

Book Reviews



ENVIRONMENT

STEWARDS OF EDEN: What Scripture Says about the Environment and Why It Matters by Sandra L. Richter. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. 168 pages. Paperback; \$22.00. ISBN: 9780830849260.

As an ecologist, I have read many articles and books about creation care over the last few decades. Some of these were written by scientists, some by theologians, and some by philosophers. As a result, I wondered what new perspectives Sandra Richter, a noted Hebrew Bible scholar, might offer in her recent, and highly praised, book, *Stewards of Eden*.

Creation care is a topic near and dear to my heart. However, teaching at a Christian liberal arts college in the Midwest, it is often challenging to encourage evangelical students to transcend their preconceived notions about environmental stewardship. They often think that it's not something that Christians should worry about. Many believe that it's strictly an area of concern for secular liberals. Would Richter's book be helpful? Could her words connect with some of the students that I struggle to reach?

A quick glance at some of the chapter topics, such as "The Domestic Creatures Entrusted to 'ādām," "The Wild Creatures Entrusted to 'ādām," and "Environmental Terrorism," piqued my interest. These aren't topics typically addressed as entire chapters in similar books. There was an absence of chapters specifically detailing different forms of environmental degradation, the history of the environmental movement, and Christian motivations for creation care. Richter does touch upon these topics, but her organization and focus is distinctly different from other texts.

The lion's share of *Stewards of Eden* is a deep dive into the Hebrew Bible, specifically the Torah, shining light on our Creator's covenant with and expectations of his people. Richter begins at the beginning, with Genesis as a "blueprint for creation," establishing identities, relationships, and responsibilities. She describes how the rebellion of "God's chosen stewards has consigned all under their authority to frustration and death." This sets the stage for the establishment of Yahweh's law, which gives life to those who obey.

As we, predominantly nonagrarian people, live out our lives, it is tempting to skim over the aspects of the law recorded in the Torah that are devoted to care for the land and animals, and often even care for the poor. However, Richter brings these subjects into sharp focus in the several chapters of her book. In particular, Deuteronomy and Leviticus are used to show the reader that proper care for creation was an important aspect of the law given to the Israelites. Neglect or misuse of the

land and its human and nonhuman inhabitants brought judgment and hardship.

Using modern case studies, Richter shows that, by extension, the same principles are in operation today. For example, she contrasts modern factory farming of animals with care of domestic beasts prescribed by Yahweh's law. The Old Testament laws specified "a Sabbath's rest, a share of the harvest, humane treatment," and "slaughter with dignity and compassion" for domestic animals. Failure to follow a modern-day equivalency of these laws results in not only dreadful "living" conditions for the animals, but concentrations of animal wastes that pollute our water, antibiotic resistant microbes, and the inability for small family farms to remain economically viable.

As a scholar of the ancient Near East, Richter also brings interesting historical perspectives into the narrative. During times of warfare, invading armies often killed wildlife, razed vineyards, and cut down fruit trees. These tactics terrorized and demoralized the local population, as they negatively impacted the land's ability to support its inhabitants for generations. The Israelites were specifically instructed not to employ these strategies, even if it would bring short-term gain. Again, using modern examples, she makes a case that Yahweh's life-giving laws against wanton environmental destruction, even for national security, still have relevance.

Although her strengths are most apparent in chapters focused on the Old Testament, Richter rounds out her book with a discussion of the hope realized in the redeeming work of Christ, work that extends to all of creation. This good news comforts us as we groan in anticipation for the day of the Lord. I appreciate the amount of space she dedicates to the discussion of nature in apocalyptic literature, as a counterpoint to the belief that the good creation will be reduced to a pile of ash by its Creator. Continued care of creation while we yearn for restoration is part of our calling. This good news should inspire us to action.

In *Stewards of Eden*, Richter aptly uses her expertise to support the thesis that "scripture speaks to this topic [environmental stewardship] repeatedly and systematically" and that it is "not alien or peripheral to the message of the gospel." There is a lot in this slim volume. Richter is specific and carefully references her statements, but she leaves enough narrative "space" that the lay reader will remain engaged. Her appendix and notes are helpful for those wanting to take action and/or learn more.

As a person already interested in this topic, I found her ability to link modern environmental concerns to ancient Hebrew law fascinating, and I am inspired to explore further. Those interested in the intersection of scripture and creation care should consider adding *Stewards of Eden* to their libraries. For those unfamiliar

with or resistant to considering creation care as part of our Christian calling, it may be most fruitful to explore this book, with its end-of-chapter questions, in discussion groups.

Reviewed by Laurie Furlong, Professor of Biology, Northwestern College, Orange City, IA 51041.



HISTORY OF SCIENCE

RETHINKING HISTORY, SCIENCE, AND RELIGION: An Exploration of Conflict and the Complexity Principle by Bernard Lightman, ed. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019. ix-307 pages, with notes, selected bibliography, and index. Hardcover; \$50.00. ISBN: 9780822945741.

First some background to the making of *Rethinking History, Science, and Religion*. This edited collection by Bernard Lightman, Professor of Humanities at York University, Toronto, Canada, and past president of the History of Science Society, is the product of a two-day symposium on “Science and Religion: Exploring the Complexity Thesis,” during the International Congress of History of Science and Technology in Rio de Janeiro in 2017. One can consider this to be a companion volume to *The Warfare between Science and Religion: The Idea That Wouldn’t Die*, edited by Jeff Hardin, Ronald L. Numbers, and Ronald A. Binzley (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018).¹

In one way, *Rethinking History, Science, and Religion* is a focused and daring work. It asks a fundamental question directed at much of contemporary historiography in the field of science-religion relations: if science and religion are not perpetually in conflict, as ever so many historians have claimed over the past fifty years, is complexity a better, if not the best, way to recount the relationship between science and religion? Complexity is the solution first proposed by John H. Brooke in his now classic 1991 text, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press).² In fact, Lightman dedicates his edited book to John H. Brooke, the leading proponent of complexity.

But what does the “complexity thesis” add to our discussion? Is it really a thesis? Is it a principle? Does it explain or does it rather describe the situatedness and contingency of the science-religion relationship, its cartography, as David Livingstone might say? Is its sole positive feature to discourage us from making facile assumptions about the relationship between science and religion? Or does it simply add another c-word to our vocabulary: complexity instead of contrast, concordance, compatibility, conflict, conversion, complementarity (or harmony)? Brooke has famously said, “There is no such thing as *the* relationship between science and religion. It is what different individuals and communities have made of it in a plethora of different

contexts” (p. 321, italics original, *Science and Religion*). That statement certainly invites one to consider a complexity thesis.

Although the role of complexity has been a conversation topic for several years,³ Lightman wants to gauge the current “pulse of the field.” He wishes contributors to test the “complexity principle” in scholarly contexts other than the usual Christian West (often seen as Europe and the USA/Canada), as well as in public spaces. This move invites an additional question: will the complexity thesis be able to provide a coherent narrative, or will it merely give us one contextualized example after another with no perceptible trend to bind them together? If there are many complex stories to tell, then it seems that a master-narrative or pattern would be a pipedream at best.

After an introduction by Bernard Lightman, the book is divided into three sections: Part I: The Local and the Global; Part II: The Media and the Public; and Part III: Historiographies and Theories. The book concludes with “Afterword: The Instantiation of Historical Complexity,” written by John Hedley Brooke.

Part I contains four chapters ranging from a local context (chap. 1, “The Stigmata of Ancestry: Reinvigorating the Conflict Thesis in the American 1970s,” by Erika Lorraine Milam), to more global ones (chap. 2, “Three Centuries of Scientific Culture and Catholicism in Argentina: A Case Study of Long-Term Trends,” by Miguel de Asúa; chap. 3, “Reexamining Complexity: Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s Interpretation of ‘Science’ in Islam,” by Sarah A. Qidwai; and chap. 4, “Christian Missionaries, Science, and the Complexity Thesis in the Nineteenth-Century World,” by John Stenhouse).

Each of these chapters addresses the complexity thesis with a different focus. Erika Milam argues that the supposed conflicts between science and religion “gained rhetorical traction” by both scientific creationists and die-hard evolutionists because they both denied the complexity of their own origins. Irven DeVore’s studies of primate behavior is used as a template to test that thesis. Miguel de Asúa identifies three trends in Argentinean scientific culture: (1) colonial period harmony, (2) nineteenth-century conflict, and (3) twentieth-century indifference. Sarah A. Qidwai calls us to carefully consider the interpretation of science in Islam rather than by Islam in the 1865 self-published commentary by Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898). John Stenhouse examines whether Ronald Numbers’s suggestion that we introduce some mid-scale patterns (or generalizations) such as “naturalization, privatization, secularization, globalization and radicalization,” aids us in understanding the complexity of science/religion relationships in the nineteenth century. Stenhouse concludes that a study of missionary science outside the West complicates Numbers’s attempt to “simplify