

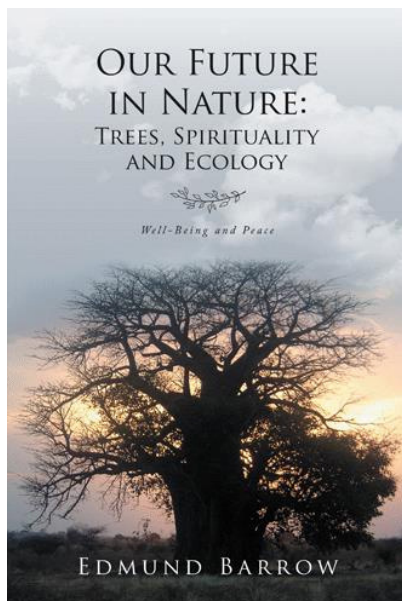
## **Our Future in Nature – Trees, Spirituality and Ecology**

Edmund Barrow

Balboa Press. 2019

345 pages. Paperback. ISBN: 978-9822-2663-3

€22



The author, Edmund Barrow, grew up on an organic farm in Ireland and studied natural sciences in Trinity College, Dublin. He holds a Masters degree in Development. Edmund has worked for over 40 years, mainly in Africa, but also in Asia and the Americas, in more than 20 countries, focusing on how communities conserve and benefit from nature. He emphasises local learning in terms of governance, empowerment, benefit sharing, natural resource management, and the more spiritual aspects of nature. This includes the importance of local and indigenous knowledge. He has extensive experience with participatory approaches to environmental management, village-level land use planning at landscape levels and forest landscape restoration. Edmund has published widely, emphasising practical lessons to enable people benefit from conservation. He lives in Kenya and is an Associate member of the Society of Irish Foresters.

The central theme of this thought-provoking book is that humankind has held trees and woodlands in awe and reverence since the dawn of time. Who has not felt a

sense of awe, silence, stillness, and presence in an ancient forest or in front of a sacred tree? Perhaps this is because we depend on nature for the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the services nature provides. Sacred trees and sacred groves transcend race, colour, and creed. They are found everywhere on our fragile planet. This book will appeal to religious and spiritual traditions, to the conservation and environmental movements, and to those concerned with education, health and peace. He places great importance on Pope Francis's book, his second encyclical, *Laudato Si: On Care of Our Common Home*. Pope Francis draws all Christians into a dialogue with every person on the planet about our common home. We as human beings are united by the concern for our planet, and every living thing that dwells on it, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. Pope Francis's letter joins the body of the church's social and moral teaching, draws on the best scientific research, providing the foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows. Edmund argues that while the pope has given great direction, action has not filtered down to the bishops, especially in Africa.

His book offers its readers the means to take better care of our fragile and only home – planet Earth. Often undervalued, unrecognised, or disrespected, sacred trees and groves are conserved against mind-boggling pressures. Sacred trees and groves can conserve unique biodiversity, which helps create or recreate connectivity in the landscape. As such, sacred trees and groves may be relict survivors of bygone ages and are a resource for restoring degraded natural landscapes.

The Society of Irish Foresters reprinted a seminal article first published in 1963 in the *Journal of the Cork Archaeological and Historical Society*, *The Sacred Trees of Ireland* by A.T. Lucas in 2017 (56 + viii pages. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-78808-864-0). The author, Anthony Lucas (1911-1986), was a very thorough researcher and combed through a great number of published historical sources from cover to cover, collecting references on index cards to many aspects of Irish life that he was interested in. Lucas's text on sacred trees deals with the subject under a number of headings starting with legendary trees mentioned in early Irish literature, then moving on to trees associated with churches and saints as mentioned in early sources and finally bringing the story up to the present day with rag bushes and trees at holy wells. The information is expertly contextualised and many references to such trees in all parts of Ireland are gathered together. It was never intended to be an exhaustive list and the author stated that clearly at the start. That said he did gather an extraordinary amount of information on the subject especially from the early sources and his text has been and will continue to be an essential starting point for anyone researching sacred trees in Ireland.

Edmund's book suggests ways for those involved with religion and spirituality and for those working with conservation and land use to jointly engage in repairing the damage we have done to Earth. Lessons and ideas from the book may help connect us as a powerful force for peace, respecting nature and the fragile Earth we inhabit.

Few of us enjoy ready access to a formal sacred tree or sacred grove, but we can all have our own personal bit of sacred nature – in the park, a woodland, a riverbank, in our garden, even on our patio. He distinguishes between spirituality and religion arguing that spirituality is in the heart, but that religion concerns the rules that frame a particular religion.

The messages from this book may help you cope with the stresses of life, and in helping you, it will help nature and Mother Earth. It is worth bearing in mind that on this planet there are sufficient resources for everyone's need but these are unevenly distributed, as the author puts it, "there is enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed".

*John Mc Loughlin*