

The main contribution of the book is perhaps less in its advocacy of compatibilist indeterminism, a position not especially hard to find within the tradition even if neglected more recently; but, rather, in the skilful combining of elements from many thinkers to form what is, I think, a plausible (though not incontestable) and certainly ambitious synthesis framed in contemporary terms. It was a pleasure to read a work of philosophical theology presented with such sophistication, critical sensitivity to the tradition, attunement to existential realities, and a generosity of spirit.

John D. O'Connor OP 

Blackfriars, Oxford, UK

Email: [john.oconnor@english.op.org](mailto:john.oconnor@english.op.org)

doi:10.1017/nbf.2024.33

Theology and Ecology in Dialogue. The Wisdom of *Laudato Si'* by Dermot A. Lane, Messenger Publications, Dublin, 2020, p. 176, €19.95, pbk

As theologians attempt to engage with contemporary problems, their response to the critical task is often twofold. On the one hand, there is the external subject under discussion, be that the environment, fundamentalism, race, and so on. On the other hand, there is the internal subject of theology itself that is stretched, refined, and continually held up to account in order that it continues to be adequate to the demands and signs of the times. A common risk is that theology develops as an adjunct to the theme under consideration, rather than (re)claiming a position whereby theology operates and functions *within* the particular phenomenon. For instance, a theological book is produced that furthers an unhelpful dynamic of theology plus (insert relevant category). Dermot A. Lane's (1941-) *Theology and Ecology in Dialogue* explicitly and carefully avoids this pitfall, skilfully bringing together the work of theology and the challenge of the environmental crisis.

It is through the lens of complexity that Lane bridges the gap between theology and ecology, positing that 'ecology cannot be separated from social or cultural or economic or ethical or religious issues, or from the hard sciences and the soft sciences' (p. 18). In this way, the author's argument is shaped by the paradigm of complexity called for in *Laudato Si'* (2015), citing that we are not 'faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental' (LS, 139). Although, as the book's title indicates, this text was originally published to 'coincide with the fifth anniversary of the publication of *Laudato Si'*' (p. 5), the opening chapter positions the study within the wider context of papal teaching on creation that predates the encyclical. *Theology and Ecology in Dialogue* is also inspired by subsequent discourses on method and approach in theological studies by Pope Francis, principally through *Veritatis Gaudium* (2018). While anachronistic, *Laudato Si'* is an effective example of the theological workings that the publication,

*Veritatis Gaudium*, would later call for, and Lane also posits *Querida Amazonia* (2020) as a regional case study involving an interdisciplinary laboratory method '[c]onsistent with this radical thinking on integral ecology in *Laudato Si*' (p. 18).

Even as problems are multifaceted and complex, Pope Francis recognises a singular and shared task, which he describes as a 'broad and generous effort at a radical paradigm shift or rather – dare I say – at "a bold cultural revolution"' that involves the 'cultural level of academic training and scientific study' (*Veritatis Gaudium*, 3). The Apostolic Constitution addresses ecclesiastical universities and theological schools but, as the previous quotation indicates, its reach is beyond the walls of pontifical institutions to the method and content of theological studies more generally. Simply put, the work of theologians occurs in the same world as the phenomena that theology engages, and Lane reminds readers that '[w]e are not external observers but rather participants in the drama of life that belongs to the natural world, the community of human beings and the wider world of creation' (p. 43).

Lane regards theology as contributing to the 'broad and generous effort' in the movement towards a paradigm of complexity, where challenges are no longer addressed in isolation or removed from the ground. For Pope Francis the 'rich legacy of analysis and direction has been tested and enriched, as it were, "on the ground" thanks to the persevering commitment to a social and cultural meditation on the Gospel undertaken by the People of God in different continental areas and in dialogue with diverse cultures' (VG, 3). Lane's study responds to the Pope's call by providing a way of moving theology towards a complexity within itself so that it can be fruitfully part of the 'broad and generous effort' to respond to complex phenomena.

Across seven chapters, Lane relates theology to ecology through a series of steps, beginning by embedding theological anthropology within an integral ecology, centred on a 'radical relationality, reaching across the natural world and human beings' (p. 35). Crucially, this 'radical relationality' is not hinged upon humanity alone since 'all entities in the natural world are constituted by different and varying degrees of relationality .... These relationships arise out of a dynamic movement from simplicity to complexity, from intense interactions to the emergence of something that is different and new' (p. 43). Lane makes the same observation of theology and is keen to overcome reductionism, building on the work of eco-feminists in exposing the negative impact of dualisms, such that the given examples of sacred and secular, objective and subjective, spirit and matter, anthropocentrism and biocentrism, political and mystical, spiritual and material, nature and culture are re-visioned and re-directed (at the level of language and discipline) so that we might consider how 'Matter reveals Spirit', the 'secular mediates the sacred', 'human images the divine', 'Nature discloses grace', and that 'Creation is sacramental' (p. 22).

Having related a theological anthropology to an integral ecology, Lane draws upon what he terms a deep pneumatology that, while being 'quite incomplete' (p. 72), recognises the experience of the Spirit as part of the 'development of human consciousness' which is 'the outcome of an expanding cosmology and ongoing biological evolution' (p. 58). In his chapter 'Integral Ecology and Deep Pneumatology', Lane makes an important contribution through his reflection on the Hebrew theology of the spirit, which he defines as being 'earthy: dwelling in dust, in nostrils, in bodies and in the material elements of air, water, fire and earth' (p. 67), helping to overcome a dualism of spirit and matter. Such insight has an impact upon the theology of creation, for example,

in the move from a perception of a formless void waiting to be infused by the divine spirit to something closer to Karl Rahner's argument that matter is 'endowed from the beginning with a dynamism towards spirit' (p. 69), or the view of Bonaventure for whom 'matter is loaded with spiritual possibilities, and these possibilities derive from the action of the spirit in creation' (p. 70).

Here, Lane enters the historic debate between the incarnation of Jesus as an add-on to creation and incarnation as 'built into creation *ab initio*' (p. 87). Lane's reading of an answer to this is to bring theology into dialogue with evolutionary science and he is movingly eloquent, stating for instance that 'Jesus of Nazareth is a child of the cosmos and so, when the Word/*Logos* was made flesh/*sarx*, the Word adopted the materiality of cosmic and biological evolution as well as the full reality of the human condition in Jesus' (p. 84). In this way, ecology is part of the language and grammar of theology and is specifically valuable in articulating the Christ event with a 'radical relationality' and is supportive of a pneumatology that is 'not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us' (LS, 216).

Lane has published widely and has lectured since 1970, which is evident throughout the book as he offers useful outlines, lists, and diagrams that summarise key arguments. Perhaps Lane envisioned *Theology and Ecology in Dialogue* as a guide for groups in seminars or parishes to develop and support discussion and change praxis. In this relatively short text, Lane covers much ground for those engaged with theological and ecological studies and, at the same time, enables an open field to emerge into view as 'ecology should permeate the whole of theology, moral, systematic and liturgical' (p. 14).

Ryan Service 

Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, Italy

Email: [fr.ryan.service@rcaob.org.uk](mailto:fr.ryan.service@rcaob.org.uk)

doi:10.1017/nbf.2024.35

Wonder Strikes: Approaching Aesthetics and Literature with William Desmond by Steven E. Knepper, Foreword by William Desmond, State University of New York Press, 2022, pp. xx + 273, \$95.00, hbk

Any reference to a 'unique singular' will immediately attract the attention of a student of Aquinas. The singular, which only God or the bumpkin can know, according to the *De Veritate*, is for William Desmond uniquely instantiated in the work of art, while it is 'yet big with an inexhaustibility that no set of finite determinations can deplete'. Desmond is a philosopher at ease with metaphysics, unlike many of the continental philosophers of his formation, precisely because he finds that art and religion prevent the overreach, static system and false closure arising from narrow conceptions of what