

Book Reviews



ENVIRONMENT

BLUE PLANET, BLUE GOD: The Bible and the Sea by Meric Srokosz and Rebecca Watson. London, UK: SCM Press, 2017. 208 pages. Paperback; \$32.00. ISBN: 9780334056331.

I have been anticipating this book in which two friends, Meric Srokosz and Rebecca Watson, bring part of the results of their “The Sea in Scripture” project together in the book *Blue Planet, Blue God*. You might think it would be a short book. What, after all, does the Bible say about the sea? It turns out, quite a lot!

The aim of the book is straightforward—to examine what the Bible says about the sea. However, in spite of the impression given by their typical British understatement, the authors really want to change our worldview. For most of us, looking out at the sea from a comfortable chair beachside or perhaps eating fine seafood at a quayside restaurant, the ocean appears to be monotonous—much of a muchness. Those who venture out on the ocean know differently, particularly those who don a mask and gaze at the wondrous beauty beneath its surface; the authors want us to share this perspective. They take us on a grand tour examining what scripture and science have to say about the 71% of our planet that is ocean. They challenge us to rethink how we view the ocean, and they show, in great detail and with theological rigor, that the Bible covers a multitude of sea-related topics which are of personal and global relevance. The authors pull no punches in pointing out where humans are to blame for the problems with our ocean. They call to account those unwilling to change comfortable lifestyles that destroy this natural resource. In spite of this, the book’s tone is hopeful, continually pointing to a God who cares for and has declared the oceans, along with all of creation, good.

The book reads more like a sea voyage than an airplane trip. Those hoping to get from point A to point Z quickly, will be frustrated. The authors take readers on a journey that draws from the Bible, science, history, poetry, music, and literature. Lengthy quotes will frustrate some. The authors compel readers to discover for themselves the broad relevance of the sea to the Christian life and the critical role Christians play in caring for our beleaguered seas. Chapter 6, “Coping with Chaos and Uncertainty,” illustrates this nicely. The chapter begins with a discussion of different uses of the word “chaos” in modern times and then explores human vulnerability through a poem and a hymn by Victorian hymn-writer William

Whiting. The science of chaos theory follows, leading from a story about an eleventh-century Viking and the 2004 Asian tsunami, and then to flooding and hurricanes in modern-day Britain and the USA. The authors present a discussion of El Nino weather patterns and impacts. They point out how vulnerable humans and the ocean are to these weather patterns. Srokosz and Watson then return to a biblical analysis of uncertainty among Semitic peoples. At this point, the reader is only halfway through the chapter! Long passages from the Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea help the reader to reflect on the fact that “the Bible affirms that God not only stills and confines the sea, but also stirs it up and makes it roar.” God is recognized as the Sovereign of the sea—the One in whom we can put our trust when faced with our own vulnerability and fear. The chapter ends with a stark reminder from Isaiah and Hosea that our sin has consequences both for other humans and for the sea.

Srokosz and Watson consistently challenge our ideas about the sea and perhaps even our faith. They state:

This book, then, touches on some of the most fundamental issues of our time, such as economics, migration, and climate change, but it also offers perspectives on some of the most enduring questions for humanity: those of meaning and purpose, of our place in the world, and the need to allay our fears and seek stability despite threats to the status quo.

Indeed, each chapter ends with a summary of the key messages and then delivers a challenge. Discussion and reflection questions help to unpack and personalize the challenge as well as suggest specific actions, lest the reader not come up with their own.

Returning to Chapter 6 on Chaos, the authors state that “the established order in the world is both dangerous and vulnerable; it cannot be taken for granted, yet through God it is ultimately sustained and overall God’s rule prevails.” They challenge us not only to trust in God’s rule, but also to recognize that much is not in our control. We are indeed vulnerable. We can embrace that vulnerability and even delight in it through experiences in the sea. Reflection and discussion ask us to reflect on the balance of chaos/uncertainty, God’s sovereign rule, and whether or not our own “order” might be another’s oppression. The action section uses Gaelic folklore to help us to understand, how hard action can be in response to what we have learned, before going on to encourage us to be pro-active in disaster planning/response and to curb behaviors which negatively affect the sea.

Some of the themes examined through these various lenses are awe and wonder, anthropocentrism,

human impacts, the need for restraint, the sacredness of the sea, chaos and order, vulnerability, consumerism, and poverty. The book does not attempt to be exhaustive and some problems which are presently a very hot topics, such as plastic pollution, are given little attention. Yet the main effects of humans on the sea – overfishing, climate change, and pollution – are all examined in sufficient detail and clarity for non-scientists to understand.

One of the key themes of the book is summarized in the concluding chapter:

Our exploration of the Bible has revealed that a key aspect of God’s perspective on the ocean is his delight in his creation apart from any role we as humans may have in it. It has intrinsic value to him and was not created by him solely for the benefit of humanity.

This is an important truth that needs to be taught to both Christians, who can easily see the created world as the stage on which humans act and which provides for humanity, and to the professional conservation community which is increasingly framing nature conservation in instrumental terms. The ocean has value to God, irrespective of all it provides for us. A Rocha, a Christian conservation organization whose Marine Conservation program I direct, is seeking to live out this truth in caring for the ocean. I look forward to many discussions with volunteers, interns, and other scientists after passing them a copy of this book.

If we have a Blue God, how then are we as Blue People to live? The final pages of the book are an important call to action. In light of the science and the Bible, now what? The authors do not give easy answers, as there are none. As much as we should, except in special circumstances, get rid of plastic straws, this will not solve our ocean’s problems. Their approach mirrors that of our work with A Rocha, in which both science and theology inform our praxis. The call is to a radical lifestyle that rejects consumerism, moves forward humbly, and is led by Christ’s example of a life of self-sacrifice and love.

We need to live in harmony with God’s purposes for his creation, mindful of the “sacredness” of the sea, and seeking not to overstep the limits set for us. It also means recognizing that there is no neutral ground: not making the lifestyle and attitude changes required is an active decision, entailing responsibility (and, yes, guilt), not a passive one. By doing nothing, we are directly contributing to the ruin of God’s good earth.

Challenged yet?

Reviewed by Robert Sluka, Lead Scientist, A Rocha Marine and Coastal Conservation Programme, Titusville, FL 32780.



HISTORY OF SCIENCE

A HISTORY OF TECHNOSCIENCE: Erasing the Boundaries between Science and Technology by David F. Channell. New York: Routledge, 2017. 286 pages, index. Hardcover; \$155.00. ISBN: 9781138285545.

This is an important book for anyone who is interested in philosophy of science and technology. Although not an easy book to read, it deals with how technology has changed science in the last 150 years into something quite different from what it was before. David Channell is well qualified to write on this subject. He has a BS degree in physics and a PhD in the history of science and technology from Case Western Reserve University. He has received funding from the NSF for research in this area and two Templeton Foundation grants, including a joint Templeton-ASA lecture grant in 1998. Channell is currently a professor of historical studies at the University of Texas at Dallas.

There have been many different attempts to describe a scientific method, but relatively few attempts to describe an engineering method. Many practicing engineers and practicing scientists view their disciplines as being rather different. One of the aims of *A History of Technoscience* is to understand how engineering and science interact today.

Channell’s opening paragraph describes the theme of the book:

In the twenty-first century science and technology are coming to be seen as indistinguishable activities, often referred to by the term technoscience. It is difficult to characterize many of the developments that have come to form the basis of the modern western world as either purely scientific or purely technological. (p. 1)

For someone not familiar with the topic, the most important chapters are Chapter 1: Introduction, and Chapter 11: Epilogue, in which Channell shares his final conclusions. The vast majority of the book is historical, showing how technoscience has developed over the last 150 years. In the introduction he analyzes several different approaches to the relationship between technology and science. These perspectives, in the general order of their historical development include technology as dependent upon science; science and technology as independent; science as dependent upon technology; science and technology as interdependent; and, erasing the boundaries between science and technology.