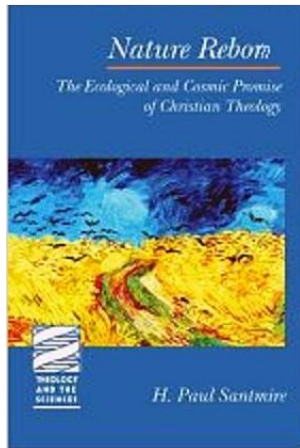


BOOK REVIEW

H. Paul Santmire. *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1985.

and

H. Paul Santmire. *Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2000.



In *The Travail of Nature* H. Paul Santmire provided an historical overview of the development of the way in which Christian theology views nature. Tracing this progress from Irenaeus and Origen, Karl Barth and Teilhard de Chardin, to the mid 1980s, Santmire addressed both the unfortunate legacy of many Christian theological notions - seen in the use, abuse and destruction of the natural world - and the dawning of a new ecological understanding of scripture. He concluded that an 'ecological reading of biblical faith ... could lead to a new birth of Christian thought about nature.'

Thus, 'The travail of nature in Christian theology could come to a blessed ending.'

His later work, *Nature Reborn*, again focused on the scriptures, this time to reclaim classic, mostly premodern, Christian themes and to reenvision them in the light of the global environmental and cultural crisis. Santmire proposed to 'revise the classical Christian story in order to identify and to celebrate its ecological and cosmic promise'. He explored the themes of Christian Cosmology, Christology, Creation and Eucharist, so that the Christian story can be then rediscovered (history), reshaped (theology), reexperienced (spirituality), and reenacted (ritual). He anticipates a future for the Christian church, 'shaped by its ecological and cosmic ritual enactments, and buoyed by its new ecological and cosmic spirituality'.

Both books are well written and soundly researched, although the absence of a bibliography is a disappointment for anyone who wishes to pursue further reading in the areas raised by Santmire. This is partly compensated by the extensive endnotes and index in each book.

The Travail of Nature is an academic historical and theological work and, at 274 pages, is a solid read. *Nature Reborn*, at 154 pages, is more accessible, and Santmire's use of the first person and of personal examples makes it more approachable than his earlier book.

H. Paul Santmire is Senior Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Akron, Ohio.