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## Book Review

Levente Hufnagel (ed.), *Ecotheology: Sustainability and Religions of the World* (London: IntechOpen, 2023), xiv + 374 pp., £139.00 (cloth), ISBN: 978-1-80355-436-5.

The editor of this collection heads a research institute in multidisciplinary ecotheology but has also published extensively in the field of ecology and biology, a background which helps to explain—at least in principle—the volume's multidisciplinary approach. In their brief introductory chapter, Hufnagel and co-author Ferenc Mics argue that because multidisciplinary ecotheology functions as a science recognized within both ecology and theology, it 'ensures the highest possible reliability of knowledge' and 'thus becomes suitable for overcoming the global ecological crisis and establishing a sustainable society' (p. 3). This sets a high bar. However, the introduction does not adequately describe the various methodologies, theories, or tools of analysis commonly employed by ecotheologians, or indicate any tensions between theological methods and the natural sciences. The introduction also fails to define sustainability or establish the religious scope of the chapters, which are worthwhile tasks given the text's subtitle. In fact, at no point does the editor introduce the chapters or authors—with their various backgrounds, disciplines, and cultural locations—or really explain how the chapters were organized. As a result, the reader is left to navigate the text, which includes several exciting and thought-provoking contributions, on their own. Some potential categories are highlighted below.

The volume's first section, titled simply 'Ecotheology', consists of Fourteen chapters (including the introduction) which vary in theme, methodology, and relevance to the topic. Some contributors take a comparative approach. In Chapter One, 'Religion and Environmental Crisis', Michael York examines the 'detriments and advantages' of world religions as they relate to ecological crisis by using the sociological tool of 'ideal types' to compare four religious groups: Abrahamic, secular, dharmic, and pagan (York's is the only chapter that comments on Buddhism or Dharmic traditions, albeit briefly). Adjacently, Marcel Poorthuis' chapter on Abrahamic religions draws special attention to how interpretations of Creation accounts within Christianity, Judaism, and Islam have shaped their respective ecologies. In Chapter Three, Philippe Crabbé revisits Laudato si' to compare how three ethical frameworks (ethics of care, virtue ethics, and ethics of relational values) reflect ecological ontologies. In Catholicism, for example, '[b]eing a steward is a job. Caring is a state of being' (p. 30). Similarly, in Chapter Four, Hanoch Ben Pazi draws on the theological reflections of Rabbi Soloveitchik to develop a Jewish ethic of relationship which emphasizes resilience and action.

Several chapters emphasize the role of education for religious organizations. For example, in Chapter Thirteen, Ninin and Rachman contend that Islamic instruction in Indonesia should expand beyond religious ritual and emphasize a duty to the environment (a suggestion somewhat undermined by their claim that pro-environmental behavior 'is self-determined and has nothing to do with religion' [p. 182]). Alternately, Gueye and Mohamed's Chapter Fifteen effectively demonstrate how Islam's theocentric perspective and codified 'ethical reference systems' are well-suited for developing a Creation-care ethic (p. 219). As one of the few chapters that provides actual examples of how religious groups deploy ecological ethics around the world, Gueye and Mohamed successfully illustrate the substantive impacts of educational campaigns.

Some of the volume's strongest chapters examine the roots of ecotheology within classical ethics. For instance, Paul Robertson and Paul Pollaro's 'Ancient Greco-Roman Views of Ecology, Sustainability, and Extinction' is a fascinating study of how classical conceptions of nature developed by Aristotle, the Stoics, and Pliny the Elder (who purportedly made the first ever extinction claim—an herb *silphium*) shaped Renaissance thinkers like von Humboldt, Darwin, and Cuvier. Similarly, Sergey Dolgopolski's Chapter Twelve draws a line between Edmund Husserl's mereology of the universe to Augustine's *De Tritinate* and eventually to Philo's examination of *huparxis* (the divine's ability to impact Creation without being a part of it). These two eco-anthropologies are illuminating (at least for Western epistemologies) and would have been better positioned earlier in the text.

Many contributors look to Indigenous communities for insight on ecological crises. For example, in Chapter Nine, Anthony Oswald Balcomb agrees with York that '[a]ll human communities exploit nature to one extent or another' (p. 131) but celebrates Indigenous knowledge as an 'antidote' for the Anthropocene. Balcomb draws attention to the tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous (e.g., Western) ontologies and points to various phenomena that challenge such archetypes, notably, increased syncretism in the Global South. Similarly, John-Okoria Ibhakewanlan's chapter compares ecological themes in African and Lakota cosmologies, though it does not identify many practical implications. In Chapter Fourteen, Saúl Millán makes a captivating inquiry into the alterity of Mesoamerican pre-colonial cultures in order to draw comparisons with modern psychoanalysis, for example, Freud's unconscious as 'the other of oneself' (p. 208). Although Millán's chapter doesn't pertain to ecology, it does prompt the reader to examine how ancient mythologies depict relationships with the natural world, both in life and death.

Published in 2023, it makes sense that several chapters consider ecotheology through the lens of compounded crises and make note of COVID-19. José Ivo Follmann's employ of Merril Singer's syndemics in Chapter Six draws attention to the 'indissoluble relationship' between ecological and social injustices, reiterating the benefits of a multidisciplinary approach (p. 77). Prompted by Niklas Luhmann's insights on religion and the environment, Lluis Oviedo's chapter examines how religious groups promote or challenge ecological initiatives at three intersecting levels

(systemic, cultural, and personal) in the context of ESG (environmental, social, and governance goals). This broad, sociological approach to ecological ethics remains useful, and Oviedo does well to put Luhmann's work to test in a modern context.

The title of the second section, 'Sustainability and Human Ecology', implies a switch from the 'pure/theoretical' to a more applied branch of ecotheology (p. xiii), but only one of the seven chapters in this section makes any mention of theology, ecotheology, or discusses religious or spiritual practices in any relevant way—an oversight of the editor, rather than the contributors themselves. For example, Macagnan and Seibert (Chapter Sixteen) highlight the importance of cultural sustainability by investigating how financial co-ops develop an organizational culture; Sikhulile Bonginkosi Msezane (Chapter Nineteen) presents a cogent analysis of environmental content in South Africa's geography curriculum; and Thor-André Skrefsrud (Chapter Eighteen) makes a strong case for multicultural education in the dissemination of sustainable development goals. Such examinations could fit very loosely in the framework of 'integral ecology' in that they understand cultural sustainability as a correlate of environmental sustainability, but none of them refer to religion, spirituality, or ecotheology whatsoever. The opposite is true in Chapter Seventeen, where Muthoifin and Surawan discuss the 'sustainability' (i.e., the durability) of Indonesian theological institutions rather than Islamic teaching on environmental sustainability. In fact, the only chapter in Section 2 that approaches the theme of ecotheology is Baloyi Magezi Elijah's theological reflection on land justice in post-apartheid South Africa. But even Elijah's argument for land equity conflicts with other principles of ecotheology: 'If God wanted people to be landless', Elijah writes, 'He would not have placed them on land and instructed them to subdue it' (p. 346). The volume concludes with Ford, Turner, and Mai's truly fascinating case study of the Mayan Milpa forest garden cycle which, although compelling, again makes no connection to religion, spirituality, or theology.

A sturdy volume on multidisciplinary approaches to sustainability and world religions would be very useful for an undergraduate course in theology, religious studies, or even—as Hufnagel suggests—ecology. Unfortunately, this is not it. Although many chapters are insightful and highlight important themes in sustainability (education, ethics, classical thought, and Indigenous ontologies), too few engage with the intersection of ecotheology, sustainability, and world religions, and almost none explicitly consider the welfare of non-human animals or biological systems. Ultimately, the volume lacks cohesion, making its potential strength—a multidisciplinary approach—also its primary weakness. Moreover, multiple chapters have glaring grammatical and spelling errors. For these reasons, interested readers should take advantage of InTechOpen's open access platform to find the useful chapters for free online and save £139 on the cost of a hardcover.

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