Biology

DOI: https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF6-26McReynolds

ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE: Caring for the Creator's World by Mark McReynolds and Karen McReynolds. Novare Classical Academic Press, 2025. 567 pages. Hardcover; $121.95. ISBN: 9781600517105.

This textbook by Mark and Karen McReynolds serves as an engaging and accessible introduction to environmental science, thoughtfully integrating scientific understanding with faith-based principles of responsibility, stewardship, and moral action. Mark holds a PhD in ornithology and a master's degree in recreation resource science. His extensive experience in environmental science, particularly concerning avian ecology, greatly enhances the credibility and depth of the textbook. He combines scientific rigor with a commitment to environmental stewardship, making the concepts both relatable and engaging for students. Karen is an associate professor of science at Hope International University, with an MA in natural science and a BS in physical geography. Her academic focus spans environmental science and related fields, providing a robust foundation for the book's content. She emphasizes not only the scientific aspects of environmental education but also the ethical implications that come with it.

Environmental Science consists of 11 chapters, organized into coherent sections designed specifically for younger audiences. It serves as an excellent resource for high school or lower-level college students just beginning to explore the mechanics of the natural world as well as the deeper questions regarding humanity's role within it. The book offers a balanced, encouraging, and intellectually rigorous exploration of our planet's systems, the challenges facing them, and the ethical imperatives that arise from a faith-informed perspective. This holistic approach not only makes the content more relatable but also instills a sense of agency among the students.

One of the textbook's most remarkable strengths is the clarity with which it explains core environmental concepts. Rather than overwhelming readers with complex terminology, the authors introduce foundational topics such as ecosystems, biodiversity, energy flow, climate systems, and human impact through vivid examples and real-world scenarios. For high school or lower-level college students who may be encountering environmental science for the first time, the book provides a strong conceptual framework that prepares them for more advanced study. This scaffolded learning environment supports students in grasping complex ideas without feeling intimidated. The illustrations, along with chapter-end exercises, further reinforce key concepts and make the material relatable and easy to digest.

The authors skillfully integrate faith and learning throughout the text, avoiding the pitfalls of forcing religious ideas into scientific content or attempting to offer theological interpretations of scientific mechanisms. Instead, they use faith as a lens through which to understand why environmental science matters and how individuals can respond ethically to what they learn. Throughout the chapters, readers are invited to reflect on themes such as stewardship, responsibility, humility, justice, and care for the vulnerable—values shared across a wide range of religious traditions. Central to this framework is the concept of the Creation Caregiver, a theme interwoven throughout the book. Students are encouraged to view Earth not merely as an unlimited resource but as a gift entrusted to humanity. This perspective fosters a sense of gratitude, humility, and duty toward the planet. Faith integration is subtle; instead of being heavy-handed, it is presented gently, inviting reflection rather than prescribing conclusions. For younger audiences developing their identities, values, and sense of agency, this balanced blend of scientific information and moral insight is particularly meaningful.

A particularly compelling chapter examines environmental justice, providing tools and illustrations that delineate how environmental issues are often intertwined with social equity. For example, the textbook discusses Toxic Tours, which serve as a case study for understanding environmental injustices. They blend scientific analysis of pollution with moral teachings about compassion and equity. Students are encouraged to think critically about how environmental problems disproportionately affect vulnerable communities and how their faith can motivate action toward fairness and restoration. The intersection of values and science in this context presents rich opportunities for classroom discussion and personal reflection, making complex topics more accessible and relevant.

Another highlight of *Environmental Science* is its hopeful and solutions-oriented tone. While it does not shy away from discussing the harsh realities of environmental problems such as climate change, deforestation, and pollution, the authors present a balanced view by showcasing hopeful case studies. These include innovations such as restoration projects, renewable energy solutions, and community-driven conservation efforts. By featuring these examples, the authors not only educate students but also inspire them to imagine themselves as active participants in environmental stewardship rather than passive observers of global issues. The hopeful tone is balanced against reality, helping students maintain a realistic yet optimistic view of the challenges ahead. The textbook also includes numerous opportunities for students to apply what they learn in meaningful ways. The exercises at the end of each chapter are particularly

well designed for high school or lower-level college learners. They prompt not only comprehension of scientific concepts but also personal application and ethical reasoning. For example, students might be asked to analyze problems related to plastic waste in water systems and then reflect on how their own choices influence that system. Alternatively, they may examine habitat loss and connect it to faith-based principles of protecting creation. This dual-layered questioning approach makes the book a strong tool for educators, especially in Christian schools or any educational setting that prioritizes values-oriented learning.

This textbook succeeds in presenting environmental science in a way that is not only rigorous and accessible but also deeply meaningful. Its thoughtful integration of faith and learning presents students with an opportunity to see science not as a separate domain from belief but as a complementary field that enriches their understanding of purpose and responsibility in the world. For educators yearning to find a textbook that encourages both intellectual growth and character formation, this book is an exceptional option. It strikes a balance that neither downplays scientific rigor nor neglects ethical considerations, ensuring that students not only gain knowledge but also develop a sense of purpose.

A noteworthy aspect of *Environmental Science* is that it integrates Christian principles with ecological stewardship, making it particularly suited for faith-based educational environments. In contrast, other faith-based textbooks focus on scriptural teachings while varying in scientific rigor. Secular environmental science textbooks prioritize comprehensive scientific principles and data, often without religious context. This creates a clear distinction whereby the faith-based texts emphasize stewardship aligned with biblical teachings, while secular texts offer a neutral, evidence-focused perspective. Each type serves its intended audience effectively, highlighting the diverse approaches to environmental education.

In conclusion, *Environmental Science* is an outstanding choice for educators looking for a resource that promotes both scientific literacy and character formation through a faith-informed lens. By equipping students with both knowledge and a deeper sense of purpose, this textbook helps cultivate the next generation of thoughtful, responsible caretakers of Earth. Mark and Karen McReynolds offer not only a valid academic perspective but also a moral compass for students navigating the complex and often daunting world of environmental science. This engagement with the material will inspire students to take action in their communities, bringing innovative solutions to the environmental challenges we face today.

Reviewed by Berenise Charlton, assistant professor of environmental science, Grand Canyon University, Phoenix, AZ 85017.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF6-26Pohl

A THEOLOGY OF THE MICROBIOME: An Intersection of Divinity and the Microbial Life Within Us by John F. Pohl. SacraSage Press, 2024. 363 pages. Paperback; $24.99. ISBN: 9781958670538.

The microbiome has been the focus of intense research, especially over the last decade. Topics related to the intersection of faith and the microbiome are ripe with possibility for better understanding the relationship between the human body, the microbiome, the spiritual dimension, and God's nature. This book gives a perspective on how process theology can be used to integrate faith and microbiome science. In this well-researched book, the author goes to great lengths to document both scientific and theological sources; however, it may be a challenging read for those unfamiliar with process theology. A glossary of relevant terms would have been helpful.

John Pohl is a physician who is board-certified in pediatrics and pediatric gastroenterology with clinical and research interests in pancreatitis and cystic fibrosis; his certifications and expertise make him highly qualified to address medical aspects of the human microbiome. The preface reveals that this book is the outcome of his doctoral degree in theology from Northwind Theological Seminary, working under a leading scholar in relational and open theology, Thomas J. Oord.

Process philosophy and theology were developed in the mid-20th century by Alfred Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and other theologians. A key tenet of process thought is that God can both affect and be affected by any process found in the universe, from the macro scale to the subatomic particle. Process theology is aligned with open theology, and as such, the outcome of this interactive process is uncertain, and therefore God is not completely omniscient, omnipotent, or immutable.

In the first chapter ("A Call to Metaphysics to Benefit Religion and Science"), Pohl lays a philosophical and historical framework for subsequent chapters, with a focus on comparing the process of science with theology and metaphysics. Metaphysics is seen as a complement to science since it can take into consideration the entirety of nature, including aspects that cannot be addressed by science. In this chapter, the author also begins to articulate the concepts of process theology that challenge the traditional Christian understanding of God's nature in terms of his characteristics.

I found Pohl's discussion of Stephen Jay Gould's concept of nonoverlapping magisteria (NOMA) to be especially interesting. Gould's proposal does not allow any overlap between science (objectivity) and religion or theology (subjectivity). In contrast to NOMA, Pohl redefines a term used in philosophy, "monad," to describe reality in