

und Jagd vorausgesetzten Lebenswelt und den realen Erlebnishintergründen nachspürt und dabei biblisch-archäologische, ikonographische, religionsgeschichtliche und auch zoologische Erkenntnisse aufnimmt und in hilfreicher Weise aufbereitet (377; mit gut gewählten Illustrationen).

R. präsentiert eine schöne Studie für die wissenschaftliche und auch homiletische Psalmenauslegung, die mit einiger Mühe und Ausdauer auch das heutige individuelle und gemeinschaftliche christliche Gebet bereichern und inspirieren kann durch das Erschließen dieser teils fremden und befremdenden Bilderwelt. Ferner werden viele, heute zuweilen als problematisch empfundene militärische Bezüge in christlicher Literatur und Liedgut von diesem atl. Hintergrund her verständlich(er). Ähnliche Untersuchungen zu weiteren Metaphernwelten der atl. Weisheitsliteratur und der Propheten wären wünschenswert. Ferner liegt in der atl. Feindmetaphorik ein wesentlicher Hintergrund der im NT teilweise ausgeprägten militärischen Metaphorik, die nicht nur auf die Auseinandersetzung mit Satan und seinen Helfershelfern angewandt wird (z. B. Eph 6.10-17), sondern auch erstaunlich unbefangen zur Beschreibung christlicher Existenz verwendet wird (z. B. 2Tim 2.3).

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The Earth Story in the New Testament (The Earth Bible Volume 5)

Norman C. Habel & Vicky Balabanski (eds.)

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SUMMARY

This is the fifth and final volume in a series produced by the Earth Bible project, a team under the chief editorship of the Old Testament scholar, Norman Habel, and whose core members are based in Adelaide, South Australia, and influenced by Indigenous Australian attitudes to the earth. The team, however, draws on the work of other scholars from a variety of international locations. The first volume – *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth* – developed the team's basic approach of reading the Bible's material about the earth in the light of six ecojustice principles, subsequent volumes treated Genesis, the Wisdom traditions and the Psalms and Prophets, and here attention turns specifically to New Testament texts.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dies ist der fünfte und letzte Band einer Reihe vom Earth Bible Project, einem Team unter dem Alttestamentler Norman Habel als Hauptherausgeber. Die Teammitglieder kommen hauptsächlich aus Adelaide, Südastralien, und sind von den ursprünglichen

australischen Haltungen zur Erde beeinflusst. Das Team bezieht allerdings die Arbeit anderer Wissenschaftler von verschiedenen internationalen Standorten mit ein. Der erste Band – *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth* – entwickelte den Grundansatz des Teams: das Lesen des biblischen Materials über die Erde durch die Linse von sechs Prinzipien ökologischer Gerechtigkeit. Nachfolgende Bände behandelten Genesis, die Weisheitstraditionen, die Psalmen und die Propheten. Der fünfte Band widmet sich nun besonders neutestamentlichen Texten.

RÉSUMÉ

Voici le cinquième et dernier volume dans la série produite dans le cadre du projet *Earth Bible* par une équipe conduite par Norman Habel, spécialiste de l'Ancien Testament, dont la plupart des membres travaillent à Adélaïde, au sud de l'Australie, et sont influencés par l'attitude des Australiens indigènes vis-à-vis de la terre. Cette équipe a cependant bénéficié des travaux de savants de pays très divers. Le premier volume, « *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth* » exposait l'approche fondamentale qui consiste à lire les textes bibliques concernant la terre à la lumière de six principes d'écojustice. Les volumes suivants abordaient la Genèse, les traditions sapientiales, puis les Psaumes et les Prophètes. Ce cinquième ouvrage considère plus spécifiquement les textes du Nouveau Testament.

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This volume is difficult to review for three main reasons. (i) The basic approach and its key principles were set out somewhat more fully in the first volume. It is therefore not clear whether and how its ecojustice principles are related to an appropriate ecotheology. The contributors, however, treat them as unchallengeable axioms by which Biblical texts are to be judged. (ii) The project deals with what is indisputably a highly significant issue – the ecological crisis and what role the Biblical texts play in contributing to that crisis or helping to resolve it. It should be remembered, then, that the reservations contained in this review are not about the project but about how it is carried out in this volume. (iii) Its actual treatment of texts is often, to say the least, highly debatable. In fact, it has been a long time since the reviewer read so many essays that seemed to him to provide flawed or highly strained interpretations. This would need to be demonstrated in detail but is not possible in a short review. All that can be done is to give a brief description of some of the contents and to raise a few questions about the hermeneutical principles employed and the characteristic judgments reached.

After the six ecojustice principles have been stated, there is an introductory chapter on ecojustice hermeneutics, in which the discussion is related to the essays that follow. The first of these provides a positive reading of Matthew 6:25-34 in the light of the uncontroversial second principle of interconnectedness, whereby earth

is seen as a community of mutually dependent living things. Interestingly, however, the essay fails to address vv. 26c, 30b in which humans are explicitly said to be of more value than the birds or the grass. A later essay does criticize the Lukan version of this material. Its discussion of Luke 12.13-34 claims that this passage overvalues the human with respect to the other-than-human in a way that 'is at odds with a sense of the intrinsic worth of Earth' and that its characterization of divine providence in nature forgets 'the provisioning labour of women and slaves and . . . the agency of a provident Earth.' In another essay the use of the metaphor about the plough in Luke 9.62 – 'no one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is worthy of the kingdom of God' – is said to involve the kingdom of God in endorsing assumptions associated with ploughing and therefore to subjugate and devalue women and earth who are both to be ploughed as a work of the kingdom.

An essay on John 1 suggests the prologue devalues the earth because it treats darkness as a negative force in contrast to its treatment in Genesis 1. Two essays respond to this but, surprisingly, neither challenges this interpretation and only the second restores a measure of exegetical sanity by attempting to differentiate between various uses of the term *kosmos* in John's Gospel. Another contribution attempts to counter the dominant interpretation of Hebrews, which it holds to be world-renouncing and earth-denigrating, by proposing that the language of Hebrews 11 about 'strangers and exiles upon earth' refers not to a pilgrimage towards a heavenly city but is rather a way of talking about a different encounter with earth that respects earth's hospitality.

There are three essays on so-called apocalyptic material in the New Testament, all properly critical of premillennial dispensational interpretations and the ecological attitudes that often accompany these. The first of these treats Mark 13, which is retrieved from possible connotations hostile to ecological concerns by reading it as not referring to a *parousia* at the end of history, and 2 Peter 3, which is found to be irretrievable in its exhortation to expect eagerly the melting of the elements and the torching of heaven and earth. The other two essays – on Revelation – conclude the volume on a more positive note by focusing on the Apocalypse's critique of Roman imperialistic exploitation of the earth and its vision of a renewed earth.

Not all contributions have been mentioned here, but the above should suffice to give a flavour of the volume's approach. The two most contentious principles it employs are that the earth and all its components have intrinsic worth and that the earth is a subject with its own voice. The difficulty is not so much with the principles as with the way they are interpreted. The former is interpreted to mean that there can be nothing that smacks of the prioritising of human life in God's purposes and no duality of heaven and earth, in which heaven is superior as God's place, while earth is in need of redemption. Passages of the Bible which contain such

perspectives are subject to critique as devaluing the intrinsic worth of earth and can be retrieved, if at all, only by reading them against the grain. In this approach interpretations which take seriously a spiritual and heavenly dimension are lumped together with cosmological dualism and branded as the heresy of 'heavenism.' The axiom that earth is a subject with its own voice is not simply interpreted metaphorically. Every reference to earth in the book is spelled with a capital 'E' and, in order not to refer to earth as 'it' but also not to reinforce a patriarchal oppressive attitude, one writer employs 's-e' and 'h-r' as the accompanying pronominal forms. Seeing earth as the object of either divine or human actions is characteristically held to be inappropriate, as is hierarchical language of rule and power in reference to earth. There is little recognition that what might be more important is how rule or power are exercised or that human sin might have blighted the original goodness of earth. Instead earth has to be treated as co-creator with God and as partner with God in producing salvation and healing.

These characteristic judgments are both controversial and problematic. The reviewer would argue that what is needed for an illuminating reading of Biblical texts about the earth is a hermeneutic derived from an explicitly Christian ecotheology, which is grounded in a sense of solidarity with the groanings of creation, is trinitarian and sacramental in its perspective, works with major Biblical themes, including justice and blessing, is sensitive to the distortion of such themes within the Christian tradition and its practices, and engages with the best of current theoretical and applied analyses of the ecological issues that face us. Perhaps the Earth Bible team would be partially satisfied if this volume provoked those who work from this rather different ecotheological stance to attempt to provide more plausible and discerning readings of specific Biblical texts, some of which may well remain troubling because their writers did not share our particular present concerns.

This collection subjects the texts to both positive and negative evaluation in the light of six ecojustice principles. The project is important but the way in which it is carried out here and the interpretation of the foundational principles are problematic. Christian readers are likely to want to work from a more theologically grounded hermeneutic, which is sensitive to urgent concerns about the earth, and to produce critical readings that do more exegetical justice to the Biblical texts.

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