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Norman C. Habel (ed.). *Readings from the Perspective of Earth. The Earth Bible, Volume One.* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, and Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000. Pp. 279. No Price Listed.

[1] *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth* is the first volume in a series produced by the Earth Bible Project, located in the Center for Theology, Science and Culture, associated with the Adelaide College of Divinity and Flinders University of South Australia. Veronica Brady, in her preface to the volume, reminds us of the common charge made against Christianity, "that the lack of care for the earth and its creatures - the arrogant assumption that they exist merely for us to use and exploit - can be traced back to the Bible" (13). The aim of the Project is to unite "in a common goal of learning how to read the text from the perspective of the earth" (10). The Earth Bible Team admits that much of the Bible does not seem to reflect a religious worldview that was particularly sensitive towards the natural environment. However, it advocates the application of the "basic hermeneutic of feminist scholars" (39), suspicion and retrieval, in order to uncover "suppressed Earth traditions that resist the dominant patriarchal anthropocentric orientation of the text" (40). While the patriarchal emphasis of the Bible has lead many feminists to search for spiritual fulfillment outside the Church, others have remained within the Christian tradition, arguing that beneath the thick layers of patriarchal history lies a "tradition" which has meaning for women. Similarly, the Earth Bible Team suggest treating the Bible with "suspicion," in that it is likely to be anthropocentric having been written by humans, but that it is possible to "retrieve" "traditions about the Earth or the Earth community that have been unnoticed, suppressed or hidden" (39).

[2] Following the aims of the Earth Bible Project, each contributor, using the hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval, has interpreted sections of the Bible in terms of any number of six eco-justice principles: the Principle of Intrinsic Worth, the Principle of Interconnectedness, the Principle of Voice, The Principle of Purpose, The Principle of Mutual Custodianship and the Principle of Resistance. Thus, at the very outset the volume is not pretending to offer a traditional or authentic reading of the Bible as environmentally friendly but instead to re-read it in such a way that it can potentially offer support and guidance to Christians who wish to incorporate ecojustice into their religious lives. In particular, the chapter by Heather

Eaton, "Ecofeminist Contributions to an Ecojustice Hermeneutics," most strongly makes the point that the "liberationist stance taken by the Earth Bible Project is advocational: it does not pretend neutrality or objectivity" (54). She stresses, as does Dianne Bergant in her chapter, "The Wisdom of Solomon," that a text is given meaning by its reader; "understanding is never merely a mastery of objective data - it also involves a subjective interaction with the text" (141).

[3] Another issue taken up by *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth*, is the desire to "move beyond obvious texts" (72) and to look at "troublesome sections" (138). David Jobling and Nathan Loewen look at the Book of Amos, "not among the 'classic' biblical texts for ecotheological or 'Earth' reading" (72), and Keith Carley analyses Psalm 8 and concludes that "the Earth's interests are certainly not central" (121). Iutisone Salevao gives us a treatment of Hebrews 6:7-8, where he argues that it "remains a disturbing text" for him both as an ecotheologian and a Samoan; "it stands in conflict with the principles of ecojustice espoused by Samoans and echoed in the Earth Bible Project series" (231).

[4] This personal touch crops up frequently in the entire volume. The book is a mixture of academic scholarship and private reflections; the majority of the authors are clearly engaged both academically and spiritually in the Earth Bible Project. I do not wish to suggest that this undermines the value of their interpretations, but this volume must be read as having emerged from within the Christian community; the authors are distinguished and skilled theologians but they also have a vested interest in interpreting the Bible as supporting ecojustice.

[5] As the first book in a series I would have expected to find some indication about how future volumes might take the discussions further. For instance, the focus of this volume was hermeneutics: how to re-read the Bible with principles of ecojustice in mind. There was virtually no discussion about how such hermeneutics would actually translate at the social level, or, to put it another way, how the theory could be put into practice. Norman Habel does briefly discuss the Earth Charter Movement and its plan to submit a "moral charter for Earth, similar to the Declaration of Human Rights" (27) to the United Nations in 2002. He suggests that "the Earth Bible series reflects a similar moral concern" (27) but gives no indication as to how this sentiment of concern, even if it is convincingly supported by reference to the Bible, will translate into action. While this volume does not over-romanticize the ecological content of Christianity and honestly admits that it in no way supports an ecological world view as a whole, I think any reader also deserves to be convinced that ecojustice is a viable politics as well as a good idea.

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