

JOSEPH COLESON, ed. *Care of Creation: Christian Voices on God, Humanity, and the Environment*. Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2010; pp. 208.

There is increasing interest and concern regarding the current health of the planet, its human and non-human inhabitants as well as a marked increase in the number of volumes published from Christian perspectives on related topics. 'Creation care', 'going green' and many other such terms are increasingly used, so much so that the term 'green-washing' has arisen in response to trite and profit-driven usages of these 'green' terms. Thankfully, this collection of essays could not be considered as 'green-washing' the faith, but rather is a positive contribution to the conversations of Christian eco- and social-justice. Joseph Coleson states that the intention for the book is to further elucidate the 'divine mandate to care for God's good creation on this earth' (p. 12). It goes beyond this to blend the two sides of the 'coin of compassion' (eco- and social- justice) that can sometimes be separated in Christian thought when environmentalism is mentioned.

The book is divided into three parts: Part 1 is titled 'Creation, Alienation, Redemption' and in four chapters aims to 'lay out the biblical theology of care for creation'. Part 2 focuses on 'Care for Humanity', covering topics such as genetic engineering, abortion, euthanasia, human trafficking and environmental degradation as violence in three chapters. Over the next five chapters, Part 3 covers 'Care of the Environment' through topics such as land, water, endangered species and general stewardship, and concludes with a call to action on these issues from well-known evangelical creation care advocates Matthew and Nancy Sleeth.

There are numerous constructive and thought-provoking themes conveyed, even within the introductory chapter. However, there are points which could still be subject to some debate. For example, the introduction at one point states that our responsibilities to each other are different in a number of respects from our responsibilities to the rest of creation. Only one difference is noted: that 'we were not given stewardship dominion over each other, as we were over the earth and the rest of its creatures' (p. 12). While the scriptures may point to this, some would posit that the idea of loving, self-giving relationship with humanity and all of creation need not be differentiated with such a human/nature divide. It is acknowledged the comparatively brief nature of the chapters leads to not all terminology and concepts being unpacked in great detail. Nonetheless, I think two areas would have benefited from receiving more attention and clarification. Firstly, mention is made of 'stewardship dominion' (eg. pp. 12, 43) - one of the more well-known Christian ecological responses. However it would have been nice to have seen some more wrestling with terminology as there are other ecological responses which can be expressed in terms such as partnership, sacrament, covenant, celebration, Earth community, or even

pastoral care.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the extent to which Coleson points to equality within humanity, noting '*adam* (humanity) has been created equally (female and male) in the image of God, is admirable. While it may be considered outside the scope of the piece, it would have been helpful to see further attempts to spell out in more detail what actually constitutes being created in the *imago Dei*. For example, to what extent do other created life forms praise and bring forth glimpses of the Creator?

In chapter 2, Kelvin Friebel provides a fairly anthropocentric piece which focuses on issues surrounding humanity's fall, and sees creation 'in such a condition, not by its own action, choice, or volition, but because of what humans have done against God' (p. 33). He also touches on the somewhat thorny issue of God's retribution against human sin, where this sin causes creation to become an agent and/or 'an object of divine judgment, an innocent victim (p. 37).'

The subsequent chapter has Christopher Bounds introducing the charge that many within the Christian faith today are complicit in a form of Gnostic heresy. This 'virus' takes a dim view of the earthy, physical world, elevates the spiritual nature, also focusing on the liberation from earth and the pure spiritual joy of the heavenly life to come. This can then lead to low levels of concern and care towards God's creation, and attitudes of uncaring domination of the earth and earth community. It is a helpful chapter connecting humanity, salvation and the redemption of all creation through Christ, and brings some elements of Wesleyan thought to bear on the matter. However, I am not convinced of Bounds' claim that 'all creation existed in harmonious relationship through the holy leadership of our first parents' (p. 49). It reiterated to me that as humans, we have a tendency to overrate our importance, and too easily slot into a human-centered (*anthropocentric*) vision of reality rather than a God-centered (*theocentric*) one. Thankfully this point is perceptively reflected on in the following chapter titled 'God's Constant Care of the Universe' by Kenneth Gavel.

The complex ethical dilemmas of euthanasia, abortion, and genetic engineering are carefully and considerably tackled in chapters 5 (Burton Webb and Stephen Lennox) and 6 (Christina Accornero and Susan Rouse). The section is rounded off by the compelling and poignant piece by Jo Anne Lyon, which through personal narratives and facts, draws attention to various ways selfish and greedy humanity has found to exploit fellow brothers and sisters. I found this chapter to be one of the highlights of this compilation. Environmental degradation is argued to be equivalent to violence against the poor. This argument is supported by moving stories – stories that must be heard in the current debate on climate change. The potential for climate change to cause pain, suffering, hunger and thirst on a large scale is particularly evident amongst the poorest and weakest. A story is told of a Zambian AIDS widow's futile attempts to grow crops for her

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<sup>1</sup> See Clive Ayre, 'An Approach to Ecological Mission in and through the Christian Community in Australia: Beyond Apathy to Committed Action,' unpublished PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 2008.

family in the increasingly unpredictable seasons in her land. The question is raised – who is our neighbour? Hope is raised through insights from stories of the past work towards justice, particularly of Wesleyan origin, the centrality of prayer and ends with a dare to ‘dream of the transformation both of people and of the planet’ (p. 119).

Section 3, ‘Care of the Environment’ begins with Travis Nation and Kenneth Dill focusing on land and water conservation. The importance of land and water conservation is addressed, along with an important factor that can sometimes be conveniently overlooked – self-discipline. The next three chapters: ‘Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources’ (Richard Daake and D. Darek Jarmola), ‘Every Living Creature’ (Ronald Crawford and Joseph Coleson) and ‘Endangered Species and Habitats’ (Martin LaBar and Donald Wood) flow effectively and are all well constructed and written. A great number of topics, from agribusiness to aesthetics, to exotic pets and eating meat, are covered within the chapter’s small footprints and are well worth reading. Matthew and Nancy Sleeth’s final list of various actions to take is certainly helpful, though certainly not exhaustive.

The inclusion of both ‘Suggestions for Reflection and Action’, and ‘For Further Reading’ sections at the end of each chapter is welcome and encouraging as the questions posed are generally thought-provoking and are quite practical. Mental assent is but one part of the Christian life. Taking action after gaining knowledge is vital to the living out of our faith – an obvious ingredient of the Wesleyan tradition. It is encouraging to see this volume published within the Wesleyan Theological Perspectives series, as the Wesleyan tradition has a constructive and hopeful part to play in the care of God’s creation. Overall, this is a positive contribution to the conversation of Christian eco- and social-justice, and gives a firmly grounded, yet loving and compassionate call to action in and for the earth and also towards our fellow humanity in the current climate of degradation, ecological concern and widespread injustice.

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