
Book Review

Bruno Latour, *If We Lose the Earth, We Lose Our Souls*, translated by Catherine Porter and Sam Ferguson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024), 110pp., \$14.95 (pbk), ISBN: 9781509560462.

In this very short treatise, Bruno Latour contends that Christianity does have something to offer in the intellectual space of a world dealing with the devastating consequences of climate change or the 'New Climatic Regime', as he calls our current time period. Chapter One is an edited conversation between Latour and Antonio Spadaro, SJ. During this dialogue, Latour laments the lack of explicit discussion about the cosmos in both contemporary theology and secular discourse. It is within this landscape that Latour praises Pope Francis's *Laudato Si* extravagantly for his willingness to imagine a cosmology wherein the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth are linked. Moreover, Latour argues that the pope's position makes space for greater emphasis on the incarnation. It is the incarnation that allows for Christians to be concerned about the wetlands at the same time they are teaching children the catechism.

Chapter Two is made up of comments offered to a scholarly conference in 2021. In it, Latour insists that climate change forces Christian preaching and theology to start over because it has wholly upended the stable cosmology we have relied upon for so long to articulate our stories and symbols. The very instability of the New Climatic Regime challenges the all-too-common Christian bifurcation of the spiritual and material. Again, emphasizing the incarnation, Latour calls Christians to consider how our interdependent lives reflect a reality wherein our charitable acts are in fact salvific in the here and now, and not for some place out in the distant future. In Chapter Three, Latour reminds us that all of the metaphors, rituals, preaching, etc., that make up the historical understanding of Christianity were formulated in the relative climatic stability of the Holocene. He once again praises the papal encyclical by asserting that the pope's genius is in connecting our current ecological crisis with the perennial apostolic concern: the cry of the earth is indeed linked to the cry of the poor. Latour implores Christian preachers and theologians to recognize that because we have moved into the New Climatic Regime, borrowing Jesus's words, we cannot continue to pour old metaphors, rituals, preaching, etc., into new wineskins. Chapter Four title is as illustrative as it is provocative for so many developed world Christians, especially Protestants: 'If You Lose the Earth, What Good Will It Do You to Have Saved Your Soul'? Here, Latour examines this question from multiple angles, especially pressing Christians to answer what sort of gospel, or good news, do they deliver if they are telling

people the end of the world as we know it should not matter, as long as your soul is saved. Perhaps, and in one of the most controversial arguments pointed at developed world Christians, Latour argues that if they want to be more like Christ, then they must imitate their savior by abandoning the security of heaven in favor of working here on an endangered Earth.

While there are certainly ideas in this book worth spending time reflecting on (e.g., his emphasis on the papal link between the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth, the challenge preachers to think through their uses of metaphors in the New Climatic Regime, and the contention that the incarnation has much to say about caring for the planet), there are a couple of problems that cannot be overlooked. First, there is not a clearly discernible thesis that holds the book together. Instead, the chapters appear more as incomplete thoughts amidst four mostly disparate essays rather than a coherent book-length argument. The reader must intuit what the thesis is that holds the four chapters together, rather than being told clearly what it is by the author. Second, this is a book that lacks a definitive audience. It is an open question whether this book is written for Christians who might be struggling with the idea of a theology that is more informed by an explicit recognition of the planetary ravages due to climate change or if it is meant more for a secular audience that is generally skeptical about Christianity's ability to provide substantive wisdom amidst the New Climate Regime. I also struggle to imagine what sort of academic environment would be suitable for this book. Could I see myself using the book with my own undergraduate students? No. Would I recommend it for use with seminary students or others in advanced graduate programs? Probably not. This book is too philosophically sophisticated for undergraduates and, in my estimation, too incomplete of an idea to be helpful in a seminary setting. While preachers could gain much from being exposed to the book's ideas, they are formulated in such a way that would leave those without advanced backgrounds in philosophy flailing to translate it for themselves and their congregations. The only setting I could legitimately imagine it used in is a graduate seminar on the broader works of Latour or something similar. While Latour has much to offer in terms of philosophical and theological reflection, this particular book is not where I would encourage someone interested in him to begin.

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