The Tibetan system of harnessing the belief in transmigration to the mechanism of succession is unique. Competent sages identify incarnations of a high order (tulkus) by determining into which newborn baby a recently deceased personage has passed. The succession of Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas (the former representing successive incarnations of Avalokitiśvara, the latter those of Amitabha) is assured by this method.

[See also Reincarnation and Soul.]

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R. J. Zwi Werblowsky

**TRANSSEXUALITY.** See Gender Roles.

**TREES** are a form of nature that represent life and the sacred continuity of the spiritual, cosmic, and physical worlds. A tree is often used to symbolize a deity or other sacred being, or it may stand for what is sacred in general. The religious beliefs that surround a tree may include as sacred any one or all of the physical parts of the tree: its trunk, branches, leaves, blossoms, sap, or roots. Sacred objects constructed from the wood of special trees are also used for religious purposes.

The physical properties of trees are combined with supernatural or sacred ideas, the beliefs that surround a tree's connection with what constitutes religion in different cultures. Trees are not only sacred in the major religions of the East and West, but also in other traditions where belief in the sacred is combined with beliefs in the power of ancestors, in the creation of life in birth, about death and the afterworld, and about health and illness. Trees represent certain deities or ancestors, serve as mediators or links to the religious realm, and are associated with cultural beliefs in heaven or the afterlife. Trees may be valued as spiritual and physical contributors of life because they furnish liquids valued as sacred beverages used in ritual or as medicines for curing a variety of illnesses.

Through association with a particular religious or historical event, an individual tree or species of tree acquires the symbolic significance of the event as part of its meaning. The oak, date palm, and willow were used in the building of Solomon's temple and in constructing booths at Sukkot (Lv. 23:40). Deodar wood is used in the construction of Hindu temples. The oak is commonly taken to be the tree under which Joshua set up a pillar at Shechem to commemorate the nation's covenant with God (Jos. 24:26). The Jewish captives in Babylon in 597 BCE hung harps on weeping willows along the banks of the Euphrates (Ps. 137). The religious significance of this act established the willow as a symbol of mourning, death, and rebirth. The branches of the palm tree stand for Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as well as for his rebirth. These associations are still prevalent in Christian tradition.

A society's religious beliefs about what kinds of trees are sacred generally depends on the nature and number of trees found in its territory. If trees are plentiful, the forest as a whole will also be an important part of the religion's spiritual beliefs and rituals. The Kwakiutl Indians of Pacific North America, like many other societies living in a tree-filled environment, believe that their heavily forested inland region is the home of supernatural beings.
The Innate Power of Trees

Religious or spiritual power may be inherent in a tree or in the elements that make up the tree. For example, in Taoist thought, trees and all forms of nature contain yin and yang energies, that is, the opposing forces of the universe. Each tree has spiritual power as it contains and balances these inequalities: the light and dark colors of the leaves and bark, and the opposition between light and shadow. In southwest China feng-shui stands for the interaction of yin and yang and represents a power that affects the world and everything in it. Feng-shui may be found especially in strange and awe-inspiring trees and stones. The contemplation of these powers or the active cultivation of trees to enhance their spiritual force, as in the Japanese art of bonsai, builds gentleness of character, religious spirit, and respect for mankind.

The Andaman Islanders use the intrinsic qualities of hibiscus trees to aid them in their struggles to catch large turtles and fish. It is through the spiritual qualities of these trees that the Islanders are able to succeed in overcoming their prey and to protect themselves from harm. The particular qualities of the tree represent essential elements of physical and spiritual life and ward off dangers associated with turtles and the sea.

The Haida Indians of North America used a power inherent in hemlock branches to scrub themselves in ritual baths. The tree had the power to purify and protect the Indians and to enable them to attain the degree of cleanliness required during their rituals and thus remain on good terms with their supernatural beings.

Power to Avert Illness and Evil. Trees offer protection from both physical and spiritual illness through their associations with the divine. For the Ainu of Japan, ra-mat (literally “heart,” translated as “spirit” or “soul”) is a power that resides in all things in varying degrees. Wood is especially rich in ra-mat, which is provided by the spirit of Shiramba Kamuy, the usher of the world and male god of vegetation. The Ainu believe that nothing is more effective for protection against evil and spiritual problems than inaw (carved wood offerings). The wood of over fifteen kinds of trees including oak, willow, lilac, dogwood, and magnolia may be used in the carving of inaw, which are then offered to good kamuy (spirits). Similarly three trees—the thorn, elder, and alder—are predominantly used to carve inaw for bad kamuy. Inaw are also hung in houses to provide general protection for the home and its occupants.

In the Konkan district of western India it is believed that barrenness can be cured by planting a tree for the uneasy spirits that wander about and inhabit women, preventing conception. Under favorable circumstances the evil spirit will leave a woman suffering from barrenness to take up residence in the newly planted tree, allowing the woman to conceive. The Indian mimosa tree is believed to provide spiritual protection against wicked spells and the evil eye. The illness caused by Sitālā-Māyā, the Indian goddess of smallpox, may be averted by setting up a branch of the neem tree just as Buddhists invoke certain sacred trees for health.

Trees may represent a spiritual healing for and protection from evil. The oil of the olive was traditionally used to soothe pain and so the olive tree or a sprig of the tree has become a symbol of the grace of Jesus Christ through which the sorrowful sinner finds eternal peace.

The Cosmic Tree. In many religions the universe is portrayed as multilayered, the layers kept distinct and in place by a world tree running through the exact center of the cosmos. [See Axis Mundri.] Salishan Indians of North America hold that their deity made three worlds, one above the other: the sky world, the earth, and the underworld. All are connected by a single tree that passes through the middle of each. The Babylonians believed that their cosmic tree, Kiskanu, was the home of the god of fertility and Ea’s mother, Bau, the goddess of plenty. Heaven, or the home of Bai Uügen, is believed by the Altai people to be on the top of a giant fir tree that grows at the earth’s navel. The Vasyugan Ostiak (Khatny) believed that the cosmic tree’s branches touched the sky and its roots extended to the underworld. A copy of the celestial tree of the Siberian Tatars stands before the palace of Erlik Khan, the lord of the dead.

Similarly, in Scandinavian mythology the cosmos is connected by a sacred ash, Yggdrasill. Its roots reach to Niflheim, the lowest region of Hel; its trunk, enwrapped by the snake of the ocean, is in Midgardr, the realm of humans; and its branches reach to Asgard, the home of the gods. Other versions of the myth depict the great ash with three roots: Niflheim or Hel under one, Utgardr, the realm of giants and demons, under the second, and Midgardr under the third. On top of Yggdrasill sits the eagle of Ódin (Odin), chief of the gods; nearby is the Spring of Urdr (“fate”), where the gods dispense justice and determine the fate of the world. At Ragnarök, the doomsday of the gods, Yggdrasill will shake its roots, freeing the monsters of the lower regions.

Indian tradition offers many variations of the cosmic tree. In the Upaniṣads the tree is inverted with its roots in the sky while its branches cover the earth. The eternal asvattha (“fig tree”; Ficus religiosa) is a manifestation of Brahma in the universe. This forest tree is also described as rising from the navel of Varuṇa or of Nārāyaṇa as he floats in the waters of the universe.
The ancient Egyptians believed that the sky was a huge tree that overarched the earth. The stars were fruits or leaves on the tree and the gods perched on its boughs. This tree separated the ocean from the sky, the upper from the lower worlds. Osiris, lord of the dead, was identified with this celestial tree. The sun was born from the tree every day while the celestial tree disappeared each morning, thus marking the periods of night and day. The year was also symbolized by 365 trees representing the days of their calendar year.

Cosmic space is also defined horizontally by trees. In addition to the center of the earth and the sacred tree, with its roots deep in the underworld and its trunks and branches defining the world of man and the gods, many American Indian religions add sacred trees, and their associated colors, birds or other animals, and gods, to each of the four cardinal directions. The Maya, the Aztec, and the Indian cultures that later took part in their cultural heritage believed that five sacred trees (the four corners of the world and the center) were responsible for the organization of the universe; they allotted particular times of the year, or entire years in some cases, to serve under the dominion of each direction.

The Tree of Life. Many religions believe that the cosmic tree stands for the sacredness of the world, its creation, continuation, and fertility. Thus in many cases the world tree is also a tree of life and immortality as well. The patronesses of the cosmic tree for the Warao of South America are the Grandmothers, deities who are also associated with seasonal change and the winter solstice. The trees of the cardinal points and the Warao deities take on an especially interesting form. The southeast represents the soul of the Mother of the Forest, a deity of the world of light, while the southwest is the body of the Mother of the Forest. For the Warao, deities of the northeast and northwest represent the Tree of Life, the moriche palm, and so symbolize sustenance and fertility. Hebraic teaching and Islamic tradition describe the Tree of Life with its roots in heaven and its branches overarching the earth. Zoroastrianism teaches that the Tree of All Seeds, or the Tree of All Healing, which grows in the cosmic sea, Vourukasha, is responsible for life on earth.

In ancient Egypt, the celestial tree was also a tree of life. Its fruit kept the gods and the souls of the dead in eternal youth and wisdom. Out of this tree of life emerge divine arms some of which bear gifts while others pour out the water of life from an urn. In the Vedas, Varuna lifted the celestial tree of life and by squeezing its fruit between two stones obtained soma, or amrita, the drink of immortality. Ancient Egyptian religion also associated this tree with fate. Sekhmet, the goddess of writings or fate, sits at the foot of the cosmic tree where she records on the tree itself, or in its leaves, all future events as well as the important events of the present for the benefit of future generations.

The Tree of Knowledge. For Buddhists, the Bodhi Tree, or Bo Tree, is both the source of life for all beings and the tree of enlightenment. Sakyamuni Buddha made a special resolution at the foot of this tree of wisdom to remain under its branches until he attained supreme enlightenment. It was under this tree that he attained enlightenment after he was tempted and threatened by Mara and his three daughters Tannah, Rati, and Raga, who were like swaying branches of a young leafy tree singing songs of the season of spring.

The Babylonians believed that two trees guarded the eastern entry to heaven: the tree of truth and the tree of life. Similarly, in the Garden of Eden described in Genesis stood the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. After Adam ate of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil offered by Eve, God said, "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Gen 3:22). Adam and Eve were driven from the garden, marking the beginning of mankind's troubles on earth.

Trees as Food. In many religious trees are believed to be responsible for spiritual nurturance and sacred food. The Polynesians of Futuna believe that in Polotu, the abode of the gods, grows a sacred tree, the Puka-tala. The leaves of this tree will change into a wide variety of foods when they are cooked and so may supply all needs. For the tribes of South America's Gran Chaco, the god Cotaa created a wondrous tree that would provide food and drink for hungry people.

The bark of the alder tree is credited by the Karok Indians on the Klamath River in northwestern North America with providing salmon, an important food source. The creator of the world, Kureya, built a dam at the entrance of the Klamath River that prevented salmon from coming upstream to the Karok. This bark of the alder tree looks like salmon when it is broken off the tree and wetted. A Karok myth relates how this bark was used by Coyote to trick the women who guarded the dam into allowing the salmon to come up from the ocean, forever supplying food for the Karok. Salmon play both a life-sustaining and a religious role among these Indians, as does the wood of the alder tree.

Creation of Mankind. In many religions the myth of a people's origin relates how a cosmic tree played an important role in either the actual creation of people or the emergence of mankind in this world from some other world. These beliefs are intimately tied to what is
believed to be sacred. For example, among the Ainu the human backbone is regarded as the seat of life, and was originally made from a willow branch. But more frequently the cosmic tree or tree of life is responsible for the creation of the people of a society. Kiowa religion features a girl child, Pekehashaidei, carried by a growing tree into the sky where she marries and has a boy child. Carrying her child with her, she falls through a hole in her world. The child survives the fall to this world and is raised by Spider Old Woman, a very sacred being. Later the child creates Kiowa culture.

The Uyurucareas of Bolivia believe that their god Tiri split a tree and from the opening came all the people of the earth. The Zuni, in their story of creation, are brought up from the lowest world level, where all is darkness, with the aid of the two sons of the sun. Branches from the pine tree to the north, the spruce to the west, the silver spruce to the south, and the aspen tree to the east had to be gathered before they could leave the Darkness World. The Zuni climbed the long prayer stick made from the pine of the north to the third world; scaled the crook from the spruce of the west to the second world; used the prayer stick from the spruce of the south to rise to the world below this one, and finally emerged into the Daylight World (this world) by climbing the prayer stick made from the aspen tree. This emergence story tells the cosmic tree, the trees of the four corners, and the tree of life as sacred elements that bring the Zuni to their present world and that serve as important parts of their religious beliefs.

The Seneca Indians of northeastern North America also give an account of the discovery of the world originating with the sacred people of the sky. In the middle of their village stood a tree covered with white blossoms, which gave light to the people when the tree was in bloom. When the blossoms fell, there was darkness. A woman of the Seneca dreamed three times that the tree must be pulled up by the roots. After the third dream, her people uprooted the tree. Upon discovering their actions, the chief became angry and ordered the woman who had had the dream to be pushed into the hole where the tree had been. The falling woman then discovered this world, an event that marks the beginning of the Seneca culture.

**Trees as Ancestors.** A common extension of the notion of the cosmic tree as the source of all life is the belief in a tree as an ancestor and creator. This belief can take many forms. The Warramunga of northern Australia, for example, believe that the new life present in the womb of a mother receives its spirit or soul from certain trees, entering the womb through the navel. The Lakota on the upper Missouri River say that the first man and woman were two trees and that a snake chewed their roots off in order to allow the couple to walk away.

The Sauras of India honor the banyan tree, for they believe that “it is our mother.” The banyan tree succored two fatherless children whose mother had abandoned them under its branches. The children would have perished but for the milk of the banyan that dripped into their mouths and fed them.

For the Ndembu, the “milk tree” (mu
dyi) is a dominant symbol of their culture and religious beliefs. The white latex sap of the tree is believed to represent breast milk and semen, suggesting the creation and nurturance of life. This tree stands for what is good in Ndembu society and is used in rituals to counter evil forces. The tree also stands for the spirits of the ancestors of the matriline, the important lineage of descent, and so represents social custom and structure.

In another vein, trees can be associated with a shrine dedicated to a deceased relative, who, in time, becomes an ancestor. Among the Nuer a colvic is the spirit of those people struck by lightning. These people are believed to have been chosen to enter into close kinship with the god Kwoth. A person killed by lightning is said to become a Child of Kwoth, a spirit of the air. The blood relatives of the deceased, his patriline, erect a riek or shrine over his funeral mound and plant a sapling of the nyuot tree at its side. The nyuot tree is associated with the colvic spirit and with the rain and the sky to which the soul of the dead person has been taken. When this sapling is planted during the rains (when most lightning occurs), the tree takes root. If it were to die another would be planted in its place. This tree becomes a shrine for the deceased’s lineage. It is through this shrine that the deceased’s spirit may become active in the everyday affairs of his relatives.

**This idea of a sacred tree representing the lineage or clan is an old one.** For many cultures, the ancestors are the deities and are responsible for life, death, and spiritual happiness. The wooden totem-pole used particularly by cultures of the Pacific Northwest coast of North America is not merely a name or emblem of different family groupings. The totem is a collective label, but it also has a religious character: the totem’s origins related to the special relationship to the ancestors and the sacred world. Theinaw of the Ainu, mentioned above, were originally the receptacles of ancestral ramat; later, the winged inaw (shuttu inaw) came to represent ancestors. Some of these winged inaw became minor kamsu owing to their concentrated ramat, and were effective in warding off injurious magic.
Trees and Divine Powers

Trees may be viewed as having souls or spirits themselves or they may be a part of some divine being. Thus trees may symbolize a deity either by serving as the visible embodiment of a sacred presence or by marking a sacred spot that a deity frequents. Sacred trees may be the abode of deities or may be the divine beings themselves. For instance, the sacred heath worshiped in the time of Plutarch grew around the sarcophagus of Osiris and was known as the “soul of Osiris.”

Trees with Souls or Spirits. Many religions include beliefs that trees have souls or are sentient sacred beings. The Australian Aborigines believe that the spirit of men resides in the land and that a tree, a bush, or a rock is the present incarnation of this spirit and has great religious value. A group of relatives thus includes humans and the spirits of these natural features of the landscape. If an Aboriginal leaves the area, he would leave a vital part of himself behind.

The pre-Islamic jinn are associated with certain kinds of trees. These trees are conceived as animate and rational, for a supernatural life and power resides in the trees. In Greece the dryads were oak nymphs, and the tengu of Japan are forest spirits.

The Trobriand Islanders of the western Pacific depend both spiritually and physically on the spirit of their canoe and the tree from which it is made. Once a tree is selected, the owner, builder, and helpers must perform a short ceremony before the tree can be cut down. A small cut is made in the trunk, and a bit of food is placed in the incision. This is an offering to the tree’s tokway, or wood spirit, to induce the spirit to leave the tree so that the workers may begin the process of converting the tree into a canoe.

The Japanese have a story about the spirit of a very large and old willow tree that grows near a temple. The village decides to build a bridge and use the willow’s wood for part of its construction. A young man, who like his ancestors before him loves and respects the old tree, saves it by offering to substitute wood from his own land in place of the willow tree. The village accepts and the tree is saved. Returning from work one day the young man meets a beautiful young woman under the willow. They marry with the understanding that the young man never ask his wife where she came from or who her parents were. He agrees. The emperor declares that a temple is to be built nearby. The village is eager to have the willow included in the building materials for the good fortune it will bring. One morning when the willow is being cut down the wife wakes up and tells her husband that she is the spirit of the willow, that she married him to make him happy in return for saving her (and the willow) so many years ago, but that now she must return to the willow to die with it because she is a part of it.

The spirit of a Buddhist nun of the eighth century CE is believed to be embodied in a giant ginkgo tree in Japan. This tree is called the Nurse Goddess Tree of Miyagi Field because of hanging formations that resemble human breasts, from which moisture drips in wet weather. This tree’s “moisture” is believed to have the power of restoring milk to a woman who is unable to nurse. The tree itself is worshiped as a sacred mortal who has become a god and is filled with divine power.

Deities as Trees. Trees may give birth to deities, or sacred beings may be made from trees. Among the Ainu of Japan, A-e-oina Kamuy, a sky god, is born to the elm tree spirit as is Kamuy Fuchi, supreme ancestress and ruler of all departed spirits. She was born from the elm tree impregnated by Kando-ioro Kamuy, the possessor of the heavens. Her spirit is manifested in the sacred fire of the hearth and in vegetation.

In Asia Minor the almond tree and the river Sangarius were believed to have given birth to the god Attis, and consequently maturing almond trees became his symbol. The Tupari of the Mato Grosso region of Brazil believe that two of their male gods were born from a large rock. Since they had no wives, they cut down two trees, and each carved himself a woman and so populated the world.

Trees may also represent the essence of the deity. For example, the Buddha’s fig tree, asvathyha, is the chosen symbol of his essence, synonymous with all existence and all life. Among the Mandan Indians along the Missouri River in North Dakota, the world had two creators: First Creator and Lone Man. Lone Man leaves the cedar with the Mandan as a protection from all harm. The cedar is the body of Lone Man and contains his essence. Among the Arikara the cedar trees grown in front of their lodges are the body and spirit of Mother Corn, an important deity.

Deities Symbolized by Trees. Wreaths and crowns of foliage, usually laurel, olive, myrtle, ivy, or oak were sacred to Apollo and so symbolized some particular personification of him. The myrtle was also a symbol of both Venus and Neptune, the male and female deities of the productive and fertile powers of the waters. Several species of oak were symbols of Zeus.

Frequently a tree is held to be sacred because a deity resides in its branches. The asvathyha is said by some to be the abode of Brahman as well as embodying his essence and serving as the tree of wisdom and life. Other sources say that in this sacred tree abide Brahman.
Viṣṇu, and Śiva, as well as Viṣṇu in his incarnation as Kṛṣṇa. Among the ancient Semites, the goddess Al-Ozza had her abode in a sacred acacia at Nakhla.

Some trees are taken as symbols of a sacred person because of particular religious qualities the tree possesses. The myrtle is believed to be the symbol of pure maidenhood in Christianity and so is ascribed to the Virgin because of her pure life and sacred character. The palm, cypress, and olive are also symbols of the Virgin during her annunciation. They denote peace, heaven, and hope.

Greek beliefs frequently describe the actions of the gods in transforming human or divine beings into trees. The virginal Daphne, fleeing Apollo's embrace, is turned into a laurel tree by her mother, Gaia, the earth. Apollo breaks off a branch and crowns himself with it. In another myth, Aphrodite takes pity on Smyrna, mother of the slain Adonis, and transforms her into a myrrh tree.

Trees as Vehicles of Communication with Deities

Trees serve as a means of communicating with the divine in three ways: through their use in shrines, the meeting place on earth of a sacred being and mankind; through the relationship between sacred trees and shamans, the religious mediators of the divine; and through the use of sacred drinks or drugs made from trees that allow a mystical contact with the sacred.

Trees and Religious Shrines. Sacred trees may be found along with bushes, shrubs, rocks, or even with a temple to make a shrine. In ancient Egypt, by order of Pepi II, a new center of worship was officially recognized by planting a Syrian fir in the town. Among the Pare of Africa, religious shrines were sacred groves of trees and depended in size upon the size of the community who would worship in them. Many Shintō shrines are built under the branches of an ancient tree as an alternate abode for the deity of the tree. The usual sacred tree of Shintō is the evergreen sakaki. It is usually on the grounds of the shrine, protected by sacred ropes. One of the most powerful shrines in Java lies in the center of Modjokerto, where at the foot of a large banyan tree lies a small stone statue of Ganpaša, the Hindu elephant god of wisdom, surrounded by a white fence.

A shrine in the town of Kagami in Japan is dedicated to Musubi no Kami, the god of love, and built in honor of a cherry tree, Kanzakura. A myth tells of the spirit of a sacred cherry tree. A young girl falls in love with a handsome young man and will not accept the marriage arranged for her by her father. When the girl discovers she has fallen in love with the spirit of the cherry tree, she chooses to become a caretaker of the shrine devoted to the tree. There she stayed for the remainder of her life, representing religious perfection and dedication.

Sacred trees pass on communications from deities by speaking directly to men, or indirectly through their whispering leaves whose sounds must then be interpreted by priests. At Dodona in Epirus, the talking Oak of Zeus delivered divine messages to men through priests. Wood from this oak was also used to build the Argo and spoke to the heroes with a human voice. At Delphi, the laurel tree served as the voice of Apollo. The famous sacred tree near Shechem called the "tree of the revealer" in Genesis 12:6, was originally a Canaanite tree oracle.

Trees and Shamans. Shamans or priests are frequently associated with sacred trees as oracles or interpreters of divine will. The shaman may be spiritually connected to the cosmic tree. Most frequently the shaman uses the cosmic tree as a vehicle to ascend to the sky or to the deities of the universe to gain sacred information.

In addition to the ability to transverse the universe and communicate with the deities by means of the sacred tree, shamans can communicate with the spiritual realm through divination, frequently using parts of sacred trees for ritual communication. According to the religion of the Sisal, an ethnic group in the Tumu district of northern Ghana, the first diviner or shaman descended from God shortly after man descended to earth using the baobab tree. Shamans also frequently have spirit helpers to aid them in their ceremonial. Among the Coast Salish of North America, one of the most powerful spirit helpers is known as Biggest Tree and aids the shaman in acquiring gifts made from cedar. These gifts are "alive" for those who possess the power to perceive and use them.

Religious objects made of wood may also act as messengers. The wooden inaw of the Ainu are messengers (shongokoro guru) or intermediaries between the Ainu and the kamuy or between the kamuy themselves.

Trees and Divine Intoxicants. Many religions include the use of a divine potion, made from sacred plants, as necessary vehicles to the divine. Shamans frequently incorporate the use of such potions into their practices. Varuna obtains soma, or amrita, the fruit of immortality, by squeezing the fruit of the celestial tree of life between two stones. The palmrya palm is a symbol of Śiva, yielding an intoxicating and powerful juice. In Chan Kom, descendents of the Maya use a favorite Mayan intoxicant and purge that has strong religious associations. They make a ceremonial mead of fermented honey and add the bark of the balche tree dur-
ing the process for its narcotic effect. This drink, *balche*, enables communication with the deities and is necessary for all religious rituals, especially those for fertility, abundance of crops, rain, health, and family. [See Beverages.]

**The Ritual Use of Trees**

Sacred trees have a ritual significance. The trees and their meanings may be incorporated into rituals of curing, initiation, marriage, and death. Trees used in any of these contexts stand for the divine and represent the sacred beliefs being honored through the ritual.

Trees appear in rituals in various forms as symbols for the divine. Sacred beverages are made from tree bark. Incense made from the sap and bark of sacred trees calls deities down to this world and then “feeds” them while they are here. [See Incense.] *Copal*, an incense made from a tree sap and used by many cultures in Latin America, not only aids communication with the deities but protects the ritual participants from harm by driving away evil and purifying the area. Most frequently, wood is used to construct powerful religious paraphernalia, such as the sacred poles erected to symbolize the presence of the ancestral spirits or the cosmic tree during the ritual. The symbol of the cross is used in different religions to symbolize specific divine beings or the sacred in general.

The Zinacantecos, descendants of the Maya in Chiapas, erect cross shrines for every kind of ceremony. Three small pine trees are fastened to crosses and pine needles are strewn on the ground around the crosses to set off the area as sacred and ritually pure. There must be three crosses for a ceremony, and one is generally a permanent wooden construction, supplemented by two crosses made entirely from fresh pine boughs. The triadic symbol displays the Catholic religious use of these crosses as well as the traditional Native American beliefs. Crosses are “doorways” to the houses of the ancestral deities. They mark the boundaries between the sacred and the profane realms.

In Christian belief, the cross may be referred to as a symbol of the Tree of Life that stands in the Garden of Eden. The wood from the True Cross was believed to have the power to restore the dead to life. A variety of different trees are credited with being the wood chosen for Christ’s cross: cedar of Lebanon, dogwood, mesquite, ash, and oak.

**Trees in Rituals of Initiation and Marriage.** Many African cultures mark the transition from youth to adulthood through rituals of initiation, and some of the most powerful symbolism of this change is represented through the use of trees. [See Rites of Passage.] Among the Ndembu, the milk tree, the *mudzi*, a symbol of life and the ancestors, is used in both male and female initiation ceremonies to transform boys and girls into fertile, productive adults. Traditionally, a girl’s initiation ceremony and the use of the milk tree served as her marriage ceremony as well.

Every young girl among the Newari of Nepal is married to a small tree (*bel*) from early childhood. In India, the “marriage of trees” may be performed when a woman has been married for many years and has not yet borne children. One tree representing her husband and one tree symbolizing her fertility are planted side by side so that their combined growth may symbolically and spiritually increase her fertility and the growth of life within her womb.

The “marriage tree” is common in South India as a representation of a male or female ancestor. This tree is necessary for all weddings and is adorned as a part of the ceremony. In Java large “plants” are assembled from banana stems and scalloped tree leaves of various types, and wrapped with green coconut branches. These “flowers” made from trees are essential ritual elements for the wedding ceremony, representing the virginity of the bride and the groom.

**Trees Associated with Death and Rebirth.** A variety of trees are specifically associated with religious beliefs about the fate of the dead and the rebirth or passage of their souls to the afterlife. Christian death symbolism involves the use of willows and cedar trees. These trees symbolically stand for the death of the body as well as heralding a rebirth of the soul. These trees are almost always present in cemeteries in America and may be accompanied by conifers or other kinds of evergreens: a promise of everlasting life. Wood is the most common material from which coffins are made for burial in Christian practice in the United States. The leaves of the bainie palm used by the Coorgs of South India are associated with death and are used in funeral rituals.

Many religions practice tree burial as the appropriate spiritual resting place for the deceased. The Khasiyas of eastern India leave the deceased in the hollow trunk of a tree. Many North American Indian groups placed their dead in trees or on wooden structures grouped together to form a sacred burial ground. The Nootka and Southern Kwakiutl used another form of tree burial. They folded the body up and put it in a large box, which was then placed high in a tree. A wooden mortuary column was erected to display the family crest of the deceased.

In many religions, without proper religious burial the soul of the departed would be in danger and could harm the deceased’s living friends and relatives. For the funeral pyre, the Coorgs of South India cut down a mango
or pavili tree that grows in the burial ground. The entire tree must be used for cremating the corpse; improper use of the tree's parts may result in another death in the community in the near future.

[See also Vegetation.]

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PAMELA R. FRESE and S. J. M. GRAY

**TRENT, COUNCIL OF.** Also known as the nineteenth general council of the Roman Catholic church, this council opened on 13 December 1545 and closed on 4 December 1563, after twenty-five formal sessions. The road to Trent, long and tortuous, passed through Constance, Basel, and Pisa. The cry for a sweeping reform of the church from top to bottom—“reformatio capitis et membrorum”—had been raised one hundred years before Luther posted his theses. It continued to ring out through the fifteenth century, accompanied more often than not by the insistence that serious reform could be achieved only within the framework of a general council. Basic to this coupling of reform and council was the widespread conviction that the papacy was incapable of or unwilling to put right the tangle of abuses that threatened to smother the ecclesiastical life of Christendom. Indeed, it was argued by many that the popes' chronic misuse of their dispensing powers, particularly with regard to the appointment to benefices, was the root cause of those abuses.

The demand for a council became the standard rhetoric not only of churchmen but also of princes and statesmen. Concordial preeminence assumed doctrinal status in many of the best universities in Europe and found its way into a thousand pamphlets, treatises, and broadsides. Preachers thundered the message from their pulpits, and echoes were heard in busy chancelleries no less than in silent Carthusian charterhouses. No pope could be elected until he had assured the cardinals in conclaves that he would summon a council within a year or two of his coronations.

Such were the shock waves loosed at the Council of Constance (1414–1418). The questions addressed there were at once constitutional, procedural, and moral. With whom or what lies ultimate authority within the church? The monarchical concept of the papal primacy had taken its classical form in the days of Gregory VII (d. 1085), had pressed its brief even further under the great lawyer popes of the thirteenth century (e.g., Innocent III, d. 1216, and Clement IV, d. 1268) and, scarcely checked by the extravagances of Boniface VIII (d. 1303), had reached a kind of practical hegemony, at least in fiscal affairs, at Avignon (1305–1376). But the protracted scandal of the Western Schism (1378–1417), when two and then three rival "popes" competed for the allegiance of Christendom, brought the notion of papal monarchy into severe disrepute, just as the solution of the crisis by a general council convened at Constance under the aegis of the German emperor enhanced the idea of conciliar superiority. The council's deposition of the three squabbling claimants, its election of a successor (Martin V, 1417–1431), and its solemn decree, *Sacrosancta*, all combined to stake out a constitutional po-