

Ecojustice Takes An Unjust Look at Psalms

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Abstract

This essay consists of an exploratory review and critical analysis of Norman Habel's widely acclaimed ecojustice perspective stemming from the work of the Earth Bible project he founded. In particular, the essay showcases one of the chapters in one of Habel's many edited books as model to illustrate some of the profound weaknesses contained in Habel's perspective, arguing that the weaknesses identified there can be generalized to most if not all of the other contributions in these multiple edited works. Although some broad penetrating criticisms have been laid against this approach to reading Scriptural texts in the applicable literature, they consist largely of abstract arguments rather than extended textual demonstrations of deficiencies as shown in this essay. Beginning with lengthy but key preliminary contextual remarks, the essay then provides crucial background information on the historical roots of the ecojustice approach within the modern ecological perspective. Since virtually all ecojustice contributors place themselves squarely within that particular theoretical tradition, the essential features and historical links of modern ecology are reviewed. There it is shown that many of the foundational philosophical assumptions, presuppositions, values, and theoretical doctrines associated with Marxism and Darwinism have been imported into the Earth bible approach largely unexamined, unquestioned, and unacknowledged, with grave ramifications for the process of biblical interpretation. Finally, the essay takes a detailed look at the particular chapter in question to compare and contrast the ecojustice perspective with the traditional Christian view of Psalms 29 and 96-97. It

insinuates that there are many serious problems inherent in the process of an ecojustice interpretation of biblical text that are largely irremediable due mostly to a severe paucity of theoretical and methodological reflexivity and the a-priori adoption of a worldview entirely foreign to the biblical worldview.

Keywords: Earth Bible project; ecojustice perspective; storm god; theophany; Ba'al god; modern ecological perspective; Marxism; Marxian ecology; socialism; Earth's voice.

Preliminary Remarks

This essay consists of an introductory review and critical analysis of Norman Habel's widely acclaimed ecojustice perspective as represented in the work of the Earth Bible project he founded, the history of which will be detailed later in this essay. In particular, we will focus our critical lens here on one particular chapter in one of Habel's many edited books, a paper he co-authored with Geraldine Avent titled, *Rescuing Earth from a Storm God: Psalms 29 and 96-97*.¹ The assertion is that this exercise could easily have been done with any of the book's contributions.

Our aim will be to showcase the chapter as a kind of model to illustrate some of the profound weaknesses contained within the ecojustice perspective itself as a whole and, therefore, in most if not all of its works. Some broad criticisms have already been laid against the aims and methods of the Earth bible project in the literature largely as abstract arguments (Conradie, 2004; Kavusa, 2019; Sweatman, 2018), but textual

¹ As mentioned, the article is contained in one of Habel's edited books, Volume 4 of the Earth Bible series on psalms and prophets (Habel, 2001a). As such, it is being employed as a model here to demonstrate what is problematic with the ecojustice perspective in general from a strict biblical perspective and worldview. In effect, most if not all of the contributions in Habel's edited works tend to be plagued with the same weaknesses mentioned here pertaining to Habel and Avent's chapter on storm gods.

demonstrations of deficiencies have been much harder to come by.

As the book title implies and as the chapter authors themselves explicitly state in their introduction, both chapter and book are part of a much larger effort to engage in comprehensive scholarly, multidisciplinary biblical ‘re-readings’ and ‘re-interpretations’ based on a modern ecological theoretical viewpoint with the application of what is referred to as ecojustice principles. It stands to reason, then, that a proper understanding of both the key concepts and central points of the chapter and the book itself as a whole (and at least all other ‘Earth Bible’ book-length commentaries on biblical texts), not to mention the ecojustice perspective itself, cannot be achieved until these key historical details are thoroughly addressed.

Much more importantly, however, it is also essential to acquire some kind of fundamental critical understanding of what exactly constitutes the central features of a modern ecological perspective so that an objective evaluation of the authors’ central claims can be legitimately engaged. Given that the authors themselves as well as the book and project contributors locate themselves squarely within that particular theoretical tradition, this is an absolute precondition for objective analysis and exegesis.

Interestingly enough, however, a glaring paucity of theoretical reflexivity is a curious central feature of the entire ‘Earth Bible’ project itself as well as its many book-length commentaries on various biblical texts, let alone its theoretical approach and particular applied hermeneutics. It is almost as if all of the authors involved in this project have collectively declared for themselves a virtual monopoly on truth and understanding about the ecology as reflected in the Bible. That is to say, so far as what is explicitly detectible, nowhere in any of the Earth

Bible readings and discussions² do we find a clear identification nor well-balanced comprehensive objective comparative assessment and evaluation of its own theoretical and methodological strengths and weaknesses, even in Habel's sole work on the topic of hermeneutics (Habel and Trudinger, 2008).

Quite to the contrary, what we do find is the Earth Bible perspective presented as if it is the only legitimate perspective applicable to authentic biblical interpretation, a form of rampant and forceful ecological evangelizing or proselytizing of opinion presented as absolute truth very much in tune with modern radical ecological approaches – rather reprehensible for people who market themselves as scholars. Overwhelmingly, the strengths of the theoretical and methodological elements are underscored to such an extent that the materials read more like an exercise in propagandizing rather than objective scholarly analyses and exegeses.

This sense of a fervently-held truth monopoly comes across rather loud and clear just from a cursory glance at back and front covers of Earth Bible texts and other places within these works where the goals or aims of the Earth Bible project and ecojustice perspective are generally described and repeatedly touted like biblical truths in ministerial sermons. Over and over again, it is emphasized how re-readings and re-interpretations of biblical texts from the perspective of 'the Earth' or 'the Earth Bible project' or the 'ecojustice principles' of the Earth bible project yields 'fresh' insights into the so-called 'voice of the Earth' that had been previously muted or ignored within the Bible itself and by other theoretical and theological approaches.

² There are many volumes of independently-authored Earth Bible readings up-to-date too numerous to mention in the confines of this brief critical essay. But just a few recent book-length works can be cited here to demonstrate that this particular theological perspective continues to be widely employed in the scholarly literature (Lamp, 2022; Trainor, 2021; Havea, 2021)

These other approaches to understanding biblical texts, we are constantly told, have silenced the loving voice and intrinsic value of the Earth. Thanks to the Earth Bible approach, finally scholars from around the world can now relate the Earth's story in the Bible from the Earth's point of view and challenge the rampant misunderstandings of the Earth's voice in biblical text which have resulted from traditional biblical approaches. In doing so, we are told, the heartless cruelty of divine justice towards the natural world is exposed by Earth Bible writers who are sensitive to Earth's voice as allegedly expressed in biblical texts.

What's more, the ecojustice perspective of the Earth Bible project can easily be harmonized with most other critical approaches towards the Bible such as historical criticism, ecofeminism, and textual analysis. Among other things, here it doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that the ecojustice perspective of the Earth Bible project denies the principle of divine inspiration of the Bible. When the organic flow of meaning within Bible is not viewed as sacred, then presumably any kind of contemporary anthropomorphic theoretical model can be projected into any biblical text to derive or even create meanings.

That being the case, let us try to define some of the terms the authors use a bit more clearly and objectively in order for readers to attempt a balanced and genuinely reflexive analysis of the claims they make about various biblical readings. Before we begin, it is absolutely crucial to keep in mind throughout this essay that the so-called ecological perspective cum theoretical perspective existed prior to the emergence and development of the Earth Bible Project³ or the so-called

³ Historically speaking, the Earth Bible Project is actually a program developed circa 1997 by a team of scholars associated with the Center for Science, Theology and Culture at Flanders University of South Australia located at the Adelaide College of Divinity. It is an international project which includes several volumes on ecojustice readings of major biblical texts from the perspective of justice for the Earth. The Earth Bible

‘ecojustice perspective’ which its various authors proclaim so highly. As such, it is an historical theoretical development both distinct from and integral to the ecojustice perspective.

Historical Roots of the Ecojustice Perspective

The concern about making this historical relationship is well-placed, it turns out. The so-called principles of this perspective have been explicitly defined and discussed by the lead authors of that project but, curiously, its historical roots have not been straightforwardly presented nor critically evaluated. Hence the glaring lack of genuine theoretical and methodological reflexivity. This is unfortunate, to say the least, given that it is so integral to the modern ecojustice perspective in the sense that much of its philosophical assumptions, presuppositions, theoretical components, and hermeneutics are indeed incorporated within it.

A. Marx, Darwin, and Company

The point is that the birth of both ecology as a disciplinary subject matter and the ecological perspective far precedes or predates the birth of the Australian ecojustice perspective. The term ‘ecology’ itself was coined by Ernst Haeckel in 1866 as part of efforts to promote and popularize Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theory in Germany at the time as well as an attempt to forge a link with Karl Marx’s view of ecologically sustainable economic development under socialism. He wanted to replace Darwin’s rather loose and imprecise expression ‘economy of nature’ (2017) with a more precise view of the environment consisting of complex interactional systems of

homepage emphasizes that so-called ‘ecojustice principles’ guide critical questions about Scripture such as: Does the text value or devalue the Earth? Is the Earth’s voice permitted or muted? Are human beings in the text portrayed as dominating Earth or as members of an Earth community? Does the text show how Earth suffers unjustly? Surely, then, it’s rather difficult to believe that scholars predisposed to asking these kinds of critical questions hold any kind of spiritual reverence for the Bible.

organisms, plant communities, and species surviving through specific metabolic processes in a state of dynamic equilibrium.

Marx used both Darwin's and Haeckel's ideas as well as those of the great German chemist Justus von Leibig, the German chemical physicist Julius Robert von Mayer, and the socialist physician Roland Daniels, to develop the concept of 'social metabolism' upon which he defined and severely criticized the labor process under capitalism (Foster, 2015, 2013). According to this definition, Marx claimed that human beings regulate and control the 'metabolism' between themselves and nature. Accordingly, human production operates within a universal 'metabolism of nature', not outside of it, and the capitalist economic system represented an unnatural inorganic break from the natural metabolic structure of the universe. The result is a rupture in that organic relationship, and only a socialist economic system could restore organic metabolic balance between human beings and the environment.

B. The Nature of Ecological Crisis

Ecological crisis occurs when there is an 'irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself', Marx proclaimed (1981, p. 949). In his mind, the capitalist system of production caused this so-called 'rift' to occur, not human nature nor any other factor. In other words, Marx claimed that there was a strong deterministic metabolic relationship between society and nature, and he was the first theorist to incorporate thermodynamics and this broader metabolic relationship into a reductionistic political-economic theoretical critique of capitalism.

It is important to note that shortly after Marx's socialist critique of capitalism became widely popularized, socialist critiques of capitalism at that time became synonymous with socialist ecological critiques of capitalist economic systems. Suddenly, these socialist ecological critiques emerged across the liberal

scholarly world to become very popular in Britain such as the zoologist E. Ray Lankester's strong critique of British capitalism and the Victorian concept of 'process', and the British botanist Arthur. G. Tansley's introduction of the ecosystem concept in the development of his materialist approach to ecology that incorporated both organic and inorganic processes (Foster, 2000, 1999).

As pioneers in the ecological critique of economic systems, it is absolutely crucial to keep in mind here that both Lankester and Tansley were self-professed "socialists" and were officially registered members of many avowedly socialist organizations. What's more, Lankester was Marx's close friend as well as Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley's protégé, while Tansley himself was the first editor of the Ecology journal and the founder of the British Ecological Society itself established on the basis of openly socialist principles. We are not even considering here the intimate friendship between the avowed atheist Darwin and the communist theoretician Karl Marx, who dined at Darwin's house and both of whom held strong admiration for each other.

Ecology and the ecological perspective as we know it today, then, rests upon a socialist and materialist systems theoretical base with all the underlying presuppositions and philosophical assumptions that this relationship presumes. That means that the complex relationships between social-productive systems like capitalism or socialism and the wider ecological systems within which they take place have largely only come to be understood and critiqued through Marxist economic theory and its underlying philosophical assumptions.

The central point to keep in mind here cannot be emphasized strongly enough especially as it applies to theological thought and scholarship with profound implications for the process of biblical interpretation. There is an intrinsic and integral relationship between the socialist theory expounded by Karl Marx and the modern ecological perspective that is historically

rooted (Burkett, 2006; Chen, 2017; Egerton, 2011; Foster, 2002, 2015; Haydock, 2017; O'Connor, 2017).

C. Marxist Ecology Enters Theology

Worse yet, the application of Marx's political-economic theory to an understanding of ecological processes has been done in a largely unconscious, un-reflexive, and taken-for-granted manner by scholars across disciplines. More to the theological import of this point, Marx's critique of capitalist society through the atheistic theoretical lenses of historical materialism is the fundamental bedrock of both ecology as a subject discipline and the ecological perspective as it is known today, and as such it has crept surreptitiously into various theological work on both the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible (Boer, 2019; Cort, 1988; Norman, 1987; Reed, 2015).

In America, this view originally emerged in the ecological movement of the 1960s as an initial scholarly liberal socialist response to the various modern ecological crises perceived to be plaguing the planet from that scholarly point of view.⁴ Even there, its deep roots are to be found in Marx's environmental critique of capitalism based on his theory of socialism, a prophetic vision of sustainable human development only achievable through a distinct, unavoidable, and indeed even welcomed revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism at whatever cost.

In other words, there is a profound, formative link between Marx's ecological ideas expressed as integral components of his theory of socialist revolution and modern ecological economics inside of the so-called modern ecological perspective. For this reason, it is crucial to know the essential historical components of the original ecological perspective in order to understand how and where it infuses and informs theoretical claims made by the

⁴ Interestingly, it is around this time that historian Lynn White wrote his famous critique of Christianity as the cause of ecological crisis.

latest ecojustice version of that Marxist-rooted ecological perspective. Essentially, what this means is that no objective critical evaluation and assessment of the application of the 'ecojustice' perspective towards any biblical text can be rendered without first examining the historical links between Marxist socialist theory, the emergence and development of ecology, the contemporary ecological perspective, and the 'ecojustice' theological viewpoint.

Rescuing Earth from a Storm God?

Informed by these telling historical details, we can now proceed to deal with the ecojustice material at hand and confidently demonstrate how un-reflexive, historically uninformed application of theoretical models in theology can and do often lead to warped and analytically shallow interpretations of Bible passages.

In their study of Psalms 29 and 96-97 in the Old Testament of the Bible, Habel and Avent launch a severe frontal attack on Psalm 29 and, by logical extension, on the Christian worldview itself, not to mention the Christian theological perspective in general. Here in Psalm 29, they flatly assert, can be 'clearly observed' the very 'nature of God's view' of the natural world, the undeniable, irrefutable 'real deal' about the 'nature' of God. According to the authors, and regardless of what they argue to be previous erroneous interpretations, Psalm 29 is nothing but 'an expression of Yahweh's manifestation in a storm theophany'. It is nothing but the thunderous powerful voice of a bully Christian God more or less acting out like a petulant child as lord over all of His creation.

A. Detour into Theophany, Baal, and Psalms

Before we pursue the Habel and Avent study any further, however, we need to take another short detour in order to understand the authors' later claims with greater clarity. It is necessary to fill in some missing theoretical and historical

details on some of the main concepts that they use such as ‘epiphany’, the storm god ‘Baal’, and even the historical meaning and uses of psalms in general. A thorough, comprehensive understanding of at least these three major concepts in the Habel and Avent study is without doubt absolutely indispensable to a proper understanding and critical assessment of the distinct ‘ecojustice’ interpretations of biblical passages made by the authors.

Generally, theophanies refer to the temporariness and suddenness of the appearances of God, not the enduring presence of God in a certain place or object.⁵ However, the Incarnation of Christ may be seen as the ultimate, fullest, and sustained kind of divine manifestation in a wide spectrum of theophanies. Specifically, it is meant to refer to the manifestation of the Abrahamic God to people or the sensible sign by which His presence is revealed to human beings. A theophany, then, is a physical appearance of God to a human being. The Old Testament of the Christian Bible describes several of them both implicitly and explicitly. In general, in the Old Testament they are viewed as potentially fatal encounters preferably to be avoided as much as possible, where God has appeared as a burning bush, a man, an angel, a thunderstorm, or a pillar of cloud or fire, just to name a few.

By contrast, the storm god Baal referred to by the authors, actually properly spelt ‘Ba’al’, is not and was never a part of

⁵ Although the term ‘theophany’ was employed in reference to God appearances in the ancient Greek (the Illiad), in Near Eastern religions, and in the epic poem from ancient Mesopotamia (the Epic of Gilgamesh), Jews and Christians specifically applied the concept or idea to the Bible to mean the occurrence of an event in which the Abrahamic Creator God the Father reveals Himself to a person (Harvey, 1964, p. 241). By contrast, an ‘epiphany’ is simply a sudden or striking insight or realization which permits a new insight into a problem or situation at a deeper level of meaning. In the Christian religion, it is a holiday which celebrates the revelation of God in the person of His son Jesus Christ as a human being, the Creator God the Father manifested as a human son in Jesus Christ (Merriam-Webster.com, 2023).

Christian doctrine at all at any point in history. Generally speaking, Baal was an honorific title meaning owner or lord in Northwest Semitic languages spoken in the Levant during antiquity. The Levant refers to a large area in the Eastern Mediterranean region of Western Asia east of Italy. From its continual use among people, it later came to be applied to cultural gods of one sort or another usually related to the harvesting of agricultural crops for human food. Therefore, the agricultural connection is strong.

The Canaanites who inhabited parts of the Middle East before, during, and after the Hebrews arrived also worshipped a god which they called, 'Ba'al'. However, the Canaanites worshipped Ba'al as the universal god of fertility and lord of all that grows upon the land used for human survival and sustenance. Most importantly for our present purposes, the Canaanite god Ba'al required constant gruesome sacrifices of children publicly burnt alive by fire, most often the first-born male. Although apparently unknown to or ignored by Habel and Advent in

their study, this is what David the third and greatest king of Israel was addressing directly when he wrote Psalm 29, one of the main foci of the study. But more about this later (Hermann, 1999).

Now we come to the issue of what are 'psalms', properly speaking. What were they exactly, who wrote them, and why were they written? Although there is a lot of dependable and valid research on the topic of psalms as applied to the Bible, fortunately we do not need to engage in an extensive review of this material for this investigation. It will suffice for our purposes simply to provide a rudimentary dictionary definition and general descriptive details. Generally, a psalm is a sacred song or hymn, in a manner of speaking, particularly those contained in the biblical Book of Psalms and used in Christian and Jewish worship as sacred poems usually with specific forms. That book of Psalms is a book in the Bible containing a

collection of religious verses which are either sung or spoken, but mostly recited.

Most importantly, at that time most individual psalms were composed in order to praise God, sometimes for His power, sometimes for His beneficence, sometimes for His creation of the world, sometimes for His previous acts of deliverance for Israel. The nature of that praise tended to depend very much on the expressed purpose of the author. So, then, any interpretation of any psalm, let alone other types of biblical passages, that takes place through the technical or functional application of raw theoretical models without being informed by these spiritual contextual details ends up being somewhat skewed and misguided.

As a whole, these psalms envision a world in which everyone and everything will praise God, and God will in turn hear their prayers and respond favorably. It is important to point out that a psalm is not a song, which is a musical composition with lyrics for voice or voices. Rather, psalms are sacred poetical compositions specifically intended usually for collective public use in the praise or worship of God. As such, there are many different kinds of praise: for example, general praise, lamenting praise, enthronement and royal praise, wisdom praise, and imprecation praise. It will suffice for us to keep firmly in mind that the Psalms in the Old Testament of the Bible were mainly intended for prayer to and worship of God for His past faithfulness, present love, and future hope, not for other purposes which may or may not be attributed to them as a part of particular theoretical perspectives, philosophical worldviews, or hermeneutical techniques such as contextual or story theory and textual or linguistic analyses which are wholly foreign to a biblical worldview.

B. Ecojustice Looks at Psalm 29

With regard to the authors' theoretical treatment of Psalm 29, it is relatively facile to demonstrate this point. From the

ecojustice perspective, here God is viewed as being more interested in demonstrating almighty overwhelming power over a poor, pitiable, defenseless 'Earth Community', more selfishly interested in seeking His own victory and glory over creation (to the "applause of a council of divine celestial beings") than he is about suitably expressing a sensitive love for His creation and all the beings that inhabit it.

In other words, God's behavior in Psalm 29 is simply raw, egotistical theocentrism without blessing for Earth's people or the 'Earth Community', as the authors are so fond of saying. Here the authors proclaim that God means to effectively silence "the voices of the Earth and the Earth Community" by callously demonstrating invincible and rather petulant storm God powers.

Come to Earth's rescue Habel and Avent and the entire Earth Bible Team, please. Of course, they don't fail to deliver the expected theoretical cure. Contrary to Psalm 29, Psalms 96-97 effectively come to save Earth from the overwhelming invincible powers of a callous, insensitive Christian storm God's behavior in Psalm 29. Those psalms transform an incredibly violent thunderstorm into the 'righteousness' and 'justice' of God which "the Earth sees", to which "all the trees ... sing for joy", and about which "... the Earth rejoice(s)" and celebrates. God's thunderstorm voice becomes a 'life-restoring act' from the view of the Earth Community, the authors insist.

The total silencing of the Earth Community in Psalm 29 is replaced by the restoration of the 'Earth's voice' in Psalms 96-97. This result leads the authors to confirm the existence of worshipping communities within ancient Israel who were actively practicing worshipping traditions that devalued the Earth. The authors wanted to challenge the validity of worshipping communities and religious traditions such as these which operate to devalue the Earth Community by treating the Earth as a terrain for the destructive display of what they assert to be 'divine power plays', more or less.

Here the strong implication without doubt is that the Christian community as well as Christianity itself “... negates and silences the voice of the Earth and the wider Earth Community” by worshipping and celebrating in unity the awesome power of the God of Israel. The theoretical assertion is that God is exalted, but only “at the expense of the Earth Community”.

Among several other problems plaguing this kind of theoretical perspective, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to perceive the raw unadulterated anti-Semitic philosophical assumptions upon which it is founded. Here it is unnecessary to dive into an extensive analytical assessment and evaluation of the merits and shortcomings of this shortsighted view of the relationship between the Earth Community and the biblical God in Christian doctrine, a lengthy exercise better left to another paper. It will perhaps suffice simply to provide an alternative interpretation of Psalm 29 that is much more historically accurate, objective, spiritually sensitive and truthful biblical than the baseless claims emanating from ecojustice ecological hermeneutics.

C. Psalm 29 Through Christian Lenses

It goes without saying that ecojustice hermeneutics falls far short of understanding the full Christian meaning of biblical passages in general, let alone the particular psalms in question. In the Christian view, Psalm 29 cannot be properly interpreted and understood out of its organic spiritual context or apart from the whole Bible itself, grounded in recognition of the sinful nature of human beings. Sinful human beings have a way of attributing to other entities what belongs rightfully to God. Sinful human beings often see and understand what God has done, but yet deny the fact that God has done it. Instead, they seek to attribute to other things what is rightfully God's work such as when Darwin attributed things to 'evolution', a pertinent example here.

When applied to the central topic under discussion, thunderstorms are often described poetically by biblical

authors as being ‘the voice of the Lord’ or some such reference. The point was that it was believed the Lord makes storms happen. From a secular scientific point of view, yes there are specific atmospheric conditions that often lead to storms, like two air fronts colliding, for example. But what lies behind those conditions, what factors account for their existence, what causes two air fronts to collide, and so forth, are issues in Christianity where an almighty God can be invoked. This is even more the case in the early history of Israelites who were living among groups who did not share Christian doctrine, traditions, or worldview.

At the time of the writing of Psalm 29, for example, one of those pagan groups living in Israel were called the Canaanites, as most novice Bible students probably know. Now, it is important to point out here that the authors Habel and Avent don’t tell the reader everything they need to know about the worshipping behavior and religious traditions of the Canaanites and the specific problems they were causing, absolutely essential in order to render a proper interpretation of Psalm 29. The Canaanites worshipped a God called, Baal, who was believed to be in charge of one thing in particular, namely storms. In other words, from the Christian perspective, the Canaanites attributed storms to their false god, Baal.

D. David’s Psalm 29

Now, since the Canaanites were living in some of the same areas as the Israelites at that time, however, some of those Israelites were tempted to worship that particular ‘storm God’ in order to solicit desperately needed rain to care for their crops and animals. That’s when Psalm 29 comes into the picture. That psalm is a praise psalm in which David states the Lord is receiving praise for being the God of the storm needed for survival. Here David is arguably not attempting to ‘devalue the Earth Community’ in any way, shape, or form, as the Earth Bible authors proclaim. From a Christian point of view, he is simply and fervently urging fellow Israelites to stop attributing

the power and benefits of storms to the false Canaanite God, Baal.

This is because fellow Israelites at the time were so prone to idolatry and Baal worship many times out of desperation for survival that many complaints about this behavior finally reached David's ears. Of course, among these complaints were horrifying grievances coming from the Jewish neighbors of Canaanites who were watching them publicly burn alive their first-born male children in sacrifice to the false Baal storm god. So, then, David's purpose in writing Psalm 29 was at least twofold: to stop the horrific Canaanite practice of burning their children alive in sacrifice to a false Baal god and to encourage some Jewish groups to see the foolishness of David talking directly to that false god.

That is why the psalm takes a particular form. For example, the 'voice of God' is a phrase that repeats itself seven times in verses 3-10. If you look carefully, the first statement in the psalm matches the last statement; the second statement matches the second to last statement; and so forth. Due to the odd number of verses, one statement occupies the special 'middle' place. David describes thunder here as 'His' voice, the voice of the God of the Hebrew Bible, not the voice of the Canaanite storm god, Baal. He's trying to persuade both the Canaanites and idolatrous Jews that the rain stemming from storms which produces good harvests and cares for animals is the handiwork of the one true Hebrew God, not the work of the false pagan god, Baal.

By the same token, when lightning is described in this psalm as cutting the skies with fire, it's simply David's picturesque way of describing lightning, and the 'Lord's voice' causes this to happen. The 'voice of the Lord' in the storm uses lightning to achieve the effects David is speaking of – breaking down trees, shaking the Earth, and so forth. David is here emphatically not attempting to 'devalue the Earth' at all, as the ecojustice ecological perspective of the authors seems to conclude. What

David is doing something quite different within his own worldview at that time.

Evidently, he is attempting to mock the Baal storm God by exaggerating its Canaanite-defined godlike powers in a concerted effort to lure idolatrous Jews away from Baal storm god worship. The effort is perhaps also aimed at converting as many Canaanites as possible to worshipping the Hebrew God in order to persuade them to stop the horrific Canaanite practice of child sacrifice to their storm god, Baal.

This alternative Christian-based interpretation of Psalm 29 demonstrates the many problems inherent in the process of biblical interpretation when it is not properly historically informed and when it does not take into consideration a heartened biblical worldview during that process of interpretation. Before scholars are entitled to impute or attribute scandalous meanings to biblical passages that are questionable at best, whether 'ecological' or not, they should first demonstrate a thorough understanding of those passages from within the context of the entire Bible itself and from within the Christian doctrine.

David wrote those psalms to contrast exaggeratingly and poetically the horrific child sacrifice Ba'al storm god of the Canaanites with the one true Hebrew God of the Old Testament Bible, not to devalue Earth and the Earth Community. That's what he believed as king of the Jews at that time. When the intentions and purposes of biblical authors are taken out of their natural context and placed within external or foreign theoretical systems, then the biblical passages under examination come to take on meanings that are more consistent with the contemporary philosophical assumptions underlying those theories than they are indicative of some newly discovered truth about the nature and origin of the Bible itself.

Conclusions

As a simple way of trying to demonstrate the profound weaknesses contained within the ecojustice interpretation of biblical text, this essay closely examined a chapter on the Psalms in one of Habel's many edited works on this subject and then compared it to standard interpretations which employ a biblical worldview. The essay contends that the historical roots of the ecojustice perspective are firmly planted within the socialist and atheistic doctrines, philosophical assumptions, presuppositions, and values of Marxian ecology and Darwinism, with grave ramifications for the process of biblical interpretation.

The results suggest that these interpretative problems are irremediable due mostly to the adoption and application of an a-priori worldview entirely foreign to the worldview contained within the Bible itself as well as to the application of foreign theoretical and theological models which fundamentally distort biblical meanings, misrepresenting them as fresh insights. A severe paucity of theoretical and methodological reflexivity only compounds these problems. One of the telltale signs that the ecojustice perspective is a fundamentally distorting and misleading view of biblical meaning is that it is easily harmonized with many other similar critical approaches to the Bible such as historical criticism, ecofeminism, and textual criticism, among many other approaches antagonistic to a biblical worldview.

Generally, this essay demonstrates the inevitable interpretative pitfalls of projecting foreign contemporary theoretical and theological models, doctrines and values backwards into ancient biblical texts rather than trying to understand them in their own terms, that is, in terms of the values and principles contained in the cosmology or worldview out of which they emerged (Wright, 2001). Under these conditions, biblical interpretation becomes a hazardous enterprise indeed, and ecojustice 're-readings' and 're-interpretations' of biblical texts

to fit a set of wholly-unrelated pre-determined modern values and principles become manifestly suspect, untruthful and unjust in strict biblical terms, hence the meaning behind the title of this essay.

As well, it underscores the significance of placing contemporary theories and theologies within a proper historical context so that underlying philosophical assumptions and presuppositions can be identified, related to main points, and promptly critically evaluated. The claim here is that it is virtually impossible to appropriately evaluate and assess a particular perspective, theological or not, in the absence of comprehending its trajectory of historical development. In our case here, that history is intimately and integrally bound up with the central features of the modern ecological movement which itself finds its own lifeblood mainly in the socialist and atheistic doctrines of 19th century Marxism and Darwinism.

It almost goes without saying that this point is especially important when dealing with controversial, hot-button contemporary social issues like the ecology, environmental crises, and climate change. Within the sophisticated, highly technologized mass-mediated communication systems of the modern world, the concerns and worries caused by serious climate change and environmental problems can easily trigger massive waves of public hysteria and panic. However, it is precisely at those times that various powerful interest groups are jostling over favored public policies and programs in the quest to address environmental perceived threats, real or imagined.

Public panic can then be easily manipulated or exploited by such interest groups some of which may be more interested in pursuing radical social change than forging authentic biblical interpretations. Under such circumstances, theology and theological thought in general risks becoming the handmaiden of fashionable ideological trends. Lynn White's accusations against Christianity for allegedly causing environmental

degradation is a case in point (1967), but by no means is it a freak contemporary exception.

Since the other Earth Bible ecojustice interpretations of biblical text emanate from the same historical and theoretical traditions reviewed above, it would indeed be unusual for them not to adopt the same sort of heavy-handed focus upon the role of power relations and structures of exploitation, domination, and oppression in society. In the modern view, those power structures are commonly related to capitalist economic productive systems as the ultimate original sin, if you will.

In such a view, the ills of society are sourced in social structures and institutions rather than in the imperfections of human nature as per a strict biblical view. When projected backwards into ancient power relations by an ecojustice perspective, then power is expressed differently because the evil capitalism argument cannot be maintained. So, then, it becomes an exploited or muted 'Earth voice', or an all-powerful bully divine God, or

The idea that seems to be dominant in this perspective is the belief that the social practices and institutions established by the system of power structures is the sole or primary source of ecological abuse and crises, not human nature as per a strict biblical worldview nor any other possible factor (such as long term solar magnetic cycles, or sudden changes in planetary alignments or movements, or tectonic shifts, or even divine providence).

Although drawn from Marx's critique of capitalism, as demonstrated above, ecojustice authors mask their Marxian socialist theoretical partisan views in the much safer ecological language characterizing modern social environmental theory. Doing so deflects criticism more easily because opponents don't want to be defined by proponents of this view as anti-environmental.

When viewed as a political, ideological and rhetorical strategy for promoting sweeping social changes in economic productive systems consistent with Marxian socialist theory, adoption of an ecojustice perspective of the Bible with foundational roots in Marxian ecology becomes highly questionable and suspect. Criticizing capitalist productive systems from a Marxian socialist viewpoint while wearing an ecological protective mask is surely a more effective defense against the opponents of such a theological view. Arguably, however, the effect is the same in that the sacred spiritual meaning of particular scriptural passages are reduced to profane materialistic themes and tenets more characteristic of socialist doctrine than authentic biblical interpretation.

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Marc Grenier

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