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BOOK REVIEW

Celia Deane-Drummond. *A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth*. Cascade Companions 37. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017. xiv + 167 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-4982-3699-7. \$23.00.

Celia Deane-Drummond's *A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth* is the thirty-seventh volume in the Cascade Companions series, which according to the publisher's script at the beginning, is meant to bring the richness of "Christian theological tradition" to the "general," or non-specialist, reader in "brief yet compelling volumes" (ii). In keeping with the short format of the series, this volume is a very manageable 167 pages (plus fifteen pages of front matter) divided between seven chapters. These seven chapters are preceded by a preface and acknowledgements section and followed by additional features: an appendix highlighting Christian organizations and networks engaged in environmental activism, a glossary of key words used in ecotheology, a bibliography, and two indexes (general and Scripture).

Chapter 1, "Introduction to Ecotheology: A Map," functions as an introduction to the field of ecotheology. Here Deane-Drummond highlights the ecological concerns of our contemporary situation (most notably climate change) before giving a brief overview of ecotheological studies (historic and current) and ecological ethics. In chapter 2, "Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics," Deane-Drummond explores various issues related to reading the Bible with ecological concerns in mind. Thus this chapter highlights different ecological readings of Scripture (most notably agrarian readings and the interpretive principles of the Earth Bible project) as well as specific issues related to ecology, including: the question of creation care in the biblical text, the

biblical worth and valuation of non-human creation, as well as questions connected to eschatology and the future of all creation.

In chapter 3, Deane-Drummond focuses on aspects of ecotheology that relate to liberation theology. Here, Deane-Drummond gives particular attention to liberation theologies from the majority world as well as the works of various eco-feminists. Chapter 4 functions both as an introduction to and evaluation of the second encyclical of pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (also known by its subtitle, "On Care for our Common Home"). This encyclical was published in 2015 and, as Deane-Drummond argues, was significant because it put "ecotheology firmly on the map of Christian theology" (55).

Chapter 5, titled "Deep Incarnation," focuses on the relationship of Christ to ecological concerns and pays particular attention to the significance of the incarnation for Christian ecotheology. Chapter 6 focuses on humanity and explores what it means for human beings to be "created in the image of God," as well as the relationship (and interconnectedness) of humans with the broader creation. Deane-Drummond's concluding chapter 7 focuses on Christian ecological ethics and gives particular attention to the aspects of economy, sin, and justice before closing with specific steps that can help one to develop "theologically informed ecological ethics" (120).

Throughout the book, in each chapter, there are sidebars ("boxes"), which give short, specialized discussions related to the chapter's subject matter. The book concludes with a postscript that gives an appeal for the necessity of "practical wisdom" (125) in dealing with contemporary ecological concerns.

In my opinion, the primary strengths and weaknesses of this volume are related to the same issue, namely the short length of the volume. Regarding its strengths, this volume (true to its title) generally provides an excellent introduction to those interested in the subject of ecotheology. This book provides a good exposure to the field of ecotheology, particularly for Protestants and Evangelicals who might have limited exposure to the topic. Furthermore, the compact size of this volume makes it easy to read and its contents very accessible. The reflection questions at the end of each chapter are stimulating and naturally lend themselves to

classroom settings, where discussions would be encouraged. In short, Deane-Drummond is one of the leading scholars in the field of ecotheology, and this book presents her work in an abbreviated and therefore accessible manner to those who might not otherwise be familiar with her work. For those interested readers who would want to read a fuller treatment of the subject I would recommend Deane-Drummond's larger monograph *Eco-Theology* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2008), though this volume is now somewhat dated.

Another strength of this volume is that, beyond merely being a survey of the field of ecotheology, it also seeks to engage in the practical side of Christian ecotheology. I already mentioned the study questions at the end of each chapter, but this practical engagement can also be seen in the appendix, where Deane-Drummond lists Christian organizations (with links) that are actively engaged in environmental causes, as well as the seventh chapter and postscript, where Deane-Drummond lists specific ways that Christians can develop "theologically informed ecological ethics" (120). Indeed, given our current global ecological situation, inaction is increasingly *not* an option.

That being said, it must be acknowledged that this book is *necessarily* dated. Similar to ecology, the field of ecotheology is a 'fast-moving' field. New discoveries, new crises, as well as ever-increasing pressures (such as rapid climate change and biodiversity loss) push scientists, philosophers, and theologians to continually answer new and arising situations. In this sense, Deane-Drummond's work, while excellent, is very much a specific product of its time. For instance, while a fair bit of attention is given in chapter 4 to Pope Francis, and his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which was released in 2015, as well as the Paris agreement to which it was connected (55), it remains to be seen what the effect of these works will be. Indeed, news of nations pulling out of the Paris agreement (notably the USA) or not reaching agreed targets (including Canada) suggests that the impact of these works is not what was initially hoped for. In fact, there has been a strong global reaction to this inaction from youth (exemplified in 2019 by Greta Thunberg) that the author does not mention. Nor can she, because these events happened after the book's

publication, and it would be unfair to expect this. This volume is important and, as I mentioned, is a good introduction to the field of ecotheology. However, I would simply caution the reader that the field of ecotheology is quickly changing and constantly evolving. Due to this factor, even given the relatively recent publication date (2017), this volume is unable to address all the current issues of this field.

Second, there are some areas where I disagree slightly with Deane-Drummond's characterizations of certain issues. For instance, in her discussion of agrarianism, Deane-Drummond does little to distinguish the older agrarian thinking of John Muir and Henry David Thoreau, which was arguably more romantic in its outlook, from the newer agrarian thinking of individuals like Wes Jackson, which focuses more on a recognition of the inter-relatedness of ecosystems and the practicalities that implies. This is, however, a disagreement of nuance, and it is appreciated that Deane-Drummond even raises this area of thought, as I personally think it one of the most important fields of ecological thinking for the North American context, where consumerism and industrialized agriculture have often caused so much ecological damage.

Finally, the greatest weakness that I see in the volume is the one that the author herself admits. As Deane-Drummond notes, "I am conscious in writing this book there is so much more that I could have done; this book is really a sampling of ideas rather than anything more comprehensive" (xi). She goes on, "I hope that my academic colleagues . . . will forgive me if some of their most treasured ideas or even books or articles do not appear here" (xi). Forgiveness is unnecessary, but it was disappointing to see areas of Protestant and Evangelical thought underrepresented. It should be said that this critique is entirely selfish and pragmatic. As someone who largely works and worships within these traditions, which are not necessarily known for any sort of ecological awareness, it is helpful to be able to highlight theological voices from within these traditions as I find people are: (1) more inclined to listen to them; or (2) be encouraged that ecological concerns are in fact a valid expression of their faith. Thus, for those within Protestant, and especially Evangelical, traditions

Review: DEANE-DRUMMOND *A Primer in Ecotheology* R37

who want to hear ecotheological voices from within those traditions, I would recommend the works of A. J. Swoboda, *Tongues and Trees: Towards a Pentecostal Ecological Theology* (Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 40; Leiden: Brill, 2013); Daniel L. Brunner et al., *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology: Foundations in Scripture, Theology, History, and Praxis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014); and more recently Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).

Despite its limitations, I have no hesitancy in recommending this book. It is well-written, accessible, and provides an excellent introduction to ecotheology for students or those new to this field of study. The only caution I have is the same one that the author herself notes “this book is . . . just a taste for what this is about” (xi). Indeed!

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