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BOOK REVIEW

Stephen D. Moore. *Gospel Jesuses and Other Nonhumans: Biblical Criticism Post-poststructuralism*. Semeia Studies 89. Atlanta: SBL, 2017. xii + 151 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-62837-190-1. $24.99.

It is something of an adage among wine drinkers that one should not buy a bottle of wine because of the label's design, however clever or beautiful it might be. This saying has come into use for the very simple reason that a bottle's label—especially in today's saturated market—cannot tell you about the quality of the wine. As it turns out, this adage serves as something of a useful warning for the current monograph. In the interest of transparency, I admit that I was drawn to this work because of how it was advertised on the SBL website as well as the book's back cover, its 'label' if you will. In particular, it was my interest in ecotheology and the Bible's relationship to current environmental concerns that drew me to the claim that this "book is essential reading for biblical studies students and scholars interested in cutting-edge critical theory and biblical ecotheology and ecocriticism" (back cover). As this monograph is among the first to apply nonhuman theory to the biblical text, I was curious to see whether or not this critical methodology would offer a fresh approach that I could use to approach the biblical text in a way that would have relevance for ecotheology and related fields.

The book is an easily digestible length, approximately 150 pages, consisting of six chapters, including an introductory first chapter. Though the introduction tries to connect the various chapters under one "encompassing concern" (2), which Moore notes is the "ecological" (2), the book is more accurately described as a collection of essays (something the author himself admits) that are loosely connected by the theme of

nonhumanism. The first chapter, in addition to setting out the 'unifying' theme, provides a very brief introduction to nonhuman theory and also gives a synopsis of the following chapters (two of which have been previously published).

Chapter 2, "Why the Risen Body Weeps," begins by introducing affect theory, a theory related to emotion and response, by noting various strands of the theory and its historical development. After this introduction, Moore goes on to apply the theory to the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1–44). Here he focuses particularly on the emotional reaction of Christ to the decaying flesh of Lazarus. In chapter 3, "The Messiah who Screamed," Moore again uses affect theory to examine Christ's cry at the time of his death as it is described in the Gospel of Mark. In chapters 4 and 5, Moore shifts away from affect theory and engages in queer temporality, a type of deconstructionist methodology, which he notes is a subset of queer theory (though in this instance "decoupl[ed]…from sex and sexuality" [63]). In chapter 4, "The Dog-Woman of Canaan," Moore combines queer temporality with "metaphoric animality" (11) to examine the story of Christ and the Canaanite woman found in Matthew's Gospel. In chapter 5, "The Inhuman Acts of the Holy Ghost," queer temporality is again leveraged and combined with affect theory to explore the role of the Holy Spirit in the narrative of Luke–Acts. In the final chapter, "What a (Sometimes Inanimate) Divine Animal and Plant Has to Teach Us about Being Human," Moore turns to "plant theory" (110) to explore the various 'nonhuman' representations of Christ in the Gospel of John.

The last chapter highlights Moore's attempt to show how Christ is depicted in nonhuman terms. Here, Moore notes various nonhuman descriptions of Christ (such as the "lamb of God" in John 1:29 and a "vine" in John 15:5) and argues that these show that Christ, in the Gospel of John, is in part conceived of in nonhuman terms. While I do not fully agree with Moore's conclusion, his argument that this challenges what it means to be human (i.e., humans are not animals) is well taken. At the very least, the description of Christ in nonhuman terms offers the reader a challenge to reconsider what it means to be human.

The monograph has a couple of strengths that are worth noting. First, Moore writes in a style that is both engaging and relatively easy to understand. This clarity is appreciated given the subject matter, a theoretical development of post-structuralism, which can be notoriously difficult for the uninitiated to understand. To be sure, there are some difficulties with clarity in the monograph, which I will address later, but these are issues of relevance and connectivity. Thus, overall, Moore does a good job of making the basic concepts of nonhuman theory understandable, which is a credit to his writing. Second, and more importantly, this book is valuable in that it is among the first to attempt to bring nonhuman theory to the biblical text and its stated goal of applying this to ecological issues is intriguing. Certainly, the attempt to "erode" the Enlightenment idea of what it means to be human (2), as chapter 6 does, holds great promise when it comes to approaching ecological issues, and Moore is to be commended for making the attempt. However, this raises the question of whether or not Moore is successful in doing what the book promises.

Unfortunately, I have found that most of the book is unable to live up to its promise. Here, I will limit my comments to a particular weakness, which I find emblematic of much of the book. Despite the strengths of Moore's monograph, his bringing nonhuman theory to the biblical text and his ability to clearly explain the basic concepts of nonhuman theory that he uses, Moore is unable (perhaps unwilling) to demonstrate how the core aspects of his book support his overall arguments and goals. The most glaring example of this is the lack of clarity in large parts of the book as to how Moore's essays *actually* apply to the 'ecological'; particularly, the "current global ecological crisis" (5) that is supposedly the catalyst for nonhuman theory and Moore's "encompassing concern" in the book (2). To be accurate, Moore claims that the ecological concern of the book is mostly "implicit" and only occasionally "explicit" (2). However, having read the book several times I can only surmise that an ecological concern is explicit exclusively in Moore's use of the word 'ecological' in the first chapter and the use of plant theory in the sixth chapter, while on the other hand his implicit concern is *so*

implicit that it is scarcely discernable. For instance, in the third chapter, when Moore notes Christ's 'affective' (emotional and physiological) reaction to the imperial war "machine" that is embodied in the crucifixion and the cross Moore does *nothing* to connect this observation to ecological concerns or issues. Indeed, I remain unconvinced that Christ's reaction here is somehow nonhuman, that is to say something different than our conceptions (Western or otherwise) of what it means to be human. This is not to say one cannot use nonhuman theory for ecological concerns and, in fact, I believe the theory holds great promise. However, I remain unconvinced that in the majority of the essays Moore has demonstrated the theory's connection to and value for ecological concerns.

Moore admits at the end of the first chapter that the current monograph is a more rightly understood as a "collection . . . of five essays" (14) and I affirm this claim. However, I disagree with Moore's assertion that the essays are "bound intimately to each other" by "theoretical and thematic threads" (14) (except, perhaps, through the *very* broad parameters of nonhuman theory and, I suppose, the New Testament). Rather, I simply affirm Moore's other observation that there is no "inexorably unfolding argument" in the collection of essays and therefore, "no formal conclusion" (14). Indeed, one can and should ask if there even is a point. Certainly, I believe that the current scientific evidence points to a growing ecological crisis (global warming, species extinction, etc.) and this has pushed some people of faith to turn to their holy scriptures for ethical and moral guidance. Though I do not think this is Moore's primary concern, I believe that nonhuman theory, as a critical theory, does hold some promise as a valuable lens by which people of faith can approach the biblical text. Handled carefully, I believe nonhuman theory can highlight aspects of the text that challenge our conceptions of what it means to be human and show our connections as creatures to the broader creation. However, in my evaluation, Moore has largely failed in his attempt to connect nonhuman theory to ecology, and given the urgency of the matter this is a shame. To be sure, there is value in the monograph, but this remains theoretical, and mostly in its capacity as an introduction to nonhuman theory,

affect theory, and other methodological idioms. But it remains incumbent upon the reader to make the connections, and most will probably be uninterested in doing this. In terms of the book's claim to contribute *meaningfully* to ecological concerns all I can say is, "buyer beware the label."

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