

the issue in his book. A consideration of mutilation, and whether the Church had a role in softening earlier, harsher methods of punishment, would have been a fine discussion.

At one point the author shows the underlying idea of certain canons to be that “civilization is built in cities, and must be protected by systems; that Christianity is in the business of building civilization in real-world political communities, not in deserts on the fringes of cities; and that such a civilization can only be sustained by law and order” (185). This idea he bluntly affirms in the *Postludium* of the book: “Christianity endorses the rule of law. It does not have a grudging acceptance of law” (275). For the Byzantines and the Eastern Church, law was an ethical construct “fundamentally concerned with the moral structuring of society” (274). Based on the equality of everyone before the throne of God, taking Scripture as its charter, and preferring a conciliar and ecumenical model to a monarchical one, the early church was able to soften the harshness of late Roman and Byzantine law, transforming an instrument of retribution into one of correction, and raising a persecuted minority into a symphonic partner for the ordering of society. These are ideas that retain their interest and their value today, and for persons interested in them, McGuckin’s book is an excellent place to begin.

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Restored to Earth: Christianity, Environmental Ethics, and Ecological Restoration

Gretel Van Wieren

Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013 (208 pages)

Restored to Earth is a revision of Gretel Van Wieren’s doctoral dissertation from Yale University. The thesis of her book is that “fundamental, significant, and lasting environmental change will occur only when avenues are created for people to physically, intellectually, socially and spiritually connect with the natural world” (viii). In this volume, Van Wieren presents a case for community involvement in efforts to bring about ecological restoration, arguing that it is spiritually essential for humans to alter the way they interact with the environment.

This volume is divided into two parts. The first part consists of four chapters focusing on the ethical basis for restoring the environment. Van Wieren begins with a helpful explanation of different types of ecological restoration. She outlines many of the approaches to environmental ethics that focus on restoration, including religious, scientific, and philosophical approaches. In this introductory chapter, Van Wieren also provides a definition of the relationship between Christianity and ecological restoration. The second chapter moves into a discussion of perspectives on nature, relating these perspectives to the methods of restoration that they drive. Van Wieren recognizes that ideas have consequences and demonstrates the connection between approaches to ecological restoration

and their ideological sources. Chapter 3 focuses on the spirituality of human participation in environmental action. In her argument, Van Wieren emphasizes personal spiritual fulfillment, in the form of a sense of connection to God, through demonstration of neighbor love and ecological restoration efforts. Her claim is that environmental activism should be interpreted through and conducted for the subjective, spiritual experiences achieved through participation. The fourth chapter moves beyond individual impetus for environmental activism to outline communal attitudes and values that need to be developed to encourage broader participation in restoration activities. These values include “(1) cohabitation, (2) accommodating variety, (3) promoting wildness, (4) sensuousness, (5) creating publicity, and (6) celebrating” (129–30). According to Van Wieren, inculcating these values in a community is necessary to develop “restorative communities of place” (134).

The second part has two chapters; both focus on contemporary interpretations of ecological restoration. Chapter 5 outlines the elements of a spiritual approach to environmental activism that can be incorporated alongside an explicitly scientific approach. Van Wieren attempts to reconcile the subjective, spiritual emphasis in her restoration ethics with a scientific approach in order to provide a middle way between the two widely disparate environmental ethics. For Van Wieren, scientific methods can have a personal, spiritual interpretation. The sixth chapter calls for “re-storying” the earth. Van Wieren’s prescription is a reinterpretation of ecological restoration through religious terminology. According to Van Wieren, this spiritual, narrative approach to environmental activism encourages a spiritual connection with nature. Van Wieren’s thesis requires acceptance of this connection between an invented narrative and lasting environmental activism.

Van Wieren is partially successful in demonstrating her thesis. She solidly proves that creating a spiritual narrative around environmental restoration will lead to lasting participation in restorative activism. However, Van Wieren fails to show that a lasting commitment to ecological restoration requires a narrative connection to the creation. Additionally, the spirituality that Van Wieren advocates seems to be a version of pantheism that finds a connection to God in nature through restoration activities rather than through direct communion with God. Contributing to this, Van Wieren conflates a sacramental approach to environmentalism with pantheism (78). While a healthy sacramental approach to environmentalism finds spiritual benefit in ecological restoration due to the act of worship of God expressed through restoration of his creation, Van Wieren’s pantheistic approach argues for spiritual benefit due to the connection with the “divine presence in the world” (79). This approach to religious environmentalism is unhealthy because it confuses the creation with the creator and disrupts a traditionally orthodox understanding of the horizontal relationship between humans and nature.

Van Wieren is also very critical of an ethical approach that emphasizes the ongoing and future redemption of the created order because of Christ’s work on the cross. The basis for her rejection of redemption as a theological understanding of environmentalism is twofold. First, she demonstrates a desire to focus on human action over against divine action in the restoration of the created order. For Van Wieren, this allows for a more scientific approach to ecological restoration than the religious terminology of redemption

permits. Second, though Van Wieren accepts the necessity of redemption for human sin, she ignores the disordering of creation that is recorded in Genesis 3. According to Van Wieren, the purpose of ecological restoration is “moral restitution” for “ill-conceived human acts ... but not divine redemption” (176). The rejection of an eschatological approach to environmentalism ignores some of the clear teaching of Scripture that advocates for a coming divine renewal of creation (e.g., Rom. 8:18–25). Van Wieren’s approach may more appropriately be labeled “spiritual” or “religious” than uniquely “Christian.”

Despite some weaknesses, this book adds to the ongoing conversation about environmental ethics in several important ways. In *Restored to Earth*, Van Wieren provides an excellent overview of multiple approaches to environmental ethics, particularly those that have a less-theological emphasis. Her analysis of the field in the first chapter is a helpful introduction to a broad and variegated field of scholarship. Additionally, Van Wieren is justly and incisively critical of the emphasis on re-creation of nature. She helpfully notes that there can be no absolute determination of what the restored ecosystems should look like. Van Wieren recognizes that ecosystems change, and that restoration should be scientifically and realistically informed (69–71). She also argues for taking justice to human populations into consideration alongside justice for the environment (123–26).

Overall, *Restored to Earth*, is a helpful overview of contemporary approaches to ecological restoration. To date it is the best book on religious approaches to ecological restoration and can be commended on that basis.

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