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und Erde (Helsinki, 1931); Willibald Staudacher's *Die Trennung von Himmel und Erde* (Tübingen, 1942); Vittore Pisani's "La donna e la terra," *Anthropos* 37-40 (1942-1945); 241-253; Uberto Pestalozza's *Religione mediterranea: Vecchi e nuovi studi* (Milan, 1951), esp. pp. 191ff.; and Gerardus van der Leeuw's "Das sogenannte Hockerbegräbnis und der ägyptische Tjknw," *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 14 (1938): 151-167.

Mircea Eliade's *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities* (New York, 1960), pp. 155-189, and *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York, 1958), chaps. 7 and 9, deal with earth and agriculture and offer ample bibliographies. For a discussion of the images of the goddess in relation to the sacredness of the earth, see Andrew Fleming's article "The Myth of the Mother-Goddess," *World Archaeology* 1 (October 1969): 247-261, and *The Book of the Goddess: Past and Present*, edited by Carl Olson (New York, 1983), which deals with the role of the goddess in prehistory, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Canaanite-Hebrew culture, in Christianity, gnosticism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Japanese religion, Afro-American culture, Amerindian religions, and in contemporary thought and practice. Bibliographies for these topics are included on pages 251-259. *Mother Worship: Theme and Variations*, edited by James J. Preston (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1982), presents several cases from the New World, Europe, South Asia, and Africa.

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*Revised Bibliography*

**EARTH FIRST!** Earth First!, the best known among the so-called radical environmental groups, was founded in 1980 in the southwestern United States. With its slogan "no compromise in defense of mother earth," it underscored its anti-anthropocentric ideology. In contrast to the anthropocentric point of view it promoted a "biocentric" or "ecocentric" axiology that insisted that every life form, and indeed every ecosystem, has intrinsic value and a right to live and flourish regardless of whether human beings find it useful.

**DEEP ECOLOGY.** This axiology has a significant affinity with deep ecology, a philosophy and term derived from the work of the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1912-). Naess developed deep ecology to critique what he considered the "shallow" anthropocentric ethics of most forms of environmentalism as well as to articulate a biocentric perspective in which nature is considered to have intrinsic value.

Naess's path to that perspective was grounded in his joyful and mystical experiences in wild nature, which led him to appreciate and draw from the pantheistic philosophy of Baruch Spinoza as well as from the Hindu Vedas, especially as interpreted by Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948). Naess's version of deep ecology suggested that a path to one's personal self-realization can involve expanding one's sense of self to include nature. Consequently, biocentric ethics can be understood as a form of self-love rather than a duty or obligation. Naess was clear, however, that there are many experiential, religious, and philosophical bases for a deep ecology perspective and that his represents only one of them.

After hearing about it in the early 1980s, the earliest Earth First! activists adopted deep ecology as a descriptor for their own ethics even though few had read Naess's philosophy in detail. However, they identified with what they understood to be his critique of anthropocentrism and his biocentric ethics. The early affinity between Earth First! and deep ecology was animated by two shared perceptions: first that all life evolved in the same way and from the same single-celled organism and thus all life forms are related, and second that the biosphere and all its life forms are sacred.

Whereas Naess insisted that there are many tributaries to a biocentric perspective, radical environmentalists tended to believe that monotheism cannot be one of them. Such activists generally blame monotheistic religions and the agricultural practices that evolved simultaneously with them for environmental deterioration as well as the destruction of premonotheistic foraging cultures. They also believe that the

societies that preceded monotheism and/or agriculture were more environmentally sustainable because they considered nature sacred. These activists often single out Christianity as the most powerful global form of Western monotheism in part because it is seen as devaluing the earthly realm and locates the sacred beyond this world and in part because it has been aligned with political power. The earliest Earth First!ers found such critiques in the work of historians such as Paul Shepard, Lynn White, Perry Miller, and Roderick Nash. Earth First! cofounder Dave Foreman, the most charismatic of the group's early leaders and the one most responsible for articulating its critical perspective, asserted:

Our problem is a spiritual crisis. The Puritans brought with them a theology that saw the wilderness of North America as a haunt of Satan, with savages as his disciples and wild animals as his demons—all of which had to be cleared, defeated, tamed, or killed. (*Harpers Forum*, 1990, p. 44)

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF EARTH FIRST!** Foreman and his earliest Earth First! comrades found substantial evidence that such attitudes were alive and well in contemporary America. During the years leading up to the formation of Earth First!, when he was still working for the Wilderness Society, Foreman concluded that ordinary political advocacy had become ineffective because the government had been corrupted by corporations, which were assisted by a virulently antinature Christian ideology, including that of President Ronald Reagan and his secretary of the interior, James Watt, a devout evangelical Christian. That antinature religious ideology, which desacralizes nature and unleashes a voracious appetite for "natural resources," combined with modern science and advanced technology, had produced an environmental calamity in which most of the world's life forms were jeopardized, Foreman and his cohort believed. This belief that human beings are precipitating an environmental apocalypse that imperils a sacred natural world provides the urgency felt by Earth First!ers and undergirds their conviction that resistance to these trends is a moral imperative.

**TACTICS AND GOALS.** The general public knows less about the social, religious, and ethical perceptions of Earth First!ers than it does about the movement's controversial tactics. Earth First! activists have engaged in rowdy and well-publicized protests that often have involved civil disobedience, including innovative blockades of logging roads and industry or governmental offices as well as clandestine sabotage operations that increasingly have utilized arson.

These tactics sometimes are employed by individuals associated with offshoot groups such as the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), which believes that tactics more aggressive than those usually deployed by Earth First! are essential. The ELF first emerged in the United Kingdom in 1992. Its participants called themselves "elves" to evoke playfully a sense that they were spirits of nature or other representatives of the natural world who were defending themselves. The moniker was also a way for many of them to signal their pagan identity.

Soon radical activists in North America also were calling themselveselves as they took credit for a series of dramatic and costly sabotage and arson attacks. Their targets included forest service offices and equipment, ski resort lodges built in habitats considered critical for endangered species, genetic engineering laboratories, and gas-guzzling sport utility vehicles. Whatever the targets or the descriptors they choose when announcing their actions, radical environmentalists consider civil disobedience and sabotage to be forms of economic warfare against the destroyers of nature. They hope that those tactics will thwart destructive commercial enterprises by making them unprofitable.

Some Earth First!ers consider themselves anarchists and seek the overthrow of all industrial nation-states. The majority, however, have a less revolutionary goal of securing legal protection for habitats large enough to ensure the survival of biological diversity. Indeed, the movement helped bring that term, which often is abbreviated as *biodiversity*, into popular parlance and public debate. This broader objective depended on environmental legislation and law enforcement, which most Earth First!ers, despite their justification of extralegal tactics, hoped to strengthen. Indeed, the earliest Earth First! activists theorized that an uncompromising radical environmental movement could strengthen the resolve and lobbying power of mainstream environmentalists.

Although it is difficult to judge whether the presence of a radical environmental front makes mainstream groups more effective, after the formation of Earth First! some mainstream environmental groups did develop stronger positions, at least in part as a response to Earth First!. A number of them also adopted biodiversity protection as a central priority, something that had not been prevalent before Earth First!'s emphasis on it. Some of the leaders of mainstream groups who publicly criticized the movement's illegal tactics privately acknowledge that the radicals have played a positive role politically.

**ROAD SHOWS, WILDERNESS GATHERINGS, AND OTHER RITUALS.** Equally important, the critique of anthropocentric attitudes that the militants of Earth First! forcefully articulated contributed significantly to the spread of deep ecology spirituality within the wider environmental movement. One way that occurred was through the creative efforts of the movement's leaders, artists, and musicians.

Some of the first generation of Earth First! activists, for example, toured the United States conducting "road shows" that also could be labeled biocentric revival meetings. Those shows sometimes would juxtapose photographic slides of intact "sacred wilderness ecosystems" with wilderness habitats ruined by logging. The epistemological assumption behind the presentations was that a spiritually receptive heart would know that a great wrong had been committed. The American Earth First! singer Alice DiMicelle, for example, once explained during an interview that her role during performances in a 1992 Earth First! tour of the United Kingdom was, through her photographs and music, to awaken in the

audience, many of whom had never experienced a sacred wilderness ecosystem, the mystical experience that is available in such places.

Perhaps the most common theme in the road shows was conversion stories, frequently that of Aldo Leopold, who is considered by many the greatest ecologist of the twentieth century. In the 1930s Leopold, who had contributed to the federal government's campaign to exterminate the wolf and other predators, encountered a female wolf and her pups and with his Forest Service mates shot the wolf, only to witness the "green fire" dying in her eyes as she expired. That experience precipitated Leopold's biocentric epiphany of the intrinsic value of predators, even those labeled varmints by the mainstream culture. This led to his repentance and subsequently to some of the most poignant biocentric nature writing of the twentieth century. In the 1980s and afterward Dave Foreman became well known for ending his road show performances by recalling Leopold's conversion, urging those assembled to repent, howling with him the cry of the wolf as a sign of their reconnection with and ethical commitment to wild nature.

Wilderness gatherings of Earth First! activists provided another important venue for earth-based religious rituals. Movement poets and musicians performed their own works, which reflected and reinforced perceptions of the sacredness of life while providing activists with powerful bonding experiences. Others took on the role of religious leaders, developing sometimes elaborate pageants that depicted a "fall" from an early nature-and-goddess-worshipping paradise of foragers (caused by the advent of sky-god-worshipping agricultural societies) that precipitated an ecological calamity. In those performances a cosmic redemption also was enacted as a remnant community of resistance, which understood the earth's sacred nature, arose and fought for the reharmonization of life on earth. Movement members who were also involved in Neopaganism, Wicca, or New Age rituals often played significant roles in shaping the ritual life of the emerging movement. Indeed, Earth First! has many of the sources and characteristics of a wide variety of contemporary nature religions and arguably has contributed to a number of them.

Even more influential than the rituals at wilderness gatherings was the invention of a ritual process that became known as the Council of All Beings. It was developed primarily by two Buddhists, the American Joanna Macy and the Australian John Seed, both of whom became pioneering figures in the deep ecology movement internationally. They achieved this in part by spreading this process and similar ones primarily though not exclusively in North America, Australia, and Europe. The heart of the ritual involves an imaginative, if not mystical or shamanic, process in which the human participants take on or represent the identity of other beings and entities of nature, expressing during the council's deliberations their anguish about environmental deterioration, their hopes for the future of life on earth, and their counsel and support in pursuing ecological justice.

Further illustrating the role that Buddhism has played in the movement, John Seed was introduced to Earth First! by the American Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Gary Snyder, a Buddhist who variously calls himself a deep ecologist or a "Buddhist animist." Snyder also has been one of the leading proponents of bioregionalism, a decentralist environmentalist ideology that has become the de facto social philosophy of radical environmentalism. It envisions local political self-rule within political units whose boundaries would be redrawn to cohere with the contours of differing types of ecosystems.

Snyder attempted to communicate with the Earth First! movement soon after he heard about it but criticized tactics he considered violent that were being advocated by some Earth First!ers, including Foreman. However, Snyder was strongly supportive of Earth First!ers' deep ecological intuitions and direct action resistance as long as it remained non-violent and thus, in his view, effective political theater. After hearing about Earth First!, Seed quickly arranged to participate in one of the earliest North American road shows, which contributed to his own fusion of Buddhism, deep ecology ritualizing, and radical environmental activism.

**SABOTAGE AS RITUAL.** For some Earth First! activists, however, the most important ritual actions are sabotage and civil disobedience, which constitute acts of earth veneration and can lead to spiritual experiences that reconnect their participants with nature. For example, early in his Earth First! period Dave Foreman, who left Earth First! but not its overall ethical commitments around 1990 primarily because of political differences with a growing faction of anarchistic newcomers, spoke of sabotage as a form of ritual worship. A number of other Earth First! activists have described mystical experiences of "earth bonding" or reported communicating with the trees they inhabited during antilogging campaigns. Those experiences reflected or helped shape the pantheistic and animistic worldviews that Earth First! activists often share. Indeed, so many Earth First!ers consider themselves pagan that a possible description for the movement would be the pagan environmental movement.

Whatever terminology Earth First! activists identify with, during its initial decade at least, the movement probably received its greatest inspiration from the southwestern novelist Edward Abbey (1927–1989). His *Desert Solitaire* (1968) described mystical experiences in the desert that taught him humility and a proper spiritual perception; for him, that meant biocentrism and reverence for the land. Abbey's novel *The Monkeywrench Gang* (1975) portrayed ecological saboteurs fighting back against a totalitarian and relentlessly destructive industrial civilization that was in league with religions that seek salvation beyond this world. Though a work of fiction, the book was based on an actual group of ecological saboteurs (mentioned briefly in *Desert Solitaire*) who in the 1950s battled the strip mining of the Black Mesa plateau by the Peabody Coal Company. Through its characters *The Monkeywrench Gang* captured the

various types of nature religion that animated those early green rebels, such as Doc Sarvis's hope that "Pan shall rise again!" (Abbey, 1975, p. 44) and George Washington Hayduke's pondering of "the oceanic unity of things" and his rationale for sabotage, which was grounded in his understanding that the desert is "holy country" (Abbey, 1975, pp. 227, 128).

**EARTH FIRST! AS A RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT.** The human perception of sacred places, along with battles over them, is common in the history of religion. Often there is an environmental dimension to such perceptions of sacredness; sometimes places are invested with an aura of holiness because they are remote, dangerous to access, or characterized by great biomass or geomorphological uniqueness (as is the case with caves, geothermal vents, and mountains). What is religiously innovative in the Earth First! movement and other radical environmental groups is the notion that the greater is the contribution of a place to the planet's genetic and biological diversity, the greater is its sacredness.

Although Earth First! activists affirm that the entire biosphere is sacred and worthy of defense, because they cannot be everywhere at once, they must make hard choices and decide which parts they will act to protect or heal. Consequently, the most important ethical priority is to prevent extinctions and the destruction of the world's most important biological reserves. Even decisions about where to camp are determined on the basis of such considerations: a site should be near enough to connect spiritually to the most fragile and thus sacred ecosystems but not so close that it damages or defiles them.

Apocalyptic expectations of the end of the world or a lesser disaster also have been common in the history of religions. Environmental degradation may have played a role in fostering the kind of suffering that gives rise to such expectations. What is novel in the apocalypticism characteristic of Earth First! is that for the first time such an expectation is grounded in environmental science or at least on one credible reading of currently available scientific data. Moreover, as Earth First!ers are drawing on the same countercultural religious elements as others involved in contemporary nature religion, many of them also are drawing on contemporary science as a religious resource, and this represents another innovation. Many Earth First!ers, for example, consider James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis spiritually meaningful, inspiring or supporting their pantheistic religious sentiments. Others have been moved by those, such as Thomas Berry, who endeavor to consecrate scientific narratives of the evolution of the universe and biosphere, making them into new sacred stories that promote the veneration and defense of nature.

Not all radical environmentalists, however, are comfortable calling themselves religious, including a number of biologists who have supported radical environmental initiatives. This discomfort is usually the result of equating religion with the Western institutional forms of religion that they consider

authoritarian and antinature. Nevertheless, those environmentalists rarely object to and almost always rely on metaphors of the sacred to express their conviction that nature has intrinsic value. They also often describe environmental destruction as desecration or defilement. Even though a few participants in these movements call themselves atheists, this generally means that they do not believe in otherworldly deities or divine rescue from this world, not that they deny a sacred dimension to the universe and earthly life. Indeed, they often characterize their connections to nature as spiritual.

The Earth First! movement can be considered religious in that it views the evolutionary process, the diversity of life, and the entire biosphere as precious, sacred, and worthy of defense. Another religious aspect is that its participants construct myths, rituals, and ethical practices that cohere with such beliefs. This kind of nature religion attempts to express a form of spirituality that coheres with evolutionary understandings of the origins and diversity of life. It claims to offer a solution to intractable and intensifying environmental problems, and if nothing is done to halt the unfolding environmental catastrophe, it offers hope that some may survive and eventually live on the earth respectfully and sustainably, especially those who develop spiritual humility.

As the radical environmental worldview is at odds with that of many of the earth's other peoples, viewing most religions as part of the problem, it enjoins resistance to them as well as efforts to persuade those who adhere to them to resacralize their perceptions of the earth. In light of these differences and because the environmental conditions that contributed to the rise of Earth First! and other radical environmental groups show no signs of abating, it is likely that such groups will continue to precipitate or become involved in environment-related social conflicts. It is also likely that for the indefinite future such religiosity and movements will continue to play a role in shaping religious attitudes and behaviors toward the earth's living systems.

**SEE ALSO** Ecology and Religion, articles on Ecology and Buddhism and Ecology and Nature Religions; Gandhi, Mohandas; Neopaganism; New Age Movement; Wicca.

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## EAST AFRICAN RELIGIONS

This entry consists of the following articles:

- AN OVERVIEW
- ETHIOPIAN RELIGIONS
- NORTHEAST BANTU RELIGIONS

### EAST AFRICAN RELIGIONS: AN OVERVIEW

East African religions do not form a single coherent body of beliefs and practices. They show great diversity in myths and cosmologies and in beliefs about the nature of spiritual powers; in kinds and authority of ritual experts; in the situations when ritual is performed; and in responses to the advent of Islam and Christianity. This diversity is consistent with the ethnic, geographical, and historical diversity of the region. Our knowledge of East African religions is very uneven, and this may also contribute to the seeming diversity.

The total population of the Eastern African region in 2003 was about 263 million people. The population com-

prises some two hundred more or less distinct societies, each defined by its own language and sense of identity, its own traditional territory and political structure, and its own system of family relations, marriage, and religious belief and practice. These groups are distributed very unevenly in areas of high and low population densities.

East Africa contains several clearly defined geographical and cultural areas, with an immense variety of societies, languages, and religions. It has been the meeting place of several main language groupings, and its peoples are remarkably diverse in their cultures and forms of economic, political, and familial organizations.

In the northern part of the region live peoples representing several main language families and groups: Semitic and Hamitic (Cushitic), mainly in Ethiopia and Somalia, and three subgroups of the Chari-Nile group of the Nilo-Saharan family—Sudanic, in the far northwest corner, Nilotic in the upper Nile Valley, and Para-Nilotic (Eastern Nilotic or Nilo-Hamitic) mainly in the Rift Valley region. To the south are many people speaking Bantu languages (of the Niger-Congo family). There are small pockets of speakers of other language families (such as Khoisan, or click, languages in northern Tanzania), and there are of course speakers of intrusive languages such as Arabic and English. In most parts of the region Swahili has long been used as a lingua franca, although in a debased form rather than in its proper form as spoken along the Indian Ocean coast. However, there appears to be no direct relationship between language and religious belief and practice.

The situation is different as regards economic, political, and familial types, and belief and practice are more obviously linked to them. Although there are a few hunting and gathering peoples, such as the Hadza of Tanzania and the Okiek of Kenya, the vast majority of the population consists of mixed farmers, growing grains and keeping some livestock, and pastoralist livestock herders.

A century of European colonial rule over the entire region and the long Arab colonial overrule along the coast have brought about degrees of unity and interaction. Trade and wars have also often linked peoples together in varying ways and degrees. Although East African peoples are traditionally farmers and livestock herders, large towns and urban centers exist throughout the region, from the ancient cities of Mombasa, Mogadishu, and Zanzibar on the coast to the modern cities of Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Kampala, and Dar es-Salaam. Scattered are many lesser towns that have attracted mixed immigrant populations from the countryside and from which modern Christian and syncretist movements have spread out into the rural areas. Today there are virtually no peoples in the region who are unaffected by Christianity or Islam (although the depth of influence of these faiths varies widely); but traditional local religions remain active in almost every part of the area.

**DIVINITY AND MYTH.** All East African religions have a belief in a high god, the creator. Perhaps the most accurate term