Grey into Green: A Pentecostal Contribution to Ecological Hermeneutics

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Introduction

When Lynn White, Jr., published his provocative article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," in the journal *Science* in 1967,[1] the environmental movement in the United States was in its early stages, and went largely unaddressed by Christians. To many Christians in the United States, the media images of the movement looked too much like the larger countercultural movements, with longhaired young people speaking out against governmental inaction and corporate disregard for the wellbeing of the natural world. These people were deemed un-American and the movement they represented might be summarily dismissed. But then White's article laid the bulk of the responsibility for the ecological crisis squarely on Christianity. He argued that biblical passages such as Genesis 1:26–28 had been interpreted throughout Christian history as a warrant to exploit the natural world for human expediency and thriving. Coming from a historian by training, White's charges carried weight among a secular audience that had little exposure to the resources of historic Christianity. However, once White's charges were published, they caught the attention of several Christian thinkers who set out on a quest to defend Christianity from these charges. Here was born a concerted effort to develop a Christian ecotheology. Secondarily, the seeds were planted that would eventuate in a branch of biblical interpretation known as ecological hermeneutics.

The present essay will highlight key moments in the development of ecological hermeneutics for the purpose of identifying a possible contribution from another hermeneutical quest, the development of a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic. Both endeavors have generated considerable momentum in their quests, with voices contributing from quite varied global audiences. No attempt will be made here to provide exhaustive historical analyses of these hermeneutical ventures, nor will there be any attempt to identify all of the various expressions of these hermeneutics. Rather, the focus will be to conduct a sort of conversation between two contributors to their respective quests. Representing ecological hermeneutics will be Australian Norman Habel, considered by many the father of ecological hermeneutics, while representing Pentecostal hermeneutics will be American Chris Green, one of the leading voices in Pentecostal theology today. To begin, we will look briefly at the development of ecological hermeneutics and Norman Habel's distinctive contribution to it.

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[1] Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203–7.

1. The Rise of Ecological Hermeneutics

As mentioned above, with the publication of White's article, Christians began to engage the ecological crisis in an intentional way. At first, there were the efforts to rebut White's charges that Christianity was the primary culprit in establishing an ethos where human thriving at the expense of the environment could occur. These efforts have become legion and are of no concern for the present argument.[2] More important for our purposes is the methodology adopted by those who took up White's challenge. This approach may be termed the "ecological wisdom" approach. Here the Bible is mined for positive statements concerning the natural world. Passages such as the creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2, land regulations regarding Sabbath (Leviticus 25:1–7, 11–12), Psalm 104, God's speeches in Job 38–41, Paul's assertion that the whole of creation will participate in God's eschatological redemption (Roman 8:19–21), a series of passages I call "creational Christology" (John 1:3, 10; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2–3a; and Revelation 3:14), and the vision of the new heavens and earth in Revelation 21–22, are advanced as evidence that the created order had, has, and will have enduring worth in God's estimation. Interpreters from across the spectrum of Christian traditions, including Pentecostalism,[3] have contributed to a massive and growing bibliography of studies aimed at showing that care for God's creation is integral to Christian faith, drawing heavily on the ecological wisdom of the Bible to support their positions. Perhaps the acme of this approach occurred in 2008 with the publication of *The Green Bible* (HarperOne). This version highlighted ecologically friendly passages in green ink (both ink and paper were ecologically friendly as well) and provided study aids and supplementary articles by notable scholars and clergy from many denominations. A casual perusal of this version would indicate that the Bible has much positive to say about the created order.

While a popular way to respond to White's challenge, the ecological wisdom approach is quite limited in a significant way. In a scathing critique of *The Green Bible*, Norman Habel tabbed the methodology of this approach naïve, primarily due to the lack of attention paid to those passages that do not advance an ecologically friendly view of both God and human beings toward the created order.[4] In Habel's view, a hermeneutic of suspicion is needed in order to

[2] One of the very first substantive responses to White was Francis A. Schaeffer's *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1970). Probably the best, concise response to White is Richard Bauckham's charge that White's argument lacks nuance in that it does not take into account non-Christian influences on Christianity in the medieval period nor does it assess the positive relationship with the natural world in Christian tradition. It is noteworthy, however, that White puts the onus of addressing the ecological crisis on Christianity and points to Francis of Assisi as a model for a way forward. See Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 15–19; and White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," 1206–7.

[3] Recently, Jeffrey S. Lamp, "Ecotheology," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 357–66. See sources cited there.

[4] Norman Habel, "When Earth Reads *The Green Bible*," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 3:3 (2009): 421–22.

ascertain the Bible's overall message with the requisite nuance of the Bible's depiction of the place of the other-than-human creation in God's dealings with human beings.

Norman Habel is a prolific Old Testament scholar whose later years have been spent in developing an ecological hermeneutic that takes into account all that the Bible has to say about the place of the natural order, which he terms "Earth," in God's economy. The first step was the formation of the Earth Bible Project near the end of the twentieth century. Habel and several other scholars began to develop a hermeneutic of suspicion in consultation with ecologists, and derived a series of six "ecojustice principles" that would provide the contours of a critical ecological hermeneutic. The principles are as follows:

- *The principle of intrinsic worth:* the universe, Earth, and all its components have intrinsic worth/value;
- *The principle of interconnectedness:* Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival;
- *The principle of voice:* Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice;
- *The principle of purpose:* the universe, Earth, and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design;
- *The principle of mutual custodianship:* Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners with, rather than rulers over, Earth to sustain its balance and a diverse Earth community; and
- *The principle of resistance:* Earth and its components not only suffer from human injustices but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.[5]

The group's first major literary effort was a series of five volumes that read select biblical texts across the Christian canon in light of these interpretive principles.[6] In subsequent years, these

[5] Norman Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, eds. Norman Habel and Peter Trudinger, Symposium Series 46 (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 2.

[6] Entries in the series include Norman Habel, ed., *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, Earth Bible 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Norman Habel and Shirley Wurst, eds, *The Earth Story in Genesis*, Earth Bible 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Norman Habel and Shirley Wurst, eds, *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, Earth Bible 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Norman Habel, ed., *The Earth Story in Psalms and Prophets*, Earth Bible 4 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); and Norman Habel and Vicky Balabanski, eds, *The Earth Story in the New Testament,* Earth Bible 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002). The Earth Bible Project is presently engaged in the publication of the Earth Bible Commentary Series, several volumes of which are currently in print: Habel, *The Birth, Curse and the Greening of Earth: An Ecological Reading of Genesis 1–11* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix: 2011); Michael Trainor, *About Earth's Child: An Ecological Listening to the Gospel of Luke* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix: 2012); Raymond F. Person, Jr, *Deuteronomy and Environmental Amnesia* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix: 2014); Habel, *Finding Wisdom in Nature* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix: 2014); Anthony Rees, *Voices of the Wilderness: An Ecological Reading of the Book of Numbers* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix: 2015); Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Letter to the Romans: Paul among the Ecologists* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix: 2016). In 2017, the publisher switched to Bloomsbury T & T Clark, and several more volumes have emerged: Margaret Daly-Denton, *John: An Earth Bible Commentary:*

principles were subjected to a radical revisioning in order to produce a more robust hermeneutic. This led to the formation, under Habel's direction, of the Consultation on Ecological Hermeneutics in the Society of Biblical Literature in 2004. This consultation, now known as the Ecological Hermeneutics Section, developed a more refined hermeneutic centered on three criteria: suspicion, identification, and retrieval. These criteria are a reworking and expansion of the ecojustice principles articulated earlier. Briefly, the criterion of *suspicion* asserts that the biblical depiction of Earth frequently suffers due to the anthropocentric bias of the Bible, expressed in terms of interest for human beings and the divine-human relationship. Moreover, subsequent generations of interpreters have followed in this bias, effectively suppressing the voice of Earth in favor of human concerns. This has proven especially the case in Western cultural contexts that place a high value on economic, scientific, and technological progress. In reading a biblical text, an ecological interpreter must identify the anthropocentric bias in order to proceed with examination of the text in light of the remaining two criteria. The criterion of *identification*, then, seeks points of connection between human beings and Earth in the text for the purpose of creating a sense of empathy for Earth. This criterion proceeds in light of the close kinship that human beings have with Earth. These points of connection may be overtly present in the text, but just deemphasized in light of the author's explicit purposes in the text, or they may be sublimated, with the author unaware that such points of contact are present. Finally, the criterion of *retrieval* seeks, in light of the anthropocentric bias(es) present in a text and the point(s) of identification established by the reader, to retrieve the voice of Earth that is rendered silent in the text. This move understands Earth not just to be a passive object at the disposal of God and/or human beings, but a participating, speaking subject that has voice, a voice that can speak in celebration of its place of value in God's economy or in protest at injustices that are evident in the text or in subsequent interpretations of the text.[7]

This ecological hermeneutic is a subversive-constructive hermeneutic, approaching the text with a particular suspicion in order to subvert its apparent intention for the purpose of constructing an ecological reading of the text from the perspective of Earth. Here the term "subversion" must not be seen as an attempt to undermine the intentions of the author in the text, but rather to see in the author's own presentation a bias that might be reassessed from an ecological point of view to provide a point of identification with Earth so as to hear how Earth might respond to the text. Here emerges the constructive aspect of the

Supposing Him to Be the Gardener (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017); Marie Turner, *Ecclesiastes: An Earth Bible Commentary: Qoheleth's Eternal Earth* (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017); Michael Trainor, *Acts: An Earth Bible Commentary: About Earth's Children: An Ecological Listening to the Acts of the Apostles* (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2020); Jione Havea, *Jonah: An Earth Bible Commentary* (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2020); Jeffrey S. Lamp, *Hebrews: An Earth Bible Commentary: A City That Cannot Be Shaken* (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2020); Alice M. Sinnott*, Ruth: An Earth Bible Commentary* (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2020).

[7] Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics," 3–5.

hermeneutic. Subversion leads to the construction of Earth's voice, which in turn confronts readers of the text with a challenge to act on behalf of Earth.

Perhaps an astute reader of this essay will notice in reading both the six ecojustice principles of the Earth Bible Project and the three criteria of the Ecological Hermeneutics Section that the language employed is not explicitly Christian. This did not escape the notice of another stream within the quest for an ecological hermeneutic. In the United Kingdom a research project was conducted at the University of Exeter, 2006–2009, in which an interdisciplinary group of scholars came together to examine the potential contribution of the Bible to ecotheology and environmental ethics. The focus of this effort was to survey the broad span of Christian history and Scripture in order to ascertain the various interactions between Christianity and the environment. At one level, the effort was descriptive. At another, it was prescriptive, seeking for ways to articulate major Christian doctrines ecologically in a way that is consonant with a "scripturally shaped Christian orthodoxy."[8] This appears to differ in intent from the Earth Bible Project's approach, which seems more focused on providing an ecological hermeneutic that is capable of interacting with secular and other-faith-based groups.[9] Others have also engaged largely within the Earth Bible Project's framework while suggesting tactical approaches that incorporate the focus of the Exeter group on articulating Christian doctrines in ecological terms.[10]

For the purposes of the remainder of this essay, we will focus squarely on Habel's and the Earth Bible Project's formulation of ecological hermeneutics as we bring it into conversation with Pentecostal hermeneutics. To this end, we will direct our attention to one volume in which Habel identifies the particular problem with the "ecological wisdom" approach to ecological hermeneutics, *An Inconvenient Text*,[11] titled with a nod to former United States Vice President Al Gore's influential documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). Once we describe Habel's concern, we will examine a particular aspect of Chris Green's Pentecostal hermeneutic that provides yet another tactical approach that addresses Habel's concern.

2. Norman Habel and *An Inconvenient Text*

In *An Inconvenient Text* Norman Habel not only explicates and applies the ecological hermeneutic described above, but also places it within the larger discussion of the problem the Bible itself presents to ecological hermeneuts. Habel sets the stage for this discussion by presenting a pair of terms that identify the content of the Bible with respect to Earth. For

[8] David G. Horrell, "Introduction," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Perspectives*, eds. David G. Horrell, Cherryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate, and Francesca Stavrakopoulou (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 9.
[9] Ernst M. Conradie, "What on Earth is an Ecological Hermeneutics? Some Broad Parameters," in *Ecological Hermeneutics*, 309.
[10] E.g., Jeffrey S. Lamp, *Reading Green: Tactical Approaches for Reading the Bible Ecologically* (New York: Peter Lang, 2017).
[11] Norman Habel, *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* (Hindmarsh: ATF, 2009).

Habel, there are "green" texts and there are "grey" texts. At its most basic level, a green text is one that presents a positive assessment of Earth, whereas a grey text is one that in one of several ways deprecates Earth in its presentation. But the issue is more than simply cataloging texts according to their stance toward Earth. It also involves the disposition of the reader toward Earth. Habel states, "To be green is to have empathy with Earth because I know myself as a child of Earth. To be grey is to view nature as a resource for humans to exploit because I assume humans are superior to the rest of nature."[12] So for Habel, the issue is two-fold. First, there are clearly texts that present as either green or grey. But second, there is also the involvement of the human reader, one that is clearly favored in many biblical passages but one that is also involved in a history of interpreting those texts in a way favorable to human interests. It is this recognition that presents a problem for the ecological reader, and it is a recognition that seemed to escape notice in *The Green Bible*. The biblical picture of God as creator, presented as a credential for a green God in this version, has to be balanced by the frequent depiction of God as one who wreaks havoc on nature on behalf of human beings.[13]

The structure of Habel's book reflects this realization. He opens the volume by examining three major categories of grey texts (chs. 1–3). The first category (ch. 1) he labels the "mandate to dominate," exemplified by passages such as Genesis 1:26–28 and 9:2 where God entrusts human beings with the mandate to dominate and subdue Earth. Noting that the verbs used in Genesis 1:28 for "dominate" and "subdue" are used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe violent actions, Habel argues that the passage endorses human exploitation of Earth for human ends.[14] The second category of grey texts (ch. 2) is called the "mighty acts of God" passages, represented by the Flood and Exodus narratives and Ezekiel's visions of the destruction of the land. In these passages God perpetrates ecological violence either on behalf of favored Israel or in judgement against human beings. The third category (ch. 3) refers to the "promised land," seen in the conquest of Joshua of Canaan that entailed the destruction not only of the human inhabitants of the land, but the animal life as well, and in the visions of Isaiah 65 that indicate that the present state of desert lands must be eschatologically transformed into habitats more preferred by human beings. All of these categories depict God as somewhat less than green, and it is these passages that present the major challenge to a green reading of the Bible, despite the green ink found in the pages of *The Green Bible*.

In chapter 4, Habel discusses the reality that in large measure served as the catalyst for the development of the Earth Bible Project's hermeneutic. Habel's engagement with the reality of ecological crises, especially global climate change, and the relationship of human beings

[12] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, xix.
[13] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, xx–xxi.
[14] See Habel, *The Birth, Curse and the Greening of Earth*, 35–40. Terence Fretheim, on the other hand, is representative of those who see the potential for a positive assessment of Gen 1:26–28 in ecological terms. See his *The Book of Genesis*, New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abindgon, 1994), 346.

with the planet, convinced him that the state of ecological crisis facing the world must be the starting point for engagement with the Bible.[15] The ecological dilemma facing the world today is the hermeneutical grid through which the Bible is questioned for its contribution to the crises at hand, not some epistemologically derived approach to biblical exegesis. The rationale for this claim is clear: in the times when the biblical writings were composed, there was no consciousness on the part of biblical writers of an impending global ecological catastrophe. True, there are indeed statements of various kinds addressing creation, but there is no sense of ecological crisis. That must be teased out of the text, a text that has an ambivalent approach to the assessment of creation in the economy of God. From here, in chapter 5, Habel describes the ecological hermeneutic developed by the Earth Bible Project. It is this hermeneutic that provides interpreters with an approach to engage the grey texts of the Bible.

Having described the impetus for and methodology of the Earth Bible Project's hermeneutic, Habel proceeds in chapters 6–8 to reread the texts identified in chapters 1–3 through the suspicion-identification-retrieval criteria in order to hear the voice of Earth. But in this section of the book, Habel does not simply provide a tutorial in this hermeneutic. Rather, he places it within a larger context of interpretation in which he introduces further considerations for reading the Bible ecologically, which he then brings together in the conclusion of the volume in a way that reveals the reasoning behind naming the volume as he did.

The reality of ecological crises facing the world and the ambivalent presentation of creational themes in the Bible present an ecologically-oriented reader with a set of three related problems. First is the realization that the Bible is an *inconvenient text*.[16] This is precisely the case because of the convergence of several inputs into the calculus of determining the role of the Bible in addressing ecological problems. The presence of the grey passages that in some way devalue Earth, in words or actions of God or human beings, presents the major obstacle. Were the Bible only a depository of ecological wisdom, always presenting a unified vision for Earth in the dealings of God with creation, an ecological reading of the Bible would be easily attained and a course forward for addressing ecological crises, at least as far as the Bible were concerned, would be more readily discerned. However, such a reading is possible only at the expense of the grey passages, and to these grey passages other Bible readers might eagerly point in order to support more exploitive approaches of human beings toward the other-than-human created order. A way is needed to handle the grey passages.

Here, the Earth Bible Project's ecological hermeneutic provides a way to handle these grey passages. Yet it does so in a way that further makes the Bible an inconvenient text. Due to the awakening of an ecological consciousness among human beings in recent decades, this

[15] This is also argued in Lamp, *Reading Green*, 3, as the foundation for the tactical approaches described in that volume.
[16] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 115–17.

hermeneutic serves to find ways for human beings to identify with the plight of Earth as presented in the grey texts and in environmentally exploitive human actions against Earth, and to retrieve Earth's voice in light of these depictions. Earth cries out at injustices perpetrated against it, frequently in terms that protest against the grey texts. This is often interpreted by some as an anti-biblical reading practice. This further complicates an ecological reading of the Bible. Not only does the Bible at points present itself as ecologically negative, or ambivalent at best, the ecologically minded reader using Habel's ecological hermeneutic may be viewed as denigrating the divine inspiration of the Bible.

Yet a final consideration complicates the picture and heightens the sense of the Bible as an inconvenient text. There are indeed numerous passages in the Bible that may be termed green, as indicated by the green ink of *The Green Bible*. These passages highlight the problematic presence of the grey passages, because it leaves the reader with the difficult prospect of having to find a way to navigate the presence of both grey and green passages in a time of dire ecological crisis. How is the church to map a course of response to environmental degradation and related human suffering if a significant source of doctrine and practice is so ambivalent?

This brings us to the second of the problems facing ecologically oriented readers of the Bible. The nature of the biblical data in light of ecological crisis presents the reader with an *uncomfortable choice*.[17] The reader, having employed the ecological hermeneutic outlined in this volume, is left with evaluating three voices: the grey texts with their depictions of anthropocentric bias and divine action against Earth; the green texts that affirm the intrinsic value of Earth; and Earth's voice retrieved from the problematic grey texts. Habel presents the situation in terms that show his Lutheran background. A choice must be made between which texts, grey or green, predominate in reading the Bible ecologically. In a tack that betrays his Lutheran background, Habel boldly asserts that the way of Jesus of Nazareth, characterized as a way of service and not domination, must prevail (cf. Mark 10:42–45).[18] In perhaps his most provocative statement in the entire book, Habel asserts that the challenge to follow the way of Jesus when reading the Bible ecologically "involves declaring that the grey texts of the Old Testament are superseded and are no longer valid expressions of our faith in Christ."[19] How does Habel justify this approach?

In his rereading of the categories of grey passages in chs. 6–8, Habel draws upon several green texts to identify points of identification with Earth and to identify the substance of Earth's retrieved voice. For example, Genesis 2:15 is cited as a green text that provides the counter to the grey "mandate to dominate" text of Genesis 1:26–28, a choice of service to Earth over

[17] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 117–20.
[18] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 118–19. Habel quotes Luther's dictum "*Was Christum treibet*," or "what points to Christ?"
[19] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 77. Habel also includes grey texts in the New Testament in this sentiment.

domination of it.[20] In like manner, Psalm 104, in which "God is the vibrant blessing that permeates all of creation,"[21] is the green textual response to the grey "mighty acts of God" passages.[22] And as antidote to the grey "promised land" passages, the green Sabbath legislation of Leviticus 25–27 is cited.[23] Yet in a sense, these textual skirmishes are but tit-for-tat exercises, effectively highlighting the nature of the uncomfortable choice. Readers may indeed by fiat choose to read the green passages over the grey passages, but surely a more substantive justification is required.

The more substantial justification occurs in two hermeneutical moves in which Habel establishes certain New Testament passages as embodying what it means to be consonant with the way of Jesus of Nazareth. These passages, then, exert a hermeneutical control for dealing with the biblical depiction of creation. The first of these is the incarnation of God in Jesus (John 1).[24] This text is crucial for justifying the rejection of grey passages, for in the incarnation the God who has previously been depicted as outside of creation and intervening in it, often to the detriment of Earth, is now depicted as operating from within creation. Habel's language to this effect is quite literally visceral:

> In the text of John 1, God "becomes" one specific piece of Earth: a human called Jesus, whose body is composed of the very same elements and organisms that are part of any living flesh. In this act of God we gain a clear revelation of God identifying with and permeating creation, rather than disturbing or destroying it.[25]

The incarnation represents a radical shift in orientation of God's relationship with creation. In a strong correlation with the criterion of identification in the Earth Bible Project's ecological hermeneutic, God, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, identifies with Earth. Habel declares, "When the Word became flesh, God joins the web of suffering creation and suffers with it."[26] Partially on the basis of this radical reorientation of God's relationship with creation, the ecological reader of the Bible is justified in resisting the grey passages of the Bible.

Another justification is found in two passages within the Pauline corpus: Romans 8:18–27 and Colossians 1:15–20.[27] In the former passage, Habel sees Paul's use of the term "groaning" as further cementing the identification of God with creation in a way that both affirms the integrity of creation in its own right in the present but also maintaining that integrity eschatologically. Those grey passages in the Old Testament classified as the "mighty acts of

[20] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 75–77.
[21] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 88.
[22] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 87–89.
[23] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 101–1.
[24] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 91–95. This idea is developed in a slightly different direction in Lamp, *Reading Green*, 62–69.
[25] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 94.
[26] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 95.
[27] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 108–13. These passages are also paradigmatic in a Pauline ecotheology by members of the Exeter University group, David G. Horrell, Cherryl Hunt, and Christopher Southgate, *Greening Paul: Rereading the Apostle in an Age of Ecological Crisis* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010).

God" and the "promised land" passages depict Earth suffering in its present state at the hands of both God and human beings for the benefit or judgement of human beings as well as being in need of radical reconstitution in order to become more hospitable for human thriving. Habel, however, sees in Romans 8:18–27 a reaffirmation of divine identification with Earth, particularly through the repetition of the term "groaning" in the passage.

> This Romans 8 text is particularly significant in a green reading context: instead of a sweeping divine intervention that eliminates Earth or transforms the natural into the unnatural, creation itself, together with a groaning humanity and a suffering Spirit, are anticipating a healing of the wrongs done to creation. The present creation is an integral part of the process for birthing a green future. Creation remains![28]

Here in the person of the Spirit, God identifies with a groaning creation, human and other-than-human alike, affirming the integrity of Earth by virtue of divine presence and moving it toward its ultimate healing in the eschaton. This is a natural extension of the doctrine of the incarnation for a green reading of the Bible, and allows for the superseding of grey passages again by virtue of the divine presence participating within creation.

Colossians 1:15–20 further emphasizes the divine identification of God in Christ with Earth via the creation of all things through Christ, creation's ongoing sustenance in Christ, and creation's *telos* as being for Christ.[29] Crucial here, too, is the sense that all things, visible and invisible, in heaven or on earth, will be reconciled through the cross of Christ (cf. Col 1:20). Taken with Romans 8:18–27, this passage establishes for Habel a basic criterion for a green reading of the Bible: do "the perspective or principles in a text … intensify the groaning of creation or contribute to its liberation and ultimately ours as well"?[30]

Having wrestled with an inconvenient text and an uncomfortable choice, the ecological reader of the Bible is faced with one further problem: an *unenviable task*.[31] This unenviable task is to "liberate ourselves from the power of those grey texts that have controlled our thinking; and through green texts to listen with empathy to cries of a suffering creation, and discern God's presence in solidarity with all who suffer."[32] This entails readers not only undertaking a potentially radical shift in hermeneutical thinking as concerns the "authority" of the Bible in Christian circles, but a concomitant shift in how we then respond to ecological crises in light of the new understandings that arise from this new hermeneutical approach.

In *An Inconvenient Text*, Norman Habel is not seeking to provide another in a myriad of theoretical hermeneutical approaches to reading the Bible. It is a hermeneutical response of urgency in light of ecological crises that pose dire threats to all inhabitants of Earth. The preceding discussion sought to articulate the salient points of Habel's position. At this point,

[28] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 111.
[29] For further discussion on this passage, see Lamp, *Reading Green*, 57–62.
[30] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 113.
[31] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 120–21.
[32] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 121.

we turn our attention to the final consideration of our investigation. Is there a contribution to ecological hermeneutics from Pentecostal quarters?

3. Chris Green's *Sanctifying Interpretation*

The field of Pentecostal hermeneutics is rife with discussion, yielding not one but several models that purport in some way to present a distinctive hermeneutic for Pentecostals, including models that suggest no distinctive model is necessary. The present discussion cannot survey the field[33] nor sample the various models for a contribution to ecological hermeneutics. Rather, one particular, rather distinctive model will be considered here, articulated in Chris Green's book *Sanctifying Interpretation*.[34] The book under consideration is an expanded and revised second edition of the original that appeared in 2015. Our efforts here cannot attain to a thorough explication of Green's proposal, so we will focus here on two key considerations for an ecological hermeneutic: vocation in interpretation and the role of problematic texts in shaping this vocation.

A significant impetus for Green's Pentecostal hermeneutic is that Pentecostals had erred in following an evangelical hermeneutic that relies on epistemological foundations for establishing the authority of Scripture. Rather, a Pentecostal hermeneutic should be more concerned with what Scripture is intended to accomplish for believers rather than some abstract notion of Scripture's authority that relies on concepts such as inspiration, inerrancy, and the like.[35] The focus should be on Scripture's purpose rather than on Scripture's essence. Green's model eschews foundationalism in exchange for a sacramental approach to Scripture. Green terms his understanding of Scripture as soteriological rather than epistemological. Scripture achieves its purpose if it helps move human beings toward holiness. Reading Scripture is thus interpretation that sanctifies.

However, rather than focusing here on an understanding of holiness that has prevailed in Pentecostal circles that frames it in behavioral and moralistic terms, Green proposes that holiness be understood in vocational terms that mirror the vocation of Jesus in the world. In terms akin to the Eastern Orthodox understanding of theosis, or divinization, Green describes sanctification as participation with Christ such that believers are "at-one-ed" with Christ and empowered by the Spirit to extend Christ's vocation into the world.[36] Such a vocational reading shapes believers' identity to assume the vocation of Jesus to identify with the poor,

[33] Helpful recent surveys of the developments in Pentecostal hermeneutics may be found in Jacqueline Grey, "Biblical Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture with the Spirit in the Community," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, 129–39; and L. William Oliverio, Jr., "Theological Hermeneutics: Understanding the World in the Encounter with God," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, 140–51.
[34] Chris E. W. Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation: Vocation, Holiness, and Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2020).
[35] Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 5.
[36] Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 35.

the oppressed, the dispossessed.[37] Indeed, identity is only possible when viewed in light of the vocation for which we are called. Scripture, read in community and encountered in liturgy, shapes the community into conformity into the image of Christ and thrusts it into the life of those outside of the church in the world.

This vocational framing for the act of interpretation yields some provocative insights when Green turns his attention to the actual interpretation of Scripture. Green argues that an imperfect text written by imperfect human beings and interpreted imperfectly by us nevertheless works to perfect us to do what we were (re-)created to do, namely, to "mediat[e] God's divine-human holiness sanctifyingly to the rest of creation, and, in the process, receiv[e] our own transfiguration in the image of the one from whom, in whom, and for whom we live."[38] How is this possible? Here Green articulates a key proposal in his model: we must wrestle with Scripture. "Wrestling with Scripture, and being wounded by it, alters us savingly, because Scripture does not merely tell the story of the cross: reading it requires our crucifixion."[39] Too often we have come to read Scripture through our own biases and in ways that confirm these biases, "so distort[ing] the Scriptures that we make God's Word unfaithfully our own," requiring that "[w]e need to be saved from these unsanctified and unsanctifying readings," which "takes place only as we allow the Spirit to use texts to threaten and overthrow our misreadings." [40] Scripture, read in community and soteriologically, discomfits us, drawing us to a Christ who suffered in his vocation and who requires that we suffer our own crucifixion to ourselves and our faulty interpretations as we read and grow into our vocation. Indeed, in the confrontation with Scripture, especially with those texts that cause us to wrestle with ourselves, "God not only meets us there—at the point of our troubledness and bewilderment and wonder and awe—but also there transfigures us. That is, sanctification is possible because of the contrariness of the Word, because the Spirit makes these texts 'hard' for us."[41]

But Green goes beyond the mere classification of texts as "hard," whether they be ambiguous because some aspect of their presentation is opaque to us (e.g., translation difficulties or obscure metaphors) or because their plain assertion challenges our misconceptions. Green states, "But there are other things in our sacred texts that are indeed wrong and dangerous, and they are there for us as Scripture because God has purposed them to generate difficulties for us, difficulties that test our patience and frustrate our expectations."[42] Indeed, in these texts especially are Green's words borne out: "because God saves us not from but by interpretation and for it, these difficulties are a sign that the Spirit is truly at work among us, drawing us along, however agonizingly, toward perfection in Christ, the wisdom of God and

[37] Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 82.
[38] Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 55.
[39] Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 154–55.
[40] Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 158.
[41] Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 164.
[42] Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 155.

our sanctification."[43] Were we afflicted with a hermeneutical cowardice that causes us to avoid such texts or a penchant to fall back onto an abstract doctrine of Scripture to alleviate the tensions in these "wrong and dangerous" texts, we would miss out on an opportunity to be changed by the encounter with Christ in them. The very courage to think of a biblical text as wrong or dangerous would affront many. Green here is urging us not to soft-peddle these texts in a domesticated interpretation, but to take them as opportunities to re-examine our hermeneutical and existential attitudes. In other words, what do these texts tell us about ourselves and how do their challenges help sanctify us that we might in turn participate in Christ's sanctifying mission in the world?[44]

Our treatment here of Green's ambitious program, incomplete though it be, nevertheless identifies a couple of key considerations for conversation with Norman Habel's ecological hermeneutic. To this discussion we turn in conclusion.

4. Grey into Green: A Pentecostal Contribution to Ecological Hermeneutics

As suggested by the preceding discussion, two topics emerge as potential Pentecostal contributions to an ecological hermeneutic. First, Green's understanding of the "wrong and dangerous" texts may help address Habel's concern for Scripture's grey texts. Second, Green's focus on vocation as integral to interpretation and identity for readers of Scripture confirms Habel's contention that today's ecological crises stand as a call to engage Scripture in a way that fosters action from readers.

As we observed, Habel is concerned with the difficulties that the presence of grey texts presents for a green reading of the Bible. Their presence rendered the ecological message of the Bible ambivalent at best. His proposed solution was a combination of hermeneutical moves, namely, countering grey texts with matching green texts and prioritizing certain New Testament texts, such as the incarnation of Jesus in the Johannine Prologue and two passages from the Pauline Corpus (Rom 8:18–27 and Col 1:15–20), so that they exert a hermeneutical control over grey passages such that the grey passages may effectively be ignored in a green reading of the Bible. Yet at the same time, the three criteria of ecological hermeneutics seem to approach the problematic anthropocentrically biased passages as something that may be engaged via the criteria of identification and retrieval. So it is puzzling that after developing the hermeneutic that Habel would resort to a tactic that would result in ignoring whole sections of the Bible from consideration.

It is at this point that Green's hermeneutic regarding difficult passages comes into play. Rather than see these passages as obstacles to a green reading, perhaps they may be a route to a

[43] Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 185.
[44] See his discussion, "Making Peace with the Warrior God," in Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 140–50, as exemplary of Green's approach to such passages.

more robust green reading. In this regard Green's approach to difficult passages may be no more than an amplification of a full application of the three criteria of ecological hermeneutics. Rather than avoid or neuter the grey passages, it offers a way to engage these texts head on, seeing in them opportunities to examine our own attitudes toward Earth. Where do we see ourselves in these grey texts, and how do we see in these "wrong and dangerous" texts opportunities for us to remedy those wrong and dangerous parts of ourselves in our contact with Earth? For Green, these texts aren't so much tensions that would endanger a green reading of the Bible, but they would be texts placed in the Bible by God for the expressed purpose of challenging our own greyness and fostering a deeper empathy with Earth such that we hear Earth calling out not just to human beings in general, but to us as green readers in particular. The grey texts become the tools God uses to bring us into a deeper life of living in and for Earth.

And here we encounter the second part of Green's hermeneutic, that aspect that sees interpretation of Scripture as integral to shaping us to become sanctified and sanctifying in our vocation in the world. The grey texts work to dismantle our own grey tendencies so that we become fit to engage in ecological action in the world. It is clear that Habel views an ecological hermeneutic as more than an academic exercise; the fact that the ecological crises of our day shape our approach to Scripture in such a hermeneutic shows that something from our reading must translate into action in the world. Indeed, an ecological hermeneutic has been termed a "transformative hermeneutic" for this very reason.[45] Moreover, the human vocation in the world has been framed in ecological terms as a vocation of priestly co-regency with God serving and protecting creation in anticipation of creation's destiny to become the dwelling place of God.[46] What Green's approach offers is a way for the grey texts of the Bible to become instrumental in shaping human beings to exercise their vocation of sanctifying the world ecologically through the very act of interpretation. Indeed, again, interpretation is sanctifying.

Conclusion

Chris Green's Pentecostal hermeneutic offers some ways to fine tune the ecological hermeneutic of the Earth Bible Project. It is not a wholesale revamping of the hermeneutic. It offers a way of helping handle those troublesome grey texts of the Bible in a way that does not involve rejecting whole sections of the Bible from consideration. Rather, it uses their very greyness to shape readers into those who would act in ecologically redemptive (or sanctifying) ways in the world. Moreover, the affinity of Green's hermeneutic with the aims and approaches of the Earth Bible Project's ecological hermeneutic may help recommend

[45] Lamp, *Hebrews: An Earth Bible Commentary*, 13.

[46] Lamp, *Hebrews: An Earth Bible Commentary*, 27–32. This framing of the human vocation in terms of the Adamic mandate to serve and protect the Garden (Gen 2:15) and its recapitulation in the Second Adam serves as a major organizing theme for this commentary.

ecological hermeneutics to the larger Pentecostal hermeneutical program. Mutual edification is surely a path to sanctification.

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