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*Inspired Sustainability: Planting Seeds for Action* by Erin Lothes Biviano. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016. xvi + 286pp. ISBN: 978-62698-163- 8

Researched and drafted by Erin Lothes Biviano, while she held an Earth Institute fellowship under the direction of Jeffrey Sachs at Columbia University from 2007-2010, *Inspired Sustainability* offers a rare empirical look at how ordinary people of faith engage ecological issues in the context of their religious congregations. While most books dealing with religion and ecology focus on doctrines along with their potential implications and promises for forming integrated worldviews, in the present volume Biviano reports qualitative data about the views and opinions held by individuals in local-level faith communities. Her sample is drawn from people identifying with a variety of religious traditions including Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity of various denominations, Islam, and Judaism. Biviano's focus is on the US context with the core of her research participants recruited in New Jersey, where she is now an assistant professor of theology at the College of St. Elizabeth. She also lists atheist and agnostic interviewees but they are not featured in the present monograph.

Biviano coded her data to examine seven recurring themes related to religiously flavoured sustainability education and action initiatives, including how they are inspired and maintained: (1) scientific literacy, that is, the importance of insights from the natural sciences for motivating faith-based ecological consciousness; (2) awareness of global connectivity, which perceives that intertwined relationships permeate the Earth community; (3) commitment to social justice, which flows from faith-inspired commitments to human equality; (4) reverence for creation, which, for many of Biviano's research participants, arose out of a conviction that nature was intrinsically spiritual, (5) interfaith connections, meaning that ecology transcends religious boundaries; (6) expanding religious visions as they enlarged the research participants' understandings of categories like God, neighbour and self, often putting them in a cosmological context; and (7) independent thinking, that is, a refusal to accept the herd mentality so often associated with religiosity by secular academics. With the aid of these themes, Biviano refines her 'green blues' theory, which she variously explains as "a mélange of ambiguity, conviction, discouragement, and persistence regarding sustainable living" (p. xxi) and "a religious dimension of grief for the environment that experienced the diminution of creation's beauty as a spiritual loss" (p. 50). However, her green blues theory is also about practical theologies that work, which, even if they are not wholly successful in overcoming the malaise of presently existing un-sustainability, nonetheless show awareness of contemporary challenges for the Earth community and support, propose, and sometimes even enact alternatives.

It is people with socio-ecological perspective and location that feature in the interview data in this monograph. Indeed, most of the people interviewed are involved with committees at their places of worship that were formed to engage sustainability issues. This is an interesting focus, allowing Biviano to question an assumed status quo in which most religious traditions active in the United States of America can affirm the value of the natural world without moving toward transformative ecological action.. Further, Biviano maps important insights

regarding multiple ways that people on the ground and in the proverbial pews both care about and engage in this work. It is significant from a community-engaged perspective that those voices are given prominence in this work. Indeed, Biviano admits that she had wished she could simply publish the transcripts of her interviews because they are so rich. As a result of her focus, readers learn that Biviano's respondents sensed that if religious leaders actually spoke about ecological issues from the pulpit in the US context, they would endanger their jobs. The response of these concerned lay people was to engage directly in ecological issues without pastoral leadership; this becomes the most prominent theme in the book.

Other interesting points that can be gained from reading this monograph include the impression that evangelical Christians cannot speak effectively about global climate change due to a perceived partisan understanding of that socio-ecological challenge, but can circumvent that partisan framing of the issue by speaking about the biblical basis for creation care. Another prominent theme is the affirmation of the importance of growing food to raise ecological consciousness, physically connect with the soil, and provide a basis for action. When addressing that area, Biviano memorably relates an encounter with a Quaker woman who grew all her own food, employing a freezer and a canner to meet her nutritional needs, using what fruitfulness of the Earth is available in a suburban New Jersey yard. There is also a poignant reflection on the value of considering Earth as mother for fostering ecological action. A recurring theme is also the importance of naming the effects of ecological degradation on people living in poverty and otherwise marginalized in order to activate a sense of religious moral duty to reclaim the dignity of the human person, which is a central belief of the faith communities engaged in this research.

At times Biviano's reporting is interspersed with theological reflection, including the thought of the prominent twentieth-century theologian Paul Ricoeur, the ideas of the storied Orthodox Rabbi Joseph D. Soloveitchik, Buddhist articulations of interbeing, the example of the Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I, and the Catholic Social Teaching of recent popes. Yet, the volume still lacks theological weight, a problem compounded by what seems to be a breakdown of good copyediting so that quotes are not always properly introduced or redacted, leaving the reader to struggle to navigate information like names and events that are not situated. There are also a notable number of instances of unacknowledged verbatim repetition of very distinctive quotes, sometimes only a few pages apart. The result is a style that seems episodic even within a single page. The overall impression is that the book is a report, not an analysis and synthesis. This is regrettable given the importance of bringing an engaged research methodology to bear on the wicked problem of the insight-action gap in ecological action, and the potential that Biviano's green blues theory has to aid in that effort. . Nonetheless, if only as a potential motivator for transformative action and for its insight into lay people's ecological motivations and actions, *Inspired Sustainability* remains a valuable read.

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