

## Book Review

Lisa E. Dahill and James B. Martin-Schramm (editors).  
*Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril*  
Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016. 283pp. \$36.00.

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*Eco-Reformation* is a collection of articles by sixteen Lutheran theologians (ECLA) that discuss the integration of Christian faith with earth-care. These authors believe that Christians, as part of their Christian duty, must respond to the environmental challenges caused by climate change, rampant capitalism and its commodification of nature and other expressions of social and environmental injustice. The articles are not grouped into sub-sections but there does appear to be a tendency to move from the theological foundations to the practical outworking of integrating ecological concerns into the ministerial and sacramental life of the church.

A key goal of the writers was to reorient readers from a mechanistic and utilitarian approach to nature to a more wholistic and communal approach. Readers are repeatedly challenged to see God closely connected with the earth and nature (57). The book concludes by stating 95 Theses for a reformation on behalf of the environment.

Like many compendiums addressing complex issues, the content focusses on generalities and personal attitudes; only rarely prescribing concrete steps to redress the environmental catastrophe they believe is coming. Readers will benefit from some useful distinctions and terms that can help them think in a more nuanced way about human-

theological-environmental relations. Two articles deserve specific mention. First, Martin-Schramm's article "Bonhoeffer, the Church, and the Climate Question" uses Bonhoeffer's ideas on church-state relations to provide a decision rubric to help determine when Christians are justified in acting against the divinely instituted government. In this regard, the chapter provides a corrective to the political passivity that may flow from Luther's doctrine of the two swords. Though I do not agree with the author that climate change justifies militant social action by Christians, readers will benefit from engaging with this chapter.

Robert C. Saler's article, "Joseph Sittler and the Ecological Role of Cultural Critique" is the second article deserving special attention. This piece provided an intellectual framework to discuss the morality of environmental change, by asking "When does humanity's use of nature, and its resultant change, become abuse of nature? The question is critical because too often environmentalists oppose change (e.g. harvesting forests) that does not harm the ecosystem. Regrettably, the article does not resolve how to distinguish use from abuse, but I commend it for at least raising it.

I was disappointed with the authors' decision to hold the West's use of capitalism and resultant desacralization of nature as the key problem behind our environmental issues while ignoring more pressing issues such as third-world monetary corruption, support

for terrorism and funding the development of nuclear weapons. I suspect the environment would do better if these leaders funded agriculture and water wells rather than their bank accounts. The authors also never seemed to ask the question that if a sacral view of nature is so critical, then why is India not a paragon of environmental beauty?

My greatest criticism, however, concerns the authors' failure to take biblical teaching seriously enough. Scripture describes God using environmental catastrophes to punish nations that violated His law. Yet, the authors scarcely mention how disobedience of God's commands can negatively damage the environment. For example, not one author noted how our staggering divorce rate harms the environment through increased resource use of transitioning from one homestead to two (cf. Yu and Liu, 2007). Don't personal ethics matter as much as structural ones?

In sum, the authors should have helped readers navigate the complexities of environmental stewardship. Unfortunately, they simply echoed the mantras of the anti-Christian environmental movement instead.