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Pedlar, James E. Review of *From Nature to Creation: A Christian Vision for Understanding and Loving Our World*, by Norman Wirzba. *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 54, no. 2 (2019): 236-238.

Wirzba, Norman. *From Nature to Creation: A Christian Vision for Understanding and Loving Our World*. The Church and Postmodern Culture. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015. 174 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0801095931.

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From Nature to Creation gives an accessible but substantive account of creation. It draws on a wealth of historical and contemporary sources and offers insightful integrative proposals for Christian life. Wirzba delivers a strong critique of the reductive and instrumentalizing tendencies of modernity and calls us to foster “an iconic way of perceiving the world,” which will enable us to “see the world with the love by which God sees and sustains the world” (4-5). This is a compelling and creative book that will serve well as a course text or resource for pastors and scholars.

Chapter one discusses how the “death of God” in modernity entails the loss of the true significance and meaning of creaturely life, thereby leading to the “death of creation.” Wirzba suggests that consumer capitalism, industrial agriculture, and contemporary medical practices are examples of the ultimate fulfillment of this atheistic trajectory in the post-modern context. He contrasts this with a christocentric account of creation, drawing upon Irenaeus’s doctrine of recapitulation. He argues that we must jettison the “diseased imagination” (drawing on Willie Jennings) of modernity and “learn the art of creaturely life,” a life that is “attuned to God as Creator and the world as God’s creation” (30).

The second chapter distinguishes between the Christian conception of “creation” and various understandings of “nature.” He suggests that modern industrial society has adopted and fostered an idolatrous view of “nature” by divorcing nature and culture, isolating human civilization from “nature,” and undercutting our sense of human participation in and responsibility for creation. He identifies William of Ockham and the rise of nominalism as a key moment in the shift toward a conception of the human subject as standing apart from the world and able to impose order upon it. Wirzba then draws upon Jean-Luc Marion to provide an account of idolatry as “the imposition of self upon the world for the purpose of the self’s comfort, control, or glorification” (54). Rather than glorifying the world, Wirzba suggests that idolatry leads to the world’s denigration, because creation becomes the means through which humanity vainly

pursues an endless number of competing desires, inevitably resulting in exploitation and conflict.

After identifying ways that contemporary social life clouds our perception of creation, chapter three sets out Wirzba's account of "iconic perception" as a way to not only "see" the world but to love the world as God's creation. Again drawing upon Marion, Wirzba argues that this mode of perception provides "a hermeneutic that constitutes us as bearing testimony to a world that exceeds comprehension" (71). He suggests that the practice of the Sabbath is a key spiritual discipline which can move us from idolatrous to iconic perception of the world. Wirzba incorporates the classic defense of iconography from John of Damascus as well as insights from Athanasius and Alexander Lossky in deepening the christological grounding of his argument. He provides a number of clarifications that will prove helpful to those of the Western theological tradition, particularly in relation to asceticism. While many contemporary voices see the ascetic tradition as a problematic abandonment of creation, Wirzba sets asceticism in the context of an apophatic sensibility which chastens our attachment to any particular creaturely expression of God's love.

Chapter four focuses on the "human art of creaturely life" via an exposition of Genesis 2-3 (95). Wirzba presents an agrarian account of the human person as bound and limited by dependence on the land and other creatures. Here, as elsewhere, Wendell Berry's influence is profound. Wirzba suggests that the garden is a place where we are confronted with our own embeddedness in creation and the limitations of our ability to understand and manipulate the world around us. He then turns to Bonhoeffer's reading of human sin as a desire to rebel against the good and God-ordained limits of creaturely life. The human vocation, Wirzba suggests, is to live with our own limitations while creating space for other limited creatures and embracing them in love. He closes the chapter with a call to resist participation in contemporary industrial agriculture and support smaller scale agricultural practices that honor creaturely life.

The final chapter focuses on gratitude as a fundamental expression of creaturely life. Wirzba suggests that modernity's rejection of received tradition and wisdom gave rise to economic practices wherein relationships, alliances, and gifts were abandoned in favor of self-interest. The result is that "gratitude has been replaced with entitlement" in contemporary Western culture (144). He engages Derrida's claim that genuine gifts are an impossibility, showing that Derrida's argument is based on a false

vision of human freedom. When we recognize that we are inescapably bound to creation (and thereby to one another) we are freed to receive creation as a gift and to give ourselves for the world. Wirzba closes with a call for us to embrace our role as “eucharistic beings” and “priests of creation” called to “receive the world from God, share it with others, and give it back to God as a blessing” (156).

From Nature to Creation makes a significant contribution to Wirzba’s body of work. He draws on an impressive breadth of sources in historical and contemporary theology and writes in a clear and concise way that will engage readers with varying levels of expertise. While Wirzba does not engage John Wesley or the Wesleyan tradition, it is not difficult to see how his agenda could be appropriated by Wesleyans, especially in light of Wesley’s profound love of creation and his emphasis on human stewardship and responsibility. Wirzba’s argument also engages spiritual life and discipleship in a way that resonates with the Wesleyan orientation towards “practical divinity.” In short, Wesleyan-Holiness scholars, students, and pastors will find much to appreciate and discuss in this fine book.