

Book Reviews

Christiana Peppard and Andrea Vicini, eds. *Just Sustainability: Technology, Ecology, and Resource Extraction*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015. Pp xii-292. US\$42.00.

Understanding the crossroads of justice and sustainability requires an interdisciplinary perspective. The *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church* (CTEWC) book series editors have rightly chosen this relevant topic and have used their global network to attract scholars from around the world to write on this theme. Accordingly, *Just Sustainability* is “the outcome of a global collaboration” (p. xi). As the editors explain in the Introduction, this anthology which serves as the third volume in the CTEWC book series of conferences in Padua (2006) and Trent (2010), aptly employs “an understanding of justice that is both temporally and geographically broad, entailing fairness to future generations as well as respect for ecosystems and the earth processes on which all forms of life ... depend” (p. 3).

To respect the diverse perspectives and contexts of the contributors, it is appropriate that the editors presented the articles into three categories: Locations, Structures, and Theological Stances and Sustainable Relations. Moreover, the book’s subtitle—“Technology, Ecology, and Resource Extraction”—tries to capture the basic coherence of the interlocking major issues and the diverse perspectives of the authors of this rich collection of Catholic theological ethics.

Reading this collection of twenty-eight articles enables me to discern, at least, five major interrelated areas that I consider a valuable contribution to the

emerging interdisciplinary perspective on justice and sustainability. First is the importance of the use of ecological mediation in doing Catholic theological ethics. This interdisciplinary methodology is particularly highlighted in the articles of Peter Knox and Celia Deane-Drummond as they critically appropriate the empirical data provided by Earth sciences, together with the best available ecological insights, that serve as material starting point and analytical “tool” for subsequent theological reflection. Their articles suggest that the use of ecological mediation in theological ethics is an extremely important approach as we strive to make sound ethical judgment on the issues of sustainability issues (e.g., the ecological impact of modern technology and resource extraction), which properly belong to the domain of ecological and environmental sciences.

Another significant contribution of this book is its affirmation of the “greening” of the Catholic social teaching (CST). This is particularly affirmed in Christine Firer Hinze’s article, which proposes that the “stranded assets” of the CST allow us to see the intimate connection between economic injustices and ecological crises. The inseparability of *economics* and *ecology* is obviously implied in their common prefix “eco,” which is etymologically rooted in Greek *oikos* (household). Thus, the advocacy that embraces the inseparable issues of justice and sustainability may be expressed today in compound terms like “just sustainability” and “ecological justice.” In this book, the contributions of John Sniegocki, Benedict Chidi Nwachukwu-Udaku, and Edward Osang Obi highlight this integral ecological perspective. It can be shown that this positive trend has become explicit only in the post-Vatican II period, specifically beginning in the 1971 CST (e.g., *Justitia in mundo*, no. 70 and *Octogesima*

adveniens, no. 21), which eventually led Pope Francis to rightfully embrace the emerging holistic notion of “integral ecology” in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*.

The third is the book’s treatment of ecological poverty as an urgent ethical/moral issue. This is particularly highlighted in the article of the late João Batista Libanio (1932-2014) who challenges us to hear both the “cries” of the poor and of the Earth which, according to his analysis, “result from colonial legacies and ongoing patterns of exploitation” (p. 43). Indeed, to recognize the ecological poverty of the unsustainably exploited Earth is possible only from a non-anthropocentric and holistic perspective on poverty which, consequently, challenges us to expand our praxis of liberation and notion of preferential option for the poor. Libanio, moreover, affirms that this ecological perspective on poverty is common among Latin American liberation theologians, such as Leonardo Boff, who are extremely critical to “the current type of development that leads the earth to exhaustion.” (p. 43). Indeed, many theologians from Latin American context remain pessimistic about the promises of sustainable development under the dominant neoliberal capitalism of the global North, which has been consistently perceived by the global South as promoting unjust and unsustainable model of economic development. To a certain extent, the articles of John Karuvelil, Kenneth Weare, and John Sniegocki in this book can also be interpreted to support this critical view.

The fourth major area which I consider as offering very important perspective on justice is the treatment of the sexist oppression as both human and ecological issue. Along this line, the respective articles of Dzintra Ilisko and Ann Marie Mealey promote the ecofeminist view that broadens our understanding of justice and sustainability. We may recall that ecofeminism emerged

as part of the “third wave” of feminism, which began in the 1980s to widen the discourse on women liberation by including all other subjugated groups and victims of the global ecological destruction. Drawing from the central insights of ecofeminism, Mealey’s article affirms that “the oppression of women and the oppression of nature are interconnected [and that] these connections must be uncovered in order to understand both” forms of oppression (p. 184). Her article strongly emphasizes the crucial role of education and “the need to deconstruct patterns of behavior and theological thinking that perpetuate structures of inequality between men and women that are subsequently reflected in the ways in which we relate to the environment” (p. 183).

Lastly, the fifth significant contribution of this book that I want to highlight is the crucial move to go beyond the ingrained tradition of anthropocentric perspective. This challenging task can be shown particularly in the articles of Osamu Takeuchi, Nancy Rourke, and Denis Edwards. Their common ecological perspective basically aligns with the prevailing discourse in environmental ethics whose natural starting point is “fighting anthropocentric views.” Unfortunately, it can be shown that the present magisterial pronouncements found in the CST on ecology tend to maintain a certain degree of anthropocentrism. In fact, the stewardship model, which has been rightly criticized for its lack of horizontal dimension of relating with nature to the effect of forgetting human beings’ universal kinship with all creatures, still dominates in the current ecological theology of the magisterium. Thus, if the above authors would courageously maintain the ethical principles of non-anthropocentric perspective, a clash with the ecological perspective of the present magisterium is inevitable.

The rich collection of articles in this book has

explored many other important ecological issues which cannot be sufficiently treated in this review. Nevertheless, if there is one very important ecological perspective that this book fails to adequately develop and recognize, I think that is the indigenous peoples' (IPs) worldview. In fairness, however, Randy J. C. Odchigue's fine article points out the economic and cultural poverty of the marginalized Filipino indigenous peoples (IPs) who have been unjustly displaced from their ancestral domains due to logging and mining activities in the name of development. Hence, although the IPs are not completely missing in the picture, their particular perspective is not sufficiently developed in the book. We are challenged to learn the wisdom of the indigenous peoples whose valuable cultural insights and ecological praxis have stood the test of time.

As a whole, this is an excellent book on environmental ethics which every social and ecological advocate must read. Its publication is very timely as this would serve as helpful companion to contextualize and understand the ecological teaching of *Laudato Si'*. This is, indeed, a valuable contribution not only to the field of environmental ethics but also to area of ecological theology.

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