
Book Review

Richard Bohannon, *Religions and Environments: A Reader in Religion, Nature and Ecology* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), xii + 368 pp., \$42.95 (pbk), ISBN: 978-1-78093-802-8.

Richard Bohannon has gathered an impressive collection of religion and nature writing in this anthology in religion, nature, and ecology. In the introduction, Bohannon indicates that he assumes some familiarity with the contemporary environmental crises. He gives a short overview of these in the first paragraph. This is worth paying attention to because many of the essays that follow deal with the particular examples given. He immediately moves in the second paragraph to hopeful developments. The main body of the introduction addresses the relevance of religion to nature and ecology as the title of the book promises. There is also a brief but helpful discussion of troublesome terms such as environment/s, wilderness, nature, ecology, and garden. The title itself, *Religions and Environments*, acknowledges that environment is quite different from place to place and that there is no one universal description that fits all religions. The general introduction provides a map of the book and is a must-read for understanding why things appear where they do.

Religions and Environments is divided into three parts: 'Wilderness: Nature as Wild and Remote'; 'Garden: Cultivated and Transformed Landscapes'; and 'City: Natural and Human Environments'. The parts are subdivided into two or three sections each with descriptive headings. Part One, for example, has two sections. The first presents accounts of encountering the wild, and the second deals with religious traditions and their ideas of the wild. The make-up of this section establishes a pattern of moving from more general accounts to more particular responses. It also includes material from essays or books by early nature writers/ecologists, such as Henry David Thoreau and John Muir, as well as more recent and contemporary names, such as Thomas Berry and Gary Snyder. Less well-known nature writers from around the world are also presented. The excerpts are arranged thematically and not historically. Dates of publication for each of the excerpts, books, or essays are given, however.

Each part of *Religions and Environments* has an introduction giving the reader an overview of the section. The introduction to Part One introduces the authors and also gives a brief but enlightening account of the notion of wilderness and its special place in the history of North American environmentalism. It also alerts the reader to the variety of types of readings. Some deal with ritual and activism, whereas some are scholarly or reflective essays. Part Two, framed by the concept of the Garden, is designed to show the human-centered nature of gardens, including forests and other managed landscapes, in contrast to notions of wilderness. These are generally more practically oriented and include the Chipko movement (as described by Vandana Shiva), Wangari Maathai's work on reforestation, and accounts of two religious

rituals, a Eucharist of the African Earthkeeping Churches and the Thai Buddhist tree ordination ceremony.

The introduction to Part Three places the turn to the built environment and environmental justice in the context of the historical scholarship on the environment. It touches briefly on the key events leading to a consideration of the built environment (primarily cities). This is the strongest part, more singularly focused and slightly longer than the others. It concludes with four essays from different perspectives on the relationship of justice to environmental issues: Laurel Kearns gives a general overview of the history of the eco-justice movement and meanings of environmental justice, Jeremy Bernstein addresses environmental justice from a Jewish perspective, Leonardo Boff advances a Catholic liberation theology perspective, and James Cone elaborates the perspective of Black liberation theology.

While it is likely that scholars in religion and environment might choose different excerpts and even different themes, *Religions and Environments* is a very accessible and useful book for graduates and undergraduates interested in this field. The writings include varying degrees of difficulty, as Bohannon includes a range of styles from a range of perspectives—historic, philosophic, religious, disciplinary, activist, and ritualistic. It does allow for choosing those most appropriate for a class or other learning group as well as personal interest. The book includes a bibliography and index, useful tools for any reader.

One significant lacuna obvious to this reader is the absence of any writings dealing with climate change issues and fossil fuel extraction and use. The very first paragraph of the introduction mentions the endangered boreal forests of Alberta, Canada, and the oil sands. Yet there is no treatment of this issue at all throughout the book, although there have been several excellent books published on this issue, especially by Canadians. One such is Andrew Nikiforuk's *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent* (2010). In addition, Bill McKibben provides a more activist stance with his 350.org movement. There have also been direct religious responses by several churches and religious groups to tar-sand development, as well as spiritual writings by the internationally known David Suzuki. It is difficult to imagine any course in the field of environmental ethics or religions and environment that could ignore climate change and fossil fuels, including the Alberta tar sands. If it were used as a course text, this anthology would have to be supplemented with additional, appropriate readings on that issue.

These criticisms aside, Bohannon has provided a worthwhile, convenient, and accessible selection of powerful and inspirational readings that invites a wide readership, whether for personal enrichment or more formal teaching.

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References

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 Nikiforuk, Andrew. 2010. *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent* (Vancouver, BC: Greystone Books).