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Book Review

Celia Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 167 pp., $23.00 (pbk), ISBN: 978-1-4982-3699-7.

Celia Deane-Drummond begins her excellent survey of the field of ecotheology with the affirmation that one cannot adequately do ecotheology without taking into account mainstream scientific consensus. While one might expect a Christian theologian with a PhD in plant physiology to say this, it also indicates the reality of our present society: the average American Christian is skeptical of the truth of climate change and other global environmental problems because of a fear that science is somehow tainted by partisan political agendas. From there Deane-Drummond lays out the ecotheological map, as she calls it, in Chapter 1. The second chapter, 'Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics', does not shy away from the rather tenuous relationship the Judeo-Christian scriptures have had historically with environmentalism. She is fair in assessing Lynn White's 1967 critique of the Judeo-Christian creation story, but ultimately argues that it is far too simplistic.

The third chapter looks at the robust influence various liberation theological thinkers have had on the field, spending time explaining why and how these thinkers have incorporated an ecological mindset into their own theologies. Chapter 4 highlights the impact Pope Francis and his encyclical *Laudato Si'* have had in such a short time on contemporary ecotheology. Chapter 5, 'Deep Incarnation', reviews how some thinkers have turned to Christology for insights into understanding the predation, suffering, and death that are intrinsic to our evolutionary universe. In Chapter 6, Deane-Drummond does not survey the field of anthropology so much as examine a few case studies that suggest the relationship between *Homo sapiens*, humans made in the image of God, and the rest of creation is far more complex than previous generations may have believed. The final chapter, 'Christian Ecological Ethics', reviews a number of contemporary ethical issues in the field, ending with four suggestions that might help Christians shift to more theologically informed ecological ethics. I found myself wishing that those four suggestions were developed more fully though, not because they were incomplete thoughts, but because I wanted to know more of her reflection on these topics. The intended goal of each chapter is to give the reader a taste of what the field has to offer, and, for the most part, I believe Deane-Drummond is highly successful in this effort. The book also includes a very detailed glossary of terms that are essential for anyone who wants to be fluent in ecotheological vernacular. It also includes a list of prominent examples of Christian environmental activism. These two additions are welcome ones, especially for someone who might be completely new to the field.

The gray boxes within each chapter are sometimes less than helpful. At times it is especially difficult to understand whether the box text is supplementary material, which is common enough to that sort of formatting, or if it is material that should have been written into the regular text of the chapter. For example, in Chapter 6, this situation is particularly dicey as the recounting of a story in Box 1 is not an aside, but is relied upon in the subsequent pages of the chapter. While this may be the book's most flagrant example, these formatting irregularities occasionally distract from the general readability of the book.

While most of the time Deane-Drummond gives an equitable amount of time to each author during the course of the survey, when she does not, the reader can be left a bit confused. Do the extra words spent on one theological position rather than another indicate a tacit or explicit acceptance of that specific worldview? This is the case in her review of The Earth Bible project in Chapter 2. Moreover, the survey approach employed in most of the book completely breaks down in Chapter 6, which is not a survey but instead a version of a previous academic piece written by Deane-Drummond. The content of that chapter is a thoughtful reflection on the topic of anthropology in light of ecotheology, but it is not a survey of the field per se.

As I mentioned already, Chapter 4 is dedicated entirely to Pope Francis and the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. While I join in celebrating the magnitude of this work's impact on the Christian world, especially Roman Catholics, as well as on those outside of the Christian faith, I question whether Deane-Drummond is too lenient in her appraisal of the encyclical. In particular, she asserts that Francis speaks out against types of oppressive anthropocentrism that his predecessors were often negligent to address. I certainly do not disagree, but I maintain that she gives Francis far too much credit. There are definitely portions of *Laudato* that question destructive versions of anthropocentrism, but most of the encyclical is entirely in step with the anthropocentrism that has been historically fundamental to Catholic dogma, and unfortunately too common in much of Christian thought and practice in general. It is questionable whether the current Pope's namesake, St Francis of Assisi, would recognize the Vatican's words on the position of humanity vis-a-vis creation as a step forward in the ecotheological dialogue or only a slight adjustment of the status quo.

While this book is not for the grizzled ecotheological veteran, it is perfect for anyone looking for a concise, yet thorough, introduction into ecotheology.

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