
Introduction:
Nature-venerating Spiritualities

The *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* has sought since its inception to illuminate all aspects of the complex ways religions, nature, and culture are entwined, including whether the affective and spiritual dimensions of human experience promote or hinder environmentally beneficent behavior. This issue's three feature articles complicate our understandings of these relationships with a focus on what we are calling 'nature-venerating spiritualities', namely, spiritualities in which nature is considered sacred in some way.

The first of these is by sociologist Bernard Zaleha who, in providing a synthetic analysis of existing studies, forcefully concludes that 'perceptions that tend toward the pantheistic end of the sacrality scale are the strongest predictors of pro-environment behavior' and moreover, 'nature veneration is predictive of pro-environmental behavior'. This is followed by a qualitative study by Annick Hedlund-de Witt based on interviews with environmentally concerned individuals in Victoria, Canada. In a way that complements Zaleha's findings, she concludes that those who report experiences in nature that lead to a this-worldly, evolutionary spirituality, a corresponding kinship ethics, and a sense of the intrinsic value of all life all develop strong environmental commitments. Interestingly, although not explicitly identified as 'green' Christians, some of the interviewees studied indicated that the foundation for their expressed nature spirituality came directly from the Bible, suggesting that their nature-venerating spirituality was compatible with at least some understandings of biblical traditions. Peder Anker then provides another analytical layer through his study of the fusing of deep ecology philosophy with theology in Norway, a development that began in the early 1970s. He found that leaders in the Norwegian Church, noticing the appeal of nature-venerating deep ecology had to many Norwegians, saw potential in fusing this philosophy to a theology of creation care, and thus, an opportunity to draw younger people back to the Church and

revitalize it. His study not only shows the cultural traction that nature-venerating spiritualities may have in countries that are generally seen as largely secular, it shows that conventional religious forms beyond Norway might also be transformed and perhaps even revitalized by adopting more nature-venerating views and practices.

In addition to these feature articles this issue has a review essay that presents an interesting contrast. Dennis Frohlich provides a close reading of *The Green Bible* and finds the interpretations promoted by the editors as a useful guide to green living are inconsistent with, or directly contradicted by, the ways the editors framed their study, wrote about it, and selected passages, which supposedly promoted environmentally friendly beliefs and behaviors.

This issue provides much on-the-ground evidence to ponder regarding whether spiritualities that consider nature to be sacred are more likely than other religious forms to mobilize their adherents to promote environmental conservation or ethical responses to the many issues that are related to the health and resiliency of environmental systems. It also offers fresh perspectives on the possibility that nature-venerating spiritualities might be grafted onto the world's most prevalent and powerful religious forms.

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