and propaganda in *The Technological Society* both echoes and deepens their analysis of the modern era; but no more than they was he able to answer the question, 'What is to be done?' Christians (so Ellul maintained) are summoned to be a witnessing presence in the world, joining in efforts to promote the common good, while at the same time taking care not to reduce Christianity to a mere generic affirmation of justice, development and human rights. What the world needs from the church is *the gospel* – or otherwise stated, God. Wise counsel indeed, but hardly a blueprint for the church's action in society.

What is the theological reader to take from this stimulating work? At one level, it can serve as a healthy reminder that theologians have no monopoly on reflection concerning the faith once delivered to the saints. Like any discipline, theology can at times be tediously parochial. It is good to have the windows opened from time to time to let in light and air. Christian intellectuals from outside the theological guild may practice what Barth called 'irregular dogmatics'. Moreover, such figures may be more attentive than the professional theologian to the forms of training (in language, virtue and the emotions) that are *already* in place and operative in technocratic society. We are always being schooled, always being disciplined, whether we know it or not. The five thinkers examined here understood this well; hence their hermeneutics of retrieval was always accompanied by a healthy dose of suspicion. As Weil would have put it, the Beast has designs on us, and so we need to be able to decode the messages he is communicating about how we should live and, especially, what we should love. Weil's great essay 'On the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God' reads very oddly as educational theory, but it at least places the question of love at the centre of any Christian *paideia*.

Beyond this, Jacobs' book gestures toward the possibility of something like a renewed Christian Republic of Letters devoted to the question of the human good. The spaces in which this will happen are uncertain - books? journals? online forums? But whether physical or virtual, such spaces would allow for inquiry into the question of human *personhood* of a sort that Jacobs' five would have recognised. Spaces of this sort are badly needed - especially ones where Christians can bridge their own confessional divisions, and/or discuss these issues with non-Christians (a possibility Weil would have relished). That would be an authentic humanism. May the tribe of those wishing to pursue it increase.

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Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril*

(Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018), pp. xvii + 238. $28.00.

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God is always merciful to creatures, creating them, pursuing communion with them, setting them free and redeeming them for eternal life, according to Elizabeth Johnson. In her new book, this argument grows out of a systematic critique of Anselm of Canterbury's theory of satisfaction, which in Johnson's view is so

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preoccupied with human guilt that it eclipses God's much more extensive interaction with all of creation. God has never wanted to be placated but has always already been merciful. Crucially, humans are recipients of this unmerited compassion along with the rest of the natural world. This perspective helps us see the larger biosphere with new eyes, especially now that ecological destruction has taken on dramatic proportions.

Johnson's spirited writing makes this book a page-turner. The argument unfolds as a dialogue with a fictitious student. Jargon-free, evocative and witty, the book is very suitable for a wider readership. The author interacts substantially with biblical scholarship as well as feminist, Latina and liberation theology, in addition to her dialogue with Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Niels Henrik Gregersen and Pope Francis, as well as with evolutionary biology more generally.

According to Johnson, God's liberation of creatures is not a radically new initiative, but part of God's ongoing, intimate involvement with creation. Even ultimate redemption and resurrection are not fundamentally new, but are God's way of opening up the possibilities hidden in biological flesh from the beginning. To make this point, Johnson draws especially on Deutero-Isaiah, whose message she describes as one grand sweep of creation and liberation, including God's attentive care for wider nature. In fact, humans do not merit God's attention due to their particular intellectual capacities; rather, they have evolved in intimate connection with *all* living creatures. Johnson's view of creation is fundamentally non-dualistic, portraying God as merciful towards all 'flesh'. Accordingly, salvation cannot be restricted to humans on account of Christ's cross. God does not save humanity through the cross, but is merciful to all of creation even despite the cross. Rather than any putative satisfaction, what is instrumental in salvation is Christ's resurrection, and God's affirmation of Jesus' creaturely 'flesh' resonates with all of creation. The cross, in turn, represents God's unflinching solidarity with all of creation.

An instructive chapter spells out how the New Testament describes salvation in Christ with a heterogeneous bundle of metaphors, rather than relying just on sacrifice. With sections on 'deep incarnation', Christ's 'deep cross' and 'deep resurrection', the book ends in a celebration of pan-creaturely ecumenism: due to God's fundamental, creating and liberating grace, 'human beings and [all] other species on earth have more in common than what separates them'. God shares the existence of every living thing, and God's saving activity is encompassing not only in allowing no chasm between creation and redemption, but also in saving every animal, plant and ecosystem.

Johnson's book is full of fresh insights. As the extinction of species has taken on dire proportions, her renewed look at how we interpret grand biblical traditions is highly pertinent. While this is a genuine achievement, Johnson's single, seamless arc of divine salvific activity from creation all the way to ultimate resurrection nevertheless raises questions. For example, she sees 'the relevance of the incarnation for the bear, the squid, the wetlands, and the bugs' in Christ sharing their life conditions, protesting the death of every living thing. True, perhaps even grasses may have their place in eternity, but with the assumption that God the Son was incarnate in Jesus, the claim that Christ shares the existence of a squid or a wetlands plant requires explication. Moreover, micro-organisms are absent from Johnson's account of creation, although by many orders of magnitude more numerous than plants and animals. Very often they are deserving of our deep appreciation. However, they also illustrate that Johnson's portrayal of creation is too soft around the edges, for they include the tuberculosis bacterium and the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, the cause of the bubonic plague. Johnson laments the death of every single creature, but theologians should welcome an eventual

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extinction of these particular bacteria. On the biblical side, Johnson is absolutely right that in Genesis 1, human 'dominion' does not legitimise absolute human 'domination' of the biosphere, but she downplays the potentially violent aspect of the divine mandate.

These points resist integration into the theological vision of a seamless single sweep from creation to resurrection. Johnson's spirituality of creaturely solidarity is an important goad for further reflection, yet natural evil in creation is more thoroughgoing than she acknowledges. This points to a further shortcoming, which is that the book does not explore in what distinctive ways God the Spirit is active among creatures precisely within this ambivalence of creation. Romans 8 suggests, for example, that the Holy Spirit is also an important topic to explore in response to the groaning of creation, rather than just the work of the Father and the Son.

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Randall B. Smith, *Reading the Sermons of Thomas Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide*

(Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2017), pp. xxxiv + 342. $44.95.

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Like Aquinas's own masterpiece, the *Summa Theologiae*, this invaluable introduction to Aquinas' sermons is written for 'beginners'. In the case of the *Summa*, it has been much debated who these beginners could have been, given that the work itself is of such depth and complexity. Despite the theories of some scholars, it is normally held that the readership Aquinas had in mind was not one of complete beginners who needed to be introduced to the basic facts of Christianity, nor even students setting out in the academic study of the content of scripture for the first time, but was comprised of those who, equipped with significant study of the Sacred Page, were now to encounter its teaching for the first time in a more systematic order rather than according to the order of the individual texts. Likewise, the beginners at whom Smith's unashamedly technical volume is directed are likely to be already somewhat familiar with the teachings of Aquinas himself, but to have not yet had the opportunity to study this doctrine as it is expressed in his more homiletic output. From one point of view, such a need may be something of a surprise, given that Aquinas was a Dominican, a member of the Order of Friars Preachers. However, it is true that Aquinas has normally been viewed in recent times less as a pulpit preacher and more as a taciturn academic and classroom teacher.

Aquinas' image in contemporary scholarship has nonetheless undergone something of a transformation in recent years. From being perceived as the official representative of Roman Catholic thought in the first half of the twentieth century, the effective collapse of interest in his work in seminary teaching after the Second Vatican Council left him rather out of the theological picture until the last few decades, when there has again been a growth of interest in his singular and enduring contribution. After Vatican II,

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