

○ **REVIEW OF ANNE F. ELVEY, *AN ECOLOGICAL FEMINIST READING OF THE GOSPEL OF LUKE*** (LEWISTON, NEW YORK: EDWIN MELLEN PRESS, 2005)

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This volume brings together several innovative readings of the Gospel of Luke from a combined ecological and feminist perspective. The author, Anne F. Elvey, represents a particular Australian context where she has partnership with the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Melbourne and also with The Earth Bible Team which merges ecological, ethical research with biblical interpretation and its re(de)constructive hermeneutics.

This volume is specifically designed to provide, within the intricate web of ecological interconnectedness, a wider engagement with the topics of Earth and women. The intertext of Earth is particularly significant to Elvey, insofar as it is re/membered with the principles of voice and resistance and informs the text and its construct and representations. According to her work, human relationship with and within the wider Earth community resonates on a number of levels in the text, behind the text, and in front of the text. The interplay of the earth community and the text opens up new vistas to Scripture as they serve as instruments for ecojustice, which is often dismissed in the interpretations of the Bible. This explicit purpose gives focus to her effort to interpret responsibly on her own.

Chapter One presents a reading practice that is multidimensional, making explicit the interpretive process – including its own contextual, hermeneutical, and textual framework. This strategy has resulted in the rejection of biblical interpretations that condone the political, economic, social, and religious exploitation of the Earth community and foster the logic of ‘divine necessity’. The concept of ‘divine necessity’ in particular has justified a colonial-imperial construction of the other. By disclosing the intertextual otherness of Earth when she reads the Bible, however, Elvey shows that biblical texts and their readers are all embedded in Earth and bear a material indebtedness to it. Reading the Bible with an ecological feminist awareness, such as an attention to the metaphor of ‘pregnant body’, as well as the paradigm of ‘gestation’, should be highly rewarding inasmuch as it provides a better chance of making ethical appropriations of the text for our time.

Chapter Two, ‘Ancient Memories: Pregnant Bodies and Earth’, grounds the basis for an intertextual reading of Luke and its construct of the pregnant body. Hence, she pays more attention to the human relationships with nature within cultures of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean worlds, from Palaeolithic through to the first-century CE Roman period. The differing images of human relationship drawn from those cultural, anthropological spaces and times help build a more concrete framework for interpreting the figure of the pregnant body in the Lukan text.

Chapter Three, ‘On Remembering the Material Given: Pregnant Bodies and Earth’, engages in contemporary postmodern discourses on the gift and the given. Elvey articulates the concept of the ‘material given’, which represents a condition that is materially necessary for human and other life. This ‘material given’ also becomes a site of interconnectedness between self and other, which goes beyond colonizing commodification and its exchange relationship, and forms a ground

for a particular ecological feminist mode of biblical interpretation. For Elvey, keeping or re/membering of the pregnant body and Earth is a key element for a hermeneutical, theological approach as such.

Chapter four is a treatment of 'The Birth of the Mother: A Reading of Luke 2:1–20'. Elvey sees the birth of Jesus as a moment that the mother Mary is born as a 'keeping' woman. She points out that the birth of the mother as a 'keeping' woman forms a basis for re-reading of the text that ought to re/member the pregnant body. Mary's pregnancy presents a gestational paradigm throughout the Lukan text. The reading of such a paradigm, however, shall not evade the violence to come in Jerusalem by way of her child's death and also in power and exploitations by way of colonization. In this regard, 'keeping' can be understood both as a storing of life and as a reserving of death.

Chapter Five focuses on such themes as 'Keeping, Women, Earth and Death'. Elvey observes that the Lukan keeping woman constructs a transformative connectedness to nature within a structure of dualism – such as command and obedience, master and slave – that forms a colonizing motivation both in the past and in the present. Chapter Six further explores the role of 'The Outsider Within' in Luke, refining the ambiguity of relationship of the gestational paradigm to the 'logic of divine necessity'. That is, the 'only-one-ness' of divine purpose creates a tension, only to be subverted by the gestational paradigm that suggests 'the material interconnectedness of self and other' as much revealed in the divine visitation (cf. 1:39–56; 7:36–50; etc).

Chapter Seven, 'Compassion and the Other', discusses the way in which the text exhibits a gestational paradigm, unveiling the construction of 'other' and allowing 'the alterity of the other' to function subversively. The parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25–37) is one example that reveals 'the fecundity of a caress' as expressing a passionate bearing of the wounded person by 'the more-than-human Earth community'. Chapter Eight, 'The Lukan Basileia', offers an interpretation of the reign of God in terms of gift relationship. The Basileia as a gift (12:32) opens a space where hospitality wins and where both gratitude and sustenance have to prevail. Thus, the repair of the world should be in order.

The main contribution of this volume lies not only in the way of theoretical advancement of the ecological feminist paradigm, but also in the actual application of it to the Gospel of Luke. Largely located within the liberationist tradition, the volume brings up liberating, or better transformative, consciousness among readers today in the global context of ecological crises. Though the volume itself remains a valuable example of this type of approach, it nonetheless cultivates a quite distinctive kind of outcome that is serious and powerful with regard to its 'gestational' integration of humans and more-than-humans.

Since the volume is designed to provide what other approaches do not – insight into the intertextuality of Earth and the text – one may miss a detailed explanation of the socio-historical, cultural, political system behind the language of the gospel, especially from the Circum-Mediterranean region in the first century CE. With the aid of the intertext of Earth, however, one may benefit from what is an equally valuable aspect – or 'material' to use Elvey's terminology – of the text that would otherwise remain invisible. In conclusion, the volume contributes to a sharp revisioning of a mutual/'heteronomous' Earth (comm)unity, as opposed to interested/'ideological' power and exploitations.