

Karl Loning and Erich Zenger, TO BEGIN WITH, GOD
CREATED ... BIBLICAL THEOLOGIES OF CREATION.

(ET Omar Kaste; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 200 pp.
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The authors state: "Our purpose [for the book] was above all to bring the two parts of the Christian Bible into dialogue with one another in such a way that both their many voices and their single basic message would become audible" (p. vii).

The book takes a quasi-canonical approach to the subject of creation and its correlated subject of salvation. It is driven by a traditional view of the "Fall" in which the God-created good creation remains under constant threat from the chaos. However, ecological issues are the real agenda behind the book. While this is admirable, the attempt to make a case for contemporary Christian theology's ecological concerns and actions from creation theology is fundamentally flawed. Moreover, the authors ultimately do not deliver such a theology.

The book is well punctuated with comparative literature and iconography. However, the comparisons are really "nothing new under the sun" for biblical scholars. It is divided into four parts: Ideas About the Beginning of Creation; Personification of the Creative Beginning; The World as the Creation of the Merciful God; Creation, Torah, and God's Rule (Psalm 19).

In the Introduction, the authors draw parallels with the Apostles Creed and the creation inclusio of the Bible, i.e., Genesis 1–2 and Revelation 21–22: both begin and end on the note of creation theology (p. 1). They concede that creation theology is not central to either Christian Theology or the heart of the NT. However, the authors observe that the soteriologically preoccupied NT seems to parallel other ancient Near Eastern texts with comparable theologies. These theologies emphasize that redemption (soteriology) relates to the Creator-God/Savior-God's ability to restore life-giving power to those who have fallen to the power of sin and death. "Bib-

lical creation faith and biblical salvation faith belong together like the two sides of a medallion” (p. 4).

There are some rather strange intertextual comparisons in the book. In chapter two, the authors compare the creation theology of Genesis with the likes of Psalm 22, Isaiah 61, 63:7–64:11 and Job. In relation to these texts, they thus refer to the *Sitz im Leben* of creation theology as “theodicy.” The basic premise here is that the chaos threat to the originally created-good creation is an ever-present opportunity for God to demonstrate his theodicy by always redeeming life from chaos’ clutches. Thus, salvation is always the goal of creation. Should this not, then, be a demonstration of God’s salvation rather than theodicy? Indeed the theodicy argument from these texts’ creation theologies is grossly underdeveloped, tenuous, and bizarre.

The authors are perhaps on more solid ground when they argue in chapter four for the establishment of God’s rule as eschatological deliverance for creation. But comparisons with the Gospel of John and creation theology in chapter six are left wanting. When the book is not stating the obvious, it is so obscure that one is left wondering what was meant, e.g., in reference to Jesus’ defense of his healing work in John 5:19–29 and specifically 5:22: “Judgment is interpreted in terms of creation theology as the salvation of creation from death through the works, in the world, of the logos that has become flesh” (p. 91). This is not at all clear from the text-but these kinds of leaps are typical for much of the book-including its habit of reading way too much into the biblical text.

The later two parts of the book again either state the obvious, e.g., that the Flood narrative is a creation-recreation myth demonstrating the goodness and power of the Creator/Savior, or remain obscure and underdeveloped, e.g., at the conclusion of the book: “In view of the continually intensifying ecological crisis a newparadigm for dealing with creation is demanded by the biblical theologies of creation” (p. 189).

Biblical theologies do not demand new paradigms. Rather these creation theologies should be providing the means to such ends. But if one is to keep to the authors’ biblical theology/canonical approach (their paradigm), then one must use the theologies already present in contextually appropriate ways. This is why the book ultimately fails: with all the build up for this ecological conclusion, it just does not deliver. The book does not really demonstrate (in two and a half pages) how these biblical theologies of creation are applicable in any practical sense-which is what one would expect.

Ultimately it is not the main ideas or values of the book that are in question: it is the bizarre accumulation and delineation of its contorted

“sub-ideas” related to biblical texts that are its downfall. As a subpoint, it is also disappointing that the “on its last-legs” documentary hypothesis-at least the use of the meaningless JEDP-continues to be employed. With regret, and not for a lack of open willingness, this book cannot be recommended.