

A [sample entry](#) from the

Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature

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Edited by

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- See also: Berry, Thomas; Environmental Ethics; Epic of Evolution; (and adjacent, Epic Ritual); Religious Studies and Environmental Concern.

Religious Society of Friends – See Friends, Religious Society of (Quakers).

Religious Studies and Environmental Concern

The establishment and growth of Religion and Ecology as a new area of study can be attributed in part to its instigation by scholars who feel morally and ethically compelled to address serious environmental problems. That religion itself has been implicated as a catalyst of environmental decline has prompted such scholars to examine the relationships among human cultures, religions, and environments. The *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* is, of course, one manifestation of the effort to understand such relationships. But it is hardly the first example of interest in religion and ecology among religious studies scholars, and some of this interest is more than analytic, it is itself religious. Indeed, especially since the mid-1960s, there has been intense scholarly interest in the relationships between human cultures, religions and environments, not only among religious studies scholars, but also among philosophers who have been pioneering the field of ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS. Some ANTHROPOLOGISTS have also focused attention on ECOLOGY AND RELIGION and have been

developing a field known as ECOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY. A good starting point for the study of religion and nature is to review the range of scholarly approaches to understanding the relationships between cultures, religions, and environments. Here we focus on the role played by religious studies scholars in religion-related environmental studies and activism.

Religion and Ecology in the American Academy of Religion

In 1989 and 1990 David Barnhill (then a professor of Buddhism and Environmental Studies at Guilford College) and Eugene Bianchi (a professor of Christian Theology and specialist in Roman Catholicism at Emory University) teamed up to propose a religion and ecology “Consultation” to the American Academy of Religion, an important academic association devoted to the study of religion. The consultation was approved and held its initial sessions in 1991. The Christian process theologian Jay McDaniel, and the Buddhist scholar and deep ecology activist Stephanie Kaza were among the group’s earliest supporters, both of whom were engaged in their own scholarly and activist work toward environmentally friendly religion. Demonstrating strong interest from Academy members, in 1993 the Consultation became a “Group,” a status which it has maintained to this writing.

The religion and ecology initiative represented a concerted effort to focus scholarly attention on the religion variable in human/ecosystem interactions. Some of the scholarly work presented there clung strictly to historical or social scientific analysis. The majority of the group’s presentations, while they might have been involved in or taken such work as their starting point, have also had a normative, ethical dimension.

Some participants explored how the world’s dominant religions could be “mined” or “reconfigured” to promote environmentally sustainable lifeways. Others, influenced by perspectives articulated during the emergence of ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS and RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM, promoted the revitalization of cultures and religions they considered to be environmentally benign (such as indigenous, pagan and animistic ones), but that had been declining in the face of what the presenters considered the world’s dominant, imperial religions (especially the monotheistic ones). Still others proposed or endorsed recent religious innovations (such as the “Universe Story,” “EPIC OF EVOLUTION,” ECOFEMINISM, and various NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS including WICCA) as correctives if not antidotes to anthropocentric religions that view the Earth instrumentally and consequently degrade it. Yet others advanced an EARTH CHARTER in order to capture and deploy religious ethics in a way that would promote a new environmental ethics, one that would consider the preservation of biological diversity a sacred duty, while simultaneously valuing cultural and religious diversity.

Within the wider American Academy of Religion, critics of the religion and ecology group have argued that religion and ecology scholars are more engaged in green religion and “missionary” work than in scholarly analysis. Such criticisms are likewise addressed to other ethically or religiously engaged groups in the AAR and reflect a wider fissure within it. For some scholars of religion, religious studies should promote religious tolerance and thus a more humane world, and therefore to promote the “greening” of religion, or to participate in it, would be appropriate modes of academic engagement. For others, such as Donald Wiebe (1999) and Russell McClutcheon (2001), who analyze in complementary ways the religiosity animating much of what is called “religious studies” today, the task of the discipline is properly to analyze religion rather than to defend or engage in it.

The conflicting responses of those in the religion and ecology group reflect this fissure. Some are apparently not involved in religious production or environmental ethics. Others unapologetically defend the normative religious or ethical dimension of their work and the group’s attention to it, arguing that the world cannot afford to have scholars sit on the sidelines in the struggle for sustainability.

The differing approaches and tensions reflect the plural identity in the religion and ecology field to date, which has scholars engaged in both analytic and normative work. This said, most participants and observers of the AAR’s Religion and Ecology Group would acknowledge that much of the work of its affiliated scholars is animated, at least in part, by environmental concern. And some of the participants would certainly understand themselves to be “engaged scholars” involved, in one way or another, in the struggle to “green” religion and ethics. (The word “green” is now used not only as an adjective but also as verb and adverb in a linguistic innovation that signals environmental action.)

Religion and Ecology Beyond the Academy

Outside of the American Academy of Religion, the contributions of religious studies scholars to the greening of religion is more transparent and less controversial. These contributions have been substantial and driven by a sense of environmental urgency, an impulse which predated the controversy of the LYNN WHITE THESIS. America’s premier twentieth-century conservationist Aldo Leopold, for instance, urged the revisioning of ethics and religion toward a biocentric axiology in the 1940s, as Curt Meine, his biographer, reminds us in this encyclopedia. As Leopold asserted in 1947, when it comes to conservation, “philosophy, ethics, and religion have not yet heard of it” (Flader and Callicott 1991: 338).

Philosophy, ethics and religion have now all heard plenty about nature – beginning perhaps with a number of little-known conferences that focused on religion, ethics, and nature during the 1970s and 1980s. Several of these

occurred as the disciplines of environmental ethics and CONSERVATION BIOLOGY got off the ground. But two events deserve to be singled out for dramatically increasing public and especially religious attention to environmental ethics.

The first, in 1986, was inspired in part and influenced by religion scholar and Roman Catholic priest THOMAS BERRY, and held at the Basilica di S. Francesco in Assisi, Italy, during the WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE’S twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations. Leaders of the five world religions who had been invited issued the “Assisi Declarations on Religion and Nature,” which set forth religious obligations to nature and spurred additional discussion and statements among and from other faiths in the subsequent years.

The second was a “Spirit and Nature” conference held at Vermont’s Middlebury College in 1990. It featured the Dalai Lama and a number of prominent religious leaders and scholars who had previously focused attention on religious responsibilities toward nature. The conference was followed by a similarly titled American Public Television broadcast and widely distributed video (produced by the well-known journalist Bill Moyers), and a book (Rockefeller and Elder 1992). All three “spirit and nature” manifestations promoted the idea of nature protection as a fundamental religious duty.

The driving force behind this conference was Steven Rockefeller, a Middlebury comparative religion scholar with a Ph.D. from Columbia, who also happened to be a practicing Buddhist born of one of America’s wealthiest and most politically prominent families. No doubt Rockefeller’s background and connections help explain the success of the conference. More importantly, the conference was successful because it reflected and captured a growing environmental concern among a wide variety of religious individuals and groups, and it evoked and inspired more of the same. The conference was capped by an interfaith religious service that included the voices of whales and other creatures, brought to the congregation through the medium of Paul Winter’s music, itself an expression of contemporary nature religion.

In the subsequent years, Rockefeller and a number of other religious studies professors would become even more deeply involved in promoting a fusion of environmental concern and religious ethics.

The “Religions of the World and Ecology” Conferences

The next most significant development along these lines was a series of conferences, hosted by The Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University with support from diverse environmental, religious, and animal welfare groups. Entitled “Religions of the World and Ecology,” the conferences occurred between 1996 and 1998. Like the “Spirit and Nature” conference, these were followed by publications. Between 1997 and 2004, ten

SP Critical Perspectives on "Religions of the World and Ecology"

Since its inception, the issue of "engaged" scholarship has been a focal point for intense debate within the field of Religion and Ecology. The sharpest criticism has come from those who charge that scholarship incorporating ethical concerns and thus an "environmental agenda" ultimately compromises the critical acumen associated with distanced scholarship. These are not idle concerns, but they were not easily resolved, nor were they foremost in my mind when in 2001 I was asked to evaluate the Harvard book series during a Religion and Ecology Group session at the American Academy of Religion meeting in Denver, Colorado.

After first acknowledging the monumental contribution of the Harvard Series, I expressed a number of reservations about the way it was framed and some of the tendencies found in the published articles. Three of these are worth repeating here, for they reflect some of the concerns that led to this encyclopedia project, which is itself an exercise in religious studies, and was designed to remedy lacunae in the inherited "religion and ecology" field as it had unfolded in its initial decades.

The first criticism was that the "Religions of the World and Ecology" enterprise was not as inclusive as it sounded, for its main conferences and book series focused only on those religions labeled "world religions." To their credit, the series included indigenous religions, which until recent decades had not been studied as a related religious type in venues like this. But the "world religions" category is problematic in itself and any list of religions so labeled will be difficult to maintain against criticisms. Scholars increasingly recognize that the contemporary multi-religious world decreasingly fits into tidy and conventional religious categories such as "world religions." Moreover, the conferences and books drew primarily on scholars and figures closely associated with, if not committed to, the traditions under scrutiny. This left much nature-related religiosity out of sight, including individuals and groups engaged in nature-focused spirituality, such as many environmentalists who are not involved in any formal, established religion but who often consider nature to be sacred in some way, as well as Pagans, Wiccans, and some New Age devotees, who consider a perception of nature's sacredness to constitute the very center of their religious worldview.

Although such lacunae were pointed out to the conference organizers early enough to remedy the oversight, and despite a sympathetic hearing and a recognition by them that there were significant gaps, nothing was done to make the conferences and book series more inclusive. Many scholars and religionists aware of this episode traced it to anti-Pagan bias and/or a desire not

to offend mainstream religions, especially the conservative monotheistic ones that have typically ridiculed Earth-based religions and sometimes even repressed their practitioners. Even if a lack of funding made rectifying the oversight difficult, leaving the original decision in force represented a choice, one that reinforced the original omission.

A second criticism was that embedded in the series was not only a clear bias toward mainstream traditions but also one favoring the mainstreams *of* these traditions. The "World Religions" format established a structural and conceptual hurdle that made it difficult to attend fully to the critically important dynamic of religious bricolage. On the one hand this obscured the important dynamic of hybridization in the contemporary greening of religion. It also undermined the desire for "creative revisioning" that was set out as a goal in the "Series Foreword" by (Tucker and Grim 1997: xxii) by casting implicit suspicion over such hybridization, seeing it as somehow impure compared to the existing traditions. This kind of tone was present in many of the contributions in the series, largely because so many of them were entrusted to scholars who were experts in their tradition's texts; even when critical, they tended to remain loyal to what they took to be the text's original meanings. Some of the authors ridiculed those engaged in what they considered inauthentic religious innovation, that is, at least, when they did not ignore popular religiosity and social movements altogether in favor of textual and worldview analysis.

In short, the series, by privileging the mainstream in its choice of its speakers and contributors (with a significant exception in the Indigenous conference and book, which paid substantial attention to contemporary grassroots engagements, and a few other notable exceptions) did not consistently look to the margins, where religious innovation tends to be most intense, arguably providing more fertile ground for new religiosities, including greener ones. Even when such religious production was charitably evaluated as possibly of some environmental utility, it was clear that many of the scholar-elites writing in these volumes considered such innovations to be "misunderstandings" and "misappropriations." This may have well served "political correctness" or religious orthodoxy, implying that only people with a certain background can or ought to interpret a tradition, but it was not good religious studies. Critical religious studies recognizes the critical role that hybridity and boundary transgression plays in the history of religion and that for non-devotees, ethical judgments about such transgressions will have to rely on concerns other than faith-based belief regarding what constitutes a "pure" strain of an extant tradition. In summary, assumptions that often accompany textual and worldview analysis often

Continued next page

discount popular, nature-oriented spirituality, making them invisible, and this kind of analysis has been the priority of the Harvard series, and indeed much of the religion and ecology field.

A third criticism was the idealistic (namely idea-focused) premise of the entire enterprise. Tucker and Grim in their series foreword insisted, quoting Lynn White, that "Human ecology is deeply conditioned . . . by religion" (in Tucker and Grim 1997: xvi). But this claim unfortunately assumed that which needs to be a central *conundrum* and subject of a scholarly inquiry into the relationships between religion and nature. It would have provided a better starting point for the religion and ecology series to turn this premise into a question: "Is environmental action conditioned by religious attitudes about nature?" Then, if an affirmative action were to follow, we could then push deeper, "If environmental behavior is so conditioned, how does this work within the immensely complex ecological and political systems in which we are all embedded?" Certainly many of the entries in this encyclopedia question the idealistic premise of this series and the majority of the inherited "religion and ecology" field. Some of these suggest, on the contrary, that it is environments which decisively shape religions, not vice versa, and that over the long run, the only religions that will endure will be those proving "adaptive" within their earthly habitats.

In these areas of criticism – undemonstrated idealism combined with a narrow focus and privileging of religious mainstreams – and in a number of other problematic assumptions conveyed by this series and much of the "religion and ecology" field, two differing approaches to the field can be discerned. One is activist in its priorities and chief orientation. It seeks to turn religions green while being careful not to offend religious majorities and mainstreams. For an activist, even a scholar-activist, this is an understandable choice, for to the extent that religious worldviews influence behaviors and thus impact ecosystems, the ones held by more people will be the most important environ-

mentally. Another approach places the priority on simply understanding the relationships between *Homo sapiens*, their religions and other cultural dimensions, and their livelihoods, environments, and so on – which is no simple task! This effort may also be motivated by environmental concern and it is certainly not value-neutral – many of its scholarly practitioners hope that the answers to such critical inquiry can help guide both environmental activism and public policy. But the approach endeavors to bracket value assumptions in an effort to prevent them from occluding understanding of the role of religion in nature.

Although these can be distinct approaches, in the real world these approaches, and those engaged in promoting them, sometimes, inevitably, intersect. Tensions between these approaches can even operate synergistically, helping to illuminate together the religion and nature terrain better than either would in isolation. Nevertheless, it is time for scholars involved in this interesting field of inquiry to exhibit greater self-reflexivity and transparency with regard to the approach they are engaging in, alerting the reader to when they are engaged in this approach, and their rationale for such choices. This would lead to greater clarity and would help guarantee that the inevitable tensions that accompany scholarly inquiry will be creative and productive as the field evolves.

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Further Reading

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See also: Ecological Anthropology; Ecology and Religion; Environmental Ethics; Evolutionary Biology, Religion, and Stewardship; Religious Environmentalist Paradigm; Social on Science, Religion and Nature; White, Lynn – Thesis of.

Harvard University Press books appeared, constituting an impressive series bearing the same title as the conferences. The volumes explored what the series editors decided were the world's major religious traditions: Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Indigenous Traditions, Jainism, Judaism, Islam, and Shinto.

The conferences were organized and the book series edited by two Bucknell University Religious Studies Professors, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, both of whom had been inspired by the work of Roman Catholic theologian PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, as well as by Thomas Berry and his protégé [philosopher and mathematician] BRIAN SWIMME, who together became the most influential religionists promoting the consecration of scientific and

evolutionary narratives, which they called *The Universe Story* (Swimme and Berry 1992). They and others moved by these narratives have been involved in grafting these new sacred stories onto existing and new religious forms, sometimes monotheistic ones (such as when Christians celebrate the "Universe Story" linking it to creation through ritual performance), sometimes not (such as can be found in ritualizing of the EPIC OF EVOLUTION, and in the COUNCIL OF ALL BEINGS as presented in the work of Buddhism scholar/activist JOANNA MACY and the deep ecologist JOHN SEED).

Tucker and Grim have been instrumental in promoting the Universe Story through their long service as Vice President and President (respectively) of the American

Teilhard Society. The Society was founded in 1964, Thomas Berry himself serving as its president during the 1970s. Grim assumed the presidency in the early 1990s, and continued well into the twenty-first century. Tucker called the Society the “Seedbed for Thomas Berry” in a 2003 interview (31 January in Bucknell, Pennsylvania; this paragraph and its quotes are gleaned from this same interview). Tucker and Grim, her husband, were well placed to know, for they had facilitated the society’s role in this regard. For example, Tucker assembled a number of Berry’s essays and presented them to a publisher in the early 1970s, which led eventually to the publication of Berry’s influential *The Dream of the Earth* (1988), which would sell over 70,000 copies. For another example, the new journal *Teilhard Studies* (winter 1978) devoted its first issue to Berry, entitled “The New Story: Comments on the Origin, Identification, and Transmission of Values.” Tucker and Grim were also been active in the AAR’s Religion and Ecology Group and instrumental in the development of the journal *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion*, which commenced publishing in 1997, providing additional venues for promoting a sacramental sense of the Universe’s evolution. They have worked to draw the broader religion academy’s attention to the Earth Charter as well, which also conveys such spirituality.

As important as an inspiring universe or other religious worldviews might have been in fostering the emergence of “religion and ecology” as a sub-field of religious studies, the field was driven as much by an apocalyptic reading of the current state and likely near-future of the planet. Tucker and Grim, for example, began the series foreword of “Religions of the World and Ecology” with a strikingly apocalyptic tone:

Ours is a period when the human community is in search of new and sustaining relationships to the earth amidst an environmental crisis that threatens the very existence of all life-forms on the planet . . . As Daniel Maguire has succinctly observed, “If current trends continue, *we* will not” (Tucker and Grim 1997: vi).

Although some may think the extinction of *Homo sapiens* is a real, near-term possibility, few scientists share such a view, let alone fear that “all life-forms on the planet” will go extinct. This suggests that the framing of these volumes may be grounded more on an apocalyptic faith than biosphere science. Scientists increasingly do, of course, express alarm about the extent and rate of environmental degradation. It should be no surprise that this would fuel apocalypticism. Indeed, some future scenarios do envision the end of the world as we know it, even suggesting this has already occurred, as Bill McKibben problematically did in his best-selling *The End of Nature*. He did so by conceptually extracting humans from nature,

for humans can only end nature if they are not a part of it. This illogical feat McKibben accomplished with little criticism, which was made possible by the apocalypticism of the age. We might, nevertheless, have wished for a more judicious framing of McKibben’s book, which had much otherwise to commend it, as well as the Harvard series, which despite such framing, will properly be understood as a benchmark for a certain type of engaged religion and ecology scholarship. And on a human level, the apocalyptic framing is understandable, for soberly presented ecological prognostications are certainly frightening enough to warrant such fears.

What is even more important to the current religion and nature discussion is the claim by Tucker and Grim in the introduction that the environmental crisis is grounded in defective religious perception, “We no longer know who we are as earthlings; we no longer see the earth as sacred” (1997: xvii). This implies not only that the Earth is sacred, but that earlier humans had a different and superior religious sensibility toward nature than modern humans.

Whatever the truth of such assumptions, they certainly make comprehensible why Tucker and Grim, and the other scholars who share such presuppositions, have labored so assiduously in developing the “Religion and Ecology” field. They hope to rekindle a sense of the sacredness of the Earth, which they consider a prerequisite to restoring ecological harmony. Indeed, a fundamental premise of most of the ferment occurring under the “Religion and Ecology” is a global, green-religious reformation.

The introduction to the Harvard series made this clear: Religious studies scholars could contribute significantly to the quest for sustainability by identifying and evaluating

[t]he *distinctive ecological* attitudes, values, and practices of diverse religious traditions . . . Highlight[ing] the specific religious resources that comprise such fertile ecological ground: within scripture, ritual, myth, symbol, cosmology, sacrament, and so on (Tucker and Grim 1997: xxiii).

The objective of the conference series was thus to establish a common ground among diverse religious cultures for environmentally sustainable societies, while treating individual traditions as resources to be mined for the envisioned religious reformation. Many if not most of the scholars writing for the Harvard Series seemed to share the objective of its editors, striving to uncover and revitalize the green potential of the religions they were analyzing.

This encyclopedia provides many examples of scholars deeply involved in this process. Perhaps one of the more interesting is that of J. Baird Callicott, a protégé of Aldo Leopold, and one of the world’s pioneers of the field of environmental ethics. As if taking a cue from Leopold’s above-mentioned lament that philosophy, ethics, and religion have had little to do with conservation, Callicott

has tramped worldwide pursuing cultural and religious resources for Leopoldian land ethics. Perhaps the foremost expression of Callicott's religion-related work is *Earth's Insights: A Survey of Ecological Ethics From the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback* (1994), a project he pursued although, as he discloses in *NATURAL HISTORY AS NATURAL RELIGION* in this encyclopedia, he regards most religions as superstitious. He nevertheless hopes they can be made to promote conservation ethics that cohere with ecological science.

"Culminating Conferences" and Targeting the United Nations

After the World Religions and Ecology conferences at Harvard that focused on religious traditions, two "culminating conferences" were held, producing or contributing to three significant trends: 1) the spreading of spiritualities in which the evolution of the universe and life on Earth is considered a sacred story; 2) the wider extension of green forms of mainstream religions; and 3) the greening of international institutions.

The first culminating conference, "Religion, Ethics, and the Environment: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue," occurred on 17–20 September 1998 at Harvard University. The focus of this conference was cosmology, environmental ethics, and the world religions. Speakers included Thomas Berry, the entomologist and biodiversity advocate E.O. WILSON, and J. BAIRD CALLICOTT, all of whom have in their own ways promoted the consecration of scientific narratives. Steven Rockefeller also spoke. Since the Vermont "Spirit and Nature" conference, Rockefeller had become a critically important facilitator of the Earth Charter process. The Charter, intended for United Nations ratification as a sustainability strategy, is a remarkable document claiming that all life has intrinsic value and expressing reverence for the miracle of life, while calling the nations to understand, in one way or another, that preserving the Earth is a "sacred trust."

The second culminating conference took place on 21 and 22 October 1998, and brought the themes of the earlier conferences, including the sense of the sacredness of the universe, right to the United Nations (the second day was held at the American Museum of Natural History). This conference illuminated the role of religious studies scholars in the Earth Charter initiative, and indeed, one of the sessions was devoted specifically to "charting the course" for the Earth Charter.

One of the speakers was Oren Lyons, a professor of Native American Studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo, and the "Faithkeeper" of the Turtle Clan, Onondaga Nation, one of the traditional nations of the HAUDENOSAUNEE CONFEDERACY. In 1991, Lyons himself had participated in another important extension of nature spirituality into the culture's mainstreams, through a Bill Moyers public television program based on a conversation

with Lyons. Mary Evelyn Tucker was another speaker at the United Nations, bringing the message she was taking from the overall conferences, that religions were indeed turning green, sometimes in dramatic and decisive ways. Her experiences of this perception she discussed several years later in *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase* (2003). Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme were also presenters, bringing their reverence for the universe directly to the conference, and kindling substantial interest. The first day at the United Nations drew an overflow crowd including many United Nations employees, and 1000 people attended the sessions at the Natural History Museum.

Perhaps even more importantly, a number of prominent figures associated with the United Nations spoke and endorsed the overall effort to green religion and ethics, including Maurice Strong, who reportedly first hatched the Earth Charter idea while serving as the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. This conference was held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro and became known simply as the "Earth Summit." Adnan Amin, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environmental Program, also articulated his support for the overall effort to promote a global environmental ethics and politics congruent with it. A few years after this meeting at the United Nations, in 2002, on the occasion of the United Nations' World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (which was the official follow-up meeting to the Earth Summit), Steven Rockefeller played the leading role in promoting the Earth Charter. The Charter received respectful mention from a number of world leaders, but no formal attention on that occasion.

This discussion has demonstrated that ideas and initiatives, incubated if not birthed by religious studies scholars, have played important roles in the greening of religion and environmental ethics. They are, moreover, beginning to influence global environmental politics, bringing to them an important and sometimes innovative religious and ethical dimension.

The Forum on Religion and Ecology

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim developed the conferences to encourage scholarly work in the service of greening the world's religions, to promote a sense of the sacredness of the universe and evolutionary narratives, and to support related ethical initiatives including the Earth Charter. To continue such efforts they also used the conferences to spawn a long-term initiative, which they called the "Forum on Religion and Ecology." Known to many by its acronym, FORE, the organization was, according to its website, established to help develop "religion and ecology as an academic area of study and research in universities, colleges, seminaries, and other religiously affiliated institutions."

A number of religiously affiliated colleges and seminar-

ies have been developing religion and ecology as specialties, and in 2003, the University of Florida, a state-sponsored, secular institution, inaugurated the first "Religion and Nature" emphasis as a central part of its new Ph.D. program in Religion. Such developments – occurring both in religious and secular institutions – suggest that the field of religion and ecology began emerging from its infancy in the early years of the twenty-first century. The differing approaches, confessional/ethical on the one hand, and historical/social scientific, on the other, will sometimes be in tension, but this is likely to be a creative one. Sometimes the differing approaches will be blended in creative scholarly hybrids. Taken together, the various approaches will produce diverse kinds of scholarly work as the field is further constructed.

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Restoration Ecology and Ritual

Ecological restoration is the active attempt to return a landscape or ecosystem such as a prairie, a wetland or a lake to a previous condition, usually regarded as more "natural." This is done through the alteration of soils, topography, hydrology and other conditions, the introduction of extirpated or otherwise missing species of plants and animals, and the elimination or control of species not present in the historic, or model landscape.

Although restoration has existed in its modern form since early in the twentieth century, for most of that time it was merely a curiosity represented by only a scattering of projects, and playing no significant role in conservation thinking or practice. Only since about the mid-1980s have conservationists begun to take restoration seriously. This development has been accompanied, or perhaps to some extent driven, by the growing recognition of the value of restoration as a conservation strategy, a technique for basic ecological research, a way of experiencing and learning about landscapes and ecosystems.

At the leading edge of this ongoing discovery of