

A [sample entry](#) from the

# **Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature**

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Orunmila, has been marvelously preserved in Santería. In *Ifá*, nuts, shells, and chains, are cast, read, and interpreted by ritual specialists called *babalawos*. *Babalawos* commit thousands of myths (*patakis*) to memory and use them, as directed by *Ifá*, to communicate their interpretation and advise believers on life. *Patakis* are replete with nature symbolism and often prescribe offerings or sacrifices (*ebó*) that require animals, plants, music and dancing for the orishas.

Beginning in the seventeenth century, British and Dutch colonialism established Protestantism as a major religion in the Caribbean. African religious traditions on mainly Protestant islands did not survive as intact as Haitian Vodou and Cuban Santería. There is nonetheless a distinctly African spirit that pervades West Indian Christianity, especially in Pentecostal and Revivalist forms, whose spirit possession, drumming, dancing, and speaking in tongues are clearly rooted in traditional African religion. Also rooted in Africa, belief in sorcery (*obeah*) and in ritual specialists who combat it is widespread in the Protestant Caribbean.

In twentieth-century Jamaica, Ethiopianist interpretation of the Bible found scriptural prophecy of the return of God to Earth as an African king. This inspired the African focus of Jamaican Rastafarianism, which emerged from a confluence of Ethiopianism, Garveyism, and Revivalist Christianity. As a result, Rastas believe that Jah (God) has returned to the Earth in the person of King Hailie Selassie I, who was crowned King of Ethiopia in 1930.

Rastafarianism reveres nature as Jah's self-expression and gift to humanity, and thus as sacred. Rasta's symbolic color triad of red, gold, and green reflects this, as green represents the vegetation of Africa and Jamaica. The religion is strongly influenced by this reverence for nature, as Rastafarian biblical exegesis demonstrates. For example, the ganja herb was first grown on the tomb of King Solomon, and its use for communion with Jah is encouraged in the Book of Genesis ("And the Earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind . . . and God saw that it was good" [1:12]) and in Psalms ("He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man" [104:14]). Besides its uses in healing, ganja is smoked for meditation and communal rituals called *Nyabingi*, and thus the ganja herb, along with the Lion of Judah (Hos. 5:10–14), is a dominant symbol in Rastafarianism.

### Conclusion

In spite of the wide diversity of Caribbean religious cultures, taken as a whole the region's people generally share a deep sensitivity to nature as an expression of and gift from God. From the Taino to the Rastafarians, Caribbean believers have always viewed God, spirits (or the Holy Spirit, the *lwas* or the *orishas*) and the dead as manifest in nature. Understanding, communing with, and

living in harmony with the sacred is thus only possible because of nature and the eternal living force, or *ashe*, that inhabits it.

This rooting in and respect for nature of Caribbean religious cultures has not, however, ever inspired broad environmental activism anywhere in the Caribbean. Deforestation, one of the region's most pressing environmental concerns, is the result of poverty, a force that overpowers Caribbean people's deep reverence for nature. At the local level, trees considered to be the homes of spirits in African-derived religions like Vodou and Santería, are spared the axe, while Rastafarians decry the exploitation of nature as another crime committed by Babylon, or the White oppressor. Yet these religions are generally made up of the region's poor, whose daily struggle for survival makes any threat to Caribbean ecosystems (though obvious to everyone) seem a tertiary concern at best. Christian missions, meanwhile, have throughout the islands financed soil conservation and reforestation projects, although their efforts have had a relatively weak impact overall and cannot atone for Christianity's economic sins that have for five hundred years underlied the Caribbean's environmental degradation.

Terry Rey

### Further Reading

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- See also: Candomblé of Brazil; Mother Earth and the Earth People (Trinidad); Rastafari; Santería; Shamanism – Traditional; Trees in Haitian Vodou; Umbanda.

### Carson, Rachel (1907–1964)

Rachel Carson certainly deserves the title, "Mother of the Environmental Movement." Her book, *Silent Spring*, published two years before her death in 1962, was a clarion call to the world to balance the needs of humans with the needs of the Earth.

Born in rural Springdale, Pennsylvania, Carson had a life-long interest in the natural world. Her mother taught her a love for nature that informed all her writing, from her first book, *Under the Sea Wind* (1941), to her last, *Silent Spring* (1962), a work that started a global movement to save a planet that was well on the way to being destroyed by industrial and governmental policies that ignored the delicate balance required in humans' dealings with nature. In only twenty years between her first and

last book, Carson explored and translated the oceanic world for millions of readers around the globe, challenged the most powerful corporations and the male-dominated scientific community, and laid the groundwork for an ecofeminist movement that highlighted the interconnectedness of every part of the natural world. Her theories about nature and about the obligations of the scientific community undermined long-held beliefs about linking the control of disorderly nature and the control of women.

In 1925 Carson began her scientific training at Pennsylvania College for Women (later renamed Chatham College), under the mentorship of Mary Skinker, a biology teacher. Skinker's influence on Carson was tremendous; it was she who encouraged Carson's scientific interest, helped her get a place in graduate school at Johns Hopkins, and mentored her in her struggle to enter the male-dominated scientific community.

In the summer of 1929, before Carson entered Johns Hopkins, she received a scholarship to work at the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole in Massachusetts. Living on the ocean was not only a thrill to the young scientist, but that summer focused her graduate studies on marine biology, the subject of *The Sea Around Us* (1951) and *The Edge of the Sea* (1955). Her enduring interest in, and reverence for, the sea was as close as Carson came to a philosophy of life. She saw in the oceanic world what she referred to as "material immortality," the slow accretion of new life from the old.

After finishing her Masters of Arts in Marine Zoology in 1932, Carson taught briefly at the University of Maryland. The death of her father and the Depression forced her to look for more financially secure employment, and she began working for the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries (later the Fish and Wildlife Service). After a brief stint in Chicago during World War II, Carson returned to Washington and

became General Editor of *Conservation in Action*, a series of pamphlets put out by the Fish and Wildlife Service. She also had begun to study the effects of DDT on the environment and suggested to *Reader's Digest* an article on the deleterious effects of the chemical on the environment. The magazine rejected her proposal, and it took another ten years before Carson was able to focus on DDT.

Before becoming engaged with research on the use of pesticides, Carson focused on two books about the sea, *The Sea Around Us* and *The Edge of the Sea*. These two books, especially *The Sea Around Us*, illustrate the most powerful themes in Carson's work: a religious reverence for the sea, the womb of life, and a belief in the connectedness of all living things. The sea, she believed, was the generator and the grave for all: the alpha and omega of the planet. The life of the sea controls the life of the land and thus human life, an axiom that Carson believed should humble human beings.

After the enormous success of her two books about the sea, Carson turned once again to the issue of the chemical poisoning of the environment. During the late 1950s, the *New Yorker* had a weekly column called "These Precious Days," a "fever chart of the planet Earth, showing Man's ups and downs in contaminating the air, the sea, and the soil." Carson collected all these columns and noted the rise in Strontium 90, the rise in pesticide use, and the rise in cancer rates around the world. Humans were, she concluded, poisoning the Earth and themselves.

While universities around the United States were doing studies that showed alarming consequences from the use of pesticides, the U.S. Department of Agriculture insisted that, with precautions, the chemicals would have no adverse effects on humans or wildlife. Into this conflict Carson brought her skill as a researcher and her passion as an environmentalist. She also experienced the ways in which government controlled the truth. The Department of Agriculture and several chemical companies that had large governmental contracts set out to destroy Carson's reputation when *Silent Spring* came out and when the book was widely heralded as "a plea for reason and balance in the use of pesticides." Vesicol Chemical Corporation tried to have Houghton Mifflin suppress the book before publication, and Monsanto chemical company questioned Carson's credentials as a scientist and discounted her as a "hysterical woman." When CBS showed "The *Silent Spring* of Rachel Carson," Carson was attacked on air by Robert White-Stevens of American Cyanamid, claiming that her book was a series of gross distortions. On the contrary, even today no one has been able to document an error in *Silent Spring*.

In the opening chapter of the book, the reader is returned to a pristine rural landscape that experiences sudden death and decay. From there the book begs for a considered and selective approach to the use of pesticides. Carson questions whether any civilization can wage

#### Carson on Sea Spirituality

From Rachel Carson's *The Sea Around Us*:

The sea lies all about us. The commerce of all lands must cross it. The very winds that move over the lands have been cradled on its broad expanse and seek ever to return to it. The continents themselves dissolve and pass to the sea, in grain after grain of eroded land. So the rains that rose from it return again in rivers. In its mysterious past it encompasses all the dim origins of life and receives in the end, after, it may be, many transmutations, the dead husks of that same life. For all at last return to the sea – to Oceanus, the ocean river, like the ever-flowing stream of time, the beginning and the end (212).

relentless war on life without destroying itself, and without losing the right to be called civilized.

Carson's concern for the balance of nature, for the respect for the wilderness, and for the place of humans in the magnetic chain that binds all life, made her deeply conscious of the ways in which seemingly minute causes produce mighty effects that no human being can escape.

Mary A. McCay

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**Cartesian Dualism** – See Descartes, René – and the Problem of Cartesian Dualism.

### Casas, Bartolomé de las (1485–1566)

Bartolomé de las Casas was a Dominican friar, born in Seville, Spain, who after an experience of conversion in 1514 spent the rest of his life defending the rights of the indigenous peoples of the New World. His devotion to justice, expressed in pointed, indignant, and prodigiously documented critiques of the Spanish colonization, as well as numerous crusades to the canonical courts, and court hearings on the conquest, earned him the name “defender of the Indians.” He was also a major theologian of peace, and arguably one of the founding fathers of anthropology, ethnography, and what can also be called “nature writing,” for his works abound in anthropology and ethnographical descriptions of the natural world of the Indies.

He wrote extensive and passionate histories of the inequities committed by the Spanish in their conquest of the new world. Both his *History of the Indies* and the

*Apologetic History*, totaling six hefty volumes, still constitute the wealthiest sources of information about the culture and society of the Indians of the New World. Yet, these works were only published three hundred years later. A summary, however, was published during de las Casas' lifetime under the title of *Very Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552). This became a sixteenth-century best seller, translated into six European languages and undergoing many editions shortly after its publication. Such was the fervor and vivid nature of de las Casas' descriptions of the devastation of the Indies that it is alleged that this book became the source of the so-called “black legend” imputed on the Spaniards, who having suffered defeat in history were haunted by a divine curse because of their sinfulness, savagery, and unjust treatment of the Indians.

His treatise *De único vocationis modo* (*The only Method of Attracting All people to the True Faith*) (ca. 1534–1537) became the inspiration for Pope Paul III's encyclical *Sublimus Deus* (1937), in which the rationality of the Amerindians is proclaimed as a manifestation of God's sublimity. Because of his defense of the Indians' right to be treated on the same terms as the other European nations of his day, de las Casas' work is also thought to be a precursor of the international declaration of human rights and the idea of an order of law that applies to all human beings regardless of race, class, gender, or religion. In chapter 48 of his *Apologetic History* we find the rudiments of an international declaration of human rights.

In a famous debate with Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in Valladolid, de las Casas confronted and refuted the Aristotelian-derived “right” to wage war and enslave the Indians. In the treatises prepared for his encounter against Sepúlveda, de las Casas developed and defended a prophetic, Christian, and theological humanism that laid down the foundations for a radical and pacifist democratic ethos that enshrined the unity of all humanity. The publication of his complete works in a critical edition, numbering thirteen volumes, made available for the first time in complete and unabbreviated form carefully crafted treatises and legal briefs on behalf of the Indians.

De las Casas' work is characterized by its tenacity and unwavering nature. His defense of the Indians was a vocation and calling. Above all, his work reveals his active advocacy for pacifism. Furthermore, it is a theologically grounded pacifism (i.e., to wage war is contrary to the gospel and the Christian teachings, notwithstanding the long tradition of using Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas to develop a theory of “just war”). Both the tenacity of his vocation and commitment to pacifism are rooted in his boundless love for the Indian.

This love in turn led de las Casas to give himself over to a prophetic activism that was guided by Christian utopianism. Being a witness to the plight of the Indians, he was an engaged advocate and he clamored for justice on their