

HOPE FOR GOD'S CREATION: STEWARDSHIP IN AN AGE OF FUTILITY. By Andrew J. Spencer. Brentwood, TN. B&H Academic, 2023. 240 pages. \$24.99 (paperback).

The environment is a prominent topic in contemporary discourse. Doomsdayers and naysayers populate news cycles and internet forums to either legitimize or discredit the notion of imminent environmental devastation. Into this contemporary problem, Andrew J. Spencer, a supervisor of operations training at a nuclear power plant and a senior research fellow for the Institute of Faith, Work, and Economics, offers a biblically informed, theologically conservative ethic of creation care. The hope that creation, which presently groans under the curse of sin, will one day be restored on the day of Christ's return (Rom 8:18–25) should lead God's people to care for and steward God's creation in anticipation of that coming renewal of all things (14). To make the case for his argument, Spencer divides his work into three parts with ten chapters, including an introduction and epilogue.

In Part I, Spencer sets the stage by offering an account of the promises and perils of environmental engagement and an abbreviated survey of environmental ethics in the United States since the Industrial Revolution, with a particular focus on evangelical Christians. Spencer notes that creation care is a way that Christians seek the good of the city where they live by pursuing goods like clean air and water and regulating polluting businesses for the betterment of all. Creation care is also a common good cause through which Christians can create friendships with neighbors who do not share their convictions, which can lead to a chance to share the gospel (19). However, he warns against making environmental concerns the only contemporary problem that needs addressing or any potential theological drift or compromise that might occur.

In Part II, Spencer lays out the theological framework from which his vision of creation care flows. To do so, he offers four doctrinal questions that are explored in the following four chapters: 1) What are the sources of authority for environmental ethics? 2) Why does creation have value? 3) What is the human role in creation? 4) What is the end goal or final state of the created order, and how does it come about? (62–63).

For Spencer, the canon of Scripture is the final authority on all matters of faith and life. Rooted in the Scriptural revelation, the Christian is freed for a life of careful engagement with other fields of study like science, without compromising one's conviction to biblical authority or

succumbing to scientism, an ideology that sees science as the only legitimate form of epistemological discourse (74–78).

Spencer argues that creation has an inherent value because the triune God made it and called it “very good” (89). It also has an instrumental value because through it our daily bread and everything needed for our body and life are provided (92). Even after the fall into sin, creation still has value because it is the place of God’s ongoing work of salvation and redemption wrought by Christ’s incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and eventual coming again (97–98). As a result, Spencer warns against succumbing to pantheism, which distorts the Creator–creature distinction or dualism, which teaches that the creation is something to be overcome and left behind (99–103).

Created in the image of God, humans have a unique role in the created order and are called to steward God’s creation (106–112). While some environmentalists possess a distinct antihuman bent, Spencer argues that humans made in the image of God are necessary for the flourishing of created life, even as they wrestle against the power of sin and recognize that the renewal of creation will come only as a result of God’s gracious initiative and work on the day of Christ’s return.

In Part III, Spencer turns his attention to how the theology of creation care he has described becomes incarnate in the practices and lives of God’s people. He first explores how the church must maintain its proper identity and mission of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples; however, drawing on the work of Francis Schaeffer, he notes that the church is a “pilot plant” that holistically forms God’s people to follow Christ with integrity and credibility in all aspects of life, including their care for the creation and environment (157–165).

Spencer next takes up the challenge of conspiracy theories and political conflicts surrounding questions of ecological change, both of which undermine the gospel (186). He calls readers to practice self-restraint in things like greenhouse gas emissions and personal consumption habits, even if the predictions of climate armageddon turn out to be overstated (175–177). He also recommends an active localism that seeks to find sustainable solutions to problems in the concrete places where people live and work with those they know personally and interact with regularly (184–186). Finally, Spencer encourages readers to become more conscientious of practices such as resource sharing, food production, energy usage, consumption and waste, and sabbath rest at a personal, congregational, and political level so that everything is done to the glory of God, in service to the neighbor, and for the flourishing of the creation (209).

Hope for God's Creation helps fill a lacuna in conservative Christian scholarship by offering a balanced and persuasive theological argument from the Scriptural witness that describes how caring for God's created world is an important part of following Christ, even as God's people ultimately look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

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FINDING PHOEBE: WHAT NEW TESTAMENT WOMEN WERE REALLY LIKE by Susan E. Hylen. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans, 2023. 188 pages. \$21.99 (paperback).

In *Finding Phoebe*, Susan E. Hylen provides a necessary corrective to modern caricatures of the roles and agency of women in the ancient world. She deftly weaves together primary classical sources and biblical texts to challenge the idea that women in the Roman Empire were necessarily passive and helpless. Using the figure of Phoebe in Romans 16 as her guiding light, she shows the myriad ways in which Roman women exercised agency and authority in both society at large and in early Christian communities.

Hylen organizes *Finding Phoebe* thematically and divides the work into four parts: Wealth and Property, Social Influence and Status, Virtues of Women, and Speech and Silence. Each of the parts is then broken down into four chapters, each of which discuss a particular subcategory of the theme. A strength of this organization is that the themes are organized around Roman sensibilities, rather than contemporary categories. Thus, Part 1: Wealth and Property includes chapters not just on property ownership and property management but also on marriage and occupations. The remaining three sections continue this organization around Roman social concerns. The chapters within each section are brief, usually around 10 pages, with the last two to three pages devoted to New Testament texts and study questions.

Each chapter of the book begins with examples from the lives of women in the Roman Empire. Sometimes, as in the first chapter, Hylen weaves together a hypothetical family out of her own reading of primary source documents. In other chapters, she presents primary sources such