
Book Review

Dieter Gerten and Sigurd Bergmann (eds.), *Religion in Environmental and Climate Change: Suffering, Values, Lifestyles* (New York: Continuum International, 2012), 269 pp., \$120 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-4411-6929-7.

In *Religion in Environmental and Climate Change: Suffering, Values, Lifestyles*, editors Dieter Gerten and Sigurd Bergmann draw primarily from papers presented in Potsdam, Germany, in January of 2010 to demonstrate the impact of religion in the realm of anthropogenic climate change.¹ A strength of the text is the intertwining of the sciences and humanities, representing a collaborative breadth in disciplinary diversity. Anthropologists, sociologists, theologians, physicists, philosophers, historians, ethicists, and ecologists each approach climate change from within their area of expertise, yet are united through a focus on how religion (primarily Christianity) impacts and is impacted by climate change.

Part 1 sets the stage for the rest of the text. In their introductory chapter Gerten and Bergmann argue that in light of the urgency of global climate change, religion may be a key part of the solution. Holding a formative influence over much of the world's 'worldviews, moral systems, practices, aesthetics, ethics, lifestyles, hopes and fears' (p. 4), faith carries substantial power when organized into religious bodies, to varying extents shaping culture and human understandings of the world. Next, Wolfgang Lucht discusses how objects such as Neolithic flint axes (and today's cars, buildings, airplanes, and furniture) become symbols of cultural cosmology—shaping cultural worldviews and informing personal identity in relationship to the world. Since many of these symbols are tied to fossil fuel technologies, he argues that in the modern world these cosmologies relate directly to global climate conversations. Then, critiquing classical Christian doctrines that affirm an object-relationship with nature, Lucht argues for reinterpreting any ancient stories that support extractive and exploitative economic human interaction with the rest of the natural world. Michael Reder next argues that religions could be formidable participants in climate discussions due to their 'social capital' as well as their traditional concern over ethics and morality.² Finally, Timothy Leduc observes that the demystification of research alone may not be enough to overcome unarticulated cultural beliefs born of anthropocentric, economic,

1. At the 'Religion in Environmental and Climate Change' symposium, Telegraphenberg, Potsdam, Germany, 11–13 January 2010, a workshop organized by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, and the University of Greifswald, in association with the European Forum for the Study of Religion and the Environment and funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.

2. 'This term describes norms, mentalities, social relations and networks that promote cooperative behaviour and solidarity in a society' (p. 41).

and industrial ideologies that teach us to ignore the signs of anthropogenic environmental degradation. He argues for a 'resacralization' (p. 62) of the natural world, integrating Christian and scientific cosmologies to reanimate patterns of living and researching.

While essays from Part 2 fit well into the framework promised in Gerten and Bergmann's introduction, the book's notable lack of religious diversity becomes evident in this section, which represents the main shortcoming of the text. Subtitled 'Recent Dynamics in World Religions', the section ought to be simply 'Recent Dynamics in Catholic and Evangelical Christianity', since it offers analyses of topics limited to these faiths. Within this context, the essays may offer a diversity of disciplinary approaches, but without contributions from other Christian traditions and other world religions, the offering is at best one-sided.

Roman Catholic theologian and social ethicist Markus Vogt and Lutheran theologian and ethicist Friedrich Lohmann both discuss climate justice from Christian perspectives. Vogt questions the ethics of selling emissions rights in a world where industrialized nations' current levels of pollution cannot be sustainably extended to all nations. Through moral persuasion, he argues, the principle of sustainability ought to be added to the Catholic human rights principles of personality, solidarity, and subsidiarity to help guide human action with regard to global ecology. Lohmann further contends, drawing on the Genesis account of creation, that anthropocentrism is a valid foundation for Christian environmental ethics. Anglican theologian and geologist Michael Roberts and sociologist Laurel Kearns both discuss evangelical Christianity's potent influence on the debate over climate change in the United States. Roberts highlights evangelical contributions to both sides of the climate change debate, while Kearns focuses on the fallout of 'climategate' at the Copenhagen talks in 2009, after which evangelical support for climate-related activism dropped significantly.³ She does cite one concrete contribution made by GreenFaith, which provided energy audits and compact-fluorescent light bulbs to over 700 congregations (including solar panels for 24 congregations), supplying a rare reference in the book to activism at the community level.⁴ Martin Schönfeld concludes this section, arguing that one effect of climate change will be a widening gap between fundamentalist and liberal approaches to faith. While he recognizes positive contributions from some liberal monotheistic traditions, he projects that the superior number of fundamentalist traditions—those which tend to react against and deny climate change research—will likely cause a decline in monotheistic traditions in response to climate change. Conversely, pagan traditions, which he defines as indigenous religions and other faiths that attach intrinsic spiritual value to the land itself and 'conceive...of the divine as being transcendent and immanent' (p. 171), will likely increase. While Schönfeld does not make the connection explicit, there is an interesting parallel between his description of pagan religions and individuals in monotheistic traditions who approach faith from mystical rather than doctrinal foci. This suggests to me that those types of monotheistic spiritualities better suited to encouraging proactive responses to climate change have something important in common with pagan spiritualities, which could be valuable to the ongoing discussion of religion and climate change.

3. Media leaks questioning the validity of scientific research regarding climate.
4. Founded 1992.

Part 3 contains five case studies that examine how non-Christian religions help people cope with the culturally deleterious impacts of climate change. Susan Crate's ethnographic study of the Siberian Viliui Sakha tribe offers insight into cultural and economic suffering that climate change has brought to the region. She highlights the benefit of integrating indigenous understandings of native landscapes into climate research. Lioba Rossbach de Olmos surveys anthropological methods of understanding indigenous perspectives on climate change, asserting that non-Western perspectives provide valuable insight into how humans respond to anthropogenic climate change. Urte Undine Frömming and Christian Reichel examine how specific Indonesian communities adapt to changing climate conditions. Gulnara Aitpaeva provides a fascinating study of *Jaichylyk* (an indigenous practice through which locals believe they can control the weather) in Kyrgyz culture and history. She praises *Jaichylyk* as a philosophy that, if recovered, could help locals respond to and even mitigate anthropogenic climate change. Finally, Holger Sonnabend closes the text with his study of historic European response to climate change, concluding that while science may explain what is happening, it does little to offer meaning or value systems to address the suffering, uncertainty, and fear relating to climate change. As one of the major functions of faith, people (past and present) will thus continue to seek meaning and purpose through religion.

What seems clear from reading this book is that religion adds a potentially valuable voice to the discussion of anthropogenic climate change. What is less clear is how the voices of religious leaders, theologians, and ecclesiastical spokespersons translate to action in the pews and out in the streets where daily decisions impact global climate change. While a diversity of major world religions might change the appearance of the discussion through their own distinctive contributions, the difficult question for readers of whether or not religion motivates action remains largely unanswered.⁵ Laying aside the critique of the book's lack of attention to religious diversity and evidence of direct grassroots activism stemming from religious belief (which would validate the claim that religion is an 'essential' companion in the discussion), where the book excels is in offering readers a range of perspectives on how religion informs some discussions of climate change. Individually, the essays are well researched and compelling. As a collection, perhaps the biggest contribution this study makes is inspiring further interdisciplinary research into questions not addressed at the Potsdam symposium.

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5. The exceptions being Kearns's brief account of evangelical activism sparked by the debate over the credibility of climate change research, and Roberts's assessment of political leanings and activism based on evangelical belief.