# Call to Action: Hope of Nature

George B. Handley. *The Hope of Nature: Our Care for God's Creation*. Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2020. 315 pp. Paperback: $16.95. ISBN: 978-1-62972-726-4.

*Reviewed by Mette Ivie Harrison*

*The Hope of Nature* is structured with three sets of three (I might be tempted here to make a Star Wars three trilogies joke, but I will refrain for the sake of a serious forum). As a reader, I was surprised at the original trio because none of them attempted to convince me that global climate change is real through a recitation of facts or charts. That does come later, in the second trio, "Climate Change and the Poor," written with geology professor Summer Rupper. Handley explains in later essays that he doesn't feel that science and data are his strong suit. Thus, most of the essays argue that being an environmental activist is consistent with Mormon theology, and then further, that Mormon theology demands environmental action, going back to founder Joseph Smith and the retelling of the Creation story in the book of Moses.

Handley is, in my opinion, at his best when he talks about his own personal experiences. His recounting of his visit with writer Marilynne Robinson (along with poet Lance Larsen), his essay on the Provo River delta, and his final essay about his own engagement on the Provo City Council are strong and stirring essays. I admit my bias here as one who has stepped away from full activity in Mormonism, but I was less engaged with quotations from past leaders of the Church. I found myself actively jolted by quotations from Brigham Young, who is still revered as a prophet of the Church despite his violent racism. It is hard for me to take advice on environmentally sound practices from either Young or Joseph Fielding Smith. Joseph Smith himself is only barely

more palatable to me as a guide to a better spiritual life or relationship with God and/or nature.

Nonetheless, I appreciated the reminder of what were once core doctrines of Mormonism, including the idea that body and spirit are indivisible, that all physical things were created first spiritually, and that we have an obligation to build the kingdom of God on earth. I have written regarding statements by modern General Authorities about our obligation to be stewards to the environment and have been saddened by the political reality that most Latter-day Saints easily dismiss these exhortations because of our faith's attraction to the larger conservative movement in the US since the 1980s. Unfortunately, many LDS have decided that abortion is a higher crime than global climate change and its effects on the poor. When Handley reasonably asks why Latter-day Saints aren't moved by the obvious problems all around them, a part of me wanted to shout, "Have you never heard of *Saturday's Warrior*?" My childhood was blissfully safe after listening to the *Saturday's Warrior* songs dismissing global warming and exclusively blaming Satan for discouraging us from having children.

But really, Handley lays out a more nuanced view of the religious reasons that Latter-day Saints are inclined to reject global climate change in "The Restoration of All Things" (220). The parable of the talents leads some Mormons to believe that nature must be "improved" upon and not left to its original state. Then there is the problem that our view of the future is that the earth will be turned into a heaven. Also, there is the imperative to have children (cue *Saturday's Warrior*), so that is a priority over stewardship of the earth. Then, finally, many Mormons consider hastening the end of the world to be important work, as it is understood to be a form of ushering in the Millennium.

On the other side, Handley argues that there are doctrinal or theological reasons for Latter-day Saints to champion environmental

activism. The earth and humans and God are all "interwoven" spiritually and temporally, and thus the earth should be treated with respect as another spiritual creation of God, equal to humanity. Furthermore, it is wrong for some people to use up resources that others have no access to, especially if we are truly asked to embrace the law of consecration. King Benjamin's speech reminds us that we are nothing in comparison to God, and to nature. We should be humbled by it instead, and our free will must be used to enact stewardship. Then there are "selfish" reasons, such as the pleasure of being in nature, and the warning that the end is near, which means that we will be called to account for our sins, including those against nature itself.

Overall, I found the arguments of the book to be persuasive. If I have one major complaint, it is the dearth of female voices quoted throughout the text. In the first trio of essays, I could not find any women quoted (though they are in footnotes). Later, in the essay with Rupper, we hear from more women, and Marilynne Robinson is quoted. I find myself frequently frustrated with this problem among progressive Mormon men and also progressive ex-Mormon or post-Mormon men. There is not enough reflection on what angle of truth is perpetuated. I feel like this may be my hobbyhorse, and people may tire of me bringing it up over and over again, but it's true: women need to be quoted and treated as equal sources and authorities in every way, including in academics, history, and environmental science.

It took me some time to figure out who the intended audience of this book was, because it seemed clear to me that those who do not believe in global climate change or in being responsible stewards of the planet are unlikely to read it. Handley seems to be speaking exclusively to the small choir of Latter-day Saints who are committed to environmental issues. It only became clear to me in the last essay, "The Blessings and Paradoxes of Environmental Engagement," that although Handley is speaking to this choir, he is also trying to get them/us to see

that local engagement in politics and engagement with those we see as being on "the other side" is the only way that change can be made. And this call to action is something I am still sitting with.

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# Delightful Futuristic Mormon Morality Tale Offers Teaching Tool for Progressive Parents

Matt Page. *Future Day Saints: Welcome to New Zion*. Self-published, 2020. 58 pp. Hardcover: $25.00. Color illustrations.

*Reviewed by Christopher C. Smith*

After his death and resurrection on Earth, Jesus Christ traveled to New Zion—a planet in the Kolob star system—and appeared to its six-eyed alien inhabitants, whom he named the Othersheep. He explained to the Othersheep that they had been created by Celestial Parents, and that on other worlds throughout the galaxy lived celestial siblings who would one day emigrate to New Zion. He commanded them to prepare the world for their siblings' arrival (3). The first ship to arrive, in the year 2806, brought green-skinned creatures from the planet Siro. Nine more groups of alien emigrants followed, until the last arrived in 2841 bearing Earth's humans (4–7).