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Book Review

S. Lily Mendoza and George Zachariah (eds.), *Decolonizing Ecotheology: Indigenous and Subaltern Challenges* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022), 292 pp., \$40 (pbk), ISBN: 9781725286405.

Decolonizing Ecotheology offers rich and insightful chapters proposing innovative theological, hermeneutical, and political approaches to ameliorating the distress and potential destruction of the Earth by highlighting the perspectives of indigenous people around the world. The goal is to reclaim ecotheology from an exclusively Western paradigm and work differently and more collaboratively towards healing the Earth. The editors note that Western approaches to ecological recovery are rooted in 'colonial and neo-liberal epistemologies' (p. 1). Christian theology has traditionally been based on a dominion paradigm that has been anthropocentric, in opposition to a cosmocentric, community of creation paradigm, and has contributed to the objectification of the natural world. Even as ecotheologies try to correct for this, they have done so in a way that fails to account for the legacy of colonialism and the centuries-old subjugation of indigenous and subaltern religious perspectives regarding human beings relationship to the Earth. Indigenous religions are ecotheological. Yet Christian ecotheologies derive from a place of privilege that too often deny the wisdom of indigenous religious perspectives and the contribution they have to make to the Earth's healing. This text exposes this problem with the goal of infusing the project with fresh, innovative, trans-sectional approaches to ecotheology.

Part One highlights the Earth in relationship to the Bible. These essays challenge conventional Western biblical hermeneutics, which prioritize an androcentric and culturally- and theologically-homogenous reading of the text. The chapters combat the false assumption of exclusive monotheism within scripture that is the legacy of colonialism and highlight non-human aspects of creation as participants in the maintenance of existence: the water and the Earth. Part Two calls for the practice of rituals derived from indigenous religions that encourage a pluralistic religious approach as a way of honoring the Earth. It is clear in this section that indigenous religions are those that value the Earth and promote the practice of human beings maintaining harmony, balance, and reciprocity with Mother Earth. These essays encourage a syncretistic convergence to develop and decolonize ecotheology. Part Three engages in Earth politics on a grassroots level inviting us to examine practical efforts to address ecocide. These contributors move from the theoretical to the practical, demonstrating the ways global capitalism and neo-liberal imperatives continue to disproportionately impact the economically disadvantaged in the Global South. The essays in Part Four call for decolonization and the Earth's rising through rigorous engagement with indigenous spiritual wisdom.

This collection is an exciting foray into the perspective of the 'commons', the elements of the natural world and people most connected to that world at the grassroots level. The text gives voice to those disproportionately affected but not equally responsible for impending ecological catastrophe. George Zachariah rightly points out that Western ecotheology has engaged in a false universalizing of human responsibility for the problem of climate change and ecocide, revealing a blindness to racist, sexist, and religious imperialistic imperatives. Many of the essays draw crucial distinctions in human behavior between citizens of the Global North and those of the Global South, the economically privileged and ethically lethargic versus those on the social and cultural margins who have been economically exploited and feel the brunt of ecological pain. These authors carefully introduce us to categories like 'climate debt' and 'climate colonialism', making clear that even efforts to 'fix' the problem of climate change are often clothed in white supremacist, patriarchal, and neo-liberal assumptions inexorably leading to the displacement and harm of indigenous people and further ecological erosion. The voices from down under invite theological, epistemological, and economic transformation in a way that revalues the land, the water, and all the living species that make up the living Earth.

The essays are compelling and represent various subaltern perspectives from around the Earth including Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and North and South America. Native North American and Diasporic African perspectives would have certainly enhanced these offerings. And while there are essays that remind us that certain Western theological categories, like monotheism and eschatology, are products of the Western colonization of religious knowledge, more specific attention to critical theological concepts like God, spirit, sin, and salvation would have helped to more clearly demonstrate how this collection of essays works to decolonize ecotheology as a sub-discipline.

Overall, the work importantly posits a theological method promoting a pluralistic approach to religion and faith, one that helps us combat and subvert the hegemonic preoccupation with religious purity, which has informed Christian triumphalism and conquest of land and allowed evangelical Christianity to work in tandem with white supremacy and patriarchy. The Earth has been victimized by this racist, androcentric quest for purity. These essays destigmatize syncretism and present indigenous wisdom as an offering to Western ecotheology to save it from its own epistemological and theological failings. It is a must-read for anyone seriously concerned with how an ecotheological faith and practice can actually contribute to the healing of the only planet that is our home.

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