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Review: *The Ocean of Life: The Fate of Man and the Sea*

By Callum Roberts

Reviewed by Byron Anderson

DeKalb, Illinois, USA

Roberts, Callum. *The Ocean of Life: The Fate of Man and the Sea*. New York: Penguin Books, 2013, ©2012. 405pp. ISBN 9780670023547 US\$30.00 cloth; 9780143123484 US \$17.00 paperback. eBook version: 9781101583562. US\$9.99.

The Ocean of Life has a passionate message that says the fate of man is linked to the sea. To show this link, a history of the ocean is presented in how seas have changed over time from the beginning to the current period, though the book's focus is on the span of time involving human activity. This impact can be summarized thusly, "... humanity has achieved dominion over the oceans and marine life is in difficulty" (p. 215). Few people realize the extent of damage and time is running out, but the damage can be reversed if humans are willing to change course.

The evidence of human impact on the ocean is ample, and numerous facts and evidence are presented to show the extent of change and damage. For example, fishers today land just about 6 percent of what they did 120 years ago, an issue complicated by having a billion people rely on seafood as their main source of animal protein. Fish are being replaced by pollution from plastics, sewage, oil, and toxic wastes. Greenhouse gases have caused the ocean's temperature to rise creating acidification which can, for example, weaken coral reefs and make it difficult for marine life to process oxygen. Overlooked factors affecting the ocean include the role of living barriers, like wetlands and dunes, which ameliorate impacts of sea-level rises. Also overlooked is noise caused by navel sonar, seismic bangs from oil and gas exploration, the drone of engines, and others. Marine life has a difficult time adjusting to noise pollution. Plastic buildup in the ocean gets its own chapter which stresses that "Plastics are completely foreign to life, so animals have been unable to mount any evolutionary defense against them" (p. 159). Another chapter details the problems affiliated with aliens, invaders, and aquaculture. Each of these threatens the diversity of ocean life which is the key to resilience.

Changing course will entail great effort. Cullum, marine conservation biologist at the University of York, proposes a New Deal for the oceans, "... a plan to rebuild and sustain the abundance of life at sea" (p. 290). There is a need for parks in the sea. Other issues, like overfishing, are solvable though not easily achieved. Some solutions are currently in place, such as, the Marine Stewardship Council that marks seafood from sustainable fisheries. Cullum believes that fixing the ocean is a continuous process, and that, "We can live alongside wild nature. The alternative is self-destruction" (p. 350).

While there are other recent books on the ocean and civilization, the uniqueness of *The Ocean of Life* is in both detailing the damage sustained by the ocean and then proposing solutions. The text is supplemented with photos, two appendices, notes and an index. The book is ideal for students, researchers, and environmentalists with an interest in the ocean and should be in all academic library collections.

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