

Elizabeth Johnson's *Creation and the Cross*

At the invitation of Tricia Gemmell, seven parishioners from Sydney's lower north shore met on four occasions to discuss the most recent offering of Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson. It is set out in her book *Creation and the Cross The mercy of God for a Planet in Peril*. This opportunity was another initiative of a strong and local ecological movement.

Johnson begins by asking how we can imagine the love that our God has for the created world; how the Christian Churches strive to understand this; and how in their liturgical prayer they 'open the core Christian belief in salvation to include all created things'. At our best, we Western Catholic Christians—wanting to operate out of a good theology—rely upon such theologians as Elizabeth Johnson and our Australian Jesuit, Andrew Hamilton. Could we have learnt more from what Sacred Scripture offers our ecological endeavours? One of the delights in reading Johnson's book has been how often and how knowingly she has interpreted these scriptures for us.

Like St Paul, we can be passionately concerned about the whole creation groaning in labour pain and waiting for redemption (Romans 8:22). Might this be our focus? In the preface for the last Sunday of the liturgical year, *Christ, King of all Creation*, we pray that 'by offering himself on the altar of the Cross as a spotless sacrifice, Jesus might accomplish the mysteries of redemption'.

In the preparatory reading for the four 90-minute meetings we shared much of Johnson's wisdom. To be people of conviction, from which would flow action for ecological commitment, 'we obviously need a distinctive way of looking at the world' (p. 198). Perhaps we are even to participate in how 'Jesus might accomplish the mysteries of redemption'. This book's theology can help us understand the faith conviction by which we act; it is an enlightening 'grace'.

In the space available let us mention two rewarding insights for those who will read this book.

1. Johnson pays tribute to the eleventh century theologian, Anselm, whose theological treatise *Cur Deus Homo (Why God Became Man)* explained why it was necessary for God to become a human being and die in order to save the human race. In her Introduction, which precedes 'Wrestling with Anselm'—the title of the first of her six books that *comprise Creation and the Cross*—we are told why she takes issue with Anselm's 'satisfaction theory'. Or, rather, she has Joseph Ratzinger, a critic of Anselm's thesis, do it for her (p. xiii).

It put a decisive stamp on the second millennium of Western Christendom, which takes it for granted that Christ had to die on the cross in order to make good the infinite offense that had been committed and in this way to restore the order that had been violated.

2. It is intended to be a theology of salvation as accompaniment; Jesus is with us to deliver us; indeed, to bring freedom to the whole cosmos. This theology 'holds the faith conviction that God forever companions the world with liberating, saving mercy' (p. 222): *The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril*.

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