

Book Reviews

Overall, I found the book to be a worthwhile read (I even ordered another copy to give as a present). With over 200 footnotes, Wirzba provides abundant opportunity for further study and reflection. I would recommend it to a Christian study group as a springboard for discussion.

Reviewed by Bruce E. Buttler, Professor of Biology and Dean of the Division of Science at Burman University, Lacombe, AB T4L 2E5.

BEING-IN-CREATION: Human Responsibility in an Endangered World by Brian Treanor, Bruce Ellis Benson, and Norman Wirzba, eds. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015. 242 pages, notes, index. Paperback; \$33.00. ISBN: 9780823265008.

Where do humans belong in the natural world? How are humans to interact with the rest of creation? With the advent of an impending environmental crisis on the horizon, if not already present, these questions become more significant for Christians and the rest of humankind to protect our environment and promote eco-awareness. In *Being-in-Creation: Human Responsibility in an Endangered World*, Brian Treanor, Bruce Ellis Benson, and Norman Wirzba present a collection of ten essays, the majority written by professors of philosophy or theology, that focuses on the Christian environmental perspective, stressing our “creatureliness” and intimate relationship with the rest of creation rather than exerting our dominion over the natural world.

In the introduction, Brian Treanor uses Lynn White’s essay, “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,” to help Christians rethink Genesis 1:28:

[White’s essay] places the blame for our present ecological crises squarely on the Genesis account of creation and its subsequent interpretations, taking issue with the apparent claims of superiority implicit in doctrines of *imago dei* and with exhortations to domination and exploitation based on it ... (p. 3)

In essence, Treanor is arguing that Christian interpretation of this passage and the abuse of the environment “has led us squarely into the environmental crisis by suggesting that we have absolute dominion over the earth, including the right to use it in a gluttonous or profligate way” (p. 3). The essays comprising the remainder of this anthology aim to help the reader

rethink (or reconnect with) what it means to be human in the wider context of creation ... we will never live sustainably over the long haul unless and until we come to accept that we are just one type of creature among many fellow creatures, rather than omnipotent gods exercising capricious (and intemperate) dominion over the rest of the cosmos. (p. 13)

In his essay “Rowan Williams and Ecological Rationality,” Jarrod Longbons uses Rowan Williams’s view that the ecological crisis is “an opportunity that causes society to rethink life with a necessary ecological rationality that can help us rediscover some of the implications of the Christian doctrine of creation” (p. 37). Longbons also cites Williams to support his argument that humans and nonhumans have a reciprocal relationship, as both live in interconnectivity with one another:

To understand that we and our environment are alike in the hands of God, so that neither can be possessed absolutely, is to see that the mysteriousness of the interior life of another person and the uncontrollable difference and resistance of the material world are connected. (p. 41)

This rationale “reveals human relationship to and responsibility for nature, despite the two obvious differences between these two classes of creatures” (p. 41). At the heart of Longbons’s argument is the idea that society, as it becomes more materialistic, is apathetic to nonhuman life; however, rethinking the doctrine of creation calls Christians to bring nature closer to the Creator, as “Christianity compels humans to bridge God’s life and the world’s life” (p. 49).

Similarly, Norman Wirzba’s essay, entitled “The Art of Creaturely Life: A Question of Human Propriety,” focuses on the intimate relationship between humans and nonhumans. Wirzba begins by focusing on the beginning of human life in the Garden of Eden. Adam was created from the soil, and animals and plants are likewise largely dependent on the soil. Wirzba cites Wendell Berry, stating that “the soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all ... Without proper care for it we can have no community, because without proper care for it we can have no life” (pp. 53–54). Wirzba is arguing that there is a circle of life that ultimately ends in the soil, and by failing to care for it, we are taking “a stance against creation” (p. 54). He finishes the essay using a gardener and a gardener as an example for creation in its entirety: “A gardener cannot simply impose her will upon the garden ... A gardener, in other words, gives herself to the garden so that the garden can flourish” (p. 72). As Christians, we are called to this type of self-offering to form a new relationship with God’s creation, not simply imposing our will on the world around us and exploiting God’s gift to humankind.

The idea of the divine call to care for creation is evident in Christina M. Gschwandtner’s “Creativity as Call to Care for Creation? John Zizioulas and Jean-Louis Chrétien.” She argues that Chrétien suggests

that “offering the creation to God in praise in hymnody is both a special task for human beings and a response to the divine call. Humans hence carry a responsibility for the world: they shelter, protect, and shape it” (p. 100). Zizioulas believes that this call “is not heard in the same fashion by other creatures,” making humans unique and set apart from the rest of creation (p. 103). If this is the case, then why do humans, especially Christians with a specific divine calling, exploit nature and destroy God’s creation?

Two of the final essays in the collection give Christians a few pieces of advice for re-entering this relationship with creation, whether or not that was their intention. Edward F. Mooney uses the comparison of a mall and a swamp to show the effect of our culture and society today in his essay entitled, “Reflections from Thoreau’s Concord.” He states that “to sense a swamp’s wonder is being intelligently alert there, finding sympathy for it and its creatures in a way that repays attention as the place brings you alive. The mall, in contrast, deadens the ‘you’ of the wild” (p. 135). Thus, humankind needs to find joy in nature, not in the ever-present materialistic nature of society and culture. This joy will lead to a deeper appreciation and understanding of the intimate relationship humans have with God’s creation.

In a similar fashion, T. Wilson Dickinson’s “Care of the Soil, Care of the Self: Creation and Creativity in the American Suburbs” attempts to revisit the doctrine of creation by going back to biblical passages (as in Isaiah and the Psalms) that contain deep, vibrant phrases about creation. As Christians made in God’s image, it is our duty to preserve this brilliant imagery rather than to destroy the earth. We need to be in an attentive relationship with the world around us rather than thinking “it can be fixed later” or “technology can solve that problem.” Dickinson also uses the example of mowing a lawn in an urban area, which depicts the idea of conformity to a “T.” Everyone’s lawn must be perfectly manicured and ever green; however, “the uniformity of the suburbs also makes those within it blind to the needs that exist outside its borders, as the ‘world of manicured yards conceals the blights of poverty, land degradation, and economic injustice’” (p. 166). As called beings by our Creator, Christians need to start noticing the invisible and stop using Genesis 1:28 as a biblical basis to abuse the gift of God’s creation.

This book is directed toward readers with an interest in philosophy and theology, as well as those concerned about the state of our environment. It requires careful reading with attention to detail and an advanced knowledge of philosophy and theology, or meticulous research to understand the

intricate theories presented. Many of the authors make key points that help summarize their beliefs; Treanor also summarizes each essay in the introduction, helping to give a broad overview if the reader could not understand the depth of theological or philosophical issues at hand. The overall goal is for humans, especially the target audience of Christians, to become more aware of the philosophical and theological basis for creation care. Multiple viewpoints on a single topic are often presented in a single essay, giving a broad Christian perspective that allows the reader to formulate their own opinions or dig deeper into a specific topic. Readers will likely find themselves intrigued by the arguments and will rethink their own opinions on the doctrine of creation as it relates to their lives.

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LOVING LATER LIFE: An Ethics of Aging by Frits de Lange. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015. 159 pages. Paperback; \$19.00. ISBN: 9780802872166.

Loving Later Life is a book that could potentially be of interest to anyone, because everyone is faced, in theory, with the prospect of living later life. However, if the author’s contentions surrounding our great anxiety toward aging are correct, there is little chance that the book will become a bestseller. That being said, *Loving Later Life* is a significant contribution to the burgeoning conversation surrounding the ethics of aging. De Lange provides an honest and unflinching look at the realities of old age that our culture often ignores or attempts to paper over. He seeks to meet the ethical challenges surrounding aging through the nuanced development of a theologically informed ethics of care emerging from Jesus’s double command to love God and neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:38-40). Along the way he engages with an intriguing mix of sources, including some that may not be familiar to English-speaking audiences, encompassing the fields of theology, philosophy, history, sociology, psychology, and gerontology. The book also includes a significant bibliography and detailed index.

After a brief introduction, de Lange begins the first chapter by asking why theological ethics should take an active interest in the subject of aging. The unprecedented aging of contemporary societies, the ethical blind spots of gerontology, theology’s unique ability to speak in a pastoral and existential voice, and the inadequacy of the prevailing ethical paradigms for