



## *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*

Larry L Rasmussen

(New York: Orbis Books, 1996)

This work by Larry Rasmussen is almost 20 years old. I reread it as a run up to his more recent work, *Earth Honouring Faith*, which I will review later this year.

The book is in three parts. The first, Earth Scan, is an overview of the situation of the time; the second, Earth Faith, develops some key understandings about what is entailed in a conversion to Earth; and the third part, Earth Action, develops an Earth ethic in which compassion and solidarity are core virtues.

The book is interwoven with narratives intended to ground his thesis. It is an unusual style, but one which is prize winning in literary circles as well as theological ones.

We have much to be grateful for in this book as it seriously addresses the value of a religious contribution to the future of Earth, *provided* that religions become what he calls Earth Faiths. This requires "a dedication to earth in the manner of the sacred and sacramental" (xii). This is about a conversion to Earth.

One of his core concepts is that Earth, including human society, is a community. Ecological thinking has discovered that nature is a community, and he extends that notion to include humans. As a consequence they have a responsibility as a participant in that community.

I find myself holding on to the notion that the finite contains and infinite, a notion derived from Martin Luther, which he develops at some length as the basis for valuing Earth as sacred and sacramental. Writing as Christian monotheist, he draws on Luther's theology of the cross to develop an Earth ethic based on entering into the pathos of the Earth community and acting from that position of empathy.

It is timely to be grounded in this Earth ethic in order to bring a broader perspective to current negotiations about the future of planet Earth.

Mary Tinney

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