

BOOK REVIEWS

The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology. By Douglas E. Christie. New York: Oxford UP, 2013. 488 pp. Cloth \$29.95.

Can the world's contemplative religious and spiritual traditions contribute to our efforts to live wholly and ecologically in this time of unprecedented environmental destruction when "the very fabric of life" has begun to "fray and tear" (54, 142)? In this profound and profoundly important book, Douglas E. Christie argues that they certainly can. But, he adds, they will need to be "reimagined" in light of current understandings of science and religion (4). Using Christianity's ancient monastic and contemplative traditions as one example, Christie shows how, through "dialogue" and "critical retrieval," we might articulate and practice a "contemplative ecology" for our time (17, 23).

For Christie, the contemplative traditions offer us nothing more important than the testimony that a "disciplined" and "sustained practice of attention can yield a radical transformation of consciousness" of the sort that will be crucial to our efforts to heal ourselves and the world (7, 54). This practice of attention, valued not just by Christian monastics but by contemplatives from the world over, includes cultivating awareness of both "the inner life" and "the life of the world" (150). Christie proposes nine ancient contemplative practices for a broad and deep contemplative ecology. In addition to paying attention, these include understanding oneself as part of "a larger whole" (13); making "contact" with that whole (69); "grieving" over the destruction of the earth and our separation from it (92); "wandering" as well as coming to know "particular places" deeply (122); listening to "the voice of the world" (181); crossing the "boundaries" that separate the self from human and nonhuman others (227); facing "death and loss" honestly and fully (312); and, finally, imagining the earth as if it already were and yet could still become a "paradise" (317).

In several ways, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind* brings to mind another inestimable book on contemplative ecology, Belden C. Lane's *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (Oxford UP, 1998). Like Lane, Christie works back and

forth between the ancient and the present. In terms of the ancient, he gives particular attention to the Christian monks who lived as ascetics in the deserts of Egypt and Syria in the third and fourth centuries and to the contemplatives who followed in their steps, looking at length at the stories, sayings, and writings of figures such as Abba Antony, Evagrius of Pontus, and Thomas Merton, among many others. At the same time, he works just as closely with more recent “ecological literature,” including the poetry and prose of Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, Czeslaw Milosz, Denise Levertov, Gary Snyder, N. Scott Momaday, Mary Oliver, Robert Hass, Louise Glück, Leslie Marmon Silko, and others (62). Also like Lane, Christie crafts his scholarly writing with its own literary quality by working memoir-like narratives into the academic analysis, writing more than once, for instance, about sitting in silence with a small community at Redwoods Monastery before joining thousands to protest the logging of the old growth Redwood forests in northern California.

Those who desire to live in touch with and to participate in the restoration of this “luminous” and possibly “numinous” earth will deeply appreciate *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind* (8, 18).

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***Myths of Wilderness in Contemporary Narratives: Environmental Postcolonialism in Australia and Canada.* By Kylie Crane. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 228 pp. Hardcover \$85.00.**

Kylie Crane ends her first book with a telling anecdote when she recalls being asked by her undergraduate professor how she imagined nature. As an Australian, Crane was struck by the dissonance between her answer—“ideas of threat and survival” and “imaginings of vast, unexplored spaces, devoid of human traces”—and those of the rest of her German classmates, who spoke of “recuperation, regeneration, of regularly returning, and pleasant seasons” (181–82). Crane realized that her response was informed by Australian ideas