

Lamp, Jeffrey S. *The Greening of Hebrews? Ecological Readings in the Letter to the Hebrews*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012. 134 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1610976558.

Reviewed by David A. Ackerman, Pastor, Church of the Nazarene, Buhl, Idaho, Adjunct Professor, Nazarene Theological Seminary (Kansas City, MO), Nazarene Bible College (Colorado Springs, CO), Northwest Nazarene University (Nampa, ID), and Indiana Wesleyan University (Marion, IN).

The church and its theologians have been slow to address the increasing environmental crises adversely affecting the health and welfare of humans and other-than-human creation. More serious study is being devoted to the intersection of the Bible, theology, and ecology. Jeffrey Lamp has approached this challenge with a creative reading of the Book of Hebrews. Lamp's basic thesis is that the voice of earth has been suppressed in Hebrews because of the Christological and anthropological bias of the author. Lamp builds his ecological hermeneutics in reflection of his dialogue with the Consultation on Ecological Hermeneutics of the Society of Biblical Literature.

Lamp's method is defined by three criteria. The criterion of suspicion attempts to hear the voice of earth behind the author's bias. Lamp's goal is for readers to become more sensitive to the prophet voice of creation. It is not so much what Hebrews says about creation but what it does not say. The criterion of identification builds on the author's emphasis on the superiority of the Son. The incarnation of the Son allows humans to identify with creation because the Son took upon himself the stuff of earth. Through the Son, humans and earth are brought together. The resurrection of the Son marked the final redemption of the physical. The ascension of the Son placed something of earth in heaven and anticipates heaven and earth joining as the dwelling place of God and humans. Finally, the criterion of retrieval examines earth as an object of divine care and concern in its own right. Earth is co-beneficiary with humans of God's redemptive work through the Son. Earth calls humans to actualize new creation in the present anticipation of eschatological fulfillment.

The anthropological bias of the author is apparent in the opening verses in 1:2-3a. Because humans are the pinnacle of God's creation, the voice of the rest of creation is suppressed and ignored. In chapter two, Lamp lays the groundwork for "creational Christology" that posits that the Son's incarnation bridges humans with earth, brings their experiences together, and shows the worth of both. The Son's suffering draws our

attention to the suffering of creation and that we share in its pain. The Son's redemptive work through death shows that the stuff from which humans are made is an object of redemption. The way to honor the Son is to care for all that is part of the Son's redemptive mission.

In chapter three, Lamp explores the struggle of animals behind the atonement language in 9:11-10:18. Animals served as the "fuel for the engine of the sacrificial cult" (24) in the human drama of sin and redemption because their sacrifice was not adequate for salvation. Animals participate in Christ's redemptive work because they no longer must lose their lives for human benefit. Because animals were created from the ground (Gen. 2:19), they share in the same corporeality as the incarnated Son. Both animals and humans share in the "breath of life" that makes them living beings (Gen. 2:7; 6:17; 7:15, 22).

Traditionally, the promise of rest (4:1-11) has been spiritualized or restricted to possession of the literal land, such as with dispensationalism, that the land serves only to produce the benefit rest for people. In chapter four, Lamp argues that the Sabbath provides the context for care for the land. The land belongs to God and was granted in trust to the Israelites to be cared for in Sabbath economy. The land was connected with its inhabitants (Exod. 23:10-12; Lev. 26:3-45). The cycle of rest for the people also brought rest for the land. Violating Sabbath led to the abuse of the land. If people rejected God and God's laws, the land would not produce and the people would lose the land. Thus, human sinfulness disrupts the wellbeing of the land. The only way for the land to be restored would be the expulsion (exile) of the perpetrators. In the bias of the author, the Sabbath rest of God is found in the Son, and this rest should also include the land.

In chapter five, Lamp builds on J. Moltmann's idea of "immanent transcendence," that God is distinct from creation but present within it through the Spirit. Hebrews contains few references to the Spirit (2:4; 3:7; 6:4; 9:8; 10:15), and these largely support the development of Christology, what Moltmann calls the "Spirit of Christ." The Spirit calls for the community to enter into the Sabbath rest provided by the Son (4:1-11). Lamp argues that the reference to the "eternal spirit" (9:14) refers to the Holy Spirit in line with the author's bias to set off the temporalness of the old covenant with the eternity of the new covenant inaugurated by the Son. The Son offered himself as the perfect sacrifice through the eternal Spirit, thus connecting the Spirit with the materiality shared by humans and earth. Through the Spirit, God enters into the struggles, victories, and sufferings of creation and moves it towards new creation, which brings humans and creation together in the eschatological kingdom of God. The

Spirit empowers believers to participate now in the liberation of the earth from its corruption.

In chapter six, Lamp critiques reading 11:16 with an escapist eschatology of the removal of the faithful and the destruction of the present order. The author spiritualizes earthly realities into corresponding heavenly ones. This view could result in indifference in caring for creation and justification for its exploitation. Lamp builds on N. T. Wright's view that the resurrection of Jesus anticipates the final coming together of heaven and earth. The Son exercises sovereignty over creation now through the Spirit and the Eucharist. His resurrection connects the present order to its redemption and transformation in the future (12:25-29). Humans and creation are connected presently and are both destined for better things. The encroaching kingdom brings both together in the present. We can evidence this eschatology in the present by caring for creation.

Building on the work of Denis Edwards, Lamp argues in chapter seven that the Eucharist (implied in 13:10) and Melchizedek's offering of bread and wine (7:1-10) connect humans and creation. (1) Eucharist lifts up all creation to God and brings humans into relation with creation. (2) Eucharist is a living memory of creation and redemption. (3) It is the sacrament of the cosmic and risen Christ who is the beginning of transformation of the whole cosmos. (4) Eucharist is a participation with all of God's creatures in the communion of the Trinity. (5) The memory of the cross brings solidarity of victims, one of which includes nature.

Hebrews 2:1-4 contrasts the eternal Son with the transitory nature of angels and creation. Lamp argues in chapter eight that this subordination by the author has the unintended effect of making creation a casualty of an escapist eschatology. The Son as the superior wisdom and direct revelation from God was the agent of creation and continually sustains it. Through the Son, humans are enabled to identify with creation and to come to know more about God through the indirect revelation of the Son's wisdom. Psalm 104 expresses God's passion and joy for creation. Destroying natural habitats contributes to the diminishing of God's joy. Earth calls humans to be doxological intercessors on its behalf. The Son who brought the world into being and sustains it provides for its ultimate redemption.

Lamp has challenged a casual and traditional reading of Hebrews. The suppressed voice of creation is allowed to speak through the author's Christology and rhetoric. Those who want to better understand Hebrews and would like resources for the ecological dialogue would find this book a gold mine for exploration and an example of creative exegesis.



Copyright and Use:

**As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.**

**No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.**

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.