had me stand in the long driveway beside our house to practice my cast before we could make the journey to a stream in New Mexico or Colorado. He would tell me to be patient and feel the cast, allowing the rod to be an extension of my arm and self. On journeys to various waters he would tell me stories from his many years fly fishing, teaching me lessons on how to read the structure of a stretch of water and all its surroundings, how to approach rivers, and most importantly to fish with quiet calm, subtlety, and respect.

I was also taught, and have learned more deeply with each year of fishing, that it is not the catching of fish that is the chief objective of the practice. My cousin once remarked, for example, that he realized that he had reached a special place in his fly fishing practice when he could walk away from rising fish without feeling a desire or pressure to catch them. This seems to resemble the ideal of non-attachment associated with religions originating in Asia. What was important to him at that moment was simply to sit, watch, and lose himself in the sounds of the river, in watching the fish in their own belonging to it, sipping flies off of the surface of the water.

Fly fishing brings to many such Earth-engaged spirituality. I have often felt similarly, as the sounds of the stream and the rhythm of casting blend me into a reality so much greater than my own self. On one occasion on the Frying Pan River in Basalt, Colorado, I became so enraptured with the pursuit of a certain trout that I hardly noticed two elk who had moved into the stream not more than a few yards away. There was a moment in which we seemed to acknowledge each other’s presence, neither of us spooking or running away. That day it was not the fish caught which made the day special, but the sudden realization, sharing a space on that stream with those magnificent elk, that I was a part in something more. In agreement with McGuane, who stated “fly fishing is a road to nature based spirituality,” these are among the spiritual meanings I and many others have found in the pursuit of the wonderful and mysterious trout. And like many others, these moments of engagement with nature lead me to conservation work, seeking to defend and improve the natural living habitat of all of the Earth’s creatures (Lyons 1998: 12).

Samuel D. Snyder

Further Reading
See also: Fishers; Mongolian Buddhism and Taimen Conservation; Mountaineering; Nile Perch; Surfing; Whales and Whaling.

Foreman, Dave – See Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Ferality; Radical Environmentalism.


Fox, Matthew (1940–)

Matthew Fox is known for being the founder of the University of Creation Spirituality in Oakland, California and for authoring 24 books, including The Coming of the Cosmic Christ, Original Blessing, Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart and his most recent, One River, Many Wells. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of the magazine Original Blessing and hosts Techno Cosmic Masses: events intended to reinvent
worship, which are structured like a Mass including techno music and multimedia. What he is perhaps most well known and notorious for, however, is having been expelled from the Dominican order. The reasons for this expulsion are the same reasons he is important when considering religion and nature.

Fox had been an ordained priest since 1967, but in 1991, as a result of extensive research by the Catholic Church, he was ordered to leave his California school or face dismissal from the Dominican order. The Vatican objected specifically to Fox’s refusal to deny his belief in pantheism, his denial of original sin, for referring to God as “mother” and for promoting a feminist theology. There were additional scandals, one of which was caused by Starhawk’s presence as a staff member at the University of Creation Spirituality. Fox has now found a home within the Episcopal Church.

Fox focuses on reinventing worship, art, human sexuality and most importantly embracing wilderness, both internal and external. He emphasizes the need for humanity to change its relationship to the Earth, or else risk losing it completely to pollution and environmental destruction. One of his most potent and fascinating ideas related to this idea is presented in In The Coming of the Cosmic Christ. He suggests that we rethink and reacquaint ourselves with the concept of the Cosmic Christ and the crucifixion story of Jesus Christ in a way that is relevant to the global environmental crisis. What he suggests is a paradigm shift, which he defines as a new Paschal Ministry for the third millennium.

This paradigm shift can be described in one way as a shift from the quest for the historical Jesus to a quest for the Cosmic Christ. The historical Jesus is the individual whom we encounter in the Bible. Fox explains that Jesus was, among other things, a mystic. He specifically cites Jesus’ Abba experience, or his nondualistic experience of God. This nondualism is exhibited in John 10:30, when Jesus states, “The Father and I are one.” This is not a mysticism of the Fall-Redemption tradition, which favors mysticism of the sacraments. It is creation-centered mysticism, which is an act of reentering the mystery of the universe and human existence in it. Power is not elsewhere, outside ourselves, but is within us, just as it was within Jesus Christ the man.

In defining the Cosmic Christ, Fox makes the basic assumption that the Cosmic Christ is cosmic, preexistent wisdom. Among the many books of the Old Testament and New Testament that he says contain passages referring to the Cosmic Christ are Job, Baruch, and Proverbs, Philippians, Romans, Colossians and Ephesians. The Cosmic Christ is not an individual, anthropomorphic character, but rather an eternal, penetrating and changing energy that has the potential greatly to affect our world and our human lives. Most importantly, Fox states that the emergence of the Cosmic Christ will usher in a paradigm shift: a shift from the Enlightenment mentality, which denies mysticism and lacks a cosmology, to the new paradigm, which represents a return to mysticism, a reinvention of work, sacred sexuality and an imminent rather than transcendent creator.

Fox makes what the Catholic Church sees as a radical leap when he suggests that we see and understand Mother Earth as Jesus Christ crucified, as well as the “mother principle” being crucified. By mother principle, he means that nurturing and mystical part of ourselves that is intimately connected to the Earth. By proposing this, he writes that he is invoking the ancient Jewish, and Christian tradition of the Paschal Ministry, meaning, the resurrection and ascension of Christ, the salvation foreshadowed in the Old Testament and the sacraments. Fox suggests that in a Cosmic Christ context, the Paschal Ministry takes on new power, deeper meaning and moral passion. This occurs because the Paschal Ministry will be understood as Mother Earth conceived as Jesus Christ, crucified, resurrected and ascended. “It is the life, death and resurrection of Mother Earth” (Fox 1988: 149).

Fox’s vision is about collective not personal salvation. It occurs on an earthly, if not universal level. Fox believes that the Cosmic Christ will usher in a new era of self-expression and “the reinvention of the human.” What follows is an inevitable compassion for all creatures and the Earth itself.

Andrea A. Kresge

Further Reading
See also: Berry, Thomas; Cathedral of St. John the Divine; Christianity (2) – Jesus; Christianity (7e) – Creation Spirituality; Gaian Mass.

Francis of Assisi (ca. 1181–1226)

Francis of Assisi through the centuries has been one of the Catholicism’s most popular and inspirational saints. His embrace of a life of poverty, simplicity, and charity has inspired many both inside and outside the Roman Catholic Church. But he is perhaps best known for his exuberant stress on our kinship with animals and all of creation. Francis’ life was chronicled by his followers in The Little Flowers and in biographies by Thomas of Celano and later by Bonaventure. These hagiographical accounts are
replete with stories of Francis preaching to “my little sisters the birds,” to fish, and to wild flowers of their need to praise God. In another famous story, Francis addresses a fierce wolf at Gubbio as “friar wolf” and miraculously persuades him to cease killing and to live in peace with his human and animal neighbors. Though these accounts mix myth and legend with biography, they remain the primary vehicle through which each generation has envisioned Francis and associated him with a vital sense of kinship with creation. Preaching was central to Francis’ mission, and the image of Francis preaching even to nature underscores a sense of identification with all of creation. Likewise the stories of Francis’ ability to speak to animals and to tame wild ones fit a common medieval hagiographical motif that sees the holiness of saints as allowing a brief recovery of the peaceableness and harmony between the species once enjoyed in Eden but lost in humanity’s fall (see Sorrell 1988: 52–4).

Francis was born in Assisi, Italy, to a wealthy cloth merchant and his wife. Francis received some liberal arts schooling and as a young man fought in Assisi’s war with Perugia. He was captured in battle and imprisoned for almost a year. He suffered a long illness and, on recovery, joined a military expedition to Apulia in the south. We are told that after a vision in a dream, he returned to Assisi and embarked soon thereafter on following the example of Jesus. After a dramatic break with his father, Francis committed himself to poverty, begging, and preaching. He gave away his (and many of his father’s) possessions, withdrew from his family and friends, served lepers and the poor, and repaired a church. A growing band of companions joined Francis and the pope gave his official blessing to the new order. This small band of friars grew over the centuries into today’s array of Franciscan orders.

In recent decades, growing environmental concern has prompted many to look to Francis’ powerful sense of kinship with nature for inspiration. Pope John Paul II in 1979 proclaimed Francis to be the patron saint of ecology. Some have called Francis a pantheist, but that misses how deeply traditional his religious views were. His vision was primarily theocentric, not ecocentric. His core focus centered on Christ, giving praise to God, and love and service to humanity. He expressed his affection for, and closeness to, animals and the rest of nature with rare exuberance, but he never wavered from the medieval church’s teachings on the hierarchy of creation with humanity as its crown.

A number of influences may have helped Francis to stress the goodness of creation. His era saw a growing interest in the observation and artistic depiction of nature. He was deeply impressed by the ideal of chivalry and he loved a number of popular French troubadour songs and poems that praised both knightly virtue and the beauty of nature. He came to refer to his friars as “God’s troubadours.” He may well have heard stories of the lives of Irish saints which commonly depicted even animals as recognizing a saint’s gentleness and authority. Francis’ decision to become a wandering preacher and frequent hermit meant that he had close and sustained contact with nature and animals. He and his companions often lived in caves, hovels, and forest huts, and these stays likely deepened his identification with nature and its species.

Early and medieval Christianity had long emphasized the goodness of creation, but an equal emphasis on human superiority tended to undercut any emphasis on humanity’s kinship with the rest of creation. Francis and a few other Christian nature mystics were distinctive in celebrating God’s presence throughout the natural world and humanity’s kinship with the animals and the rest of nature. Francis employed chivalric and familial terms of address to animals and natural elements to emphasize the intimacy of the communal bonds between humanity and the rest of creation. For example, in The Canticle of Brother Sun, (also known as The Canticle of the Creatures), Francis spoke of “Sir Brother Sun,” “Sister Moon,” “Brother Fire,” and “Sister Mother Earth” (in Armstrong 1982: 38–9). Some interpret the Canticle as a call to humans to praise God for the goodness, beauty, and usefulness of creation, while others read it as an exhortation to all of nature to praise God for God’s blessing upon it. In either reading we are left with a strong sense of our need to respect the entire community of creation (Sorrell 1988: 128).

The intimacy of our connections to the rest of creation is emphasized in a number of Francis’ other writings. Francis’ prayer, The Praises to be Said at All the Hours, is primarily a collection of diverse biblical praises, many from the Psalms. It exhorts both humans and all of nature to praise God. Another important prayer, The Exhortation to the Praise of God, was at least partly written by Francis and is a compilation of biblical passages attesting to our relatedness to the rest of creation. “Heaven and Earth, praise Him (cf. Ps. 68:35). All you rivers, praise Him (cf. Dan. 3:78). All you creatures, bless the Lord (cf. Ps. 102:22). All you birds of the heavens, praise the Lord (cf. Dan. 3:80; Ps. 148:10)” (in Armstrong 1982: 42–3).

What inspires is not so much Francis’ corpus of writings, which is quite sparse, but the charm of the accounts and legends of his exuberant energy celebrating the whole of creation. Francis’ writings have not had much of an impact on the development of mainstream Catholic theology or ethics, for he had no great Summa Theologicae to impress later generations of the learned, but his great text was his life, which has continued to inspire many across the ages. He lacked the education to invoke Aristotelian or neo-Platonic metaphysical understandings of the natural cosmos, but he did have a literalist power in his direct appropriations of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially
Psalm 148, and the Gospels concerning specific birds, animals, fish, stars and planets. Francis was a medieval friar; not an ecologist. But it is not surprising that many today who are ecologically minded find in him a kindred spirit.

William French

Further Reading
See also: Christianity (5) – Medieval Period; White, Lynn – Thesis of.


Freeport (West Papua, Indonesia)

The site of the richest gold and copper mine in the world, Freeport lies where the rugged southern slopes of the West Papuan Highlands approach the coastline. The removal of entire mountains has been extremely lucrative for both the American mining company Freeport McMoRan and the Indonesian Government, yet devastating to local inhabitants and their natural environment.

The mountains of the region are the source of intricate belief systems that link the Amungme and Nduga people to the natural world. For these peoples, each peak and valley, and all the forests and rivers, are repositories of the ancestors. Indeed, the ancestors shaped the spine of the central mountain range with their bones and their heroic endeavors created the rivers and gorges. They also released the first humans from the ground and grew the first food plants. The ancestors’ spirits – the traveling female creators Situgimina and Ugatame, and Manu the creator snake, and others, such as the guardian spirit Dingiso, a tree-kangaroo – inhabit trees, rocks and pools. Though seldom seen, they are always there. The landscape created by the ancestors and all its valued elements must be maintained in order for life to continue. This is the responsibility of the people and the elders who are entrusted with the task of ensuring that the proper rituals are performed.

Even what is worn personally, by way of feathers, fur, bone and teeth, deliberately denotes connection to the ancestors and embodies experience of the land they created. No ceremony, moreover, is complete without the slaughter of pigs, their blood expressing the health of the land, their flesh imparting prosperity to all partaking of it.

The outside world came relatively late to the mountains with the arrival of Dutch Franciscan missionaries in the 1950s. Whereas they came barefoot with only a few essentials, starting educational and health facilities, American fundamentalist evangelists badly damaged local leadership structures and the possession of local knowledge during the next decade. Still worse was Indonesia’s takeover of Irian Jaya (1963–1969), and American mining to remove mountains for gold, copper and other minerals at Grasberg near Timika (from 1967 onward).

The physical assault upon the mountain, the military assault upon its people and the undermining of their spiritual knowledge is a familiar story of devastation. And yet the cultural and religious lives of both the Amungme and Nduga have proven remarkably resilient and adaptive. Even those among them who work in mining towns continue to participate in initiation ceremonies, funerals, marriage exchanges, hunting, fighting, and trading expeditions, and thus take periodic refuge in village life. Independence fighters, members of the OPM (Organisasi Papua Merdeka) who resist Indonesian control over West Papua, also frequent the forests above and around the mine, and join the local people in affirming the ancestors and the land itself as powerful protectors and weapons of defense against environmental despoliation. The OPM groups seem more comfortable in combining their ancient beliefs with helpful passages from the Bible and new rituals dedicated to bringing about West Papua’s independence. Efforts at resistance against the mining, however, have been put down ruthlessly, with the use of Indonesian or American helicopters (the mining company paying protection money to the Indonesian government).

Mark Davis
Alexandra Szalay

Further Reading
See also: Penan Hunter-Gatherers (Borneo).

**Freud, Sigmund (1856–1939)**

Austrian physician and neurologist Sigmund Freud, as the founder of psychoanalysis, developed not only a general theory of psychology, but also both a therapy and a method of research. Freudian psychoanalysis seeks to maintain an individual’s psychic equilibrium between the demands of the id (instinctual impulses and primitive needs), the ego (consciousness) and the superego (the conscience as largely shaped by unconscious understandings of communal moral standards). Freud argued that if the child's developmental stages are not satisfactorily completed, various pathologies emerge. These become manifest as neuroses or psychoses when and if the individual's defense mechanisms (rationalization, sublimation, projection, regression) become inadequate in the face of internal and/or external threats. If one’s conscious tolerance cannot cope with the degree of excitation occurring, threatening elements remain unconscious, but are then liable to contribute to or exacerbate the potential for defense mechanism breakdown. Freud employed the term *eros* for one's life instincts toward self-preservation and reproduction. The psychic, emotional and sexual energies associated with instinctual biological drives are referred to as the *libido*. By contrast, the *thanatos* or death instinct encompasses an individual’s impulses toward self-destruction and death. This last is chiefly understood as a person’s innate aggressiveness and destructiveness. On the animal level, aggression occurs in relation to needs of habitat, food and/or reproductive necessities. In humans, aggression ranges from anger in private disputes to mass dysfunction and social war.

Therapeutically, Freudian psychoanalysis employs the patient’s use of free association as well as his or her emotional transference to the analyst. Because of an alleged circularity between Freudian practice and theory in which confirmation of the latter is suggested by the evidence produced by the former, the methodology is not widely accepted as rigorously or logically "scientific." Freud has nevertheless become an immense contributor toward the popular Western view of human nature.

Freud is also significant in articulating his "Civilization Thesis" that has since come to underlie all Western debate relating to the “role” of the natural world vis-à-vis humanity. His seminal works that establish the foundations of this discussion are *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930, 1961). While religion for Freud becomes essentially a device employed by the immature individual who refuses to confront the nature of reality in sober fashion, Freud also presents nature as an entity that civilized humanity seeks to subdue, dominate and utilize for its own benefits. Civilization, as the replacement of individual power by community power, is founded upon renunciation of instinct. As such, it is a community superego.

Inasmuch as Freud’s culture versus nature polarity posits that the super power of nature is a major source of human suffering, civilization is what sanctions whatever socially condoned activities and resources are employed for making the Earth useful. According to Freud, the first acts of civilization consist in the use of tools, the domestication of fire and the construction of dwellings. However, in the contemporary emergence of popular forms of spirituality, the contended conflict between nature and culture is the central issue that has come to be challenged. The current spectrum of nature religions denies Freud’s two options, namely, either hiding from nature or subduing it. Nature becomes less and less simply a resource and something to be exploited as well as tamed. With growing awareness of industrial pollution and technological fallibility, the destruction of nature – or at least an ecologically balanced and sustainable Earth – is being increasingly recognized. It is this perception of the “loss of nature” and a planet capable of supporting a rich diversity of living forms including the human that constitutes the immediate focus behind the contemporary emergence of “nature religions” as distinct forms of spirituality. The development of a consciousness that embraces nature and religious culture as symbiotes rather than opponents takes its cue from reinterpretting Freud’s “Civilization Thesis” that claims culture serves merely “to protect men against nature.”

*Michael York*

**Further Reading**

See also: Ecopsychology; Jung, Carl Gustav; Transpersonal Psychology.
Friends – Religious Society of (Quakers)

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) was established in the 1640s and currently has about 336,000 members in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the West Pacific, and the Americas. As with many Western religious traditions, Quakers today express the pluralism reflective of our time with four divisions including Friends General Conference, Friends United Meeting, Conservative Friends, and Friends Evangelical International. These divisions span a range of belief from New Age through Christian conservatism. In this regard, Barbour and Frost (1988) maintain that the search for a tie that binds the Quakers is very difficult. In 1937 the Friends World Committee for Consultation was established to improve communication and understanding among Quakers of various persuasions, and it continues to function in this capacity.

The Quaker affinity with nature began with founder George Fox, who encouraged the study of "whatsoever things was civil and useful in nature." In his 1680 Wheeler Street sermon, Fox preached that it is not God’s intention that humans use other creatures in a “lustful” manner, exhorting Quakers to “leave all creatures” as they found them. In 1693 Quaker William Penn, Governor of Penn’s Colony, later the U.S. State of Pennsylvania, encouraged Quakers to exercise “caution” in their “use of the world.”

John Woolman (1720–1772) has exercised substantial influence on the development of contemporary Quaker ecological and environmental thought, viewing the creation with awe and Earth’s resources as a gift from God. Woolman’s position appears to be rooted in the Quaker view that God created the world and remained in it (Cooper 1990: 28). During his 1760 visit to Nantucket Woolman reflected, “...the earth, the seas, the islands, bays, and rivers ... were all the works of (a God) who is perfect in wisdom and goodness” (in Moulton 1989: 114). Similar to Penn, Woolman cautioned against “impoverishing” Earth’s resources because of the impacts such acts might have on future generations. During his visit to England in 1772, Woolman noted the disparity between rich and poor in England, the repressive ways in which the poor were treated and, in the same context, objected to the way stagecoach horses were often driven to their deaths or overworked until they grew blind. Woolman’s compassion was inclusive. In several places in his journals he spoke of a “universal love” for his fellow creatures (in Moulton 1989: 29). In a unique reflection on environmental conditions, Woolman wondered if the polluted air of the cities of his time might “hinder the pure operation of the Holy Spirit” (in Moulton 1989: 190).

The focus of contemporary Quakers is on the decline of nature due to human activities. As with other denominations and sects, Quakers are addressing questions about the nature of environmental crisis, the fitness of humanity to occupy Earth and the requirement to live in harmony with other life. Much of this is being done within the context of what Quakers refer to as living in “right relations,” a term referring to an equitable sharing of resources through simple living and sustainability.

Among the themes that reveal themselves in current Quaker thinking on environmental and ecological issues, and nature in general, are the assumptions of the goodness of creation and support for the unity, interrelatedness, and community of humanity with nature. These positions are generated from the belief, on the part of those referred to as “liberal” Quakers, that the truth and meaning of a God-centered spiritual universe is available through continuing revelation occurring to individuals or to those gathered in corporate worship.

Those Quakers with a developed environmental awareness often call for a revision of outmoded concepts of God. They view the universe as an interconnected community of being in which the inward dwelling of God’s spirit provides the unity and continuity of the universe and where the spiritual and the material laws governing the universe are closely related.

Quakers closely link belief and action and, although somewhat slow to start, environmental activity in the Monthly and Yearly Meetings began increasing dramatically in the 1990s. Environmental issues treated in the Meetings include population growth and control, environmental witness, living in unity with nature, spirituality, environmental education, finances and investments, global warming, cosmology, sustainability, military impacts, consumption patterns, native peoples, lifestyles, legislation, and environmental justice, among others, in order to develop a new vision of a community of living things.

Quaker organizations have long expressed their concerns or positions about issues by proclaiming or publishing comments called “Minutes,” “Queries,” or “Advices.” Over the past several decades, Quakers have also expressed their concerns or positions on environmental issues in these ways.

In 1987 the Friends Committee on Unity with Nature (FCUN) was founded to integrate Quaker positions on simplicity, peace, and equality with the environment. FCUN is a primary supporter of La Bella Farm in Costa Rica, a sustainable agricultural project and sponsor of Quaker Eco-Witness, a project to promote government and corporate policies on biological integrity and sustainable and ecologically integrated human communities.

In 2000, the Quaker Environmental Action Network was formed as a committee of the Canadian Yearly Meeting. Other Yearly Meetings host environmental groups including, but not limited to, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s Environmental Working Group and the Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting’s Ecological Concerns Network. Until 2001, Pacific Yearly Meeting, among other environmental activities, also sponsored
the publication Earthlight, currently published by an independent non-profit organization acknowledging links to its Quaker heritage. Another Quaker organization, Right Sharing of World Resources, based on a model of self-help and sustainability, funds a number of projects, primarily in less-developed countries. The primary function of most of these groups is to raise environmental awareness among Quakers, couple environmental awareness to Quaker religious faith and practice, and expand Quaker environmental thinking into the general population.

Tom Baugh

Further Reading
See also: Quaker Writers in Tasmania (Australia).

Friends of the Earth – See Brower, David; A Christian Friend of the Earth; Salvadoran Reflection on Religion, Rights, and Nature; Sierra Club.

Friluftsliv

Friluftsliv, a Norwegian word, is pronounced “Free-Loofs-Leaf,” and can be literally translated as “open air life,” although it is usually translated as “outdoor recreation.” However, for some of the most vocal pioneers of the deep ecology movement, it has been taken up as something much more: a near-religious call for a spiritual inhabitation of the natural world as we enjoy our time out in it – more than recreation, it is a poetic and philosophic kind of re-creation of our original natural home.

The word first appears in print in Henrik Ibsen’s epic poem Paa Vidderne (1859): “In the lonely seter-corner, / My abundant catch I take. / There’s a hearth, and a table, / And friluftsliv for my thoughts” (Ibsen 1957: 62). The great explorer and humanitarian Fritjof Nansen extolled its virtues, particularly the fact that it is best practiced alone, where the soul can personally confront the grandeur of nature without human distraction. Turning outdoor activity into socializing or sport is counter to the spirit of friluftsliv, which has much more in common with the deep solitude of the Romantic era, where poets and painters discovered the sublime through an individual encounter with the magnificence of nature.

In recent years the mountaineering educator Nils Faarlund has done the most to uphold the soulful and philosophical side of friluftsliv in his native land, at the same time as various bureaucratic and political forces were turning it into a simple sporting activity that could be easily managed. Faarlund retorted with this manifesto of what it is not:

*It is not sport*, in the sense of physical activity in a selfish, competitive way. *It is not tourism*, in the sense of the business and practice of rapid transit through different places. *It is not a scientific excursion*, collecting specimens of objective interest. *It is not a “trade-show” style of Himalayan mountaineering*, using nature as a sparring partner. *It is not outdoor activity* in the sense of a safety valve for a fundamentally antinatural aggressive lifestyle (1992: 164).

What, then, is it? “An unselfish I-Thou relationship that tries to come away from the anthropocentrism of a nature-dissonant society,” (1992: 164): Faarlund concludes. Inherently, friluftsliv, as Faarlund, Ibsen, and Nansen want to define it, is a fundamentally spiritual belief that simply getting out into nature, enjoying the hike, the climb, the ski, the swim, is an essentially personal religious experience that gives the greatest possible meaning to human life.

This remains a minority definition of the term within Norway, but it is this definition that has gained some support and adherents in the rest of the world, either as part of the deep ecology movement, as taught by Arne Naess, John Seed, Bill Devall, George Sessions, and others, or in some of the literature in outdoor recreation studies that recognizes that a walk in the woods can be a very deep experience indeed.

David Rothenberg

Further Reading
See also: Deep Ecology; Ecosophy T; Mountaineering; Muir, John; Naess, Arne; Rock Climbing; Surfing.

Fruitlands

A. Bronson Alcott and Charles Lane, influenced by the Transcendentalist idealism then current in New England,
founded the Fruitlands community in 1843 at Harvard, Massachusetts. Fruitlands ranks as one of the very first communes to be devoted to sustainable, low-impact living. Industrialization was just beginning to enter American life when Fruitlands was launched, but the community’s founders could see that alienation and exploitation of workers would characterize the way of life the factories portended and sought to create a better model for living.

Fruitlands, unusually in its time, refused all exploitation of animals. The residents did not eat meat or dairy products and did not use animals or their manure in farming. They also espoused a variety of lifestyle practices that they believed to be nonexploitive and sustainable. They declined to use not only alcoholic beverages, but also coffee and tea. They bathed in cold water. They generally woke and slept with the sun, minimizing their use of candles and lamps. They avoided the use of money, engagement in business, and involvement with politics and religion. They wore only linen clothing because cotton was produced with slave labor.

The community, which received its name from its founders’ plan to grow fruit as their main food, was the object of some derision, given the eccentricity of its members (one, Samuel Bower, was a nudist; another, Joseph Palmer, was once jailed for refusing to shave his beard). It lasted less than a year and was dissolved later in 1843.

Further Reading
Hinds, William A. American Communities and Cooperative Colonies. Chicago: Kerr, 1908.
See also: Back to the Land Movements; Brook Farm; Transcendentalism.

Fuller, Buckminster (1895–1983)
Buckminster Fuller is best known as the designer of the geodesic dome. The world’s first geodesic dome was unveiled to the public at the 1965 International Trade Fair in the city of Kabul, capital of Afghanistan. It took untrained workmen no more than two days to complete the structure, which served as the American Pavilion for the fair. Its “skeleton” was composed of interlocking aluminum triangles, and its “skin” was nylon cloth stretched over the skeletal frame. The building was lightweight and easily assembled; moreover, the dome’s component parts had arrived by air, flown in on a single airplane.

Since then, the principals of the geodesic dome have been used in the construction of many buildings worldwide. The distinctive shape of Fuller’s dome even inspired the naming of a newly discovered carbon molecule – buckminsterfullerite. This is a large carbon molecule (C60) whose close physical resemblance to a geodesic dome provides an appropriate illustration of Buckminster Fuller’s belief in the fundamental interconnectedness of the universe, on a macro and micro scale.

Richard Buckminster Fuller, Jr. was born 12 July 1895 into a respectable Massachusetts family who traced their lineage back to the Puritan settlers. The Fuller men were ministers, war heros and state representatives. The Fuller women counted among their number Buckminster’s great-aunt Margaret Fuller, a leader in the Transcendentalist movement.

Extremely far-sighted from birth, “Bucky” Fuller could see few details near to hand, though he could perceive larger shapes in the distance. In a sense, he was “blind,” until the age of four, when he received his first pair of corrective lenses. In adulthood he always wore a distinctive pair of black-rimmed glasses.

Buckminster Fuller credited his early visual impairment for his unique perspective on the world, namely, a personal philosophy of attempting to grasp the whole of an idea before taking it apart to analyze the component parts. In later life he traveled the world speaking to university audiences everywhere, warning against overspecialization and urging consideration of the “ecology of man.” Fuller called his work “comprehensive anticipatory design science” and told people his goal was to employ all the power of science to enable humankind to achieve its highest potential on Earth, simultaneously preserving, utilizing and renewing Earth’s resources.

Fuller briefly attended Harvard, but he was unable to conform to the discipline of higher education. Formal education on the whole, he felt, was a waste of time. He looked forward to a day when children would educate themselves via television, without the repressive influence of a set curriculum.

Buckminster Fuller’s inventive genius was apparent from an early age. In kindergarten he was asked to build a house of toothpicks and peas. Five-year-old Fuller constructed a stable lattice of four-sided triangles (tetrahedrons) alternating with eight-sided figures (octahedrons). Many years later the adult Fuller patented this design under the name “octet truss,” and argued that the tetrahedron was the simplest three-dimensional shape possible, and the basis of all other material systems. He called his octet truss the “Coordinate System of Nature.”

Among other childhood inventions was an oar for Fuller’s rowboat, based on what he knew of jellyfish locomotion, which required less strength to use and
allowed him to face forward and see clearly where he was going. Throughout Buckminster Fuller's adult career, he continued to use the principles of design he observed in nature to make technology more efficient.

A publicist promoting Fuller's exhibitions coined the word “Dymaxion” using a blend of the words “dynamism” and “maximum” to mean getting the most use from all materials at hand. Fuller liked the term, and eventually copyrighted it himself. When he designed his portable house, entirely self-contained, with no wasted space, the bathroom using a fraction of the usual amount of water, he named his creation the Dymaxion house. Similarly his Dymaxion car was streamlined, fuel efficient, and extremely maneuverable.

The map of the Earth he designed, called the “Dymaxion Airocean World,” minimized the distortion so common in most flat maps, and enabled ocean navigators to plot their courses more accurately. Buckminster Fuller coined the phrase “Spaceship Earth” to express his sense of the planet as a closed system moving through space.

Buckminster Fuller criticized the scientists of his day for overspecializing in narrow fields of study. He felt that studying details without first comprehending the whole picture led to widespread waste of natural materials, and contributed to a mistaken belief that resources were scarce. Fear of want, not lack of resources, was the source of war, cruelty and conflict. He further argued that there are enough resources on this planet to support all the peoples of the world in comfort, without the need for constant competition, if we would only use science and technology wisely.

Fuller recommended the study of synergetics as an alternative to the traditional disciplines of science. He used the word “synergy” to mean that all events are interrelated, such that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Synergy encompasses synchronicity, which is easily observable in the ordinary day-to-day world, when suddenly unconnected events in our lives come together and are revealed, suddenly and unexpectedly, to be part of a larger pattern.

Synergetics is therefore a “comprehensive design science” which first attempts to identify the larger pattern of the cosmos, then separates out specific instances of this pattern, turning them to human use. Fuller strongly felt that humans cannot afford any longer to focus only on individual portions of their immediate environment, while ignoring the effects of their actions on the larger system.

In Buckminster Fuller's worldview, God is synergy. Fuller said that “belief” is the opposite of knowledge. Belief holds an untested, illegitimate claim to reality. Buckminster Fuller claimed to “believe” nothing and to “know” only what he could prove to his own satisfaction. He “proved” God’s existence through his understanding of pattern. To Fuller’s mind it was obvious that pattern could not exist without reason.

He saw patterns in beehives and waves, molecular structures and star systems. He said that all matter in the universe consisted only of patterns of energy that had temporarily assumed a given form. How they interact with other patterns of energy (such as how light can pass through a seemingly “solid” pane of glass, whereas your hand cannot) can vary, but the fundamental material of creation does not. Our ordinary concepts of “solidness” and “separateness” are therefore mistaken notions, perpetuated by our imperfect sensory equipment.

All things in the universe are connected in some way as part of a larger pattern. Patterns imply design and design implies the existence of a designer, and therefore the reality of God can be irrefutably proven.

If the simple existence of an ordered, patterned, universe proves God exists, then what sort of god was Fuller talking about? Evidently, a metaphysical, omnipotent, omnipresent god who heard prayers.

From 1927 to the end of his life, every night before falling asleep, Buckminster Fuller meditated. He called this meditation, “Ever Rethinking the Lord’s Prayer” and he published one version of it as a poem in Critical Path (1981). He said that humanity can glimpse fragments of the totality of creation in those fleeting moments between waking and sleeping, between consciousness and unconsciousness. Just as in ancient times, God exists on the borders of the unknown.

Fuller felt that if he were doing what he termed the “Great Intellectual Integrity” (a concept that embraced both God and the universe) intended, then life would take care of all his needs. To all appearances, it did, for remarkable coincidences seemed to follow Buckminster Fuller throughout his life, and he took all of it as further proof of the existence of a universal intellect.

As a field of study, Fuller's synergetics holds intriguing possibilities and may be as lasting a legacy as the octet truss and the geodesic dome. Buckminster Fuller saw interrelations in fields previously assumed to be unrelated. He refused to be bound by any one single discipline, and he can be compared to the original thinkers of ancient Greece, for whom philosophy meant only the search for knowledge, whether it is mathematical, scientific or religious. He has also been called the first ecologist and the first eco-theologist — although, given his refined notions of a cosmic “greater intellectual integrity,” one might hesitate to label Buckminster Fuller a theologian.

Richard Buckminster Fuller, Jr. died 1 July 1983,
having written 22 books, published more than 60 articles, held 25 patents, and been awarded 48 honorary degrees and the Medal of Freedom from the United States government.

Further Reading


Fuller, R. Buckminster. Synergetics: Explorations in the


See also: Architecture; Fisk, Pliny.