

ECOS: Journal of the British Association of Nature Conservationists, 27/1 (2006): 116-117

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGION AND NATURE

Bron Taylor (ed)

Thoemmes Continuum, London & NY

hbk, 2 vols, xlvii + 1877 pages, £225

ISBN1 84371 138 9

It is becoming accepted that environmental questions, such as how should we manage natural resources are, in fact, more about how we should manage ourselves than about the resources. No longer can we look at the planetary environmental crisis merely in scientific and economic terms. To do so limits vision and is therefore artless science. Rather, today's crisis is fundamentally a cultural one. It cannot be grasped only at conscious levels of the cognitive processing. It requires, in addition, insight that is religious, mythological and spiritual.

Up until now, such insights have been expressed mainly through new and rapidly evolving fields of study. Examples include transpersonal psychology (e.g., Roszak, Gomes & Kanner (eds) *Ecopsychology*, 1995); ecotheology (e.g. Gottlieb (ed) *This Sacred Earth* (1996); ecofeminism (e.g. Diamond & Orenstein (eds), *Reweaving the World*, 1990), sociology of religion (e.g. Peason, Roberts & Samuel (eds), *Nature Religion Today*, 1998); and totemistic biodiversity (e.g. the late Darrell Posey's remarkable valedictory edited collection undertaken with the United Nations Environment Programme, *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity*, 1999).

Pioneering and courageous though such texts have been, each has felt like a piece of a wider jigsaw in some body of transdisciplinary knowledge, the big picture of which had not yet fallen into place. The publication of this major new work finally brings the supersaturated solution to crystallisation. This is, by any scholarly standards, a ground-breaking and awe-inspiring piece of work – a ecological *summa theologica* for our times.

The twin volumes comprise some 1,000 entries by 520 of the world's foremost practitioners and scholars. Through dedicated editorial support given over several years by Taylor and his consulting editor, Jeffrey Kaplan, each piece has been hand-crafted to a level of literary pleasure and scholarly prescience that often causes the hair to stand on end in the reading. These are not posturings from icy academics who have burrowed a niche deep into abstract epistemologies from ivory towers to hide their human dysfunctionality from the world. Far from it. This is exercising philosophy exercised down in the Platonic groves of academe, like when Phaedrus took the reluctant Socrates out into nature and blew his mind. These are contributions from women and men, native and non-native, scholar and activist, who care passionately about this Earth and who demonstrably believe that the head-heart-hand triune of clear thinking, profound feeling and radical action can perhaps save ... if not this planet, then at least perhaps something of our human integrity and dignity. And that has always been the task of true religion: to disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed.

Bron Taylor, who is America's foremost authority on radical environmental movements with a personal penchant for the spirituality of surfing - oceanic, not virtual - sets as his constellating task the question, "What are the relationships between human beings, their diverse religions, and the Earth's living systems?" The peer-reviewed response range from Ed Abbey through alchemy, architecture, bioregionalism, Blake, Disney, ecofascism, gardening, Incas, Ireland, Palaeolithic religions, primate spirituality, sacred sites in England, sustainability and the WCC, WWF, zen and all the way to Zulu war rituals. Contributions average 1,500 words. Each includes some half dozen key texts for further reading as well as cross references calculated to "provide contrasts and sometimes unexpected comparative reference points" and overview links to such integrative articles as "Social Science on Religion and Nature."

Sadly, the inevitable cost of an opus like this will put it beyond the personal pocket of many scholars and practitioners. But consider sending your librarian the website link at www.religionandnature.com. Consider it as a gift option for that special colleague who's had an office whip round. Damn it ... bust the bank and consider it for yourself, because no other work in print more fully lays out the established field of knowledge that now comprises religion and nature.

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