
A substantial collection of essays at the intersection of philosophy, theology, and ecology, Ecospirit is a welcome addition to the growing stream of publications on religion and the environment. First presented at a conference at Drew University in September 2006 entitled “Ground for Hope,” the essays variously seek to “ground” theology, philosophy, and ethics “in the earth.” The book’s editors, Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller, describe both the conference and edited volume as transdisciplinary, ecumenically pluralist, and concerned with both theory and practice. Collectively, the authors’ efforts to bridge the divide between “ground” (matter, earth) and “spirit” (or thought) results in the creative, composite vision of “ecospirit” or what the editors term the book’s “ecosophical vision” (p. 12).

The volume begins with a brief introduction by Kearns and Keller, who provide a helpful framework and overarching vision for the twenty-nine entries that follow. The essays—not all of which I am able to mention here—are divided into six sections. The very different essays in Part I, entitled “Ecogrounds,” set the stage for the rest of the volume by foregrounding certain approaches, ideas, goals, and concerns that reappear in subsequent articles. Jay McDaniel introduces the themes of ecotheology, process thought, and ecotheological embodiment. Catherine Keller initiates the volume’s ecological engagement with postmodern theory, while Rosemary Radford Ruether highlights the contributions of ecofeminism. In an especially compelling article, Anna Peterson draws long-overdue attention to the complex and understudied relationship between people’s stated ecological values on the one hand and their actual behaviors on the other.

The essays in Part II, “Econatures,” analyze issues at the junctures between theology, philosophy, science, and politics. Laurel Kearns, for example, offers an illuminating analysis of the so-called “faith versus science” debate on global warming, while Glen Mazis intriguingly depicts humans, animals, and machines as engaged in a “fleshy dialogue” in the “shared surround.” This section also includes one of the book’s only articles on non-western religio-cultural traditions: John Grim’s interpretation of
indigenous place-based knowledge and “responsible lifeways.” Part III seeks to forge a middle path between poststructuralist theory on the one hand and ecological thought on the other, resulting in creative new hybrids such as David Wood’s concept of “econstruction” (a cross between ecology and deconstruction), which serves as the title for this section, and Luke Higgins’ “micropneumotology” of “spirit dust.” Drawing on both ecofeminism and process thought, the articles in Part IV deconstruct socially and ecologically pernicious theological doctrines and propose more life-sustaining renditions in their stead. For example, Mark Wallace and Sharon Betcher present “grounded” or “earthy” conceptions of the Holy Spirit, while Whitney Bauman exposes the imperialistic legacy of creatio ex nihilo. Lawrence Troster’s proposal of a specifically Jewish creation theology and Seung Gap Lee’s analysis of Christian eschatology in South Korea provide welcome variations to the ‘western’ and Christian emphases of the book as a whole.

Parts V and VI shift the focus somewhat from what might be called the eco-abstract to the eco-particular. Compared to the more theoretically and conceptually oriented essays of the previous sections, most of the articles at the end of the volume zero in on particular places, specific grassroots initiatives, and concrete ecospiritual practices. Part V, “Ecospaces,” emphasizes the importance of both social and ecological (or “ecosocial”) location and examines the interplay between religion, culture, nature, and politics in specific places. This section includes Marion Grau’s insightful analysis of competing sacramental entities in the Arctic (caribou and oil) and Daniel Spencer’s compelling proposal for a practice-based ethic of ecological restoration. The book ends with five very different entries under the category, “Ecohopes.” Mary Evelyn Tucker cites the Earth Charter initiative as a positive step in transitioning to “a planetary civilization,” while Fletcher Harper offers a more localized example of a grassroots interfaith environmental initiative in New Jersey. Two collaborative “ecoliturgies” and a poem by Karen Baker Fletcher conclude the volume.

Fortunately, a number of commonalities help hold together the numerous, broad-ranging essays of Ecospirit. These commonalities constitute what I see as the main contributions the volume as a whole makes to the interdisciplinary field of religion and ecology. First, despite Grim’s and Troster’s contributions, the book is located clearly within the Christian religious and ‘western’ philosophical traditions and thus promises to make