
Book Review

Leah D. Schade and Margaret Bullitt-Jonas (eds.), *Rooted and Rising: Voices of Courage in a Time of Climate Crisis* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 210pp., \$30 (pbk), ISBN: 9781538127766.

By now, many writings for a general audience have been published on the subject of climate change that aim to dramatize both the reality and the unsurpassed gravity of the crisis. These works, often meant to awaken awareness and to persuade the skeptical or indifferent, range from pioneering classics such as Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature* (1989) to recent, graphically detailed accounts of impending woe such as David Wallace-Wells's *The Uninhabitable Earth* (2019). Such prophetic admonitions are certainly warranted, given the persistence of climate skepticism or indifference. Yet at this stage of environmental history there is arguably no less need for words to hearten the already convinced, those countless souls who feel dismayed, overwhelmed, on the brink of paralysis or despair about all the geophysical and political obstacles to achieving anything like full restoration of an earth in peril. As Mary Evelyn Tucker observes, in her Foreword to this latest book, 'a tsunami of sadness is engulfing us' (p. xiii). What then, might prevent someone who loves and cares deeply about this planet's flourishing from losing heart altogether?

It is mainly for the sake of encouraging and inspiring such despondent, hushed members of the green choir that the array of testimonies found in *Rooted and Rising* has been assembled. The result is an invaluable, enspirited, and uplifting anodyne to hopelessness. Graced with a 'Special Introduction' by Bill McKibben and a Foreword by Mary Evelyn Tucker, the collection contains almost two dozen essays by various hands, in addition to interposed commentary by the co-editors—including introductions to each of the book's seven sections, lists of questions to ponder, and multiple entries with recommendations for spiritual practice.

The list of contributors represents a worthy span of personal-vocational identities and religious dispositions within the broad sweep of Abrahamic faith traditions. For the sake of achieving a reasonable coherence within the volume, the editors' decision to maintain a focus on Abrahamic faith-perspectives makes a good deal of sense, while the collection likewise includes some passing recognition of Buddhist, agnostic-humanistic, or other spiritually informed worldviews. A number of different Christian denominations are represented among the essayists, in addition to the enlisting of Jewish and Muslim voices. Thus the range of testimony here is amply revealing and diverse, though I believe the Church of Latter-day Saints qualifies as yet another Abrahamic faith tradition with a distinctive history of earth-grounded experience in America worth drawing upon as well.

Because the book—quite rightly, to my mind—supposes our current climate predicament to be implicated in a profound crisis of spirit and religiosity, its response to this emergency is ‘rooted’ in practices meant to foster renewed hope, faith, love, and absorption in the contemplative wellsprings of ameliorative action. In this regard the volume’s brief exercises in spiritual praxis strike me as especially helpful and germane. Such contemplative grounding is thus construed to be essential for sustaining hope and productive action. Also crucial for inward sustenance, as this volume underscores throughout, are rituals of mourning and appreciative gratitude, ties of friendship, and diverse forms of worship. And aspiring not only to recognize but to live into a sacramental vision of the world, a theological prospect set forth eloquently by contributor John Chryssavgis, offers yet another motive for hope.

‘Hope’ is indeed a byword of *Rooted and Rising*. To be sure, the current crisis renders problematic the very concept of ‘hope’—at least, according to its conventional presumption of circumstantial, temperamental optimism. For even if international initiatives to reduce carbon dioxide and methane emissions shift promptly now into high gear, as appears unlikely, it is already too late to reverse or probably even to halt the overall slide toward atmospheric degradation, simply too late to restore the wondrous earth we once knew. A mitigation of the most horrific global outcomes may be the best we can expect. From that standpoint, things really are hopeless. Yet from the mystagogical standpoint of faith’s deeper wisdom, as *Rooted and Rising* recognizes, the sort of hope called for in this circumstance is inherently paradoxical—something, that is, both impossible and necessary. Not only necessary but urgent, as contributor and scientist Katherine Hayhoe suggests in her essay, starting from the title: ‘The Imperative of Hope’ (p. 57). Contributor Roger S. Gottlieb, in a piece titled ‘Living with Environmental Despair’, concludes that ‘what is called for’ at this juncture ‘is perhaps neither hope nor hopelessness—but courage to live with the fear’, given that ‘despair I suspect will for the indefinite future be a permanent part of an awakened consciousness’ (pp. 168, 167).

In the light of that ‘awakened consciousness’, *Rooted and Rising* takes full account of the rationale for despair about earth’s ills, and about the pressing challenge to ecojustice that this crisis entails. Yet the volume’s chief value is to put a human face on what it might mean to live with the fear without letting it overcome us. Toward that end, the book’s many personal stories of and by those who have demonstrated such endurance and resolve, including Margaret Bullitt-Jonas’s own moving account of triumphing over an addiction recalling our culture’s addiction to fossil fuel, blend into a compelling cloud of witnesses. For this and other reasons, I’d judge *Rooted and Rising* to be a must-read anodyne to hopelessness in our cultural moment, a book I will be recommending as spiritual sustenance to several disheartened friends.

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