Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. (372 pp.) [ISBN: 9780801030994]

Elliot Rice
Christchurch, New Zealand

At a time when concern for our ecological environment has come to the fore of Pacific and global concern, Catholic theologian Matthew Levering's *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation* is a timely, thorough, and creative theological interaction with some of our deepest questions about God and creation. The third volume in his "Engaging the Doctrine of" series, his goal here is to listen carefully to the challenges mounted by the developing ecological crisis and by modern science against the Bible's creation account, particularly as it is expressed in Genesis 1-3, and to respond with a nuanced affirmation of traditional theological convictions—particularly those articulated by medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas.

In the two opening chapters, his argument begins with the wise and good Creator who has life in himself, and in whom creation has life. Having purposefully limited his discussion to God as Creator, rather than as Trinity (pp. 5–12), Levering expounds this eternal life in God with discussions of "Divine Ideas" (chapter one) and "Divine Simplicity" (chapter two), owing much to the logic of Thomistic philosophical theology. As such, this is a thoroughly Catholic piece of theology that starts with God as Creator, rather than with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of creation, or the Spirit as creation's Perfector. Given the last half-century's eruption of Trinitarian theology, and especially given his previous volume, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, his decision to ground the eternal life of God in these abstract concepts is surprising. Though his engagement of the divine ideas and simplicity is rigorous, it is also, to this reader, tedious. Where a Trinitarian account of God's inner life is demonstrably dynamic, I agree with Levering's interlocutor Gregory Doolan that this "is primarily a philosophical doctrine, rather than a theological doctrine inextricable from the mystery of the Trinity" (p. 66).

If the first two chapters represent the tedium of a First Article Theology, the following four chapters demonstrate its promise with stimulating discussions of "Creatures" (chapter three), "Image of God" (chapter four), God's command to "Be Fruitful and Multiply" (chapter five), and "Original Sin" (chapter six). Each chapter is clearly laid out, beginning with a careful and broad enquiry into the challenges raised by modern scientific accounts of the cosmos and its creatures, which leads Levering to ask insightful questions of the Genesis creation story. For example, in light of the countless species now extinct, "Why would such unfathomable multitude and such strange diversity, seemingly purposeless, absurd, and wasteful, characterize God's plan of creation?" (p. 110). Or given the growing recognition that overpopulation is one of the biggest contributors to the developing environmental crisis, "Does the growth of human population express the wisdom of God in creation?" (p. 196). Each chapter then critically considers alternative Christian responses to these issues, in which Christian scholars have either ceded ground more or less entirely to science, or sought to reassert a form of biblical literalism. Seeking synthesis, Levering then offers a consistently Thomistic theological response, ceding ground to science where reasonable, all the while

enabling the church to hold fast to convictions of theological centrality, albeit with Catholic accents. As he says himself, "I . . . aim to show appreciation for modern science without falling into what David Bradshaw insightfully describes as the erroneous view that 'science provides the deepest insight into nature.'" (p. 4).

Having affirmed that God has life in himself in the first two chapters, these subsequent chapters express how all creation participates in God's life. Two chapters deserve special mention. In "Be Fruitful and Multiply," Levering draws attention to the dangers inherent in an ever-increasing human population consuming resources on a finite planet, and invites us to question the sensibility of God's command to fill the earth. He considers the perspective of Christian environmentalist Bill McKibben, who promotes single-child households for the sake of reversing population growth (pp. 206–15). Levering's engagement with the concept is sensitive and willing. Despite affirming McKibben's emphasis on wise stewardship of earth's limited resources, he concludes by arguing for the deeper wisdom of creation. "Simply as created, humans participate in the ontological goodness of God: it is good to be. Wondrously, God also calls humans to share in his own happiness, to be God's friends and to know him as he knows us" (p. 222). While wise stewardship is important, this cannot be undertaken at the cost of welcoming this gift of more humans for life in communion with God.

In "Original Sin," Levering considers the likelihood of Adam and Eve's actual existence against scientific opinion "that our genetic variability requires a much larger . . . group of ancestors, perhaps ten thousand and at least a few thousand" (p. 228). Reasoning that all humans must find unity in the first humans to make sense of original justice, original sin, and "Atonement" (chapter seven), he concedes that this unity can be found in both a monogenetic account (following Kenneth Kemp) or a polygenetic account (following Karl Rahner), provided we ascribe some form of priestly representative role to Adam and Eve for original sin. He rejects Peter Enns' denial of original sin altogether, arguing that if human sinfulness was calibrated into creation, then the Creator God must be unjust. Having established these perimeters, he then offers a constructive account of original sin, communicating the traditional doctrine in conversation with modern sensibilities.

This book is a worthwhile contribution to an often-sidelined doctrine, inviting the church to theological reflection on an increasingly public issue. It is thoroughly ecumenical in its scope and robustly Catholic in its conclusions. There is particular benefit in Levering's careful interaction with issues around evolution and the relationship of science and faith. This book serves as an invitation to pastors, theologians, and Christians engaged in science to wade beyond schismatic arguments into liberating theological reflections on the wonder of creation.