

Inhabitanace: Ecological Religious Education, by Jennifer R. Ayres. Baylor University Press, 2019. 216pp., 1 b/w illustration. Hb., \$44.99. ISBN-13: 9781481311373.

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In the 2019 book, *Inhabitanace: Ecological Religious Education*, Jennifer Ayres proposes a new approach for teaching about humanity's relationship with the natural world. For much of the last 50 years, Ayres argues, environmental education has triumphed technological solutions and humankind's ability to problem-solve its way out of environmental crises. This reactionary posture has proven inadequate. In response, Ayres presents a framework for ecological religious education that fosters moral development rooted in a theological understanding of *inhabitanace*—humans must learn to fall in love and seek “to live well” in the world. Christian communities in particular should draw from their *ecological theological anthropology* to foster a “human ecological character” (5) capable of cultivating the love and commitment necessary for resilient life on Earth.

To make the case, Ayres' divides the text into six chapters. The first two chapters begin to define *inhabitanace* and establish a theological and moral framework for the examples that follow. Central is the distinction between the outdated worldview that positions humanity apart from a problematized environment, and an ecological perspective in which humanity is a coparticipant in a dynamic habitat. Both can be supported by theological frameworks (Lynne White famously diagnosed the former over half a century ago). In Chapter 2, Ayres repeats the call for character development by identifying four helpful sets of “ecological dispositions” and the introduction of “ecovirtues” (20–21) as a necessary update of Aristotelian *phronesis*: our affective and creative capacities are critical for authentic and effective ecological conversion. Chapters 3 and 4 explore the pedagogical frameworks necessary for such character development. Ayres avoids surveying specific examples of religious teaching regarding the environment, and instead identifies four tensions within conventional teaching on the subject, most notably that, despite its unparalleled impact on the ecosystem, humankind has been unable to enact lasting solutions to the problems it creates. In response, Chapter 3 revives the

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principle of *paideia* as “moral formation for participation in a community” within classical thought as a precedent for a human vocation today (42). For Christians, such formation is expressed through the triad of ecological consciousness, ecological imagination, and ecological faith. Chapter 4 introduces pedagogical models (for example, Bloom’s Taxonomy) and Ayres effectively draws on Lee Shulman to frame commitment as the highest order outcome for ecological education (70), a goal accordant with Ayres’ endorsement of slow knowledge. The final two chapters turn to examples of religious communities that illustrate the power and vulnerabilities inherent in the human experience of place. The examples Ayres provides are a real strength of the text and, although brief, they are didactic accounts of how ecological religious education might look: a compost liturgy at Washington DC’s Church of the Pilgrims, water sojourners at a Presbyterian church in Kentucky, or church-run market gardens in the heart of Chicago. While further examples or qualitative methods might seem wanting here, including too much information might actually contradict the book’s proposition: for Ayres, effective ecological religious education must consider the unique makeup of its audience—there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

Throughout the text, Ayres gives plenty of time to the agrarian Wendell Berry and naturalist Aldo Leopold (as one might expect from a book on ecological education), but also introduces important thinkers like environmentalist David Orr and activist bell hooks. Sometimes hidden in the endnotes, these interdisciplinary references provide a valuable resource. Although Ayres regularly references Pope Francis and his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’*, little time is spent describing the unique histories of ecological education within specific religious communities, Catholic or otherwise. Of course, this is the work of volumes, but some commentary here might help explain the author’s method and scope particularly when considering the role of religion in environmental discourse. One of the book’s boldest statements is the implication that faith communities—primarily Christian ones—have a monopoly on the moral character development necessary for ecological enlightenment.

Written in the midst of declining US environmental policy, *Inhabitanace* remains timely. Effective ecological education must look past superficial solutions to today’s crises and instead focus on developing longstanding ecological commitment rooted in a reflective love for the place each of us inhabit. To this end, this book would be instructive for leaders or participants in faith communities that wish to foster congregational dia-

logue around ecology and sustainability. However, like the best educational texts, Ayres' doesn't simply list the answers and readers should not expect a step-by-step guide that can be easily applied to any setting. Instead, Ayres provides a language and framework to help readers creatively discern pastoral and practical responses within the unique places they inhabit. Those exploring the intersection between religion, ecology, and education might also find this text helpful, but should know that it develops from an explicitly Christian theology.