

Book Reviews

On the whole, I found this book to be an accessible, useful introduction to the work of Jacques Ellul. That being said, an introductory chapter situating Ellul's thoughts within the larger intellectual traditions would have been helpful.

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THEOLOGY

ECOTHEOLOGY: A Christian Conversation by Kiara A. Jorgenson and Alan G. Padgett, eds. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020. xx + 228 pages. Paperback; \$24.99. ISBN: 9780802874412.

Have you ever wondered how theologians develop responses to new and emerging issues at the interface between faith and science? *Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation* gives readers a front-row seat to that process, recording interactions among four contemporary theologians on the question of how human beings ought to relate to the nonhuman creation. The question is timely, contentious, and exceedingly important. At one time, human domination (dominion) over the nonhuman creation was the most widespread paradigm for that relationship. In the 1980s, Christian environmental stewardship emerged as a corrective to dominion/domination. In recent years, attempts to move beyond stewardship have taken shape. Like many theological questions, a singular and definitive answer is elusive. But the importance of the question is not in doubt. Human exploitation of the nonhuman creation has eroded ecosystems, decimated species, and changed the climate in ways that should cause remorse, bring about repentance, and cause dramatic change. We need to find a new way forward.

Unsurprisingly, the authors in *Ecotheology* don't provide a single answer. Rather, their goal is to "assist individuals and communities to develop their own ecotheology and to explore the spiritual and theological dimensions of cultivating a greater love of the world" (p. 13). In this review, we summarize and assess each theologian's contribution, and we provide some overall thoughts about the *Ecotheology* project. The structure of our review echoes the structure of the book.

Chapters 1 and 2 (reviewed by Matt Heun)

Ecotheology begins with Richard Bauckham's essay "Being Human in the Community of Creation," which contains one of the strongest and most effective takedowns yet of the "dominion as domination"

narrative. Short and concise, he argues (a) that God's predominant characteristic is love (goodness, compassion, justice, kindness) and (b) that "human dominion over other living creatures will reflect God's rule by showing these same qualities" (p. 30). Continuing, Bauckham argues convincingly that although stewardship has been a valuable paradigm, it ill-advisedly places humans above the nonhuman creation in a vertical power relationship. Instead, he favors the "community of creation" in which human beings live in "conscious mutuality with other creatures" (p. 21). These moves by Bauckham are both helpful and important. Rightly understanding our relationship to the nonhuman creation is essential if we are to honor its inherent value rather than focus on its value to us.

My quibbles with chapter 1 are few. First, Bauckham's focus on other "creatures" leaves one wondering about the nonhuman, noncreatures that also inhabit our planet. Does the community of creation extend to air and water? to coal deposits and lakeshore pebbles? Second, Bauckham occasionally slips into stewardship language, despite wanting to move beyond it. Indeed, his re-reading of Genesis includes "God ... entrusting to our care ... something of priceless value" (p. 25). Bauckham struggles, as we all do, to match our diction to our (eco)theology.

Ecotheology continues with Cynthia Moe-Lobeda's "Love Incarnate: Hope and Moral-Spiritual Power for Climate Justice." She exposes the "paradox of the [high-consuming] human," in which the good things of everyday life depend upon fossil fuels and the globalized economy in ways that cause "death and destruction due to climate change and the exploitation of people and their lands" (p. 69). She rightly identifies our consumptive patterns of life to be an externalization of Paul's lament, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:15b). Moe-Lobeda claims that agape love is the antidote to our moral inertia, and she offers eight helpful guideposts for ways to live in agape love.

My only critique is that she could have done more to highlight the challenges to living according to her guideposts. It will be much harder than "calling down ... the [climate justice] music that already exists" (p. 94).

Response from Dave Warners

Matt's praise for Bauckham's dismissal of the stewardship-as-dominion paradigm is spot on. I also agree with his point that Bauckham's "Community

of Creation” is a helpful alternative concept with the caveat that “community” should be understood more as “ecosystem,” including nonliving elements of creation. I thought Matt would comment on Bauckham’s emphasis on order in creation; evolutionarily and ecologically, creation can be a messy place, and too much emphasis on order conjures up unhelpful perceptions from the days of Natural Theology. In reviewing “Love Incarnate: Hope and Moral-Spiritual Power for Climate Justice,” Matt rightly commends Moe-Lobeda’s emphasis on love. Love sacrifices for the sake of the other, and a human-creation relationship marked by love is a worthy aspiration. A regret I had with this chapter is its nearly single-minded focus on climate change. While climate change is the pressing issue of our time, it is certainly not our exclusive ecological/eco-theological challenge.

Chapters 3 and 4 (reviewed by Dave Warners)

Steven Bouma-Prediger’s “The Character of Earth-Keeping” does two important things. He starts by deftly detailing the limitations of the stewardship paradigm, offering “earthkeeping” as an improvement. He then pivots to a discussion on virtue ethics and their applicability to the practice of earthkeeping. I especially appreciated Steve’s focus on two of the virtues: wonder and humility. His ideas for how these virtues can be used to embody a more appropriate posture and practice of creation care are refreshing. Extending virtues into the realm of creation care is an important contribution by Bouma-Prediger both here and in his other writings. But in light of the strong encouragement for readers to cultivate these virtues, it would have been helpful to offer suggestions for how such cultivation can be achieved. Additionally, the author emphasizes that human beings are unique among all God’s creatures, which may be important for avoiding biocentric accusations. But given the many problems our species has introduced and continues to promulgate, a sobering reality check of our creatureliness, limitations, and finitude might be needed more.

In “The Unfinished Sacrament of Creation: Christian Faith and the Promise of Nature,” John Haught takes a long view of planetary well-being. He contends that an eschatological awareness should infiltrate and inform ecotheology. Haught advocates for recognizing that the world we are caring for is an emerging creation, moving from its inception toward a God-ordained end point. His emphasis that creation is in the process of coming into being is a strength of this chapter. And yet, besides encouraging Christians to

become aware of the unfolding character of creation, the reader is left wondering what should be done differently in light of this new awareness. Haught points out that our species is a remarkably recent newcomer to this ongoing creational unfolding. Given our evolutionarily recent arrival, combined with the dramatic impact we are imposing, more direction for how and why human influence ought to be exerted would have been helpful. For example, when we recognize that God has been in relationship with nonhuman creation all along, we must admit our relationship with God is of much shorter duration. This realization ought to evoke a deep respect for those other relationships, and deep regret when our selfish actions compromise or terminate them. Although practical implications of the perspectival shift Haught advocates are not provided, he lays ample groundwork for rich dialogue on the creation care actions such an awareness ought to inspire.

Response from Matt Heun

Dave is right to appreciate both pieces of Bouma-Prediger’s chapter, earthkeeping and eco-virtues. But the author could have done more to link the concept of earthkeeping to eco-virtues. I was left wondering how earthkeeping (vs. stewardship) leads to better (or different) eco-virtue formation. As Dave says, Haught’s long view of creation is a helpful reminder that newcomer status should affect our relationship with the nonhuman creation. But should Haught have been the first chapter instead of the last? He opens a space to discuss how the relationship between human beings and the nonhuman creation should evolve, space that could have been filled by the ideas of Bauckham (the community of creation), Moe-Lobeda (working within and against systems for their reform), and Bouma-Prediger (earthkeeping and personal ethics).

If you enjoy the structure and tone of this review, you will also enjoy the format of *Ecotheology*. On the positive side, it is economical; readers experience four voices in one book and read responses to each chapter from the other co-authors.

However, if you wish that we reviewers had better coordinated our thoughts before writing this review, you will wish the same of the book. *Ecotheology* is less the conversation promised by its subtitle and more a conference session with presenters and respondents, appropriate for an audience of theologians. An alternative project would have assembled the same theologians in a collaborative writing process, allowing authors to incorporate coauthor feedback

Book Reviews

into revised chapters before publication. The result would have been a more polished and more insightful collection of ecotheological contributions.

That said, the *Ecotheology* project is largely successful in meeting its stated goal of assisting individuals and communities to develop their own ecotheology. The chapters were great conversation starters for us. Although the book could have been sharpened by deeper dialogue and collaboration among the authors and editors, the essays and responses in *Ecotheology* will stimulate good conversations among other readers, too!

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TO THINK CHRISTIANLY: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement by Charles E. Cotherman. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. 320 pages. Hardcover; \$35.00. ISBN: 9780830852826.

How do Christians studying at secular universities, where religion is either ignored or attacked, achieve an integral Christian perspective on their areas of study and future careers? Charles Cotherman presents a first-rate history of one way that Christians have sought to answer this question, namely, in establishing Christian study centers on or adjacent to university campuses.

The Christian study center movement (CSCM) in North America arose to teach and guide Christians in how to think and behave Christianly in all areas and professions of life, by drawing upon the insights of biblical and theological studies. Cotherman defines such a study center as “a local Christian community dedicated to spiritual, intellectual and relational flourishing via the cultivation of deep spirituality, intellectual and artistic engagement, and cultivation of hospitable presence” (p. 8). He rightly contends that the roots of the CSCM movement are found in two institutions: L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland (founded 1955) and Regent College in Vancouver (founded 1968). In Part 1, Innovation, he presents the history of these two institutions.

In chapter one, Cotherman gives an account of the birth and development of L'Abri under the leadership of Francis and Edith Schaeffer. As missionaries to an increasingly secular Europe, their encounter with its culture, art, and philosophical ideas led Francis to contextualize the gospel—as an evangelical Presbyterian minister rooted in the Reformed faith—in an intel-

lectually honest fashion to people influenced by this culture. L'Abri's ministry was so effective because of two other equally important features: the practice of a deep spirituality amidst the rhythms of everyday life, and the practice of relationships in a hospitable community, both of which Francis and Edith were instrumental in shaping. As more people visited L'Abri and were helped in their faith or accepted the gospel, it became known in the wider evangelical Christian world. This gave rise to branches of L'Abri being established in other nations, and to Christians seeking to establish communities on university campuses that embodied L'Abri's intellectual, spiritual, and relational strengths.

In chapter two, Cotherman presents the history of the rise of Regent College and its progress toward financial and academic stability at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. The first principal, James Houston, played a key role in attracting good faculty and in shaping the curriculum to educate lay-people in the Christian worldview for their secular careers. It provided students with a strong sense of community and vital spirituality. Regent also sought to be a witness to and partner with the university by purchasing property on the campus and by obtaining university affiliation. With the decline in enrollment for lay theological education in the 1970s, Regent survived by offering the MDiv degree (1978), attracting new students preparing for pastoral ministry. When other attempts at establishing Christian colleges and Christian study centers were initiated at other universities, Houston served to encourage and guide such ventures by drawing upon Regent's experience.

Inspired by the vision and community of L'Abri and by the success of Regent College, Christians ministering at other university campuses sought to establish “evangelical living and learning centers” on or near the campuses of state universities (p. 91). Part 2, Replication, gives an account of three such CSCM ventures: (1) the C.S. Lewis Institute (initially at the University of Maryland, later in downtown Washington, DC); (2) New College, Berkeley; and (3) the Center for Christian Study at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. Cotherman also includes in this section a chapter on the history and progress of Ligonier Ministries under the leadership and teaching gifts of R.C. Sproul (initially in Pennsylvania, then in Orlando, Florida). Although originally modelled after L'Abri as a lay-teaching retreat center in a rural setting, Ligonier's move to Orlando marked a shift to a ministry focused on Sproul's teaching gifts in (Reformed) theological education that