

The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology. David G. Horrell, London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2010. 161 pages. ISBN 0-978-1845536220.

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In his famous article on the causes of environmental degradation, Lynn White Jr. said that the environment couldn't be saved by advancements in technology alone. What was needed was either the adoption of a new religion or the modification of an old one that could provide the necessary motivation to change human behavior. Not wanting to jettison Christianity, Horrell believes that its reading of Scripture can be modified from its traditional anthropocentric and dominionist interpretation to a more environmentally friendly one. This text sets forth his findings regarding the extent our reading of Scripture can be modified.

Part 1 provides readers with intellectual landscape that brings the issue of the environment and scriptural interpretation to the forefront. In chapter 1, Horrell makes the case that the environment is degrading and that human activity is the cause. The following chapter reviews various hermeneutical approaches to the bible. Horrell designates readings of the bible that seek to uncover the hidden pro-environmental information there as "recovery." The readings of those who reject the bible as hopelessly dominionist and anti-environmental are called "resistance." He concludes by arguing that these opposed readings exist because the interpreters began at different places.

Part 2, comprising the bulk of the book's content, considers the key passages marshaled by environmentalist readings of scripture. Horrell carefully summarizes the pro-environmentalist readings and relates his assessment of the relative certainty or strength of the interpretation. Time and time again, Horrell explains that the pro-environmental readings are less convincing than the eco-theologians claim. Too often, the Scripture is "ambivalent" towards valuing nature.

In Part 3, Horrell sets forth his ideas on how Scripture can be read to better support an environmentalist worldview. Likening the problem to the controversies over slavery and the role of women, Horrell believes the answer lies in choosing some passages to be the lens by which all other passages are interpreted and/or marginalized. This idea is similar to Martin Luther's use of grace as the lens to interpret all other Scripture. Horrell avoids a simplistic approach as he clearly states that this hermeneutical tactic should be done openly and consciously and with due respect to, 1) a critical reading of the text, 2) church tradition, and 3) contemporary science. While doubting that

Scripture can fully be reappraised to pure environmental ideals, he does think that appropriate re-readings will help reorient our anthropocentrism to embrace a less arrogant attitude regarding humanity's role in the world.

Evangelical will be disappointed, though not surprised, by Horrell's almost complete neglect of an Evangelical insights on the passages he considered. Though Grudem, Beisner, and Wright received passing mention, his failure to read more broadly forced him to see contradicting voices in Scripture when there was no reason to do so. It never seemed to occur to him adopting a critical approach should include being critical of the assumptions of higher criticism. Horrell should have been more critical of the Armageddon-like claims made by environmentalists. In addition, he failed to consider the possibility that anthropocentric readings of Scripture can result in environmental protection. Note that Scripture claims that God made the earth for us but that we must also remember that we are not its owner (Gen 1; Psa 8). Nevertheless, this text is worthwhile for anyone interested in learning how eco-theologians use scripture and how those uses are evaluated by a non-evangelical. Horrell is to be commended for at least paying enough attention to Scripture to recognize that the readings made by eco-theologians are ambiguous at best.