

Book Review

Douglas J. Moo & Jonathan A. Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 250 pp. \$24.99

Review by Robert Henry

IT IS ALL TOO COMMON IN MODERN Christianity to regard creation merely as a backdrop to the theater of humanity, as some floor upon which the jewels of God's handiwork live, move, and have their being. However, in contrast to this vision of the natural world and its bizarre, yet dazzling host of creatures and living beings, is the perspective put forth by scholars Douglas and Johnathan Moo in their work *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. One of the main goals of this book is to challenge the mistaken idea that we are to be saved from this earth, rather than embracing the perspective for which the authors argue, which is that the true eschatological goal is to be saved with the Earth (1). Creation is not merely some additional appendage of God's creative act, namely Man. It should be understood as the aggregated entirety of God's design. This review will focus on the authors' discussion of creation care, their challenge to both modern and traditional views of creation, as well as their prescriptive theses for the Church, along with a comprehensive theological analysis of creation and our responsibilities as members of the created order.

First, it is essential to understand what this father-and-son team means by creation care. In the first part of the text, "Queuing the Questions," certain terms are investigated, and the topics to be explored are clarified. For instance, the term creation care as used in this text refers to the "ethical responsibilities for the non-human world" (24). The authors focus on the for and about care for creation. The former refers to a general attitude of *a priori* care for creation that excludes human concerns. The latter highlights why we should care for God's nonhuman creation. The authors chose the term creation over nature or environment for several reasons. First, there is a tendency to deify nature rather than recognize its created status. Second, nature is too often viewed as a mechanistic series of events separate from God rather than flowing from Him. Finally, the environment places too much of an emphasis on the subject to whom it refers, rather than the *ding an sich* (thing-in-itself). As such, humanity is a part of, not a foreground to, the cosmos.

In the section "Why Are We Talking About It?," the authors address the challenges and complex relationship Christianity has had with pollution and ecological issues. All too often, there is a common perception that the faith is indifferent to

such issues due to its soteriology and eschatology. They explain that the terms nature and environment, all too often, have multiple meanings which reflect these challenges and that complex relationship. More specifically, nature can refer to a mechanistic system that can be manipulated by humans in contrast to a created order. Likewise, environment can refer to human-centric surroundings rather than God's creative setting.

These themes of humanity and creation are further developed through considerations of scriptural hermeneutics. The authors discuss biblical interpretation as a way of supporting the claims of caring for creation. They cite "the first part of the 2010 book *Greening Paul* by David Horrell, Cherryl Hunt, and Christopher Southgate" (31). Through this interpretive lens, Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate suggest that there are two approaches to scripture regarding creation. The first is resistance to ecology since so much of scripture, especially the writings of Paul, is almost exclusively focused on human concerns. The second approach, they suggest, is to read the text ecologically or to revise what the text states rather than resist or recover these earlier themes of nonhuman, ecological emphasis that had been overlooked due to cultural or thematic concerns. These revisions do not contradict the meanings of the text but align with them, as Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate argue. These considerations include descriptive, prescriptive, inclusive, and canonical aspects of scripture (31).

The authors suggest our biblical interpretation is interactive, from application to text, as well as text to application (41). They identify these as historical and systematic theology. These particular historical or systematic theological systems inform how we interpret scripture. This can be what is meant by embedded theology as concerns certain denominations and traditions. Then there is culture. Cultural values can affect the way we interpret a passage. For instance, someone's acceptance of homosexuality can influence how certain passages in scripture are read to support same sex practices. The third is science. Certain scientific discoveries can affect how we see and interpret passages. For instance, the gap theory in Genesis may be used by some to integrate the theory of evolution into the creation and development of species and humanity.

The second section, "Arriving at Answers," aims to offer solutions to these problems. In Chapter Three, the authors explain how order and chaos, as expressed in earlier mythologies and culminating in the clear and perfected descriptions of God's creative purposes formed in his creativity, demonstrates creation's intrinsic value. This intrinsic value, as the authors remind their readers, is found in God's declaration of creation's goodness, as explained in Genesis 1:31. As such, human-kind's presence is not the singularity of creation but a feature of it. The two authors speak of creation's abundance and diversity, rather than a singular focal point to which all other created phenomena are merely processes leading to humanity.

In Chapter Four, it is suggested that while creatures by their nature fulfill their role in creation, it is our responsibility to choose to participate in this role. Thus, we are called to take dominion over creation as stewards, not as elevated species transcending their natural environments. This idea is further explained through Old Testament themes of Hebraic responsibilities to the land promised to and given to Israel, which is reiterated in Chapter Five. Chapters Six through Nine progress through this covenant to its fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, whose gospel message speaks of the renewal of all things, including creation.

In the third and final part, “Reflecting on Relevance,” the authors examine how creation care is connected to humanity’s salvation. They highlight the broader plan of redemption, which includes more than the salvation of humanity and isn’t merely founded on it. Ultimately, the gospel, or the good news, is predicated on a Christological premise of restoration and the importance of Christ’s presence in creation, which has been cursed. In Chapter Eleven, the authors situate their arguments for human stewardship of creation within the context of how this role should be elevated in the hearts and minds of a collectively narcissistic humanity. In the following chapters, we are introduced to a perspective on the wisdom literature in scripture that emphasizes how intelligibility and design are woven into the fabric of creation itself. This infusion of intentionality is not merely a spill-over from humanity but an integral part of the nonhuman array of design. Furthermore, it is through creation that God’s glory is displayed. The authors argue that humanity’s response in worshipping God through this display demands stewardship of the created order. All of this culminates in recommendations for sustainable living, environmental justice, and cultivating attentiveness to creation through practices such as Sabbath rest, simplicity, and spiritual disciplines.

While their work in this text not only draws attention to the failures of Christians regarding creation care, establishing an ancient tradition in scripture and early Church perspectives on creation care, as well as their theological and practical solutions to this issue, some questions remain unanswered. For example, the authors affirm that creation is in bondage to decay but do not adequately explain why animals suffer in ways that seem unrelated to human sin, particularly in pre-human evolutionary history. Theodicy is sidestepped.

Likewise, one could argue that the authors hold a subtle, yet nonetheless present, anthropocentric bias. Much of their ethic is framed in terms of how creation care benefits humans (e.g., future generations, global justice), rather than developing a theocentric or biocentric ethic grounded in the intrinsic worth of nonhuman life, particularly in relation to human sin, especially in pre-human evolutionary history. Additionally, by ignoring deep time and the suffering encoded into evolutionary processes, they avoid hard questions about God’s goodness in a world where predation, disease, and extinction long predated human action.

Overall, Douglas and Johnathan Moo provide a comprehensive and engaging narrative about the origin, history, status, and ultimate destiny of creation, including humanity. Focusing on the whole of creation, including nonhuman entities, helps contextualize the scriptural narrative of the Fall and the restoration of all things. Moreover, recognizing that the gospel and the incarnation are events predicated on a holistic view of creation is foundational. Christ came to make all things new, not just to redeem humanity. Furthermore, imbuing all of creation, including nonhuman members, with value presents humanity with an especially important task of stewardship given our rationality, intelligence, and agency. In short, the book *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, challenges the Christian community to reevaluate how we view creation, our understanding of it within God’s plan, his future kingdom, and our responsibility now—not just in the “sweet by and by”—for maintaining and restoring it as we wait for Christ’s renewal of all things.

Robert Henry is Adjunct Professor at Gateway Community Technical College (KCTCS), Northern Kentucky University, and Assistant Editor of *Verba Vitae*.

Work Cited

Horrell, David, Cheryl Hunt, and Christopher Southgate, *Greening Paul: Reading the Apostle in a Time of Ecological Crisis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010).