

the American doctor in Liberia. This doctor lived and the African doctor died. Smith explains that part of “being courageous is coming to terms with the fact that these inequities happen all the time” (p. 199).

While much of the content was inspiring, I also found some disappointments. For example, Smith’s suggestion to “have courage to be fully you” (p. 141) made me hesitate. Statements like this may lead people to be more complacent than courageous. Yes, we shouldn’t try to be someone else. We should use our unique giftings to love God and love our neighbors. But shouldn’t we always strive to be better? To be like Jesus?

Strengths of the book include the detailed stories and science, with moving anecdotes alongside convincing data. All of these are equally inspiring and thought provoking. Emily Smith is clearly a skilled storyteller and scientist. Thus, this book is a successful display of science communication. It integrates science and faith seamlessly. For example, she frequently repeats a phrase attributed to Saint Dominic: “your desk is your prayer bench” (p. 69). Science and faith are not separate; for Smith, her epidemiological desk work is how she communes with God and expresses her faith. Overall, this book should satisfy a variety of readers.

I recommend this book for anyone curious about the field of epidemiology, or curious about how knowledge of public health and poverty can help Christians be good neighbors. While this book may not be a suitable text for a university-level course, since it is neither a “faith book” nor a “science book” (p. 3), it does serve as a helpful example of science as vocation and of science and faith integration. For those with a theology background, it helps to show that science can be embraced. For those with a science background, it can show that faith can turn work into a calling.

Throughout the book, Smith introduces the reader to many people: Dr. Edna Adan Ismail (p. 15), Frederick Douglass (p. 44), Dr. Paul Farmer (p. 77), Father Gustavo Gutiérrez (p. 80), Dr. Kathryn Hayhoe (p. 172), and many more. So, who was the neighbor? Clearly, these people were. They courageously centered their lives around their neighbors. May we learn from their examples, and from the expert stories and science shared by Emily Smith.

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## ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

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**CREATION CARE DISCIPLESHIP: Why Earthkeeping Is an Essential Christian Practice** by Steven Bouma-Prediger. Baker Academic, 2023. 213 pages. Paperback; \$25.99. ISBN: 9781540966322.

Steven Bouma-Prediger is a religion scholar at Hope College, Michigan, and a well-known theologian who has written about the need for Christians to care for the environment. In his latest book, Bouma-Prediger summarizes the main arguments for earthkeeping and illustrates them with personal testimonies, which make for a delightful and convincing read. He utilizes a pastoral tone that does not water down the scientific content while backing up his arguments with abundant footnotes and Christian meditations from scripture at the end of each chapter. The author presents earthkeeping as a practice solidly rooted in the Bible, Christian theology, and tradition, that is demonstrated in several Christian communities. In short, he maintains that “care for the earth and its flourishing is part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian” (p. 3).

Earthkeeping is a concept related to creation care that, in Bouma-Prediger’s mind, is better than stewardship. Stewardship in English “churchy” jargon often minimizes the inherent value of the environment, seeing nature as a collection of resources to be exploited. By using the word earthkeeping, the author emphasizes the meaning of Genesis 2:15: “to take care of the garden.”

After clarifying why we should read his book in the first chapter, Bouma-Prediger walks us through selected scriptural passages about nature in the second chapter. We realize the strong connection between us and the other creatures and God’s provision to all the created order. He also emphasizes the need to revise our view of the end times. If Christians see the future as living in an immaterial heaven, the earth is not worth saving. With a proper reading of scripture, we understand that God loves his creation, and he expects us to care for it.

The third chapter delves into theological aspects of earthkeeping, in which the author dismantles an accusation that it implies pantheism. Christian theology removed gods from nature but did not remove nature’s sacredness. No creatures are gods, but they still have value to God. The pillage of nature cannot be justified. A biblical meditation from the book of Job centers on the use of Leviathan and Behemoth to understand ecological hospitality. The lengthy descriptions of these creatures (assumed by the author to be the crocodile and the hippopotamus) are a reminder that “we humans are not at the center of things” (p. 82). God cares for these creatures even though they are not designed for our specific use.

Chapter 4 borrows relevant teachings about nature conservation from different theologians influential in the history of the Christian church. He quotes Pope Francis, Patriarch Bartholomew I, H. Paul Santmire, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Randy Woodley. Their views represent diverse theological positions: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, Ecofeminism, and Native American Christian, respectively. The chapter ends with excerpts from the “Joint Message for the Protection of Creation,”

# Book Reviews

a document written in 2021 by the heads of the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican churches.

Bouma-Prediger gives a practical guide in chapter 5 to describe what to do in our earthkeeping ministry. We should start with reflections on scripture and rescuing Christian tradition in our relationship with the natural world. Living simply is a virtue to cherish, and avoiding overconsumption minimizes severe damage to the environment. “Remember that you have never seen a hearse with a luggage rack” (p. 137) is a phrase that admonishes us not to be greedy with the environment. The disconnection of humans with nature is regarded as “ecological homelessness,” which should be counteracted by developing the virtue of caring for creation.

In the author’s discussion of environmental justice and environmental racism, he points out that the consequences of pollution and resource depletion are suffered unequally by specific human communities. To be aware of these injustices, we should educate ourselves on how to manage the earth wisely and not abuse its resources. In this way, we will develop ecological consciousness. This section finishes with several ways we can practice earthkeeping as individuals and as a community, after we have learned how to practice gratitude, generosity, and the sabbath rest.

The last chapter presents a biblical statement of shalom: “It is not just about reconciliation between people or reconciliation between humans and God. It is about flourishing of all the earth” (p. 187), where God’s creatures, including plants and animals, praise the Lord.

An important omission from this book that is essential to understanding the value of creation care was Lynn White Jr.’s criticism of Christian theology as an exploiter of nature in his influential article “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis.”<sup>1</sup> Some may argue that much of the “greening” of theology was a response to this article, which corrected a misunderstanding of “dominion” and the stewardship mandate in scripture.

Bouma-Prediger’s assertion that the afterlife will be “earthy” may not be acceptable to some evangelical groups. If we do not go to heaven and heaven comes to us, then the “left behind” theology is wrong, requiring us to value this earth and not consider it disposable. “An escapist eschatology implies an ethics of neglect and exploitation” (p. 69).

The author’s endorsement of positions considered by many as extreme will also be controversial. For example, he quotes the environmental activist and writer Wendell Berry several times, once saying that the destruction of nature is “the worst horrid blasphemy” (p. 39). Most Christians would probably take issue with that statement. He also quotes the African American theologian James Cone, who accuses conservationists of being racists if they do not fight against white supremacy. Environmental racism is a possible root of injustice and nature destruction in some

cases but conflating it with white supremacy does not help the Christian cause.

These controversial topics do not diminish the book’s value as an excellent pastoral and academic resource for Christians and anyone interested in conserving nature. Bouma-Prediger is highly qualified to teach us about creation care and the different ways to engage in earthkeeping. His masterful biblical exegesis is persuasive in making the case that the environment should matter to Christians regardless of their political perspectives. I highly recommend this book.

## Note

<sup>1</sup>Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–7, <https://archive.org/details/HistoricalRootsOfEcologicalCrisisV>.

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**RECONCILIATION IN A MICHIGAN WATERSHED: Restoring Ken-O-Sha** by Gail Gunst Heffner and David P. Warners. Michigan State University Press, 2024. 314 pages. Paperback; \$29.95. ISBN: 9781611864939.

I am certain, because it piqued my anxious imagination, that I first heard the phrase “reconciliation ecology” from my friend Dave Warners (coauthor). It’s at least partly an allusion to the phrase “restoration ecology,” which was by then recognized as a subspecialty of applied ecology, even having its own academic journal. Its goal is scientific support for restoring biodiversity and ecosystem function. The problem with restoration ecology is that, while populated with dedicated researchers and practitioners, it struggles with making its case in the wider North American culture.

This new book by Heffner and Warners addresses that issue and is an absolute joy for the hopeful direction it offers. My review copy is well marked up and, having read it twice, I can report that it gets richer on second pass. It too is about restoring biodiversity and ecosystem function, but it probes deeper into human worldviews and their effects on both degradation and restoration.

Plaster Creek (Grand Rapids, MI) is the “Ken-O-Sha” in the title. That Heffner and Warner choose to use the Ottawa name (translation, “Water of the Walleye”) presages their centering of human history and cultural significance in its Indigenous roots. It also recognizes that the human-nature connection and relationship, which is associated with Indigenous worldviews, offers an alternative to the rigorous commodification and conquest attitudes of white settlers and, regrettably, most of their descendants.

The book is ostensibly an expansive report on the authors’ efforts (with volunteers, students, and community members) to restore a degraded urban stream to