Elizabeth Johnson’s ambitious and compelling book seeks to straddle a number of divides that many in our contemporary world think have become unbridgeable gulfs: she aims to put Darwinian evolution into dialogue with Christian faith, to find a way to mediate between anthropocentric and ecocentric ways of thinking and living, and to help Christians to appreciate more deeply that practical action for ecojustice is essential to the life of faith. She does so by putting a lively and readable account of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of the Species* into dialogue with an account of Christian faith based on the Creed.

In three informative and absorbing chapters near the beginning of the book, she sketches the context, life and work of Darwin, and engages at some depth with his famous publication. The description that she offers of *Origin* in Chapter 2, as being both ‘a rigorously argued treatise’ that could be debated by experts in the field and ‘also a wonderfully accessible text’ that many non-experts can benefit from reading (pp. 24-5) is also a good description of her own treatment. This recommends her book to scientists and theologians alike, as well as to the general reader who may be less familiar with these specialist fields. Throughout her treatment, Johnson invites the reader to contemplate an image that Darwin proposes in the last paragraph of *Origin*, ‘an entangled bank’, brimming over with interconnected and co-dependent species, full of life and inspiring to the beholder (p. xviii). His ability to see – to truly behold the world and all that is in it – is something that people of faith can learn from Darwin, she claims. Once the entangled bank comes into focus, the relational account of life that Johnson has long championed in theology is seen to be present in
evolutionary theory as well, ‘offsetting the stereotype that life consists of nothing more than brutal competition.’ (p. 121)

Her next four chapters turn to the Creed as a dialogue text and propose, as she has done before in her work, a Trinitarian approach to Christian belief. Fascinatingly, she begins this analysis in Chapter 5 not with the Father as transcendent Creator, but with the Spirit as the continuous ‘presence of the Giver of life [...] within and around the emerging, struggling, living, dying and evolving circle of life.’ (p. 133) The rich, imaginative and poetic language that she uses in her account of the Spirit is engaging and compelling, drawing on biblical images of wind, water, fire, bird and wisdom to craft an account of immanent creatio continuo with which to balance a more transcendent creatio ex nihilo (pp. 134-43). These two understandings of creation come together in her proposal of panentheism which, she holds, is better placed to witness to the truth that there is no such thing as a purely ‘natural world devoid of the presence of God’ (p. 149) than a more traditional theology. The latter’s tendency to emphasise God’s transcendence at the expense of God’s immanent presence makes it harder to combine the two sides of the coin in dialogue with Darwin.

In the chapters that follow, she contemplates the entangled bank of the world in this panentheistic light, beholding the presence of ‘the Vivifier’ in a free, empowered creation (p. 154) on the one hand, and listening attentively to the groaning of suffering creation on the other. She helpfully charts various theological cul-de-sacs to avoid, as she seeks a way in which the world described by Darwin can also ‘be understood as God’s good creation’ (p. 155), without getting caught in ‘a zero-sum game in which one protagonist’s gain is the other’s loss.’ (p. 157) Chapter 6 proposes the relation between God and human freedom as a way of proceeding that holds promise here. Using this approach, it is possible to speak of a world in which the Spirit ‘powerfully invites but never coerces’ (p. 158), accompanying creation on a journey which ‘is marked simultaneously by ontological dependence and operational autonomy.’ (p. 160)
It is the autonomy of creation that brings with it ‘the shocking enormity of pain and death’ that so marks the evolutionary paradigm, presenting a serious challenge to Christianity’s belief in a God of ‘compassionate presence’ in the midst of suffering. (p.191) Weaving together Niels Gregersen’s idea of ‘deep incarnation’ with a ‘non-competitive model of relationship between God who is Love and the world’ that she derives from Karl Rahner, Johnson powerfully suggests that ‘plenitude of life for all’, understood in the widest sense possible, ‘is God’s original and ultimate intent.’ (pp. 196-200) Christianity, with its emphasis on the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s incarnation, suffering, death and ‘deep resurrection’ (p. 208), is well-placed to speak of God’s willingness and desire to bear ‘the cost of new life.’ (p. 205)

The last two chapters of the book turn to the practical consequences of beholding the world with the stereoscopic vision that she has taken. Chapter 9 describes the entry of *homo sapiens* onto the evolutionary scene, with the startling capacity of that species for wonderful achievement and idolatrous destruction alike. Johnson calls for conversion, from self-centeredness as a species to compassionate love for the Earth ‘as an inherently valuable, living community in which we participate’, professing that this conversion ‘is a moral imperative’ for our time. (p. 259) She finds nourishment in Scripture for the arduous and demanding journey ahead, and offers a resourceful and compelling reading of key themes that can sustain humanity as we discover – and act in accordance with – the ecological vocation entrusted to us by the Creator of Darwin’s entangled bank. Whether one is inclined to agree that panentheism provides the best way to walk that road or not, Johnson offers an illuminating and inspiring account of the need to do so, which imbues the reader with a profound sense of urgency.

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