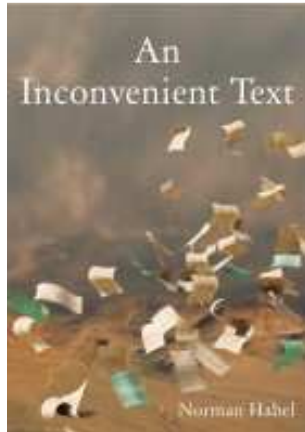


## BOOK REVIEW

**Habel, Norman.** *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?*  
Hindmarsh, SA: ATF Press, 2009.



Norman Habel writes: "In this volume I dare to face the reality that the Bible is an inconvenient text that includes not only 'green texts' but 'grey texts' – texts that do not reflect a genuine concern for creation or empathy for Earth." He expresses the hope that his book will "reach numerous people who are concerned about the way in which the Bible has been used uncritically to support green thinking".

In the Preface, Sallie McFague describes Habel's work as "a rigorous analysis of the ecological ambivalence of Scripture ... favourite texts such as those concerning the mandate to dominate, the mighty acts of God, and the right to the promised land come in for radically new interpretations."

Habel acknowledges the reality that many parts of the Bible are not supportive of a green ethic; indeed, they have been used to justify the exploitation of the earth, and the destruction of the planet. He sets out to "clarify the way they devalue nature, focus on human needs, and suppress the character or voice of Earth in the text."

However, it is not sufficient merely to highlight the problems posed for contemporary Christians by "grey texts". Habel proposes an alternative way of reading a text, no matter how "grey" that text might be. Using tools similar to those of feminist literary criticism, he applies a three step process to read biblical texts: suspicion, identification and retrieval. This process, explains Habel, allows the reader to identify with the Earth "as a character and voice in the text, even if that voice has been suppressed".

The book analyses three sets of "grey texts", focusing particularly on three themes: the mandate to dominate, the mighty acts of God and the promised land. It then discusses the emerging earth-sensitive world view, which informs the way texts are read today. This is followed by a second reading of the three "grey texts" from the first section, using the new approach and, finally, by a conclusion that challenges the reader to "liberate ourselves from the power of those grey texts that have controlled our thinking ... empathise with our Earth and our kin in Earth community, and to celebrate and enact the blessing and healing our God gives exuberantly to all creation".

This book offers a way of re-reading and re-claiming the Bible as a sacred text of continuing relevance for the earth-conscious twenty-first century believer.