

# Rediscovery of early 20th-century ecotheology

July 6 2016

---

The vast majority of us subscribe to the idea that human activity dramatically changes the natural environment, altering many biological processes. But addressing the global nature of human impact may require help from belief systems large enough to conceptualize on a cosmic scale.

Although Christianity has seldom been recognized as an ally to the ecological movement, with the Church proving all too often too slow to meet the environmental challenge - there are many Christian theologians that contributed to and significantly participated in the early ecological thought.

Now, the article by Dr. Panu Pihkala from the University of Helsinki published in "Open Theology" reveals many forms of Christian environmentalism and points out Christians who partook in general green politics.

While previously there was a general understanding that ecotheology surfaced only in the late 1960s, Pihkala found many examples of earlier ecological engagement in the texts contributing to achieving a sustainable human-earth relationship from the early 20th century archives both in Europe and beyond. These early texts bear evidence that significant elements of this world religion were converting to the service of the earth community well before the iconic Sixties.

It is in the late 1960s that the role of Christianity in environmental issues

started to be contested. But this study shows that before that time, disagreements were scarce and there was a co-operation between Christian and other environmentalists instead. Pihkala emphasizes the constructive resources of Christian theology and ethics to guide movement in that direction.

This is the first major study on early twentieth century ecotheology. The findings will shape environmental history and provide support to the views which emphasize that environmentalism has a long history of interchange with religion. "A truly groundbreaking theological research" - observes H. Paul Santmire. "Pihkala unearths a remarkable modern history of ecotheological reflection and does so with compelling insight. And this is much more than theological archeology. Pihkala allows figures such as Charles E. Raven and Liberty Hyde Bailey to speak to us today, all with the promise of a fresh understanding of the too long neglected contribution of Joseph Sittler to contemporary ecotheology. Serious work in this field must now presuppose Pihkala's wide-ranging study." concludes Santmire.

**More information:** Panu Pihkala. Rediscovery of Early Twentieth-Century Ecotheology, *Open Theology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1515/opth-2016-0023](https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2016-0023)

Provided by De Gruyter

Citation: Rediscovery of early 20th-century ecotheology (2016, July 6) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-07-rediscovery-early-20th-century-ecotheology.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.