

Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation

EDITED BY KIARA A. JORGENSON AND ALAN G. PADGETT, WITH A FOREWORD BY KATHARINE HAYHOE

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This is an exemplary ecumenical dialogue on ecotheology and will be essential reading for those in the field. Four leading ecotheologians—Anglican, Lutheran, evangelical-Reformed and Catholic—each offer an account of what they see as the central points in ecotheology. The other three authors provide comments which critique and expand on that essay, illumining one another. The book is an excellent introduction to the basics of ecotheology and also takes the reader deeper with rigor and substance.

The first essay is by biblical scholar Richard Bauckham, who states that while the interpretation of “dominion” (Gen. 1:28) as “stewardship,” however flawed, has proved useful, it is not sufficient. Based on meticulous exegesis of key verses in Genesis 1, he proposes that humans see themselves as “fellow creatures” within the interconnected community of creation. Bauckham points out that the biblical perspective is neither anthropocentric nor biocentric, but theocentric—and that all creation is included in God’s plan for our future.

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda declares that after recognizing God’s infinite love, “we are to embody it in the world” but is haunted by the intertwining of good and evil, as the privileged participate in structures that perpetuate the crisis, even while they have good intentions. She locates the roots of moral inertia in lack of discernment of what God is doing in the world, a “privatized” sense of neighbor-love and the modern/postmodern “self” too individualized to resist structural evil. How can we find moral and spiritual agency? She reflects on eleven key biblical-theological claims about love (*agapē / ahav*) and describes eight “guideposts” for living by love in the world.

Steven Bouma-Prediger revisits the debate on “stewardship” and judges the concept inadequate, preferring “earthkeeping” for the call to Christians to “serve and protect.” Character as well as conduct is required for “earthkeeping” and in his discussion of ecological virtue ethics, he notes the role of narrative in forming character, the “ecological” dimensions of the virtues and focuses on wonder and humility in probing reflections. He affirms that without these virtues we cannot become “the kind of people” who will care for creation.

John Haught describes three ways of “reading nature.” What he calls “archaeology” confuses what science finds to be earliest in the order of time with what is most real in the order of being, resulting in reductionist materialism which is ethically barren. In the analogical and sacramental reading of nature,

intrinsic to any Christian view, creatures are windows to the eternal transcendent and are sacred as they reveal God. Haught finds this view lacking inasmuch as it is “nontemporal;” Christian ecotheology has been weakened by its neglect of the central biblical theme of promise and future fulfillment of all creation. This lack is remedied in the “anticipatory” reading which incorporates the scientific discovery that the universe is a *narrative* and is still coming into being. The vision of a cosmic journey of transformation joins with that of promise to develop the most complete and viable ecotheology—in which the core virtue is hope.

The four authors in *Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation* agree that humans have become a force seriously damaging the natural world, that Christians are late in engaging or even recognizing the gravity of the crisis, and that theological neglect of nature is partly to blame. Their theological responses are complementary rather than at odds, and the dialogue format greatly enhances the whole work. An Orthodox Christian voice would have been welcome and only John Haught specifically mentions any religions other than Christianity. This is, however, overall an invaluable contribution to ecotheology and will be a wonderful resource for courses on the subject.

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