

Further Reading

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- See also: Christianity(8) – Ecumenical Movement International; Christianity(9) – Christianity's Ecological Reformation; Christianity and Sustainable Communities; Cobb, John; Environmental Ethics; Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism.

Eco-Kabbalah

This term refers to a school of thought within Judaism first articulated near the turn of the twenty-first century that turns to the Jewish mystical tradition (Kabbalah) as a source of inspiration for a contemporary religiosity emphasizing the holiness of the natural world. It may be seen as a Jewish parallel to the "Creation Spirituality" (not to be confused with Creationism) tendency found in certain contemporary Christian thinkers.

The growing awareness of ecological crisis in these decades led to a reconsideration of the central role of faith in creation in pre-modern Jewish theologies. Most modern (nineteenth/twentieth-century) versions of Judaism downplayed the theme of creation, "conceding" speculation on the world's origins as an area better pursued by scientists than by theologians. Outside of rather narrow ultra-Orthodox circles, few Jews cared to defend the biblical account of creation, even if extended to refer to seven "eras" rather than the literal "days." This stood in sharp contrast to the classical theologies of the Middle Ages, both the philosophical thought of Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) and the mysticism of the Zohar

(ca. 1290), in which faith in creation stood at the very heart of Judaism's self-understanding. Nevertheless, the Genesis creation narrative retains a prominent place in the religious life of contemporary Jews as the source of the weekly Sabbath celebration, the defining ritual act of traditional Jewish piety. Celebration of the Sabbath is portrayed as an act of human participation in the divine rest that constitutes the fulfillment of creation. There thus remains a sense, mostly undefined, that faith in God as Creator is an essential part of Judaism, despite Jews' willingness to accept the legitimacy of scientific cosmology and cosmogony.

Kabbalah, an esoteric Judaism dating at least to the twelfth century, offers an alternative version of creation, one that has been more attractive to some contemporary seekers. Some have even claimed parallels between Kabbalistic speculations and the language of contemporary science. The Kabbalists see creation as emerging out of God, an energy-flow that both embodies and hides the elusive divine presence within the ever-changing physical forms that constitute our world. God is the underlying source of all reality, the "deep well" or "quarry" out of which being is drawn, the "Ground of Being" (to readapt a phrase from Christian theologian Paul Tillich, itself echoing Jewish mystical usages) rather than a supreme Creator who stands outside the universe as created. The divine flow of energy constantly proceeds from *Eyn Sof*, the infinite and completely mysterious entity that contains all of being, transcending any distinction between past, present, and future. The creative energy of the cosmos, often depicted as a divine desire for self-expression, first emerges in a realm described as "Nothing" or perhaps "non-being." From there it emerges into a primal point of reality, continuing to expand and grow through various stages (named *sefirot* or primal numbers, and constituting the essential subject of most Kabbalistic speculation) until it is manifest as *Shekhinah*, or the "indwelling" divine presence (often depicted in feminine terms) immanent throughout the universe. God is thus seen as the mysterious core of being, the natural world serving as a "garb" within which the divine is hidden. God and world are primarily related as deep structure and surface manifestation, rather than the conventionally understood Creator and creation. (This is not to say that theistic formulations of God as Creator are entirely absent from Kabbalistic sources. The mystical tradition is imperfectly grafted onto a much older and highly developed tradition of personalist theism, which it seeks to absorb and transform, but never to deny.)

Such a theology implies that reverence for God and respect for nature are inseparable from one another. God is present throughout the natural world; indeed it is primarily through nature that God is experienced and comes to be known. It offers a version of Judaism that appreciates the work of botanist, zoologist, chemist, and physicist

as each uncovering some part of the single truth that constitutes *raza dim'hem'nuta*, the mystery of faith. Rather than feeling threatened by scientific understanding, as so much of religion has in recent history, this renewed Kabbalah positions itself as a poetic meta-science that both transcends and encompasses scientific achievement, much as *Eyn Sof* both transcends and embraces the universe that is the object of scientific observation.

This theology of creation is complemented by a revelation theology (always essential in Judaism) that understands God's self-revelation as a constant process, symbolically encapsulated in Moses' and Israel's experience at Mount Sinai. The content of revelation is essentially nothing "new," but a making manifest of that which has been true since creation: the realization that God underlies all of being and is thus to be discovered and encountered in every time and place. This revelation, however, serves as well to make a demand upon the faithful that they act and indeed shape the lives of both individual and community according to norms that reflect and respond to this great truth. In traditional language this shift is indicated by the move from God's ten utterances of creation ("Let there be" in Genesis 1) to the ten commandments of Sinai, restating the original utterances in the imperative mode.

This theoretical framework is articulated in various ways in the writings of Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Daniel Matt, Arthur Green, and others. Its historical roots can be seen in several of the great mystical theologies of Judaism in prior ages. Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.), the Zohar, Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov (ca. 1700–1760), and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935) have all had a role in shaping this contemporary understanding. Eco-Kabbalah also contains a series of implied attitudes and norms of behavior (here the writings of Arthur Waskow especially come to mind). It is an activist strain within the Jewish community as well as an intellectual/religious tendency in Jewish thought. The reappropriation of Kabbalistic language by postmodern Jewish seekers takes place in an age when vast numbers of Westerners are turning to the neglected wisdom traditions of humanity (Asian, Native American, etc.) in hope of guidance to transform behaviors that threaten the very existence of humanity and the planet we inhabit. The Eco-Kabbalist believes that such wisdom is to be found within mystical Judaism, needing only to be liberated from the anti-materialist bias that is so pervasive in the medieval Western tradition. Such classical biblical and Jewish forms as the sabbatical year (requiring that farmland be left fallow for one in every seven years), the Sukkot festival with its supplications for the rainy season, and the annual celebration of a New Year of Trees all invite adaptation to the needs of our time. The last of these, the Tu biSh'vat festival (occurring in January or February), has taken hold in large parts of the Jewish community as an occasion for

ecological awareness. The formerly obscure Kabbalistic custom of a *seder* or symbolic banquet for that day has been adapted by several modern Jewish movements, each of which has published its own text for a celebration that highlights environmental education. These and other rituals throughout the year are reinterpreted as reminders of ecological awareness and opportunities for heightened sensitivity to environmental issues in the Jewish context.

Arthur Green

Further Reading

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- See also: Jewish Environmentalism in North America; Jewish Law and Animal Experimentation; Kabbalah and Eco-theology; Vegetarianism and Kabbalah.

Eco-kosher – See Jewish Environmentalism in North America; Waskow, Rabbi Arthur.

Ecological Anthropology

What is the place of humans in nature? What should it be? The first question is pivotal for ecological anthropology, the second for environmental philosophy and ethics, and also for a more recent field, spiritual ecology. Probably both are very ancient and elemental questions of most thoughtful humans, the former since humans evolved into self-aware and rational beings, the latter since they became spiritual beings. Viable answers to such questions are indispensable for any ecologically sustainable green society. In most cultures, religion is usually decisive in answering such questions. Nevertheless, with a few notable exceptions, ecological anthropology has usually ignored the relationships between religion and nature.

It was not until the pioneering field research of anthropologist Julian Steward (1902–1972) in the Great Basin and Plateau region of the United States, especially among the Shoshone, that the place of humans in nature was addressed through ecological observations on cultural behavior. The result was his 1938 *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Socio-political Groups*, wherein lie the roots of cultural ecology. Steward's theory and method of cultural

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