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Book Review: Making Peace with the Earth: Action and Advocacy for Climate Justice

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Grace Ji-Sun Kim (ed.), *Making Peace with the Earth: Action and Advocacy for Climate Justice*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches Publications, 2016. (Paperback). 297 pp., \$25.00. ISBN 978-2-8254-1668-6.

As the field of ecotheology grows, I often find myself asking the question, “That sounds good in theory, but how does it work in practice?” Does the lofty theoretical work of ecotheologians translate to the local level, and if so, how are local faith communities implementing environmental concerns as an expression of their faith? Therefore, I noted the publication of *Making Peace with the Earth: Action and Advocacy for Climate Justice*, edited by Grace Ji-Sun Kim, with anticipation. A publication of the World Council of Churches, this volume offers a range of global theological perspectives, case studies, and activist stories which provide insight into what it is like to put climate justice into practice in faith communities. Most of the work focuses on Christian expressions of ecotheology. The final three chapters address working in interfaith partnerships, as well as the basis for climate activism through indigenous and Hindi spiritualities in India. Several other chapters also include sections on interfaith projects.

In addition to its focus on practicality, I appreciated this text for its willingness to showcase voices from around the globe and the accessibility of prose in many of the chapters. While I wanted to hear even more stories of congregations or faith-based initiatives that are effectively putting ecotheology into practice, this volume offers a good starting place for hearing a range of voices and methodologies.

The text is arranged into three sections: “Churches Respond to Climate Change,” “Eco-Theology and Climate Justice,” and “Interfaith Initiatives and Care for the Earth.” The first section includes a case study on the early adoption of eco-friendly practices by the Church of Sweden (Henrik Grape), a history of the work of the Eco-Congregation movement in the Church of Scotland (Adrian Shaw), and a focus on the church “Environmental Diploma” and carbon calculator created by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (Ilkka Sipiläinen). These helpful chapters offer a timeline of implementation of their projects, highlights of their particular efforts, and sections reporting what they learned through the process. These chapters could serve as encouragement for faith communities just getting started in environmental awareness, helping to recognize they are not alone, that the process takes a while, and that good progress can be made through concerted effort at the local level.

Other chapters in the first section provide more targeted data. One addresses the importance of environmental awareness by medical personnel (Larisa Skuratovskaya, Nino Zhvania, and L. Cornelius). Not particularly related to people of faith, Skuratovskaya, Zhvania, and Cornelius’s chapter was interesting

nonetheless. Another chapter details a movement of youth for climate justice that emerged out of the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (Pawel Pustelnik). While interesting, Pustelnik's story would be difficult to pattern another effort after due to the particularity of its context and set of circumstances. Issues related to justice and the environment in Palestine formed the focus for a contribution by Simon I. Awad. The ideas and experiences of the organization discussed by Awad could serve as a helpful model for faith-based international justice groups interested in incorporating an environmental dimension in their work. The final chapter in section one, "One Earth, One Sea, One Sky" (Joy Kennedy), offers a succinct and insightful explanation of why eco-justice is important in our time, weaving together biblical references and the current state of the environment alongside a subtle but compelling recognition of human interconnectedness with the Earth, sea, and sky, and the human suffering resulting from misuse of natural resources. The brevity and accessibility of this chapter makes it a useful entry point into the ecotheological conversation for individuals unaware of this field.

Part two, "Eco-Theology and Climate Justice," offers some background into the way the World Council of Churches became involved in climate change advocacy, including Western expressions of Christianity as well as the important voice of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Eastern Orthodox Church (Elias Crisostomo Abramides). Jochen Motte explores the interchange of ideas, resources, and awareness among churches in the United Evangelical Mission, with member churches in Africa, Asia, and Germany. Motte provides some interesting food for thought regarding awareness of consumer practices in "first world" countries and their impact on people in other parts of the world such as palm oil production. Motte problematizes advocacy from "first world" nations to try to get impoverished people to act in more environmentally friendly ways, such as sending high efficiency pellet stoves so people do not have to rely on firewood for fuel, which contributes to the destruction of endangered species' habitat. While this sort of action is helpful in a way, it can also be a way for "first world" Christians to ignore the necessity of changing their own practice, placing the blame on other cultures.

An interesting contribution from Lucas Andrianos reviews and compares models of sustainable development, measuring policies and strategies, as well as providing indices for monitoring outcomes and assessing levels of greed. Further chapters in section two provide insight into shifting the perspective and actions of "first world" Christians toward climate justice (Richard Brand, Katja Breyer, Klaus Breyer, and Eva-Maria Reinwald), ideas for incorporating environmental awareness into religious education and campuses (Raphael Sartorius and Dietrich Werner), and two excellent chapters offering postcolonial

expressions of ecotheology from Korean authors (Jea Sophia Oh and Meehyun Chung). A brief chapter on “Art for Climate Justice” draws on the artwork of the cover artist, Lucy D’Souza-Krone.

The third section, “Interfaith Initiatives and Care for the Earth,” highlights interfaith work on climate justice, beginning with a chapter by Fletcher Harper detailing the reasons for faith-based advocacy for fossil fuel divestment. Harper peppers this chapter with examples of faith communities working on this issue. Marina Ngursanzgzele Behera bring to light the impacts of tourism in North-east India (even so-called eco-tourism) on indigenous communities and the land they steward. A final chapter explores Hindu theology, the current context of environmental degradation and climate change in India, and examples of faith-based environmental action from a Hindu framework (Siddhartha). This chapter incorporates imagery and stories from Hindu sacred scriptures, and invites all to participate in the dance of Krishna, “or the divine force, ... present in the millions of people who are consciously trying to live differently, not succumbing to the deceit of consumer society” (233).

A fascinating epilogue by Ernst Conradie summarizes the main themes of the volume, including what is not said. He offers the critique that, in attempting to come together around core values that can be shared broadly, the Christian church risks “self-secularization,” missing its particular purpose of stating environmental care from an uniquely Christian perspective (239). He focuses on the need for prophetic hope in the face of paralysis and despair around climate change and injustice: though “economic inequalities are so intractable,” he yet calls for the worldwide community of Christians to “rediscover such hope as a source of inspiration for an environmental praxis, ethos and spirituality” (243).

A member of a peace church myself, and with the knowledge that Ji-Sun Kim teaches at a Quaker seminary (Earlham School of Religion), I felt this volume missed an opportunity of connecting the considerable literature and practice in fields of nonviolent theology in combination with climate justice, since the book focuses its title on peace and justice. The text also did not include much in the way of environmental justice and environmental racism, and acknowledgement of the Christian community’s involvement in environmental justice in both positive and negative ways. While I appreciated the perspectives of these theologians and practitioners, I would like to see future work that draws on the knowledge of conflict resolution and transformation, experiences and activism around environmental racism, and explications of non-Western expressions of justice. Awareness of these literatures and advocacy initiatives may help communities of faith imagine how they might engage in holistic action and advocacy for climate justice that does not simply offer a façade of “greenness” to those churches that can afford to retrofit their buildings. What might interra-

cial or cross-cultural climate justice look like, and how can Christians—often operating from a position of privilege—form true partnerships of solidarity in these endeavors? These questions are not adequately addressed in the present volume, leaving fertile soil available for future compilations.

In the preface to the volume, Ji-Sun Kim likens this project to the *madang* in a traditional Korean home, an open-air courtyard that serves as a family room and gathering space for shared life. The eclectic and energetic mix of celebration, sorrow, discussion, and range of passions present in *Making Peace with the Earth* lends itself well to the *madang* image. Ji-Sun Kim states: “It is my hope that readers will create *madangs* around the world: linked-together places for the worldwide church to work together to make changes in the world that will help lead toward peace on earth. The *madang* is open; let us come in, converse, envision, and reimagine.” This book provides the beginnings of that conversation, and invites us to carry the discourse into our own contexts and communities.

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