Faith in America
Changes, Challenges, New Directions

Volume 3
Personal Spirituality Today

EDITED BY CHARLES H. LIPPY

Praeger Perspectives

London
CHAPTER 9

Nature Religion and Environmentalism in North America

Bron R. Taylor and Gavin Van Horn

In western New Jersey, after learning about straw-bale housing and organic gardening, a group of workshop participants are led in walking meditation by a Catholic nun dressed in blue jeans as she describes for the group the evolutionary story of the universe. Pulling out of a church parking lot in the Midwest, an evangelical Christian puts her hybrid car into gear: On the bumper of the car is a sticker asking, “What Would Jesus Drive?” Just north of San Francisco, Zen Buddhists practice mindfulness while tending their organic tomatoes at Green Gulch Farm Zen Center. At the Lothlorien Nature Sanctuary in southern Indiana, Neopagan practitioners gather together to “regreen” their lives and the land, celebrating an annual calendar that includes, among other items, earth steward weekends, colorful maypole dances, and solstice festivals that bring people together for camping and workshops.¹

Such examples are just a small selection of the many ways that diverse Americans are drawing upon religious and spiritual commitments in response to environmental concerns. Yet, regard for the natural world is not always welcomed on the American landscape. For some, environmentalism is viewed with suspicion, particularly when it is seen as tied to deep reverence for or even worship of the earth. Some conservative Christians, for example, consider environmentalism to be a Trojan horse that threatens Western civilization with a revitalized Paganism.² Thus, concern about environmental problems is often a contested realm of conflicting religious perceptions.

In this chapter, we argue that religious perceptions and practices have decisively shaped American environmentalism and have done so to such an extent that much environmentalism can be considered a form of nature religion. At least three major types of what can be called “green religion”
have emerged in American culture. By reflecting on the impact of such religious configurations, one can speculate as to their long-term influences upon religion and environmental politics in America. An examination of the historical and present manifestations of “green religion” and “nature religion” suggests that such phenomena, which have been very important in North American religious history, will continue to shape environmentalism both domestically and internationally.

RELIGION AND NATURE RELIGION

This analysis must first clarify the terms religion, nature religion, and green religion. With regard to religion in general, religion scholar David Chidester provided a broad but helpful definition when he wrote that religion can be defined as “that dimension of human experience engaged with sacred norms” that are related to experiences of extraordinary, transformative, or healing power. Although this may be a circular definition (religion is whatever people consider sacred and the sacred demarcates the religious realm), it does reflect the ways in which people actually speak about religion, as Chidester points out. It has the added advantage of allowing one to sidestep thorny issues such as whether one must have otherworldly divine beings to have religion, for such a definition requires the observer to take sides in implicitly religious disputes about what constitutes an “authentic” religion. Deploying a vague and admittedly circular definition allows an analytic, religion-focused lens to be employed whenever people use rhetoric of the sacred (or its opposite) to describe and promote what they most deeply feel and experience.

The term “nature religion” and its plural nature religions will be used here simply as umbrella terms for religious perceptions and practices that, despite substantial diversity, are characterized by a reverence for nature and consider nature to be sacred in some way. Another helpful way to think about religion (in general) harkens back to its Latin root, religare, which originally meant to tie fast or to bind. With this in mind, nature religion involves the feeling some people have of being bound, connected, or belonging to nature. “Green religion” will be used to refer to religious sensibilities that consider environmental concern a religious duty, regardless of whether nature itself evokes reverence or is considered sacred.

EUROPEAN AMERICANS AND NATURE: FROM EUROPEAN CONTACT TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In North America, scholars have been asking questions explicitly about the intersections among religion, nature, and culture since the late 1960s. In part, this scholarly examination has proceeded from the recognition that religious narratives shape the landscape in significant ways, even as these narratives themselves are shaped by contact with the land. American soil has indeed proven fertile ground for alternative and conflicting religious valuations of nature.
European Americans were deeply conditioned by the attitudes typical of the continent from which they had come. Consequently, their perceptions and feelings regarding nature were often characterized by fear and hostility, or, at least, by a deep ambivalence toward the wild landscapes that differed greatly from the domesticated agricultural and pastoral ones they left behind. In the region that came to be known as New England, these attitudes were shaped decisively by Christianity, especially Puritanism, whose devotees sometimes viewed American Indians as not only physically but spiritually dangerous, even in league with Satan. Early colonial leader and minister William Bradford, for example, described his first impressions of the landscape in no uncertain terms as "aidious & desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts & wild men." In other parts of the continent, Spanish explorers and friars, who founded missions and settlements in what would become Florida, Mexico, and the American Southwest, held many of the same ambivalent views about the American landscape and its inhabitants and generally sought to convert both the land and native populations from a "savage" to a more "civilized" condition. Such beliefs played an important role in the violent subjugation of American Indians and the land they inhabited.

Although Native American religions at the time of European contact were shaped by local relationships to particular lands and nonhuman animals, and thus consisted of diverse cosmologies and ritual practices, many scholars recognize distinctive differences in their respective perceptions of the natural world. Religious historian Catherine Albanese lists some of these religious commonalities among Native Americans: a fundamentally relational universe, a belief in other-than-human persons, a sense of kinship with the natural world, mythological narratives that included birth-out-of-nature origin accounts, a mythic sense of time, rituals to restore harmony, a belief in shape-shifting (i.e., humans and animals are able to change physical forms with one another), an "ethos of reciprocity," and an understanding that primary foods had sacred origins. For these reasons, Native American religions are often described as religions that hold nature to be sacred or as place-based spiritualities.

By way of contrast, Christianity in general, and Puritanism in particular, provided a cosmology and theology that reinforced the general impetus among European settlers to consider land not as something sacred and worthy of reverence, but as a resource to be exploited for both material and spiritual ends. For such Christians, both the material and spiritual ends had something to do with glorifying and satisfying a deity who resided beyond the earth and thus should not be too closely identified with it. Nevertheless, some early colonial writings also expressed the belief that one could learn about this deity through nature and that people could grow spiritually through the challenges and dangers posed by nature.

Therefore, for many early settlers, the natural world was not only a material inheritance but a spiritual gift. Puritan ministers such as Cotton Mather and especially Jonathan Edwards, who published important works in the early eighteenth century, promoted a Platonic doctrine of correspondence, in which nature on earth was seen as corresponding to divine
realities. For example, in expounding upon the traditional Christian doctrine that the book of nature complemented the book of scripture, Mather encouraged people to take walks in the “public library” of nature. Edwards also viewed the natural world as a place to read divine “signs,” and wrote that the natural world was not merely a commodity, but had inherent worth, since it was the effulgence of divine glory. This notion helped fertilize American ground for the appreciation of nature that was soon to grow wildly, including the Transcendental movement and the many other forms of nature religion that would follow. According to such historical interpretations, nature in early European America was invested with complicated religious meanings.

Perhaps the most prevalent scholarly narrative suggests that American attitudes did not shift toward nature appreciation until this had first occurred in Europe, beginning with the Enlightenment, and then, with the Romantic reaction to it. Roderick Nash, for example, spotlights figures such as the English philosopher Edmund Burke, whose *Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), along with Immanuel Kant’s *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), linked the aesthetic and the sublime. Meanwhile, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who did as much if not more than any other figure to precipitate the Romantic movement, grounded his critique of civilization by appealing to nature’s sacred purity. As Nash puts it, “Rousseau argued in *Emile* (1762) that modern man should incorporate primitive qualities into his presently distorted civilized life. And his *Juliet ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) heaped such praise on the sublimity of wilderness scenes in the Alps that it stimulated a generation of artists and writers to adopt the Romantic mode.”

Soon European literary figures would visit America, where wildlands could be experienced directly, helping to reshape the perceptual possibilities for the intelligentsia of America’s cities during a period when wild landscapes were retreating rapidly. By the late eighteenth century and with accelerating frequency during the nineteenth century, nature was increasingly described as sublime in American arts and letters. Meanwhile, the influence of Deism (a religious movement that relied on basic Christian teachings purged of their supernatural elements) made its own contribution to nature religion in America, for Deists understood God to be revealed exclusively through the laws of nature.

Many figures and movements could be featured in this history in which an appreciation for the sacred dimensions of nature gained momentum. Some of these include the Deistic third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, whose *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785) linked the “sacred fire” of liberty to the connection of the people to the land; Christian thinkers, including a number of prominent figures from the Religious Society of Friends (popularly known as the Quakers), who found nature sacred and articulated what could be called a kinship ethic with nonhuman creatures; artists such as Thomas Cole and the Hudson River School of artists, who depicted wildlands as mysterious, sacred places; poets such as William Cullen Bryant, whose “A Forest Hymn” (1825) expressed that the Creator’s hand could be found in the very forests that
most European Americans had previously found perilous, and Walt Whitman, who wrote famously in *Leaves of Grass* (1855), “This is what you shall do: love the earth and sun and animals,” thus articulating an early, religious kinship ethic toward all creatures; and novelists such as James Fenimore Cooper, whose Leatherstocking tales (published as five novels between 1826 and 1841) not only expressed a reverence for nature but also appreciation for Native American lifeways, which Cooper understood to be deeply dependent on and embedded in nature. Cooper’s perspective later became a feature typical of much environmentalist thinking, but this perspective was also evident in early calls for nature preservation, such as when in 1832 George Catlin, “an early student and painter of the American Indian,” was the first to promote the idea of setting aside large national parks that, in his view, should include both wild natural beauty as well as Indians and wild animals.

Better known are developments that gained momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century, some of which were precipitated by the rise of the Transcendentalists, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson in *Nature* (1836), who argued that all natural objects can awaken reverence, “when the mind is open to their influence.” Indeed, at times, Emerson sounded an animistic tone, speaking of the spiritual truths conveyed by nonhuman beings. Other times he struck a pantheistic note, speaking effusively about the beauty and sublime character of nature. In contrast to the confusions and clutter created by the urban world, Emerson wrote, “In the woods ... a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reigns.... In the woods, we return to reason and faith.” Although some interpreters note his Platonic idealism, which led him to view nature more as the pathway to spiritual truth than as a spiritual end, he nevertheless contributed decisively to the dramatic rise in nature appreciation in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

Emerson’s influence includes his impact on Henry David Thoreau and John Muir, both of whom were, by most accounts, far more interested in nature for its own sake than Emerson. Indeed, in *Walden* (first published in 1854), Thoreau seems to provide an early example of what can be called nonsupernaturalistic nature religion, which will be discussed in more detail below. He also represented an archetype, even if he only partly embodied it himself, of the personal, spiritual return to nature. By the end of the century and into the next, John Burroughs would more consistently follow through on such impulses, fusing a scientific naturalism and a religious pantheism in what was perhaps the best early example of the back-to-the-land movement that became an important characteristic of the American counterculture in the second half of the twentieth century. Burroughs, Thoreau, and Muir were all naturalists who were more scientifically inclined than Emerson. For this reason, they fueled a more naturalistic form of nature spirituality than Emerson and most other Transcendentalists, and they pioneered an approach more amenable to the veneration of nature through environmental activism and bioregional
experimentation than those of a more Transcendentalist bent (or those today who might be considered New Age in spiritual orientation).

This race through time brings us to the cusp of the age of conservation, which is most often traced to Thoreau, Muir, and the utilitarian forester and founder of the United States Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot who, for his own part, was influenced by the Social Gospel movement that flourished at the turn of the century. A central reason for sketching this history is to underscore that by the beginning of the twentieth century, most of the main features of religious environmentalism had become manifest and were beginning to spread. A key rationale for this presentation is to emphasize that the American experience is a result of complex reciprocal influences between European and American experiences, perceptions, and worldviews, and to suggest that the land itself, so wild and different from the domesticated landscapes in Europe, had its own influence on the minds and hearts of those engaged with it. Less well studied and understood are the reciprocal influences among the experiences of those who came to North America from Africa, and later those from Latin America and Asia, as they encountered the land and other peoples here.

More clear is that by the time the historian Fredrick Jackson Turner proclaimed and lamented the end of the American frontier (circa 1890 with the end of significant, armed, Indian resistance), many Americans of European ancestry were regretting the steady decline of wild landscapes. Turner himself asserted that this loss threatened the virility and spiritual health of the nation. Such anxieties helped set the stage for the further development and increasing diversity of nature religions, many of which, during the twentieth century, also came to promote a spiritual or religious environmentalism.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY NATURE RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENTALISM UNTIL EARTH DAY

The first two-thirds of the twentieth century was characterized by developments that built on those sketched above. A few examples of particular importance, however, should be highlighted because of their influence. Among the most noteworthy was the emergence of nature-based youth movements such as the Boy Scouts and Indian Guides. Ernest Thompson Seton set this trend in motion when, during the first decade of the new century, he established the "Woodcraft Indians" movement and subsequently helped shape the Boy Scouts (founded in 1910) and Indian Guides (1925). Through these movements, Seton spread his view that American Indians provided ideal models for spirituality and ethics. Influenced by Darwinian thought, Seton also wrote widely about the emotional and altruistic lives of animals, although his critics claimed he did so in an unscientific and anthropomorphic way. Whatever the truth in these criticisms, Seton fostered a more positive evaluation of the continent's first human inhabitants, promoted a nature-based spirituality that understood nature as a sacred place where God can be encountered and virtue developed, and thereby helped shape the century’s environmentalist discourse.
Better known is John Muir, who was born in Scotland, immigrated to rural Wisconsin as a youngster, wandered widely as a young adult, and eventually found his own Shangri-la in the wildlands of California’s Sierra Nevada mountain. Whether by clinging to the top of a tree during a windstorm, tromping across the continent from north to south, or jumping crevasses in an Alaskan blizzard, Muir embraced the natural world and it seemed to enter into him “not by the eyes alone, but equally through all one’s flesh like radiant heat.”24 His writings expressed a sacramental communion with nature that went beyond philosophical symbolism. As he wrote in My First Summer in the Sierra, “We are now in the mountains and they are in us, kindling enthusiasm, making every nerve quiver, filling every pore and cell of us. Our flesh-and-bone tabernacle seems transparent as glass to the beauty about us, as if truly an inseparable part of it, thrilling with the air and trees, streams and rocks, in the waves of the sun—a part of all nature, neither old nor young, sick nor well, but immortal.”25 His writings are replete with similar passages, which arose out of the belief that “In our best times everything turns into religion, all the world seems a church and the mountains altars.”26 Reflecting the influence of both Transcendental thought and Darwinian theory, nature’s totality, particularly its grandeur, thrilled Muir, and these perceptions led him to underscore human insignificance in some of his writings.

Such feelings led Muir to become a champion of the areas he considered sacred. According to Albanese, “To go to the mountains and the sequoia forests, for Muir, was to engage in religious worship of utter seriousness and dedication; to come down from the mountains and preach the gospel of preservation was to live out his life according to the ethic that his religion compelled.”27 In 1892, Muir co-founded the Sierra Club, which articulated the preservationist ethic that would undergird the wilderness movement in general, and, at least in theory, guide the management of the National Park Service.28 Using both theistic and nontheistic religious language (he often sounded more pantheistic and animistic than theistic), Muir described his own spiritual experiences in nature, called on Americans to travel to wild places to experience the earth’s sacred voices for themselves, and battled the more politically powerful Gifford Pinchot on a number of issues related to wildlands management. The most famous conflict was over a dam Pinchot sought to build at Hetch Hetchy valley in Yosemite National Park.

The nation’s first forester who became its initial United States Forest Service director, Pinchot had a more orthodox, anthropocentric, and utilitarian religious ethic than Muir. He succeeded in establishing the “multiple use” doctrine as the management philosophy for governing most federal lands. Although Muir lost most of the specific battles he waged, he contributed to the more preservationist ethic undergirding the National Parks and designated wilderness areas in the United States, and he helped to make the wilderness movement an important social force, if not a new religious movement.

Some scholars, such as Stephen Fox and Michael P. Cohen, portray Muir as more pagan than theistic. Fox builds a compelling case that Muir’s use of theistic tropes was motivated more out of a desire for political
effectiveness (convincing a predominantly Christian nation to protect his own sacred places) than out of a theistic cosmology. Whatever one’s judgment about whether Muir remained theistic in some way or became more of a pantheistic or animistic pagan, the tension between Muir and Pinchot can be seen as archetypal all the way into the twenty-first century. Conflicts among those who are more traditionally theistic (if not always orthodox), but believe there is a religious duty to conserve nature (at least for people’s sake), and those who believe that nature is directly sacred in some way, have contributed to at least some of the internal tensions among environmentally concerned people in America. So the battles between Muir and Pinchot, which were especially heated in the first dozen years of the new century, are noteworthy for presaging much of what was to follow later in the century. No longer would nature be assigned a role as merely picturesque theater or as a backdrop for human accomplishment, but increasingly in the twentieth century, nature became a stage for new productions: a place for theatrical battles over sacred space.

Such was the case in another monumental dam battle at Echo Park in the Dinosaur National Monument. If Echo Park Dam became the “test case,” as historian Roderick Nash suggests, to measure wilderness enthusiasm in the mid-twentieth century, then the victory there may well have represented a tally mark in favor of a particular form of religion. As one Sierra Club member noted before the Senate subcommittee that heard arguments from both preservationist and development constituencies, “We have had money changers in our temples before. We have thrown them out in the past, and with the help of this good committee we shall do it again.” Similar rhetorical flourishes were involved in the battle over dams in the Grand Canyon, such as the infamous advertisement run by then-Sierra club director David Brower, which pointedly asked Americans, “Should we also flood the Sistine Chapel so tourists can get nearer the ceiling?” This remark, and others like it, were a summary confession of a belief in the sacrality of the natural world and implied that natural spaces could be desecrated by commercial or utilitarian interests.

Another twentieth-century development that indicated a growing religious apprehension of the natural world can be discerned in the writings of two well-known scientific writers, Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson. Their nature-related spiritualities and influence on later environmentalists are underappreciated by many scholars, who instead focus on their influence in popularizing ecological understandings.

Leopold, who died shortly before the publication of A Sand County Almanac (1949), is now considered the greatest ecological ethicist of the twentieth century, in large measure for articulating a holistic and biocentric “land ethic,” as, for example, in these famous passages:

The land is one organism. . . . If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of cons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.
All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts ... [and] The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.\textsuperscript{32}

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.\textsuperscript{33}

Less well known is the influence on his thought by the Russian mystic Pyotr Demianovich Ouspensky, who was in turn influenced by Theosophy as well as other Russian mystical thinkers, including Georges Ivanovitch Gurdjieff. Leopold’s holism, which anticipated James Lovelock’s Gaia Hypothesis and considered life to be integrally connected and interdependent, can be traced to these influences.\textsuperscript{34} Also not well known are that Leopold confided to his daughter that his own religion came from nature, and that his family considered his (as well as their own) religious understandings to be best characterized as a pantheistic spirituality in which there was no personal God orchestrating things, but nevertheless, a sense of the land as sacred and valuable apart from human needs.\textsuperscript{35}

Carson also had a deep, nature-based spirituality. This is less known than her role in precipitating the modern environmental movement through Silent Spring (1962), which assimilated current scientific understandings to express alarm about the threats posed by pesticides and herbicides.\textsuperscript{36} Of course, when writing Silent Spring, Carson was concerned about her scientific credibility, and so her spirituality and ethics were only subtly expressed. But careful reading of her work, especially her earlier books focused on the oceans and talks presented to women’s organizations, make her own nature religion clearer, as well as the deeper reasons for her environmental activism.\textsuperscript{37} Her spirituality did not involve extra-worldly divine beings, yet her language sometimes expressed a subtle animistic perception\textsuperscript{38} as well as a spirituality that appreciated the miracle and mystery of life on its own terms. She even dedicated Silent Spring to Albert Schweitzer, whose reverence for life ethics had become famous, thereby making clear her own affinity with such ethics.

As a marine biologist, Carson often highlighted the evolutionary, geologic forces of a world where “man is an uneasy trespasser” and the natural cycles and rhythms of the ocean continually created and destroyed, giving and taking life.\textsuperscript{39} The boundaries that Carson explored were not just the ocean’s edges, but the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman, wherein the nonhuman formed a kind of ecological baseline. Thus, Carson called into question two kinds of faith: faith in “scientism” (the benevolent impacts of human technological mastery) and faith in a God disconnected from natural processes. The impact (and controversy) of Silent Spring can be partially attributed to Carson’s willingness to question these dominant cultural faiths.

**NATURE RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENTALISM SINCE THE 1960s**

Between the end of the Second World War and the publication of Silent Spring, Americans focused on recovering from the trauma of war, and
environmental issues were little discussed. The 1960s brought many upheavals, from those surrounding the civil rights movement to cold war ideology. The cold war precipitated both a reliance on atomic weapons for security and engagement in the bloody war in Vietnam. These events not only led to widespread distrust of the government and its anti-communist ideology; they also forced many into a serious reappraisal of Christianity, the country’s dominant religion.

Those looking for new forms of religious meaning and political engagement found a greater array of religious alternatives than had ever been the case previously. This was in part owing to immigration from Asia, but also to the proliferation of new religious movements that appealed directly to those disenchanted with the dominant, organized, institutional religions.

Less often noticed, for it was not always understood as religious, was the growth of a spiritually holistic environmentalism that challenged the anthropocentric ethics of the culture’s mainstreams. The movements and figures previously discussed made available such religious and ethical alternatives, and when the broader social and environmental conditions were ripe in the 1960s, they grew more rapidly and widespread than ever before. A key watermark in this development was the celebration of Earth Day on April 22, 1970, which not only publicized but also ritualized a growing national consciousness regarding environmental problems. Media coverage of this event was extensive, and it is likely that key pieces of national legislation that followed in the 1970s (such as the Endangered Species Act) were influenced by this visible, mainstream recognition of our environmental predicament. For some among the diverse constituencies that rallied to commemorate Earth Day the event assumed a religious character, delineating a special time of ritual remembrance, celebration, and solidarity. Since then, a tripartite typology of religious environmentalism and activism has come more clearly into view.

The first, a sense that “green religions” are environmentally concerned world religions, emerged from a great ferment over religion and nature in America during and since the 1960s that was rooted in scholarship focusing on the relationships between religions, cultures, and the earth’s living systems. Among the most interesting work was that of anthropologists, including Roy Rappaport, Marvin Harris, and Gerrardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, who focused on the role ritual and religion can play in regulating ecosystems in a way that supports traditional livelihoods and prevents environmental deterioration. But these theorists had little impact on popular green religion.

A number of other scholars, however, engendered a strong reaction among both scholars and some lay people by arguing that some of the world’s major religious traditions are especially responsible for environmental deterioration because they foster environmentally destructive attitudes and behaviors. The most commonly identified culprit was Christianity (especially the most powerful Protestant forms), and sometimes scholars articulated prescriptions to fix such religions, or offered alternatives to them.
Such critiques and suggestions drew two reactions. In the first, religious thinkers either defended their traditions arguing that, properly understood, they are environmentally friendly. Others argued that some streams within their traditions provide green alternatives. In the second approach, culpability was forthrightly acknowledged, and ideas for the “greening,” or for the environmentally friendly reform of the tradition, were advanced.

In America, the bulk of such reflection occurred within Christianity for a number of reasons. A large number of Americans identified with Christianity, which had been the tradition most often blamed for environmental destruction, so Christians felt a need to respond directly to such criticisms. As well, the tradition’s emphasis on sin and repentance provided an internal, theological basis for reevaluating life and making changes in the light of faith.45

Although there was a greater quantity and range of debate within and about Christianity and the environment than in other world religions, similar questioning about and soul-searching within other traditions began in earnest.46 Scholars of religion also began to respond to such concerns. A scholarly field, now best known as “religion and ecology,” emerged in the early 1990s, which sought to identify obstacles the world’s religions might pose to environmental sustainability, uncover the resources within such traditions for promoting sound environmental behavior, or alternatively, to discover the ways in which these traditions would need to change in order to become more green. By the early twenty-first century, significant scholarly work had explored the world’s major religious traditions to understand their environmental attitudes and impacts, as well as to lay a foundation for steering them in greener directions.47

Reforming religious thinking and action along environmental lines was not easy and did not, by all available evidence, extend widely. Indeed, it has always been difficult to assess the extent to which environmental attitudes and behaviors cohered, and under what set of circumstances they were more or less likely to do so.48 It is clear, however, that some intellectuals and lay people have been pushing their traditions to understand the quest for environmental sustainability as a central religious imperative.49

For example, once a year, in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, an Episcopal church in New York City, humans are not the only animals that attend the worship service. On the feast day of St. Francis (the patron saint of ecology), in addition to a “Gaian Mass” intended to promote ecological consciousness, the church conducts a ceremonial blessing of animals, which often involves a lively assortment of creatures, ranging from an African elephant to llamas to birds, dogs, cats, and even blue-green algae. For over three decades, the cathedral has spearheaded many efforts to promote “green” perceptions among its congregants, including an “ecology trail” and architectural and artistic additions both inside and outside the sanctuary that draw attention to humanity’s place within the larger earthen ecosystem.50

On the opposite coast of America, a different type of “cathedral” has been recognized as worthy of reverence and protection, as California old-growth forests have become popularly known as “cathedral groves.”
Interfaith groups like the Religious Campaign for Forest Protection contend that these majestic trees are part of God’s sacred creation, and seek to protect these groves from further exploitative development. Drawing especially on Jewish and Christian theological traditions, this group grounds its forest conservation efforts in a stewardship ethic and an apprehension that the natural world can lead people to understand divine truths.  

Yet another example of religiously motivated environmental ethics comes from a type of American Buddhist practice popularly known as “engaged Buddhism.” Religious studies scholar and practicing Buddhist Kenneth Kraft has highlighted the role that American Buddhists have played in protests at nuclear waste facilities and test sites in Nevada, where participants have performed ceremonies and walking meditations as a way to draw attention to this environmental threat. Kraft proposes that a collective environmental ethic, which he calls “eco-karma,” may further alert Buddhists to their long-term obligation to the natural world.  

Though many other examples of institutional religious “greening” could be given, the above selections reveal the creative manner in which environmental concerns are being translated through the filter of religious practice. Many lay practitioners, religious leaders, and scholars continue to dialogue and respond to environmental inequities and degradation with the understanding that these problems mandate appropriate religious attention.

The second typology suggests that green religions are “nature-as-sacred” religions. However, the boundaries among these types are fluid. This is not a problem if one remembers with Jonathan Z. Smith that “map is not territory”; in other words, typologies do not perfectly mirror the world but are useful if they help orient us to the terrain. Nature-as-sacred religions provide a general map for detecting an increasingly substantial piece of religious terrain in the American context.

Regardless of the social scientific curiosities that may animate scholars involved in the emerging “religion and ecology” field and regardless of whether the scholars involved feel loyalty or affinity toward the traditions they focus upon, most of them seem to consider nature to be sacred in some way. This conviction appears to be tethered to an ethical concern about environmental decline. Such religion is the second general type of green religion that has emerged with some force in American culture. Because nature is considered a sacred point of reference that should inform one’s ethical and political motivations, this type of religion may be defined as nature religion.

This definition is apt, for the perception that nature is sacred and worthy of reverent care is central to the identities of a number of groups whose participants consider themselves to be engaged in what they also sometimes call nature religion. Such religions include Paganism, many if not most indigenous religions, and some New Religious movements and branches of New Age spirituality. The survey of earlier environmental thinkers and groups revealed that such spirituality is not new in North America, but that such trends have been strengthened since Earth Day.
The revival or reinvention (depending on one's historiography) of Paganism is an especially important contemporary manifestation of the sensibility that the earth is sacred. In rhetoric and sometimes in practice, pagans support environmental causes. Indeed, those who consider themselves to be pagan have been deeply involved in radical environmentalism, including through participation in Earth First! (from 1980) and the Earth Liberation Front (from the early 1990s). Such groups have alternatively deployed demonstrations, civil disobedience, sabotage, and even arson, as well as more mainstream tactics from boycotts to electoral politics, in their efforts to save the living beings they consider to be intrinsically valuable, and a "Mother Earth" they consider sacred. Indeed, those who are self-consciously pagan in their religious identity are the ones most likely to be at the forefront of ecological resistance movements in America. This is because when the earth is itself considered sacred, and not only indirectly so because it was created by a divine being, then the earth itself becomes the locus of religious and ethical devotion.

Like some of the earliest environmental advocates in America, politically radical pagans generally express affinity with what they perceive to be the nature-beneficent spiritualities and lifeways of indigenous peoples. Some try to draw on such spiritualities in their own religious lives, even though this can be problematic and controversial. They have sometimes, as well, expressed solidarity through political action by supporting Native American groups who are struggling for cultural survival and to protect places sacred to them.

Indeed, there has been a stunning revival of indigenous cultures and spiritualities purporting to consider nature sacred and promoting ethics of kinship toward all creatures. This development has nowhere been stronger than in North America. Evidence ranges from the engagements of indigenous peoples in lobbying and other forms of activism seeking to protect places considered sacred and essential to their traditional livelihoods; to scholarly analyses of "traditional ecological knowledge" which argue for the value of such knowledge in the management of ecosystems; to the hard work that goes into preventing the extinction of indigenous languages, upon which ceremonies and connections with the natural and spirit worlds are thought to depend; to other forms of ethnographic and archeological work, which can help indigenous people protect and reconstruct their traditions.

Native Americans have also contributed their own comparative analyses of native religious perceptions in relation to forms of theology that are traditionally more transcendent in orientation. As early as 1973, for example, Native American scholar Vine Deloria contrasted indigenous American perceptions with Christianity, noting differences in conceptions of space and time that he believed to be crucial for religiously informed relationships with the natural world. This is captured well in the following statement: "The major step to be taken to understand religion today is to understand the nature of religion as it occurs in specific places.... Rather than attempt to graft contemporary ecological concern onto basic Christian doctrines and avoid blame for the current planetary disaster,
Christians would be well advised to surrender many of their doctrines and come to grips with the lands now occupied.” Highlighting the importance of place to religion, Deloria continued, “To admit that certain lands will create divergent beliefs and practices and to change to accommodate to those realities is certainly preferable to extinction... That a fundamental element of religion is an intimate relationship with the land on which the religion is practiced should be a major premise of future theological concern.”

Deloria’s contention underscored that conceptions of land are critical to religious understandings, and particularly to nature-as-sacred religions.

The impact of what is now several generations of reappraisal of the value of indigenous culture has led to an increasing affirmation in Western popular culture of the nature religions of indigenous peoples. Two additional examples that have reached large audiences are noteworthy. The motion picture Pocahontas (1995), which celebrated a form of indigenous spirituality, offers one such example. Directors Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg reported after the release of the movie how they “tried to tap into [Pocahontas’s] spirituality and the spirituality of the Native Americans, especially in the way they relate to nature.”

The animistic nature spirituality and environmental kinship ethic depicted in this Disney-produced movie was reincarnated at its Animal Kingdom theme park in Florida, which opened in 1998. There a performance titled “Pocahontas and Her Forest Friends” reprises the story and the quest for kinship and harmony among all creatures, beseeching audiences, “Will you be a protector of the forest?”

The opening ceremonies of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah, provide a second example, when an assumed American Indian reverence for Mother Earth was celebrated on ice. During the opening ceremony, representatives from five of the region’s indigenous nations offered in their own languages both welcoming messages and spiritual blessings; these were then translated into the official Olympic languages. To tunes played on indigenous flutes, skaters in Indian-inspired costumes performed a dance, choreographed in synch with native drumming depicting the “heartbeat of Mother Earth” herself. The narrator underscored the value of this indigenous Mother Earth spirituality, and many of the Native American participants were thrilled to be able to present their cultures in a positive way to a television audience estimated at three billion.

In North America it is not only pagan, radical environmentalist, and American Indian groups, however, that consider nature to be intrinsically sacred. Some of those involved in New Age subcultures and New Religious movements share such perceptions, even though these groups have acquired a reputation for otherworldliness and political apathy.

Some in these movements, for example, view consciousness change as a prerequisite to both positive social change and environmental well-being. They also consider efforts to protect and restore nature as important ways to educate and foster the needed transformation of attitudes. Some even think that healthy ecosystems themselves contribute critically important energies to the envisioned consciousness transformations, such that
without environmental protection and restoration movements, and the resulting healthier natural energies, consciousness change is unlikely to occur.66

Yet another nature-as-sacred movement that has gained momentum in the post–civil rights era is homesteading. Rebecca Gould traces the homesteading impulse to John Burroughs, but also to Thoreau’s Walden, a text that remains a centerpiece in the sacred canon of many homesteaders. Like Thoreau’s pondside adventures, Gould asserts that homesteading has been “the turn to nature as a form of spiritual regeneration and cultural dissent,” with nature serving as the “ultimate reference point.”67 Though nature may be thought of as timeless or foundational in some sense by homesteaders, Gould contends that their choices reflect a larger American story of the “turn to ‘nature’ and the extraecclesial quest for ‘the religious’” in the face of modern social dilemmas.68 Homesteading, thus, serves as one example of the ferment over religion and nature in North America, representing a mode of dissent from dominant cultural streams by turning to nature as a place of proper physical and spiritual habitation.

The “greening of religions” phenomenon and the growth of nature religions involve a diversity of religionists, activists, and scholars, all of whom believe the earth is in peril by human behavior yet worthy of reverent care. Hence initiatives are underway to bridge the gap between what is (ecological decline) and what ought to be (environmentally sustainable lifeways). In this respect, the “Earth Charter” is one example of green religious production that might prove globally significant.

The Earth Charter was first proposed by Maurice Strong, a Canadian who served as general secretary for the 1992 “World Summit on Environment and Development,” which was sponsored by the United Nations and held in Rio de Janeiro. During the late 1990s the Earth Charter went through an extensive drafting and review process within a number of nongovernmental, religious, “civil society” organizations that are engaged with the United Nations.69 The drafting process was designed to gain maximum support from the international community. A draft presented to the United Nations during the “World Summit on Sustainable Development” (WSSD), a follow-up to the Rio conference held a decade later in Johannesburg, South Africa, spoke of “respect and care for the community of life in all of its diversity” and proclaimed that protecting and restoring the ecological integrity of the earth was a “sacred trust,” inseparable from the quest for justice and peace. The document concluded, “let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life.”70 As has been noted, individuals involved in green religious production frequently use rhetoric of the sacred to express awe and reverence toward the “miracle” of life. We have reviewed early and recent examples where science has been an important source of such perception. In addition to these forms of green religion, it appears that evolutionary understandings introduce yet another possibility: nature religion without supernaturalism.

By speculating on current trends, one may surmise that nonsupernaturalistic nature religion will likely become an important feature in the religious life of America and beyond, and such religion will increasingly
become a wellspring for environmental action based on kinship ethics and a reverence for life.

A good way to explore this hypothesis is to address two sets of questions:

1. How strong are the trends leading to the three types of green religious production under analysis? More specifically, are the social and environmental conditions that gave rise to them likely to wane or increase and intensify?
2. What are the drivers of “nonsupernaturalistic” nature religion? Are these likely to become more or less important influences on nature-related religion?

With regard to the first set of questions, two critical factors catapult forward all three forms of nature religion: environmental degradation and evolutionary science. These variables are intertwined in a complex mix with many other variables, but they are, for a number of reasons, becoming decisive elements in religious production.

For many people, environmental degradation is increasingly obvious and alarming. Thus, responses to such perceptions have been grafted onto existing religions (green religion type 1), and mixed in with revitalized and new forms of nature-as-sacred religions (green religion/nature religion type 2). This development represents a significant innovation in the history of religion. Increasingly and for the first time, apocalyptic expectation arises not from the fear of angry divinities, or incomprehensible natural disasters, but from environmental science.

With regard to the second set of the preceding questions, although environmental science is reshaping green religions of type 1 and 2, evolutionary narratives may also serve to erode the otherworldly beliefs that usually accompany such religious forms. Most relevant to speculations about the future of religion (in general) and green and nature religions (in particular) is the conviction that evolutionary science is the central driver producing or at least shaping green religions of type 1 and 2, yet this science makes less plausible certain metaphysical tenets of such religion.

The reason for this is because evolutionary narratives provide a cosmogony that, while leaving many mysteries unexplained, has explanatory power apart from beliefs in intelligent design or other forms of divine creativity. Thus, evolutionary science can challenge religious ideas that locate divinity beyond the terrestrial world, even as various religions begin to turn green through an appreciation of what are, at their roots, evolutionary insights.

Indeed, within hardly more than a century, notwithstanding polling data in America revealing that less than half of Americans believe that natural selection provides the best account of the diversity of life and human origins, it appears that evolutionary understandings have gained a solid foothold, if not widespread acceptance, among the world’s better educated sectors. Moreover, despite resistance from conservative religionists, evolution is increasingly taught globally and appears to be well along the way toward acceptance among both well and less well educated sectors, at least when taking a long view and realizing that gestalt shifts usually take time.
Meanwhile, within only the past several decades, large numbers of people began to recognize that environmental degradation is severe and threatens both the quality of life, and the processes integral to life itself. Such recognition appears to have grown even more rapidly than beliefs in evolution, probably because such dynamics are more easily observed (often through global media) than are evolutionary processes. Sometimes this degradation is depicted in moral or aesthetic terms, or explicitly or implicitly as desecration, accompanied by dismay since it is believed to threaten the beautiful if not miraculous and awe-inspiring diversity of life on earth.

Given the comfort that an otherworldly existence offers to humans facing an apparent mortality, it would be a fool's errand to suggest the total eclipse of such beliefs. It seems a reasonable hypothesis, however, in the light of recent decades of intellectual, cultural, and religious developments, to expect, at least when thinking in very long time frames, that supernatural religions, including those forms that fit green religion types 1 and 2, will gradually decline or be significantly reshaped.

It may be that the third, nonsupernaturalistic type, now only nascent and growing within small enclaves of devotees around the world, will inherit much of the religious future. With such religion, people feel awe and reverence toward the earth's living systems and even feel themselves as connected and belonging to these systems, but without believing in deities that exist independently from these systems.

Many scientists, alarmed by the implications of ecological fragmentation, have become more explicit about such a reverential attitude, often times using metaphors of the sacred to describe the natural world and its evolutionary processes. A statement issued in the early 1990s by a group of prominent scientists including Stephen Jay Gould, Stephen Schneider, and Carl Sagan, expressed the following sentiment: "As Scientists, many of us have had profound personal experiences of awe and reverence before the universe. We understand that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Our planetary home should be so regarded. Efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment should be infused with a vision of the sacred." David Takacs, when interviewing scientists who had devoted their lives to the conservation of biological diversity, found such sentiments to be common, concluding: "Some biologists have found their own brand of religion, and it is based on biodiversity. [They] attach the label spiritual to deep, driving feelings they can't understand, but that give their lives meaning, impel their professional activities, and make them ardent conservationists.

The impact of Darwinian theory upon religious perceptions has helped shape many scientifically informed types of nature religion. In the early twentieth century, those like John Burroughs were already expressing such perceptions. For Burroughs, Darwin's claims did not lessen the wonder of existence; rather, he writes, "It seems to me that evolution adds greatly to the wonder of life." Burroughs undoubtedly summarizes the feelings of many who view evolution as a sacred process when he wrote, "The forms and creeds of religion change, but the sentiment of religion—the wonder
and reverence and love we feel in the presence of the inscrutable universe—persists.... If we do not go to church so much as did our fathers, we go to the woods much more, and are much more inclined to make a temple of them than they were." According to modern scientists, it may be less inclined to put it as boldly as Burroughs, increasing numbers of books written by scientists illustrate how, for some, the natural world evokes a religious reverence for life.

For example, twentieth-century anthropologist and naturalist Loren Eiseley, in his wide-ranging books and essays, expressed a deep reverence for life and its mysteries. He came to this reverence in no small part through scientific inquiry, for although he was a believer in evolution, he averred that science was unable to fully explain the beauty, value, and mystery of life. The following passages succinctly capture this sensibility:

I am an evolutionist ... [but] in the world there is nothing to explain the world. Nothing to explain the necessity of life, nothing to explain the hunger of the elements to become life, nothing to explain why the stolid realm of rock and soil and mineral should diversify itself into beauty, terror, and uncertainty.

No utilitarian philosophy explains a snow crystal, no doctrine of use or disuse. Water has merely leapt out of vapor and thin nothingness in the night sky to array itself in form. There is no logical reason for the existence of a snowflake any more than there is for evolution. It is an apparition from that mysterious shadow world beyond nature, that final world which contains—if anything contains—the explanation of men and green leaves.

Eiseley concluded his life without any pretension that he understood what the explanation for life was, yet he never wavered regarding his intuition that it was a miracle and worthy of reverent care.

Such an affectively grounded spirituality of connection might not resemble today's more common supernaturalistic religions. They might, nevertheless, require religious terminology to capture the feelings. It might also require ritual forms to physically venerate the living systems for which the word "sacred" is used as a way to express their ultimate value. It may be that such a religion, in which an evolutionary story becomes intertwined with reverence for life, and combined with practices designed to protect and restore nature, will play a major role in the religious future of Americans.

Whatever the future may hold, it is clear that ever since the arrival of Europeans in North America, the relationships among the continent's diverse peoples, environments, and religions have been complex, contested, and sometimes violent. Religious traditions have played a prominent role in American interpretations of the natural world. Likewise, the American landscape itself has inspired new religious vision and practice. Thus, in North America, religious history has had a great deal to do with nature and nature a great deal to do with religious history. This relationship has and will continue to have a great deal to do with the rest of the biosphere and the fate of all those who depend upon it.
NOTES


12. See Gatta, 27.

13. See ibid., 35–70, for a provocative discussion of the nature-related spirituality of both Calvinist and Quaker thinkers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

14. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Gatta’s *Making Nature Sacred* provides excellent discussions of these and many other influential artistic figures; for Cole, Bryant, and Cooper, see 71–88; for Whitman, 110–16; and for Herman Melville, 116–25. For more discussion of these figures and movements see also Nash, 67–83.

15. See Nash, 100–101.


18. For Emerson, though occasional forays into “wild” country were good fodder for thought, nature was a place to think, not to live. Eschewing Muir’s camping invitation and later beckoning Muir to join him in New England since nature “is a sublime mistress but an intolerable wife” (Nash, 126), Emerson’s writing primarily appealed to nature as a conduit for divinity (not the resting place of divinity). As Gatta (89) puts it, Emerson ultimately seems to reduce the nonhuman world to an epiphenomenon. Thus, despite his disdain for nature’s commodification, nature was more useful for Emerson as symbol rather than reality. Emerson’s influence, however, cannot be denied, and Albanese points out that many streams of nature religion that championed nature’s healing capacities (including the New Thought movement in the late nineteenth century and the New Age movement in the late twentieth century) esteemed Emerson’s writings (Albanese, 114–15).

19. Gatta names Thoreau “the presiding spirit of American environmental literature,” adding, “For Thoreau, the accumulation of merely factual knowledge never offered sufficient ground for understanding the essential nature of nature. No literary figure of the antebellum era grasped more deeply than he what it might mean in religious terms to extend revisionist notions of biblical hermeneutics toward formation of a new hermeneutics of nature. No one felt more intensely than he what Emerson’s call to shift the locus of spiritual authority—away from the revelation
preserved in scripture toward a ‘revelation to us’ through nature—would mean in practical experience. And no one pursued more deliberately the spiritual implications of emergent ‘developmental’ or evolutionary scientific discoveries” (Gatta, 72).


However, there are still many topics that deserve further attention. Mart Stewart, for example, points to the “counterlandscape” experienced by slaves, who moved between the spaces created by plantation owners and field bosses, and thereby constructed cultural identities influenced by their familiarity with the Georgia lowlands. It has also been noted that swamplands served an archetypal function as a space of liberation and religious resistance in African American literature. In *Making Nature Sacred*, Gatta briefly examines the religiously liminal and ambivalent properties of swampland in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Dred* and in W.E.B. Du Bois’s underappreciated novel *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911). In a more contemporary milieu, the works of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison stand out for their use of nature religion themes. Comparing and contrasting the African experience and its contribution to nature religion in America remains an open area of opportunity for scholarly research.


25. Ibid., 16.

26. Ibid., 270.


28. Muir has been criticized by some for his apparent disdain toward the “unclean” and “dirty” Indians he encountered in the California Sierras. While it could be argued that Muir felt wilderness was threatened by people in general, regardless of their ethnicity, ambivalence, if not hostility, toward Native Americans framed a good deal of the ideology behind early National Parks policy, which often excluded native peoples from areas believed to be sullied by human habitation.
These policies of exclusion have since been exported globally, sometimes creating acute conflict in areas that have been sustainably utilized by local peoples for long periods of time. For a first-rate treatment of Native Americans in relation to the National Parks, see Mark David Spence, Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).


32. Ibid., 239.

33. Ibid., 262.

34. David Pecotic, “Pyotr Demianovich Ouspensky” (1225–27), and “Georges Ivanovitch Gurdjieff” (730–32) in Taylor, ed. See also Lovelock’s fascinating “Gaian Pilgrimage” in ibid., 683–85. For his original theory, see James Lovelock, Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

35. For the most revealing discussion, see Curt Meine, Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 506–7.


37. For example, see Rachel Carson, The Sea around Us (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950). But an even more forthcoming expression of her spirituality can be found in “The real world around us,” an address she presented in 1954 to nearly 1,000 women journalists, and finally published in Linda Lear, ed., Lost Woods: The Discovered Writing of Rachel Carson (Boston: Beacon, 1998), 148–63, especially 159. Here one finds her expansive love of nature and the mysteries of the cosmos, as well as the underpinnings for her engagement as an environmental activist, for she concludes with a call to action. Also of special interest is her early claim about the superior moral intuition of women, which would be echoed later by at least some of those who would call themselves “ecofeminists.”

38. A 1942 memo from Carson to a person in the marketing department of the publisher of her first book, Under the Sea Wind (1941; reprint, New York: Dutton, 1991), provides a revealing window into Carson’s biocentric motive and, arguably, reveals a kind of animistic imagination. For this memo, see Lear, ed., 54–62.


40. For the importance of Earth Day as a social movement as well as an assessment of its contested character, see Robert Gottlieb, Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1993), esp. 105–14.


45. For an excellent starting point on the ferment regarding Christianity, see Elspeth Whitney, “Thesis of Lynn White” (1735–1736), and the Christianity section (316–75), in Taylor, ed.

46. As early as 1989, Roderick Nash published a chapter in *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), describing the “greening of religion” phenomena he believed to be occurring in America, noting not only prominent Christian theologians but the influence of Buddhism and Native American views on the environmental movement.

47. The efforts of scholars with the Religion and Ecology group of the American Academy of Religion, and Forum on Religion and Ecology (see www.religionandecology.org) are especially noteworthy in this regard. For a brief history of the role of religion-related scholarship in fostering environmental concern, see Bron Taylor, “Religious Studies and Environmental Concern,” in Taylor, ed., 1873–79.

48. See James Proctor and Evan Berry, “Social Science on Religion and Nature,” in Taylor, ed., 1571–77, for an important introduction to the current state and difficulties that inhere to social scientific inquiry into the links between environment-related beliefs and practices.

49. *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* has many examples of such efforts, and with regard to all of the world’s major religious traditions, and many small groups and individuals. A good starting point is with the entries beginning with the tradition one is interested in, following with the cross-references found in them.


56. For primers and references, see Bron Taylor, "Radical Environmentalism" (1326–35), and "Radical Environmentalism" (518–24), in Taylor, ed. See also the writings on radical environmentalism featured at www.religionandnature.com/bron. For a global overview, see Bron Taylor, ed., *Ecological Resistance Movements: The Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).


61. Deloria, 287–89.

62. For a good representative overview of such a view see David Suzuki and Peter Knudston, *Wisdom of the Elders: Honoring Sacred Native Visions of Nature* (New York: Bantam, 1992). Some scholars have challenged the "ecological Indian" stereotype. For example, Sam Gill argued that the notion of "Mother Earth" in Native American cosmology is a relatively recent invention created largely by Westerners and creative Indians responding to them, rather than a long-term aspect of Native American cultures. See his *Mother Earth: An American Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Shepard Krech has challenged
directly the stereotype of the ecological Indian who leaves the land untouched and has always lived in perfect harmony with it in The Ecological Indian: Myth and History (New York: Norton, 1999). For good introductions to such claims and rejoinders, see Matthew Glass, "Mother Earth" (1102–5), and Shepard Krech, "American Indians as First Ecologists" (42–45), in Taylor, ed.

63. See www.movieweb.com/movie/pocahontas/pocprod1.txt. This is from an anonymously written movie review available in May 2003.

64. This quote is from park literature describing the show. Some Native Americans have objected to Disney’s Pocahontas, however, seeing it as a distortion of the Native American past that also obscures current struggles. As Thom White Wolf Fasset put it, “Disney’s Pocahontas” may be a box-office success story in movie houses, but there is little resemblance between this environmentally correct fairytale and the continuing struggles of today’s native peoples to secure redress or halt the movement of history toward certain ecological Armageddon” (quoted in Weaver, 185).

65. See, for example, the article by Kenny Frost of the Southern Ute Drum, published by Canku Ota (Many Paths), March 9, 2002, issue #56, an “online newsletter celebrating Native America” found at www.turtletrack.org. The article conveys the pride many American Indians felt at the performance. It was reviewed in June 2003 at www.turtletrack.org/Issues02/Co03092002/CO_03092002_Olympics.htm.

66. James Redfield’s series of books on the “Celestine Prophecy” provide such a perspective. For an introduction to the New Age and nature religion, see Michael York, “New Age” (1193–97) and Bron Taylor, “Celestine Prophecy” (278–80), both in Taylor, ed. Redfield’s most important and representative books are The Celestine Prophecy (New York: Warner, 1993) and The Tenth Insight (New York: Warner, 1996). The influence of Redfield’s novels and an increasing number of other books in the New Age genre that express environmental themes helps to explain both the greening of the New Age movement, as well as why New Age thinking often permeates contemporary environmentalism.


68. Ibid., 9.


70. See www.earthcharter.org for the entire text, from which these quotes are drawn.

71. The Gallup Organizations asked people about their beliefs on evolution and creation in 1982, 1991, 1993, and 1997. The wording of the questions was identical and the responses nearly identical during this period. Looking at the 1997 data for the general public, 44 percent of adults held a creationist view, 39 percent held a theistic evolution view, and 10 percent held a naturalistic evolution view, while among the scientists, 5 percent held a creationist view, and 40 percent held a theistic evolution view. See also, Cornelia Dean, “Evolution Takes a Back Seat in U.S. Classes,” New York Times, February 1, 2005.


75. Ibid., 246.


77. Loren Eiseley, *All the Strange Hours* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 242. Here, Eiseley’s thought, perhaps unsurprisingly, echoes Aldo Leopold’s reflections on the mysterious (even religious) qualities of wildlife that seemingly cannot be reduced to mechanistic explanations: “I heard of a boy once who was brought up an atheist. He changed his mind when he saw that there were a hundred odd species of warblers, each bedecked like to the rainbow, and each performing yearly sundry thousands of miles of migration about which scientists wrote wisely but did not understand. No ‘fortuitous concourse of elements’ working blindly through any number of millions of years could quite account for why warblers are so beautiful. No mechanistic theory, even bolstered by mutations, has ever quite answered for the colors of the cerulean warbler, or the vespers of the wood thrush or the swansong, or—goose music” (*Sand County Almanac*, 230–31).


79. See also Eiseley, *The Immense Journey*, and *The Unexpected Universe* (New York: Harcourt, 1972), which includes “The Star Thrower” (62–92), his best-known essay and probably the best place to start when reading his work; or another anthology, *The Star Thrower* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978), which also reprints this essay (169–85) and many others, including “Science and the Sense of the Holy” (186–201).

80. For example, see Bron Taylor, “Conservation Biology” (415–18), and William Jordan III, “Restoration Ecology and Ritual” (1379–81), in Taylor, ed.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING**


