

A [sample entry](#) from the

# **Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature**

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Edited by

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- See also: Biodiversity and Religion; Buddhism (various); Hinduism; Siam's Forest Monasteries; Southeast Asia; Thai Buddhist Monks.

## Celestine Prophecy

The *Celestine Prophecy* is a 1993 adventure novel by New Age author James Redfield (1950-) that spent over three years on the *New York Times* bestseller list, establishing itself as the most widely read spiritual novel of the 1990s, rivaled only by Tim LaHaye's evangelical Christian apocalyptic "Left Behind" series. The book tells the story of the discovery in Peru of an ancient manuscript that provides a series of nine insights that transform the lives of those who learn about them, presaging an era of heightened spiritual awareness, promising, in turn, a utopian New Age. Following the stunning commercial success of *The Celestine Prophecy*, Redfield followed up with a number of other books, including two novelistic sequels, *The Tenth Insight* (1996) and *The Secret of Shambhala* (1999).

The main worldview elements in these novels are conveyed through the experiences and words of their characters, who increasingly develop their spiritual acumen. In the following sections these themes are briefly summarized and then illustrated in the words of the characters in the novels.

### Humankind's Destiny and the New Age

The universe has both an earthly and a spiritual "afterlife" dimension. Both are interdependent and coevolving, connected by divine energy which makes positive evolution in both dimensions possible and mutually dependent. This energy travels between the earthly and spiritual dimensions through "portals," which people consciously working on consciousness evolution can increasingly perceive. Through these portals it is possible to receive teachings from ancestors and other loving presences, and empowerment for the divine, human mission. This mission

is to raise positive, loving energy to such an extent that heavenly and earthly dimensions come into alignment, inaugurating a utopian New Age. Realizing this mission is nothing less than the human destiny. As put by various characters:

Our destiny is to continue to increase our energy level. And as our energy level increases, the level of vibration in the atoms of our bodies increases . . . we are getting lighter, more purely spiritual . . . Whole groups of people, once they reach a certain level, will suddenly become invisible to those who are still vibrating at a lower level. When humans begin to raise their vibrations to a level where others cannot see them . . . it will signal that we are crossing the barrier between this life and the other world from which we came and to which we go after death. . . . At some point everyone will vibrate highly enough so that we can walk into heaven, in our same form (Redfield 1993: 241–242).

The human destiny is, therefore, "to realize that we're all here to bring the Earth dimension into alignment with the Heavenly sphere" (Redfield 1996: 183). To do this we must open the portals between these dimensions. One way to do so is through human love making:

The act of lovemaking itself opens up a portal from the afterlife to the Earthly dimension . . . Sexual culmination creates an opening into the Afterlife, and what we experience as orgasm is just a glimpse of the Afterlife level of love and vibration as the portal is opened and the energy rushes through, potentially bringing in a new soul . . . Sexual union is a holy moment in which a part of Heaven flows into the Earth (Redfield 1996: 80).

Another way is through especially powerful natural sites, namely, those that have not been destroyed through unconscious human enterprise. This possibility was signaled early in *The Tenth Insight* when a Native American indicated that his ancestors "believed this forest was a sacred midway between the upper world and the middle world here on Earth" (1996: 8). Another character later confessed that forests and other "natural areas are sacred portals" between the afterlife and earthly dimensions, and asserted that it is critical to keep "majestic, cathedral forests" with their irreplaceable "diversity of life, and [the] energies, inherent in a hardwood forest that had matured for centuries" from being converted to tree farms (1996: 208).

### Spiritual Consciousness Change and Biocultural Diversity

There are diverse spiritual tributaries to this emerging New Age, including "Franciscan Spirituals," Gnostics, and mystics in the Western world, Eastern religious avatars

of enlightened consciousness, Native Americans, those striving to reduce human suffering, such as participants in the human potential movement (a recent book Redfield co-authored with Esalen co-founder Michael Murphy [Redfield, Murphy and Timbers 2002]), and environmentalists and others sensitive to nonhuman life. The flourishing of both biological and cultural diversity is not only an end, in the Celestine worldview. The envisioned consciousness change is dependent upon both biological and cultural diversity, for both contribute insights and critical energies to the awakening of the human species, upon whom the unfolding New Age most depends. This provides a strong rationale for environmental activism and solidarity with indigenous cultures, the latter of which, in the Celestine worldview, are often more attuned to animals and nature, one of the key sources of spiritual insight.

In part because natural sites are portals between worlds, it is in the spiritual interest of humankind to protect such places and biological diversity. We need these species “not because they are part of the balanced ecosphere, but because they represent aspects of ourselves that we’re still trying to remember” (Redfield 1996: 221), including our ultimate destiny. Redfield believes that one of the obstacles to the envisioned transformations is that “few of us have experienced the mysteries of the wilderness” (Redfield 1996: 222). For consciousness to awaken, humans must continually refine their spiritual sensitivity, and the prospects for this depend on nature. Healthy forests, for example, provide more dynamic energies and greater potential for transdimensional communication and thus need reverent protection. Moreover, “the truth is that evolution is the way God created, and is still creating” (Redfield 1993: 236), and since consciousness change is an aspect of evolution, it is logically dependent on the protection of natural habitats.

### Oracles, Intuitions, and Dreams

Critically important for the evolution of human consciousness is the development of our intuitive capacities. To the spiritually perceptive person, people and animals are oracles, continually crossing our paths, pointing out the proper direction for us, or otherwise providing important lessons to enhance our own spiritual evolution.

People can certainly be oracles, for “the Manuscript says we will learn that sudden, spontaneous eye contact is a sign that two people should talk” (Redfield 1993: 208), for “if we are observant about who we talk with, then we get the messages we desire as a result” (Redfield 1993: 208). The ability for others to be oracles for each other is especially powerful “in a group when all of the participants know how to interact in this way” (Redfield 1993: 212).

In their own ways, nonhuman animals are oracles too, for “When an animal shows up in our lives, it is a coincidence of the highest order” (Redfield 1996: 218), and in *The Tenth Insight* the reader learns the symbolic meanings

and lessons to be learned from a number of animals encountered during the story.

The spiritual epistemology also requires that we develop and trust our own dreams and daydreams, another intuitive pathway through which spiritual insight appears. “Compare the story of the dream to the story of your life” (Redfield 1993: 164), the Prophecy declares, for dreams are to guide us, they “come to tell us something about our lives that we are missing” (Redfield 1993: 166). Moreover, not only dreams, but also everyday “thoughts or daydreams guide” the spiritually intuitive individual (Redfield 1993: 168). To recognize such things as messages “we must take an observer position. When a thought comes, we must ask why?” (Redfield 1993: 169)

Within the Celestine worldview, then, there are few if any coincidences – for the divine dimension is always trying to break through to us, awakening our consciousness. Of course, the healthier the energetic lines of communication are between earthly and heavenly realms, which is in truth dependent on the health of the natural world, the greater potential there will be for the full flowering of our intuitive capacities. Additionally, according to *The Tenth Insight*, it is critical to maintain an optimistic and hopeful outlook, “so that we [can] finally remember the truth that our life experiences are preparing us to tell, and bring this knowledge to the world” (Redfield 1996: 234).

### Between the Times

As with most millennialism, there are difficult to resolve internal tensions and ironies. It is not easy, for example, to reconcile the strongly stated value of the Earth’s living systems with an envisioned mass “ascension” from the physical realm into a spiritual one. It is interesting that, despite taking significant steps toward a nature-related religiosity, the *telos* seems to be more about transcending this world than living fully in it, unlike some nature religions. Indeed, one does not find prevalent here the language of “belonging” and “connection” to the Earth that is found in many other religions that consider nature sacred in some way, including much of the spirituality that inheres to environmentalism.

Those who postulate that nature has intrinsic value would likely complain that Redfield views nature as valuable only in an anthropocentric, instrumental way, as natural resource, to be used to promote human spiritual well-being. They might conclude that consequently, such a worldview cannot provide a strong rationale for environmental protection efforts, for personal evolution trumps all other concerns.

Redfield would likely view such complaints as typical of the kind of polarizing thinking that most be overcome with positive, conscious energy. He certainly would argue, on the contrary, that the health of the planet depends on the kind of consciousness change envisioned in his novels

and promoted in his nonfiction books, and rejoinder that personal and collective evolution are mutually dependent. He might well also quote one of his characters to the effect that a spiritual approach, producing human consciousness change, is *the* way to save the planet's biota:

Once we reach the critical mass . . . and the insights begin to come in on a global scale . . . we'll grasp how beautiful and spiritual the natural world really is. We'll see trees and rivers and mountains as temples of great power to be held in reverence and awe. We'll demand an end to any economic activity that threatens this treasure (Redfield 1993: 224) . . . And we'll understand . . . that the natural areas of the Earth have to be nurtured and protected for the sources of the incredible power that they are . . . As the human race evolves spiritually, we will voluntarily decrease the population to a point sustainable by the Earth. We will be committed to living within the natural energy systems of the planet. Farming will be automated except for the plants one wants to energize personally and then consume. The trees necessary for construction will be grown in special, designated areas. This will free the remainder of the Earth's trees to grow and age and finally mature into powerful forests. Eventually, these forests will be the rule rather than the exception, and all human beings will live in close proximity to this kind of power (Redfield 1993: 227).

Here then is the Celestine's vision of transformation and the reharmonization of life on Earth, one that is ultimately optimistic about humans and their technology. Cross-fertilized with environmental and personal existential concerns, the result is a powerful earthen spirituality that resonates with millions of people largely unconnected with mainstream religions. Others involved in green religious production are critical of or suspicious of such New Age ecospirituality – radical environmentalists, for example, are generally critical of New Age anthropocentrism, optimism and technophilia, and would dislike these aspects of Redfield's thought. Nevertheless, his books suggest that New Age spirituality may well be turning a darker shade of green, encouraging rather than hindering environmental activism.

Redfield himself has been actively engaged in a number of environmental causes, working with the Washington-based environmental group Save America's Forests, and has participated in the Global Renaissance Alliance (GRA), a New Age organization devoted to peace and positive social change. Such works have earned him a number of humanitarian awards since 1997.

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#### Further Reading

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- See also: Earth Mysteries; Esalen Institute; Harmonic Convergence; Harmonic Convergence and the Spiritualization of the Biosphere; New Age; Sacred Space/Place.

#### Celtic Christianity

God be with me, God within me,  
 God behind me, God before me,  
 God below me, God above me,  
 God where I rest, God where I rise . . .  
 (from the Old Irish prayer, "The Cry of the Deer").

The term "Celtic Christianity" is generally used to describe an approach to the sacred that developed in Celtic lands from around 500–800. Its philosophy is often said to include a perception of Deity immanent in creation, and consequently, a reverence for nature and reluctance to accept the doctrine of original sin. Some scholars, such as Mary Low, believe that these elements result from a high degree of "cross-pollination" between Christianity and paganism in Celtic lands (Low 1996: 4–22). The distinctiveness and very existence of Celtic Christianity continues to be hotly debated by Celticists, theologians and laypeople alike.

The most detailed sources on Celtic Christian theology are Irish, because most of the oldest native written sources on Celtic traditions are Irish. While we cannot be sure that this distinctive Irish theology reflects that of Celtic Christianity as a whole, later traditions found in works such as Alexander Carmichael's collection of prayers and invocations from Scotland, *Carmina Gadelica*, seem to reflect similar cosmological views.

One early Irish manuscript described a wondrous tree with "its upper part above the firmament, its lower part in the Earth, and every melody in its midst." It grew down from a single root, with innumerable roots coming from it below. There were nine branches full of singing white