Walker, Alice (1944–)

Alice Malsenior Walker was born in Eatonton, Georgia in 1944. She attended Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia for two years and completed her B.A. at Sarah Lawrence College in New York in 1965. She is the author of over twenty-five works including novels, volumes of poetry, essays, short stories and children’s books. She has written and spoken out for human rights and ecological justice globally.

Walker is a “womanist” – a black feminist or feminist of color, committed to “the healing and wholeness of entire communities, male and female.” A womanist “loves the Spirit” and to love the Spirit is to love creation (Walker 1983: xi–xii). It is in Walker's Pulitzer prize-winning novel *The Color Purple* (1982) that the healing power of creation becomes explicit. The sexually and physically abused Celie learns from blues-singer Shug that God is not an old white man: “it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it.” Celie finds salvation in creation – first trees, then air, then birds, then feels “being part of everything, not separate at all.” She “knows” that if she “cut a tree” her “arm would bleed” (Walker 1982: 167). “Creation” is more than “nature”; it also means creativity. Celie finds economic freedom by making pants instead of cutting “Mister's” throat. Moreover, creation includes the erotic. God pleasures in Celie’s relationship with Shug. Walker’s novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* emphasizes the sacredness of women’s natural bodies and holistic experience of the erotic. A minor character in the novel is pansexual and makes love with trees, a boulder, the Earth, or a waterfall (Walker 1992: 175–76). Creation is imbued with love and invites loving response.

Walker describes herself as a “pagan” who worships nature. Baptized at age 7, she was fascinated by the leaves in the muddy creek.

I was unable to send my mind off into space in search of a God who never noticed mud, leaves, or bullfrogs. Or the innocent hearts of my tender, loving people. . . . It is fatal to love a God who doesn’t love you (Walker 1997: 24–25).

It is not “Jesus” that Walker has a problem with but the Christian tradition’s alienation of Jesus from the folk and from nature. Jesus “coexists quite easily with pagan indigenous peoples,” she writes, because they have already learned the love that he preached (Walker 1997: 25). Feminists and womanists from a diversity of faith perspectives employ Walker’s writings. Such diversity is possible because Walker’s spiritual starting point is everyone’s common ground – the Earth. In *The Same River Twice*, Walker refers to her own Trinity: the Earth, Nature, and the Universe. She writes of Nature sustaining her happiness and as opening her “to love, intimacy, and trust” (Walker 1996: 43). She often cites the following poem in essays and public talks:

*We Have A Beautiful Mother*
We have a beautiful mother
Her hills are buffaloes
Her buffaloes hills.

We have a beautiful mother
Her oceans are wombs
Her wombs oceans.

We have a beautiful mother
Her teeth the white stones
at the edge of the water
the summer grasses her plentiful hair.

We have a beautiful mother
Her green lap immense
Her brown embrace eternal
Her blue body Everything
We know (Walker 1997: 106–7).

The poem captures Walker’s admiration for the planet in the context of a larger universe, speaking from the heart of her Pagan spirituality. For Walker, the Earth is our
mother. She observes that the relationship is not always easy. In “Everything We Love is a Human Being,” she struggles with human destructiveness toward an alienated Earth. “I love trees,” she says to the trees. The trees respond, “Human, please,” ignoring her protest that it is the lumber company who mutilates them, “...we find you without grace, without dignity, without serenity, and there is no generosity in you either—just ask any tree” (Walker 1988: 141–2). The trees associate Walker with all humans, denying her claims to individual innocence. Walker has come to refer to herself as “earthling.” The term “earthling” represents a sharing of power, resistance to human supremacy, and places all individuals, animate and inanimate in mutual relationship.

Spirituality is not grounded in a father god for Walker, but in Mother Earth, who sends the “grandmother spirit” to teach wisdom.

Karen Baker-Fletcher

Further Reading
See also: Christianity (7g) – Womanism; Ecofeminism (various); Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism; Memoir and Nature Writing; Paganism – Contemporary; Williams, Delores S.

Wallace, Alfred Russel (1823–1913)

Alfred Russel Wallace was among the leading English field naturalists of the nineteenth century who also wrote widely on non-scientific topics such as politics, social reform, and alternative religion. His best scientific works, including *The Geographical Distribution of Animals* (1876) and *Island Life* (1880), were highly regarded and contributed substantively to the emergence of modern biology. Perhaps his most noteworthy scientific achievement was his formulation of a novel evolutionary theory in the late 1850s. Although independently conceived, Wallace’s views were remarkably similar to the ideas that Charles Darwin had been working on (and largely keeping to himself) since the late 1830s. Both theorists emphasized variation among the members of a species, environmental pressures that led to competition, and the concept of natural selection. Wallace first proposed his ideas to Darwin in an essay and letter sent in 1858. Darwin, shocked to find that someone else had developed similar views, nonetheless made sure that Wallace shared credit when their ideas were first presented to the scientific community. Darwin was also prompted to write up a more comprehensive version of the theory, *On the Origin of Species*, first published in 1859. This work became the starting point for all subsequent discussions of evolutionary theory and thus largely eclipsed Wallace’s contributions. In their latter careers, the two men kept up a regular correspondence and often joined forces to defend the concept of natural selection against its various critics. However, they disagreed on some issues, notably the relevance of natural selection to the human mind and human destiny.

Although Wallace was raised in the Anglican tradition, he largely abandoned traditional religion as a young man. In the 1840s he began exploring alternative belief systems, including the burgeoning spiritualist movement, which emphasized communication with spirits that were thought to dwell in higher planes of existence that surrounded the Earth. Typical practices involved ritual séances presided over by mediums who claimed to contact the spirits and relay messages. Although skeptics (which included many of Wallace’s scientific colleagues) dismissed the movement as trickery or delusion, Wallace insisted that spiritualism could be studied experimentally, and had, to his satisfaction, passed numerous tests. During his latter career, he wrote numerous articles, books, and pamphlets that defended spiritualist phenomena.

Like other advocates, Wallace believed that spiritualism was entirely compatible with a scientific worldview and reform activism. For example, he supported women’s rights, the utopian experiments of Robert Owen, and various land reform movements. He also opposed what he felt were reactionary or cruel applications of science, such as the eugenics movement and vivisection. Linking these disparate activities was a master narrative of progress that spiritualists believed was at once natural (organic evolution), socio-political (progressive reform), and spiritual (survival and improvement of the soul after death).

How did Wallace’s spiritualism square with his views of nature? Most significantly, while he staunchly defended evolution by natural selection for nonhuman organic systems, Wallace eventually came to believe that the higher mental functions of human beings (the “moral and intellectual faculties”) could not be fully accounted for by natural selection. Instead, he invoked an “Overarching Intelligence” that guided the process of variation and
accumulation of beneficial changes and that ultimately produced brains capable of mental and moral progress.

In this he implicitly argues for a separation between humanity from other animals that many (including Darwin) felt was no longer viable. Ironically, it may well have been an overdependence on natural selection (what some call Wallace’s “hyper-adaptationism”) that led to his distinction from Darwin. Wallace felt that natural selection acted exclusively in response to environmental conditions and eventually created perfect adaptations to those conditions. When considering humans in a “primitive” or “savage” state, Wallace could imagine no conditions that would require such a large, complex, and versatile organ as the human brain, hence his recourse to supernatural guidance. Darwin, on the other hand, employed the principle of correlation to deal with this problem. He felt that the higher functions of the human mind, including self-consciousness and abstraction, could have emerged in connection with the advantages conferred by language development.

Outside of biology, however, Wallace’s attempts to situate organic evolution in a more comprehensive worldview that embraced progress, reform, immortality, spiritual belief, and ritual practice paralleled the efforts of much of the religious left of the late nineteenth century. Akin to various liberal theologies that developed in that era, Wallace yearned for a new synthesis of science and religion that would be consonant with various political and humanitarian reforms. In contrast to conventional liberalism, however, Wallace worked in an eclectic intellectual milieu that thrived largely outside of traditional religious institutions. Similar attempts to “spiritualize” science continue, most notably within the contemporary New Age movement. However, akin to Wallace, some resist what is arguably the major religio-ethical implication of evolutionary theory – that human beings are not exceptional to the natural process. Thus in spite of his obvious love of the natural world and his willingness to think boldly, Wallace’s legacy was a religiosity that continued the traditional Western pattern of looking to the transcendence of nature. A religious vision that combined evolutionary theory and was spirituality oriented toward powers and processes within nature would have to emerge from other thinkers.

_Liste Dalton_

**Further Reading**


See also: Darwin, Charles; New Age; Transcendentalism; Western Esotericism.

**Washat Religion (Drummer-Dreamer Faith)**

The _washat_ is the name for what was commonly called the “Drummer-Dreamer religion,” a Native American religious revitalization movement that began in the early part of the nineteenth century. The religion took its earlier name from the drums used in its rituals and celebrations, and from the belief that its leaders had died, obtained visions from the afterlife (and hence had been “dreaming”), then returned from the dead to lead their people. The movement began in the American Northwest and spread eastward, spawning other tribal religions with various specific rituals, but the emphasis on the discovery of tribal identity through religious practices was retained.

The precise roots of the _washat_ are notoriously difficult to pin down, but the religion owes much of its origin to the Wanapum prophet Smohalla who lived on the Columbia Plateau in what is now central Washington State. Smohalla, whose name means “dreamer” or “preacher,” was born sometime between 1815 and 1820. After a vision quest on a nearby desert mountain, Smohalla moved to the isolated village of _P’Na_ on the Columbia River (now Priest Rapids), where he refined his religion, rejecting the “gospel and plow” message of the missionaries, and embracing the ancient traditions of the elders. The faith was strongly animistic, believing that all creation was capable of being imbued with spirit, and hence deserving of respect. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Smohalla rejected what he saw as agriculture’s destruction of the Earth, and insisted that his followers return to traditional means of food gathering, social customs, and most of all, religion. Since many natives looked with alarm at the increasing encroachment of the whites, the _washat_ found a ready audience.

The religion was steeped in symbolism that called the worshipper back to a foundational relationship with nature. Smohalla began the weekly ceremony with a meal that reminded some visitors of the Christian Eucharist, with the sipping of water from the Columbia, taken with bits of salmon. In addition, the religion’s calendar celebrated salmon runs and root harvesting; the flags over the lodges contained the nature symbols of sun, moon, and star; and a tall pole adjacent to the prophet’s tule mat lodge held a small wooden bird, carved by Smohalla himself that represented the Bullock’s Oriole, the bird that had
revealed the religion to the prophet when he was on his vision quest.

As Smohalla’s fame spread during the 1860s and 1870s, other prophets, most notably Skolaskin, Haslo, and Wovoka took the religion’s basic message back to their tribes, where the latter’s refinements were the genesis of the famous “Ghost Dance” of the peoples of the Northern Plains.

Today at Priest Rapids, there is something of a resurgence of the washat, with the religion’s innate respect for the environment finding a receptive audience among both natives and whites. Gone is the insistence that natives reject agriculture and other devices of European-Americans. Instead, the modern washat stresses an attitude of thankfulness to the Creator, which in turn prompts worshippers toward looking at nature with care and respect. Men and women still worship apart in the lodge; the drums still beat for much of the ceremony; the dancers’ movements are much the same as they were in the days of Smohalla; and all participants continue to partake of the ritual meal of salmon and river water. But the washat’s move away from outward societal rejection reveals a religion that works through transformation of society.

Many Wanapums today carry this transformist spirit with them, working in local industries, orchards, and farms, with some actually employed on the Priest Rapids Dam, the dam that flooded some of the Wanapum’s prime fishing grounds. This evolution of the washat points to the relationship that the tribe enjoys with the Grant County Public Utility District (PUD), the organization that owns the dam. The District strongly supports tribal religious identity, and works with the tribe to assist its environmental efforts along the “Hanford Reach,” the last free-flowing stretch of the Columbia River in the United States. This part of the river is one of the few sites in the Pacific Northwest that still supports strong runs of Chinook Salmon, and the partnership between the Wanapums and the Grant County PUD is a significant reason for the health of the salmon population. Thus, despite the religion’s changes since its rebirth in the 1800s, the washat’s influence on the ecosystem of the Columbia Plateau remains profound.

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Further Reading
See also: Columbia River Watershed Pastoral Letter; Ghost Dance; Indian Shaker Religion; Seattle (Sealth), Chief; Yakama Nation.

Waskow, Rabbi Arthur (1933–)

One of the recognized prophets of eco-Judaism in the United States, Rabbi Arthur Waskow has been a principal and energetic proponent of such things as: “eco-kosher” practice, the “greening” of Jewish liturgy, reclaiming the ecological wisdom found in the Torah, and marrying ecological sustainability with daily spiritual practice. A lifelong political activist, Waskow began reinterpreting and opening up Jewish traditions to the concerns of the day after a pivotal Passover he spent in Washington, D.C. The year was 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. had recently been assassinated, and Federal troops had been called out to control rioting within the District’s African-American community. Waskow’s visceral experience of African-American neighborhoods under “lock-down” conditions imposed by government troops prompted him to reexamine the traditional sacred narrative of Passover in light of current events. Waskow felt a need for the “haggadah,” the booklet that tells the liberation story of the Jews moving out of slavery from Egypt (a story read during the Passover Seder service or ritual meal) to address the dynamics of racial oppression and violence he witnessed that day. In 1969, Waskow wrote and published a “Freedom Seder Haggadah” that adapted the traditional story of Exodus to address the realities of contemporary racism within a narrative framework of Jewish and African-American liberation. Many adaptations of the haggadah have followed Waskow’s innovation, including feminist-based and eventually environmentally focused haggadot.

Since then, Rabbi Arthur Waskow’s name has become synonymous with “Jewish Renewal,” a transdenominational movement that seeks to reclaim, renew, and reinterpret traditions of Judaism that it views as having been lost or regrettably “sanitized” in the face of the historical pressures imposed by cultural assimilation and anti-Semitism. In response, Jewish Renewal embraces and incorporates spiritual elements from Hasidism, as introduced by two of Jewish Renewal’s founding leaders, Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach and Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, who left the Lubavitch Hasidic movement but retained its daily spiritual rhythms and mystical components. In addressing environmental concerns in particular, Waskow explores what wisdom might be gleaned from the daily prayer and spiritual mindfulness observed in Hasidic tradition and the powerful importance placed on Shabbat (a time of sacred rest) for transforming patterns of consumption, “workaholism,” and globalization, which he believes threatens the entire web of life.

In 1983, at the invitation of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Waskow founded The Shalom Center in Philadelphia. The center is a self-described “network of Jews who draw on Jewish tradition and spirituality to seek peace, pursue justice, heal the Earth, and build community.” Later, Waskow distanced the center from its

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Reconstructionist affiliation and embraced instead the trans-denominationalism of the Jewish Renewal Movement. His encounters and exchanges with Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi in 1993 were especially formative for this shift and ultimately helped to catalyze Waskow's ordination as a rabbi in 1995.

The Shalom Center implements both social and environmental justice projects. Its members helped produce the Trees, Earth, and Torah anthology, a collection of resources for understanding and conducting the “Tu biSh’vat” ceremony, a midwinter holiday that celebrates the “Jewish New Year of Trees,” and Torah of the Earth, an anthology that explores ecological wisdom in the history of Jewish thought.

Center programs and publications also encourage “eco-kosher” practice, which takes into account not only food choices but also other consumption choices and their effects on the well-being of the planetary community. For example, Waskow asks the pointed question, “Are tomatoes that have been grown by drenching the Earth in pesticides “eco-kosher” to eat at a wedding reception?” (Waskow 1996b: 297). For Waskow, such questions extend to other lifestyle choices such as what bank one chooses to do business with or whether one chooses to consume renewable or non-renewable energy sources. “If what we sow is poison,” warns Waskow, “what we reap is poison” (Waskow 1996b: 299).

In 1996, the United Nations named Waskow a “Wisdom Keeper,” a designation given to honor forty religious and intellectual leaders around the world who are actively working on environmental issues. Together with his wife Phyllis Berman, who is no less an activist than her husband, Waskow travels to universities, synagogues, and community centers to lead Torah study groups, conduct ritual observances, and lead services in the style of Jewish Renewal. Berman is co-director of Elat Chayyim, a Jewish retreat center for healing and renewal near Woodstock, New York, where visitors eat an organic diet, study Torah, pray, and meditate. Berman is also the co-author of Tales of Tikkun: New Jewish Stories to Heal the Wounded World (Aronson and Berman 1996) and specializes in new liturgies for women.

Sarah McFarland Taylor

Further Reading

See also: Hasidism and Nature Mysticism; Hebrew Bible; Jewish Environmentalism in North America; Judaism; Judaism and Sustainability; Kabbalah and Eco-theology; Redwood Rabbis.

Water in Islam

The religion of Islam, as revealed in the Qur’an, which Muslims believe to be the word of God (Allah), emerged in the western part of the Arabian peninsula – a dry, mountainous region similar in many ways to the Iranian plateau. The Qur’an mentions water on more than sixty separate occasions, and rivers more than fifty times. There are also frequent references to the sea, to rain and hail, fountains and springs. It is not surprising that the Qur’an, and for that matter pre-Islamic Arab tradition, place enormous emphasis on the importance of managing scant water resources sustainably and equitably.

Consistent with contemporary scientific understanding, the Qur’an states that water is the very source and origin of life: “We made from water every living thing” (Qur’an 21:30). Water is also the source of nourishment and sustenance, a gift from God: “Behold! . . . In the rain which Allah sends down from the skies, and the life which he gives therewith to an Earth that is dead . . .” (2:164); “It is He who sendeth down rain from the skies; and with it we produce vegetation of all kinds” (6:99); “It is He who sendeth down water from the sky and thereby give life to a dead land and thereby quicken the dead land” (43:11); “And We send the water from the sky and give it to you to drink” (15:22); “We send down pure water from the sky, that We may thereby give life to a dead land and provide drink for what we have created” (25:48–49); and “We provided you with fresh water” (77:27). The Qur’an also makes reference to groundwater and springs: “He leads it through springs in the Earth” (39:21); “From it also channels flow, each according to its measure (13:17); and “Say: Think: if all
the water that you have were to sink down into the Earth, who would give running water its place?“ (67:30). Finally, water, with which Muslims must perform ablutions before praying and after sex, has the religious function of purifying the believer: “... and He caused rain to descend on you from heaven to clean you therewith“ (8:11).

It is noteworthy that the Arabic term shari‘a, which later came to be the term for Islamic law, originally designated “the path which leads to the watering hole.” Qur’anic descriptions of heaven, furthermore, depict it as being watered with flowing rivers (5:119, 87:17). The abundance of water imagery in the Qur’an leads M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, a contemporary Islamic scholar, to assert that water has greater religious significance to Muslims than to followers of any other tradition.

The notion of community (umma) is of central importance in Islam, and social justice is one of the most prominent themes in the divine revelation. According to the Qur’an, water is community property: “And tell them that the water is to be divided between them” (54:28). The traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (hadiths – which following the Qur’an constitute the second source of Islamic law) report him as saying, “People share three things: water, pasture and fire.” The hadiths also prohibit the withholding of water from those who need it, and from using it wastefully: “Excess in the use of water is forbidden, even if you have the resources of a whole river.”

Classical Islamic jurisprudence was formulated mainly during the eighth and ninth centuries of the Common Era and set down in the texts of four schools recognized by Sunni Muslims (the Shafi‘i, the Malikii, the Hanafi, and the Hanbali), plus a fifth school, the Ja‘fari, which is accepted only by Shi‘ites. The latter are a minority within the Muslim world as a whole, but in Iran they constitute a majority of perhaps 90 per cent. For the most part Islamic jurisprudence has remained a theoretical construct, an ideal toward which Muslim societies should strive, rather than a system actually practiced. Even in the Islamic Republic of Iran today, the official view is that the country is “working toward” an Islamic state; it does not yet claim to be one.

Within the classical legal system, water rights are determined first and foremost by the need to quench thirst. This primary right was accorded not only to humans, but to animals as well. Thus, irrigation systems must be available to all who are in need, and must not be polluted so as to protect the rights of downstream users. Furthermore, according to John C. Wilkinson, “New upstream appropriations may only take place if they do not affect... prior rights” (1990: 61). According to the hadiths, the Prophet stipulated that “no more than an ankle’s depth” of water could be taken – that is, providing adequate moisture storage in the soil for a seasonal crop. Wilkinson notes that the terms of the Prophet’s restriction arise from the Arabian context, where water-flows typically result from flash floods. Classical jurisprudence, seeking “the spirit of the law,” therefore determined that the intent was to prevent accumulation of excess water for purposes of speculation.

The hadiths also establish the principle of protected zones (harim), which include watercourses, rivers, and, significantly, their adjoining lands, including lands adjacent to wells. The harim is “the buffer zone surrounding a water body within which human activities, apart from the lawful use of water, are prohibited. The cardinal rule of harims adjoining waters is that they must remain undeveloped.”

Islamic criteria for water purity, which perhaps reflect ritual more than health concerns, state that water is polluted (najis) if it has undergone noticeable changes in color, taste, or smell as compared to its “clean” (tahir) state at the source. In short, as Wilkinson summarizes, the norms for managing water which are found in classical Islamic legal sources are comprehensive, sustainable and just:

The existence of both surface and groundwater flows are recognized and the harim rules ensure that tapping does not occur, nor that a new irrigation system or well are constructed too close to an existing one. The existence of problems of water quality and pollution, as well as of water quantity, are also treated in the Islamic code (1990: 63).

Water distribution systems in traditional Muslim societies, whether irrigation networks in rural areas or urban water supplies for public use, often fell under the classification of waqfs, which are pious endowments for the public good, protected from both taxation and government seizure. Those who made waqf endowments – usually wealthy families – were not only able to protect their wealth by investing it in this way, but could also exercise enormous power within their communities by controlling systems vital to the community’s survival. In Esfahan (Iran) province a system of regulating the distribution of water from the Zayandeh river was stipulated by an early sixteenth-century document, popularly but anachronistically attributed to the Safavid minister Shaykh Baha‘i. Much of the traditional canal system still exists, although throughout the recent drought the channels have remained dry.

Throughout Iran and Central Asia the traditional qanat systems, which provided water both for irrigation and domestic uses for three millennia, have now largely been abandoned in favor of “modern” practices such as the damming of rivers and the pumping of groundwater. Likewise, control of water resources has been transferred from pious endowments to government bodies. These changes have been brought about as a result of the application of development models imported from the West.

Richard C. Foltz
Water in Zoroastrianism

From ancient times, Iranian civilization has possessed an ethical system that recognized both the ecological realities of the plateau’s desert climate and the social imperative of conserving and distributing water in a way that ensures its availability to all. In Zoroastrianism, the original pre-Islamic religion of the Iranians, which is still practiced by a small minority today, each of the four elements is represented by a deity (izad) and revered through special invocations (yashri). Water is associated with the goddess Ana-hita (Nahid), whom Herodotus identified with Aphrodite. Another deity, Patet Apam, is described as guardian of rivers, springs, and the sea.

According to the Zoroastrian sacred text known as the Avesta, water must be kept pure and unpolluted. When Zoroastrians approach a stream, waterfall or spring, they should recite an invocation called the Ardvisura Banu (or Abzavar), from the Ahan yashri in the Avesta. The ritual calendar of the Zoroastrians marks the fall harvest, Paitishahem, by commemorating the primordial creation of the earth and fertility. Integral to such beliefs are various zoo-morphic spirit manifestations, primarily the snake and the spirits of the water are specifically associated with the calling of individuals to become diviners and are seen as the providers of wisdom, knowledge and medicines, which are given to chosen individuals. This usually involves the physical submersion of the candidate under

See also: Water in Islam; Water Spirits and Indigenous Ecological Management (South Africa); Zoroastrianism.

Water Spirits and Indigenous Ecological Management (South Africa)

Many international organizations, such as the Convention of Biodiversity, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP), and the Working Group on Traditional Resource Rights (WGTRR), are calling for the recognition of indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determination, the value of their knowledge, and the need for strategies to protect and preserve this knowledge. This has largely been precipitated by the global environmental crisis, which has revealed the shortcomings of an exclusively scientific approach, often within the Western economic development paradigm, in solving the multitude of environmental problems facing present and future generations. There has been a corresponding awareness of the need to revisit how indigenous people have managed to live sustainably within their environments, both in the past and the present. The religious worldviews (cosmologies) and knowledge systems of many indigenous peoples are intimately embedded within their physical, spiritual and social landscapes and can only be understood within these contexts.

There is an intimate connection that exists between the physical, spiritual and social dimensions of southern African spiritual healers’ knowledge and practice; particularly with reference to water resources. There is a common corpus of knowledge linking the African healing traditions with water spirits over a wide area in southern Africa. Although there are regional variations, the recurrence of common themes and key symbols remain the same throughout and form the cornerstone of the spiritual healing traditions.

Among many of the southern African indigenous peoples, there exists a set of complex beliefs regarding water, river systems and riparian zones. The spirit world is regarded as the ultimate source of such life-sustaining resources, as well as the source of knowledge of healing and fertility. Integral to such beliefs are various zoomorphic spirit manifestations, primarily the snake and the mermaid, which reside in or beyond the water and which interact with humans in a variety of ways. The rivers and the sea are the dwelling places of such manifestations and are of fundamental importance to many of the African healing traditions and their practitioners (termed amagqirha by the amaXhosa, or izamgoma by the amaZulu). The snake and the spirits of the water are specifically associated with the calling of individuals to become diviners and are seen as the providers of wisdom, knowledge and medicines, which are given to chosen individuals. This usually involves the physical submersion of the candidate under
the water of a certain river, pool, or the sea (for a few hours, to days or even years) after which it is alleged that the individual emerges wearing the full regalia of a healer: a symbolic snake wrapped around his/her body and medicines. It is the spirits that choose the client, not the other way around, and resistance to the “calling” usually leads to misfortune. Relatives are not allowed to display any grief at the disappearance of one who has gone under the water or he/she may never be returned to the living. Anyone who enters these water sources without the calling of the ancestors will disappear, never to return. Messenger animals that summon the “chosen” one to meet the spirits are remarkably similar within all the cultural groups, namely, the snake or python, the water monitor, the hippopotamus, the dolphin, the otter, the crab, and various insects.

Certain places are more favored by the river spirits than others. They are believed to live in deep pools of certain rivers, often below waterfalls or fast moving “living” water or in the sea. The occurrence of certain plants near pools, such as the reed, wild tobacco or water buchu, indicate the presence of the water spirits.

Among the amaZulu of KwaZulu-Natal the water spirits in the form of the snake are referred to as the amakhosi (the great ancestors). Local informants suggest that they distinguish between the snake(s) that is/are a manifestation of the “family” (shade snakes) and the big one, “The one which is the Lord,” representing the Supreme Deity. For example, one informant describes the python as iNkosizamahlolozi (“the lord of the shades”) who resides in the pool.

The amaZulu also recognize the existence of another category of nonhuman water spirits or semi-daemons, that are half-human/half-fish (mermaids) and have stated that this is one of the forms the heavenly princess, iNkosazana, can take. These creatures very often have transformative powers. For instance iNkosazana can manifest as the mermaid, the snake, the rainbow and gentle soft rain. This link with the rainmaking forces and fertility is a common theme throughout southern Africa. iNkosazana, the Zulu heavenly princess, as the bringer of soft soaking rains, is responsible for both agricultural and human fertility. She has all the qualities of the archetypal Fertility Goddess. Propitiation and appeals are made to her by virgins at the beginning of spring each year, appealing to her to bestow them with wealth, rain, good harvests and fertility. Caves that are in close proximity to pools, especially those with rock art, are often used by healers as sites for rituals, and are viewed as very sacred. Archeologist Frans Prins has argued there is a close association between the San rainmaking trance rituals that are held in caves near deep pools, and the amaZulu and amaXhosa beliefs surrounding the water. Much of the rock art in the eastern Free State, northeast Cape and Transkei feature snakes and water animals such as hippos. These rain animals have been linked to experiences healers have of the spirit world while in trance.

As a result of the profound sacred status that the many rivers, pools and water sources hold for southern African indigenous communities, there existed in the past, and among certain communities today, a range of taboos surrounding their access and utilization. Certain pools are held with a mixture of awe, fear and reverence. Only healers associated with the water are allowed to approach such areas. It is strictly taboo for anyone to extract plants or resources from the water’s edge. This can only be done by healers who are allowed plants for medicinal use. Common people are forbidden to go near sacred pools where the snake, mermaids and spirits are known to exist. This injunction is reinforced with the fear that uninvited people will be taken under the water never to return. Many groups limit the distance within which residential units can be erected near rivers and where cultivation can take place. Many of these beliefs and practices have been abandoned over the last century, with devastating environmental effects. In certain places there has been a resurgence of interest in these beliefs and practices. Recently in the Mvoti river area of KwaZulu Natal certain rural communities have reinstated the ancient day of rest (lesuku lwesukuNkosazana) for the heavenly princess, in response to claims made by a number of individuals who say she has visited them and complained that she needs the rivers to be left alone on certain days so that she can enjoy them and renew them without any disturbance. Collecting water, washing or utilizing any water directly from the river on her day (Mondays and Saturdays), is strictly prohibited.

The water spirits are generally believed to live in pools and swamps that never dry out. It is said that their role is to protect water sources and keep them alive. They are the guardians of the river and the providers of rain. They can however be chased away from their pools, which results in the drying up of water sources and the infliction of drought. This is precipitated by lack of respect demonstrated by people toward each other and the Earth’s resources. Pollution, noise, the use of cement in rivers and dam building can all negatively affect the spirits. Killing or injuring any of the messengers of the water (such as crabs, snakes, frogs or water birds) is also regarded as a great offence. Social conflict and disrespect at both the local and national level can offend these spirits, resulting in catastrophic floods or droughts. Scholars have
demonstrated how people harness the idiom of the water spirits to mount powerful community opposition to social, political and developmental projects (e.g., the Ambuya Juliana movement in southern Zimbabwe in the early 1990s).

Spiritual healers (diviners) are regarded as the repository and custodians of much valuable knowledge and wisdom accumulated from the past. This knowledge is by no means static as it is continually being revived and renewed through communication with the ancestors. However their access to such knowledge is under sustained threat by the forces of modernity: globalization, capitalism and religious intolerance. Ensuring indigenous people access to these sites is essential since such features are integral aspects of the nature, formation and transmission of knowledge. Changes in land distribution and ownership patterns in South Africa over the last 150 years have profoundly affected healers’ access to certain sacred features of their landscape that are necessary to perpetuate their living heritage. Protection of such resources from the ravages of modernization is also crucial, as the presence of these spirits is believed to be dependent on healthy river systems. Rivers are under sustained threat in southern Africa as a result of commercial development, farming operations, large-scale agroforestry, dam building and toxic overflow. State and private landowners may also decide to install dams or draw off large amounts of water, which may negatively affect inflow requirements to sacred pools or submerge them altogether. Sacred sites, including pools and cave rock-art sites, are also threatened by tourism (and recreational fishing), which may damage them in both physical and spiritual terms. All these factors pose great threats to the resources and knowledge base of spiritual healing in southern Africa, and mechanisms are urgently needed to protect the rights of indigenous healers, their environments, and their communities from such intrusions.

Penelope S. Bernard

Further Reading


See also: Serpents and Dragons; Traditional Ecological Knowledge; Traditional Ecological Knowledge Among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada; Weather Snake; Xhosa-Speakers’ Traditional Concept of God; Zulu (amaZulu) Culture, Plants and Spirit Worlds (South Africa).


T.H. Watkins was an impassioned environmentalist and author of twenty-eight books and hundreds of articles and reviews. Watkins exemplified the American sensibility of devotion to place that re-places an institutionally and historically centered sacrality with a commitment to, and awe before, the splendor of untamed and unspoiled land. Best known as editor of *Wilderness*, 1982–1997, the magazine
of the Wilderness Society, from which in 1988 he received the Robert Marshall Award for his “devoted long-term service to and notable influence upon conservation and the fostering of an American land ethic,” he was also a historian of the West and depression-era America. Watkins’s 1991 book, Righteous Pilgrim: The Life and Times of Harold L. Ickes, 1874–1952, was a finalist for the National Book Award.

As a nature writer and land-ethnic activist, Tom Watkins was devoted to the idea and experience of wilderness. His last book exemplified his call for the preservation of public lands and his celebration of place, written and photographic – from geology to political disputes – for the sheer wonder of the redrock canyons of southern Utah. The first Wallace Stegner Distinguished Professor for Western American Literature at Montana State University, Watkins was a tireless advocate for western lands and good writing about those lands. In the conservationist tradition, Watkins believed that wilderness would teach humans how to live: “For in wilderness,” he wrote,

as in the eyes of the wild creatures that inhabit it, we find something that binds us firmly to the long history of life on Earth, something that can teach us how to live in this place, how to accept our limitations, how to celebrate the love we feel when we let ourselves feel it for all other living creatures (Watkins 1994: 104).

In Stone Time Watkins reveals his attachment to wilderness rather like a young Wordsworth of the Prelude:

I have two important landscape memories from my childhood – that of the seashore and that of the desert. The sundown sea of my childhood gave me abundant joy, a sense of freedom and possibility, but it was an easy place, generous and forgiving; even the sea itself, its waves eternally flowing toward security, promised salvation. But this contrary landscape, this desert place of rock and sky, sere and implacable and forever challenging, gave up nothing easily (Watkins 1994: 5–6).

His romanticism was anchored to meticulous geological, historical, and legal information and insights. And as with many nature writers, he thought what was needed to save this land was to look upon it and reflect. As an environmental ethicist, he worked to affect legislation that would preserve the place for a walk, a look, a reflection. He loved the desert, and there his ashes were scattered.

Lynda Sexson

Further Reading


See also: Autobiography; Marshall, Robert; Memoir and Nature Writing; Wilderness Religion; Wilderness Society.

Watson, Paul (1950–) and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society

Terrorist to some, ecowarrior to others, Captain Paul Watson has been a looming presence over the animal rights and environmental movements for the last three decades. Since the 1970s, Watson has been a founding member of Greenpeace, a medic in the 1973 Wounded Knee face-off between the American Indian Movement and the U.S. government, and the founder and president of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. Although he has tracked elephant poachers in East Africa, saved wolves in the Yukon, liberated monkeys from zoos in Grenada, defended bison in Montana, and campaigned for the rainforests in Brazil, Watson is best known for his dramatic efforts to halt the slaughter of whales, dolphins, seals, and fish of the sea.

Watson’s militancy is fueled by his intense sense of connectedness to the living Earth as expressed in his biocentric philosophy that all life is rich, beautiful, intrinsically valuable, and sacred. Watson had a number of startling epiphanies that spoke of his destiny to protect animals, such as in 1975 when a mortally wounded whale looked him directly in the eye, expressing pity for human-kind, and communicating that he knew Watson was trying to help. Watson’s biocentrism is conjoined to a scientific understanding of the laws of ecology that dictate how human beings must live on the Earth if they are to live at all. Watson condemns the anthropocentric hubris that presumes the laws of society can override the laws of nature. He decries the violence human primates have long inflicted on the Earth, other species, and one another, and warns of an impending species extinction crisis the like of which has not been seen since the age of the dinosaurs.

Echoing Aldo Leopold, Watson believes the human species is doomed so long as it sees itself as conqueror of the bioco mmunity rather than a respectful citizen within it. More explicitly than Leopold, however, Watson calls for “Biocentric Religion” (including in volume one of this encyclopedia).

Born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 1950, Watson’s love and protective instincts for animals and nature were
manifested early. Living in southern New Brunswick, he fell in love with the water and marine life. A “kindred spirit” to all animals, Watson protested any abuse he witnessed and destroyed snares and traps. His Earth-consciousness was so intense that by age 15 he had “pledged allegiance not to Canada, the Church, or humanity, but to nature” (2002: 49).

In 1968, Watson signed up as a merchant seaman and found his true home at sea. He joined the Don’t Make a Wave Committee that protested nuclear testing by sailing activist crews into target areas. In 1972, with Watson as a co-founder, the group renamed itself the Greenpeace Foundation and cruised into French and American nuclear testing zones. During this time, Watson also did freelance writing and studied linguistic and interspecies communication at Simon Fraser University, thereby adding scientific weight to his belief that animals such as whales and dolphins have highly evolved brains and communicative capacities.

From 1972–1977, Watson emerged as the most militant member of Greenpeace. At his urging, the organization expanded its focus to include wildlife preservation issues and in 1975 launched the world’s first sea-going expedition to protect the whales. In 1976, Watson led the first Greenpeace expedition to the ice floes off the Labrador Front to rescue seals and document the killing. He returned the next year with a larger crew that included French actress Brigitte Bardot, whose presence drew unprecedented international publicity to the seal slaughters. Watson’s plan was to spray the seals with a harmless green dye to render their beautiful coats valueless to sealers, but the Canadian government quickly outlawed the tactic leading Greenpeace to renounce it. Saving the dye tactic for future campaigns, Watson instead shielded seals with his body, moved them to safety, and threw sealers’ clubs into the sea.

By breaking Canada’s “Seal Protection Act” Watson saved many seal lives and helped to inaugurate a new era of direct action for animals, but the Greenpeace board voted him out in 1975 after concluding that he violated their direct-action guidelines which stress nonviolence and bearing witness. Stung by the betrayal, Watson berated Greenpeace as the “Avon ladies of the environmental movement” because of their focus on fundraising over action. They in turn denounced him as a “terrorist” and interfered with his subsequent campaigns.

Watson started his own group, first named Earthforce and then the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, which he calls “the most aggressive, no-nonsense, and determined conservation organization in the world” (1994: xv). With the help of Cleveland Amory and the Fund for Animals, Watson purchased the first of many Sea Shepherd ships in December 1978. In a series of bold, notorious actions, Watson and crew rammed pirate whaling ships at sea and sunk others at dock, sprayed thousands of seals with dye, intervened to halt dolphin kills, and destroyed miles of driftnets that environmentalists denounced as “curtains of death.”

Influenced by Marshall McLuhan’s theories of electronic media, Watson argues that nothing is real or believable for the public until it becomes a media event. Through sensationalist tactics, celebrity supporters, videotaped evidence, and dramatic press conferences, Watson aimed to galvanize a sleeping global village to help protect marine mammals.

Unlike many activists who resort to sabotage in defense of animals and the Earth, Watson accepts that property destruction tactics can be called “violence,” but he argues sabotage is necessary to thwart a much greater violence and to capture media attention. As he explains it,

To remain nonviolent totally is to allow the perpetuation of violence against people, animals, and the environment. The Catch-22 of it – the damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don’t dilemma – is that, if we eschew violence for ourselves, we often thereby tacitly allow violence for others, who are then free to settle issues violently until they are resisted, necessarily with violence . . . sometimes, to dramatize a point so that effective steps may follow, it is necessary to perform a violent act. But such violence must never be directed against a living thing. Against property, yes. But never against a life (1982: 26–7).

Watson’s strategies and rationales place him squarely in the radical environmental camp, where illegal tactics are considered morally permissible if not obligatory to thwart the destruction of a sacred and intrinsically valuable natural world. Indeed, he made strong connections during the 1980s with the Earth First! movement, which musings considered the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society its Navy, as they were his Army. Indeed, at Earth First! gatherings, Watson’s heroism is often celebrated in poetry and song, and individuals who have served as crew for the Sea Shepherd have recruited there with some success.

Watson’s champions credit him with inventing a powerful new mode of activism and bringing bold warrior tactics and values to the defense of the Earth. His critics berate him as an arrogant vigilante and violent pirate, an “eco-terrorist” who recklessly destroys property and endangers human life. Like most radical environmentalists, Watson insists that he explored the “proper channels” for appeal, protest, and change, but found only corrupt governments that either ignore or defend immoral and unsustainable killing. He argues, moreover, that he has proposed credible alternatives to industries such as sealing only to be rebuffed without a hearing. Where laws such as the 1986 International Whaling Commission ban on whaling are flouted without consequence, Watson insists he is upholding, not breaking, the laws. He freely admits to
violating statutes such as the “Seal Protection Act,” while reminding us that Gandhi and King also disobeyed laws in contradiction with the just and the right. Watson feels the charge of terrorism carries little weight coming from those who profit from killing, and he finds no credible comparison between damaging property to save life and slaughtering life for profit. For Watson, the true violence and real terrorism lies with those who massacre animals and devastate the Earth.

Critics also accuse Watson of being a misanthrope, a Eurocentric imperialist, and a dictator on his ship. Watson is unapologetic about the kind of discipline and command required to run a ship in high-risk conditions. He unflinchingly affirms that his primary allegiance is to life itself, and especially sea life, as he openly expresses contempt for a human species plundering the planet and exterminating species. Privileging animals over humans, Watson repudiates claims advanced by some members of indigenous societies, such as a number of the Inuit and Makah, who assert they have a right to kill seals or whales in order to preserve their cultures and identities. Watson believes that when marine species are at risk of extinction further killing cannot be justified, no matter what group of people is involved or rationale they articulate. Watson thus epitomizes “no compromise” radical environmentalism as he calls others to such activist, biocentric religion. Despite such radicalism, he continues to work with mainstream environmental and animal liberation organizations including the Sierra Club, whose members elected him to serve on its national board of directors in 2003.

Steven Best

Further Reading

See also: Animals; Biocentric Religion – A Call for; Animism (various); Dolphins and New Age Religion; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Greenpeace; Radical Environmentalism (and adjacent, Rodney Coronado and the Animal Liberation Front); Sierra Club; Whales and Whaling; Whales and Japanese Cultures.

Watsuji, Tetsuro (1889–1960)

Tetsuro Watsuji played an important role as a major twentieth-century nativist philosopher in the Japanese response to modernization and Westernization. The 1867 Meiji Restoration ended a 250-year seclusion to reestablish the imperial throne to power and to survey Western models and train abroad to construct a new Japan as the best defense against Western colonization and commercial exploitation. By the 1890s, many knowledgeable Japanese who had gone abroad despaired at the great gaps between the West and Japan, some reacting by reexamining the values of the Japanese cultural past.

Tetsuro Watsuji trained under several famed nineteenth-century nativists (such as the novelist Natsume Soseki and the imperial ideologist philosophy professor Inoue Tetsujirō). In 1927 he spent a year in Germany studying Western philosophy; in direct response to the publication of Martin Heidegger’s *Existence and Time*, Watsuji developed his theory of “natural environment” (*fudo* in Japanese), which he would subtitle “Considerations about Human Ecology” (*Ningengaku-teki kosatsu*). While others before him had considered the Japanese sense of nature, Watsuji was the first to do so in a modern Western philosophical style.

His starting point was Heidegger’s emphasis on “beingness” (*sein*) as the singular foundation of human existence. Watsuji felt this to be incomplete because it stressed individual self-discovery in a temporal context; his Japanese experience of a communal society anchored in a unique awareness of nature led him to incorporate a spatial (i.e., natural environment) foundation to human self-discovery, which he termed *fudo*. It is usually translated as “climate, scenery, geologic conditions, weather” and so on, but is better rendered the “natural environment,” and includes as well the nuances of the French *milieux* (“surroundings, social sphere”). Watsuji’s starting point for developing the concept of “natural environment” was the human awareness of cold – that cold is much more than a characteristic of surroundings external to the human or a sensation or an interior mental event, it is actually a human subjectively experiencing an objective awareness. The context of the experience as well as the process itself is *fudo*, “natural environment.” He interpreted Heideggerian self-awareness to involve both beingness and *fudo*, for the latter makes any objective self-discovery possible (Watsuji 1988: 12–13); since it enables humans to stand outside themselves, *fudo* is the “self-active physical principle of the human spirit objectifying itself” (1988: 10). This natural environment provides the opportunity or turning point (*kekki*) for concrete human activity. Humans face the challenge of survival because of the natural environment (the “tyranny of nature” [1988: 6]), so that all basic elements of survival such as food, shelter, and clothing, are inevitably tied to it. Tool making and the
invention of all material products and all cultural acts occur within this natural environment; thus culture and the natural environment are interrelated.

Watsuji did several things with fudo. 1) He rejected any standard Western deterministic relating of culture and natural environment. 2) He applied the traditional Japanese sense of a natural world populated by indigenous spirits or kami (as described in archaic times in the Japanese myth cycles in the seventh-century Kojiki and eighth-century Nihon-shoki) that was subsequently refined by the worldview of the Buddhist Kegon (Chinese: Hua-yen or "Wreath of Flowers") school which posited a thoroughly integrated holistic cosmology of beings, contexts, and processes. 3) Noting that human awareness occurs existentially (Watsuji’s Japanese natural environment consists of immanent kami as an interrelated holism) he thus conceptualized an ontological relationship between natural environment and culture – this is fudo.

But this was only the first half of an essentially nativist project. In his travels during the 1920s, Watsuji noted great variations in vegetation, landscape, natural light, architecture, urban design, transportation, etc., across Asia, Europe and the Middle East, so he proposed three basic kinds of fudo: desert (Arabia), meadow (Europe), monsoon (South and southern East Asia). Since fudo structures all human activity as culture, he saw humans developing distinctive material lifestyles in each of these natural environments, but also social structure, cultural acts, and national temperaments. Desert fudo is the most intense human struggle with nature – echoed in a nomadic survival with fierce possession of essential resources, intra-human resistance and conflict, religions of stark ethics and a totally dominant, all-powerful one god. Meadow fudo began with classical Greece and Rome in a brilliant Mediterranean light and comfortable nature, making possible much contemplation about order and structure – thus Greek philosophy and science and recent European civilization leaps across the globe. Monsoon fudo is an over-intense nature – from the archaic deification of nature phenomena in Vedic India through a common trend toward seeking either a single powerful unity underlying such luster and ever-changing life (brahman in Hinduism) or the universe as the unity itself (dharma-dhatu in Buddhism). (Thus humans master nature in the meadow environment, but at best struggle and respect nature in the desert and monsoon environments.) Japan is part of this monsoon fudo, so his challenge next became how to clearly distinguish Japanese culture in relationship to its natural environment in contrast to the giants India and China, but also to the contiguous cultures of southeast Asian, Korea, and the Pacific.

Japan’s environment is unique among monsoon fudo in Watsuji’s eyes because 1) it is an island off the east coast of the Asian continent, 2) it lies on a geographical north/south axis, 3) unlike any other East Asian nation, its northern half receives cold Arctic air from Siberia and the Japan Sea, while 4) its southern half is both mainland monsoon belt-influenced but also Pacific island-related.

In his earliest writings in 1918, Watsuji had already linked Japanese culture to its natural environment, and soon did not limit this relationship to the development of material culture, but extended it deeply into the development of national character and ethos. With broad cultural sweeps, he linked such institutions as the Japanese corporate family, for example, to the traditional layout of the Japanese house, compared Buddhist temples to gothic cathedrals, Western gardens to Japanese, and so on. In parallel with such other well-known twentieth-century nativists as Okakura Tenshin and Suzuki Daisetsu, Watsuji also labored to isolate a uniquely Japanese national temperament as evidenced by its material culture. Here Watsuji built off of the Meiji imperial government’s advocacy of a new national religion/ideology of kokutai (“nation-as-corporate body,” the Japanese people as individual cells, and the imperial government as the head). As the Japanese began to establish the first modern Asian empire, the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere (Dai-toa-kyoiken, 1940–1945), Watsuji expanded fudo to legitimate the role of the state in integrating “territorial opportunities” (keiki) as human ecology. He became best known for his Ethics, his life’s work about collective relationships and responsibilities in Japanese society. He would never see the Japanese state, its nation-as-corporate body ideology, or its martial spirit as reasons for Japan’s World War II defeat, his nativism always sending him back in Japanese history to moments of foreign contact – so Watsuji could only find the reason for Japan’s downfall to have been its two and a half centuries of seclusion (1508–1867) which denied it long-range access to and mastery of modern Western technology.

Dennis Lishka

Further Reading


See also: Heidegger, Martin; Japanese Gardens; Japanese Love of Nature; Japanese Religions.
Weather Snake

Among the Zulu-speakers of KwaZulu Natal, Southern Africa, there is a myth of an immense snake that rides upon storms, wreaking havoc and destruction. Greatly feared, this sinuous goliath is kaleidoscopic in appearance, able to change its form, carnivorous, irate and itinerant. In the Midlands its abodes are the many dams and rivers that run from the heights of the Drakensburg mountains some 70 kilometers to the northwest.

This creature is both a monster and a deity, associated with the negative power of the ancestors and the destructive forces of weather and nature. It is also associated with major landmarks such as Mpendle Mountain, some 10 kilometers outside of the town of Howick. From the summit of this mountain this brilliant creature is said to fling its full length upon the back of the storm, although some would say that it is the very storm itself.

As he races across the landscape upon the high winds, the glitter of corrugated roofing, so typical of shacks in southern Africa, attract his attention, leading him to mistake this for the shimmer of water. He drops from the sky and hits the roof, only to realize his mistake. Frustrated and furious, he throws himself back upon the storm, flicks his tongue of lightning and growls his rumble of thunder, twists his torso into a tornado and takes revenge upon the domestic landscape below. His tortured path rages from Mpendle Mountain through the scenic softness of white-owned farms, toward the expanse of Midmar Dam and on toward the Howick Falls.

This waterfall is regarded by Zulu sangomas (diviners) as a sacred place of power. Here for innumerable years, during the training of initiates, they have offered sacrifices to the ancestors and to the inkanyamba who are associated one with the other, and have even become each other in a blurring of boundaries. To awaken the snake from its watery sleep here is to invite its wrath in the form of storms, tornadoes and flooding.

The water-snake myth appears to have been introduced into southern Africa with the Bantu-speaking people some 2000 years ago, for the concept is prevalent throughout the southern sub-continent. But while this concept has taken the form of a water-snake among Bantu-speaker’s, among San hunter-gatherers it was regarded as the rain-animal who could take many forms, and was a creature associated with the otherworld and responsible for weather and rain. The San were the great rainmakers, the controllers of weather and nature. For these abilities, and for their magical qualities, the Nguni feared them, yet sought their services.

In the Drakensberg region, the San were present until relatively late, having been driven out by various fugitive African groups, by the expanding Sotho and by white colonial groups, from about 1838 onwards. The last raid in the Midlands took place at Kamberg in 1872. The descend-
Further Reading
See also: Divine Waters of the Oru-Igbo (Southeastern Nigeria); Sea Goddesses and Female Water Spirits; Serpents and Dragons; Water Spirits and Indigenous Ecological Management (South Africa); Zulu (amaZulu) Ancestors and Ritual Exchange; Zulu (amaZulu) Culture, Plants and Spirit Worlds (South Africa).

Wenger, Susan (1916–), Yoruba Art, and the Oshogbo Sacred Grove

Susanne Wenger was born in 1916 at Graz, Austria. She arrived in Nigeria in 1950 and this marked the beginning of her involvement with Yoruba religion. Before coming to Nigeria, she had exhibited her works in Paris, Zurich, Austria, and other parts of Europe. Ajagemo, a high priest of Obatala (god of whiteness), introduced her to Yoruba religion in Ede and there she began her artistic works for the gods. The first of such works was the reconstruction of the Soponna cult at Ede and subsequently the renovations of the shrines of other gods in the Osun groves at Oshogbo. Her main work over the years has been the constant reconstruction, renovation, and conservation of the shrines in the Osun Oshogbo groves. The fusion of art and religion is at the core of Susan Wenger’s art, and she says the singular purpose of her work is to protect the sacredness of nature. Her works present a mixture of architecture, religion, and art.

Works of art consist of two elements, the inner and the outer, as well as two levels of knowledge, esoteric and exoteric. The esoteric knowledge level usually informs the inner element of art through knowledge, which is informed by the artist’s intended meaning(s) for the work of art. This knowledge is accessible to a few people, the artist and/or cultic functionaries in the case of religious art. The outer element of art gives expression to the inner element and manifests at the esoteric knowledge level, for it is accessible to all. It is expressed in aesthetic values and decorations. The outer element gives the work of art its visible and audible qualities. Both elements are significant and affect the performance/presentation of any work of art.

The site where Wegner carries on her art is the Osun grove. The Osun grove is located at the outskirts of Oshogbo town in Nigeria. It is an expanse of land fenced round, within which one finds the Osun River, Osun shrine, shrines for other Yoruba deities, and sculptures for the deities by Wenger and her assistants. The grove is a blend of fauna and flora and is usually a quiet and serene place. The art of Susan Wenger at the Osun grove in Nigeria exhibit the influence of both the inner and outer elements of art in Yoruba religion. The sculptures, put in place by Wegner and her assistants, are expressions of and means of conservation in Yoruba religion. The forms of the sculptures are wholly organic, with components used in proportions determined by religious injunctions. The cement is mixed with a prescribed amount of the grove’s red Earth. To ensure the conservation of nature in the grove, Wenger has been able to get the Osun grove onto the list of the Nigerian Antiquity conservation areas. Understandably, farmers who perceive these areas as a means of livelihood opposed the move vehemently, but with adequate information on the usefulness of such a stance, harmony has been achieved. Because Susan Wenger is a Yoruba by conversion/calling and not by birth/origin, her art presents some paradigms that may proffer significant import for existing relations between nature and religion.

The Yoruba hold that a combination of art and ritual remains indispensable to communication between humans and the divine. Further, nature is perceived as being sacred. Consequently, the Yoruba are more apt to think of art as an act of creative imagination (oju ona), executed with skill and an understanding of the subject, rather than see art as an object. For the Yoruba then, artistry is the exploration and imaginative re-creation of received ideas and forms, usually from the divine. Art is a vital part of being, and creativity is associated with the divine. This stance informed the state and significance of the Osun grove prior to Wenger’s work. Emphasis was on verbal art and recitations rather than a prevailing need to erect sculptures for the Osun gods, as done by Wenger and others. While it is true that figures of Yoruba gods existed prior to Wenger’s artwork, this was more at the level of individual worshippers – an example is the twin figures (ere Ibeji).

The shrines of the gods are for them a ceremonial home, while the sculptures embody their myths. Embedded in these myths are characteristics and taboos of each god. The main features of Susan Wenger’s sculptures are life-size or larger figures and bulging eyes. Both features are known characteristics of Yoruba art, in pre-colonial times and presently. In addition, the bulging eyes are signs of spiritual power in mythology and religious experiences, depicting a higher consciousness. Her figures are usually larger than human figures, but these sculptures are representations of deities and records of mythology. She sometimes works with assistants in the restoration of these shrines within the grove. Most of these assistants are artists and adherents of Yoruba religion. Some of the sculptures produced by Wenger and her assistants in the Osun grove at Oshogbo include: Ontotoo (a senior deity in the heavenly abode), Obatala (the deity of purity and
whiteness), and Iya moopo (protector of all women’s crafts and trade). These figures are characterized by a blend of fauna and flora. Natural vegetation can be seen clinging to the shrine while monkeys, birds and other animals visit at their pleasure. Wenger’s sculptures for the gods and goddesses are therefore at home in nature. These sculptures enhance the vividness of the deities to observers and worshippers alike.

The cooperation between religion, nature and culture in the Osun shrine could best be described as a collaborative phenomenon. Features of the sculptures emanate through myths from the people’s religion and cultural ethos. Whereas nature nurtures the sculptures, religion and culture manifest themselves through them. Wegner and her assistants further collaborate in the Osun grove by combining their intellectual endeavors.

The resilience of Yoruba religion is being manifested continually within and outside Nigeria. The sacred grove of Osun Oshogbo is a big monument where the intertwining of the flora and fauna with the aesthetic presence of ritual artwork coexist. The grove serves as a conservation matrix and, at the same time, proclaims the record of Yoruba myths and deities; in so doing, it contributes to the vitality of Yoruba religion worldwide.

Oyeronke Olajubu

Further Reading


See also: Sacred Groves of Africa; Yoruba Culture (West Africa); West Africa.

West Africa

West Africa is a vast region, encompassing a land mass of 2.4 million square miles, bounded on the north by the Sahara Desert, on the west and south by the Atlantic Ocean, and in the east by the mountain ranges along the Nigerian-Camerounian border. It is Africa’s most populous and diverse region, with nearly a third of Africa’s 800 million inhabitants. Its northern limit, the Sahel, receives less than 500 mm of rain per year, concentrated in a short dry season, but it is traversed by two major rivers, the Senegal and the Niger, which bring life-giving water for human settlement and irrigated or flood-plain agriculture. As one moves south, rainfall increases and becomes more regular. In the Sudanic region, rainfall ranges from 500–1100 mm, the rainy season is longer, and vegetation is lusher. It was in this region that major African kingdoms developed, centered on control of the trans-Saharan commerce. Still further south, are Guinean forests which receive rainfall from 1100–3000 mm, whose lush vegetation sheltered tsetse flies and African Sleeping Sickness, which protected its inhabitants from the Sudanic kingdoms and their cavalry-focused military power.

These climate zones tend to correspond with religious affiliations. Today, the Sahel is overwhelmingly Muslim; some areas have been Muslim for over a thousand years. The Sudanic region is predominantly Muslim, but includes notable communities of followers of traditional African religions, most notably the Dogon of Mali, and also Christians, most notably the Mossi of Burkina Faso. Islamic communities are much newer in the Guinean forest areas and remain distinct minorities behind substantial Christian and traditionalist communities along both the Upper and Lower Guinea coasts. Islam tended to follow trade across the Sahara to the trading centers of the Sahel and Sudanic regions, and was a weaker influence in forest areas that relied on human porterage to transport goods through forest zones where African Sleeping Sickness was endemic. Nature is a critical aspect of African traditional religions in the Sudanic region and forest zones of Upper and Lower Guinea.

West African traditional religions are monocentric; that is, they focus on a supreme being who created the universe and is the source of all life-enhancing powers. They also emphasize the role of lesser gods or lesser spirits and ancestors. Particularly in the Sudanic region and along the Upper Guinea coast, the supreme being tends to be associated with the sky and with rain. For example, the Diola of Senegal address their supreme being as Emitai or Ata- Emit, which means “of the sky,” and call rain “Emitai ehlahl,” “falling from God.” Given climates where plants wither and die during the long dry season and return to life overnight after the first rains of the year, it is no wonder that the supreme being as giver of life is closely linked to the sky and to life-giving rainfall. This is particularly true in the Sudanic region and the northern part of Upper Guinea. In Lower Guinea, where rainfall is less of an issue, Earth goddesses attain greater prominence. Lesser gods and spirits may also be associated with rain, the ocean, particular rivers or springs, forests, fire, or with the forces of procreation.

Creation myths associated with particular religious traditions provide important insights into their representations of nature. For example, Dogon religious traditions describe various ways in which the Earth was created, but in all of them, an initially androgynous creator god becomes a predominantly male god in the process of creating the universe. As creation continues, this supreme being, Amma, becomes identified with the sky and the life-giving properties of rain. Amma rapes a passive and voiceless Mother Earth and fathers a solitary trickster figure, the jackal, which wanders the Earth seeking a partner. It is Amma’s breath, nyama, which is seen as a dynamic, life-enhancing power that flows throughout the universe.
It is embodied in the moist, serpent-like Nummo, who purify Earth with the power of the First Word, which is identified with cloth made out of natural vegetation, twisted into coils in a primordial loin-cloth. As other disruptions in the creative process occur, the Nummo bring new, more sophisticated Words to restore order. The last and most complex is associated with the powers of the forge and of agriculture, which work in tandem restoring the Earth’s life-giving powers and bringing order out of chaos. In Dogon cosmogenic traditions, one finds a common dichotomy between the settled areas of villages and towns and the dangerous, solitary chaos of the bush. Among the Bambara, the supreme being is initially seen as a seed and agriculture is central to their religious life. As part of their transition to adulthood, Bambara boys are initiated into the tyiwara society, which celebrates the role of an antelope deity, Tyi wara, in introducing agriculture to the Bambara, and the necessity of performing agricultural rituals to ensure the fertility of the land.

Other myths describe agriculture in more disruptive terms, seeing the act of planting seed and pounding harvested grain as the reason why the supreme being withdrew from a place just above the world, to a safer place high up in the heavens. Other myths describe creation in terms of their observations of the natural order. Thus, the Yoruba describe how the supreme being, Olo dumare, gave a lesser god, Obatala, a chicken and a shell filled with sand and told him to create a world. Obatala poured the sand on the primordial waters and placed the chicken on it. It began to scratch in its constant search for food, and quickly spread the sand out, creating the dry Earth. Then Obatala began to create other living things from clay and did so in an orderly fashion, until he became drunk on palm wine and began to create deformed people and animals.

The gods and lesser spirits themselves reveal important ideas about West African representations of the natural order. The Fon and Ewe of Lower Guinea group their deities in three pantheons corresponding to the three most important realms of the universe. Mawu-Lesa, a complex god that is both female and male, heads the sky pantheon. Their children and grandchildren are associated with the pantheon of earth gods and the pantheon of ocean gods.

In many West African societies, the Earth is seen as a goddess. This is not only true of the Dogon, but is equally true for the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria and the Ashanti of Ghana. Ala, the Igbo earth goddess, guards the fertility of the land and is closely associated with the enforcement of moral codes. The Igbo term for morality, omenani, refers to “what happens on our land.” Prohibited actions can render the location of such acts barren and incapable of producing crops. This is true of the Diola as well. Asase Ya, the Ashanti earth goddess, is also linked to the maintenance of the moral order and of fertility.

Similarly, the Yoruba’s Ogboni Society, associated with a male Earth god, is responsible for conducting the judicial investigations into violent crimes; the shedding of blood is regarded as a profanation of the Earth. “The Beng of the Ivory Coast also have a male Earth god, whose priests, the Masters of the Earth, play an important role in reconciling the social order of humanity and the life-enhancing powers of the Earth. To the Beng, the Earth is all-knowing, able to distinguish between lies and truth and with a long memory as to the ritual obligations pledged to him when seeking his assistance. As Beng establish villages, the Master of the Earth ritually plants a Kapok tree, marking the space as one of human habitation, as opposed to the forest. This planting also permits the development of family life, especially sexual relations without the danger of conceiving a forest creature, a problem if sexual relations occur in lands unseparated from the bush. The Beng also worship lesser earths, refractions of the earth god, but capable of assisting them with more local tasks and punishing them for neglecting their obligations. The Earth is seen as so powerful that one day of each six-day week is set aside for his worship.

Many gods are associated with bodies of water. Thus, the Bambara of Mali link a stretch of the Niger River with the water spirit, Faro, who is a guardian of fertility. Yemoja, Oshun, and Oya, three Yoruba goddesses, are all associated with rivers, whose apparent stillness and depth mask powerful currents that can overcome human initiatives. The Igbo’s goddess of wealth, Idemili, is associated with the river of the same name. These goddesses can bestow riches in children and in economic power to their devotees. The Diola identify a whole category of spirits, the ammahl, with water. They are often linked to some of the most powerful Diola shrines or can remain independent, revealing themselves only to a chosen few. Powerful gods of thunder, like the Yoruba’s Shango and the Igbo’s Amadioha, demonstrate the destructive power associated with rainfall.

Other gods are associated with diseases. Afflictions can either be a source of punishment for wrongdoing or neglect of one’s responsibilities or a summons to take on ritual responsibility. Thus, the Diola’s family shrine of Hupila seizes men with a disease that makes their body feel like it is bound with rope. Part of the healing process involves building a shrine; it may require learning to become a priest as well. The Diola fire spirit, Gilaite, associated with blacksmithing, punishes thieves or their families with leprosy. The Yoruba deity, Shopona, and the related Fon and Ewe Sakpata, used to be associated with smallpox, seizing those who survived it as its priests and killing those who had violated its edicts. Since the elimination of smallpox, however, this deity has found a new disease to manifest its power, HIV–AIDS.

Finally, trickster gods are common in much of West Africa where they are closely associated with particular animals who are regarded as extremely wily and outside of
human control. Thus, the Akan’s Ananse is identified as a spider. The Dogon’s tricksters are identified with foxes and jackals, who speak in crude, highly symbolic language, the language of divination. These deities are not evil, but forces of disorder that disrupt human attempts to impose order on the world. They introduce diseases, natural disasters, animal pests, and powers of the bush against the people of settled townships. In the case of the Fon’s trickster, Legba, and the Yoruba’s Eshu, they portray the disruptive power of unsocialized, that is, natural, sexual powers and the disorder that they engender. All of these tricksters provide vivid evidence of the persistent ability of natural forces to disrupt humanity’s attempts to construct a world order. They provide powerful explanations of human suffering in a universe where humans exert little control.

In many West African religions, human beings are also linked to a variety of non-domesticated animals. In much of West Africa, there is a complex theory of the soul, which is created from aspects associated with one’s patrilineage, one’s mother’s patrilineage, and one’s grandparents’ patrilineages. Each of these parts of the soul is symbolized by a particular type of animal, with whom that person shares a portion of his or her soul. When the human is born, so is the animal. These animals suffer whatever pain the human suffers and vice versa. The death of one threatens the life of the other. Lineages respect the type of animal associated with them, as well as those animals associated with their paternal and maternal ancestors. In Diola society, these animals are said to live in sacred forests or other special places associated with a lineage. They are not normally hunted or eaten, even by people outside the lineage. These animals may range from mamba snakes, to hyenas, to hippopotami. In Dogon traditions, kinship with particular animals reflects the descent of all animals, plants, and people from the heavens to the Earth and the special ties that people shared in the particular portion of the celestial granary that descended to Earth carrying the necessities of Dogon civilization. This type of totemic connection is primarily a reflection of one’s patrilineage. This emphasis on spiritual ties between humans and wild animals transcends the dichotomy between settled land and the bush, which is so central to many West African religions.

Animal sacrifice is central to most West African rituals. Spoken prayer is seen as containing a spiritual power in itself. This can be added to through offerings of water, milk, palm wine, millet beer, or even gin, all of which are seen as containing a life-force that can enhance prayer. The offering of the life-force of an animal, represented by the blood which is poured on the shrine, however, gives still greater power to the prayer, enhancing its ability to pass into the world of spirits or divinities. The cooking of certain meats which are consumed by the human congregants, and the blood, which is consumed by the spirits that are invoked, creates a type of ceremonial meal in which divinities and humans both partake.

West African oral traditions include a number of anecdotes about African rulers who were unable to end droughts through the offerings of sacrifices at royal shrines. In each of these accounts Muslim scholars offered successful prayers to bring rainfall and led the rulers to conversion to Islam. For example, the ruler of eleventh-century Ghana converted because a Muslim teacher was able to pray for rain, when he had failed. More recent testimony by traditional religious leaders tends to emphasize the idea that the frequent droughts of the last quarter of the twentieth century were caused by peoples’ abandonment of their religious obligations and their embracing of Christianity or Islam, which have had little to say about environmental issues. Among the Diola of southern Senegal, this has led to the intensification of a prophetic tradition, focused on the performance of rain rituals. The most famous of these prophets, a woman named Alinesitoué Diatta, also rejected French agricultural schemes which would have shifted the emphasis of Diola agriculture from rice to peanuts, and led to the cutting down of the forest areas within Diola territory, which she saw as linked to the persistent droughts. She also criticized those Diola who converted to Islam and Christianity and refused to participate in Diola rituals or observe a Diola day of rest for the land, every sixth day. The rapid growth of Islam and Christianity, coupled with their relative neglect of rituals focused on nature, occurred at a time when droughts and desertification became increasingly severe. Whether or not the perception that religions indigenous to West Africa can more effectively supplicate the powers that govern nature will affect the continued growth of these newer religions remains to be seen. Conversely, one might predict that the instrumental aspects of Christianity and Islam that are focused on links to the powers of nature may become accentuated by African spiritual concerns brought by their converts and the growing ecological crisis affecting so much of West Africa.

Robert M. Baum

Further Reading
Western Esotericism

"Esotericism" has become a highly popular term during the last three decades. Like “New Age,” it is a catchword for a lot of quite disparate religious or cultural phenomena, and its usage in the wider public differs considerably from its usage in academic contexts. Since its first appearance in the nineteenth century, a definition of “esotericism” often refers to the meaning of the Greek esôteros (“inwardly,” “secretly,” “restricted to an inner circle”) and lays the main emphasis on secrecy and concealment of religious, spiritual, and philosophical truths. This characterization turned out to be not very helpful, given the fact that a lot of “esoteric” knowledge has been published and openly discussed – especially (but not only!) in the twentieth century. Therefore, other definitions have been proposed. Among the most influential is the concept of Antoine Faivre, who became the mentor for “history of esotericism” as a new branch of religious studies.

Systematic Definition

Faivre argued that esotericism should be defined systematically as a certain worldview or as a means to conceptualize cosmos, nature, and humankind. He distinguishes six characteristics, four of them being crucial for esotericism and two being indicative only in certain contexts. 1) The most important characteristic is the doctrine of correspondences. In this view, each part of the visible and invisible universe is connected and every single part mirrors one of the others in a symbolic way. The correspondences take the form of two different approaches to reality: following the well-known principle of “Microcosm-Macrocosm,” there exist obvious or veiled correspondences between different layers of the material and immaterial world (e.g., between the planets on the one hand and metals, the human body, or plants on the other). But correspondences may also exist between nature (or cosmos), history, and revealed texts. Nature and scripture are believed to be in harmony, which is the key to understand medieval and early modern talk of the “book of nature” being revealed like the Bible itself. 2) The doctrine of living nature conceptualizes the universe as a dynamic system, in which all interconnected parts are animated. This is also an essential assumption of a particular branch of the Western philosophy of nature, as it is of magic since ancient and Renaissance times. 3) Imagination and meditation is a characteristic that follows the doctrine of correspondences, insofar as it implies the possibility of meditation between the higher and lower world(s), by way of ritual and symbolic performance or through revelatory agents like angels and intermediate spirits. Imagination is not only a form of clear concentration necessary for magical rituals but was also depicted in early modern times as a particular “organ of the soul” that can establish a cognitive and visionary relationship with an intermediate world. 4) Borrowing a term from alchemy, the fourth characteristic is called experience of transmutation. It denotes the process of personal initiation on a spiritual path, either through a social event (like in freemasonry) or as a private change of status. Transmutation also means that the old person is entirely left behind, providing room for a new birth into wholeness and illumination, a process of regeneration and purification.

In addition to these four “intrinsic characteristics” – meaning that all of them have to be present to qualify a cultural setting as “esoteric” – there are two relative or non-intrinsic features that often occur. One (point 5) is called the praxis of concordance, which alludes to the frequent attempt to display the commonalities between two or more – ideally even all – different traditions. Prominent examples are the belief in a priscus theologia (“old theology”) or a philosophia perennis (“eternal philosophy”) that captured the imagination of medieval and Renaissance scholars. Another example is the seminal work of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society; Blavatsky searched for a common denominator of all spiritual traditions and presented her Theosophy as the revelation of the secret key to true (and universal) knowledge. A final component (point 6) can be seen in the transmission of esoteric teachings from master to disciple. This is either a sociological characteristic indicating the necessity of being introduced to a spiritual tradition or the legitimization of authority and “authenticity” by means of an “age old” chain of masters. For instance, Freemasons present King Solomon as the founder of their tradition; Rosicrucians refer to the mythic figure of Christian Rosenkreutz; in contemporary parlance the notion of “avatars,” “ascended masters,” or the “Great White Brotherhood” plays a decisive role in securing authenticity and spiritual identity.

Esoteric “Disciplines” and Their Historical Development

Applying the systematic characterization of esotericism mentioned above to the Western history of science and religion, several cultural phenomena show their obvious relation to esotericism. Furthermore, there were times of thought in Western history that appear crucial for the evolution of esoteric thinking. To begin with the esoteric “disciplines,” it might be argued that astrology provides a key to all other esoteric explanations of the cosmos. It directly follows the doctrine of correspondences to search for the
symbolic – rather than the causal – relation between the astral world on the one hand and mundane or human events and dispositions on the other. Astrologers try to translate the all-encompassing dynamics of the world’s visible and invisible features into the symbolic language of planetary energies, thus creating a fundamental tool for esoteric interpretation. *Magic*, then, can be described as the practical application of astrological symbolism. If one wants to perform a ritual, it will be advisable to assemble those components that are likely to support one another because they belong to the same cosmic principle; for a “Venus ritual” one might burn incense of Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), use an Aventurine stone, put up the Tarot card “III – The Empress,” light green candles, chant the vocal “a,” and so on. Those features are thought to “invite” the cosmic energy of Venus and help the magician to focus her or his concentration (imagination) on the ritual’s goal.

Magic and astrology share a lot with the third esoteric discipline – *alchemy*. Using astrological symbolism and magical ritualizing, alchemy is focused on the inter-relationship between mind and matter. But rather than being interested in the mere transformation of lower material into higher material – to turn lead into gold – the alchemists regard this process as mirroring the purification of the adept’s soul, thus connecting the alchemist to the hidden levels of nature. It is important to note that both alchemy and magic are not opposed to “science.” Until the eighteenth century, they were inseparably linked to the scientific disciplines. Although alchemy and magic build on a holistic model of the cosmos, their relation to nature was by no means a “sacramental” or devotional one. Alchemy and *magia naturalis* in many respects aimed at subordination and control of nature (through nature’s “purification” and “improvement”), even when animistic or pantheistic perspectives were involved.

From a historical point of view, the origins of esotericism unquestionably are to be found in antiquity and can be regarded as a confluence of philosophical and religious assumptions. The Stoic philosophy conceptualized the universe as a dynamic system of interrelated and animated parts, whereas Middle and neo-Platonism contributed to esoteric thinking with its idea that the material world is only a very insufficient mirror of the “real” world lying hidden in the transcendent or – as Christian Gnostics would have it – in man’s “sacred core,” which is undefined by “nature.” The Greco-Egyptian tradition attributed to Hermes Trismegistus (the “Thrice-Greatest Hermes”) as the divine revealer of universal truths contributed significantly to the formation of esotericism, especially with its macrocosm-microcosm doctrine and the enthronement of Hermes Trismegistus as the “founder” of the occult sciences. In late antiquity, astrology, magic, and alchemy were fully developed and enjoyed a high reputation, despite the fact that Roman and Christian emperors periodically tried to punish experts who exercised those discipl-
name but a few important protagonists of that time: Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) was among those arguing for a presence of spiritual dimensions in the material world, for which Immanuel Kant attacked him; the mysticism of Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) was adopted by philosopher of nature and alchemist Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782). The tension between a holistic esoteric worldview and the dualistic or mechanistic model established by Isaac Newton (who nevertheless wrote alchemical treatises and a commentary on the Tabula Smaragdina, which was attributed to Hermes Trismegistus himself) became even more imperative in the nineteenth century, when increased rationalization and mechanization of science, religion, and nature provoked a counterreaction. What Max Weber called the “disenchantment” of the world was answered by romantic authors in Europe and North America with an intensified focus on the wholeness and sanctity of nature. In doing so, these philosophers, scientists, and artists built on esoteric doctrines of “living nature” and “correspondences,” not to mention the revelatory aspects of divine knowledge now being “experienced” in nature. Although there had been trends of pantheism and nature’s admiration before, it was Romanticism that fully brought about a religious dimension of esotericism’s attitude toward nature. Like in today’s “deep ecology” – which is a follower of nineteenth-century thought – for Romantic authors, nature was not the mere object of study, but an object of adoration.

When in 1875 H.P. Blavatsky and others founded the Theosophical Society, a movement took on institutional form that must be regarded as a kind of turntable between nineteenth- and twentieth-century esotericism. Blavatisky’s works – especially her Secret Doctrine – remained standard reference-books for people searching for a philosophia perennis, now including even Buddhist and Hindu traditions that have been popularized by the Theosophical Society. In accordance with the esoteric tradition – and to some degree contrasting pantheistic Romanticism and Transcendentalism – Blavatsky and her followers described nature as a revelation of the primordial truths, still containing in essence the symbolic formula of the cosmos. In doing so, nature does not necessarily have intrinsic value, but it serves as a means for humans to understand the universe and their place within it. What counts is the perfection of humankind and the transformation of the spiritual self into a cosmic consciousness. This basic attitude is still discernable in those areas within the “New Age movement” where Theosophical traditions have been adopted.

In sum, one could say that esotericism is an integral part of the Western history of thought, influencing both science and religion. It employs a holistic model for interpreting the universe and focuses on the refinement and accomplishment of humans. As can be seen in alchemy, this also implies an “improvement” of nature (i.e., a transformation of impure matter into a state of pure essence). Hence, esotericism does not lead to any kind of environmental ethics, in which nature would have intrinsic value and rights. When nature is adored, it is adored for being a mirror of humankind’s primordial (and utopian) state of sacredness and perfection.

Kocku von Stuckrad

Further Reading

See also: Alchemy; Astrology; New Age; New Religious Movements; Paganism – Contemporary; Theosophy; Transcendentalism; Wicca.

Whales and Japanese Culture

Whales have for centuries been hunted and eaten by the Japanese, and whaling activities are intimately bound up with religious beliefs and practices. According to a widespread Japanese view, which stresses the interdependence of supernatural, human, and animal worlds, the whale is seen as a manifestation of Ebisu, the patron deity of fishing, who often disguises himself in this way when on festival days he approaches shrines to pray. Whales are believed to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of humans, and in return the whalers ought to utilize the carcass to the fullest – wastes are seen as an insult to the whale – and to take care of their immortal souls. Failure to do this may
cause the whales to turn into “hungry ghosts” that can cause illness, accidents and other misfortunes.

The souls of whales have in many whaling communities therefore been treated in ways similar to the souls of deceased human beings. Tombs and memorial stones can be found on at least 48 places, from Hokkaido in the north to Kyushu in the south, and annually at least 25 festivals (matsuri) and memorial rites (kuyô) are held in honor of whales. A tomb at Koganji (an old temple dedicated to whales) has been designated a national historical monument and marks the burial of 75 whale fetuses. In late April, the temple hosts elaborate memorial ceremonies with Buddhist priests reciting sutras for several days in order to help the souls of deceased whales to be reborn in a higher existence. Such services have a number of meanings. The temple priest may perform the memorial service in the belief that the whale will reach enlightenment and thus be released from rebirth into this world and enter Paradise as “Buddha.” Some villagers may believe that the whale will be reborn as another whale to be hunted. Finally, memorial services are held to ensure that the whalers, and the gunners in particular, are forgiven for the sin involved in taking life. Memorial services therefore carry special meanings to the gunners, and they frequently go directly to the temple upon returning home in order to conduct memorial services for the whales they have killed.

A number of lesser ceremonies and rituals are performed in order to repay whales for their personal sacrifice and thus secure safe voyages and rich catches. Whaling companies gather whalers and their wives for ceremonies before, as well as after, the commencement of the seasons, and in some places the wives go on pilgrimages to local shrines. Daily religious observations are conducted in front of the family Shinto altar, praying for the husband’s safety and good catches. Similar rituals are performed on the boats, where a piece of the whale’s tail may be offered to the Shinto altar. Rituals tie whalers to each other, to their families, and to the whales, thus giving the local residents both a feeling of the common heritage and meaning to their lives. This common cultural heritage is expressed and reinforced in festivals, songs, dances and local dishes of whale meat. Rituals give the community its distinct character: the set of Shinto deities is unique to each community and the festivals are different as well. But they are all variations of common themes based on a conception of the whale as a creature with an immortal soul and a worldview stressing the interdependence of supernatural, human, and animal worlds.

Successes as well as failures are explained in relation to the divine. Accidents may be caused by failure to repay the whale’s sacrifice through ritual neglect, but can also be caused by breaking taboos. There are several stories about the malevolent spirits of whales, some of them known throughout Japan. The most famous is the disaster that struck Taiji in 1878 when whalers broke an old taboo and attacked a right whale with calf. More than one hundred whalers lost their lives in the following gale. Such accidents, which have become part of the communities’ cultural heritage, and thus help in giving them their peculiar identities, have reinforced the validity of the taboo, a taboo that, incidentally, might carry some value in the conservation of the stocks.

Today many people, particularly in the Western world, see whaling as barbaric and eating whale meat as close to cannibalism. Anti-whaling groups have been especially critical of Japan, and their anti-whaling campaigns have ranged from ecotage and consumer boycotts to attempts to change Japanese views. At first sight, it seems they have had some success. Images of “cute” whales and dolphins adorn bridges, gateways, post offices, fire stations, manholes, and pachinko parlors. The number of Japanese who go whale-watching has soared, and visitors to “Whaleland” – a museum located in a whaling town – are invited to listen to “the messages of the whales.” Certainly, the Japanese have not been immune to Western discourses on whales.

At the same time, there is considerable resentment against Western environmentalists as well as the International Whaling Commission for what many Japanese see as a double standard. When the United States goes to great lengths to secure quotas of endangered bowhead whales to its Alaskan population while denying Japanese whalers the right to hunt the non-endangered minke whales, this triggers a national discourse that asserts the Japanese are victims of Western racial prejudices. It is felt that not only whaling but Japanese culture and its most important symbol, food, is under attack. In response, eating whale meat has acquired new significance: to some it has become a ritual act through which the partakers express their belonging to the Japanese nation. Moreover, whaling festivals, music and dances – most of which underscore the interdependence of the supernatural, human and whale worlds – have been strengthened and even reinvented to foster feelings of local identities in the name of cultural diversity.

Two global discourses on the uniqueness of whales and on the value of cultural diversity meet in Japan without creating contradictions. While “Whaleland” asks people to “feel like a whale,” its souvenir shop sells whale meat and other whale products. Compassion does not rule out consumptive use, and their coexistence is made possible by the holistic and contextual approach to nature found both in Buddhism and Shinto.

Arne Kalland

Further Reading
Whales and Whaling

Whales (or cetaceans, a term that also include dolphins and porpoises) have fascinated people all over the world and figure prominently in myths from the Greeks of antiquity to contemporary Amazonians and Californian New Age adherents. The best-known myth in Western societies is probably the biblical story of Jonah who was swallowed by a huge “fish” (usually believed to be a whale). The myth may symbolically represent Christ’s crucifixion, entombment and resurrection on the third day, with the darkness of the whale’s womb representing Hell. This is a very different perspective than that in an Inuit myth where the interior of the whale – its soul and heart – is a young and beautiful maiden who demands only one thing from her guests: never to touch the oil-lamp. But a raven cannot resist touching the sacred flame, the heart of the whale, whereupon the maiden dies. In this myth the whale’s interior may represent a Garden of Eden destroyed by human greed and curiosity. The myths disclose very different views on the human–nature relationship, but we should be careful not to draw premature conclusions about their impact on management ethics.

Several themes can be recognized in many of the myths. Some of them are trivial: whales assist people to catch fish, save them from drowning or engage playfully with human beings. Others are more spiritual. In many cultures whales are seen as embodied deities. In Greek mythology, Apollo turned himself into a dolphin to rescue people lost in a gale; in Japan whales might be regarded as the embodiment of the patron deity of fishing; and in Vietnam cetaceans receive human-like funerals to become “Angels of the Sea.” In most cases the whale is beneficial, but on Tikopia in the Solomon Islands stranded whales represent manifestations of potentially harmful spirits that must be appeased.

Another common theme is metamorphosis, particularly between dolphins and human beings. Both in the Amazon and in Micronesia, dolphins are believed to take human form to attend village celebrations, but the metamorphosis may also go the other way. According to Greek mythology, the first dolphins came into existence once the wine god Dionysus traveled between the Greek islands. Discovering that the crew plotted to sell him as a slave, he transformed the oars into snakes and filled the ship with vines. In panic the crew jumped into the sea where Poseidon, the god of the seas, took pity and turned them into the first dolphins. In many Pacific societies people are believed to transform into dolphins when they die, particularly if they have drowned, and the Haida in British Columbia believed that in such cases they would take the form of a killer whale. From here it was but a short step to regard whales as ancestors and guardians.

A related theme is anthropomorphism; whales live in societies remarkably similar to those of human beings. In Oceania, in the Amazon and on the American Northwest Coast, whales live in underworld societies where they behave and live much like human beings. People and whales live in parallel worlds; the whales may even be known as “underwater people.” The parallel marine and terrestrial worlds may also create a pairing of land and sea creatures, a common phenomenon in much of the Pacific. The ritual pairing of taro and whales seems to be particularly common in Micronesia, as on the Woleai atoll in the western Caroline Islands. One interpretation is that whales and taro constitute important binary oppositions symbolizing the dualities of land versus sea and male versus female. Similar pairing has been reported for killer whales and wolves among the Siberian Chukchee and American Northwest Coast Indians. In some cases each marine species has a counterpart on land.

Whale-related myths are not found only among whalers, but it is among whalers that we find the most elaborate beliefs and practices. Most whalers share with hunter-gatherers throughout the world the belief that the prey voluntarily gives itself to the hunter. This notion is strong among the Inuit and Japanese as well as in Micronesia. The exception are whalers in Western societies where, for example, Icelanders and Norwegians may rather regard whales as a gift from God. In either case, the whalers become tied in relationships of indebtedness. Svend Foyen, the Norwegian inventor of modern whaling and a very pious man, felt the same obligation to utilize all
parts of the carcass as has been reported from Alaska and Japan, and among the Faroese it may be regarded not only as laziness but also as a sinful act not to catch and accept this gift from God.

However, the notion of indebtedness is much stronger and more all-encompassing in non-Western societies, where whaling typically is seen as a sacred act that unites animals and human beings in webs of reciprocity. This is particularly noteworthy among the Inupiat in northern Alaska where people and bowhead whales are believed to communicate in subtle ways. In order to attract a whale, the hunter and his family must prove that they are worthy of the whale’s sacrifice. The whales are believed to be very knowledgeable and able to hear, see and smell over long distances and can immediately tell a good and generous person from a bad and stingy one. Great care must therefore be taken not to displease the whale, or else the animal will evade the hunter. Conflicts, noise, quick movements, dirt, blood, and death are all believed to be offensive to the whale and must be avoided.

A number of taboos have to be observed during the preparation for the whaling season, during the hunts as well as during butchering and distribution of the meat. Some of these are shared with other whaling cultures. Boats and equipment must be repaired, painted and cleaned before the season can commence, and new clothing prepared. During hunts, whalers may observe taboos pertaining to food, clothes, shelter and behavior. Among the Inuit, as well as in Norway, one should keep land clearly separated from the sea: the Inuit may refrain from eating caribou and berries during the whaling seasons, and in the past did not bring dogs to the ice at this time. Most Norwegian whalers will not bring waffles, goat cheese or rucksacks aboard the vessel. Nor should they mention terrestrial animals by their proper names. In Lamalera, Indonesia, this prohibition extends to places, whales, and persons as well.

In times of poor catches, whalers may perform magic rites. The Lamalera whaler may “turn the luck” by washing his mouth with holy water, formerly with blood. Sometimes the magic may involve deliberate breaking of taboos. A Norwegian whaler, who for a long period of time had been stuck in port due to adverse weather conditions, smeared horse excrement (doubly defiling because the dung came from a farm animal) on the cannon, the most sacred place on board. The storm calmed and the crew caught a minke whale just outside the harbor.

Most such beliefs and practices are shared with fishermen, as is the commonly found taboos against women in whaling. There are Norwegian whalers who still feel uneasy when women are on board, as they are believed to bring bad luck. But women have also more positive roles to play. One wife used to spit on the cannon at her husband’s departure, and intercourse shortly before the voyage is held to be beneficial to the hunt. The ambiguous position of women in whaling is very evident among many Inuit, and formerly, among the Northwest Coast Indian whalers as well. Although women are not allowed on the ice during whaling, the wives of whaling captains play crucial roles, to the extent that captains may say that “I’m not the great hunter, my wife is.” Before the season she may perform a ceremony directed to the moon asking for whales, and in another rite she may represent a whale symbolically being harpooned – it has even been suggested that she is the whale. The close association between the wife and whale is also expressed during the hunt. Details vary, but women have been, and some still are, severely restricted in their movements while their husbands are out whaling. Wives of Alaskan whalers sometimes remain quiet and move cautiously during the hunt. Researchers are divided whether to interpret this behavior as imitative magic acts meant to calm or to attract the whale. It is certainly a way to underline gender roles.

If everything is right (i.e., all preparations have been properly done, taboos have been observed, appropriate charms and songs have been used, and the captain’s generous wife is quietly at home and at peace with the community), the whale is believed to come and give itself as food to the people. In the past, this meant that the whale should be handled with respect. In northern Alaska, a successful catch initiated a ritual period during which time no sharp implement should be used for fear of hurting the whale’s shade. However, recently much of the respect has given way to merrymaking and a festive mood. But the captain’s wife is still given the flipper to keep for the whaling festival, and she may make the first ritual cuts and offer the whale a drink of water in a ceremony to welcome the whale to the community. The head is, at times with great ceremony, returned to sea so that the spirit can reincarnate and return as a whale.

Similar beliefs and practices have been reported elsewhere. On the Woleai atoll in the Caroline Islands, for example, an eight-day period of taboos and rituals was imposed after a pod of dolphins was caught, and during this time many of the gender roles were reversed. And in Japan, the tip of the tail is presented to the Shinto altar on board the whaling boat, and on shore people pay respect to the whales in Buddhist memorial rites.

In return for giving themselves to the hunters, people are morally obliged not only to make the fullest possible utilization of the carcasses but also to share them with others. Generosity and sharing are among the highest values in most hunting societies. And the whales will know to reward the generous. Among the Inuit in particular, there is a notion that the more one gives away, the more will come – a notion that, together with a belief in whale reincarnation, does not easily promote sustainable use of the resources. The whaling captain and his wife will feast the people several times during the year. The most important event is the whaling festival, nalukataq, held in
June after the end of the bowhead whaling season. Held inside a sacred ring, this three-day feast is a major social event among the Inupiat. But the feast is also held in gratitude and honor to the whales caught, and as a reenactment of the hunt itself. The meals mark a communion with the whale’s soul, thus uniting people and whales spatially and temporally. Hence, the feast not only marks the end of one whaling season, but begins the preparations for the next. The ritual distribution of meat is an invitation for the whales to come again the following year.

Since the 1960s, there has been a marked shift in many people’s perceptions of whales, particularly in the industrialized Western world. Several whale stocks had by that time become severely depleted and whaling became a symbol of environmental destruction. A new image of the whale was created and this was endowed with all the qualities we would like to see in our fellow human beings: kindness, caring, playfulness. An important element of this new image is the notion that whales are extraordinarily intelligent. This is widely believed, although the cetacean brain according to Dr. Margaret Klinowska – mammalian researcher at the University of Cambridge and a member to IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group – is quite primitive. In an article in *New Scientist*, she suggests that when the whales returned to live in the oceans some 20 to 40 million years ago, their brains were stuck at a stage today only found among the most primitive terrestrial mammals such as hedgehogs and bats. Another widely held notion is that whales, particularly small toothed whales like dolphins and porpoises, are spiritual beings.

At first sight these perceptions seem to resemble those held by many non-Western whalers. This is, however, to ignore one fundamental difference. According to the worldviews of Inuit and Japanese whalers, among others, the spirituality of the whales creates webs of reciprocity linking whales and whalers. Whereas their view helps to bridge the divide between animal and human realms, Western environmentalists tend to do the opposite. This is particularly the case with animal rights advocates, such as Tom Regan, who claims that whales have rights not to be disturbed in any way, whether for commerce, research or recreation.

The final connection between human and animal worlds is thereby broken. Not even beached whales may be utilized. The Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, have recently been denied access to stranded whales, which they regard as theirs by treaty rights. Seen as gifts from Tangaroa – God of the Ocean – beached whales have been utilized for their meat, oil, teeth, and bones, and access to them has become a symbol in the Maori struggle to safeguard their rights as indigenous people. The Maori, hosting the 3rd General Assembly of the World Council of Whalers, in 2001, underlined the importance of this issue.

Other native peoples see whaling practices as part of their cultural revival. In 1999, the Makah in Washington State took their first gray whale in about seventy years amid a storm of protests from animal rights groups. One of the leaders of the campaign against Makah whale hunting was Paul Watson of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. In a 1973 dream at Wounded Knee, Watson allegedly received an instruction from a bison to save all marine mammals, particularly whales. Whereas the U.S. Government defended the rights of the Makah, it reacted strongly against Canada when the Inuit there resumed bowhead whaling in the 1990s. In retaliation the United States has vetoed all discussions of marine mammal issues at the Arctic Council.

The International Whaling Commission has authorized “aboriginal subsistence whaling” that shows strong cultural ties related to whaling and the use of whales. The Japanese have long argued that they have strong cultural ties to whaling, but Norway did so only after resuming commercial whaling in 1993. Japan had not resumed commercial whaling as of 2004. Whale protectionists have tended to divide humankind into two opposing categories: those who care for the Earth versus those who seek short-term profit. As long as native peoples do not engage in trade (i.e., “live close to nature”), their takes of whales may not upset this dichotomy. In this worldview, whales serve as totem for “nature-loving” people: whales are not only used as an emblem by protectionists who care about nature, but protectionists also claim a ritual and spiritual relationship between themselves and whales. But the totem system of the protectionists is different from those reported from non-Western societies. In combination with a missionary zeal, it is more than a system of classification; it can be argued that it has unleashed a crusade against those with other perceptions and ideas. To whalers around the world the protectionists and their governments are therefore little better than fanatical fundamentalists, again in plain contrast to the importance of context found in many non-Western creeds.

*Arne Kalland*

**Further Reading**

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White, Lynn (1907–1987) – Thesis of

The “Lynn White thesis,” articulated in its most well-known form in White’s “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” (1967) was one of the most important interpretations of history to come out of medieval studies in the second half of the twentieth century. Linking the ethos of medieval Christianity to the emergence of what White called an “exploitative” attitude toward nature in the Western world during the Middle Ages, White’s ideas set off an extended debate about the role of religion in creating and sustaining the West’s increasingly successful control of the natural world through technology. The explosiveness of this debate, which still reverberates, was touched off by a confluence of factors: urgency in the late 1960s and 1970s over the newly discovered environmental crisis, White’s ability to reach an audience beyond that of professional historians, and the perception that White’s ideas constituted an “attack” on Christianity which needed to be answered before additional damage was done to the value of conventional religious beliefs. Alongside and to some extent at odds with this debate, were the responses to White’s work by medieval historians and historians of technology. These historians, concerned with specific issues raised by historical evidence and methods, found much to criticize about White’s arguments, yet acknowledged White as the founder and shaper of the new field to which they themselves now belonged. White’s ideas, and the range of responses to them, constitute an essential chapter in contemporary discussion about the relationship of religion and attitudes toward nature.

Lynn Townsend White, Jr. was the first American historian seriously to examine the role of technological invention in the Middle Ages. Although best known in the larger world for his ideas on the causes of contemporary environmental problems, within the scholarly community he was regarded first and foremost as a pioneer in the field of medieval technology. After receiving his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1938, he taught briefly at Princeton and Stanford until becoming president of Mills College in 1943. In 1958 he left Mills and until his retirement in 1974 was Professor of History at the University of California at Los Angeles, where he published Medieval Technology and Social Change (1962), demonstrating the profound effects of technological innovation on medieval society, and Medieval Technology and Religion: Collected Essays (1978). He continued to write and engage in intellectual debate until his death in 1987.

White’s work was informed by his view that not only were the Middle Ages the decisive period in the genesis of Western technological supremacy but that the uniquely activist character of medieval Christianity provided the “psychic foundations” of modern technological inventiveness. White was hardly the first scholar to associate Christianity with the birth of Western science and technology. Max Weber, Robert Forbes, and Ernst Benz, among others, had earlier suggested general causal links. However, White refined these arguments by pointing not only to broad elements within the Judeo-Christian tradition (the biblical mandate of Genesis 1:28 giving humankind “dominion over the Earth,” Christian compassion, the destruction of pagan animism, and the notion of matter as inert material) but also to the specific characteristics of Western monasticism as the fundamental cause of Western technological development. European monks, White argued, believed work to be an essential form of worship and embodied this assertion not only in the Rules governing their lives but also in their practice of their faith. Monastic communities spearheaded new technological techniques. Their cathedrals, in marked contrast to Byzantine churches, were typically equipped with mechanical clocks and organs, two of the most complex machines known prior to the early modern period. Additional evidence that medieval Christianity sanctioned technological advance can be found in manuscript illuminations, among them a ninth-century illustration of David’s army using a rotary grindstone driven by a mechanical crank to sharpen their swords while the heathen enemy uses an old-fashioned whetstone, and a fifteenth-century illustration of a personification of the virtue of Temperance, standing on a windmill, a bridle and bit in her mouth, spurs on her feet, holding eyeglasses and wearing a clock on her head. This kind of evidence, taken together with the record of medieval technological invention, White argued, demonstrated that deep-seated values embedded within Latin Christianity made the pursuit of technology appear morally virtuous, leading ultimately not only to Western technological dominance but also to the continuing impact on the environment of an aggressive stance toward nature.

White’s ideas on the relationship of Christian values, technological dynamism and environmental decline can only properly be understood within the context of his overall approach to the study of history. White believed that religion was perhaps the most important force
shaping human societies and, furthermore, that religious values often operated below the level of conscious expression yet had direct effects on human behavior. As a medievalist, he was inclined to see the Middle Ages as the wellspring of Western culture. He also thought that the study of history was not a merely antiquarian enterprise but held meaningful lessons for the present. Finally, despite his negative assessment in “Roots,” elsewhere he frequently asserted that technology was a fundamentally humane and liberating force, and he implicitly suggests an image of an inherently dynamic, progressive and Christian West in which “values” rather than politics or economics determine history. These underlying views informed his work, giving it a power and resonance beyond narrower historical interpretations.

The impact of White’s thesis on the community of environmentalists, philosophers of technology, and religion scholars concerned with environmental issues was immediate and long lasting. In the twenty years following the publication of “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” over two hundred books and articles used White’s ideas as a focal point. His ideas penetrated the popular press, appearing in *Time Magazine*, *Horizon*, *The New York Times*, *The Boy Scout Handbook* and *The Sierra Club Bulletin*. The great bulk of these responses were to one particular aspect of White’s argument, his claim in “Roots” that Christianity inculcated a specifically “exploitative” attitude toward nature and consequently that Christianity bore “a great burden of guilt” for the current environmental crisis. Biblical scholars and eco-theologians, among them James Barr, Carl Braaten, John Cobb, and Joseph Sittler, argued instead that the Judeo-Christian tradition could more accurately be described as mandating a care-taking or stewardship relationship to the natural world; Christianity therefore was not part of the problem, but part of the solution to environmental issues. Guidance should be sought from those many elements within the Judeo-Christian tradition that mandated that humans should be the guardians of nature, not its despoilers. Paradoxically, although many eco-theologians argued vociferously against White, they could use his thesis to reinforce the view that environmentalism was at bottom a religious and ethical movement. Like White, they believed that religious values were the most effective antidote to environmental degradation and, like White, who had suggested that St. Francis be made the patron saint of ecologists, they believed that Christianity was a sufficient repository of environmentally sensitive attitudes.

Among historians and philosophers of technology, however, White’s thesis stimulated a rather different debate. These scholars called for a closer look at the history of Western attitudes toward nature, labor and the environment and questioned whether White’s characterization of medieval values might be overdrawn. In company with the eco-theologians – scholars such as Susan Power Bratton, Paul Santmire, Roger D. Sorrel, and Clarence Glacken – White found an appreciation for nature on its own terms and a sense that human use of nature and animals should be governed by spiritual and moral obligations found to be normative within medieval theology. A detailed study by Jeremy Cohen of the medieval exegesis of Genesis 1:28 showed that medieval commentators typically dealt with questions of God’s covenant and human sexuality, bypassing the issue of technological dominion of nature altogether. George Ovitt, Jr. argued, against White, that by the thirteenth century most monastic orders no longer directly performed work with their hands and, far from elevating manual labor in and of itself, consistently subordinated it to spiritual ends. A number of scholars provided evidence that non-Western and pre-Christian cultures also had records of environmental damage. Other scholars, including Carl Mitcham, John Passmore, Robin Attfield and others, found a sympathetic attitude toward human control of the natural environment in Classical, chiefly Stoic, writers, similarly cutting into White’s argument that Christianity had a uniquely aggressive approach to nature. Finally, some writers questioned whether White had done more than show an association between Christianity and technology in an age in which a religious perspective permeated every dimension of human life. Had White shown that religion was a cause of technological development, or simply that technological development taking place for economic and political reasons was framed in Christian terms by medieval and later people?

This broad range of responses demonstrated that the links between religion, technology and environmental decline were hardly as direct or straightforward as White had made them appear. Nevertheless, White’s powerful and original reading of history, which has shaped a generation of scholarship, remains the touchstone for current and future discussion.

_Elsbeth Whitney_

**Further Reading**


White, Lynn, Jr. *Medieval Technology and Social Change.*
Whitney, Elspeth. “Lynn White, Ecotheology, and History.”
See also: Ecology and Religion; Radical Environmentalism; Religious Environmentalist Paradigm; Religious Studies and Environmental Concern; Sittler, Joseph A., Jr.

**Whitehead, Alfred North (1861–1947)**

Alfred North Whitehead’s life and work can be divided into three relatively distinct phases: an early period of mathematics and logic (1885–1913), a middle period of epistemology and philosophy of science, (1914–1924) and a later period of constructive metaphysics (1924ff.).

In 1885 Whitehead became a fellow of Trinity College in Cambridge where he remained until 1910. His *Treatise on Universal Algebra* in 1898 won him election to the Royal Society in 1903, but the mathematical period was epitomized by *Principia Mathematica* I–III (1910–1913), co-authored with Bertrand Russell, Whitehead’s earlier student. *Principia Mathematica* argued that mathematical symbols are derived from intuitive schemes of logical reasoning. This rooting of abstract mathematical concepts in basic human activities anticipated a tenet in his later constructive metaphysics, as did his distinction between pure and applied mathematics, laid out in *An Introduction to Mathematics* (1911), which can be seen as a forerunner of the later distinction between eternal objects (EOs), or mere possibilities, and the actual occasions (AOs), which embody specific configurations of order.

In his middle period Whitehead worked mostly in London, where he taught mathematics at University College (1910–1914), and held a professorship in Applied Mathematics at the Imperial College of Science and Technology (1914–1924). Already in *The Concept of Nature* (1920) Whitehead aimed to overcome the “bifurcation of nature,” which is the result of a mind–body dualism but also follows from the epistemic dichotomy between “real” nature and “mere” phenomena. Whitehead’s way here departed from Russell’s. Since the apprehension of the world is part of the way the world is, “knowledge is ultimate” (Whitehead 1920: 22). Whitehead here laid the ground for his later doctrine of panpsychism (the view that mental properties apply to all things, including atoms).

In 1924 Whitehead moved to Harvard University where he remained Professor of Philosophy until his retirement in 1937. In *Science and the Modern World* (1925) he set out to account philosophically for the new physics of relativity and quantum theory. With relativity he argued that there is no simple location of things as assumed by Newtonian physics; space-time-matter makes up a unified field of internally related energies-and-events. With quantum theory he argued for a temporal atomicity, according to which the constituents of matter are not solid substances but ephemeral events (cf. Planck’s Constant). This view was later developed in his main work, *Process and Reality* (1929). In contrast to a mechanical view of nature, however, Whitehead endorsed a panexperientialist position. Actual occasions “prehend” their immediate past environment and possess a freedom in the process of their becoming; immediately after their actualization they perish and become the stuff for future processes of emergence, or “concrescence.”

Since *Religion in the Making* (1926), Whitehead assumed three ultimate principles, 1) creativity, or the chaotic energy presupposed by all actual occasions, 2) eternal objects as the source of information or possibility, and 3) actual occasions which combine creativity with some specific combination of eternal objects. Neither creativity nor eternal objects “exist” on their own, but only as ingredients in actual occasions. God is the chief example of these metaphysical principles. Just as anything else, God is an actual entity with both physical and mental aspects. God’s “consequent nature” is derived from the past occasions of the world, while God’s “primordial nature” is derived from the divine envisagement of eternal possibilities.

As said in *Process and Reality*, God is both a creature of the world, and the world’s creator (Whitehead 1978: 348). Accordingly, God is not the creative source of all that is (as in the Abrahamic traditions), but the formative source of order and novelty in the universe (as in Plato). God is therefore not omnipotent, but has the consistent will of stimulating the growth of complexity in the universe by offering divine “lures” to each actual occasion. God is only one agent among others, but is a formative cause in all worldly events. Moreover, God is one actuality among others, but God is unique by being an everlasting actual entity who never perishes. As everlasting, God encompasses all past reality, which achieves “objective immortality” by being preserved and evaluated in the “consequent nature” of God.

Whitehead considered his own thought as an “inversion of Kant’s philosophy.” The world cannot be construed on the basis of a perceiving subject; rather, mind and subjectivity are “superjects” which are co-determined by their environment and immediate past. Whitehead termed his own philosophy “organicism,” but his metaphysical scheme seems to be influenced by mathematics and physics more than by evolutionary thought. It has been up to later process thinkers such as Charles Hartshorne, John B. Cobb, David Ray Griffin and Charles Birch to develop the evolutionary and ecological aspects of process thought. In the science–religion discussion, Whitehead’s philosophy has been carried forward by Ian Barbour.

*Niels Henrik Gregersen*
Whitman, Walt (1819–1892)

Walt Whitman, the self-professed bard of the people, was born on Long Island in 1819. Whitman spent much of his life in Brooklyn, where he worked as a printer, school teacher, and journeyman. These experiences and the myriad people of New York who Whitman met as a result would later frame the ideas of democracy and equality at the heart of so many of his poems.

Whitman’s best-known collection of poems, *Leaves of Grass*, probably would have – like its author – fallen into utter obscurity had it not been for a letter of praise for the volume written by New England Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson extolled the volume for its unadorned language and bold treatment of nature in a letter written to Whitman, which the latter published in well-read papers for all to see. Whitman’s decision to do so was a successful marketing ploy: following the publication of this letter, the poet and his volume were vaulted into the literary public eye. It ought to come as no surprise that Emerson was taken by Whitman’s poetry: influenced by Eastern texts such as the Bhagavadgita, Whitman articulated many of the beliefs held and articulated by Emerson and other Transcendentalists, such as Thoreau, who was a welcome visitor at Whitman’s home in Brooklyn.

Whitman’s writing also demonstrates his affinity for the works of long-time friend, John Burroughs, and his talents as a naturalist. Readers of his *Specimen Days* will find detailed descriptions of the Midwestern prairie and the geology of the American West. The work also contains extensive lists of wildflowers and animals as well as keen observations concerning migration patterns of many bird species and panegyric praise for the immense power of the Mississippi River.

Walt Whitman was raised in a family with long-standing ties to the Quaker Church; however, any influence he might have received from the Society of Friends is eclipsed by his Eastern and Transcendent cosmology. Whitman, like Emerson and others, held that any idea of God is best understood in terms of a universal energy that manifests itself in every living creature. Although Whitman’s later writings do suggest a turn toward Christian theology, much of his *oeuvre* is marked by this sense of universal connection and ecstasy.

Whitman worshipped the physical: the blade of grass that revealed the oneness of the Earth and the cosmos, the prostitutes in Philadelphia, the odor of an armpit after a day of work. He saw a clear division between the soul and the body and contended that the fault of many religions is that they reject the physical while privileging the spiritual. In place of this ideology, Whitman suggested that we view the two aspects as married to one another, and he set about celebrating the divine within the maligned physical existence. To this end, he contended that the universe and all its transcendental splendor could best be found in the common elements of the natural world. Our willingness to step outside the constructs of society and self in order to revel in these elements allows us to actualize these ideas of universal connection in our own lives. This idea of universal connection is often expressed by Whitman in highly sexualized terms. In “Song of Myself,” Whitman depicts spiritual rapture through sexual union. This connection, he held, makes manifest the unity between individuals, their environment, and the divine.

Whitman’s belief that sexual union – both metaphorical and literal – grants access to the eternal was the cause of much controversy surrounding his work. His homoerotic overtones along with his unconventional and often explicit marriage of sexuality, nature, and God caused him to fall out of favor with Emerson, his initial champion. He was also fired from his governmental job at the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the U.S. Department of the Interior for the “obscene” nature of these beliefs. The controversy surrounding Whitman was heightened by his self-described role as a messianic figure. Convinced of the verity of his beliefs, Whitman saw himself as a sort of savior or oracle for the people, and he held that his “democratic literature” articulating this universal connection could help Americans fully actualize their spiritual imaginations.

These same elements of Whitman’s poetry are what
have allowed for his continued popularity. Whitman’s willingness to break out of hegemonic culture and its mores in order to celebrate the mundane and unconventional has ensured his relevance today. His belief in the organic connection of all things, coupled with his organic development of a poetic style that breaks with many formal conventions have caused many scholars and critics to celebrate him for his innovation. His idea of universal connection and belief in the spirituality present in a blade of grass succeeded in transmitting a popularized version of Eastern theology and Whitman’s own brand of environmentalism for generations of readers.

Kathryn Miles

Further Reading
See also: Bhagavadgita; Emerson, Ralph Waldo; Friends – Religious Society of (Quakers); Nature Religion in the United States; Religious Environmentalist Paradigm; Romanticism – American; Romanticism – Western toward Asian Religions; Transcendentalism.

Wicca

Wicca emerged in 1940s’ England as a highly ritualistic, nature-venerating, polytheistic, magical and religious system, which made use of Asian religious techniques, but operated within a predominantly Western framework. It arose from cultural impulses of the nineteenth century, in particular from the occult revival of the 1880s onwards and Romantic literary rediscovery of Classical ideas of nature and deity. Various threads were gathered together and woven into Wicca by Gerald B. Gardner (1884–1964), a British civil servant who retired in 1936 and lived in Highcliffe and London, England before moving to the Isle of Man in 1954. He visited archeological sites in the Near East, and joined esoteric groups like the Folklore Society, the Co-Masons, the Rosicrucian Fellowship of Crotona, and the Druid Order. Gardner claimed that the Fellowship of Crotona contained a hidden inner group of hereditary witches who initiated him in 1939 and whose rituals he wrote about in fictional form in the novel High Magic’s Aid (1949) under the pseudonym Scire. Gardner’s writing borrowed from many sources, including the work of magician Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), writer D.H. Lawrence (1885–1930), a ritual magic group called The Golden Dawn, Freemasonry, spiritualism, and archeology, to name a few.

According to Gardner, witchcraft had survived the persecutions of early modern Europe and persisted in secret, following the thesis of British folklorist and Egyptologist Margaret Murray (1862–1963). Murray argued in her book, The Witch Cult in Western Europe (1921), that an old religion involving a horned god who represented the fertility of nature had survived the persecutions and existed throughout Western Europe. Murray wrote that the religion was divided into covens that held regular meetings based on the phases of the moon and the changes of the seasons. Their rituals included feasting, dancing, sacrifices, ritualized sexual intercourse, and worship of the horned god. In The God of the Witches (1933) Murray traced the development of this god and connected the witch cult to fairy tales and Robin Hood legends. She used images from art and architecture to support her view that an ancient vegetation god and a fertility goddess formed the basis of worship for the witch cult.

From the 1940s on many Wiccans believed, based on Murray’s work, that they were continuing this ancient tradition of witchcraft. However, since the first appearance of Murray’s thesis, historians and other scholars have refuted her evidence and, over time, dismissed most of it. Most, though not all, Wiccans today acknowledge that there is little evidence for a continuous witchcraft tradition, but claim that their religion is a revitalization and re-invention of ancient folk practices that existed in pre-Christian Britain, even if they were not part of any organized tradition. Some Wiccans today continue to identify “The Burning Times,” as they call the witch persecutions, as their “holocaust,” even though historians have shown that the so-called witches of early modern Europe existed in the imaginations of their persecutors, though many may have participated in folk practices such as herbal healing that were prevalent at the time in the general population.

After the repeal of the 1736 Witchcraft Act in England (an act that made the practice of witchcraft a crime) in 1951, Gardner was able openly to publish accounts of Wicca under his real name in Witchcraft Today (1954) and The Meaning of Witchcraft (1959). Witchcraft Today brought public attention to Gardner and he made numerous media appearances promoting Wicca. Both books contained information on Wicca as it existed at the time and in the following years Gardner initiated many new witches. Covens also sprang up and operated according to the outlines provided by Gardner’s books. By the mid-1950s, Wicca had become relatively popular, at least in part because of Gardner’s love of publicity, which drew public attention to it. In the early 1960s it was exported to the United States by Raymond Buckland. Gardner died in 1964, but by that time his tradition of Gardnerian Wicca was firmly established.

The religion described in Gardner’s books and spread by his students takes nature as a central aspect of devotional life. Gardner’s ideas about god and goddess drew
from British literature and occult circles that promoted Romanticism’s fascination with the gods and goddesses of the ancient world. Over time specific deities such as Demeter and Pan were transformed into an archetypal mother goddess and an archetypal fertility god. According to historian Ronald Hutton this process was complete by the 1940s and represented post-war Britain’s desire for and fear of wilderness: “the domains that civilized humans had traditionally found most alien and frightening; they were those of the two deities to whom the modern imagination, frightened, jaded, and constricted by aspects of civilized living, had turned” (Hutton 1999: 50). The attraction of urban dwellers to deities that embody nature and rituals associated with seasonal changes that many modern people have lost touch with continues to be an important aspect of Wicca and among the reasons for its growth throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. Gardner’s rituals also offered an alternative to the modern world in that participants were nude and sexuality and the body were seen as sacred.

Four main rituals were celebrated on the four seasonal festivals described by Murray as the witches’ sabbats (Candlemas, May Day, Lammas, and All-Hallows Eve). Most Wiccans today also celebrate four other festivals: winter solstice, summer solstice, spring equinox and autumn equinox. These eight festivals make up the Wiccan “Wheel of the Year.” At each of these seasonal rituals the god and goddess are addressed in their aspects appropriate to the season, and they are embodied by the priest and priestess leading the rituals. For instance, on May Day the goddess/priestess as embodiment of giver of life and nurturer of new seeds is most prominent. Many contemporary Wiccans call this festival Beltain, an Irish name for “Bright Fire,” and weddings or “handfastings” are often performed at this time. A midwinter ceremony or Yule ritual might celebrate the return of the sun during the longest night and the rebirth of the sun god. Wiccan festivals are intended to remind participants of the cycle of life, of human death and rebirth, and the changes evident around them in the natural world.

Gardner’s Wicca was initially described as a fertility cult rather than a “nature religion,” although Wiccan perceptions of both male and female deities are linked to nature and regarded as empowering forces for both men and women. One of Wicca’s most well-known ritual texts – The Great Charge, written by Gardner’s one-time High Priestess and collaborator Doreen Valiente (1922–1999) from earlier versions – concentrates specifically on the Wiccan perception of the goddess as the world of nature. The “Charge” describes her as “the beauty of the green Earth,” “the white moon among the stars,” “the mystery of the waters,” and “the soul of nature who gives life to the universe.” The goddess’ male counterpart is also connected to nature and moves through The Wheel of the Year. He is The Lord of the Greenwood, Sun King, Corn King, Lord of Life and Death, and Leader of the Wild Hunt.

Wicca is a religion in which the divine is immanent; its goddess and god live in the Earth, the moon, the stars, the bodies of men and women. Humans, nature and gods are all interconnected and sacred. The basic ritual form of Wicca – the circle casting – illustrates another way in which the divine is in the world, not outside it. While different variations on circle casting exist, most circles are oriented with the four cardinal directions and these directions are typically associated with forces of nature: fire, air, water and Earth. Some Wiccans address the “powers” of a particular direction while others address the “winds” while casting their circles. In preparation for ritual work Wiccans shed their clothes or don special robes, then someone marks the perimeter of the circle with a knife or wand and the four directions are greeted and invoked, as a way of asking for the powers that they represent to be present. For Wiccans ritual space is thus oriented in relation to the natural forces identified with each direction, in order to remind participants of their relationship to the world around them.

Since Gardner’s first covens, Wicca has spread across North America, northern Europe, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, evolving, and at times mutating quite dramatically. Wiccans have only a few beliefs that most of them adhere to, and these include “The Witches Rede: An it harm none, do what you will,” and “The Law of Threefold Effect,” the belief that any action a person commits will return to that person threefold. As Wicca has spread to different parts of the world, debates about belief and practice have surfaced. For instance, in the Southern Hemisphere Wiccans disagree as to how the seasonal rituals of the Wheel of the Year should be celebrated, given that winter solstice/Yule in the Northern Hemisphere is midsummer in the Southern. In the United States and Canada, practices borrowed from North American Indians have been adopted by Wiccans and this cultural appropriation has been criticized by other Wiccans as well as by native people. But this debate means little to some Europeans who turn to Celtic, Saxon or Germanic traditions for inspiration, making links to the supposed indigenous traditions of northern Europe. Likewise, feminist Witchcraft, which was shaped by the American feminist movement, has had a profound impact on Wicca in the United States, and is in part responsible for the fact that many Wiccans have dispensed with the god and focus on one great goddess. In the United States in particular a multitude of derivations have developed, including Reclaiming, Faery Wicca, Dianic Wicca and Seax Wicca, all of which have in turn crossed back to Europe.

Both Gardner and Murray emphasized the importance of polarity, of goddess and god, and identified men with masculine qualities and the goddess with feminine energy and the goddess. However with the influence
of feminism and gay rights movements many Wiccans today believe that same sex couples can work effective rituals together and that men can embody goddess energy just as women can embody the god. Within Wicca there is much diversity of opinion concerning whether or not masculinity and femininity are essential qualities each sex is born with, and these issues remain controversial in some Wiccan communities.

The increase in Wicca’s popularity is partly due to the parallel rise in environmental awareness since the 1970s. Vivianne Crowley, a Wiccan priestess and author of *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age* (1989), notes the changing emphasis within Wicca from nature veneration to nature preservation: “Wicca . . . moved out of the darkness, the occult world of witchery, to occupy the moral high ground – environmentalism” (Crowley 1998: 177). Crowley asserts the centrality of the veneration of nature, which is “considered to be ensouled, alive, ‘divine’ . . . The divine . . . as a ‘force’ or ‘energy’ and as manifest in the world of nature” (1998: 170). She further points out that the processes of nature, such as “conception, birth, mating, parenthood, maturation, death” are portrayed in The Wheel of the Year.

However, Wiccans demonstrate a wide range of attitudes toward protecting the natural world. Some are radical environmentalists while others view nature more abstractly. The development of Wicca was influenced by idealized views of nature in the writings of English Romantics as well as more recent works of literature such as J.R.R. Tolkien’s description of the woods of Lothlorien in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954). Understandings of nature in Wicca also derive from Western esotericism, particularly as transmitted by nineteenth-century Romanticism. Nature, in esoteric thought, is a reflection of a greater divine reality or part of a greater magical totality, and as such it requires a different level of engagement. The esoteric theory of correspondences portrays the cosmos as complex, plural and hierarchical, with living nature occupying an essential place within it. Nature is at once both an intermediary between humanity and divinity, and imbued with divinity itself. “Nature” is often perceived by Wiccans as something different from “the environment.” For those Wiccan groups which retain a link to their heritage in high ritual magic and hence the Western esoteric tradition, there is every reason for a focus on inner nature due to the basic law of magical correspondence: humanity is a part of the cosmos, and therefore any operation performed on or in a person will affect the entire universe. In treating the self as well as nature as sacred center, Wicca follows in the wake of esoteric and occult philosophy, in which these are one and the same. While there may be a spiritual and/or magical engagement with nature, this does not necessarily translate into environmental action.

For some urban-dwelling Wiccans, imaginative descriptions of the natural world may provide a more “real” experience than an actual walk in the woods. Anthropologist Susan Greenwood observed that some Wiccans show no interest in nature other than as a backdrop for rituals, with celebrations held in the woods becoming in effect a celebration of the liberation of the inner self from the domination of the everyday world. “One Wiccan, when invited to go for a walk, cried off because it was raining and he might get his feet wet: ‘Can’t we just visualize it?’ he said” (Greenwood 2000: 113). The Wiccan response to nature is thus often confused, revealing both intimacy and distance as nature is shaped by the Wheel of the Year, sacred circles, and ritual to suit people’s needs for relationship with the Earth. There is a turn to nature as a source of revitalization, an attempt to reengage with a nature from which participants feel estranged, to reenchant the natural world which they feel has been exploited and dominated. The veneration of nature, the concern for the Earth, and the pantheism of seeing the divine in all of nature has led to an attitude of reverence for a romanticized wild, untamed landscape on the one hand, and to sadness or revulsion at human estrangement from this ideal, living in towns and cities away from the land, on the other. For some Wiccans veneration of nature and identification as “Wiccan” or “Pagan” manifests as a romantic attachment to the countryside, a dream of living away from towns and nurturing a closer relationship with nature. Some Wiccans do live in rural areas, but most continue to live urban lives and very few depend on the land for their living. Nature and Wiccans’ understanding of it are extraordinarily complex, and this is exacerbated by the diversity of contexts in which an examination of Wicca’s engagement with nature must occur.

Some Wiccans have become involved in environmental struggles as a way of putting their beliefs into practice. One of the most vocal of these is the American Starhawk, whose writings have been heavily influenced by feminist and environmentalist movements. Starhawk’s popular book *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (1979) is largely responsible for spreading feminist Wicca in the United States. Starhawk has also been the most vocal American Wiccan in promoting activism of all kinds and has involved herself in numerous protests that range from anti-nuclear demonstrations, to forest activism blocking logging in old-growth redwood groves in northern California, to anti-globalization resistance. Although much of her environmental activism has been in high-profile protests, she has also organized workshops combining watershed conservatism and forest ecology with magic and ritual. Other environmentalists also hold Wiccan beliefs and practice “eco-magic,” such as organizations like theDragon Environmental Group in England and both British and American Earth First! radical environmentalists. While Wicca and environmentalism do not automatically go hand in hand, although some Wiccans argue that they...
should, in practice Wiccans live their relationship to nature in different ways.

Wicca has become a global phenomenon and significant Wiccan communities can be found in most countries inhabited by significant populations of people of European descent, including Great Britain, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa, but Wicca has also spread to countries such as Japan that are closely linked to Western cultures by the global economy and media. Gardner’s original prototype of a coven meeting in the woods and dancing naked under the trees retains its attraction as a fertility religion that allowed men and women to feel closer to the natural world and to pass on their knowledge by secret initiation, but today it is as likely to be spread through internet sites and how-to books that can be ordered from online stores, even while it maintains a focus on nature.

Joanne Pearson
Sarah M. Pike

Further Reading

See also: Animism; Animism – A Contemporary Perspective; Aradia; Astrology; Circle Sanctuary; Donga Tribe; Dragon Environmental Network (United Kingdom); Druids and Druidry; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Ecofeminism (various); Eisler, Riane; Feminist Spirituality Movement; Freemasonry; Gimbutas, Marija; Goddesses – History of; Golden Dawn; Indigenous Religions and Cultural Borrowing; Middle Earth; New Age; Pagan Calendar; Pagan Festivals; Paganism – Contemporary; Pantheism; Polytheism; Radical Environmentalism; Reclaiming; Shamanism (various); Starhawk; Wicca – Dianic; Z Budapest.

Wicca – Dianic

Dianic Wicca, sometimes called feminist Witchcraft, began in Southern California in 1971, when Z Budapest and five friends met to celebrate the Winter Solstice. The time was ripe for a meeting of Wicca and feminism. Both were gaining in visibility. By 1969, “Marion’s Cauldron” was being broadcast over the airwaves regularly in New York City, and Central Park was the site of a 1970 “Witch-In” attended by over 1000. In the same year, some 50,000 people marched down Fifth Avenue in support of the Women’s Liberation Movement. A few years earlier, a small group of radical feminists calling themselves W.I.T.C.H. had publicly and theatrically linked the image of the witch to women’s empowerment. Arguing that all oppression, including the abuse of nature, was due to male domination, they saw themselves as resistance fighters, and proceeded to use Halloween costumes and guerrilla street theater to get their message across with drama and humor. Their success led to autonomous covens of W.I.T.C.H. springing up in major cities across the country.

W.I.T.C.H. was decidedly political, not spiritual. Like other feminists critical of religion, Budapest argued that the spiritual was political. She claimed that patriarchal religions had colonized women’s souls and her unique contribution was to embrace the image of the witch as a symbol of women’s empowerment and use it to create a feminist version of Wicca. Building on the then-popular belief in ancient Goddess-worshipping matriarchies, she called her new tradition Dianic Witchcraft after the Goddess Diana was independent of men added to the attraction of the name. Presenting as a new religion with ancient roots, the Dianic Craft incorporated many elements of Gardnerian Wicca, so many that it is considered a Wiccan tradition.

Dianic Witches do a radical feminist analysis of gender and power, seeing women’s oppression and environmental abuse as intimately linked and firmly rooted in patriarchal religions, in hierarchies that privilege the spiritual over the material, the mind over the body, and men over women. Like other Wiccans, they celebrate the Earth and the turning of the seasons. Unlike them, Dianics also celebrate women’s “blood mysteries” – birth, menstruation, birth/ lactation, menopause and death – which are understood as women’s ability to create life, sustain it, and return it to the Source. In doing this they attempt to link what they
believe is the sacred within them to the sacred around them in the natural world.

Divinity is envisioned as an autonomous female goddess. Some Dianics believe she is an entity, others see her as a metaphor for the Earth. Almost all agree that it is not necessary to believe in Goddess in order to experience her, as she is also understood to be immanent in nature as well as the interconnection between every living thing. The dynamic cycle of birth, life and death is represented in Goddess’ three aspects of Maiden, Mother and Crone and mirrored in the phases of the moon. This image of the Triple Goddess represents major stages of women’s lived experience, and provides a symbol with which they may identify throughout their lives. She is seen as the Original Creatrix, drawing all life out of herself in an act of divine parthenogenesis. She is the matrix from which all else arises. Acknowledging Goddess, the Divine Self, within themselves allows Dianics to spiritually give birth to themselves as they leave behind male-dominated and sometimes misogynist religious conditioning.

Unlike other Wiccans, Dianics do not incorporate concepts of male divinity into their practice and reject the belief in the need for sexual polarity in order to practice magic. Men are traditionally not allowed to participate in Dianic rituals nor become members of Dianic covens.

Hierarchy is seen as a patriarchal “thought form,” and most Dianic covens attempt to govern themselves by consensus or through a circle of elders, rather than incorporate the more familiar Wiccan role of high priestess. An exception to this is the McFarland Dianic tradition out of Texas. Developing independently from Budapest’s lineage, this feminist group functions with high priestesses and includes men. However its impact has been limited and the name Dianic usually refers to those whose spiritual roots can be traced back to that first winter solstice in Los Angeles.

At least two Dianic groups in the United States do a great deal of teaching, and welcome to their classes any women who are open to “Goddess consciousness,” whether or not they are or become Dianics. These are the Reformed Congregation of the Goddess (RCG) out of Madison, Wisconsin, and its affiliate, the Circle of Aradia (CoA) in Los Angeles. Literally thousands of women have passed through their training classes, making their influence felt far beyond their numbers would suggest. Although Starhawk – Witch, theologian and widely read author – is not Dianic, she has also had a significant impact upon the Dianic Craft, especially in the strong commitments to the environment and peace that are present in the practice today.

Wendy Griffin

Further Reading


See also: Aradia; Astrology; Circle Sanctuary; Ecofeminism (various); Eisler, Riane; Feminist Spirituality Movement; Gimbutas, Marija; Goddesses – History of; Pagan Festivals; Paganism – Contemporary; Reclaiming; Starhawk; Wicca; Z. Budapest.

Wilber, Ken (1949–)

Drawing on thinkers ranging from Plotinus and Aurobindo to Hegel and Piaget, and grounding his own thought in extensive meditation practices, Ken Wilber synthesizes modern science and traditional spirituality to provide a progressive understanding of cosmic, biotic, human, and divine evolution. In Up From Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution (1981), Wilber describes the three basic modes of human development: prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal. The prepersonal characterizes societies oriented by magical and mythical modes of consciousness. Personal consciousness emerges in a few elite persons thousands of years ago and eventually culminated in the mental-egoic consciousness of Enlightenment modernity. Unfortunately, mental-egoic or personal consciousness often (but not always) involves dissociation of ego-mind from body, emotions, nature, female, and God. Mental-egoic consciousness entails heightened death-anxiety, which people (especially men) have sought to assuage through Atman projects that seek to make the mortal ego immortal. The technological domination of nature may be understood in part as such an Atman project. Although alienated and dissociated both from nature and from God, mental-egoic consciousness may continue its evolutionary trajectory toward the centauric stage, which reintegrates mind/body while recognizing the perspectival and thus partial character of worldviews. In subsequent transpersonal stages, humankind would experience the divine presence in all phenomena, thereby generating compassion for all sentient beings. According to Wilber, all phenomena are manifestations of the divine, the Alpha and Omega of cosmic history.

Despite the drawbacks of mental-egoic consciousness, Wilber maintains that worldwide achievement of it and the institutions related to it (including constitutional democratic government, freedom of inquiry, sustainable economic development) could have a dramatic positive
impact on humanity’s treatment of nature. Rational-democratic societies do not make war on one another; moreover, they can alter their practices in ways that avoid environmental catastrophe, thereby making possible the continuing evolution of consciousness needed for the long-term well-being of the Earth and humankind.

In Sex, Ecology, Spirituality (SES) (1995) and A Brief History of Everything (1996), Wilber lays the groundwork for “integral” thinking. Deemphasizing his earlier emphasis on death anxiety and Atman projects, Wilber now seeks to unite the perennial idea of the Great Chain of Being, as informed by spiritual, cultural, social, and natural scientific evolutionary concepts, with a four-fold set of distinctions allegedly capable of analyzing all phenomena. Drawing on the notion of holons developed by Jan Smuts and Arthur Koestler, Wilber maintains that virtually all phenomena are wholes from one perspective and parts from another. A cell in an organism, for example, is a whole that includes parts, but is also a part of the organism. Emphasizing that holonic evolution generates emergent qualities, Wilber divides the Kosmos into four grand domains: physiosphere, biosphere, noosphere and theosphere. The physiosphere includes the non-biological features of the universe, including the stars and planets that arose in the billions of years following the Big Bang. The biosphere, the domain of life, depends upon the much older and much vaster physiosphere, but involves features that transcend the physiosphere. Finally, the biosphere gives rise to the noosphere, which includes complex sentient life such as mammals and humans. Again, the noosphere both depends on physiosphere and biosphere, but also transcends them, by exhibiting emergent characteristics, including self-consciousness, language, and rationality. The theosphere, which both includes and transcends the other three domains, refers to dimensions of consciousness that include what is traditionally understood by the notion of God.

In a controversial move, Wilber argues that just as the biosphere contains the physiosphere in the sense of comprising all its basic features (although plainly not its material expanse), so too the noosphere contains the biosphere in the sense of comprising all its basic features (although not its biotic mass), while adding new ones. Affirming that neither biosphere nor noosphere were “destined” to emerge on Earth, Wilber joins proponents of the anthropic principle in arguing that the cosmos is ordered such that biosphere and noosphere would eventually emerge somewhere.

To this vision of cosmic evolution, Wilber adds his four-quadrant analysis. The four quadrants are: Upper Left (UL), individual as experience internally; Upper Right (UR), individual as experienced externally; Lower Left (LL), collective as experienced internally; Lower Right (LR), collective as experienced externally. Consider how the four quadrants may be used to analyze someone purchasing tickets for a figure-skating competition. Seen from UL, the activity is the first-person experience of someone eager to witness athletic and artistic prowess; seen from LL, the person shares certain cultural views about sport, artistic expression, and so on; seen from the UR, the object of investigation is an organism whose constituent parts obey natural laws and whose behavior accords with predictable patterns; from LR, the individual’s actions are interpreted in terms of social, political, and economic categories. In SES, Wilber reduces the four quadrants to the Big Three: UR/LR, LL, and UL, which correspond to the topics of Kant’s critiques of pure reason, practical reason, and judgment. According to Kant, Weber, and Habermas, modernity’s triumph was to differentiate among domains (for example, religion, politics, art) that are collapsed together in pre-modern societies. Although the Big Three originally distinguished three legitimate modes of inquiry and behavior (natural science, politics/morality, and personal experience and aesthetic expression), eventually the UR/LR quadrants (natural and social sciences) marginalized the UL and LL quadrants, which take into account domains that can be understood only from the inside.

Wilber argues that a constructive, integral postmodernity will restore legitimacy to all four quadrants. Instead of viewing sentiment as an accidental feature of the cosmos, integral thinking adheres to Whiteheadian panpsychism, according to which all phenomena – even atoms – have at least some meager interiority. Greater interior complexity confers higher moral status on entities. Because a cow screams louder than a carrot, many people have fewer moral qualms about eating the latter than the former.

Although endorsing the valid ecological concerns of deep ecologists, Wilber criticizes them for holding “romantic” views involving worship of nature, especially when that “nature” in fact involves the same reductionistic materialism and systems theory that forms what Wilber calls “industrial ontology.” Authentic nature worship, as described by nature mystics such as Emerson, involves discerning that material nature is but the lowest-level manifestation of nature, understood as creative Spirit. A vigorous opponent of naïve yearning for pre-modern social formations, while simultaneously a critic of heedless technological exploitation of nature, Wilber affirms the dignity of modernity while acknowledging the crucial contributions of pre-modern peoples. Although his views are at times sharply contested, he is widely admired for his ambitious effort to integrate nature, humankind, and Spirit in order to form a constructive postmodernism that re-enchants the world without inviting personal and social regression.

Michael E. Zimmerman
Further Reading
See also: Deep Ecology; Ecopsychology; New Age; Perennial Philosophy; Transpersonal Psychology; Whitehead, Alfred North.

Wilderness Religion

The conceptual associations of religion with wilderness, and religion with nature, are enormously complicated, whether considered semantically, historically, epistemologically, metaphysically, scientifically, or ethically. The challenges of definition alone are daunting. “Nature” is one of the most semantically confused words in English. Definitions for “religion” abound, yet none is universally accepted. “Wilderness” offers no respite from confusion. Such semantic and conceptual tangles frame the account here, beginning with the apparent antagonism between the spiritual domain of religion and the material domain of nature.

If wilderness is conventionally associated with the natural, that is, the evolved composition, structures, and functions of the world, and religion is conventionally associated with the supernatural, that is, phenomena such as God outside the evolutionary pale, then how conceivably can religion be meaningfully conjoined with notions of wilderness? Heaven and all things godly – the supernatural – are sacred. And the Earth and all things wild – the natural – appear profane. Thus religion appears to be antithetical to wilderness and nature.

There is considerable evidence to support such a conclusion. Religion has long been associated with the cultural legitimation of the economic exploitation of the natural world. Although preservationists associate wilderness with those areas of the Earth that are “untrammeled,” that is, landscapes free of economic utilization where humans are visitors only, the religious mainstream tends to position nature as a resource provided by a supreme being to serve human needs. The natural world is conceptualized as “fallen,” as a material domain that, despite its fallen nature, offers redemptive possibilities. Through economic utilization and technological control the faithful might recover in part from the Fall, thus restoring the human spirit – which is associated not with the natural and material world but the supernatural and spiritual world.

On this account, relatively wild places, such as mountains, deserts, forests, and bogs, are conceptualized as the “ruined Earth.” Thus domestication, whether harnessing a wild river, mining gold from a mountain, logging an ancient forest, or draining a wetland, is religiously warranted as part of the recovery from the Fall. Apparently, with perhaps exceptions such as Native American and other Earth-friendly religions (e.g., Wiccans, goddess feminists), religion legitimates an assault on the wild Earth. So viewed, the metaphysical divide between the natural and the supernatural is insuperable.

Nevertheless there are strategies, especially for the religiously faithful who believe in the possibilities of a continuing revelation, by which wilderness, religion, and nature can be related. Lynn White, Jr.’s. famous essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (1967), can be interpreted as the beginning of a continuing reconsideration of the relationships between wilderness, religion, and nature. If we think of religious narrative as simultaneously describing a reality that is and prescribing a reality that ought to be, then the world’s religions can be influential in rethinking humankind’s place in, actions upon, and obligations to the Earth’s remaining wild and natural places. Such an analysis begins by attempting to uncover the religious sources of contemporary beliefs about nature and wilderness.

The idea of wilderness does not easily equate with the idea of nature. One conventional meaning of “wilderness” is that part of nature which is untrammeled or free (for example, as reflected in the language of the Wilderness Act in the United States of America). Wilderness connotes those lands which are part of the “pristine biosphere,” a term used by ecologists to denote natural systems continuing on evolutionary trajectories largely free of human influence. (Some analysts believe that such a notion of wilderness is a “received idea” that is scientifically untenable.) Many scientists, including conservation biologists and ecological restorationists, believe that the conservation and restoration of extensive core wilderness areas are essential to the future of life.

But “wilderness” does not have the same connotation as “nature.” Clearly, the former connotes habitat whose conservation is a necessary condition for continuing the evolved composition, structure and function of natural systems. As the history of science makes clear, the latter connotes an epistemic object for scientific study. Wilderness draws our attention to the world beyond ourselves. Nature draws our attention to the world that can be known.
scientically. Ironically, this distinction is grounded in a religious history of effects that is clearly evident in the writings of Frances Bacon and René Descartes at the advent of the scientific revolution. For them nature became an object of science, for it was through inquiry that humankind would be able to turn the natural world to our will, thus recovering from the Fall.

The distinction of the ideas of wilderness and nature does not imply that wilderness cannot be known scientifically. Scientists, such as wildlife ecologists, conservation biologists, and ecological restorationists, actively study wilderness ecosystems, however, is not to achieve control over the object of study through theoretical knowledge. Rather the end in view is the comprehension of the many circumstances and processes (from genetic to ecosystemic levels of organization) that created the natural system, many of which remain essential to its continued functioning. Such knowledge also articulates the consequences of our actions on the web of life – in religious terms, the creation itself. Contemporaneous ecological science makes clear that the human dominion of nature, despite its religious warrant, is an impossibility.

If “nature” connotes a theoretic object of study through which humans hope to gain causal control over the world, and “wild nature” connotes places which humans affect (to a greater or lesser extent) but do not control, then it follows that wilderness is more natural than nature. Ecologists use the term “anthropogenic biosphere” to denote nature in this sense. Nature is increasingly trammeled by humans, exploited through commerce, and polluted by industry. Wilderness advocates argue, with some justification, that “wilderness management” is an oxymoron, a self-contradictory notion since the essential quality that defines the wild (self-direction or natural agency rather than human control) is lost. Wilderness, then, is by definition on a self-willing or self-organizing trajectory rather than one controlled by human beings.

As the twenty-first century begins, there are few if any true terrestrial wildernesses – lands unaffected by, let alone devoid of, human influence. A number of prominent scientists argue that the wild world hangs on the precipice of catastrophe. The language used to describe the so-called biodiversity crisis is often religiously resonant. “An Armageddon,” Edward O. Wilson writes, “is approaching at the beginning of the third millennium. But it is not the cosmic war and fiery collapse of mankind foretold in sacred scripture. It is the wreckage of the planet by an exuberantly plentiful and ingenious humanity” (Wilson 2002: xxiii).

Given the contrast between a naturally evolved and untrammeled world continuing on an evolutionary trajectory and the increasingly trammeled and declining anthropogenic biosphere, the idea of wilderness carries two prescriptive ideals. One is the idea that some considerable portion of the evolved world – the flora and fauna and their habitat – should remain wild and free. While this ideal is conventionally associated with the wilderness preservation movement, it increasingly finds religious warrant. The other ideal is that those areas of the Earth and the associated flora and fauna whose continued existence has been jeopardized by human activities should be restored to a relatively wild trajectory. Again, this ideal finds religious justification, since restoration is as much about normative human self-conceptualizations as it is about actions on the world.

Arguably, given the hold of narrative traditions on human consciousness, the continuing articulation and later realization of these prescriptive ideals has been argued by many as necessitating the commitment of religionists. Some have argued that only through the engagement of religiously faithful communities can culturally dominant notions of nature and wilderness be reconsidered, and a turn toward sustainability be made.

How then do world religions figure in such reconsideration? While no comprehensive account can be attempted here, there are many possibilities. Indigenous, Eastern, and so-called nature religions offer various points of departure for challenging sedimented beliefs that the natural world is nothing but an economic resource. Or that nature is merely material. Some of these sources are ancient, with origins before the onset of literacy, as with the Vedas in the Upanishads. The notion that Atman is Brahman implies that the ever-increasing hold of egoic-consumerist consciousness within the new world order is a contingency rather than a necessity imposed by human nature. Such an ancient insight clearly resonates with the contemporary ecological realization that interconnection within systems is a more fundamental reality than individuation. Likewise, Native American traditions, such as those of the desert Southwest in the United States, position the natural world as one which is spiritually alive rather than dead matter moving mechanically.

The Forum on Religion and Ecology, a continuing academic project involving dozens of scholars, is actively exploring the potential of the world’s religions for ecological reform, including the preservation and conservation of wild species and their habitat. The Forum website contains essays exploring the ecological possibilities of most of the world’s religions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Indigenous, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, and Daoism.

There can be little doubt that the world’s religions provide narrative sources that serve as the basis for reconsidering human relations and obligations to the naturally evolved world. However, because industrialized European and North American nations are the world’s most prolific consumers and polluters, and thus impose the heaviest load on wilderness areas such as the Amazon, because the sources of the governing attitudes toward wilderness and nature in the West are grounded in biblical...
sources, and because the global political economy is largely dominated by nations whose religious roots are in Judaism and Christianity, the biblical religions are crucially important.

Biblical sources of Western attitudes toward wilderness and nature reflect a lingering consciousness of what was lost in the ecological transition from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic. Just as the “3K” background radiation is interpreted as evidence of primordial cosmological events, so biblical texts, such as the Garden narrative in Genesis, can be interpreted as evidence of a recent (ca. 15,000 B.C.E.) yet receding past, that is, the transition from a 200,000-year era of nomadic hunting and gathering to sedentarism and agriculture. This epochal ecological transition arguably leads to a psychic sense of the loss of connection with the natural world which in turn underlies the mythic narrative of expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Expelled from the Garden, humankind falls into agricultural drudgery and a perpetual longing for return. Some argue that ecological dysfunction will not be resolved until environmentalists escape this dream.

Likewise, Psalm 104 can be read as remembrances of things past, when humans lived in close association with and possessed an intimate knowledge of the natural world – its seasons and cycles, flora and fauna. Psalm 104 is interpreted by some as the textual underpinning of natural theology and, finally, the ecological sciences themselves. Such biblical themes are also clearly resonant in the Romantic poets, such as William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Their poetry celebrates the created world and mourns the loss of our connection to it. The Romantics, in this sense, see a further fall from grace in the industrialization of the world.

These streams of thought from Genesis to the Romantics constitute the narrative sources for nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideas of wilderness. Conditioned in part by the Romantics, nineteenth-century writers often saw the wilderness and nature through a biblical lens. George Perkins Marsh, considered by many as the first environmentalist in a modern sense, exemplifies this idea. Recognizing the pervasive and deleterious consequences of the actions of humankind on the natural Earth, he argued that these changes were the consequence of the failure to heed the created order.

Wilderness was viewed also through a biblical lens by Henry David Thoreau and John Muir (less obviously in Thoreau than Muir). Thoreau, read as critically responding to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s transcendentalist notion that nature was made for Man by God, came to the realization that the wild Earth needed no purpose other than its own. In wilderness alone, he argued, was the preservation of the world. He equated the walker with a pilgrim in search of holy ground, and characterized wild nature as a sanctum sanctorum. John Muir, read as one of the first evolutionary thinkers, believed that he saw the Creator still at work in the mountains of California. Wild nature, the flora and fauna, the mountains and valleys, the forests and the rivers were sacred ground to Muir. Their value exceeded any economic utilization. Every day in the mountains, Muir proclaimed, was a resurrection day for the human spirit.

Biblical sources continue to influence the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Aldo Leopold, a seminal wilderness thinker and staunch defender of wilderness, critiqued a biblically based Abrahamic ethic that saw the land community as nothing but an economic resource. He argued that only by superseding such an ethic for a land ethic could humans live on the land without spoiling it. Lynn White’s later critique (1967) set in motion a continuing theological reassessment of humankind’s relations to nature. Religious conservatives such as Francis Schaefer and liberals such John Cobb, Jr. were among the first to respond to White’s arguments in the early 1970s. Today there are literally thousands of biblically based and religiously inspired reassessments of humankind’s place in and obligations to the natural world. And scholars from the scientific community, such as E.O. Wilson, now recognize new ecological possibilities in biblical sources. “For the Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the environmental ethic is compatible with belief in the holiness of the Earth and the perception of nature as God’s handiwork” (Wilson 2002: 157).

As the new millennium begins there is a growing energy among the religiously faithful to engage themselves with the questions of their faith-based relations to the wild Earth and nature more generally. While there is enormous theological diversity, there is also a convergence on a central idea. Roughly, the notion that there is an order to the created and still evolving world that transcends and in many but not all cases takes precedence over humanity’s created orders.

What conclusions, if any, can be drawn from this study of the complicated interrelations of wilderness, religion, and nature? Clearly, religion figures significantly in reinterpreting our place in nature, and especially our relations to those few habitats and species that remain relatively wild. Religion must play such a role, since humans cannot reinvent themselves ex nihilo but only move on from the culturally accumulated experiences of the past into an imaginative future. Charles Taylor argues in his monumental Sources of the Self that

It would greatly help in staving off ecological disaster if we could recover a sense of the demand that our natural surroundings and wilderness make on us . . . The world is not simply an ensemble of objects for our use, but makes a further claim on us . . . This demand, though connected with what we are as language beings, is not simply one of self-fulfillment. It emanates from the world (Taylor 1989: 513).
Many religious sources embody these demands, requiring only that the religiously faithful identify such interpretations therein.

There are some, of course, who deny the possibilities for tomorrow existing at the convergence of wilderness, religion, and nature. And clearly there remains antipathy among some religionists toward the natural (and thus fallen) world. Yet religion, in all its diversity and whatever its insufficiencies, is one of the richest and potentially most promising sources for discovering and articulating the claims the world makes upon us.

Max Oelschlaeger

Further Reading
See also: Biocentric Religion; Callicott, J. Baird; Cobb, John; Conservation Biology; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Ecopsychology; Leopold, Aldo; Marshall, Robert; Muir, John; National Parks and Monuments (United States); Paleolithic Religions and the Future; Romanticism – American; Religious Environmentalist Paradigm; Religious Studies and Environmental Concern; Restoration Ecology and Ritual; Shepard, Paul; Social Construction of Nature and Environmental Concern; Thoreau, Henry David; White, Lynn – Thesis of; Wilderness Religion; Wilderness Society; Wilson, Edward O.

Wilderness Rites of Passage

Across time and in countless ways, people of many cultures have gone into the wilderness to mark life transitions and seek guidance. They sought closeness with God, the Mystery, or a higher self. They found a time alone, exposure to the elements in an unfamiliar place, a radical shift in self and world, a trial and a gift, and a ritual death and rebirth. The core of the form was clear: leaving the ordinary world, crossing a threshold, and returning with a gift and a task. It was an initiation, a rite of passage, a new birth in the womb of the natural world.

Modern cultures seem to have forgotten most of what our ancestors knew about the importance of initiatory rites for sustaining individuals and their communities. Instead, we find ourselves strangers in our own lives, unsure of our status and value, and hungry for a connection with the abiding rhythms of the Earth and an enduring spirit.

Yet, the roots of this search remain alive. Recently, a growing number of people have created wilderness-based rites of passage for a modern context. Stephen Foster and Meredith Little, authors of The Book of the Vision Quest and The Four Shields, are among those most influential in developing and articulating a form appropriate to our time and place, the vision fast. Since the 1960s, they have trained vision fast guides through their School of Lost Borders and spearheaded the development of professional groups such as the Wilderness Guides Council. Recent developments in this field include greater collaboration among those doing such work in North America, Europe, Africa, and Australia and the development of programs and training in academic settings.

In general, people seek wilderness rites of passage in times of significant life transition or to complete life transitions begun earlier but not completed. The transition from adolescence to adulthood is an important time for initiation. Adolescents need the chance to confirm their fitness and willingness to step toward adulthood. Mid-life, marriage, divorce, loss, or simply a time of confusion and disillusionment are also common calls to a wilderness rite of passage.

These practices facilitate ego-transcendence and an opening to spirit. In doing so, they also bring healing and renewed connections with lost or abandoned capacities for guidance, vitality, and joy. Their goals include bringing back to one’s people and place something of value:
personal power, stability, energy, wisdom, or a maturity that is expressed in service to others and to the Earth.

Structure of a Typical Wilderness Passage Rite
While there are many specific forms these quests can take, they all express a common deep structure. The anthropologist, van Gennep, used this deep structure to describe traditional rites of passage, and Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell use it as the basis for the archetype of the Hero’s Journey. Despite variations in surface structures, this pattern is broadly cross-cultural. Here, I will describe a form currently being used by many wilderness rites of passage guides. It is built around a one- or two-week wilderness trip.

Preparation
This is a time for participants to identify their reasons, inner resources, and commitment for this undertaking. More mundane issues of logistics, equipment, and safety are equally important.

Severance
Participants travel to a wilderness setting and set up a base camp where they become accustomed to living close to the land, opening their senses to the features of that place, and tuning in to the rhythms of the Earth. Wilderness is a relative term, and many vision fast groups without ready access to wilderness have found that more cultivated lands can support this work. Processes for life review are helpful here. They use council-style group discussions and simple Earth-centered ceremonies along with walks, journaling, and contemplative practices such as meditation and sensory awareness.

Threshold
This phase usually comprises three or four days of solitude and fasting from food (with water, a buddy system, and other safeguards). Participants may engage in awareness practices and self-generated ceremonies, but aside from safety considerations, there are few rules. The threshold is the doorway into sacred time and space and the edge of relating to the world.

The wilderness (or wilder) setting is an important part of the threshold phase, providing both challenge and support for the inner work of disidentifying from old psychic structures, creating deeper integration both within one’s psyche and with the world, and discovering deeper sources of relating to the world.

Return
The return, or reincorporation, phase is a symbolic rebirth. This begins upon the return to base camp with quiet celebration and reflection and continues as we rejoin our communities. Sharing stories and reflecting on them, participants begin to integrate their insights and visions. The goal is to help participants discover their own meaning in their experiences and apply their own belief systems, not to impose meaning.

Implementation
After the wilderness trip, participants are supported in bringing their experiences into their lives more fully. However, it is necessary that the work of this phase belongs to each participant. This is the phase in which the gifts of the initiation are shared. Essentially it is the rest of one’s life.

Elements of Wilderness Passage Rites
Key elements of these trips are the stages of the rites of passage model, a ritual or ceremonial attitude, and the wilderness environment. Underlying them is exposure. Participants are exposed to new terrain, weather, and wildlife, large and small. They are exposed to their own vulnerability, boredom, frustration, strength, contentment, delight, and curiosity—all the states that can emerge from being alone in a living place with an authentic intention of openness. The patterns and meanings of personal history, self-concepts, ideals, and shadows are exposed as well.

Changes in sensory and cognitive input from living closer to nature lead to changes in ego structures. Familiar ego structures are no longer supported, leading to changes in self-images and less fixated conceptual structures. The natural world mirrors, evokes, and develops those inner qualities usually assigned to the realm of religion and spirituality—unconditional love, joy, power, peace, support, grace, and guidance.

Making intimate contact with the wild world brings us into contact with our “wild selves,” the parts of us that have not been conditioned by familial and cultural forces. Wild places are those not under our control and not subject to our wills, walls, or arbitrary boundaries. On wilderness rites of passage, as in all forms of deep psychological or spiritual work, we are going into wild places. We are entering realms where the artificial structures and demands of the ego and society have not restricted or walled off our innate guidance, aliveness, generosity, or fascination with the world. At the same time, wilderness rites of passage cultivate and refine those qualities necessary for living in the world in a full and engaged way, knowing our own hearts and minds, tolerating ambiguity and discomfort, being autonomous, searching deeply, and staying open to new answers.

Sometimes, the “visions” of a vision fast resemble shamanic experiences with unusual sensory or psychophysical manifestations. More often, however, the most transforming and longest lasting changes are prompted by subtle, more ordinary experiences. It is the totality of the
The world becomes less a collection of commodities to be used or exploited, and more the embodiments of an alive, enchanted, sacred world. Many of these trips conclude with specific practices, often ritualized to deepen their meaning, which support participants in articulating and accepting a sacred task related to environmental responsibility. A lesson of modern wilderness rites of passage is that living authentically means living here and now, in this place, embodied, and part of the environment. Sacred ("heaven") and profane ("Earth") are not divorced. This is not easy work, nor does it promise a quick fix. However, wilderness rites of passage and Earth-centered initiatory practices do develop confidence, trust, wholeness, a sense of enchantment and home in the wilder parts of our selves, and a natural impulse to contribute to our world. These are the foundations for maturity, inner freedom, and service.

John Davis

Further Reading


Mahdi, Louise, Nancy Christopher and Michael Meade.

Crossroads: The Quest for Contemporary Rites of Passage. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1996.

See also: Breathwork; Ecopsychology; ECOtherapy; Naropa University; Native American Spirituality; Re-Earth; Transpersonal Psychology; Wilderness Religion.
In the post-war years, The Wilderness Society broadened its arguments for wilderness preservation, particularly in response to new threats posed by increased timber harvesting and dam building by the federal government and new developments in the biological sciences. Led by Executive Secretary Howard Zahniser and Director Olaus Murie, the Society played an instrumental role in the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964, which defined a wilderness as “an area where the Earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” Since then, The Wilderness Society has helped to add 104 million acres to the National Wilderness Preservation System, often in collaboration with other environmental organizations that share its worldview. Despite the growth of its membership and the evolution of its arguments, The Wilderness Society remains committed to its founders’ emphasis on preserving wilderness for the recreational and spiritual renewal of future generations.

Daniel J. Philippon

Further Reading
*See also*: Leopold, Aldo; Marshall, Robert; Muir, John; Murie, Olaus J.; National Parks and Monuments (United States); Sierra Club; Wilderness Religion.

Williams, Delores S. (1937–)

Delores Williams is an African-American Presbyterian theologian who has played a formative role in the development of womanist theology, centering on historical and present testimonies of black women. Like other types of feminist and liberation theology, Williams’ womanist theology rejects traditional dichotomies between body/spirit and humanity/nature that pervade mainstream Christian thought. Williams offers a theological response to the defilement of black women’s bodies and identities in antebellum and postbellum America. She analyzes the surrogacy roles that were imposed on black women’s bodies, raped and forced to substitute for white women sexually and economically and used to breed slave offspring. She makes parallels between such surrogacy and the exploitative rape of nature perpetrated by strip-mining the land and clear-cutting forests – both cases represent sin involving efforts to exploit and control the productive and reproductive capacities of nature.

Williams argues that these types of sin have been nearly invisible in Christian theology. Along with her expansion of the notion of sin, she also proposes a non-anthropocentric concept of salvation, indicating her hope for the end of violence and the liberation of creation from oppression. Using the biblical story of Hagar, the concubine of Abraham banished to the wilderness with her son Ishmael, Williams represents black women as “sisters in the wilderness.” The metaphor of wilderness symbolizes a place of danger, fear and vulnerability, but also a place where God is present and strength is discovered. However, her theology lacks reflection on “wilderness” in itself as threatened. Wilderness is viewed as a projection of the human fear of exile. Given the strategic need to articulate black women’s voices and theological responses to racism and sexism, Williams has made major strides toward an “ecowomanist” theology that exposes exploitative sins against black women’s bodies and nature and points toward salvation.

Sarah Pinnock

Further Reading
*See also*: Christianity (7g) – Womanism; Walker, Alice.

Williams, Terry Tempest (1955–)

Author, activist, naturalist, desert mystic, poet, and green prophet, Terry Tempest Williams is made up of nearly as many layers as the geological cross-sections of Utah’s canyon country she brings to life in her writing. Steeped in the Mormon culture of her upbringing, Williams is also a feminist, environmentalist, and outspoken anti-war activist. A descendant of Brigham Young and able to trace her heritage back through five generations of Latter-Day Saints, Williams possesses an intense passion for the sacred landscape of her Utah home and for the larger American West – a landscape she experiences as inspired by wildness and grace. Her sojourns in the desert assume a revealing quality that leaves her heart open and exposed, vulnerable to her readers. This is precisely the point and in this respect Williams leads by example. For instance, she writes,
It is time for us to take off our masks, to step out from behind our personas – whatever they may be: educators, activists, biologists, geologists, writers, farmers, ranchers, and bureaucrats – and admit we are lovers, engaged in an erotics of place. Loving the land. Honoring its mysteries. Acknowledging, embracing the spirit of place – there is nothing more legitimate and there is nothing more true (Williams 1994: 84).

Williams is best known for *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (1991), which interweaves natural history and personal family narrative. In this work, she juxtaposes her experiences “midwifing” her mother through her ovarian cancer death to the simultaneous destruction of the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge from human-produced flooding. Williams’ grief over both is palpable. More than anything, she witnesses to the environmental cancer that is upon the Earth and the continuity between the earthbody and the human body. In “Clan of the One-Breasted Women,” the epilogue to *Refuge*, Williams recites the list of (clean-living, non-smoking, non-drinking) Mormon mothers, aunts, and grandmothers in her family who have all been stricken with breast cancer and who have died or been rendered unlikely Amazons through mastectomies. She also links these cancers to the years that the U.S. Government bombed the American West, conducting atmospheric testing of atomic weapons in Nevada and exposing other western states as well to radioactive fallout drifting on wind currents. Williams rails at this injustice and deems the cancers a price far too high to be paid for obedience – the unquestioning acceptance of authority instilled and reinforced in Mormon culture. She writes,

as a Mormon woman of the fifth generation of Latter-day Saints, I must question everything, even if it means losing my faith, even if it means becoming a border tribe among my own people. Tolerating blind obedience in the name of patriotism or religion ultimately takes our lives (Williams 1991: 286).

Williams is a self-described “edge-walker,” who travels the narrow space between the religious tradition she credits for having “forged her soul,” and her direct and very personal experiences in nature that have revealed a truth of their own. Throughout her work, she negotiates this edge by embracing themes that resonate for both Mormons and environmentalists – the importance of community, home, family, heritage, and commitment. Her co-edited anthology, *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community* (1998), carefully presents essays from a variety of Mormon writers who promote principles of ecological care and conservation as grounded in Mormon scriptural sources. The ideal of the nineteenth-century Mormon village is revisited as a model of self-sufficiency and sustainability, and Brigham Young’s advocacy of water conservation is repeatedly invoked. The anthology ultimately succeeds in marrying Mormon and environmental perspectives in a way that is inviting rather than threatening to more conservative readers.

If Williams is an “edge-walker,” then her “edgiest” book is *Desert Quartet: An Erotic Landscape* (1995). In this work, she explores the land as mystical lover and embodies a kind of “eco-eroticism” that blurs boundaries between skin and rock, wind and breath, blood and water, and fire and flesh. Williams leads the reader on a poetic journey through the desert and into intimate encounters with the Earth’s four basic elements (Earth, air, fire, water). In so doing, she engages the Earth’s “body” in a primal mystical union that pulses with pleasure and erotic intensity.

Williams sounds similar “eco-erotic” themes in her collections of essays, *An Unspoken Hunger* (1994) and *Leap* (2000), a book dedicated to her obsession with painter Hieronymus Bosch’s medieval triptych “The Garden of Delights.” The burning question within Williams while she was writing *An Unspoken Hunger* was “How do we make love to the land?” (1995), a question she confesses intrigues her in part because eroticism is so taboo in Mormon culture (Jensen 1995: 312). In *Leap*, Williams explicitly draws parallels between a fear of intimacy and eros within Mormon culture and the narrow valuing of nature solely for its practical human utility. She observes, “I see my community’s fear of homosexuality, even wildness, as a failure of imagination. Sex is like land. It must be used for something” (Williams 2000: 195).

Issues of land use and wilderness preservation are indeed central to Williams’ activism. She has testified to protect Utah’s wild lands before a U.S. Senate subcommittee hearing on the Utah Public Land Management Act and has spoken before Congress on behalf of “America’s Redrock Wilderness Act.” She has also compiled and presented to Congress a volume of writers’ witness to the historical and spiritual importance of preserving America’s public lands. At a time when the idea of “wilderness” has been exhaustively deconstructed and its use aggressively critiqued within academia, Williams continues to “buck this trend,” boldly making the case for the spiritual, psychological, and ecological importance of protecting wild places. “I choose to err on the side of preservation,” writes Williams,

and stand shoulder to shoulder with brothers and sisters in our shared desire to protect the last large expanses of wilderness we have left . . . I want to speak the language of grasses, rooted yet supple in the presence of wind before a storm. I want to write in the form of migrating geese like an arrow pointing south toward a direction of safety. I want to keep
my words wild so that even if the land and everything we hold dear is destroyed by shortsightedness and greed, there is a record of beauty and passionate participation by those who saw it coming (Williams 2001: 19).

In 1995, the Utne Reader named Terry Tempest Williams one of its “100 visionaries.” She is a Rachel Carson Institute Inductee in recognition of her work as an environmental leader; she is also the winner of a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Lannan Literary Fellowship for her creative non-fiction.

Sarah McFarland Taylor

Further Reading


See also: Autobiography; Church of Jesus Christ, Latter Day Saints; Memoir and Nature Writing; Sexuality and Green Consciousness.

Wilson, Edward O. (1929–)

An entomologist by training, E.O. Wilson’s hypotheses have had far-reaching influence not only in the biological sciences, but in the humanities and social sciences as well. Wilson’s ideas connect religion and nature on two levels. First, he argues that religion, like social behavior in general, is subject to natural selection. Second, Wilson’s primary intellectual endeavor has been to demonstrate the religiosity implicit in the natural sciences. His litany of publications includes several well-respected contributions to the field of ecology, but he is most widely known for his theory of sociobiology, and for his championship of environmental issues. This hypothesis established a scientific field devoted to finding the biological origins of animal social behavior at both the genetic and the environmental levels. Sociobiology presents challenges to current conceptualizations in the biological sciences as well as the social sciences. Sociobiological studies seek to understand the evolutionary foundations of social behaviors in animals, and to apply an ecological model to the social sciences. At the heart of E.O. Wilson’s ideas is the assertion that scientific investigation can radically improve the production of knowledge, and can be synthesized with other disciplinary systems.

Due to a boyhood fishing accident, Wilson’s vision is good in only one eye; and he has subsequently trained himself for close observation. His career in insect biology supplied him with many resources for the extension of scientific study into other fields. He is renowned for his work on the behavior of social insects, but has branched out tremendously into studies of ecology, gene-culture co-evolution, sociobiology, biogeography, environmental ethics, environmentalism, and environmental policy. He is the recipient of two Pulitzer prizes: one for his work in On Human Nature, and the other for his co-authorship of the definitive entomological work The Ants. Following his fieldwork in Cuba and New Guinea, Wilson joined the Harvard faculty of biology. He remains active there as a professor in the Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology, and as the honorary curator in entomology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology.

As a part of his larger project to understand human social life scientifically, Wilson has argued that religion is a product of natural selection. Beyond Wilson’s sentiments that religion is biological in origin, he also believes that traditional religions are ill-equipped to deal with the environmental and social problems of the modern world. In Consilience, one of his most accessible works, Wilson seeks to renew the enlightenment project of finding ultimate meaning through science. As a voice of twentieth-century biology, Wilson presents a continued call for an empirically grounded metaphysics, a religion based in fact, sounded a century earlier by such thinkers as Auguste Comte. Such a worldview would invalidate anthropocentric conceptualizations of the universe, and seek to create social harmony based on a coordinated effort between biology and the social sciences. His quest is lofty; not only does he advocate a massive research endeavor to establish scientific consensus on moral issues, he further believes that this new faith in facts needs to be created in poetic form, as an epic cultural narrative. He is a board member of the Epic of Evolution Society, and collaborates with those engaged in the consecration of scientific narratives in this way. His call for such a scientific undertaking has, however, been refuted directly by Wendell Berry in Life is a Miracle, and many non-scientists look at sociobiology as a highly controversial theory. Feminists,
cultural anthropologists, and many religious leaders present serious challenges to the legitimacy of Wilson’s scientific ideology, arguing respectively that such a position reinforces a patriarchal, scientistic, and one-sided view of moral and cultural issues.

Wilson’s call for a scientific ethic in relation to environmental issues, specifically biodiversity, is espoused in *Biophilia*. His call for a conservation ethic grounded in scientific understanding parallels Aldo Leopold’s ideology, and harkens back to Thoreau’s idea of nature as the refuge of the spirit. Wilson’s version of environmental ethics adds a new dimension to these older ones: he situates it amid the knowledge of a more mature ecology, and focuses on the complex dynamics of both genetic coevolution and biodiversity. Wilson shares the straightforward understanding of humanity as dependent upon nature for survival with his predecessors, but comes armed with a more sophisticated understanding of the fundamentally intertwined existence of humans and their environment. *Biophilia* is the innate human tendency to affiliate with other organisms. From a biological point of view, humanity is an interdependent member of the complex energy cycles of the world ecosystem. To study this system, and to further our understanding of ourselves as a part of it, is for Wilson, the central task not only of the sciences, but also of human moral and religious activity. *Biophilia* posits that true meaning can only come from science. This is not an epistemological claim for the superiority of scientific knowledge. Wilson is setting forth the idea that as humans are biological organisms, what they find meaningful should itself be biological. This suggestion is at the core of Wilson’s thinking: scientific understanding of the biological world allows humanity to renew its entire mode of being, in essence to invent a new religion.

*Evan Berry*

**Further Reading**


See also: Berry, Wendell; Biocentric Religion – A Call for; Biodiversity; Biophilia; Conservation Biology; Ecology and Religion; Environmental Ethics; Epic of Evolution (and adjacent, Epic Ritual); Evolutionary Biology, Religion, and Stewardship; Geophilia; Natural History as Natural Religion.

**Winter, Paul (1939–)**

The music of Paul Winter defies easy categorization. A recent characterization of his work is “ecological jazz,” but his music has also garnered such titles as “chamber jazz” and even “symphony world beat.” Winter credits his fusion of styles to a combination of his background playing jazz and bee–bop in Chicago, his time living in Brazil, his frequent ocean trips with zoologist–friend Roger Payne to record the complex songs of whales, and his annual pilgrimages to visit famously self–sufficient Maine homesteaders Helen and Scott Nearing. Considering this eclectic and quintessentially postmodern blending of influences, it is not surprising that Winter has often been described as a “musical shapeshifter” (Oliver 1992: 76). Not only does his music cross genre lines: jazz, bossa nova, world music, chamber music and, more recently, Celtic music, it also crosses artistic media so that his songs are often referred to as “sound paintings” or alternately “tone poems.”

Indeed, in his own personal life, raised a Presbyterian as a boy growing up in Altoona, Pennsylvania, and now a world traveler and longtime Zen meditator, Winter is no stranger to crossing genres in the combined realms of music and religion. Not unlike the prevailing patterns in American spirituality, Winter’s artistic and spiritual leanings are both energetically and unapologetically combinatory. A self–identified “Earth musician,” Winter explicitly and negatively compares singularity in sound to the environmentally detrimental practice of “monocropping” (Parmalee 1990: 17). Instead, Winter and his “Paul Winter Consort” of world musicians cultivate a kind of ecospiritual polyphony that brings together the voices of endangered species, as well as the voices of “endangered” musical instruments — symphonic instruments that are rarely heard in favor of the much more popular electronic and synthetic sounds that dominate today’s music sales. It is this commitment to what Winter calls “natural music” that helped give rise to the creation of Winter’s famed “Owlogy” — a composition dedicated to the preservation of owls and ancient forests, as played by “endangered” instruments.

For his CD *Prayer for the Wild Things*, Winter embedded the voices of 27 indigenous birds and animals into his music, creating a virtual “soundscape” of the Northwestern Rockies. Each participating creature is considered by Winter to be a “musician from the symphony of wildlife,” and each is brought to the foreground of the piece, then recedes into the mountain landscape. Not only do instru-
ments represent animals in classic “Peter and the Wolf” style, but Winter goes one step further, allowing the animals to vocalize for themselves, as his human “Earth Band” echo these voices with their own humanmade sounds.

Winter’s most famous work, the “Gaian Mass,” was composed and recorded in alternate locations: in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, with its forest of gigantic stone columns, and also in the Grand Canyon, dubbed by Winter “the Earth cathedral.” In both places, Winter has been fascinated by the dynamics of echo and the similarity and degree of “reverb” caused by both cavernous spaces as multiple voices come in contact with multiple surfaces. It so happens that both the Cathedral in New York and the cathedral of the Grand Canyon have the same eight-second reverb. This acoustic similarity carries both symbolic and artistic significance within Winter’s work. The parallel acoustics unite the more institutional space of the Cathedral (connected with the history of the Church and more structured, formal forms of worship) with the freer, nature-identified spirituality inspired by the canyon space. This kind of nature-inspired spirituality has permeated American philosophical and cultural movements from the Transcendentalists, to twentieth-century back-to-the-landers like Helen and Scott Nearing, to contemporary New Age forms of worship (Albanese 1990).

By including actual echo and by using “echo” as trope in his music, Winter conjures a sacred antiphonal relationship with the land. This call and response and Winter’s play of surfaces and sound evoke a sense of intimacy, a reciprocal love affair between the human and nonhuman world that imbues Winter’s composition and performance. In many respects, Winter’s commitment to the importance of so-called “natural music” or “Earth music” echoes David Abram’s argument in Spell of the Sensuous that in modernity cultures ultimately end up losing “a common discourse that opens directly onto the evocative sounds, shapes, and gestures of the surrounding ecology” (Abram 1996: 139). For Abram, it is the move from oral performance to the written word that goes hand in hand with a discourse that becomes closed off to the “voices” of nature. In contrast to the kind of tone deafness Abram describes and a silencing of the natural world, Winter’s inclusion of whales, loons, wolves, and wind effectively demonstrates an attempt to compose or rather re-compose a spiritual soundscape that is intrinsically “alive, aware, and expressive” in its planetary diversity.

Sarah McFarland Taylor

Further Reading
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Taylor, Sarah M. Interview with Paul Winter. Litchfield, CT, 26 June 2000.
See also: Back to the Land Movements; Cathedral of St. John the Divine; Gaian Mass; Music; Nature Religion; Nature Religion in the United States.

Wise Use Movement

The term “wise use” was used by the first forester and chief of the United States Forest Service (USFS), Gifford Pinchot. It can refer to the “multiple use” doctrine that is supposed to guide the management of public forests, allowing recreation and resource extraction compatible with ecosystem health. But the more common contemporary usage of the term as the name of a movement, first applied by Ronald Arnold, a former Sierra Club activist and a major figure in the wise use movement, implies that the wise use of land overrides environmental constraints. This understanding owes much to James Watt, Secretary of the Interior under the U.S. Reagan administration, and founder of an early wise use group, the Mountain States Legal Foundation (MSLF). Although the wise use movement (called the share movement in Canada) has a diversity of groups and priorities, participants in the wise use movement agree that natural resources are here for human use and that immediate concerns hold priority in the “use” of land and resources. Some of the individuals and groups involved in the movement are motivated by religious concerns.

The “wise use movement” emerged first in the 1980s in the western United States as an alliance of disgruntled ranchers, loggers, hunters, off-road vehicle owners, gun owners, outdoor sports enthusiasts, farmers, land developers, and extractive industries united to fight a common enemy — environmentalism. The movement, which now reaches beyond its U.S. origins, includes those who desire more access to public lands, resent government regulation against the use of their lands, oppose environmental restrictions on free-market economies, dispute consensus scientific understandings of environmental threats such as global warming, and oppose environmentalism by claiming it is Pagan, a religion in itself, or anti-Christian. According to Richard Wright (1995) some even see environmentalism replacing communism as the next, great threat to liberty and claim that environmentalists are trying to establish a “one world” government. An early
articulation of the movement’s goals was Alan M. Gottlieb’s *The Wise Use Agenda* (1989). The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship (2000) provides an example of the ways in which conservative religionists support the movement.

The wide range of interests involved in these movements often pits “wise users” against the National Parks, the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Forest Service and other federal and state agencies, as well as major environmental, religious and scientific organizations. From the perspective of environmentalists, however, state and federal enforcement and land management agencies are frequently viewed as supportive of wise use and corporate interests. Similar conflicts are seen around the globe. In addition to trying to influence public opinion, media representation and legislation, gain members and protest current policies, other more intimidating tactics are sometimes used. Corporations involved in conflicts often request that media access and coverage be blocked or censored, as in the anti-old-growth forest logging campaigns in Victoria, Australia. Frequently lawsuits are filed. These range from money- and energy-draining “SLAPP suits” (strategic litigation against public participation) to lawsuits against environmental regulations. Wise use groups have argued in the courts, for example, that the U.S. Clean Air Act is unconstitutional and that Forest Service decisions to protect lands sacred to indigenous people for ritual use amounts to the establishment of religion and are therefore unconstitutional. Going beyond legal means, some participants in wise use groups have been engaged in the desecration of sacred sites, illegal logging and hunting, character defamation, harassment, death threats, and violence against environmental activists, as detailed in David Helvarg’s *War Against the Greens*. Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) documents harassment, threats and violence on their website and publications.

Wise use groups are sometimes named in ways that seem to support environmental values. The Evergreen Foundation, the Wetlands Coalition and the British Columbia Forest Alliance, for example, are all industry fronts. The anti-environmental agenda of the movement can more clearly be seen in the titles of the books written by its proponents, such as *Ecology Wars or Undue Influence: Wealthy Foundations, Grant Driven Environmental Groups and Zealous Bureaucrats That Control Your Future*, by Ronald Arnold. Arnold is well known for two statements: “Our goal is to destroy, to eradicate the environmental movement,” and “Environmentalism is the new paganism. Trees are worshipped and humans sacrificed at its’ altar. It is evil” (*Boston Globe*, 1/13/1992). Arnold also claimed that there is a green conspiracy to eradicate rural America. In the aftermath of 9/11, he and other wise use advocates intensified efforts to have civil disobedience such as tree sitting and blockading logging roads declared “ecoterrorism” and urged stronger laws against such activities.

Arnold and Gottlieb (who also promotes gun ownership rights) are both associated with the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise (CDFE). The title of this organization, like that of Citizen’s for a Sound Economy (CSE), the American Freedom Coalition, or the Acton Institute of Religion and Liberty, illustrates the centrality of the defense of free enterprise and economic liberty, the links between wise use ideology and libertarianism, and the way conservative religion sometimes becomes intertwined with these efforts. The Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) proclaimed that its mission is “advancing liberty from ecology to the economy,” while the Cato Institute (called the most important environmental thinktank by the Wall Street journal) advertises its own with a banner reading, “Individual Liberty, Limited Government, Free Markets and Peace.” The Cato Institute focuses in part on “environment and climate change” (the term climate change is used to imply that it is just a natural part of the Earth’s history) and its staff includes a vocal opponent of global warming theory, Patrick Michaels, co-author with Robert Balling, of *The Satanic Gases: Clearing the Air about Global Warming*. Cato, and others who frequently deny or downplay the existence of environmental problems, promote themselves as “eco-realists.” Wise-use groups and institutes, such as CATO’s and CSE, are funded in part by multinational corporations, including extractive industries and biotechnology. The Reverend Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Church, motivated by his enthusiasm for free enterprise capitalism, is a backer of groups such as the American Freedom Coalition which had ties to Arnold’s CDFE. Many of these organizations have close ties with various U.S. Republican presidential administrations, for example: U.S. Secretaries of the Interior James Watt and Gale Norton were both closely associated with MLDF, and the back cover of *The Wise Use Agenda* pictures author Alan Gottlieb with President George Bush.

These close connections are evident in the religiously oriented Acton Institute, whose website claims to be a “leading voice in the national environmental and social policy debate,” while also saying that environmental activists want companies to “commit suicide” and stifle their rights to “economic initiative.” At a 2003 Exxon-Mobil shareholders’ meeting, Acton’s president, Catholic priest Robert Sirico (a former director of the LA Gay and Lesbian Community Center) spoke against interfaith activists, such as CERES (the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies), who file shareholder initiatives urging corporations to improve their human rights and environmental records. Reverend Jerry Zandstra, director of Acton’s Center for Entrepreneurial Stewardship, praised the company on its “excellent” record in human rights and the environment. Acton also helped found the Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship (ICES), made up of...
Jews, Catholics and Protestants, as a way to counter what it views as wrong and misleading religious environmentalism. ICES board members E. Calvin Beisner and Robert Royal have published influential books, Where Garden Meets Wilderness (Beisner 1997) and The Virgin and the Dynamo, which warn of “the use and abuse of religion in environmental debates” (Royal 1999, book subtitle). Beisner is a board member of the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow (CFACT), whose website “boldly proclaims that the Western values of competition, progress, freedom, and stewardship can and do offer the best hope for protecting not only the Earth and its wildlife, but even more importantly, its people.” Both CF ACT and Acton produce hundreds of radio spots on environmental issues. Many of the major groups, such as CDFE and Acton, fund conferences and have active publishing programs.

Acton, ICES, Sirico and Beisner are well known within conservative Jewish and Christian circles for the “Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship” (CDES), signed by two prominent evangelical Christians, Focus on the Family president Dr. James Dobson and Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright. The declaration was produced in order to respond to the Evangelical Environmental Network’s “Evangelical Declaration of Creation Care” (EDCC) (signed by other high-profile evangelicals as Cal Dewitt and the directors of World Vision and Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship). The differences in the two documents are instructive: the Cornwall Declaration affirmed private property ownership and market economies, while the Evangelical Declaration (1994) promoted “lifestyle choices that express humility, forbearance, self restraint and frugality” and “godly, just and sustainable choices.” The CDES prioritizes the needs of humans over nature, argues that free-market forces can resolve environmental problems and denounces the environmental movement for embracing faulty science and a gloom-and-doom approach. In contrast, the EDCC encourages Christians to become ecologically aware creation care-takers. Other differences revolve around the place and privileges of humans relative to nature, issues of biblical interpretation, the definition of stewardship, God’s sovereignty, and the worry that saving the Earth is replacing the central Christian emphasis on saving souls.

These disagreements reflect more than internal Christian conflict; the Cornwall Declaration reinforced the wise use emphasis on the ongoing improvement of the environment through human technology, the abundance of resources put here for human use, the privileged place of humans, and the opposition to seeing more-than-human nature as an idyllic, harmonious state that must be preserved. Other major targets by conservative religious opponents are environmentalists’ concern over overpopulation and animal rights (“pro-abortionists and animal rights advocates” are often presented as synonymous with environmentalism). Mainstream environmental and religious groups are viewed as radical. Acton staff member, Phillip DeVos, (2002) called the collaboration, between the Sierra Club (a “radical” group) and the National Council of Churches, to try to prevent oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge an “unholy alliance.” Other opponents charged that the EDCC held Christian doctrine hostage to an environmental agenda.

Richard Wright, a Harvard-trained scientist and evangelical Christian who wrote a widely used environmental textbook, responded directly to the wise use movement’s attack on the Evangelical Declaration in “Tearing Down the Green.” He argued that those who attack environmentalists use poor science and falsely accuse environmentalists of nefarious conspiracies, including of serving the anti-Christ by trying to bring about a global, totalitarian government. Rush Limbaugh, who in the 1990s and early twenty-first century had become the most widely listened to right-wing radio commentator in the United States, frequently has claimed that environmentalists are leftist or religious fanatics, and enemies of liberty. Such claims are common to both secularist and religious anti-environmentalists. The Former Idaho Republican U.S. Representative Helen Chenoweth, for example, in a speech delivered to the U.S. House of Representatives on 31 January 1996, attacked “environmental policies [that] are driven by a kind of emotional spiritualism that threatens the very foundation of our society.” She added,

there is increasing evidence of a government sponsored religion in America. This religion, a cloudy mixture of new age mysticism, Native American folklore, and primitive Earth worship (Pantheism), is being promoted and enforced . . . in violation of our rights and freedoms.

This conflation of some of the religious and philosophical sources of environmental concern leads some conservative Christians to label deep ecologists George Sessions and Arne Naess “eco theologians” (CFACT) and to warn Christians not to “let the trees do the talking,” as they think Native Americans and Pagans do. Environmentalists are frequently accused of “worshipping Creation” rather than the Creator.

Despite significant diversity within the movement, which includes both avowedly secular and explicitly religious voices, participants in the movement see environmentalists as threatening sacred values: either that of the American nation-state, the world’s guarantor of freedom, of free-market economics, or of true religion, or all three.

Laurel Kearns
Further Reading
Arnold, Ron. *Undue Influence: Wealthy Foundations, 

See also: Au Sable Institute; Cathedral Forests and the Felling of Sacred Groves; Christianity; (2) – Jesus (and adjacent, What Would Jesus Drive?); Christianity (3) – An Evangelical Perspective on Faith and Nature; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Evangelical Environmental Network; North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology [and the] North American Coalition on Religion and Ecology; Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation; Stewardship.

Women and Animals

Western cultures have theoretically equated women, children, animals, and “the natural” with one another and with the body. This constructed connection served and continues to serve as a means of oppression in patriarchal cultures. Why did this begin and where?

Historically, women’s seemingly more obvious reproductive functions resulted in women being identified as more animal-like in their bodily functions than men. Therefore, many cultures functioned under the assumption that women’s bodies supposedly intruded upon their rationality. Since most Western theorists construed rationality as the defining requirement for membership in the moral community, women – along with men of color and animals – who were seen as less able to transcend their bodies, were long excluded.

We cannot know precisely when and where this began, though a few argue that a matriarchy preceded patriarchy and that its overthrow – due in part to a change in human’s relationships with the other animals – enabled both women’s and animals’ oppression. Others argue against this interpretation. Some believe that through the domestication of animals, the role of the male in inseminating the female was discovered, and from this arose the idea of controlling women’s reproductive capacity.
In response to the historical alignment of women and the other animals, feminist analysis at first chose to sever the woman–animal identification, asserting that women are not animals and must be seen as equally human as men. Since the 1970s, an alternative analysis has been proposed by feminists, primarily in the U.S. and U.K., that women’s oppression must be seen as a part of an understanding of the interlocking systems of oppression that organize the world (and the oppressed) by gender, race, class, and species, and that feminism, as a transformative philosophy, must embrace the amelioration of life on Earth for all life forms.

From this analysis, rich scholarly insights have arisen. This entry can only briefly summarize some of them.

- The association of women, animals, and body manifests itself in violence on a personal level (domestic and sexual violence), and a cultural level (for instance, depiction of “meat” animals as sexualized bodies).
- The recent development of anthropornography (“depicting animals as whores”) takes place in a context of women’s sexual inequality, and illustrates the construction of inequality.
- Anti-violence interventions and theories will be inadequate if they ignore the control perpetrators gain by violence toward animals loved by the victims. In fact, by analyzing violence to the animals in the household, the deliberate nature of this violence is clearly established.
- Species, like gender, race, and class, is socially constructed, and should not be the basis upon which ethical decisions rest.
- Patriarchal science fosters biological determinism not only regarding women, but also regarding other animals.
- The defense of hunting by some environmentalists arises from its association with male self-identity.
- Falsely generic words (such as man and mankind) that elevate men to full human status must be analyzed alongside animal pejoratives for women (catty, bitch, sow, shrew, dog, chick, cow).
- A patriarchal culture feminizes animal victims; this explains the low status of animals confined for food.

The role of religion in maintaining these oppressions or as a source for liberation is much debated. Myriad questions are being posed within the ongoing dialogue. Is the resistance to examining the treatment of the other animals in religions a way of avoiding a recognition of the sameness of human beings? Is the result of anthropomorphizing God that God and humans, especially male humans, are seen as more alike than humans and animals? Is it the case that the more theology moves from being androcentric, the less likely it is to be anthropocentric? Would a body-affirming theology justify the exploitation of animals for food, clothing, or entertainment? Can religious concepts of alienation, brokenness, and separation address the treatment of devalued bodies? Could theologies of relinquishment, for men in their control over women, and for humans in their control over the other animals, emerge as sources for embodied transformations?

As ecofeminist philosophies and theologies continue to engage these issues, the links between women and animals, and the reality of human beings as animals, is poised to remain in the forefront of ideological discussions and practical applications.

Carol J. Adams

Further Reading
See also: Animals; Ecofeminism (various); Environmental Ethics; Hunting Spirituality; Radical Environmentalism (and adjacent, Rodney Coronado and the Animal Liberation Front); Vegetarianism (various).

Wonder toward Nature

Broadly conceived, wonder toward nature includes awe and dread in relation to the cosmos, a sense not only of transfixion but also of the numinous in specific locations, a marveling over something remarkable or some “first moment,” and a felt loss of explanation before the unusual or mysterious. Wonder, then, is a crucial psychological state for bringing nature and religion together (though in this state nature will often be taken as more than ordinary and thus super-natural). Wonder is a matter affecting
Western theories of religion, and has been crucial in the construction of constituting modern motions of “primitivity.”

The acclaimed founder of capitalism, the Scotsman Adam Smith (1723–90), was first to devote a third of a treatise – his History of Astronomy – to the sentiment of wonder. Wonder, by his definition, is the response to “extraordinary and uncommon objects” (meteors, comets, and eclipses being of obvious singularity among them), and in humanity’s earliest state, “every object of nature . . . considerable enough to attract his attention” will be enough to imbue wonder in the “savage’s” mind (Smith 1982: 48–9). To anything quite overawing, such as lightning, simple people will respond with a reverence that approaches fear, being totally without the rational explanations known to men and women of the Enlightenment.

Smith imagined that “primitives” were very anxious lest they offend the gods. This was a position more famously accentuated by his near-contemporary Giambattista Vico of Naples (1668–1744). Vico speculated that both morality and religion first began when “Jove’s lightning bolt” struck with horrendous surprise while promiscuous couples were having sex, this happening at an early stage when humans were almost like beasts. The brilliant Vico, who could be said to have founded the theory of animism in a few brief passages in his New Science of 1744, did not stop with negativities, for he conceived the primitive mind to be one of “prodigious imagination” (vigorosissima fantasia), everything bearing a wondrous aspect because of an “ignorance of causes” (ignoranza di cagioni) (Vico [1744] 1959: 412). Smith would have agreed. He assessed many phenomena we now see as “perfectly beautiful and agreeable” what were in earliest times “the proper objects of reverence and gratitude,” inspiring wonder as proceeding “from some intelligent beings” (1982: 40–2, 48–9). And the Scot saw the absence of causal thinking as a key factor in this complex. The sentiment of wonder behind either “consternation” and “complacency” had arisen very early, as philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) doubtless influenced Smith to conclude that early humans were not able to make a connecting, “imaginal” bridge between events. This could have occurred in much the same way as an eighteenth-century European rustic would wonder, given no explanation, over the peculiar movements of iron before a lodestone.

For the titular founder of the discipline of comparative religion, Anglo-German Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), a century later, wonder was a wellspring of religiosity, but in his approach the Enlightenment outlook tended to be replaced by Romanticism. What he described as the natural “appreciation of the infinite” was the naïve, childlike freshness with which the most ancient poets continued to experience their worlds. “A new life flashed by every morning before their eyes, and the fresh breezes of dawn [that] reached them like greetings wafted across the golden threshold of the sky.” Such new life was from “the rainer, the thunderer, the measurer,” or especially from those “bright beings, the Sun, the Sky, the Day, the Dawn . . . opposed to the powers of night and darkness,” this “contrast of light with dark being of very ancient date” (Müller 1899: 618).

Müller inferred what he took to be the earliest textual evidence of humanity’s spiritual life; namely, the signs of reverence behind the most ancient body of Sanskrit texts, the Rig Veda or Vedic hymns. Müller trusted little else but texts for revealing the nature of religions in the distant past, yet he was reacting against a more popular trend. For, by the late eighteenth century, the amount of ethnographic reporting on indigenous peoples had expanded exponentially, and the new fashion of evolutionism tempted many intellectuals to extrapolate from the most apparently primitive among contemporary indigenes back to the prehistoric origins of religion. Müller, however, was a decided “historist,” and he took a different tack by giving such priority to the Vedic hymns and what could be inferred behind them. On the other hand, he held the intriguing view that, long after the more-aware stage reflected in these hymns, many dispersed human groups lapsed into a confusion of thought – through a “disease of language” – that brought about the enormous, “curious array of belief systems . . . too often called savage,” found in the “anthropological religions” of tribal Africans, Australians, Pacific Islanders and the like (in Trompf 2002: 42). A true son of Romanticism, Müller placed the prordial impetus of an authentic wonder first, as response to a primal revelation, and the peoples his contemporaries were calling primitives and savages came only later.

Out of Müller’s views arose the common assumption that primitives, while they may be struggling with the connections of things, may also be very curious or wondering – but only “to get it wrong” (1962: 49).

This did not square, however, with the theory of Herbert Spencer (1820–1904), the English inventor and social evolutionist, arguably the first sociologist of comparative religion. Wonder, or even curiosity, he had decided by 1856, were not properties of the savage mind. That could be safely inferred even from the behavior of village rustics he observed while on his holidays, who, because they showed little interest in Spencer’s makeshift scientific demonstrations, led him to comparative insights about the reception of newly created goods. He likened the reactions of rural folk to the relative “indifference which low savages display, when shown looking-glasses, watches, or other remarkable products of civilized life,” as missionary accounts had allegedly shown. “Surprise or curiosity are not the traits of the utterly ignorant,” Spencer argued (1904: 476–7). By the act of his imagination, or an extrapolation from an alleged relic in the English countryside both across to the inexperienced modern primitive and then backwards to a supposed “original” one, we find
Spencer representing “first peoples,” or the members of most small-scale, traditional societies, as duller of wit or as often lacking in curiosity and a sense of wonder – being the very opposite to Spencer’s ideal scientist, who is a person more naturally prepared for surprise and educated by higher religion to marvel in a civilized way.

Spencer’s social evolutionism, influential in the capitalist West, bears comparison with the theories of the founder-figure of communism Karl Marx (1818–1883), who was a protagonist of historical evolution (or development) in his own manner. Apropos wonder, Marx’s The German Ideology has history begin with a primal fear of overwhelming elements in the environment and end with complete mastery over both technology and sociality. Although Marx thought there were some reasons to admire the earliest societies – especially because they had not dissolved “their relations to the Earth” (1973: 497) – primitives are nonetheless in utter awe of external forces and inevitably create the gods out of them because they are at the mercy of the not-yet-controllable. Through fear, humans are naturally driven to a mutual (his friend Engels would add “classless”) dependence on each other, and from then on history is a story of lessened uncertainty and wonder, and increasing control over the environment.

With the turn into the twentieth century, the European projection of the “wondering savage” had taken on more various aspects. By then Oceania had come into the picture. What early field researcher R.H. Codrington told of central Melanesian notions of mana – that “power or influence, not physical,” belonging “to the region of the unseen” (1891: 118–19) – had been construed as an apprehension of the “supernatural” that surprised “the natives” in their daily round. Thus, while English religious thinker F.B. Jevons (1858–1936) felt compelled by the new ethnographic data to reject the (Müllerian) thesis that “primitive man lived in a state of perpetual surprise,” he thought it fair to assume that “at any rate occasionally” any unexpected, “startling frustration” in calculations during the “natural” routine of life would make primitives realize that they were “in the hands of a mysterious and supernatural power” (Jevons [1896] 1927: 18, 20).

The Scot James George Frazer (1854–1941) was having some effect here, because he had given back to the primitive (in spite of Smith and Spencer) a sense of “the experimental.” The attempt to work magic, for all the mistaken assumptions involved, was the predecessor to modern science (and was also prior to religion). For Jevons, though, it was implicitly the failure of expectations in a world of magic that induced wonder, and thus religiosity.

A famous English theorist of religion, R.R. Marett (1866–1943), paid homage to Jevons’ approach when he argued, almost a decade before Rudolf Otto in Germany, that the word “awe” is “the one that expresses the fundamental religious feeling most nearly,” that sense of “thrill . . . whereof the component ‘moments’ are fear, admiration, wonder, and the like, whilst its object is, broadly speaking, the supernatural” (Marett 1914: 8, 10, 13). The Melanesians’ mana was invoked – and, too, the comparatively vague (and for Marett pre-animistic) conception of the supernatural among the African Masai, who not only took mysterious steaming holes as ngai, but also the white man Joseph Thompson, and his lamp as a sign of interest in indigenes’ wonder upon contact with outsiders. Marett was influenced by Scotsman Andrew Lang (1844–1912) and what he had written about primitive actions to the unexpected – and to the spooky. Marett consequently played down talk of magical experimentation and heightened his emphases instead on psychological states – on feeling and states of uncertainty before the supernatural.

The story of such European imaging has further developments in Continental and Anglophone theory. Austrian Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) speculated about the “omnipotence of thought” as common to both infants and savages (in his Totem and Taboo). Essentially he argued that one could infer “latent” psychological states in primitive peoples that were generated from the surprises of life “present to the senses and the consciousness” (Freud [1913] 1946: 122). The phenomenologist of religion, Dutchman Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950), picked up on the inheritance of scholarship and stressed the primacy of wonder in religious consciousness; yet, like Freud, he pronounced on the greater suggestibility of primitives. For him, as a child of his times, “the natives” had a habit of over-exaggerating and letting their thoughts run away, as little-known expeditions to Melanesia – one by Anglo-American psychologist William McDougall to the Torres Strait in 1898, and another by psychological anthropologist Richard Thurnwald to German Neuguinea in 1906–1909 – had already been designed to confirm.

Less denigrating models were canvassed by the German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) and the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1875–1961). For Otto the feeling of “something ‘uncanny,’ ‘eerie’ or ‘weird’ . . . emerging in the mind of the primitive human being forms the starting-point for the entirety of religious development in history” (Otto [1917] 1959: 29). Of this shuddering before the numinous, however, apprehension of “the ‘supernatural’ has nothing to do with the case,” according to Otto. In qualifying Maret, Otto contended that this was “much too imposing an expression” for the primitive case. What he called “the vestibule of religion” was the product of “naïve, rudimentary fancies” paying “homage to natural objects that were frightening or extraordinary” (Otto 1959: 134–5). Otto, however, wrote of this incipience of holy dread less out of empirical interests than out of a desire to solve a philosophical problem, that of giving the religious sense a status sui generis; and thus the primitive mind, embodied above all in the savage wonderer, was constituted as preface to high theological insights.

As for Jung, what Otto conceives more in terms of outer
relations, with primitives responding to shadows and lakes, and eventually theological minds to the “Wholly Other,” comes to be transformed in analytical psychology into interior events. Primitives operate in a world affected by “unconscious regulators-dominants” that invade the inner numinosum, generating astonishment, awe and fear. This view, however, entailed Jung’s problematic subscription to Frenchman Lévy-Bruhl’s theory of the indigenes’ “mystical participation” with nonhuman agencies in this cosmos, or pre-logical mentalities that conditioned the fearful images and phantasms erupting as interior astonishments in dreams.

The goal-posts for the better understanding of les sauvages, in any case, tended to be shifted in accordance with specialist games played in European academic disciplines. That earthier English soul D.H. Lawrence (1885–1930), for one, who was a theorist of religion in his own right, and who knew some Jung but surprisingly never read Freud, wondered where bodies had gone in all this. He apparently wanted primal wonder to be relocated in the close encounter with or near touch of nakedness, when “blood,” not just mind, was thinking (Lawrence [1923] 1971: 102–16). When blood did come into it further down the track, the interest in awe and wonder took on sinister-looking undertones, and the Dionysians’ cultivations of fascination for the lost pagan mysterium led on to the sacred Teutonic grottos of the Nazis, and the tragic misappropriations of Otto’s Das Heilige. Concern for wonder, on this account, began to lose what momentum it had left. If the unheimlich (uncanny) could metamorphose into the grausig (horrible) politically, that had to be reckoned with experientially. Awe, dread and curiosity became in psychological texts “mixed emotions” – of surprise and fear, fear and expectancy, surprise and acceptance respectively – sometimes indistinguishable from other mixed emotions, and wonder hardly coming into view at all.

The American psychologist B.F. Skinner was quick to categorize wondering under “superstition,” when, in consolidating earlier work by fellow countryman Thorndike and the Russian Pavlov, he found animals were “startled” to find reinforcement (food availability) by performing some action “totally irrelevant” to the norm (of pressing a bar), and so by experiencing what in the language of Jevons and Maret “defeats reasonable expectation” (Marett 1909: 12).

The Western intellectual community was losing its own sense of wonder – symptomatically perhaps, considering the Era of Violence – and from Durkheimian talk about collective excitations or effervescence to fancy new language about “cognitive engrossment” and “effortless disassociation,” wonder was obscured behind other categories rather tangential to it. It apparently was being “dispelled” by hundreds of a hundred-and-one photographic books, by the exponentially quickened appearance rate of new inventions, and by an ethos combining smart technology with the blasé. It has just managed to hold on with the naïve delights of children; and it somehow remains as a sense of “political correctness” when a person realizes that he/she should not dupe others with “tall stories” or play on their susceptibilities for too long.

Reckoning that the culture of high technology has subtly and tragically suppressed our older sense of wonder, Rollo May holds that social psychological health in the West is under threat. The disenchanting of the world, another way of describing the decline of wonder, seems symptomatic of the decay of religion itself. Paradoxically, the globalized access to new consumer goods from Western-originated markets has produced reactions of religious wonder among First Peoples and in other quarters. “Cargo cults” of various kinds come to mind, these not only being confined to Melanesia; and one contemplates the recently emergent Indian goddess, Santoshi Mata, to whom one prays for new commodity items. In all such reactions, however, nature portends to be the sufferer and the nexus between wonder and nature is impoverished.

In this light, it is no wonder there are religious voices calling us to attune our attentions afresh to the wonders of creation (e.g., Matthew Fox), depth ecologists persuading us that we should treat planet Earth as a living being (J.E. Lovelock), and philosophers encouraging us to “re-enchant” nature (e.g., Morris Berman).

Garry W. Trompf

Further Reading
Smith, Adam. Essays on Philosophical Subjects [1795] in
The religious traditions of indigenous peoples of the world weave together religion and nature. The extent to which these traditions are still observed today depends both on the political and economic contexts in which they are now situated, and the degree of dedication of regional spiritual leaders to conserving a traditional heritage at variance with contemporary cultural ideas and practices from the dominant societies in which they are located. In the Americas, for example, after centuries of efforts by Euro-American religious and political leaders to eradicate American Indian rituals and erase Indian culture; centuries of taking away Indian lands whose boundaries had been guaranteed by signed treaties; and more than a century of government and business control over economic development on those lands, the people in many Indian communities live in poverty and suffer the ravages of unemployment, family destabilization, alcoholism, dilapidated housing and dependence on government assistance granted at the whims of political authorities. Federal government statistics on employment and poverty witness to the state of Indian lands and communities. The casual traveler through “Indian Country” in parts of the United States, and non-Indians living on or near reservations, often note the poverty and environmental degradation of such areas – but often without probing their underlying causes. Despoiled terrain and depressed people in these contexts do not mean that native cultures reject rather than retain traditional values; rather, they reveal the chasm between those values – sometimes maintained by only a few, often termed “traditionalists” – and perspectives and practices absorbed from or imposed by the wider social milieu.

In this situation, Indian peoples in the Americas (and in other parts of the world) have not simply endured, but have acted as protectors of their environment and their cultural heritage. They have sought to live a life of balance between the spiritual and the political. There should be no separation of spirituality from political or social life. Americans have two houses, one for government and one for prayer. Our people keep them together.

Leon Shenandoah, Tadadaho (Chief of Chiefs), Haudenosaunee Nation

The forests, which are still preserved as a common reserve for the people of the world, are mostly in indigenous territories. Because we live in the natural world, we treat the natural world as our Mother. In Panama, in the last ten years, the desertification has been great. The forests that remain are on indigenous lands.

Atencio López, Cuna Nation, Panama

We, the children of the Earth, have come to share with the world and the United Nations our way of thinking, our visions, our way of life, an alternative. We do not speak of the “environment”; we speak of the spiritual and physical world in which we live, a territory in which people and nature are interrelated. “Land” is only the soil, but a “territory” is land in cosmic relation with nature, with rivers and animals and air and people, a place in which all are related. “Territory” means also our language and our values. We indigenous people are protectors and keepers of the territory, the “environment,” because we are part of it.

Valerio Grefa, Ecuador

If we have no water, we have no life. We are responsible for seeing that the lives of generations to come will be possible. Our individual lives are a part in time of the longer life of the people. If men create an environment that harms us, the life of the community will end.

Pauline Tangora, Maori, Aotearoa (New Zealand)

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other parts of the world) began in the twentieth century to reaffirm their history and their environment-related spirituality. This took various forms. Some activists have used language as a means of social transformation, cultural affirmation and political regeneration: recovery of their native tongue, and teaching it in native schools; using "nation," rather than "tribe," to refer to their people, focusing thereby on treaties as agreements between sovereign entities; and transforming the word "Indian" into a transnational reference to native nations and individuals, although usually replaced by a specific reference to their own ethnic identity (Lakota, Hopi, Haudenosaunee, Muskogee, for example) in describing their particular origins. Others have focused on renegotiating treaties and economic contracts, using Indian lawyers rather than depending on advice from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the benevolence of corporate attorneys; and on filing successful lawsuits against federal and state governments. Numerous American Indians (including Hopi, Haudenosaunee, Lakota and Dine') have used their own national passports when traveling abroad, beginning in the 1980s, rather than U.S. passports; these have been accepted by foreign governments as official credentials.

Concerns and efforts such as these led to the organization of the “World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Territory, Environment and Development” which was held in 1992 at Kari Oca, a site on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during the week immediately preceding the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, otherwise known as the “Earth Summit”). Indigenous leaders from throughout the world, concerned about devastation of Earth, which peoples from North America referred to as a sacred “Mother Earth,” and peoples from South America called “Pacha Mama,” met to address issues of sovereignty, conservation and restoration of their lands, intellectual property, racism, and cooperation with non-Indian peoples to care for the Earth environment and promote concern for the human rights and cultural identity of native peoples.

During preparations for Rio, indigenous representatives had urged the UN to speak not of “indigenous people” but of “indigenous peoples,” thereby acknowledging the diversity of peoples throughout the world and the responsibilities of nations to respect their lives and culture -- including their traditional nature-based spirituality -- and the territorial and ecological integrity of their land bases.

At the Kari Oca site, some 650 indigenous representatives celebrated their cultures from 25–30 May 1992. Through diverse religious ceremonies incorporating elements of pristine creation, they offered prayers to the Creator and Mother Earth, and pleaded for help on behalf of animal, plant and bird life; some sought the healing power of herbs and natural forces. They spoke of seeking freedom to conserve and express their spiritual beliefs and engage in their religious rituals. In a nod to contemporary conservation efforts, solar-powered lights illuminated the dirt roads at night with their stored energy.

Marcos Terena, a leader from the Terena people of Matto Grosso, Brazil, was a conference organizer, the Coordinator of the Brazilian Intertribal Committee, and the elected spokesperson to address the Earth Summit on behalf of the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples. In an interview after the Kari Oca meeting, he emphasized the relation between religion and nature:

We have organized this global conference because we did not have space within the United Nations, or in the debates of the NGOs [non-governmental organizations], and because we, as indigenous peoples, wanted to be treated in a specific manner, in a special manner, as peoples who know nature . . .

We, the indigenous peoples, for many years, have always had a harmonious relationship with nature, from which we have taken our sustenance -- not only material sustenance, but also our spiritual resistance and sustenance. Many people, including religious people, do not understand what we mean when indigenous peoples speak in this way. What we mean is that we do not have a “religion.” We do not have a “church.” We have only our spiritual power. Everyone has their spiritual power. But now [non-indigenous peoples] are far from their spiritual power. They are much closer to their technological and scientific powers. Because of this, they cannot know what nature and Mother Earth want to say.

But we, the indigenous peoples, have tried to show that in daily practice we the indigenous peoples are knowers of nature and also that our resistance, our strength comes from a spiritual relationship with nature.

The indigenous peoples have suffered a great rejection, a great genocide . . . The indigenous culture previously was treated as folklore, but now we have been able to demonstrate that our cultural force represents our own dignity as a people. If we can demonstrate this day after day, we can also demonstrate that indigenous culture is something very alive, very strong, that has sustained us in this time. We are always joined in a perfect relationship of harmony with nature and with Mother Earth (Interview with and translated by author 30 May 1992, Kari Oca village, on the last evening of the event).

On the final day of the conference, the indigenous peoples from around the Earth issued the “Kari Oca Declaration.” The declaration expressed the intergenerational consciousness of traditional cultures when it declared that indigenous peoples “walk to the future in the footsteps of
our ancestors." The document affirmed cultural and historical continuity, and a claim on native territories, by stating that those footprints are "permanently etched upon the lands of our peoples."

Indigenous peoples’ human, territorial and civil rights, even when supposedly guaranteed by treaties, often have been violated by national governments in which native lands are situated. The Kari Oca Declaration condemns rights violations by asserting that indigenous peoples "maintain our inherent rights to self-determination," despite "centuries of deprivation, assimilation and genocide." On their lands and territories, they maintain "inalienable rights" to their waters and to all resources, and profess their "ongoing responsibility to pass these on to the future generations."

Earth Summit organizers had sought in vain to have the United Nations delegates approve an "Earth Charter" that would promote ecological integrity and the well-being of the biotic community. At Kari Oca, the assembled delegates were successful in promulgating a 109-point "Indigenous Peoples’ Earth Charter." In it, they asserted their rights to their traditional manner of life and their spiritual way of life, beginning with a forceful demand to "the right to life." They noted that their territories are "living totalities in permanent vital relation between human beings and nature." They stated that the UN Convention on Genocide must specifically include genocide against indigenous peoples. The "Indigenous Peoples’ Earth Charter" recalled the link between land, spirituality and self-determination by asserting, "Indigenous peoples were placed upon our Mother, the Earth, by the Creator. We belong to the land. We cannot be separated from our lands and territories." The charter called for the establishment of an indigenous peoples’ environmental network; condemned the dumping of toxic wastes and nuclear wastes on native lands; called for the return of indigenous peoples’ human remains and artifacts to the original peoples from which they had been taken; asserted that "traditional knowledge of herbs and plants must be protected and passed on to future generations"; and stated that indigenous peoples should be free to use their own development strategies, ones which would promote "economic and ecological viability." (In the U.S., ideas from the "Indigenous Peoples’ Earth Charter" have been put into practice by such organizations as the International Indian Treaty Council NGO, founded in 1974 and with offices now in San Francisco, California, New York City, and Palmer, Alaska; and the Indigenous Environmental Network, founded in 1991 and headquartered in Bemidji, Minnesota.)

The Kari Oca gathering was important for six significant accomplishments. It provided a forum for indigenous peoples to exchange particular and universal spiritual insights and to integrate them with diverse social-political-ecological-economic perspectives; it established a foundation for and inspired ongoing collaborative work; it reinforced an ongoing pan-Indian sharing of religious perspectives and ethical values; it strengthened international indigenous cooperative efforts to promote the material well-being of native peoples, particularly through rights to natural resources and territorial sovereignty; it affirmed global native efforts to weave together nature-oriented spiritual values, environment-related religious ethics, and indigenous communities’ efforts to conserve and control natural resource use and to retain religious traditions; and it taught peoples of non-native cultures about indigenous concerns for territorial and spiritual integrity, both linked to a profound respect for Mother Earth. Although the Kari Oca ideals are still, for the most part, visions of what the future might bring, Indian traditional spiritual leaders, social activists, NGOs, and local grassroots organizations are planning and working to make those visions a concrete reality in the lives of their peoples.

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Further Reading
See also: Indigenous Activism and Environmentalism in Latin America; Indigenous Environmental Network; Mother Earth; Native American Languages (North American); United Nations’ “Earth Summits”.

World Council of Churches and Ecumenical Thought

The institutional center of ethical thought about environmental issues inside the World Council of Churches is the working group on Justice, Peace and Creation. Theological and ethical ecumenical thought relevant to environmental concerns has a wide base and a long history, which is embedded in the ecumenical thought of the twentieth century. One can trace the history of ecumenical thought through the various conferences sponsored by the WCC in
the decades since World War II, key discussions and decisions taken at Central Committee meetings or assemblies of the WCC in the last decades, and through publications of the WCC and of the people related to it. One can similarly trace ecumenical environmental thought in this way and also through the participation of WCC staff and those of member churches in such events as the United Nations environmental conferences in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and Johannesburg 2002.

The environmental thought of the WCC is closely related to, and in close conversation with, long-standing concerns of the WCC. It reflects the ongoing attempt of the WCC to develop overarching ethical themes which encompass in different ways the almost 400 member churches of the WCC, and thus reflect the global reach of the organization, as well as reflecting the centrality of its often-stated ethical commitment to justice, especially for the poor and the weak around the world.

While its ethical concerns have varied according to the issues of the times, one finds in the ethical thought of the WCC an ongoing interest in global economics and an often-stated concern for the uneven and unjust effects of capitalism on communities and individuals. This concern has changed shape according to the times, so that what was once an ethical critique of colonialism and Northern domination of Southern economies currently takes the form of a thoroughgoing critique of economic globalization, and corporations and international financial institutions which impose their logic and their will and demonstrate little or no concern either for the life of local communities or for their natural environments.

Another ongoing concern of the social thought of the WCC directly related to issues of the environment is that of science and technology. As was made clear in the well-known conference, “Faith, Science and the Future,” sponsored by the WCC which took place at M.I.T in July in 1979, ecumenical thought is concerned about the many ways in which both science and technology can escape community controls and aims, thus achieving a kind of autonomy that can result in the undermining of central values and practices relating both to the human social world and the natural environment.

In contrast to those who would let science and technology develop autonomously, ecumenical thought has stressed the inescapable moral responsibility human beings have for the social world in which they live, including the responsibility over the developments of science and technology. Such developments often largely determine human social relationships and relationships with the natural world, and cannot be left to develop on their own.

While members of the WCC work closely with other religious and secular groups, it is clear that the root of concern for the environment in ecumenical thought is a shared Christian conviction that nature is God’s creation, and is therefore sacred, possessing its own worth which cannot be determined by humanity. The sacredness of nature means above all that it is to be cared for and not ruined by human beings, who themselves are of course a part of nature. Thus faith communities can be and should be sources of values that are alternative to those that see nature as simply a resource to be exploited for human ends of pleasure and commerce. The Orthodox Churches have contributed considerably to this ecumenical theology of nature.

While the WCC member churches and staff often work with others to actualize their values, the WCC has also established several programs of its own which deal directly with issues of the environment, such as the WCC Climate Change Program, which started in 1988. The WCC has also sponsored programs and research on mobility, and on biotechnology, nuclear arms and genetic engineering.

The title of various programs and conferences of the WCC in the last several decades demonstrate both the continuity and the change in ongoing ecumenical environmental thought and action. In the 1970s the WCC developed the ethical goal of a “Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society.” In the 1980s it talked about “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.” In the 1990s the phrase “The Theology of Life” described a decentralized, contextual, community-based approach to the integration of these same basic elements which are critical for what ecumenical thought calls sustainable communities.

One strength of ecumenical environmental thought is clearly this long-standing insistence on keeping the values of justice, sustainability, peace and environmental responsibility together, and relating them to other issues such as science and technology, capitalist development, and globalization. Another unique strength is the incredible diversity of the experiences of its member churches around the world which require ecumenical social thought, including ecumenical environmental thought, to be methodologically both very general and very specific and contextual simultaneously.

The diversity of experiences and contexts as well as theologies and interests contained in the ecumenical movement which make it so rich can also make it difficult for substantive ecumenical environmental ethics to move ahead. It is difficult to achieve ethical consensus across the many kinds of diversity of member churches. It is also difficult to hold member churches accountable to each other in concrete efforts to achieve in their own contexts and communions some of the goals to which they have agreed in voting for general statements of the ruling bodies of the WCC.

Heidi Hadsell
Further Reading


*See also*: Christianity (8) – Ecumenical Movement International; Christianity (9) – Christianity’s Ecological Reformation; Christianity and Sustainable Communities; Eco-Justice in Theology and Ethics; Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism; United Nations’ “Earth Summits”.

World Heritage Sites and Religion in Japan

Adopted in 1972 for the protection and preservation of precious natural and cultural sites; the World Heritage Convention of the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), thirty years after its founding, had inscribed 730 properties (563 cultural, 144 natural, and 23 mixed “cultural landscapes”) from 125 countries on the World Heritage List. Nominations for World Heritage designation require well-documented governmental commitment to protect a site in perpetuity, clear and undisputed boundary surveys, and unambiguous arguments for the “outstanding uniqueness” of sites representing certain historical, aesthetic, or scientific genres.

Though in its formative years World Heritage selections were largely informed by Western aesthetic notions favoring monumental architecture and national parks, more recently UNESCO has worked to counterbalance this Euro-American bias by including “intangible” heritage such as sacred mountains, ritual performance traditions, and prayer (UNESCO 2001:2).

Japan’s World Heritage sites

By 2003 the World Heritage Convention had recognized eleven Japanese sites, including Hiroshima’s Peace Dome, Okinawa’s Ryukyu castles (gusuku) and Yakushima’s ancient cryptomeria forests. The sacred Kii mountain range running through Mie, Nara and Wakayama prefectures, with its unique combination of ascetic training grounds and lush forests, was nominated for consideration as Japan’s twelfth designation.

Shugendô Mountain Asceticism

Asceticism as practiced in Japan’s Kii mountains, known as Shugendô (“The Way of Acquiring Supernatural Power”), is a marginalized tradition that borrows selectively from Buddhist, Daoist, and Shintô sources. None of these borrowings is “final or authoritative” – when cosmology does not fit natural mountain formations, writes Paul Swanson, “so much the worse for cosmology” (Swanson 1981: 79). Denying themselves adequate food and sleep during long, treacherous climbs, Shugendô practitioners perform extreme austerities to access patron deities’ spiritual power for worldly benefits.

Though Shugendô has no founder or formal doctrine, the basic procedure for achieving catharsis and healing is explained by priest-guide Gojô Kakugyô like this:

> You must discover the Buddha or deity within each of you. Weep for all the words left unspoken, the acts unfulfilled. Recognize your smallness in the face of the beauty and grandeur of great nature. This is the essential meaning of sāngye (repentance, recognition). If you cannot apologize face to face, apologize to the mountains, stones and rivers. But above all you must weep (naku). Only by shedding tears will you re-emerge whole (interview, Yoshino Japan, July 2002).

Humankind, animals, supernatural beings, and great nature exist in mutual interdependence, connected by the ability to weep. Because the individuals from whom practitioners sought forgiveness are no longer living or else their relationships are too chaotic, practitioners welcome the empathy and contemplation nature affords. Joblessness, infertility, alienated family relationships, and disquieted ancestors are common motivations for participating.

Mythmaking Potential of World Heritage

Throughout history, Shugendô has reinvented itself in response to proscription, ideological attack, and followers’ changing needs. Priests at Kimpusen-ji temple (Nara prefecture) cleverly sought UNESCO’s aid to imbue its sacred mountain Mount Omine with the aura of World Heritage. If successful, the designation will have honored and protected a pilgrimage trail (the Okukake) that neither the Bureau of Cultural Affairs nor Nara Prefectural Government planned on designating as National or Prefectural Cultural Properties. UNESCO designation, said Tanaka Riten-san, the priest who initiated the nomination, is a critical step toward reclaiming Japan’s religious consciousness “thrown out” (tsuterareta) by American Occupational forces’ separation of Church and state (interview, Yoshino Japan, July 2003). Terence Hay-Edie’s analysis of a Tibetan minority in Nepal finding opportunities for “new mythmaking exercises in world heritage ordered space,” illustrates a similar convergence between UNESCO and marginalized communities’ interests in heritage protection. In both cases, claims for uniqueness and authenticity
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rested upon stewardship of sacred mountains (Hay-Edie 2001:3).

Prior to the Kii peninsula’s World Heritage nomination, an active community-based campaign promoted pride of place, cleanliness, and keeping its festivals well attended. Other voices from within and outside the community, however, questioned UNESCO’s rhetoric of “promoting peace and security in the world through collaboration among nations” while ostensibly appropriating Japan’s sacred sites for a global consumer market. Though UNESCO strives to help local and international organizations convert its ideals into effective “instruments for action,” as in the case of Biosphere Reserves which Ron Engel discusses in these volumes, critics such as McGuire have charged that Japan’s World Heritage designations have strayed from UNESCO’s founding principles of protecting endangered sites and degenerated into a system of elite cultural prizes. Far from being endangered, Japan’s World Heritage sites have long been protected by the domestic cultural property system and have been designated to boost sagging tourist markets. The resultant tourist deluge has been so great that some sites actually became endangered after UNESCO designation. On Yakushima, for example, hordes of mainland day-trippers have trampled sacred cryptomeria trees’ exposed roots, forcing caretakers’ to construct unsightly wooden rampways around the trees.

Wakayama’s Environmental Crisis

Tateishi Kôshô-san, another Kimpusen-ji priest, has been successful manipulating the forces of World Heritage designation to protect the natural environment in nearby Wakayama. Among his devotees are individuals diagnosed with terminal lung cancer and heart failure who recovered completely after performing austerities under Kôshô-san’s guidance. Kôshô-san is frequently described as “wild” (yasei-teki), “aboriginal” (senjumin-teki), and an “authentic mountain ascetic” (honmono no yamabushi). He established his own sect called “Shizendô” (“The Way of Nature”) blending Shugendô with yoga, environmentalism, and dance. His spiritual practices are grounded in criticisms of Japan’s environmental exploitation, cultural chauvinism, and floundering national education system. The Shugendô “boom” that began in the late 1990s, occasioned partly by UNESCO designation, has given Kôshô-san the ear of a growing international clientele who discovered Shugendô on the internet.

Kôshô gives greatest priority to protecting Wakayama’s natural environment. He has been a strident critic of the Bureau of Cultural Affairs and prefectural government’s declaring prominent religious sites “Important Cultural Properties,” but then creating special laws and funds to protect only individual sites. This has left a mess of the overall environmental scene in surrounding areas. Former sacred peaks and riverbanks have been smashed into gravel pits. Over 50,000 used tatami mats were dumped into a ravine, creating a thirty meter high “tatami mountain.” Junked buses and cars protrude from sacred waterfalls. Meanwhile government officials congratulate each other about forthcoming World Heritage designations to protect sacred peaks.

A major problem Kôshô-san and Wakayama residents face occurs when corporations buy land in the countryside promising to compost tatami mats or build dairy farms but instead carve gravel or dump illegally. Locals upset by these practices have been too weak, frightened, or poor to respond effectively.

Enlisting the Help of Local Bureaucrats and the Media

Kôshô-san has been successful working with local public officials, television and print media to raise awareness about Wakayama’s environmental problems. In 1996 he first confronted the Japanese mafia who created these dumping grounds – a single man standing against wealthy corporations. Blowing his conch shell, reciting sutra, and with the force of Shugendô’s patron deities Zao Gongen and Fudô-myô-ô behind him, he tried to stop them. At first his adversaries were amused and simply continued. But after getting the public officers and reporters behind him his movement gained traction. The tatami mountain was relocated to a legal dumpsite in 1996; by 1998, Kôshô’san and his environmental team bankrupted three corporations’ gravel production ventures.

Spiritual Eco-tourism

Kôshô-san has kept meticulous records of media reports documenting his activities and shows practitioners damaged sites where trucks and machinery remain. He asks, “Is this World Heritage?” Seeing ascetics perform ablutions in a sacred waterfall with a protruding Toyota Land Cruiser provokes a direct, spiritual impression that statistics cannot convey. He hopes clients will appreciate the area’s natural beauty and help protect it. Kôshô-san’s efforts are a type of spiritual eco-tourism. He encourages university students who participate to choose environmentally responsible careers. After performing austerities in Wakayama's ancient forests to gain self-knowledge and overcome depression, students develop a sense of environmental stewardship. He appeals to their desires for rigorous exercise and communion with wild nature, but then gives them spiritual and ecological guidance which helps “green” their worldviews and consumer habits. Kôshô-san has also seized upon foreigners’ interests in protecting Kumano’s natural environment to motivate Japanese people who might not otherwise recognize its value.

Conclusions

In his role as ascetic mediator between environmentally destructive corporations and concerned locals, Kôshô-san
The World Pantheist Movement is an international grassroots membership organization promoting a completely naturalistic religious response to nature and the universe, with nature as the central focus of beliefs, practices, activities and ethics.

The WPM emerged from public interest generated by the pantheism website of its founder and president, United Kingdom environmentalist Dr. Paul Harrison. It was incorporated in the U.S. in 1998, and opened for membership in 1999. Its core beliefs are incorporated in the Pantheist Credo, a statement drawn up democratically by a group of 15 volunteers and revised at intervals.

The pantheist credo begins with a statement of reverence for the self-organizing universe’s overwhelming power, beauty and fundamental mystery. It views all matter, energy, and life as an interconnected unity. It asserts that humans are an integral part of nature, which we should cherish and preserve in all its magnificent beauty and diversity, living in harmony with nature locally and globally. Acknowledging the inherent value of all life, human and nonhuman, it urges that all living beings should be treated with compassion and respect.

The credo’s “social clause” asserts that all humans deserve a life of equal dignity and respect, and actively endorses freedom, democracy, justice, and non-discrimination, in a world focused on peace, sustainable ways of life, full respect for human rights and an end to poverty. It supports religious freedom and the separation of religion and state.

The WPM credo has a strongly naturalistic base. Nature, the entire living and non-living universe, is all that exists. There are no supernatural entities and no separate spirit realms. There is a single kind of substance, energy/matter, which is vibrant and infinitely creative. Consciousness and mind are emergent qualities of energy/matter. The senses and science are our best means of developing our ongoing knowledge of the universe, and the most solid basis for aesthetic and religious feelings about reality. Nature is seen as the only real basis on which religious feeling can be built.

Death is also viewed naturalistically, as a return to nature through the natural recycling of our elements, which should be facilitated by cremation or natural burial in simple linen shrouds or wicker baskets. There is no afterlife for the individual consciousness, but we live on through our actions, our ideas and memories of us, giving us a powerful incentive to do good.

The credo is not a requirement of membership, it is a “notice on the door,” a guide to core WPM tenets for people who are thinking of joining. These beliefs are closely related to those of deep ecology, religious humanism, religious naturalism, Unitarian Universalism, and modern Western versions of Stoicism, Daoism and Zen Buddhism, and the WPM welcomes membership by anyone who self-describes as one of these.

Ritual is optional in the WPM and there are no prescribed practices. Ceremony is seen not as magical placation of a supernatural being or beings, but essentially as self-expression of reverence and belonging. Members enjoy complete freedom of expression, and this may vary from nature walks, through individual meditation within nature, to shared organic meals or even pagan-like rites of a purely symbolic character. Some members are comfortable using religious terms in pantheistic ways, while others avoid them. The WPM aims eventually to provide a network of civil celebrants for nature-oriented weddings and funerals. As of 2003 this was limited to authorizing

Further Readings
See also: Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites; Dalai Lama; Japanese Love of Nature; Japanese Religions; Lyons, Oren; Sacred Mountains; United Nations’ “Earth Summits”.

Mark McGuire
members to celebrate weddings and funerals on behalf of friends and relatives.

Many of the WPM’s members are active environmentalists, but the organization also directly facilitates nature-related activities. It encourages members to join its group, saving wildlife habitat by daily clicking at the Ecology Fund’s website. By summer 2003 this group had saved 25 acres. This activity is funded by sponsors. The World Pantheist Movement itself sponsors this aspect of Ecology Fund and of Care2’s Save Rainforest sites, and by summer 2003 had saved an additional 62 acres in this way. Finally, in association with the National Wildlife Federation in the United States, the WPM encourages its members to set aside land (even small amounts) for wildlife, through wildlife-friendly gardening and sustainable management in the interests of native wildlife. So far 42 acres have been dedicated to wildlife.

The WPM also encourages direct contact among members and other pantheists. Local groups tend to meet in natural settings for walks, picnics, star watching and so on. The WPM set up the first generic pantheist mailing lists, the pantheist Usenet list, as well as almost sixty mailing lists and bulletin boards of its own devoted to discussion, local activities, specific topic areas, and organizational development.

The World Pantheist Movement (WPM) has organized and supported a series of initiatives on religions and conservation, to build new partnerships with the world’s faiths in the struggle to save the natural world. The first event was an Interfaith Ceremony in the Basilica di S. Francesco in Assisi, Italy, organized as part of WWF’s 25th anniversary celebrations in September 1986. Five major religions were invited to make declarations on Religion and Nature. These declarations, addressed by religious leaders to the faithful in the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim worlds, describe the values and ethics that lead them to the conservation of nature. In the years following that event, other religions joined in making similar declarations, including the Bahá’ís (1987), the Sikhs (1989), the Jains (1991), and the Daoists of China (1995).

WWF, in collaboration with Martin Palmer of the International Consultancy on Religion, Education & Culture (ICOREC), built on the Assisi event to establish a Network on Conservation and Religion to link faiths worldwide working on conservation projects. As a result, in the first nine years, an estimated 100,000 religious communities became involved in conservation activities. The faiths launched programs of work, education and instruction based around their teachings on nature. Undamaged native forests on monastery land on Mount Athos, Greece, were protected from logging. A Hindu Environment Center was established in the pilgrimage town of Vrindavan, India.

In 1995, after nine years of activity, WWF invited the religions to review progress and plan for the future at the Summit on Religions and Conservation which it organized in two parts. The first session of activists and thinkers within the faiths was held in Japan on 3–9 April 1995. It took stock of what had been achieved since Assisi, and drafted Faith Reviews and Future Plans. This was followed by the second session, a summit meeting of top religious leaders in England, 29 April–3 May 1995. The event was hosted by Prince Philip at Windsor Castle, meeting in the room where William Shakespeare first performed the Merry Wives of Windsor. Participants included Madame Rabbani, leading Bahá’í dignitary; Venerable Kushok Bakula, twentieth incarnation of the Arhat Bakula, for the Buddhists; The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (Orthodox); Rev. Bernard J. Przewozny, Pontifical Adviser on environmental issues (Catholic); Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, World Council of Churches, and the Archbishop of Canterbury (Anglican) for the Christians; Swami Vibudhesha Teertha, Acharya of the Madhva Sect for the Hindus; Dr. L.M. Singhvi for the Jains; Rabbi Arthur Herzberg, Vice President Emeritus, World Jewish Congress; Dr. Adnan Bakhit, President of the University of Al al-Bayt, Jordan, representing Crown Prince El Hassan bin Talal, for the Muslims; Sri Singh Sahib Jathedar Manjit Singh, Jathedar of Akaal Takhat (Throne of Timeless Being) for the Sikhs; and Mr Xie Zongxing, Vice President, China Taoist Association; all accompanied by supporting staff. Each of the nine religions presented a paper on ecology and faith describing their accomplishments, commitments, initiatives and future prospects.

At the summit, four experts were invited to present the issues to the religious leaders for discussion: Andrew Steer, Director of the Environment Department at the World Bank; Dr. Arthur Dahl, Deputy Assistant Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme; Dr. Susan George, author and Associate Director of the Transnational Institute; and Sam Younger, Managing Director, BBC World Service. Various themes were
discussed over the four days of the summit. The harmony among the distinguished participants demonstrated how much their spiritual principles in this area converged.

At the beginning of the summit, an ecumenical celebration was held in the St. George’s Chapel in Windsor Castle, with each religion presenting something of particular significance to their tradition. The summit was followed by a procession of the leaders in London from Westminster Abbey to Westminster Cathedral.

One result of the summit was the formation of an Alliance of Religions and Conservation as the successor to the WWF Network on Conservation and Religion to follow up on the commitments made. The Alliance assembled a series of projects relevant to ecology and faith for which it sought outside support. The summit also increased the engagement of the faiths with secular organizations such as the World Bank, which led to a continuing dialogue.

Another step in this WWF initiative was the preparation by the faiths of sacred gifts for the living Earth which they announced at an interfaith celebration in Kathmandu, Nepal in November 2000 during WWF’s annual conference. Two additional religions, the Zoroastrian and the Shinto, joined the Alliance of Religions and Conservation at that time. The initiative continues to spread, with WWF France organizing an interfaith colloquium in 2003. WWF has also published various books on world religions and ecology.

Arthur Dahl

Further Reading
See also: Alliance of Religion and Conservation; Indigenous Environmental Network; Network on Conservation and Religion; Palmer, Martin; Prince Charles; Religious Environmentalist Paradigm; van der Post, Laurens.

Wright, Judith (1915–2000)

Judith Wright (b. Armidale, Australia; d. Canberra, Australia) was one of Australia’s best-known poets, twice nominated for the Nobel Prize. One of the generation of poets who emerged from World War II – about which she wrote so passionately in early poems like “The Company Of Lovers” – she brought a new note to a tradition which, largely secular and patriarchal, had ignored the erotic and religious. Writing the “feminine” into it, she brought it closer to the culture of the land’s First Peoples with whom she had a lifelong affinity – the Aboriginal poet and activist Oodgeroo Noonuccal was one of her closest friends.

Her feeling for nature was essential to this. Born into a pioneering pastoral family she grew up not only on the land, “my blood’s country” (Wright 1994: 20), but also with it, “. . . riding the cleared hills, / plucking blue leaves for their eucalypt scent, / hearing the call of the plover / in a land I thought was mine for life” (316).

As she grew older, however, she began to realize how destructive her colonial inheritance had been: “What swells over us now is a logical spread / from the small horizons we made – / the heave of great corporations / whose bellies are never full” (407).

The task was to make amends, to live with the Earth, not to exploit it. Poetry, the voice of feeling and empathy, became her way of doing this. But she also became an environmental activist and champion of Aboriginal Australians.

Her experience as a woman of love, pregnancy, and birth also drew her into the life of the cosmos. In “Woman To Child,” for instance, mother and child are part of the unfolding story of creation: “Then all a world I made in me; / all the world you hear and see / hung upon my dreaming blood. / There moved the multitudinous stars, / and coloured birds and fishes moved. / There swam the sliding continents” (28).

This moved her beyond the merely anthropocentric into the dimension of the sacred. Another poem is addressed to Ishtar, goddess of childbirth: “You neither know nor care for the truth of my heart; / but the truth of my body has all to do with you. / You have no need of my thoughts or hopes, / living in the realm of the absolute event” (102).

Her religious sense was thus essentially sensuous and bodily, immanent and transcendent, as the sequence “Flesh” makes this clear:

God walked through all my ages. He set in me
the key that fits the keyhole; use it right
and eternity’s lightning splits the rock of time.
And there I was begun and so begotten
in that unspeakable heart of flame (146).

Significantly this cosmic and mythic perspective echoes that of Aboriginal culture: “Earth watches through our eyes, and as we stare / she greets, by us, her far compatriots there, / the wild-haired Suns and the calm Wanderers. / Her ancient thought is marked in every name; / hero and creature mingle in her dream” (203).

But it also led her to grieve over the land’s sufferings at our hands: “I am what land has made / and land’s myself, I said. / And therefore when land dies? / opened by whips of greed / these plains lie torn and scarred. / Then I erode; my blood / redens the stream in flood” (279).

In this way, too, she shared the feelings of the land’s First Peoples, “the night ghosts of a land / only by day possessed” (354) who represented the other side of the triumphalist story of settlement.

This identification combined with physical frailty as
she grew older made her increasingly angry and she identified with the darker energies of the cosmos. In this poem to the moon, “ruler of women / and singler-out of poets,” for instance, she claimed the powers of a crone:

...To you, chill Domina,
I make the prayer of age. In my last quarter
let me be hag, but poet.
The lyric note may vanish from my verse
but you have also found acceptable
the witch’s spell –
even the witch’s curse (341–2).

To the end she insisted on involvement: “... who wants to be a mere onlooker? every cell of me / has been pierced through with intergalactic messages” (422).

Her sense of self has become truly cosmic here, attuned to the language and energies of creation beyond good and evil as we know them, energies she glimpsed hanging over a rockpool’s “wild embroideries.” Admiring it, “... the devouring and mating, / ridges of coloured tracery, occupants, all the living, / the stretching of toothed claws to food, the breeding / on the ocean’s edge” (419).

But there was also the deep sense of belonging, of being attuned to the language of the world, expressed in “Rainforest,” for instance: “We with our quick dividing eyes / measure, distinguish and are gone. / The forest burns, the tree-frog dies, / yet one is all and all are one” (412).

That is perhaps why after the age of seventy she wrote no more poetry. But the world would continue to speak. Self, nature, poetry and the sacred are one. In one sense, that involved a return to a more “primitive” sense of reality. But in another, it pointed a way out of the crisis posed by our present technological culture. So her Collected Poems conclude:

All’s fire, said Herclitus; measures of it kindle as others fade. All changes yet all’s one.
We are born of ethereal fire and we return there.
Understand the Logos; reconcile opposing principles.

Perhaps the dark itself is the source of meaning,
the fires of the galaxy its visible destruction ...

... “Twisted are the hearts of men – dark powers posses them.
Burn the distant evil-doer, the unseen sinner.”
That prayer to Agni, fire-god, cannot be prayed.
We are all of us born of fire, possessed by darkness (426).

Veronica Brady

Further Reading
See also: Aboriginal Dreaming; Aboriginal Spirituality and the New Age in Australia; Australia; Australian Poetry.