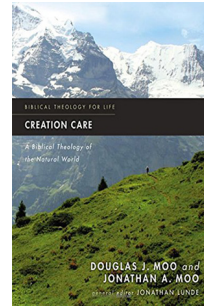


Book Review

Douglas J. Moo, and Jonathan A. Moo.
Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World.
Biblical Theology for Life

Edited by Jonathan Lunde. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018

Reviewed by, Stephen Vantassel.
Tutor of theology at King's Evangelical Divinity School



Douglas Moo, Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and author of the acclaimed commentary on Romans, joins his son, who holds a graduate degree in in wildlife ecology as well as a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies, in writing on the controversial topic of creation care. In Part 1, the authors situate the topic by defining terms (e.g. nature vs creation) and by explaining why the subject is, or at least, should be important for contemporary readers. Fortunately, for biblically literate readers, this section is relatively brief.

Part 2 delves into the biblical narrative starting with the creation narratives. The authors dutifully explain how the biblical accounts contrast with contemporaneous pagan creation stories as well as review the biblical understanding of humanity and the impact of the Fall. Using the creation and Fall motifs, the authors set the stage for understanding the role of Christ as restorer not only of souls but the entire created order. The authors contend that the “new creature” talk of the New Testament is better understood in the framework of a renewed creation. The writers are careful to reaffirm the spiritual importance and perhaps even the centrality of the atoning work of redemption for our estrangement from God.

But they are also clear that the restoration goes beyond repairing of souls and reaches out to the wider creation. Unfortunately, much space was wasted on justifying the value of creation on the grounds of the incarnation. While not disputing the idea per se, this reviewer remains puzzled as to how the incarnation proves the worth of creation broadly speaking as opposed to demonstrating the value of humans specifically. This is especially true given the authors’ failure to discuss Christ’s treatment of the Gadarene pigs, curse of the fig tree and the miracle of the fishes. Did Christ show concern for the environment in those three events? Were those actions representative of his work to restore creation? Sadly, the authors do not say.

The same criticism can be made for their interpretation of the New Heavens and New Earth of 2 Peter 3:13 as renewed heavens and earth. They contend that believing that the creation will be replaced rather than renewed engenders a dismissive attitude toward the fate and treatment of creation. The authors may be correct. Perhaps the replacement interpretation of 2 Peter does encourage a cavalier attitude toward the treatment of Creation. But in light of Peter’s use of the analogy of the Flood, could it not be said that the distinction, in practical terms, is meaningless? Whether the earth is renewed following a nuclear holocaust or

completely replaced with a new planet, is there any real practical difference for the creatures that lived on the planet?

Part 3 discusses how Christians might live out the theology concerning creation care outlined in Part 2. Readers are properly cautioned about the need for priorities, namely evangelism of the lost. But the authors also contend that the Gospel is more than just soul saving. As can be expected, the authors revisit the litany of bad news regarding environmental degradation to underscore that Christians cannot ignore this topic. Global warming, growing human population, and impacts from agri-farming are mentioned as causes or results of the imbalance in creation. Readers are exhorted to see creation care as flowing from the second great commandment of loving your neighbor.

The authors are careful not to overwhelm readers with excessive legalism or fear-mongering. They recognize that different callings will cause some Christians seeing creation care as a higher priority than those held by other believers. However, they note that Christians can do more than one thing at a time and doing something, even a little, is important. Ultimately, all must be done as stewards of God's property.

The topic of creation care is certainly an important one. Unfortunately, the authors simply repeated the errors of so many other books on the subject, albeit to a lesser extent. First, the authors did not take seriously the teaching of Scripture that directly connects our obedience to God's commands and the destruction of creation. The prophets repeatedly argued that Israel's failure to obey Torah

resulted in the environmental catastrophes of the day. The authors understood this principle in part by their condemnation of consumerism. But what they missed was that the problem lies in not just avoiding spending but spending on the wrong things. If Christians spent less on ourselves that would not be enough. We have to take the next step and spend the money for the furtherance of the kingdom of God, be it evangelism, missions, poor, etc. Likewise, avoiding idolatry and divorce also reduce the impact on the environment. Just consider nations with high rates of idolatry (worshiping physical objects called gods) and ask, "How clean is their environment?" Could those two issues be related? This review thinks so. What about divorce? Divorce increases consumerism because now two people who shared a home and property separate and buy twice as much (See Yu and Liu 2007). Regrettably, the environmental impact of our personal moral failings was missing in this book.

Second, the authors suggested that airplane was a moral challenge due to its impact on climate. They suggested that fliers purchase carbon credits to reduce the environmental impact of that flight. The authors base this suggestion on both a factual and principled claim. The factual claim is their belief that human activity (such as flying) is causing climate change. The principled claim is that we show love for our neighbor by caring for their earth. Setting aside debates over the factual claim, this review wonders whether Scripture ever requires us to look at the distant effects of our actions? It seems this sort of moral accounting is quite difficult. Perhaps God does require us to undergo rigorous moral accounting. But the authors should have proved

God wants us to. In addition, where does the bible imply that caring for the earth is loving your neighbor? This reviewer suggests that the biblical model requires us to show concern for our fellow man and the environmental task and most of the problems will be addressed in short order.

Third, the authors ignored the human population issue. While mentioning the impact of human population on the planet, they neglected to discuss whether Christians should reduce the size of their families. This oversight is significant given the value of children as a blessing from God throughout scripture.

There are certainly more issues that could be raised, such as their neglect of voices countermanding their own, such as one presented by E. Calvin Beisner. Nevertheless, the book is well written and has helpful questions at the end of each chapter. But pastors and teachers are admonished to read with a critical eye as the theology found here is not the complete testimony of Scripture.

*Stephen M. Vantassel is a tutor of theology at King's Evangelical Divinity School. He is the author of **Dominion over Wildlife? An Environmental-Theology of Human-Wildlife Relations** (Wipf and Stock).*

