

Inhabitation: Ecological Religious Education

Jennifer R. Ayres

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For decades, many have been calling people's attention to our ecological crisis. Theologians have focused on the call to be caretakers of the earth, and environmental educators have sought different ways to teach the importance of care for the earth. As a religious educator, Jennifer Ayres stands at the intersection of both fields and challenges the fields to think a little differently about ecological education. To the theologians she reminds, "[t]he theological claim that the planet is our 'common home' demands a reimagining of human life and responsibility, the order and direction of human affections, and the very heart of Christian faith itself" (7). And to the environmental educators who have tried to convince people of the importance of caring for the earth through science, she writes "dismissing the affective dimensions of learning, however, and situating ecological consciousness too fixedly in the sciences, risks failing to cultivate a transformative ecological faith" (23). Instead, Ayres calls for a kind of ecological embodied pedagogy that is "[g]rounded in an understanding of God as creator and redeemer of the world, . . . [E]cological religious education cultivates inhabitation through a set of embodied, affective, and reflective practices" (43).

Arguing that environmental education has not and cannot alone solve various ecological problems, *Inhabitation* explores a certain type of embodied pedagogy by asserting "The educational challenge is daunting—it requires a fundamental rethinking of what it means to be human" (5). Ayres states that one cannot simply learn about a subject; there also needs to be an understanding of embodiment that stems from an ecological imagination. *Inhabitation* calls for learning different ways of knowing—good ecological learning is learning of the head and heart. Ayres argues that traditional ways of teaching environmental science through facts and figures can have a better impact by incorporating the heart as well as the head. She not only has a theoretical pedagogical discussion, but also embarks on a conversation on educational practices that would benefit classroom learning as well as action by congregations and various organizations.

This is a wonderful text to be used by scholars and practitioners. Ayres's focus on different ways of knowing would provide rich conversation for various education courses. *Inhabitation* could also be used in Christian Education classes in congregations for lay people who seek a better way to know and care for their environment. The text also gives examples of how congregations have embodied the notion of inhabitation and how that has influenced their ministries. Additionally, since religious education is interdisciplinary, (Ayres notes theological, sociological, and philosophical groundings), and different areas are explored with great depth, sections of this text can also be used in various theology and sociology classes that seek a new way of thinking about our relationship to the world that we inhabit.