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### A call to creative engagement

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### **A call to creative engagement**

The details may be disputed, but the notion that we are now living within the Anthropocene (an era which is marked by the indelible effects which human activity has had upon the earth) has found widespread acceptance in both academic and popular discourse. Theological reflection on this idea – on what it means for us as human beings, living collectively in a world which is reckoned to have its origins in the Divine – is both timely and necessary, if we are to respond to it in ways which do proper justice to those aspects of human existence to which religious traditions bear witness. Norman Wirzba's 'This Sacred Life: Humanity's place in a wounded world' (Cambridge University Press, 2021, £64.99, pp: xx + 263, ISBN: 978-1316515648) is a valuable contribution to such theological reflection, and it deserves to be widely read.

Wirzba describes his book as an 'extended *essay*' which is intended to address 'the logics of creation, creatureliness and creativity' (p. xix, italics in original). This label is a helpful way in which to understand a work which is both wide-ranging in its content and also urgent and impassioned in its style. Wirzba engages with a rich variety of interlocutors, including, *inter alia*, transhumanist Max More (on the nature of life and death), anthropologist Tim Ingold (on the idea that we live in a 'meshwork' world), theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (on the necessity of seeing limit as a core part of human existence), and artist and social critic William Morris (on the interlinking natures of creativity, work and production).

Wirzba appeals to the Christian scriptures and to the wisdom of indigenous traditions to unpack the idea that the world around us, when seen as a creation, may also be seen as sacred, and as a gift. Viewed in that light, the relationship of people to

that world (and to one another) can take on a new, mutually transformative, character. Wirzba observes: ‘People ... do not exist apart from their places but grow out of them. ... Their lives are symbiogenetic, always *co-becoming with others*, which means that their doing and their agency are also an undergoing in which they respond to a dynamic, given world that is working itself out on and in them’ (p. 227, italics in original). It is through encouraging and nurturing creative human interactions with the world, and thereby emulating the divine, that the destructive tendencies characteristic of the Anthropocene can best be counteracted. Wirzba is well aware of the practical aspects of his arguments, and his concluding ‘core philosophical and theological principles that should guide our efforts in cultivating creative human lives’ (p. 240 and ff.) are alert to economic and political realities.

One might quibble with some parts of Wirzba’s analysis (his characterization of the ‘anthropic cosmological principle’ on p. 156f is quirky, to say the least). But the vision held out by his essay is engaging and timely, and it will, I am sure, resonate constructively with a wide readership.

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