in science, the limitations of the authors' bibliographic methodology hinder the specificity of their findings.

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Theology

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CIRCLES AND THE CROSS: Cosmos, Consciousness, Christ, and the Human Place in Creation by Loren Wilkinson. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023. xvii + 354 pages. Paperback; $36.00. ISBN: 9781666746341.

This book invites the reader to share a great-hearted and generous journey through some profoundly important territory. I take its aim to be to show both how humanity has arrived at the distorted and potentially disastrous relationship we have with the non-human creation, and that Christian thought, framed through an emphasis on creation, incarnation, kenosis, and resurrection can form the basis for a just form of earthkeeping which is also a sharing in the new creation.

In Part I Wilkinson identifies consciousness as the great mystery to be puzzled over, together with the fact of the existence of the cosmos. Part II reviews different aspects of the practice of science—its pleasures, paradoxes, and pains. Part III traces tensions and ambiguities in how science has evolved through the Enlightenment and its interaction with Romanticism, then how that interaction gave rise to the environmental movement, paving the way for various forms of new religion, especially variants of pantheism. Part IV then takes up the theological task, emphasizing incarnation and kenosis. In a concluding Part V, Wilkinson stresses the importance of resurrection and new creation in shaping the Christian story and understanding the human vocation.

The book, then, makes a huge journey. It is the fruit of painstaking research and long reflection. But it is written in such an engaging style that the reader's attention need never flag. The journey is, moreover, leavened with personal reminiscences which show how grounded the author is in his own place (the Pacific Northwest), and how passionately involved he has been in the journey, taking with him many generations of students and conversation partners. It was, for instance, a delight to read that he had held dialogue with E.O. Wilson, whose reductionist views differed so radically from the author's own.

Wilkinson begins from reflections on circles, with their association with cyclic time and rhythms of being, from which there is no escape, and the Cross as a decisive interruption of time. He writes fascinatingly about the design of the Celtic cross, and notes how recent religious longings have wanted to recapture a sense of the rhythms of the earth. Arguably, the linearity of the Christian narrative, and its eschatological drive, make this recapture harder. I would like to have seen this circle-cross motif developed further, but it seemed to get rather lost as the book evolved.

The author's two great allies make a fascinating pair. The first is Iain McGilchrist, whose book *The Master and His Emissary* provides an increasingly influential model of how the two hemispheres of the brain operate differently, the left toward reductive problem-solving, the right toward wonder, imagination, and empathy. The second is the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (with Wilkinson's knowledge of Romantic poets adding significantly to his analysis).

The author's conclusion will be congenial to most readers of this journal. Some of his history of science will be very familiar ground. I found the tracing of the voluntarism that catalyzed scientific enquiry back to Scotus and William of Ockham fascinating, though it must be of concern that neither of those premier historians of the rise of science, John Hedley Brooke and Peter Harrison, feature in the bibliography. And I felt that there was significant sleight-of-hand in simply associating the Enlightenment with reductive understandings of human beings and the world.

Theologically, Wilkinson's dominant motif is kenosis, which he maps back from Philippians 2 all the way into the heart of the Trinity (following von Balthasar), and forward into the necessary costs to some creatures that enable other creatures to flourish (following Holmes Rolston). I have criticized Rolston for invoking kenosis in the latter respect, since it seems to me to confuse voluntary self-giving with creatures' instinctive survival at the expense of others. Perhaps one of Wilkinson's examples, the Pacific salmon returning upriver to spawn, will make me start to think again. But neither Rolston nor Wilkinson clarify why it is that creation must be so costly to creatures and to God—it seems this is just the pattern that triune creation has to follow.

Wilkinson is very much influenced by the collection of essays *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* edited by John Polkinghorne; I too love that book, but it is important to take note of the criticisms of kenosis, both from classical systematics and from feminism, offered by Sarah Coakley in the concluding essay. Karen Kilby's recent work is a significant sequel to this critique; however, a more comprehensive treatment is needed to address this.

The innovative theology of the book is developed in a fascinating section at the end of Part IV. Wilkinson moves us up a gear with his invocation of Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*, "releasement," or "letting be." It was a disappointment that Loren did not interact with Ruth Page's use of that term in *God and the Web of Creation*, but what he goes on to do is very striking. He uses Hopkins's terminology of "selving" from the sonnet "As Kingfishers Catch Fire" to develop the idea of transitive and intransitive selving. Creatures in general "selve" intransitively—to return to the poem, they "fling out" that "What I do is me, for that I came." But God, through what Hopkins called "the great sacrifice," selves transitively in a ceaseless and costly letting be. So far, so good, but then there is a yet bolder step, in suggesting that humans too are called to transitive selving. When our "gifts of reason, creativity, and imagination are directed to other creatures—not in order to use them, but to know, name and enhance *their* true selves … human selving can echo God's selving" (p. 299). This is (using the sestet of the same poem) the selving activity of "the just man" who "justices," using humans' unique gifts to nourish the selves of other creatures, and becomes "in God's eye … Christ," as Hopkins has it. (This extraordinary theological claim could be justified by appeal to the idea that the human being perfectly "justicing" is acting as the authentic image of God in the world. The Pauline letters identify Christ as this image [Col. 1:15, 2 Cor. 4:4]. So, the process by which humans can be "conformed to the image of [God's] Son" [Rom. 8:29] and be "transformed into the same image" [2 Cor. 3:18] is seen as complete in the justicing human. But Wilkinson does not offer this groundwork—he is content to work from the poem itself.)

Here I would suggest that Heidegger's term *Gelassenheit* is very helpful, because it addresses the vital question of what it is that humans can do for the non-human creation. We can let it be, in ways that draw on all our gifts, very much including the scientific, and all our virtues—vitally those of wonder, love and hope. This hope is underpinned by resurrection, as Wilkinson goes on to conclude. I found this formulation both original and compelling. It begs many questions, but I hope it will stimulate much thought, as such a rich offering deserves to do.

There were occasional errors—for instance, Laplace should be "Pierre-Simon" not "Simon"—but the book is attractively presented and well indexed. It will introduce the general Christian reader to an intriguing vein of reflection on our place in creation and new creation, and students to important aspects of the science-religion debate. The ecotheologian will find plenty to chew on in Part IV. Above all, I am left with the sense of a profound gift generously given, by which we are all left in Loren Wilkinson's debt.

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Letter

On Makous and Biblical Longevities

In the most recent past issue of *PSCF*, Walter Makous ("Exponential Decay of Biblical Longevities," *PSCF* 76, no. 1 [2024]: 30–34) presented an intriguing theory that attempts to explain the decay in the lengths of patriarchal longevities from Shem to Moses reported in the genealogy of Genesis chapter 11.[1] Makous previously argued that the lifetimes of these patriarchs were not fabricated or "manufactured" numbers, based on an analysis of the first digit in each longevity figure.[2] In a dialogue with Walter Huebner that followed publication of the earlier paper, Makous argued that his analysis did not say that the numbers were accurately transmitted, but "simply provides evidence against fabrication as one particular source of inaccuracy."[3] However, in his new analysis, Makous has gone considerably further, by attempting to validate the patriarchal lifetimes as real numbers, with the conclusion that this "somewhat strengthens one's confidence in the truth of the biblical longevities."[4]

However, other evidence suggests that the ages in the patriarchal genealogies are not *meant* to be taken literally. If that is the case, a belief in the "truth of the biblical longevities" reported in the genealogies of Genesis may lead to the erroneous dating of historical events described in the Bible, and therefore may actually undermine the historicity of the biblical record.

Some of these issues were raised in an earlier paper by Carol Hill, which Makous did not properly take account of in either of his own papers. For example, Hill analyzed both of the major genealogies in Genesis (Adam to Noah and Shem to Abram), which list the age of each patriarch at the birth of their first son, their remaining years and their total lifespan, comprising a total of sixty age values.[5] Within these sixty values, the final digit in each age never ends in 1 or 6. If these final digits were randomly distributed, as would be expected for true age information, Hill calculated a one in half-a-million chance that these values would result.

In contrast, Makous analyzed the first digit in each of these ages, with the suggestion that the first, second,