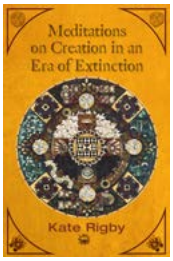
BOOK REVIEW



Meditations on Creation in an Era of Extinction

Kate Rigby (2023)
Orbis Books
ISBN: 798888660089

Lynette Lounsbury

Avondale University, Lake Macquarie
lynnette.lounsbury@avondale.edu.au

> *engaging with the devastation of the earth and balancing that with hope for healing and restoration*

***Meditations on Creation in an Era of Extinction* by Kate Rigby engages with the tangled crises of global climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, social inequity and ecological unravelling through a thoughtful reflection on creation. To do this, Rigby uses an ancient form of theological study and reflection called the hexameron engaging with earlier commentators who have done the same thing. The book is informed by history, science, Indigenous wisdom and by the faith-based initiatives from around the world that are contributing to "the healing of human relations with our fellow creatures and shared earthly environs". Her book takes on the difficult emotional work of engaging with the devastation of the earth and balancing that with hope for healing and restoration. It is a valuable book for educators faced with the hard questions of their students about climate change and the need to find answers both based in science and yet filled with hope.**

Rigby outlines her intent for the book in her introduction, revealing alongside it, her anecdotal and personal blend of storytelling and philosophy. The book is inspired by the ancient Christian literary tradition of the hexameron, a detailed meditation on the six days of creation ("hexa"), something that reflected the science and natural philosophies of the times in which they were written. The first recorded of these was by the Jewish scholar Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE-c 50 CE) and was titled "On the Account of the World's Creation Given by Moses" (xxvii). Some hexamerons were a defence of their new faith, some homilies to be delivered in Holy Weeks and some were personal reflections, but Rigby sees in all of them a celebration of the natural world from a spiritual perspective and her work is a part of this significant literary tradition but, in keeping with the form, is influenced by the time in which she is living. She also believes she is rectifying some of the wrongs that have brought us to the current place of crisis: the toxic legacy that suggested that man's dominion over the natural world excused the industrial exploitation and fossil capitalism that have brought us to the brink of disaster (xxxii).

Rigby's book is structured in this traditional hexameron format with each chapter titled for a day of creation from the first to the sixth, with a final chapter titled "Afterword: The Seventh Day". The chapters begin with the verse from Genesis that describes the day of creation that is being contemplated. This is followed by a personal story about Rigby's connection with nature, a tale about times on holidays at the beach, or her attempts at growing plants, or her delight at Australia's unique night sky. The rest of the chapter is also personal but is a detailed and thorough interrogation of the particular aspect of creation she is engaging with, and a discussion of how that part of our planet's ecosystem is surviving the Anthropocene. She looks at how previous writers of the hexameron engaged with elements such as the sun and moon, or the water, or the birds, and then gives us the hard facts about the issues plaguing the environment today. The atmosphere is polluted to extreme levels, the ocean is choking on plastic, and we are losing animal species to extinction at unprecedented levels. She doesn't shy away from the hard and often depressing details in these chapters and her research is current and varied, giving the reader an impressive knowledge of climate science by the end of the book. The book stands alongside such well known spiritual engagements with environmentalism as John F. Haught's "The Gospel of the Earth" or Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee's "Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth" in the way that is fuses spirituality with a deep reflection on humanity's role in the environmental crisis. These texts, grounded in hope and belief in renewal are united in offering readers a similar blend of reverence, action, and the call for planetary healing.

The book is engaging and highly readable. This is tough information to digest – the breakdown of how our ocean is faring was an exhausting narration of exploitation and invasion. Rigby gives it to the reader straight and simple, but she also highlights the people who are doing the hard work of conservation, environmental advocacy and she connects this with the spirituality of those

individuals, and indeed with that of the reader. For Rigby this restoration of the world is spiritual work, not merely physical. It is our Biblical mandate, but also a part our innate connection to the planet: its smallest creatures and its furthest star and all a part of the same story and creative energy as we are. This is exemplified in her description of the plight of a tiny, non-descript coral in an overheated rockpool on an unnamed shore that has an intrinsic value: a fellow creature, beloved by God which is putting out an ethical call to us as in a neighbour in need (140).

The book is an education, but also a reminder of the value of reflection upon the very idea of creation, of connectedness with the planet and of our place in its damage and healing. For educators this is a gift. Students are bombarded with stories – accurate, and legitimately worrying stories – of the plight of the planet they will inherit and their anxiety about this can be powerful. This book breaks down what is happening and what is being done simply and gently providing the reverence, the science, the work and the hope all in place. It is a spiritual book, not a scientific one, but it is framed carefully and rigorously, within the discipline and the tone is overall one of hope and a belief in potential for healing and a renewal of original creation that is a tonic for anyone overwhelmed by the rhetoric of impending doom. The book encourages critical engagement with the underlying philosophical and ethical questions surrounding environmental stewardship, fostering a deeper sense of responsibility in readers. The synthesis of spiritual reflection with pragmatic analysis allows for a nuanced understanding of ecological challenges, bridging the gap between moral consciousness and actionable insight.

Meditations of Creation in an Era of Extinction, by Kate Rigby is published by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 10545 in 2023 and is part of their Ecology & Justice series. TEACH

> *It is a spiritual book, not a scientific one, but it is framed carefully and rigorously*

