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THE EARTH BIBLE, VOLUME ONE: READINGS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EARTH. Edited by Norman C. Habel. Berea, OH: The Pilgrim Press/United Church Press, 2001, 280 pp., ISBN: 0-8298-1406-X, $28.00.

VOLUME TWO: THE EARTH STORY IN GENESIS. Edited by Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst. Berea, OH: The Pilgrim Press/United Church Press, 2001, 236 pp. ISBN: 0-8298-1407-8, $28.00.

Having read the first two volumes of The Earth Bible, Readings from the Perspective of Earth, and The Earth Story in Genesis, I believe the editors might well have missed the primary use most religious professionals would make of this series, namely, adult religious education. These are not the kinds of books that will captivate the reader, and draw one to read them straight through. The styles are too varied and the focus too dryly intellectual for most readers to pick up these volumes as
principal reading material. While several of the essays work as exegetical background material for sermon preparation, not all do. They would make excellent fodder for adult Bible studies or discussion groups. While most leaders will easily be able to develop lesson plans based on the material, a companion discussion guide would be a good secondary resource in the use of this series.

“Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” the second essay in volume one, offers a good overview for beginning a class based on this series. Most leaders would probably pick and choose other essays based on the make up and interests of their group.

Vicky Balabanski’s essay, “An Earth Bible Reading of the Lord’s Prayer,” in volume one, is one of the essays that would be an excellent resource for a sermon or sermon series. Both the outline of her essay and the thoughts contained within it, give rise to ideas for the writing of a sermon or sermons based on the prayer. As Balansky puts it, “In terms of our ecojustice perspective, these imperatives (of the prayer) do not allow us to assume that it is either God or humanity who will effect these actions alone, but rather that the creator and the created are working together in a further creative act—namely breaking down the distinction between heaven and earth” (p. 156, vol. 1, The Earth Bible).

Balabanski’s work can be used to bring an understanding of the text to those to whom one preaches, and it can be used to bring challenges from the text that directly affect their lives.

Carol Newsom’s essay, “Common Ground: An Ecological Reading of Genesis 2-3,” makes heavy references to Daniel Quinn’s novel, Ishmael, and would be of interest to the many religious groups who have read and discussed that book. But, even for those who have not read the novel, this essay’s treatment of the story of humanity’s “fall,” and Newsom’s take on what it is about human beings that changes with the eating of the apple prepares the way for strong discussion on the nature of humanity.

A few of the essays in The Earth Bible Series are quite critical of the biblical texts they examine. The texts are noted as contributing to the mindset which has led to earth’s devastation and abuse. These essays may provoke the most debate in some study groups. Keith Carley, in his essay, “Psalm 8: An Apology for Domination,” writes, “It might be said then that Psalm 8 is a classic expression of the dominating male ego, reinforced by the psalmist’s projection of this assertion of power as the will of Israel’s transcendent God.” Groups using this series should be open to hearing from writers who read some texts with a very critical eye.
One essay in each of volumes one and two looks at a biblical text from the view of a person from an indigenous culture. ‘‘Burning the Land:’ An Ecojustice Reading of Hebrews 6:7-8” by Lutisone Salevao in volume one and “The Voice of the Earth: An Indigenous Reading of Genesis 9” by Wali Fejo in volume two provide a Samoan and a native Australian perspective on these texts. These essays may lead to interesting discussions on how our own cultural assumptions influence our reading of scripture.

Volumes three through five have not been reviewed, but from my reading of volumes one and two of The Earth Bible will be a worthwhile resource for those who would like to lead Bible studies or discussion groups in seeing biblical texts from an ecological viewpoint.

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THE PAPACY: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA. Three Volume Set. Philippe Levillain, General Editor. Universite de Paris X, Routledge: New York and London, 2002, 1780 pp., ISBN: 0-41-592228-3, $495.00, cloth. (Originally published as Dictionnaire historique de la papaute by Librarie Artheme Fayard, 1994.)

The Papacy: An Encyclopedia is a scholarly reference that belongs in research and public libraries, as well. These volumes should prove especially valuable, given the administrative handling of the crises in the Catholic Church today, be they legislative or theological matters of dispute. The Encyclopedia is intended for use in academic libraries, seminaries, religious institutes, and public libraries, and it will prove to be a valuable resource for scholars, students, religious leaders, and the interested general reader, (p. xv). The bulk of the text is a direct translation of the French edition. Some changes, however–additions, and updates–were necessary in order to make this edition appropriate for an English-speaking audience and to account for developments that have occurred in the seven years between publication of the two editions (p. xv).

This extraordinary work, “a historical dictionary of the papacy and not simply a biographical dictionary of the popes,” grew out of the
close observation of ‘little facts.’ Philippe Levillain is the General Editor, and John W. O’Malley, the editor of the English translation.

The contributors are scholars from Europe and North America, numbering over 200, listed by institutional affiliation on pages xxix-xxxiv. Entries are alphabetically arranged, as are the contents of the three volumes, from A (Abbreviator) to Z (Zouaves, Pontifical), p. vii-xiii.

The entries in the Encyclopedia deal with topics in depth; see, for example the articles on Americanism (p. 39ff), and Ecumenism (p. 518ff). Each essay-topic is supported by a bibliography. A general presentation of the problem/essay/topic is followed by further elaboration for the many-sidedness of each subject matter. No other volume that I have researched or seen measures up to this encyclopedia. Other volumes on the Papacy deal historically and developmentally with the Papacy, and in some cases contain extensive remarks and analyses; but they do not match the scholarly and intrinsic value that Levellain’s work brings to us.

Entries in the Encyclopedia include such varied topics as Ostpolitik, Papal States, Papism, Vatican Secret Archives, Ultramontanism, Reserved Cases and Causes. Gallicanism (p. 615f), for example, is explained as a “resistance to the absolutization of papal Primacy (a bold entry refers to another term this Encyclopedia) from the Middle Ages to Vatican I. Gallicanism comprised two essential components: 1. the autonomy of the political domain with regard to religion; 2. a constitutional limitation to the pope’s authority.” Discussion of this topic runs to several pages.

Rather than treating the Papacy in its historical development, this work offers biographical information about each pontiff, from Peter the Apostle to John Paul II, who is covered, in a seven-page essay. By contrast, the New Catholic Encyclopedia (McGraw-Hill, 1967, 18 volumes), presents the article on the Papacy (vol. 10) with its development and with the office of the pope, in four historical divisions: (1) the early period, to 590 (2) the medieval period (3) the Renaissance and early modern period, and (4) the modern period (1789-1965).

One can also consult the essay on Judaism (p. 870-880). This piece includes the fifteen Articles of the “Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel” issued on 30 December 1993. The essay discloses the Church’s treatment of Jews, with the benefit of historical context.

There is a lengthy and historically important treatment of the Papal States (pp. 1096-1107), following the one on the Papacy itself. The article includes full-page maps of the States from the “Beginnings of the Papal States”; the Papal States after Innocent III (i.e., after 1278); and another map showing the States from 15th to 19th Centuries.
Contrary to popular notions, it is no easy scholarly task to determine the number of Popes from Peter to the present. At his ascension in 1978, John Paul II was declared the first non-Italian pope since Adrian VI (of Utrecht; 1522-3), his election having interrupted a long sequence begun by Clement VI (1523-34). However, this observation depends upon viewing the papacy in terms of a unified Italy that did not exist prior to 1870. Papal succession can be explained in several ways.

The contemporary notion of “nationality” is not applicable to the history of the papacy. The geographical area of the Italic peninsula provided 203 popes or 69% of St. Peter’s successors. There have been ten popes from the ancient Greek world and eight from the Near East. The Annuario pontificio, which establishes the official list of sovereign pontiffs since St. Peter, designates Telesphorus (125-36) and Hyginus (134-40) as Greeks, Anicetus (155-66) as a Syrian, Victor I (189-99) and St. Gelasi I (492-96) as Africans, and Dionysius (259-68) as of “unknown origin.” Even scholarly works do not agree with the list published in the Annuario pontificio; so, what is then the exact number of popes from St. Peter to John Paul II? 260? 264? 269?

In addition to the encyclopedic articles, three appendices provide a chronological list of popes (p. 1649); martyred popes (p. 1656); and Popes who are saints (p. 1657).

There is also a detailed index to the entire set. ‘Hot’ Topics not covered as essays or in large treatments can be followed up through this index. The Holocaust, for example, is treated within articles dealing with Pius XI (pp. 495-496), and Judaism (pp. 875-77). Women are treated in essays that deal with, exclusion from Church (p. 698), ordination (pp. 56, 829, 1076, 1395), and slavery (p. 1440). There are also many pages devoted to celibacy (p. 1036, 1517, 1553, etc.) and contraception (indexed under ‘birth control’) (pp. 1140-1141, 1141-42, 1143, 1247). The entire Index runs from pages 1659-1780, one hundred and twenty pages of detailed entries.

If not entirely unique, this Encyclopedia, certainly supplements and updates other recent reference books on the papacy, such as the Dictionary of Popes and the Papacy (Crossroad, 2001), the Encyclopedia of the Vatican and Papacy (Greenwood, 1999), The Modern Papacy Since 1789 (Longman, 1998), and The Chair of Saint Peter: A History of the Papacy (Orbis Books, 1999).

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Although it might be good for readers to have a modern definition of the “Bible,” editor John Rogerson, Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield, does the next best thing by describing in detail what the history of the Bible is and what (in his eyes) it should do. Perhaps the most impressive feature of Rogerson’s project is its breadth. He lays out a three-fold task that roughly plots the structure of his book. A history of the Bible charts what we know about “the processes that led from the writing, editing, and copying of the items collected together in the Bible.” It also provides a history of the interpretation of the Scriptures. Finally, a history of the Bible outlines different ways in which the Bible has been used during the past two millennia.

Rogerson’s article on the Old Testament leads the first section of the book that provides the historical background to each portion of the Bible (Old Testament, Apocrypha and New Testament). He states that the key problem in Old Testament studies is to account for the origins of Israel’s faith. After describing the traditional view that takes at face value the claim that God spoke to the Patriarchs, Moses, and the Prophets, the author summarizes the alternative schemes suggested since the nineteenth century. These include the evolutionary, the archaeological prior to 1970 (which argued for a somewhat critical, traditional reading of the Old Testament), and the more sociological explanations of German Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad. Although Rogerson is less specific about the contributions of recent archaeology (the biblical minimalists?), he says “there is now a tendency to regard all of them (the books of the Hebrew Bible) as post-exilic” (p. 6). No doubt, the reader needs a more ample selection of recent bibliography to fully appreciate the issues in the current debate.

Philip Davies of the University of Sheffield spends considerable time defining the Apocrypha, meaning “(books) hidden away.” For the most part, he says, these are books found in the Old Testament of Greek (Christian) Bibles, but not in the original Hebrew Scriptures. Where did they originate? Davies discounts the legend about Ezra the scribe, who allegedly was ordered by God to dictate 94 holy books lost in the Babylonian exile, reserving 70 (i.e., the Apocrypha) for the “wise.” He suggests that a good starting point for a category of apocryphal books was the development of a canonical list of Hebrew Scriptures under the Hasmonaeans in the first century BCE.
Like her University of Sheffield colleague above, emeritus faculty member Margaret Davies ponders the origins of the final portion of the Bible, the New Testament. She asks “how” and “why” these writings were collected? Also, “when, where, why, by whom, and for whom were they originally written?” (p. 36).

Davies says less about the genesis of New Testament writings than about their content and format. She does, nevertheless, briefly address questions of audience and authorship. For example, the fact that the New Testament books were written in Greek suggests to her that they were written for the city dwellers of the eastern Mediterranean. Although the content, order and format of the New Testament appear familiar, Davies finds many features puzzling. Why, for example, are there four gospels instead of one? Davies also expresses surprise at the preservation of the Epistles with their particularistic concerns. At a structural level, the author argues for a numerological significance of seven for the collections of the Pauline and the general Epistles. Davies also asserts that the New Testament “mirrors” the Old, the Gospels corresponding to the Torah with Jesus as a second Moses, and Acts of the Apostles constituting “a theological history” much like the historical books immediately following the Pentateuch.

Davies takes a closer look at the Pauline Epistles to Timothy, rejected as pseudonymous (for stylistic reasons) by the second century apologist Tatian and some other early Christian writers, but embraced by the fourth century bishops. She maintains that the themes of exclusive male leadership and the subordination of women in these books probably resonated with these bishops who had accepted Roman rule and social organization, and who, ultimately, defined orthodoxy and the canon.

Perhaps the most fascinating chapter in second section on the text and translation of the Bible is Geoffrey Khans’ discussion of the Hebrew Bible. He says that a variety of Hebrew scriptural texts existed before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E. Khan considers the period 500-300 B.C.E. critical for the formation of the modern Hebrew Bible. During the period, he maintains, not only the concept of a biblical “canon,” but its application to the Pentateuch and the Prophets motivated a concern to preserve the text. It was in this post-exilic era, that generally speaking, the proto-Masoretic text of the Hebrew Scriptures solidified. Even though it only became “fixed” by the third century C.E., the text was “transmitted with precision since at least the third century B.C.E.” (p. 76).

Also interesting is David Parker’s chapter on the text and translation of the New Testament. What seems odd is that there is so little discus-
sion of the Jerome’s translation of Greek New Testament books into the Latin Vulgate. The reason is the author’s contention that Jerome’s Vulgate appears was simply a collation of older Latin versions appended to his translation of the Gospels.

The author instead begins with two sixteenth century humanist editions of the Greek New Testament, the Complutensian Polyglot (1514) and Desiderus Erasmus’s Greek New Testament (1516). He focuses most of his attention on the latter that was to become “the parents of the text” of Greek New testament editions for several centuries to come.

Parker follows the theme of variant New Testament readings, mentioning the ground-breaking work of scholars like Pierre Sabatier, John Mill, and Richard Bently. Although none of these individuals appears to have suggested any doctrinal implications resulting from the textual differences, the author points to furious contemporary protests that such research undermined “the historical truth of Christianity” (p. 119). He concludes the chapter by mentioning the work of Westcott and Hort that coincided with the revision of the Authorized Version.

Stanley F. Porter’s chapter on modern translations picks up this theme, describing the major translations of the 20th century. He points out that while the first half of the twentieth century witnessed many personal translations, the second half of the century was dominated by “group translation projects sponsored by Bible societies and other . . . committees” (p. 139). Not surprisingly, Porter describes the Revised Standard Version (1952) and its successor, the New Revised Standard Version as the most significant of these translations, although he also discusses and evaluates other translations. Later on in the chapter, he examines the textual basis of modern translations, and reports on more timely issues of modern translation. These include Eugene Nida’s the theories of dynamic or functional equivalence that have helped to fuel the current controversies over gender free language in biblical translations.

Rogerson sets an important tone for understanding the study and use of the Bible in the third section, when he argues “that there is much less that is really new about modern critical scholarship than is often supposed.” In fact, the study of Scripture “has always been critical” (pp. 164-65). Although these are important insights, readers might also be wondering what Rogerson thinks about the use of the Bible, another focus of this section.

In his chapter on the Early Church, Henning Graf Reventlow surveys the use of Scripture by the Fathers from Clement to Augustine, including the heretic Marcion. He discovers a variety of ways in which it was
employed, as well as contrasting perspectives on the holy book. Clem-
ent and Irenaeus, for example, stressed the continuity and harmony of
the Old and New Testaments. Justin Martyr’s aims were apologetic,
garnering messianic passages in the Old Testament to substantiate the
deity of Jesus. Marcion’s hermeneutic was (of course) shaped by Gnos-
tic dualism, that led him to regard the Creator God of the Old Testament
as an evil demi-urge, in contrast to the redeemer God of the New, mani-
fested in Christ Jesus. Other contrasts among the Church Fathers in-
clude Origin’s stress upon the deeper spiritual “sense” or meaning of
Scripture, compared to the biblical literalism of Theodore of Mopsuestia
of Antioch. Reventlow’s descriptions of the later Fathers are shaped
by the principal goals of their ministries: Jerome the translator,
Ambrose the moralistic preacher, and Augustine for whom the Bible
was a book of doctrines and ethics written “in pictures and parables”
(p. 179).

Medievalist G. R. Evans maintains that the Bible in the Middle Ages
was typically used for preaching and teaching. She illustrates this with
examples from the work of Bernard of Clairvaux (whom she has studied
extensively), the Dominican preachers and the Scholastics. Within this
larger framework she explores the issues of religious authority and vari-
eties of biblical interpretation, as well as the study of the Bible by medi-
eval religious dissidents, including the Waldensians and Lollards. She
breaks no new ground, but offers a few interesting, if not controversial
ideas. For one thing, she asserts that by the end of the period the awe
that medievals felt for the ancients had “mutated...to the realization
that an earlier author was ‘only a man’ ” (p. 188). According to Evans
this attitude even led late medieval scholars to question the status of the
Vulgate!

The chapters by David Wright on the use and study of the Bible in the
Reformation and by Ronald Clements on the same subjects since 1700
may well be the most informative in this section. Wright identifies the
advent of printing, Renaissance humanism and the historical-linguistic
critical study of the Bible associated with it, together with the Protestant
doctrines of sola Scriptura and solus Christus as the major phenomena
that transformed the use of the Bible. He examines the impact of hu-
manist study of the text in the original languages and the numerous ver-
nacular translations spawned in the sixteenth century. The greatest
contribution of the Reformation to biblical study in Wright’s eyes was
“the recovery of the straightforward, literal sense determined by appro-
priate linguistic, grammatical and historical inquiry” (p. 217).
Clements perceives the eighteenth century as pivotal era for the use and interpretation of the Bible. As a result of the religious and political upheavals of the seventeenth century—especially in England—it became the primary task of exegetes to explain how biblical revelation accorded with “the dictates of reason” (p. 218). The new perspective of the Scientific Revolution subjected God’s creative powers to a radical reappraisal. It now became necessary to show how the powers of providence conformed to natural law. The once prevalent notion of miracles was out of sync with the new scientific cosmology; indeed, their presence in Christian belief was marginalized and considered problematic. Clements shows that the focus of biblical studies shifted, instead, to the historical context of the biblical account. Here, too, problems emerged, since the account appeared to conflict with the latest findings of nineteenth century scientists such as Lyell and Darwin. Clements explain that theologians attempted to deal with these discrepancies by applying the concept of “myth” to some biblical texts, culminating in Rudolf Bultmann’s twentieth century program of demythologizing the New Testament.

The remainder of this chapter is comprised of historical case studies in biblical exegesis—the so-called quest for the historical Jesus and the emergence of the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis on the sources of the Pentateuch. Other chapters in this section by George Bebawi and Philip Alexander examine the Bible in Orthodoxy and Judaism, provide unique perspectives and not a few surprises for western Christian readers.

A final section of contemporary interpretations of the Bible brings the story up to date. Rogerson includes a revealing chapter on Feminist exegesis, as well as three on Liberation theology, before wrapping up in a brief epilogue. By and large these authors critique the Bible itself as a potentially oppressive document. Yvonne Sherwood catalogs the many negative images of women in the Bible. Likewise, she finds that with the exception of Ruth, Esther, and the Gospel of Luke, biblical authors typically relegate female characters to the background. Author Gerald West, writing about African Liberation theology, goes further, suggesting that the Bible itself is an oppressive document. He does this with a quote from South African theologian T. A. Mofokeng, who asserts that “numerous ‘texts, stories and traditions in the Bible . . . lend themselves to only oppressive interpretations” (p. 338).

Rogerson summarizes his thoughts on contemporary interpretation of the Bible while reflecting on the benefits and drawbacks of Deconstructionism and literary criticism of the Bible. He finds deconstructionist approaches helpful in raising some basic questions
about biblical interpretation. Nevertheless, he firmly rejects the deconstructionist contention about the impossibility of recovering the authors’ “communicative intentions.” Since the biblical authors clearly had such intentions, and because their texts are artifacts, their textual compositions cannot be divorced from their social and historical milieu. Consequently, Rogerson thinks that the discovery of those intentions ought to be the primary task of scholars in the area if biblical studies.

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