

Book Reviews

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Kabbalah and Ecology: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World. By David M. Seidenberg, New York: Cambridge University, 2015. Pp. xxi + 397. \$99.

As the climate bell tolls, the religious world needs an eco-theology that teaches and demands dwelling on the earth with a newfound spiritual intentionality. Pope Francis's recent encyclical *Laudato si'* ("On the Care for Our Common Home") is a watershed in extending the breadth of its theological dialogue to include environmentalists and the scientific community, as well as extending its ecumenical reach by including not only theological contributions from papal predecessors and episcopal conferences, but also drawing prominently from Eastern Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople and ninth-century Muslim Sufi, Ali al-Khawwas. The Pope dares to heal modernity's division of faith and reason to overcome an ecological and social crisis, thus including scientific analysis and policy recommendations that will continue to provoke universal activism with a much-needed moral core.

A Jewish perspective to this theological discussion recently emerged in Seidenberg's new book, *Kabbalah and Ecology: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World*. S. builds upon the theological precursors of a growing trend since the 1970s of Jewish eco-spirituality, drawing from the writings of rabbis Arthur Waskow, Arthur Green, Eilon Schwartz and Evan Eisenberg. S.'s constructive theological rereadings of neglected mystical sources will reboot the conversation about eco-theology and activism within the Abrahamic traditions. In S.'s eyes, merely deconstructing the anthropocentric reading of the Hebrew Bible remains insufficient; his embrace of eco-centrism emerges from an assembly of premodern scriptural commentaries. S.'s insights emerge in his use of historical and philological methodologies that first soundly analyze his texts before applying them in a theological construction. When S. analyzes the scriptural term *tselem elohim* ("divine image," cf. Gen 1:26; 5:1–3; 9:6–7) as revealing the more-than-human world of nature, he shines by interpolating Gaian consciousness within obtuse kabbalistic concepts, such as "Primordial Adam" (*Adam Qadmon*) returning to the moment of creation continually unfolding. While S. nods to the work of Matthew Fox and Brian Swimme, glaringly absent are Thomas Berry's important contributions in eco-theology. Deeply indebted to David Abram's breakthrough book on eco-spirituality, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and*

Language in a More-Than-Human World (1996), as well as to the theological triad of *cosmos–eros–logos* in Martin Buber’s classic, *I and Thou* (1916), S. fuses his grounding in traditional Jewish texts with fluency in the physical sciences, to propose a new understanding of *tselem elohim* as the “more-than-human image” that has the capacity to restore monotheistic religions to their sensual vibrancy. S.’s eco-theology of *tselem* avoids getting trapped in the fallenness of stewardship that emerges in exile from Eden (Gen 1:28; 2:15), which is prescient in suggesting the potential shortcomings of *Laudato si*’s opening reinterpretation of “tilling and tending” as stewardship rather than “dominion” (67, 116, 117, 220, 222). S. warns about the limitations of his own proposed eco-theology as part of his extended conclusions in “Beyond Stewardship (Again)” (343–47), namely, that the further one extends this *theologomenon* of *imago Dei*, the further human culture extends into nature, limiting a more-than-human world, ultimately failing to regain the wild within the human (343).

S. brings a bold eco-theology of the more-than-human world of nature that seeks to “be directed toward the future” (5), one that must “not only push us to evolve theology, but also to illuminate for us, in critical ways, the meaning of ancient texts and ideas, and the history of those ideas and texts” (7). While *Laudato si*’ should be captivating our theological attention, S.’s theology contributes to the emergence of eco-theologies that reach beyond stewardship into a robust, devotional engagement with a more Gaian spiritual activism emerging from Jewish mystical sources.

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St. Augustine’s Interpretation of the Psalms of Ascent. By Gerard McLarney.
Washington: Catholic University of America, 2014. Pp. xxi + 256. \$60.

If one were to trace the history of scriptural interpretation from the beginning of the patristic era, there would appear a list of interpreters who have made indispensable contributions to the reading of the Psalms. Origen, in the third century, set about composing commentaries on the entire Psalter, thereby expanding the scope and methodology of biblical exegesis. The Psalter figured more significantly in the pastoral, devotional, and spiritual lives of Christians in North African communities’ beginning century, after Tertullian and Cyprian bore testimony to the liturgical uses of hymns during the third century. Augustine in particular contributed to this heightened concern with his exegetical treatment of the Psalms, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*.

This revised 2010 doctoral dissertation, completed at St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth, provides the focused study of Augustine’s expositions of the Psalms of Ascent (Pss 119–33) that the author asserts is crucial for a full understanding of biblical passages about the spiritual progress in its ascent to the heavenly city. Taken together with previous studies specifically dedicated to a holistic framework for