

Review

Moo, Douglas J. and Jonathan A Moo. 2018. *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.

By David R. Clements, PhD

No stone left unturned...this 235-page book on creation care covers all the bases. As indicated in the book's scriptural index, the father son duo of Doug and Jonathan Moo refer to 52 of the 66 books of the Bible in this theologically rich, yet highly readable treatment of the subject. As the authors state "we happen to live in a time when the scale of our impact on earth is out of all proportion to what it has ever been before" p. 219. This undercurrent of critical concern is present throughout the book, and yet well balanced by the premise that creation stewardship is a fundamental premise of Christian discipleship, regardless of time or place. In this way, the authors underline the message that Christians should care about the environment, and provide a litany of theological and practical reasons for so doing.

As part of the series of volumes edited by Jonathan Lunde on a "Biblical Theology for Life," the book is divided into three sections: "Queuing the Questions," "Arriving at Answers," and "Reflecting on Relevance." Because the authors are developing a "theology for life" this book is quite practical, both in the suggestions for Christian living, and in the general approach they take to finding reasonably clear answers to theological quandaries. Douglas Moo (the father) is a New Testament Professor at Wheaton College with an extensive publication record, particularly in terms of commentary series. Jonathan Moo teaches New Testament and environmental studies at Whitworth University, and in addition to his Ph.D. in the Divinity Faculty at the University of Cambridge, holds a graduate degree in wildlife ecology.

In the first section "queuing" seeks to sweep aside the common objections to the subject in the Christian community. In discussing the rise of environmentalism in society the authors discuss how Christians often do not really "feel" these issues very acutely. They do a good job of unsettling the common position of Christian anthropocentrism and accompanying instrumentalist view of nature. These perspectives tend to obscure critical environmental issues, even when in plain sight. Yet Moo and Moo are still quick to swing back to the other important pole in their arguments, that a crisis is not needed to justify creation care. I myself experienced this kind of issue some 20 years ago when after advocating creation care in a

Christian newspaper I was accused in a letter to the editor of selling out to the environmental movement.

The second chapter of the “queuing” section goes deeper and covers a variety of approaches to thinking Biblically about creation. The major point here is that many Christians throughout the ages have not seen an emphasis on creation care in the Bible, and in particular in the New Testament, and therefore if the ethic really is present, new and improved theological approaches must wade into the fray. On page 34, the authors provide a good summary of their method:

To be sure, “meaning” is a tricky word. Anyone who has wrestled with difficult passages in Scripture will have seen how faithful interpreters will come to very different conclusions about what the Bible “means.” Nevertheless, while admitting there are difficulties, we are committed to the view that there, indeed, is meaning in the text and that our job, first and foremost, is to discover that meaning. We should be trying to find whatever “green” there really is in Scripture—a color that may, indeed, have been obscured by certain cultural and theological assumptions. What we need to resist is not the text but the assumptions we may inadvertently bring to the text. Our goal is to see whether Scripture itself, not some modern ideological or political agenda, demands such a commitment.

For me, one of the most convincing aspects of their approach was that they were willing to admit when a particular interpretation was uncertain.

Most of the book is taken up by the middle section on “answers.” From the general beginning point of “A Beautiful World” (Chapter 3), the authors move through well-established Old Testament principles on creation care in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 6 takes on a pivotal role of linking the fall of creation from Genesis 3 to the groaning of creation, where Paul picks “up on this motif” (of lament) in Romans 8. From here, the authors with their extensive exegetical experience in the New Testament go on to provide some significant answer to New Testament quandaries – sometimes tentative answers, and sometimes quite robust.

Chapter 7 provides an illuminating discourse on the subject under the heading “Jesus and Creation.” This is a rich source of integrated topic: The Significance of Jesus’s Incarnation, The Peaceable Kingdom of God’s Messiah, Looking to Jesus to Learn What it is to be Human, Looking to Jesus to Learn What it is to Rule, Looking with Jesus at Creation, Looking to Jesus for Creation’s Goal: Resurrection and New Creation, and Creation’s Response to Jesus. The authors conclude that in the

incarnation lies the strongest possible endorsement of the goodness of creation. Besides that, He lived and moved and breathed creation, and spoke in parables that were often inspired by nature. The authors also celebrate the cosmic passage in Colossians 1 that heralds the good news of Christ's reconciliation of "all things."

Chapter 8 moves on to the theology of Paul, which many Christians have noted lacks references to creation care. However, the authors boldly title this chapter after Galatians 6:15: "What Counts is the New Creation." This verse, as well as another well-known verse, "if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17) are the only places where Paul uses the phrase "new creation" and these verses have historically been pigeon-holed as being solely about human salvation. Moo and Moo beg to differ saying "an argument can be made for a more expansive interpretation: that 'new creation' is Paul's shorthand expression for the radically new state of affairs that Christ's coming has inaugurated - a state of affairs that includes renovation of the created world itself." (p. 137). I won't detail all of the ways they wrestle with traditional approaches to these verses, but suffice it to say that they work hard to try to make their point.

It has been said often that a person's approach to ecology reflects on his or her eschatology. This is the subject of a very carefully put together Chapter 9 which deals with the question: does the Bible have a transformational model or a replacement model for the fate of creation? Moo and Moo line up firmly in the transformational camp, taking the chapter title from Revelation 21:5 "I Am Making Everything New!" As they point out, it does not say "I am making all new things" but rather assumes a renovating action. The authors do a very thorough theological analysis of 2 Peter 3, looking at the context, the Greek, and many other aspects to try to understand the meaning. This passage, as they admit, is responsible for the common dismissive statement about the material creation that "it's all going to burn." As well as pointing to possible meanings for the language in 2 Peter 3 in terms of a refining fire rather than a destructive fire, Moo and Moo go through many other relevant passages that point to a transformational model, found throughout scripture (e.g., Isaiah, Romans, or Revelation), and also make the comparison with the resurrection body, pointing out the logical need for continuity in the narrative of both eternal life and the story of creation.

The third section of the book, on "relevance," flowed naturally out of the rich theological middle section. In Chapter 10, the authors situate creation care solidly within the gospel. It was at this point that I realized that this would be a helpful book to recommend to any pastor who has wondered about this aspect of Christian

doctrine (or even pastors who have not!). Chapter 11 on understanding our place answers a lot of questions on how we are to love God, people and creation, and how we can do all three at the same time. Similarly Chapter 12 on wisdom points out how God provides us tools for dealing with dilemmas in creation care and life in general. Chapter 13 provides a quick guide for Christians skeptical as to whether creation really is in crisis, while the final chapter provides a fitting end, proclaiming that creation care is ultimately all about worshipping the creator – a theme that has been held up by evangelical leaders in the creation care movement – notably by Peter Harris, founder of A Rocha.

Indeed, many such leaders have added their strong endorsements for this book. And it is fitting to give the last words here to Peter Harris himself: “So it is a privilege to commend this book and a delight to know that it will now be available to the growing numbers of those who need firm foundations for their Christian worship, work, and witness in a groaning but good creation.”

David Clements is Co-Chair, Department of Geography and Environment, and Professor, Department of Biology, Trinity Western University, 7600 Glover Rd., Langley, BC, Canada V2Y 1Y1.

Author copyright.

David Clements, review of *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, by Douglas J. and Jonathan A. Moo, Northwest Institute for Ministry Education Research. www.nimer.ca, (date posted).