

Presian Renee Burroughs, *Creation's Slavery and Liberation: Paul's Letter to Rome in the Face of Imperial and Industrial Agriculture*, Cascade Books, Eugene, OR: 2022. xx + 337pp. 978-1-7252-9487-5. £36.00. Pbk.

This is a broadly researched and very interesting interdisciplinary study. It juxtaposes an intensive reading of Paul's famous and enigmatic passage on the groaning of creation, Rom. 8.19-22, with comment both on the rapacious and unsustainable agricultural economy of the Roman Empire, and on the likewise unsustainable industrial agriculture of the American Mid-West. Burroughs' objective is to provide a theological interpretation of the Romans passage, based on extensive groundwork on the Old Testament background, and to infer eco-ethical principles to inform how contemporary Christians should understand themselves, especially in relation to food.

The position at which she arrives is relatively traditional, in that she finds herself convinced that Paul has in mind the initial sin of humans in Genesis 3 and our resultant slavery to forces tending towards death and destruction. She combines this with those Old Testament passages that suggest a strong connection between the health of human societies and the health of the non-human creation within which they are set. The structure of the scheme she finds in Paul is 'creation-subjection-liberation-glorification' (111).

Such studies are very demanding, requiring fluency across a whole range of disciplines, from biblical studies to ancient history and contemporary ecotheology. Burroughs handles her diverse material with impressive confidence, and I learned a great deal from her. The chapter on Roman agriculture was fascinating. She did not quite convince me of the extent to which Paul could have had its unsustainability in view in writing his Letter, but I accept her basic contention that he offers a counter-narrative to the imperial propaganda of the Augustan Age. Her eco-ethical principles were helpful, and I appreciated their outworking in terms of food practice, and eucharist, in the closing chapter.

Inevitably in such a much argued-over passage there will be points of contestation. I wondered why Burroughs chose to interpret 'bondage to decay' in Rom. 8.21 before turning to 'subjected to futility' in 8.20. And I found her Genesis 3-based reading of 8.20, based on positing two different 'subjectors' in the two halves of the verse, very awkward. Though she generously praises the interpretative approach of the monograph *Greening Paul* (of which I was a co-author) this would be an area of disagreement between us. I felt too that her reading of Gen. 1.26-28 in terms of 'servant leadership' over-smoothed the difficulties of that passage. Also, although she claims to be using a 'reading of recovery', employing reason and science to engage the text, she seemed rather over-accepting of an Adamic fall based interpretation. This is a delicate judgment in terms of the contemporary application of the passage, given how problematic such a view is scientifically (as she herself concedes).

Alas, the quality of binding of my copy was unacceptably poor, with pages falling out at a first reading. That is very unfortunate in what is a valuable and thought-provoking study.

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