
Book Review

Chris Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change: Creation Care This Side of the Resurrection* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 247 pp., \$31.00 (pbk), ISBN: 1498297021.

Scholars of climate change tend to agree that climate change is a 'wicked' or even 'super-wicked' problem, an interconnected set of challenges that cannot fully be solved, which crosses scales, areas of expertise, and any imagined boundaries between humanity and the natural world. There is less agreement on what to do about that reality. In this book Chris Doran offers a fascinating and careful theological proposal.

The focus of the book is hope, and Doran's main point is that Christians must cultivate and model hope in response to climate change. Indeed, he does not merely argue that despair is counterproductive, but goes further to assert that 'hopelessness should not appear plausible or even reasonable to Christians who believe in the resurrection of Jesus' (p. 15). The witness of Christian faith attests to a Creator who is more powerful than death and who has chosen not to abandon the creation. In light of this, Doran argues that Christians are called to humility and to make material sacrifices in order to be a 'witness of hope' in challenging times.

The book begins with a systematic account of God as Creator (Chapter 1) and Redeemer (Chapter 2) of the world, claims that serve as a foundation for an ethics of hope for creation care (Chapter 3). The core of this ethic is humility, and Doran argues that a properly theocentric faith is an important check on the temptation to hubristically or simplistically assume that human beings can manage the world and solve its problems. Christians who truly have faith that God is in charge and ultimately powerful will surrender their desire to control, instead taking responsibility for serving others, and so cultivate and model hope.

Doran then applies that theological ethic to three moral questions. He first asks if it is appropriate to think of human beings as 'stewards' of the creation. He answers by reframing the issue, arguing that it is more important to cultivate a humble willingness to sacrifice for others than to embrace any particular label (Chapters 4-5). He next asks how Christians should respond to the dominant economic system of capitalism, which he characterizes as 'idolatrous' and 'stricken by hopelessness'. His response is a call for frugality, a 'subversive' virtue in the twenty-first century through which believers learn to honestly assess their needs rather than indulge ever-expanding desires (Chapters 6-7). Third, Doran considers the food system in the United States, which he also identifies as 'marked by profound hopelessness'. In response, he calls for Christians to learn to understand eating as the most regular chance they have to embrace the hope of the resurrection and the Eucharist by sharing with neighbors across the globe and paying moral attention to nonhuman creatures (Chapters 8-9).

The book concludes by arguing that the Christian church is called to be 'a beacon of hope' for the entire world, resisting the temptations toward climate denial or despair and humbly taking responsibility for the complexities of our age. True commitment to God's world means accepting and engaging the scientific truth of what is happening and creating new moral possibilities by learning to commit further to the world (Chapters 10–11).

Throughout, Doran draws on a range of Christian sources, with special attention to the early theology of the 'church fathers' alongside explorations of the Bible, his own personal experience, and scientific data. The book is very explicitly written to Christians, and largely to Protestants in the United States. The specificity of the audience is a strength. Doran speaks a particular religious language, and as such is able to go into depth and take decisive normative stances designed to convince a particular community.

I suspect that those outside the Christian faith and even those skeptical of Christian traditions could learn from the text, too. Whether or not one shares Doran's beliefs, he does a service by developing a careful and systematic answer to the question of where one might find hope to act and endure in a troubled time. The Christian church is, for Doran, 'a beacon of hope' not 'the beacon of hope'. This suggests room for others to offer other models. Those from other religious, spiritual, and secular traditions will need different resources for hope, but this book might help to identify them, and it makes a good case for their necessity in face of a global, wicked problem.

My main critique of *Hope in the Age of Climate Change* is that, while it reflects in detail on the hierarchical relationship between human beings and God, it spends relatively less time on the hierarchies between human beings and other creatures or those within the human species. Doran argues that Christians should understand themselves as subject to God, an attitude that reflects theological tradition and nurtures the kind of humility he argues is essential for hope. And he notes that human power over the rest of creation has been 'defined more by wickedness than our righteousness' (p. 98). However, he is not clear on whether that calls human power into question, or whether humans need to learn to surrender their power or use it more responsibly. To what extent is an 'order of creation' in which human beings are understood to be below God but above all other animals morally defensible in a world of climate change?

Doran also devotes little time to the question of how hierarchies between humans might affect the implications of his arguments. He makes a strong case that Christians in the industrialized world need to learn humility and restraint, but should the same virtues be a priority for the poor and marginalized? Many feminist and liberationist voices would suggest that oppressed human communities need to cultivate entirely different virtues, asserting themselves more rather than less in response to human institutions that have marginalized them. I wonder how Doran would respond.

No book answers all questions it raises, of course. But this one offers a clear and comprehensible religious vision of moral life in our time, which is worth engaging and questioning in detail whether one agrees or not. Many works like this will be necessary to thoughtfully cultivate hope in our time.

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