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## Book Review

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Nicola Hoggard Creegan and Andrew Shepherd (eds.), *Creation and Hope: Reflections on Ecological Anticipation and Action from Aotearoa New Zealand* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2018), 230pp., \$22.40 (pbk), ISBN: 978153260973.

This book is an insightful collection of essays that work intersectionally at the boundaries between colonialism and indigeneity, divinity and animality, and hope and despair in a time of emerging climate catastrophe. It is distinctly embedded in the rich and complicated history of the Māori people and white settlers—a history underscored by the juxtaposition of the Māori term ‘Aotearoa’ and the Dutch-Anglo term ‘New Zealand’ throughout the book. Akin to Bolivia’s 2010 ‘Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth’ as a new paradigm of the rights of native people and landscapes, *Creation and Hope’s* point of departure is the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, which the authors regard as a faulty but nevertheless laudable attempt to create a bicultural model of native and colonial development.

In a word, this is a book about *listening*. Sue Burns’s ‘Listening to the Landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand’ is a lyrical summary of the authors’ disposition toward the sacred, ancestral lands and cultures of this South Pacific island:

I am a migrant to Aotearoa. I benefit from the hospitality of two covenants, one the new covenant offered to us in Christ, the second offered by Māori—*tangata whenua* ‘the people of the land’, expressed through the Treaty of Waitangi. The Treaty gives me a place to stand here. Sometimes when travelling this physical landscape I am positioned as ‘Stranger’, ‘Other’, ‘Coloniser’. Discomfort pushes me to reflect on attitudes and ideas that have given me privilege, and I acknowledge that I have been blind to the cost of this privilege to God, to Land and to the People of this Land. (p. 63)

Burns’s ownership of her complicity with colonial oppression and patient attempt to listen to what the land and people around her are saying reflects the mutuality and reciprocity that animates *Creation and Hope*. In like spirit, Kathleen P. Rushton’s ‘Waterlings from Water’ is a moving exegesis of the meaning of Jesus’ gift of ‘living water’ to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42) in the light of recent attempts by multinational corporations to privatize, bottle, and sell the water from the ‘braided rivers and pine forests of the Canterbury plains’ to international consumers (p. 91). Global capitalism’s capture of most of the world’s liquid fresh water—what Jesus offered for free to the Samaritan woman as living water—is biblically critiqued by Rushton’s portrait of Earth as a commons, not a commodity.

The book's listening spirit is again evident in Celia Deane-Drummond's two essays. In essence, *Creation and Hope* is an ongoing conversation between the New Zealand authors and the ground-breaking ecotheological scholarship of Deane-Drummond. Deane-Drummond helpfully frames this conversation by highlighting the deep connection between human health, particularly in reference to the socioeconomic needs of indigenous communities, and ecological wellbeing. Using a Christian creation-centered ethics, she writes that 'health issues cannot be detached from ecological goods' (p. 23).

Andrew Shepherd's 'Spirit, Seabirds, and Sacramentality' interrogates my own Christian animist project in light of Shepherd's passion for restoring the habitat of grey-faced petrels (*Oi* in Māori) near Mount Karioi in Aotearoa New Zealand. Referencing the enfleshment of the Holy Spirit as a dove in the gospel stories of Jesus' baptism, he notes that 'the idea of an avian pneumatology is particularly evocative in light of the ecological history of Aotearoa New Zealand as a bird paradise' (p. 49). But Shepherd continues that:

Wallace's ecotheology with its strong emphasis on animism would seem to contend that *all* birds are an expression, manifestation of God's Spirit. However, if all birds (and indeed all species) become expressions and manifestations of God's Spirit then pragmatic questions about how one engages in conservation activity become deeply problematic. (p. 53)

Shepherd raises an important point. If the core evangelical affirmation is that 'the Word became flesh and lived among us' (John 1:14)—if every being is an enfleshment of divinity, in the registry of Christian animism—then how can discriminating decisions be made about ecosystem conservation and allocations? If everything is sacred, can anything be harvested and consumed? In reply, such decisions should be made with a Leopoldian eye toward the wellbeing of the ecosystem in question. On holy ground, whatever conservation judgments insure the integrity and beauty of biodiverse communities are good, and judgments that tend otherwise are not.

Only one of the essays sounded an unsettling note. In 'On Finishing Well', Myk Habets begins well with his Eastern Orthodox-inspired reflections on the deification of the natural world. But he concludes poorly by privileging the traditional anthropocentric-redemption schema for understanding the role of creation in God's plan. In this schema, creation, fallen and 'disordered', requires the mediation of the high 'priests of creation', human beings, to realize its true end as a 'hymn of praise to its creator' (pp. 181-90). Habets arrogates to humankind the role of archon and mediator of God's master plan to enable the natural world's redemption. 'Nature itself is mute' writes Habets, glossing Thomas F. Torrance's christotriumphalism, and must now await human beings' benevolent priestcraft so that it can speak and sing 'words in praise of the Creator' (p. 186).

From von Rad to Barth, from Kuyper to Schmemmann, this *heilsgeschichte* (salvation history) schema remains the dominant paradigm for defining the God-human-nature relationship across Christendom, East and West, ancient and modern. But this model of the agential human versus silent nature, while conventional, is neither Christian nor biblical, and has spelled ruinous ecological consequences for two millennia. Far from creation requiring human intervention to realize its redemption, it is high time—indeed this time has long since passed—for God's self-dealing viceregents to put

down their *contemptus mundi* mindset and permit the natural world to teach and redeem humanity—not the other way around.

The Bible posits the movement of creation, not redemption, as the all-encompassing gift which encircles and enlivens the health and fruition of all beings, humankind and otherkind. Nature is neither mute nor deficient but loudly cries out to us to realize our own redemption through its pacific rhythms, sublime beauty, and healing energies. *Creation and Hope* generally follows in this vein. With the Christian tradition in one hand, and the voice of the land and people of Aotearoa in the other, this collection of essays powerfully listens to the threatened but still-hopeful life-forms and places that embed all of us within the loving lap of Mother Earth.

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