

[MJTM 16 (2014–2015)]

### Book Review

Lévesque, Norman. *Greening Your Church: A Practical Guide to Creation Care Ministry for Parishes, Dioceses and Religious Communities*. Montreal: Novalis, 2014. 104 pp. Pbk. ISBN 2896466363.

In *Greening Your Church*, Lévesque offers refreshing insights into the relationship between the church and creation from a Roman Catholic viewpoint. This book is refreshing because it invites the reader to view nature through the lens of divine purpose and harmony. So much of theology is focused on the spiritual realm that the church has been detached from her earthly mandate to care for the environment. Lévesque raises creation awareness through presenting a theological perspective on creation care and a pastoral perspective on practical steps for the church community. Caring for the environment should be part of Christian spirituality and the practice of faith communities. This practical guide encourages responsible stewardship of the environment beginning with “green” approaches to basic operations within the church.

The theological foundation of creation care is predicated on both Jewish and Christian traditions as demonstrated in the Old and New Testaments and in narratives of saints in the history of the Catholic Church. According to Lévesque, this harmonious relationship between humankind and nature began to change in the seventeenth century with Descartes and his philosophical rationalism that viewed humankind above creation and “reduce[d] creatures to simple objects” (17). It was not so in the beginning. The creation account ends with “it was very good” (Gen 1:31). But when “people dare not drink from a spring or a river,” creation is no longer very good (21). In poetic imagery, the creation of Adam is seen as the work of the Creator with

nature as Adam's source. We are part of the same creation and as such must treat animals with due respect and not as objects. Concurrently, Lévesque carefully accentuates human beings as creatures created in the image of God. The relationship between humankind and nature should be one of harmony and "sacred balance" (21).

God provides for all creation through the process of nature as stated in Ps 104:27–28, "These [creatures] all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up, when you open your hand, they are filled with good things." The theology of providence has a strong link to the ecosystem. Therefore, Lévesque rightly points out, "when we destroy the balance of the ecosystem, we are preventing Providence from operating" (22). Humankind is to cooperate with nature for productivity but also with due respect to the Sabbath of land. While he advocates a high view of creation, Lévesque does warn against the worship of natural elements and creatures instead of the Creator. The goal is to bring praise to God and bless him for creation as expressed in Eucharistic and Passover Prayers. The bread and the wine are gentle reminders of the produce of the earth and of the vine. The liturgy is powerful imagery connecting us to both Christ in salvation and creation in providence.

In the Preface, Lévesque lists three groups of victims most impacted by the neglect of the environment: because of their poverty, vulnerable people cannot choose to live away from environmentally hazardous areas; future generations who arrive later will find the earth with "reduced harvests and fish catches"; and endangered species suffer due to damage of the ecosystem (12). Therefore, this book calls for pastoral action beginning with the church and religious groups as a "Christian eco-spirituality" that takes our relationship with nature seriously and that "recognizes the wisdom in God's Creation and strives to keep it in balance" (63). Lévesque states, "[we] serve God when we care for Creation" (60). Christian ecospirituality requires education, contemplation, and practical steps.

This concise volume provides excellent reflection and practical guidelines as a primer for environmental ethics and creation

care. However, as a concise volume, it is not without limitation. The Preface paints a powerful imagery of three groups of victims when the environment is neglected. However, the rest of the book makes no mention of them, and gives no resources to substantiate its claims on the effects of industrial zoning or climate change. The reader may want to know more for a better understanding and further discussion. There are good scriptural passages in support of creation and the process of providence, though not all passages are directly applicable to environmental concerns. For instance, the pollution cited in Isa 24:5 refers to the spiritual condition of lawlessness in Israel and is not a reference to nature. Also, the narrative of St. Francis turns from story to fable when the wolf “held out his paw” to him (37). There are some doubts on the validity of the author’s argument in pursuit of his agenda on creation care.

Living in modern cities with technological advances has made humankind insensitive to nature. Neglect of the environment is an urgent spiritual issue that calls for the church to take action. With beauty and gentle persuasion, Lévesque calls for the church to lead the way to reconnect with God’s creation without inducing guilt or emotional hype. The book gives the reader a new perspective on creation and Christian ecospirituality. It offers practical suggestions for church communities to reduce, reuse, and recycle. The key to Christian ecospirituality is balance. Lévesque says, “God allows us to take whatever we need, but not whatever we want” (69). I happened to read this book just before Canadian Thanksgiving, when I was heading north for a retreat. This book inspired new appreciation as I spent time in nature as God’s creation.

Howard H. W. Ngan  
McMaster Divinity College