

Religions of the World and Forests

Lao Tzu (c. 600 BC)

Ancient China

In Harmony

When the forest is in harmony, the sky is clear and spacious.
Then the earth is solid and full; all things flourish together,
Endlessly repeating themselves, and endlessly renewed.

Sayings

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (circa 4 BC – 65 AD)

Ancient Rome

When you enter a grove populated with ancient trees, higher than the ordinary, and shutting out the sky with their inter-twined branches, do not the shadows of the wood, the stillness of the place, and the gloom of this domed cavern then strike you with the presence of a deity?

Tachibanano Toshitsuna (11th century)

Shinto - Medieval Japan

Trees and plants bring the magnificence of heaven
to the human spirit.

Sakureiki, the Japanese Gardening Bible

Saint John the Evangelist

The Island of Patmos, Greece

Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees...

And He showed me a pure river of water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the lamb. In the midst of the street and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

New Testament, Revelation 7:3, 22:1-2

Abu Dawud Sulayman (817? - 889)

Muslim - Persia

Prohibition on Tree Cutting

The Prophet (Mohammed) encouraged tree planting.
Have those who are unemployed plant trees, the Prophet said.
“He who cuts a live tree without justification,
Allah will send him to hell forever.”

Li-Po (705 - 762)

Taoism - Ancient China

You Ask Why

You ask why I make my home in the mountain forest,
and I smile and am silent,
And even my soul remains quiet:
for it lives in the other world which no one owns.
The peach trees blossom. The water flows.

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 - 1153)

Christian - Switzerland

A Contemporary View of Bernard

An early biographer of Bernard, William of St. Thierry, writes that Bernard gained his understanding of scripture and spirituality alone out under the trees and in the forests.

Indeed, to this day, he declares that whatever competence he has in the Scriptures, whatever spiritual sensitivity he has for them, stems from his meditating or praying in woodland or field. And among his friends, he jokes merrily of having no other masters for such lessons but the oaks and the beeches.

William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616)

Stratford-on-Avon, England

These trees shall be my books,
And in their barks my thoughts I'll character,
That every eye which in this forest looks
Shall be thy virtue witness'd everywhere.

As You Like It

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)
Bonn, Germany

In the Woods I am Blessed

Almighty One, in the woods I am blessed.
Happy is everyone in the woods.
Every tree speaks through thee, O God!
What glory in the woodland!
On the heights is peace — peace to serve Him.

Saint Nikephoros of Chios
Island of Chios, Greece

A Lack of Trees Brings Poverty

In future times, men will become poor because they will
not have a love for trees....

If you don't love trees,
you don't love God.

Constantine Cavarinos, "The Life of
St. Nikephoros of Chios," 1976, pg. 30.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882)
Boston, Massachusetts

At the Gates of the Forest

At the gates of the forest, the surprised man of the world is forced
to leave his city estimates of great and small, wise and foolish.
The knapsack of custom falls off his back
with the first step he makes into these precincts.
Here is sanctity which shames our religions,
and reality which discredits our heroes.

Here we find nature to be the circumstance which dwarfs every other circumstance,
and
judge
s like
a god
all
men
that
come
to
her.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861 - 1941)

Hindu - India

Tree, Tell Me about God

Trees are the earth's endless effort
to speak to the listening heaven.
They bid everything on Earth, listen, but no one heeds.
Silence, my soul, these trees are prayers.
And I asked a tree, "Tell me about God."
And it blossomed.

Contours

angari Maathai
he, Kenya

Every one of us can make a contribution. And quite often we are looking for the big things and forget that, wherever we are, we can make a contribution. Sometimes I tell myself, I may only be planting a tree here, but just imagine what's happening if there are billions of people out there doing something. Just imagine the power of what we can do."

phandas Gandhi
ia

What we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and one another.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1883)
Boston, Massachusetts

Forest Healing

In the woods, a man casts off his years,
as the snake his slough, and is always a child.
In the woods is perpetual youth....

In the woods we return to reason and faith.
There I feel that nothing can befall me in life –
No disgrace, no calamity... which nature cannot repair.

The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me;
I am a part or parcel of God.
In the wilderness I find something more dear and connate
than in streets or villages.

Nature: Addresses and Lectures, 1849

Shinto Priest

Shinto – Osaka, Japan

It is the forests, and not the buildings, that mark the true shrines of Shintoism.
The deities are invited to these forests, where they and their environment are protected by the local
community, which in turn is protected by the deities.

John Muir (1838 - 1914)

Wisconsin and California

God Has Care for the Trees

Any fool can destroy trees. They cannot run away;
and if they could, they would still be destroyed — chased and hunted
down as long as a dollar could be got out of their bark hides....
Few that fall trees plant them, nor would planting avail much
toward getting back anything like the noble primeval forests.
It took more than 2,000 years to make the trees in these western woods
— trees that are still standing in perfect strength and beauty,
Through all the wonderful, eventful centuries since Christ's time —
and long before that — God has cared for these trees,
Saved them from drought, disease, avalanches and floods;
But He cannot save them from fools — only Uncle Sam can do that.

Rabbi Warren Stone
Jewish - Bethesda, Maryland

The Lungs of the Planet

The trees of our forests are like the lungs of our bodies.
They provide life for the whole being.
If we destroy our forests, the world's climate will be compromised.
Like our lungs, they provide life to all Creation.

Chief Fido David
Chilula tribe, coastal California

The Great Redwood Forests

The essence of the [great redwood] trees
has a way of touching the inner soul of mankind.
Such an experience makes a person feel humble and secure.
It gives meaning to our existence.
That is why we say that the redwood forest is like a church:
The trees have power and are alive.

Jack Ward Thomas (1936 -)
Forest science - Fort Worth, Texas

The Modern Lesson

Not only are forest systems more complex than we think;
they are more complex than we can think!

Wendell Berry
Port Royal, Kentucky

Sacramental Trees

I go among the trees
and sit still.
All my stirring becomes quiet
around me like circles on water.

My tasks lie in their places
where I left them, asleep like cattle.

I Go Among the Trees

Mary Carolyn Davies
Portland, Oregon

Forest Leading

Forests were made for weary men,
That they may find their souls again.
And trails with cedar shadows black
Are placed there just to lead men back,
Past all the pitfalls of success
To boyhood's faith and happiness.
Far from the city's craft and fraud,
O Forest, lead me back to God.

Masterpieces of Religious Verse, 1948

Henry Van Dyke
Quaker - Germantown, Pennsylvania

He that planteth a tree is a servant of God,
he provideth a kindness for many generations, and
faces that he hath not seen shall bless him.

Tsal Kanium (Grandfather Joe)
Lummi tribe, Washington

The Great Trees as Sacred Places

In our religion, the cedar, hemlock, and Douglas fir are sacred trees.
They offer spiritual connection and communion.
They help lift the mind into a spiritual place.

The places where the great trees grow are sacred places.
Special ceremonies take place only in these old forest areas.

In our language we have a word "*skalal*."
Skalal is when you become aware of the sacred.

Then your mind is lifted up.
Then you are aware of a great beauty
and the Great Spirit is everywhere.

Francis Schaeffer
L'Abri community, Switzerland

The Value of a Tree

When we consider the tree, which is “below” the fish, we may chop it down so long as we remember it is a tree, with its own value as a tree. It is not a zero. Some of our housing developments demonstrate the practical application of this.

Bulldozers have gone in to flatten everything and clear the trees before the houses are begun. The end result is ugliness.

It would have cost another thousand dollars to bulldoze around the trees, but they are simply bulldozed down without question. And then we wonder, looking at the result, how people can live there.

It is less human in its barrenness, and even economically it is poorer as the topsoil washes away. So when man breaks God's truth, in reality, he suffers.

Pollution and the Death of Man, 1970

Swami Ghanshyam Raturi
Hindu – Rishikesh, India

Chipko Movement Slogan

Embrace the trees and save them from being felled;
The property of our hills, save them from being looted.

David Gosling, *Religion and Ecology in India and Southeast Asia*, 2001, p. 59

Kahlil Gibran
Lebanon

Trees are poems that the earth writes upon the sky. We fell them
down and turn them into paper that we may record our emptiness.

Urabe-no-Kanekuni
Japanese Shinto

Every Leaf on Every Tree

Even in a single leaf of a tree, or a tender blade of grass,
the awe-inspiring Deity manifests Itself.

Martin Buber
Jewish - Vienna and Jerusalem

It can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree,
I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It....
Does the tree then have consciousness, similar to our own?
I have no experience of that. But thinking that you have brought this off in your own case, must you
again divide the indivisible?
What I encounter is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself.

President Theodore Roosevelt
Oyster Bay, New York

A grove of giant redwoods or sequoias should be kept
just as we keep a great or beautiful cathedral.

Natural History Magazine, 1919

Rabbi Alexander Schindler
Jewish - Worcester, Massachusetts

The earth we inherit is in danger; the skies and the seas, the forests and the rivers,
the soil and the air, are in peril.

And with them humankind itself is threatened.

As earth's fullness has been our blessing, so its pollution now becomes our curse.

As the wonder of nature's integrity has been our delight, so the horror
of nature's disintegration now becomes our sorrow.

Patriarch Bartholomew

Christian - Istanbul, Turkey

To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin.
For human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by stripping the earth of
its natural forests, or destroying its wetlands;
for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, and its life, with
poisonous substances ... These are sins.

Santa Barbara, 1997

Rasamandala Das

Buddhism - Coventry, UK

In the Vedas, saints and holy people are compared to trees, which give charity to everyone.
Trees never complain, but freely give fruit, shade from the sun, shelter from the storm and
even their own bodies for fuel.

Creation: A Story from Ancient India, 2005

Saint Nectarios

Island of Aegina, Greece

A Song in Every Tree

"Every tree is unique. If one listens carefully, each tree has its own
distinctive sound, like a song."

His biographer writes that he showed the nuns how to recognize
the differing songs within trees. One nun applied this insight so well that
she developed an amazingly successful skill in the art of branch grafting.
She found that by identifying harmony between tree songs, she could
graft one sapling to another with exceptionally high success.

St. Nektarios observed that anyone who listened with attention
and sensitivity could hear the subtle sounds in trees, almost like a form of
music.

Rabbi Hillel the Elder
Jerusalem

Even if I knew that I would die tomorrow,
I would still plant an apple tree today.

Abu Dawud Sulayman
Muslim - Persia

Prohibition on Tree Cutting

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Allah will send him to hell forever."

The Catholic Bishops of Mexico

Mexico City, DF

Forest Protection: A Life and Death Issue for Native People

Forest conservation has become a life and death issue for the Tarahumara Native people.... We must rethink our basic attitudes toward the forests if we are to save not only the forests from commercial exploitation, but also the villages which depend upon the forests for their livelihood.

[Because of excessive logging] desertification is moving rapidly forward in the Sierra Madre [mountains]. The once abundant and lush forests are becoming a rocky desert. Moisture loss has undermined the survival of the region's inhabitants. The situation is reaching a breaking point.... It is plain to see that the forests of Chihuahua form a fragile ecosystem in the desert belt of the world. The difference between what they are today and what they once were is abysmal. Undeniably, today's desertification is the result of irresponsible forest mismanagement.

The market orientation, which places economic incentives before all else, has created a devastating logic. If we do not stop it, it will drag us all to our deaths. For this reason, it is absolutely vital to achieve a new ecological consciousness that defends life for everybody instead of material benefits for just a few.

We appeal to the conscience of everybody and urge all Christians to take responsibility for preserving life on this planet that God entrusted to our care.

Declaration on the Exploitation of the Forest,
Translation by Carlos Agnesi, Mexico City, DF,
March 29, 2000, Nrs. 32-33.

Saint Kevin of Glendalough (513 - 618)

County Wicklow, Ireland

Hell and a Short Life

[St. Kevin promised] "hell and a short life to anyone who should burn either green wood or dry from this wood [forest] (where he had a special experience in which the trees bowed down at his prayers) till the day of doom."

Charles Plummer, *Bethada naem Erenn,
Lives of the Irish Saints*, Oxford Univ.

