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Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature

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SP Heavenism

Heavenism is a form of spirituality that tends to value all things associated with heaven to the detriment of Earth. This spiritual orientation is reflected in hymns such as *Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land*. Compared with heaven, Earth is viewed as a vale of tears, a barren land, a place of exile, a domain ruled by the forces of darkness. Heaven is the abode of God, a place of purity, happiness and spiritual joy. Those who espouse this spiritual view of reality tend to be more concerned about getting to heaven than caring for Earth. Heaven is eternal and sacred; Earth is disposable and mere matter. It is not really important what happens to Earth because it is only a temporary abode for humans; heaven is home. Christian texts like Hebrews 11, which speak of a heavenly country (11:16), are used to interpret the rest of the scriptures and render care for a polluted Earth a waste of time. The Earth Bible project (see under Earth Bible) exposes the anthropocentric and anti-Earth orientation of such texts. The project also identifies alternative traditions that highlight the sacredness and intrinsic value of Earth. A clear example is Isaiah 6:3 where the heavenly host declare, “the whole Earth is full of God’s glory.” Here God’s glory – firecloud of God’s presence – not only fills the temple but the whole planet. Heavenism is reflected in slogans such as “Forget the planet, save yourself,” and sees the environmental movement as a negative force that directs the believer away from his/her true goal: getting to heaven.

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which affirm the intrinsic worth of Earth or reflect the voice of the Earth community.

The studies in the project demonstrate that many parts of the Bible devalue Earth and the Earth community. When God sends punishment on a particular people, whether Israel, Egypt or another nation, the land, nature and living creatures often suffer unfairly. In Ezekiel, for example, the land is made desolate to somehow vindicate the name of God (Ezek. 6:14; 12:20 *passim*), not because the land has done anything to deserve such a fate. In Jeremiah, however, there are indications that the prophet hears the land mourning under the weight of these judgments (e.g., Jer. 12:4, 11).

Especially significant is the “mandate to dominate” found in Genesis 1:26–28, where humans are given the command to “rule over all living things” and “to subdue Earth.” In the Earth Bible, the verbs “rule” and “subdue” (Gen. 1:28) are not softened but allowed to have their full weight. To “subdue” (*likh’bosh*) refers to forceful subjugation (as in Jer. 34:11; 2 Sam. 8:11; Josh. 18:1). To “rule”

(*lir’dot*) refers to forceful control and conquest (as in Ps. 72:8–11). Because passages like this mandate have played a role in the conquest of nature in some countries, the Earth Bible project seeks to highlight the negative force of such texts in the current ecological crisis and balance them with alternative traditions such as Genesis 2:15. In this text, the first human is placed in the garden to “till/serve” (*la’avod*) and to “keep” (*lish’mor*) it, not to “rule” and “subdue” it.

Between the years 2000 and 2002, five volumes of the Earth Bible were published. The five volumes are 1. *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, 2. *The Earth Story in Genesis*, 3. *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, 4. *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*, 5. *The Earth Story in the New Testament*. Norman Habel of Adelaide, Australia, is the chief editor of the Earth Bible, who is also preparing popular works based on these academic volumes. One of these is a volume of Earth liturgies entitled *Seven Songs of Creation*, also published by Pilgrim Press.

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See also: *Animals in African Legend and Ethiopian Scriptures*; *Anarcho-Primitivism and the Bible*; *Biblical Foundations for Christian Stewardship*; *Christianity(3) – New Testament*; *Creation Story in the Hebrew Bible*; *Creation’s Fate in the New Testament*; *Ecofeminism and Biblical Interpretation*; *Hebrew Bible*; *Jewish Intertestamental Literature*.

Earth Charter

The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful world. It endeavors to identify the critical challenges and choices facing humanity and to provide a moral framework for the development of the emerging global civilization. It is designed to inspire in all peoples a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family, the greater community of life, and future generations. It is at once an urgent call for major social and economic change and an expression of hope. The principles in the Earth Charter were developed in and through a decade-long, worldwide, cross-cultural, interfaith dialogue on common goals and shared values.

First proposed in *Our Common Future* (1987), the report of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, the drafting of the Earth Charter was part of the unfinished business of the 1992 UN Rio Earth Summit. In 1994 Maurice Strong, the secretary general of the Earth Summit and chairman of the Earth Council, and Mikhail Gorbachev, the president of Green Cross International, launched a new Earth Charter initiative with

support from the Dutch government. An Earth Charter Secretariat was established at the Earth Council in Costa Rica, and in 1997 an Earth Charter Commission of eminent persons with representation from all regions of the world was formed to oversee the project.

The Commission proceeded to draft the Earth Charter as a people's treaty, because there was little interest among governments in negotiating new and stronger commitments regarding the environment and sustainable development. Thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations from Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East participated in creating the Earth Charter. Forty-five Earth Charter national committees were formed. Earth Charter dialogues were held in all regions of the world and on the internet. The project involved the most open and participatory consultation process ever conducted in connection with the drafting of an international document.

The ideas and values in the Earth Charter reflect the influence of a rich diversity of intellectual sources and social movements. These include over fifty international law declarations and treaties, the new scientific worldview being shaped by discoveries in physics, cosmology, and ecology, the wisdom of the world's religions and philosophical traditions, and over 200 non-governmental declarations and people's treaties. The document reflects the concerns and aspirations expressed at the seven UN summit conferences held during the 1990s on human rights, population, children, women, social development, and the city as well as the environment. It also recognizes the importance of the spread of democracy for human development and environmental protection.

The Earth Charter is an especially significant product of the global ethics movement, which gained wide support in the 1990s. In an increasingly interdependent world, cooperative problem solving is a necessity, and effective collaboration among diverse cultures and peoples requires shared values. It has been the objective of the Earth Charter initiative not to impose the values of one group, culture, or tradition on all others, but rather to seek common ground while respecting and supporting cultural diversity. This meant, for example, that the Earth Charter could not employ theological language or the concept of animal rights, but the document does acknowledge the important role of religion in achieving sustainability and affirms that animals warrant moral consideration. The Earth Charter principles reflect a consensus on basic values that is taking form in the rapidly developing global civil society.

The vision of widely shared values in the Earth Charter does focus special attention on the environment. However, the document contains an inclusive and integrated ethical vision reflecting the realization that humanity's environmental, economic, political, social, cultural, and spiritual challenges are interrelated. It recognizes, for example, the

interconnections between the protection of ecosystems, the eradication of poverty, human rights, gender equality, economic justice, democracy, and a culture of peace. The result is a new holistic understanding of what constitutes a sustainable way of living and sustainable development.

At the heart of the Earth Charter is an ethic of respect and care for all life forms and the greater community of life, of which humanity is a part. The Earth Charter founds the principle of respect for all life on the recognition that all beings are interdependent and all life forms have value regardless of their worth to people. The sense of ethical responsibility begins with an attitude of respect for others and finds expression in active caring, which involves the prevention of harm and the promotion of well-being. A fundamental purpose of the Earth Charter is to encourage all peoples to identify with the whole Earth community as well as their local communities and to expand their moral concern and caring to include the present and future well-being of the entire human family and the larger living world.

The ethics of the Earth Charter are grounded in a vision of widely shared spiritual values. For example, the document affirms, "when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more." It asserts, "the spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature." The Earth Charter culminates with a vision of peace and the joyful celebration of life.

A final version of the Earth Charter was approved by the Earth Charter Commission in March 2000. A new phase in the Earth Charter initiative began with the official launching of the Earth Charter at the Peace Palace in The Hague the following June. Efforts are now underway to disseminate the Charter around the world, to promote its educational use in schools, universities, and faith communities, and to encourage its endorsement and implementation by civil society, business, government, and the United Nations General Assembly. Thousands of local, national, and international organizations, including hundreds of local governments, have endorsed the document and are using it as an educational tool and guide to a sustainable way of living.

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Further Reading

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See also: Bahá'í Faith and the United Nations; Environmental Ethics; Religious Studies and Environmental Concern; United Nations' "Earth Summits".

Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front

Radical Environmentalism comprises a cluster of environmental movements and ideologies that share an overall worldview that includes a perception of the sacredness of nature. The religious and ideological beliefs of these movements, and the criticisms to which they are typically subjected, are described in detail in RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM. Their basic orientation can be, however, briefly characterized: Radical environmental movements trace environmental degradation to anthropocentric and hierarchical Western philosophies and religions. They prescribe in response lifestyle simplification, political resistance to the destructive forces, and a spiritual "reconnection" with nature. These responses, they believe, depend on a "resacralization" of human attitudes and perceptions of the natural world.

By the early twenty-first century Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) had become the best known of the radical environmental groups in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom, and they had established beachheads in scores of countries on every continent but Antarctica.

Earth First!

Earth First!, with its slogan "no compromise in defense of mother Earth," was founded in 1980. It rapidly became known for its dramatic civil disobedience campaigns and the occasional use of sabotage in its efforts to thwart commercial incursions into biologically sensitive lands. In its first two decades it focused especially upon North America's remaining old-growth forests, evocatively labeled "ancient" or "cathedral" forests to reinforce their special importance.

Dave Foreman, who left the WILDERNESS SOCIETY after he became disenchanted with the efforts of such mainstream environmental groups to arrest environmental decline, was the most charismatic leader among Earth First!'s co-founders (variously numbered at 4 or 5, depending on differing movement origin myths). His strategic purpose in

founding the group was, firstly, to introduce and promote sabotage as well as civil disobedience as a means of environmental struggle, whenever possible increasing the costs and removing the profit from environmentally destructive practices – in other words, waging economic warfare against those destroying nature; secondly, to shame mainstream environmentalists into taking stronger stands by harshly criticizing them and exposing their compromising positions; thirdly, and ironically given the second tactic, he expected that by taking on the mantle of "environmental extremism," a label often applied to mainstream groups by their adversaries, mainstream groups might appear more reasonable by comparison, thereby increasing their influence and effectiveness.

As importantly, Foreman wanted to attack anthropocentric attitudes, for he viewed the root of the problem as religious in essence. Drawing on historians such as Lynn White, Perry Miller and Roderick Nash, Foreman argued,

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: 44).

So like most radical greens, Foreman blamed the advent of agriculture (following Paul Shepard and Jim Mason), and Christianity as well, for environmental decline. During Earth First!'s early years it was not difficult to find evidence of an anti-Christianity view, particularly since James Watt was the Secretary of the Interior. In 1976, before his appointment by President Ronald Reagan, Watt had founded the Mountain States Legal Foundation, which bills itself as a defender of individual liberty, property rights, and free enterprise. It is regarded by environmentalists as an anti-environmental group, one of the first and most important members of the so-called WISE USE MOVEMENT. Watt was also an evangelical Christian who minimized environmental problems and was widely if inaccurately perceived (largely due to selectively quoted congressional testimony) to believe the imminent second coming of Christ obviated the need for environmental concern. Reagan, who had appointed him, told confidants that he also expected the imminent return of Christ.

Like most radical greens, Foreman saw promise in pagan religions for a biocentric ethics. Indeed, the most common perception animating the movement can be labeled "pagan," if this is defined as spirituality involving one or more of two perceptions: (1) the Earth itself is alive and sacred, a perception that for many could properly be labeled pantheism (a word derived by conflating the Greek word *pan* meaning "all" and *theos* meaning "god," signifying that "all is god"); and (2) that the world is filled with nonhuman intelligences – often thought to be capable of