
Book Review

Katherine M. Quinsey (ed.), *Christian Environmentalism and Human Responsibility in the 21st Century: Questions of Stewardship and Accountability* (London & New York: Routledge, 2024), xii + 237 pp., £108.00 (cloth), ISBN:13:978-1-032-43090-4.

This book brings together a rich collection of eco-critical perspectives relevant to research and teaching into Humanities and the Arts, honoring and often drawing on the work of Deborah C. Bowen on the fields of critical theory, Canadian literature, and Christian environmentalism. The contributions to this edited volume come from Canadian and US scholars approaching the field of Christian Environmentalism in the 21st century from an English Literature disciplinary vantage point. These North American decolonial perspectives are, however, engaging with Christianity as a global tradition, recognizing exciting artistic and Indigenous developments in the field of Christian Environmentalism as well as contributing to a bolder articulation of a Christian eco-criticism. The collection recognizes 'the complex and arguably compromised' (p. 1) position of Christianity in our consumeristic and industrialized societies, while attempting to tell a different story about the role of the Christian tradition in our contemporary conversations about human responsibility and accountability in the face of the climate and ecological crisis.

The volume boasts innovative stylistic and conceptual contributions. Liane Miedema Brown's essay 'The Practice of Lavishing Attention' speaks of a different modality of perceiving creation that could crystallize into 'an ethic of care and connection' (p. 18). Erin Goheen Glanville's chapter on 'Waves and Refugees' explores the climate refugee crisis through the medium of metaphors which can be a conduit that reaches 'beyond the limitations of language' (p. 32) to enable meeting God in creation and thus allowing for a more meaningful relationship 'with one another and to the earth' such as the gratitude 'we might experience as finite people navigating loss on a suffering globe' (p. 43). Ben Faber's discussion of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* suggests that new eco-critical approaches to the religiously inspired literary tradition can provide a more reflective and deep engagement with the climate crisis. Katherine M. Quinsey's own chapter 'Early Modern Reformed Theology and Nonhuman Animals' is a fascinating case study looking at the contribution made by 17th century English sermons and devotional literature to the emergence of later concepts of animal sentience and intelligence. George Piggford's discussion in 'Flannery O'Connor's Integral Ecology' engages in an eco-critical reading of O'Connor's short story 'A View of the Woods' (1957) to discuss both the influence of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin as well as 'the environmental and Eucharistic visions' (p. 130) in this work which anticipates the approach that Pope Francis advocates in *Laudato Si'*. In his decolonial model of engaging

in a theological reading of a literary text, Daniel Coleman's chapter 'Can We Hear What the Land Is Saying?' attempts to recover Indigenous relationships with the land as teacher. Doug Sikkema's chapter 'To Dwell Ecologically: The Practice of Re-Enchantment' addresses the ethics of scholarship in the Anthropocene, with specific attention to Christian environmentalism. Sikkema seeks to re-enchant our scholarly engagement with the world by adopting an Indigenous understanding of the land, not only as something we speak to, but also something we hear.

A seemingly unnoticed clash among the voices in the collections is that between a more 'unapologetic' decolonial perspective—such as an eco-critical reading by Emily VanZanten of the 1971 African oral work 'Jesus of the Deep Forest'—and a more familiar, apologetic defence of Christianity, through the lens of its recoverable past traditions, like its Eastern Orthodox pantheistic theology, or the Franciscan tradition, or the later 20th century eco-mystical renaissance. In contrast, Western Christianity is held responsible for keeping incarnational and salvific theology separate from environmental concerns, a perspective that appears to neglect the fact that the contemporary Environmental Christian movement, as well as the Green movement more broadly, is rooted in this Western Protestant tradition, however flawed. From a present-day perspective, Western Christianity has supported a much more profound eco-critical engagement with the Anthropocentric dimensions of the ecological crisis than the Eastern tradition, albeit political opportunity would be an important dimension to consider when engaging in such a broad comparison.

Despite this clash the book makes a strong case for a 'rediscovery' of a Christian tradition of Environmental sacramentism which could create a space of 'deep engagement' or 'inner conversion' in a manner that has been advocated by many religious and secular voices alike. The chapters in this collection propose novel eco-critical lenses that draw on Christian environmentalism to investigate literary texts. It is hoped that both the approach and the literary tradition have the potential, as Deborah C. Bowen notes in her Afterword, 'to awaken deeper awareness of the world, in such a way that the reader may even feel called to take action' (p. 231). Such a continuous engagement with Christian environmentalism through the plural religious and cultural references present in a wider literary tradition could contribute to a growing recognition that we have a sacred obligation to care for the earth.

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