Reviews

Mike Brownnutt and Keith R. Fox (Ed)

Global Perspectives on Science and Christianity

Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2024.
278 pp. pb. £19.99. ISBN 9781839739880

Different places are different. That is a refrain which resounds through this anthology of perspectives from around the world on how science fits within the Christian faith. Some aspects of science are independent of cultural context. The speed of light is the same in every country on earth, or anywhere else in the universe for that matter, and Maxwell's equations are the same for everyone. But the reception of Darwin's theory of evolution varied greatly as its interpretation became weaponised for a variety of political, ethical, and religious (and anti-religious) purposes. Some aspects of Christianity are almost universally accepted: that God became humanly embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, and that he died for us and rose again so that we might enjoy eternal life. But other aspects are highly culturally dependent, such as how to express Christian faith in contexts rich in indigenous knowledge.

It is therefore highly appropriate that the Foreword has been contributed by the geographer and scholar of contextual reception of knowledge, David Livingstone. His book Putting Science in its Place does what the clever title says. His Foreword summarises the agenda for the book, albeit through the clunky neologism Glocal (the first OED occurrence is 1983). Not only are science and Christianity simultaneously global and local, so is the relationship between them. This theme becomes a full overture in the opening chapter by Mike Brownnutt, writing from the University of Hong Kong. In a culinary pair of metaphors, he writes how the engagement of Christianity with science is less like a Big Mac (the same everywhere in the world if the franchise is operating effectively), and more like cooked rice (with differing flavours and textures according to local varieties and styles of preparation). He illustrates this with differing attitudes to vaccination during the pandemic, which led to many lives saved but also a regrettable number of unnecessary deaths—over 1 million globally and 280,000 in the USA alone, with some of those attributable to church affiliations and rather more correlating with political affiliations.

There then follow a series of chapters each coming from a different cultural perspective, and each addressing a different kind of topic. Andrew Halestrap, Keith Fox, and Paul Ewart write about the history and future of Christians in Science. This began as the Research Scientists Christian Fellowship, and was a think tank for many of the most distinguished scientists of faith in the UK to work through issues in incorporating their science within their Christianity. Under Dr Oliver Barclay it developed into a training ground for the next generation of scientists to write and speak about their faith. It then found a further mission in outreach to undergraduate students. CiS now serves as a network providing resources for scientists and churches and encouraging informed debate. Much of the chapter describes the joys and frustrations of sustainable funding for the endeavour.

Mike Brownnutt then offers an Asian perspective on the blurred boundaries between science and religion. Peter Harrison has long since elucidated how recent is the current Western understanding of the territories of science and religion ('Imagine that an academic colleague told you that he had discovered a contemporary 16th century account of

a war between Egypt and Israel …'). To some extent Western science thrived on a perceived dichotomy of the natural and the supernatural. This distinction does not apply in the same way in cultures where enchantment is basic and appeal to mechanism may be met with incomprehension.

Guilherme de Carvalho gives an account of the Brazilian Association of Christians in Science, for which the Portuguese acronym is ABC2. This was founded in 2016, and adopted the text over the entrance of the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge, "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein" (Ps. 111:2). ABC2 has grown spectacularly ever since, with strong leadership and a systematic programme for training leaders in each city where a new hub is launched. He emphasises the social dimension, and the need for communication between scientific and religious social fields.

Kostos Tampakis and Efthymios Nicolaidis give an illuminating history of 150 years of Greek Orthodox apologetics and the challenge of Darwinism, thereby illustrating the contextuality of science and its reception. Their project Science and Orthodoxy around the World (SOW) is a remarkable example of science engagement beyond Protestantism.

Bernard Boyo, Samuel Karenga, and Peter Kirira, who have been leading figures in the Christian & Scientific Association of Kenya, emphasise the significance of the wholeness of human life for the African person, as exemplified by the concept of ubuntu.

Most of the organisations whose members contributed to this book were started by scientists of faith. Many of them were funded by Templeton World Charity Foundation, largely (except for SOW) within the initiative Internationalising Christians in Science. Scientists in different parts of the world were eager to think through how their science belonged within their faith, and to invite others to join them in the journey. Other scientists, not necessarily with any faith commitment, are now realising the importance of engaging with religious systems of knowledge in order to tackle the big problems facing humanity, with a concomitant need to trust in science within its legitimate bounds.

The enthusiasm of scientists to engage constructively with faith is increasingly matched by a growing awareness of faith leaders that if the church is here to serve a world shaped by science and technology, then as influencers they need to engage with science. An example of this is the Anglican Communion Science Commission (ACSC). ACSC is not denominational for its own sake (far from it), but is scalable through the glocal church network which has taken 200 years or more to build. The vision of ACSC is for confident and courageous leadership in matters involving science, drawing on science as a God-given resource for the life of faith and the work of the Church, and offering the wisdom of faith and the voice of the Church to science policy and the use of technologies arising from science. Church-led initiatives such as ACSC can learn much from the scientist-led initiatives described in Global Perspectives, because there is a strong alignment of principles of engagement. Some issues are global, such as climate change, health care, and AI, but how they manifest themselves and how church communities can best engage are locally specific.

A commissioner of ACSC, Archbishop Linda Nichols, writes on the cover, 'This book sacrifices neither the integrity of Christian faith nor science and invites a continuous dialogue that is essential to human dignity, harmony with creation, and our relationship with God.' There are useful appendices with an extensive list

of organisations and institutions around the world and a list of relevant journals. Before the appendices, in the final chapter Mike Brownnutt does his best to bring together common threads from the different contributions. I would love to see this expanded. In some ways Global Perspectives reads like a laboratory notebook, with many valuable observations waiting to be brought together into organised knowledge. Perhaps he will be inspired to do that next. Meanwhile Global Perspectives provides a rich resource of glocal experience and thinking.

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Peter Harrison

Some New World: Myths of Supernatural Belief in a Secular Age

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. 467 pp. hb £35. ISBN 9781009477222

This book seeks to answer the questions: at what point in Western history did people begin to speak about 'the supernatural'? and at what point did the associated term 'belief' take on its modern meaning? (vii). Most importantly, Harrison's goal is to better understand secular modernity (viii). This book builds on his earlier study The Territories of Science and Religion (2015, University of Chicago Press), where he looked at the historical development of the terms 'science' and 'religion'. Clearly all these terms are interrelated, as are their changes in meaning over time.

Harrison does a masterful job of tracing the development of these terms, showing their origins and original meanings in Christian theological discussions. For example, the term 'belief" for a long period in Christian history essentially meant trust but, over time and in part due to the influence of the Reformation, came to mean assent to a set of propositional beliefs for which there is good evidence. Based on this understanding it was possible for naturalists to dismiss 'the supernatural' as lacking credible evidence (à la Hume – though Harrison points out some of the problems with Hume's arguments regarding miracles – in fact the title of the book is taken from Hume).

In today's science and religion debates the modern understanding of these terms is read back into the past to support the views that many proponents of naturalism espouse. This has led to the perception, common in the West, that scientific naturalism has always been at odds with religious supernaturalism, a perception that is incorrect as this book shows. Conveniently forgotten (due to nineteenth century 'amnesia', 238) is the point that the idea of the laws of nature, basic to naturalism, has theological origins (331), and that many of the great scientists (for example: Kepler, Galileo, Boyle, Faraday, Maxwell) were themselves Christian believers (343). Indeed, without the theologically based starting point that the world is intelligible and governed by a uniformity (367) that allow it to be described by laws (because there is a lawgiver, 228), naturalism would not have developed as it has.

An interesting observation made by Harrison is that the modern myth of progress, which has been used to support the argument that scientific naturalism has replaced religious supernaturalism in our understanding of the world (nature), is itself simply a repackaged theology of providence or eschatology in a secular disguise (4). Indeed 'The natural sciences … might be thought of as a Christian heresy.' (367). This chimes with the point made by Tom Holland (author of Dominion) in his 2022 Theos Annual Lecture 'Humanism: a Christian

Heresy' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYGQ6FIFLps). Both humanists and scientific naturalists have forgotten, or choose to ignore, the Christian theological basis underlying their beliefs.

The end result is that this book shows how odd a belief Western naturalism is compared with what most of the rest of the world believes and with what our forebears in the West also believed. As Harrison notes 'the dawn of a secular age and the rise of a naturalistic outlook is something of a historical aberration' (3). A view, naturalism, that is taken for granted in our secular society, is in fact less than obvious and its basis in the split between 'the natural' and 'the supernatural' is in fact most unnatural.

This book might be considered Harrison's magnum opus, distilling much of his erudition and his studies over many years. It achieves its goal in providing a better understanding of the secular modernity of the Western world and how it arose, and I have no hesitation in recommending it to readers of this journal.

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Andrew Briggs and Michael J. Reiss

Human Flourishing: Scientific Insight & Spiritual Wisdom in Uncertain Times

Oxford: OUP, 2021. 352 pp. hb. £24.47.
ISBN 9780198850267

This book is an output from a Templeton World Charity Foundation project on the science of human flourishing which ran from 2015 to 2018. The aim of the authors (who I'm sure need no introduction to the readers of S&CB) is to show how the promotion of human flourishing requires a combination of scientific insight and spiritual wisdom (vii). Their overall argument is that human flourishing is best described as the satisfaction of needs and yearnings across three separate, but intertwined, dimensions: the material, the relational, and the transcendent (4). Although they distance themselves from any religious apologetic objective (314), their hope is that the book might enable readers to clarify what they want from their lives and the lives of others, and even to help some readers lead more flourishing lives (3). With such goals in mind, the authors write in a clear, balanced, and non-technical way, requiring of the reader little prior scientific or theological expertise. Particularly helpful in a book covering such a broad topic, is the way it is structured and signposted. Three opening chapters on the three dimensions of human flourishing are followed by three more on the supporting 'pillars' of truth, purpose, and meaning. A further three chapters are then devoted to exemplifying how flourishing is challenged by the changing contexts afforded by: (1) the unpredictability of life; (2) the changing patterns of religious commitment; and (3) the accelerating pace of technological innovation. The capstone of the book is a final chapter on how human flourishing is ultimately fuelled by love.

With regard to content, the book is a cornucopia of fascinating facts, figures, case studies, and anecdotes taken from fields as diverse as physics, biology, psychology, education, sociology, philosophy, and theology, all of which reflects the impressive polymathic credentials of the authors. For example, we are told about the effects of wealth (30), wealth inequality (48), marriage (64), and religiosity (269) on human well-being; the special 'reverie' that can exist between mother and baby (7); near-death (94) and other transcendent experiences (87); 'reading wars' as an example of the difficulty of

establishing truth in education (129); and much more. While some topics will already be familiar to those interested in the field of science and religion, the sheer breadth of scholarship is such that there is likely to be something new for all readers.

With regard to argument, the authors make some good points along the way to their ultimate conclusion that love is the source of all flourishing. For example, they point out: that our understanding of well-being can co-evolve with measurements of well-being (45); that evolutionary explanations of flourishing (e.g. in terms of gene propagation or endorphin release) need not preclude other more metaphysical or theological explanations (8); that transcendence goes beyond religious institutions and ceremonies (103); that truth is dependent on the observer insofar as it depends on what is sought (119); and that meaning can be chosen or created but ideally needs to be grounded externally (178).

In being so cautious and balanced to appeal to a wide readership, it is perhaps inevitable that there should be some questions left unanswered or unaddressed. From the perspective of Christian theology, more might have been said about the ultimate ontological grounding of all flourishing, truth, purpose, and meaning in Jesus Christ, the Logos of all creation, and the ultimate image or standard into whom we are to be transformed. From the perspective of philosophy, more might have been said to differentiate truth from belief and knowledge, or to explain what is the meaning of 'meaning.' I was also not convinced by Chapter 8 on the limits to predictability inasmuch as for most people, the scientific advances mentioned in this chapter have arguably made little difference to their context of flourishing—if anything, general relativity (through improved GPS navigation), chaos theory (through improved weather forecasting), and evolutionary psychology (through greater awareness of some deep-seated human predilections) have increased, rather than decreased, life's predictability and comprehensibility compared to that of our forebears.

That said, the authors have done an excellent job at pitching their argument at a level that is fascinating, provocative, yet inoffensive to people of all faiths or none. I highly recommend the book. Indeed, for me, the reading of it was itself a flourishing experience!

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David A. Johnson

God Speaks Science: The Simple Chemistry of Life and Faith

Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications 2024. 127 pp. pb. £16.00. ISBN 9798385218509

David Johnson is an Emeritus Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at Quillen College of Medicine, East Tennessee State University, where he taught Medical Biochemistry for more than four decades while pursuing research into a several medically relevant human proteins. He is a committed Christian who finds the amazing intricacy and complexity displayed by the molecular machinery of living cells clear evidence for an awesome God who created and sustains the Universe. He does not advocate 'Intelligent design' but rather sees God constantly at work in all that is revealed through scientific investigation. In this short book his intention is not to provide a detailed account of the relationship between science and faith – there are many others books that do that. Rather he employs his own enthusiasm for and appreciation of all that Biochemistry and

Molecular Biology reveals about how life operates at the molecular level to enable Christians without a scientific background to catch a glimpse of the wonder of God's creation and why science is not a threat to faith. Indeed, it can enhance our faith in and appreciation of the creator God who reveals himself through both his creation and Scripture. Furthermore, he regards his scientific career as a Christian vocation with the knowledge gained being both a cause to worship and a means to enable us to benefit humanity as well as being good stewards of God's creation.

The book has a very personal, colloquial style that highlights his own enthusiasm for his subject and his faith. It comprises 20 short chapters, most of which describe key biochemical and molecular biological processes occurring in the cell, often linking them to disease states and their treatment. Each chapter starts with one or two quotes from a famous scientist, writer or the Bible. There are similar quotes within each chapter where he relates his scientific and Christian understanding of the world but this is not his major emphasis. Rather, he focusses on the science, describing some basic aspects of metabolism, the structure and replication of DNA as well as the structure and biosynthesis of proteins. He emphasises the importance of hydrogen bonds in the structures of DNA and proteins and how structure underlies their function as genetic material (DNA) and structural or catalytic entities (proteins). In many cases he uses particular examples from his own research that have medical relevance. An Introductory video on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_nKk2LVQcE) provides further information.

Johnson's aim is to make his scientific explanations accessible to the non-specialist and this involves the use of numerous black and white diagrams which are linked to his YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/@DrJQuillen) where colour versions and fuller explanations are provided. The material is clearly presented but at a level that I think would better suit someone who already has a reasonable grasp of science. I suspect Christians without much scientific background might struggle with the content, especially with some of the chemical details. For readers of this journal there is little of substance related to the dialogue between science and faith and for the scientific content there are many other excellent publications that cover the same material at greater depth and in a slightly more coherent fashion. I found the author's organisation of material somewhat jumbled and repetitive, although this was compensated for by his infectious enthusiasm for the subject matter. However, this book might be one to recommend to Christians with a basic knowledge of science who want to discover more about the amazing intricacies of life at the molecular level and so glean a new perspective on the wonder of creation and the awesome God who brought it into being and continues to sustain it.

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Michael J Reiss and Michael Ruse

The New Biology: A Battle between Mechanism and Organicism

Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2023. 304pp. hb. £39.95. ISBN 9780674972247

This readable book is written by an ordained Professor of science education (Reiss) and an (atheist) philosopher of science (Ruse). In this they consider the old debate of whether biology can be represented as a mechanical system that merely obeys atomic and molecular (mechanistic) principles, or if it is best described from an organicist (holistic) perspective. The authors do not give a

definitive answer, and they conclude that both organic and mechanical explanations have merit as metaphors for describing the complexity of biology. It is generally not possible to determine which one of the authors is speaking at any point, even though they come from different backgrounds (though both are well known for insisting that there is no inherent conflict between science and Christian faith). Readers of S&CB might be tempted to skip to chapter 8 'God and the New Biology', as I did. But that would be a mistake as the arguments in that chapter require an appreciation of the issues that are raised in the first three chapters. Taken to its extreme, a mechanistic model of biology becomes scientism – a form of nothing-buttery, in which life itself has no purpose, goal or meaning. The authors make the point that mechanistic views can tend to exclude discussion of teleology or final causes, while organic views of biology might have more to say about this. In this context, the authors suggest that recent developments in biology can make it easier to argue that biology is compatible with religious faith.

The first two chapters set out historical approaches to the philosophy of biology (from Aristotle and Plato through Newton, Kepler, Darwin and Dawkins and numerous others, with different views that largely depend on their historical context). By the mid-twentieth century, the issue seemed to have been settled, and the mechanistic paradigm had won the day. However, Reiss and Ruse illustrate that the issue is far from being decided, with both views appearing in both religious and non-religious contexts. The book is not specially about issues of science and faith, but it raises some important questions, and chapter 8 is entitled God and the New Biology"

The case for a 'New Biology' outlined in the third chapter, which includes mention of the Extended Evolutionary Synthesis, highlighting three things that don't fit well within the standard evolutionary theory (69) developmental biology, developmental plasticity and niche construction. In these the organism is an active player in the process of evolution. A simple example is that of niche construction, in which by altering its environment an organism will affect which variants that are best adapted to the modified environment. Similarly, for development, genomes work upward and downwards through tissue and environment-specific gene regulation. These are compared with explanations based on the standard evolutionary theory, in a balanced approach of arguments. My personal fear is that these honest exchanges give fuel to false claims by young earth creationist that 'evolution is a 'theory in crisis' – it is not, and to be clear the authors are not suggesting this.

Chapter four takes these theoretical viewpoints into 'real world' examples of human health (sickle cell disease, deafness, obesity and schizophrenia). To some degree the implications for health are little more than the old plea to treat the whole patient in their context, not just the presenting disease. The arguments about sickle cell disease are little more than genetic changes in different genomic and environmental backgrounds. I really didn't see the relevance of deafness to the new biology, though it does raise ethical question about what is 'normal' and the importance and value of the deaf culture. I also couldn't see the relevance of New Biology for approaches to obesity, other than admitting that it has a wide range of biological causes, and it's not just the result of overeating and lack of exercise. The current media preoccupation with anti-obesity drugs illustrates that the mechanistic model may now have the upper hand in this area. The case for different approaches to schizophrenia is more convincing, though it really shows that its cause(s) are poorly understood. This is really an argument from scientific

ignorance. The closing section on holistic medicine, should really be on 'alternative medicine' and the use of traditional non-pharmaceutical approaches. There may be some sense here as traditional (herbal) approaches may contain fortunate combinations of active ingredients. The hint that this might involve vaccine hesitancy is less appealing and dangerous!

The fifth chapter takes this into the areas of sex and gender. The discussion about sex underlines the fact that the presence of XX and XY chromosome pairs are not the sole determinants. In a minority of cases there is sexual ambiguity, resulting from abnormal chromosomes or unusual levels of sex-determining hormones. This does lead to questions of choice of language – what is normal/abnormal and what are high/low levels of contributing hormones. There doesn't seem to be any need for a 'new Biology', but a greater understanding of those who are affected. The section on gender is entertaining and informative – but what has that to do with the topic of the book? The same might be said about the following chapter (6), which explores the issue of 'race'.

Chapter 7 concentrates on the idea that the earth itself is an organism; the 'mother earth' or Gaia hypothesis. Readers of S&CB will probably be less likely to agree with the contents of this chapter.

Chapter 8 considers 'God and the New Biology'. The authors rehearse Barbour's four models for the relationship of science and faith: warfare, independence, dialogue and integration. Dialogue and independence are considered under the headings of existence, values, consciousness and purpose, and the ways that mechanistic or organicist emphases interact with each one. Disappointingly, the question of integration is almost entirely devoted to the Catholic mystic Teilhard de Chardin, whose views are at times close to pantheism (or at least panentheism) who wrote about the cosmic Christ, the Omega point and panpsychism. Teilhard's emphasis on God's immanence and active involvement in the evolution of creation are helpful, but his mysticism, will sit uncomfortably with many readers of S&CB.

Chapter 9 comes to the practical issue of how these ways of thinking affect how biology is taught. The authors argue against a wholly reductionist approach and encourage teaching that includes a more holistic approach. They illustrate this by comparing learning about plant growth and metabolism in the confined conditions of a laboratory, with the same plant growing in a forest. This is all good and appropriate, but hardly warrants description as a 'New Biology'. As the authors agree. it is merely engaging at different levels with botany, ecology, zoology, etc. They then consider how this might affect the way that people have entrenched opinions on vaccine hesitancy and or nutrition. All well and good, but this is really sociobiology, morals and ethics, addressing questions that science is unable to answer, and that cannot be resolved by doing more experiments. Yes, these should be openly discussed in the classroom, but it doesn't qualify as a new biology.

To my mind the entire 'argument' of the book is fascinating but unnecessary. The word 'battle' in the title seems an unnecessarily harsh metaphor. When all is said and done the 'mechanistic' and 'organic' descriptions are only inadequate metaphors that describe different, but overlapping and integrated ways of describing the complexity of life.

Overall, this is an interesting and well-written book, but I really don't get the question that has been posed. Life can be described at different levels, each of which builds on others. Biology is complicated and we need to get used to it! God

is equally involved with the integrated whole, as with the cellular and molecular mechanistic aspects and there is no contradiction or battle between them.

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Roger Trigg

Faith: A Very Short Introduction

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024. 112 pp. pb. £5.80. ISBN 9780192849267

The 'Very Short Introduction' series of books are designed as a way to introduce yourself to a subject about which you might previously know very little. But therein lies a potential problem for a book on 'Faith'. Surely no reader comes to the subject 'knowing very little' or without some prior preconceptions. How can you 'introduce' so familiar a subject? For myself, I confess that I came with two preconceptions, either the word 'faith' would be interpreted so broadly as to become effectively meaningless (as Schaeffer once said of the word 'god') or the book might embrace the scepticism common within the academy which regards 'theology' as an anachronistic and unwelcome intruder, a maiden-aunt from another era perhaps, hanging around for too long at a party when the cool kids want to get on with having fun.

Fortunately, I was wrong on all counts. Once again, the series adopts a careful and methodical, though extremely concise approach to the subject, but Trigg makes some interesting choices along the way.

Firstly, he maintains that 'faith' in the Western world is innately tied to Christian faith, the word may not adequately describe the relation of other adherents to their respective religions, for whom the concept of 'faith' holds a less significant role. Chapter 3 on Faith and Diversity explores this but whether this justifies the absence of any direct mention of Eastern Religions is questionable. Perhaps this is one area where a 'very short introduction' becomes a 'necessarily selective' one.

Secondly Trigg argues persuasively for the positive role of a particular kind of faith in society, a 'calm faith' with an intellectual grounding in reason leading to action. He sees the only alternative as nihilism, where the only way to resolve disagreements is by force.

The chapter on Faith and Science takes on Pinker, a champion of enlightenment ideas of progress. Trigg regards his unbridled optimism as unfounded and notes, via Kuhn, that science often advances through paradigm shifts which require a transfer of allegiance akin to a religious conversion.

Other chapters address contentious issues such as the place for religion in educating children and the distinction between the 'Christ of faith' and the 'Jesus of history'. He even sees merit in reclaiming the idea of the church as a source of authority, placing necessary limits on individual autonomy in a way that the state cannot achieve without coercion. But his main thesis remains that faith must be 'in' something, citing Locke, who pinned his beliefs (ironically so foundational for humanism!) in a 'wise maker and sovereign master'.

He admits that when faith is used as a crutch it can lead to fanaticism, and a faith that admits too much uncertainty may end up undermining itself. Must we therefore choose between flag-waving fanaticism or the wavering diffidence of scepticism? Trigg's alternative 'calm faith', strongly guided by reason, is seen

as a strength not a weakness, a place for wholehearted commitment requiring a personal response. Faith without action is dead, just as action without an underlying belief may be dangerously misguided.

In summary, this book provides a rational defence of the necessary place for (Christian?) faith in modern society, and recognises that the only alternative would be to cede all authority to those with power. This is what religious tradition challenges and must go on challenging.

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Andrew P. Jackson

Maximus the Confessor and Evolutionary Biology: The Phylogenetic Logoi

Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2025. 216 pp. hb. £135. ISBN 9781032763293

The author sets out to test the suggestion of a link between Maximus the Confessor's logoi doctrine and biological evolution and to initiate a serious dialogue between theology and evolutionary biology drawing mainly on Eastern Orthodox theological resources. After an introductory chapter setting out his aims and methodology, he begins in Chapter 2, 'The Evolutionary Logoi', by building the best possible case for such a link. Following a brief summary of Maximus's logoi, he presents the Neo-Darwinian synthesis, showing how it accounts for the unity and diversity of life via replication of inheritable variation, natural selection, and adaptation. He then points to some striking analogies between the logoi doctrine and evolution: (i) Just as populations and lineages in biology descend from common ancestors, so too for Maximus the logoi are differentiated, hierarchically ordered, and unfold historically. (ii) The logoi are likened to 'ontological codes' (a kind of 'spiritual DNA') imparting both order and the possibility of future development. (iii) Though the logoi are 'fixed' in God, they are not inert; they propel creatures towards ultimate union with God.

Chapter 3, 'The Christo-forming logoi', takes a more detailed look at the logoi. Jackson begins by reviewing how Maximian scholarship has understood the logoi 'in God' – as divine ideas, divine wills, divine energies, or as the second person of the Trinity – and begins to tease out some of the implications of Maximus's contention that God is fully present in every creature. Turning to how the logoi have been understood to be 'in creatures', he summarizes Maximus's understanding of the relationship between universals and particulars. This acts as a launchpad for a discussion of the idea of the logoi as substantial forms. Having considered the nature of the logoi on both sides of the created/uncreated divide, he explores what this implies for the God–creature relationship. Maximus is quite clear that the logoi are the same on both sides of the divide. How, then, can we protect the divine otherness? To answer this question, Jackson draws on John Zizioulas's summary of Patristic solutions to the problem of reconciling communion and otherness: (i) communion achieved by the immanence of the logoi, otherness maintained by the materiality of creatures; (ii) communion achieved by the divine energies in creation, otherness grounded in the unknowability of the divine essence; (iii) communion achieved by the incarnation, otherness maintained at the level of natures. He suggests a synthesis of the solutions resulting in a partial and dynamic panentheism.

Jackson moves on in chapters 4 and 5 to test the thesis against two major counterarguments. Chapter 4, 'The Purposeful Logoi', contrasts the purposefulness of the logoi with the purposelessness of neo-Darwinism. He reminds us that, for

all its apparent purposelessness, evolution proceeds by chance operating in a lawlike framework and questions how far this lack of purpose runs counter to divine providence. Nevertheless, Maximus's insistence on the inviolability of the logoi does seem to exacerbate the problem of purposelessness. Jackson argues that this inviolability does not forbid evolutionary change because fixed logoi determine essences while allowing modal variation and phylogenetic branching. This is plausible but leaves unresolved how radical macro-evolutionary novelties fit 'without confusion' into pre-existing logoi. This discussion leads him on to the question of providence and divine action. Having briefly discussed double agency and a creation that is entirely pervaded by the Spirit, he opts for a panentheistic naturalism: God acts in, with, and under natural causes; evolutionary mechanisms are secondary causes animated by the Logos. His approach safeguards immanence, but some readers may fear it blurs the distinction between Creator and creation. Furthermore, his reliance on the essence–energy distinction may not be convincing for non-Orthodox readers.

In chapter 5, 'The Good Logoi', he turns to the other main argument against the thesis: the goodness of Maximus's logoi versus the suffering and extinction involved in evolution. He suggests four potential ways to mitigate this tension: (i) creation as immature and evolving towards a good end; (ii) the material creation as divine anticipation of the fall; (iii) extension of the free will argument to some aspects of the nonhuman creation; or (iv) various theocentric approaches to suffering. It is an interesting approach to the problem of theodicy, but I'm not convinced he takes the discussion much further forwards.

In a brief final chapter, he concludes that Maximus is a valuable source of theological insights relevant to science and, further, that the suggestions of a resonance between the logoi and evolutionary biology are well-founded. Finally, he offers several themes that emerge from his work – essentially, a theological research programme: (i) questioning science's exclusive attention to efficient causation (and exploring the role of the logoi as formal causes); (ii) exploring Maximus's emphasis on creaturely particularity; (iii) developing the idea of providence as immanent; (iv) expanding on Maximus's understanding of the logoi as evolutionary.

Jackson's book offers an in-depth conversation between the logoi doctrine and evolution rather than a facile reconciliation. Overall, it provides a daring, creative, but preliminary synthesis and suggests constructive proposals that invite further scrutiny from both theologians and biologists.

Lawrence Osborn is a retired editor based in Glasgow. He maintains a research interest in Orthodox theology and its relationship with the natural sciences.

Stephen Goundrey-Smith
Christian Ethics and Biomedical Innovation

London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024.
304p. hb. £100. ISBN 9781666953602

This book is an academic and thorough exploration of the ethical principles that surround implementation of 'biomedical innovations', and it contains long lists of academic references. I was expecting much from the title, especially as the author has been a pharmacist and is now an ordained theologian. I anticipated that it might contain guiding principles for dealing with specific and complex biomedical innovations, of which there are many. However, I was disappointed, not by its academic rigour, which is beyond doubt, but by its lack of interaction with specific

biomedical issues. It will mainly be used by theoreticians, and is of little practical use for making ethical decisions on the real-life situations that are being posed by biomedical advances on an almost daily basis. The book frequently refers to 'radical biomedical technologies', by which he means nanotechnology, genetic enhancements, cybernetics, and cryonics (really!) (53) None of these is illustrated with a specific scientific example. A quick look at the index confirms the lack of interaction with any specific biomedical innovations and confirms that the focus is really on approaches to transhumanism. The book claims to be informed about the science – yet it almost never discusses it.

The first chapter helpfully explores the Christian theology of human bioethics from the question of what it means to be made in the image of God, it emphasises the importance of embodiment and the idea that we are co-creators with God.

In the second chapter, and several other places, the author is rightly critical of health technology assessment (HTA), which is a blunt tool for making ethical decisions, and does not account for dignity, social justice, autonomy and embodiment. It questions whether a person is really able to exercise personal autonomy if they have been modified by biomedical technology (60). Issues of the common good and social justice are discussed at length, and this became an exercise in theoretical social policy and sociobiology. Since we currently don't have distributive justice for existing simple cheap biomedical (drug) interventions, the discussion of equal distribution in a global 'enhancement society' seems almost pointless when considering new expensive and complex technologies. The second chapter comes closest to discussing specific innovations, but still only describes 'radical biomedical enhancements technologies'. The only specific example considered in the entire book is the possibility of a retinal-auditory interface in chapter 5 (220).

Chapter 3 acknowledges the need for state regulation to ensure public safety. How this is actioned so as to promote the common good will depend on how a government develops its public policy. This chapter acknowledges that in many instances there is not a clear distinction between therapy and enhancement, but then only discusses radical enhancement innovations. It would have been useful to give examples where the distinction is unclear and for which the outcome may depend on the individual context.

Chapter 4, considering public policy decisions for enhancement technologies, draws some analogies with the process for constructing the Warnock report on human embryology, and for introduction of the Summary Care Record (186) the second of which seems distant to the subject of the book.

Chapters 3-5 consider the involvement of public institutions and public policy in decision making and invokes a necessary triad of biomedical capability, ethics, and public policy, for which all three components are essential if we are to work together to support human flourishing. The author argues that there should be a distinction between ethical deliberation and policy discourse in the way that innovations are implemented and that Christians as citizens should contribute to forming public policy. The final chapter 6 is based around Aquinas' 'natural law' (for which the author sees the start of humanity as a beginning, not something to return to as we progress as God's co-creators) and Augustine's treatise in The City of God and its sociopolitical implications in a pluralist society.

In several places the author dwells on the fact that we live in a pluralistic and multicultural society, and the need to look for common values in order to find consensus. This is a laudable pragmatic

approach (emphasising shared values as much as scientific facts), though the book does not describe how such a consensus might be achieved and how any distinctly Christian views might influence such a consensus.

The book is repetitive and contains several details that aren't directly relevant or necessary, such as delving into sociopolitical theory. It often refers back to earlier chapters and then looks forward to later ones, making it difficult to follow the arguments. Its high cost suggests that it is only really intended for libraries. It is a thorough and academic discussion of sociopolitical ethics, but will be impenetrable to readers who are not experts in social and ethical theory. I look forward to a contribution from the author that shows how the principles on which he has pontificated might affect how we respond to specific ongoing real-life biomedical innovations.

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Carlos Montemayor

The prospect of a humanitarian artificial intelligence

London: Bloomsbury, 2023. 296 pp. hb. £85.00. ISBN 9781350348370

Machines made in the image of man have fascinated people for millennia. The Buddhist scholar Daoxuan wrote in the seventh century of the 'precious metal people' that recited sacred texts in a cloister and had wept when the Buddha Shakyamuni had died a thousand years earlier. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein in 1818, George Eliot's Impressions of Theophrastus Such in 1879 and Karel Čapek's Rossum's Universal Robots in 2021 explored through fiction the implications of autonomous intelligence in creatures made by men. Carlos Montemayor now brings a philosopher's perspective to these questions in his book The prospect of a humanitarian artificial intelligence, an intelligent system that would benefit all humanity.

The discussion has become more pressing since advances in electronics in the mid-twentieth century made thinking machines a practical possibility. Edmund Berkeley's Giant Brains in 1949 considered the imminent arrival of electronic computers that could process general information as well as numerical calculations. He saw danger not in the machines themselves but in the antisocial human beings controlling them. Only when there was an effective guarantee of physical safety and adequate employment could mankind could be free from the threat of robot machines. The book was timely: 1949 also saw Maurice Wilkes' EDSAC commissioned in Cambridge and so the computer age was born. A mere seven years later a group of leading computer scientists convened a Dartmouth summer project on artificial intelligence with the aim of 'devising a way of programming a calculator to form concepts and to form generalizations'. The result was an agenda for research in computer science that continues to the present day.

Just two years later Stanislaw Ulam wrote in his obituary of John von Neumann of their 'conversation centered on the ever-accelerating progress of technology and changes in the mode of human life, which gives the appearance of approaching some essential singularity in the history of the race beyond which human affairs, as we know them, could not continue.' The singularity has been near for longer than we might think.

70 years later extraordinary progress has been made with that agenda but 'artificial intelligence' in the sense of imitat-

ing the human brain remains elusive. The mathematician Alan Turing's essay on Computing machinery and intelligence in 1950 posed the question 'Can a machine think?' and thought that conversations about poetry, arithmetic and chess might distinguish a person from a machine. People would understand poetry, machines would be good at arithmetic and chess might be challenging for both. Artificial intelligence would be achieved when they could not be distinguished by an observer. The question is naïve. As the computer scientist Edsger Dijkstra observed, asking whether machines can think is about as relevant as asking whether submarines can swim.

A computer beat the world champion at chess in 1997 and chat systems built on generative large language models can converse about poetry, but this is not the same as intelligence. Interest has moved on to 'Artificial General Intelligence' or AGI which might match human capabilities across a wide range of cognitive tasks although most experts shy away from discussing sentient machines.

Montemayor draws a distinction between 'extensionally equivalent intelligence' (EEI) and 'intentionally equivalent intelligence' (IEI). EEI is AGI that is as reliable and accurate as human capabilities but without capacities for problem solving or learning. IEI augments this with motivation based on cognitive needs. The key to this is attention, the ability to sift information for data relevant for particular cognitive needs. This is a familiar task for a computer system but the book argues that it needs to be refined with moral competences related to autonomy and ethical sensitivity. These would take the IEI beyond a mere simulation.

Moral competence is important but it isn't clear it can't be simulated. And it isn't clear that its incorporation into a computer system addresses Edmund Berkeley's concern articulated 75 years ago that the danger is not in the machines themselves but in the antisocial human beings controlling them.

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Victoria Lorrimar

Science Fiction and Christian Theology

Cambridge Elements in Christianity and Science

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025. 74 pp, pb. £15.64. ISBN 9781009428910

This relatively short treatise is a very welcome introduction to a wide range of sci-fi writing. A wide range of types of sci-fi literature are summarised, and the links to Christian eschatology well laid out and argued. There is an emphasis on new female authors, with enough of the narratives laid out to pique the reader's interest. The language is formal in style with extensive references, in keeping with the Cambridge Elements' mission to present authoritative evidence.

Victoria's main thesis is that all science fiction – not just that produced by Christian authors – is a useful arena in which Christian narratives can be explored in a non-confrontational and imaginative way. She challenges current science fiction writers to present realistic ideas with thought given to their implementation in today's society as part of NT Wright's vision of building the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

The body of the work is concerned with what readers may recognise as 'hard' sci-fi, with extensive discussion of themes of AI and human enhancement, the question of whether AI entities could partner with humanity in a fruitful way, and of the possibility of uploading a human mind to an electronic long-lasting medium in an

analogous way to the Christian offer of eternal life. Victoria takes a positive and optimistic view of technology, welcoming its advancement, and celebrates 'hope punk' authors such as Becky Chambers for their quirky and warm portrayals of the future status of humanity in relation to alien races.

Political utopias are also discussed, including Ursula le Guin's view of science fiction as a safe laboratory for proposing new ways of organising society. Victoria also argues that enhancement technology has the capacity to help people with physical disabilities to gain freedom and equality, although she also notes that some people would not choose that route as they value the different perspective that living with limitations can offer.

The last chapter is the most alluring, exploring an idea proposed by Donna Haraway of 'staying with the trouble'. The idea proposed is that science fiction could partner with the Christian vision of building the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, here and now. The challenge set by climate change could be met by serious proposals from science fiction authors, based on current science, in conversation with scientists whether or not they have a Christian faith. The usual narratives of apocalypse or other ways of wiping the slate clean tend to be dismissed in favour of a continuous forward timeline, where benevolent and personally sacrificial social movements might wrest humanity away from imminent destruction.

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David Wilkinson

How Does God Act in the World? Science, Miracle and Mission

Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books 2025, 139 pp. pb. £ 17.00. ISBN 9798385208814

Religious believers face the question whether God acts in the world, and if so how. If it is concluded that God can act, the problem is why He would act sometimes and not others, and the venerable problem of evil looms large. These issues are raised in this interesting and absorbing book, written by Professor David Wilkinson of the University of Durham. With both a scientific and theological background, he is well versed in dealing with the interaction of the two, and is also concerned about the impact of any perceived link on mission. He is a Methodist minister, and the influence of John Wesley, and Methodist theological discussions, particularly in the United States, come to light. The book is based on the Didsbury Lectures, a series that invites well-known theologians as contributors. He says at one point (99) that he has approached the lectures with 'a model of dialogue', conducting a fluid conversation. This means that he covers a wide ground quoting from a range of relevant theological thinking, but sometimes without a clear thread of argument leading to any conclusion. Each page has footnotes referring to many contemporary thinkers, and, although a short book, the bibliography itself extends to 22 pages.

Some themes clearly emerge. Traditional mechanistic views of the universe, stemming from the work of Isaac Newton, have, he says (53) 'attenuated our sense of what is possible.' In his first lecture, Wilkinson insists (45) that 'chaos and quantum theory must be taken seriously' with their reminders of the varied and complex nature of the universe and the fact that there is unpredictability at certain levels. That does not mean, he recognises, that there are simply gaps in which we can insert the action of God, but when he says (45) that 'complexity and mystery must be maintained', we are not much further forward in understanding divine action. He is very good at pointing

out problems and tensions, and making judicious remarks about them, without taking us very far into understanding how to resolve them.

A particular issue arises with his treatment of chaos theory, which, with quantum theory, can appear to demonstrate a lack of causation at some levels in the universe. This has been much discussed, and Wilkinson is tempted by John Polkinghorne's location of God's activity in the hiddenness of chaotic systems. Polkinghorne made a strong link between epistemology and ontology, but that can never be right because it links what there is to human capabilities. It suggests that reality depends on how far we can access it, and so becomes anthropocentric. Reflection on the reality of God, for example, shows that objective reality must surpass our ability to understand it. Similarly, just because we cannot access causes does not mean that they are not at work. Wilkinson may be wary of a 'God of the gaps' but fails to cast any further light on the problem.

The book stresses that scientific laws are descriptive not prescriptive, and that science is always provisional. Wilkinson notes how, in the pandemic, politicians thought that they could be led by 'the science', relying on a simplistic view of how science develops, particularly in the face of an unknown situation. Because of the provisional and complex nature of science, he states that theology (as well as politics) 'needs to be informed by but not dominated by science (96)'. He is surely right about this, but, despite much wise commentary, and the view that science cannot rule out divine intervention, the book takes us little further in understanding God's action in the world.

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Chris Wild

Unravelling DNA: Applying Christian values to a genetic age.

GBJ Books, 2025. 262 pp. pb. £12.99. ISBN 9781068227509

This is an ambitious book about an ambitious molecule. As Dr Wild points out (5) the typical human cell contains around 0.000,000,000,005 grams of DNA. However, we humans, like all cellular organisms on earth, use DNA not only to encode genetic information for our working parts, but to transmit that information from cells to their progeny during life, and to our progeny during reproduction. DNA represents not only 'vertical' relationships between cells and organisms down generations, but 'horizontal' relationships between cells and organisms alive at the same time, and the widest sense, between all DNA-carrying organisms on earth – including relationships that are genetic (between siblings), societal (between persons and communities) aesthetic (between humans and daffodils) or extremely multivalent (between humans and E. coli).

Wild aims to explore advances in genetics from a Christian perspective, using a lens which he describes as the 'relationship test' (9, 71-86) – that is, in light of human relationships with self, kin, society and the world. The grounds he gives for this approach are the centrality of relationship to human identity, to the Trinitarian understanding of God, and to the Christian tenets of love for God and neighbour. Note that the relationships in Wild's test span the biological (self and kin), cultural and ethical (society), biological / metaphorical (world) and theological/doctrinal (God). In my view, the breadth of this 'relationship test' enables him to encompass a huge range of genetic technologies, but to the same extent it limits the theological or intellectual acuity of his analysis.

In Chapters 2-5, Wild is an assured

guide across a vast terrain of genetic technologies, including forensics, genetic engineering, human genetic disease and therapeutics, and reproductive biology. There are some challenges, which I illustrate using his discussion of the UK's 14-day limit for human embryo research (76-79). Firstly, he inevitably omits some recent advances, such as the human embryo models derived from stem cell lines and thus incommensurate with the 14-day limit (see comment in doi 10.1038/d41586-023-03150-y). Secondly, he speaks with unacknowledged particularity, from the standpoint of UK science, culture and law – such as the 14-day limit, which is specific to the UK. Thirdly, the breadth of his material challenges substantive discussion. In the aforementioned section, after touching on the Torah, Augustine, Aquinas and Islamic theology, Wild only urges that 'society … and the Church are engaged in responding to … proposals for change' (77) and observes the 'perennial difficulty of formulating decisions' (79).

Chapters 7-10 comment on the technologies in chapters 2-5 in light of the 'relationship test'. At this point, the discussion becomes kaleidoscopic under lenses of scripture, tradition, society and biology, but lacks theological incisiveness, or substantive proposals for a Christian response. For example, in the chapter 'Relationships with Family' after touching on genetic relatedness, mitochondrial donation, the spiritual metaphor of marriage between Christ and the Church, compatibility screening of potential parents, genetic selection for therapeutic reasons, and familial sharing of information in genetic disease, he closes by remarking that in families God introduces individuals 'created unique and in His image and likeness' (135).

In the final chapter Wild observes that 'the Church, in all its diversity, should formulate responses to genetic advances' (199); but this book makes only limited gestures toward potential approaches for such responses. Wild has been an institutional, international leader in genetic sciences. I would welcome a sequel harnessing his profound knowledge of these technologies, and exploring possible routes – whether theological or ethical, local, national or global, sectional or ecumenical or interfaith – by which 'the church in all its diversity' may respond to genetics, and similar urgent challenges to our world.

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James K. Dew, Jr. and Ronnie Campbell, eds.

Natural Theology: Five Views

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024. 289 pp. pb. $26.99. ISBN 9781540967251

In this volume, five relatively distinct voices seek to define and evaluate the project of 'natural theology,' an historic and important dimension of the Christian tradition. Three of the contributors, Charles Taliaferro (A Contemporary View), Andrew Pinsent (A Catholic View), and Alister McGrath (A Classical View), can be described as positive about this project, even if they challenge or revise some common understandings of it. The other two, Paul Moser (A Deflationary View) and John McDowell (A Barthian View), are more critical and cautious about the enterprise. Along with a brief introduction and conclusion by Dew and Campbell, the book comprises five primary essays, responses from the other four scholars, and a final response from the original author of each primary essay. In certain respects, the book covers familiar ground and historical figures like Aristotle, Anselm, Aquinas, Hume, Kant, Paley, Darwin, and Barth surface routinely, as

do discussions of cosmological and teleological arguments for the existence of God, for example. But significant parts of the book grapple with deeper and somewhat more abstract questions about how to define natural theology and its proper place in Christian theological reflection and spiritual experience.

With the possible exception of Taliaferro, none of the authors seem entirely comfortable with shorthand definitions of natural theology which conceive of it as the attempt to demonstrate the existence of God through philosophical reflection on the natural world without the assistance of revelation. McGrath argues (109-112) that such a clean binary between philosophical reason and theological revelation is basically a modern framework that should not be projected back onto the richer and more complex modes of natural theology practiced in earlier Christian eras. Based in part on a linguistic study of the terms naturalis and supernaturalis in the Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas, Pinsent raises similar questions and suggests a pure natural theology which is completely quarantined from the grace of revelation might best (or only?) apply to pre-Christian cultures (62-74). Neither McGrath nor Pinsent deny that natural theology can have philosophical and persuasive value. As a Catholic theologian and scientist, Pinsent appears to accept (59, 72) without any radical qualifications the relationship between natural reason and the knowledge of God outlined in the First Vatican Council (1870). Still, both authors maintain that there are significant negative implications and vulnerabilities associated with ahistorical and reductionistic arguments for the existence of God common in popular apologetics. Taliaferro appears the most confident in the capacity of modern cosmological, teleological, and ontological arguments to weather criticism and is the only contributor to positively explicate such arguments in this volume.

The inclusion of Paul Moser's 'deflationary' and John McDowell's 'Barthian' perspectives adds considerable dramatic tension to the conversation. Moser is consistent throughout that the ambiguous results of natural theology cannot present to us a morally perfect God worthy of our worship and devotion. This concern overlaps in ways with the Barthian criticism that natural theology can lead to distorted and potentially idolatrous images of God that very often obstruct people from the true revelation of God given in Christ. Rather than join the fruitless debates around theistic proofs, Moser recommends that Christians ground their faith in the personal experience of God found through conscience, Scripture, and Christian community, a position he believes is central to the New Testament witness. This naturally invites the rejoinder that personal religious experience can be highly variable and interpreted in different ways. McDowell's essay is a sophisticated and interesting presentation of Barth's legacy which to my mind demonstrates that the Swiss theologian still has a useful role to play in modern conversations about natural theology. I suspect none of the authors, not even McDowell, would argue for more than that.

In my estimation, the book is more about competing Christian theories of natural theology than its contemporary practice. Another way of locating the book might be that it is focused on the intra-Christian conversation or debate about natural theology more than the interface of Christian faith with the non-Christian world, though of course both discourses inevitably intersect. Why do Christians believe in God? What are reasons that Christians believe others should believe in God? The book illuminates a diverse range of responses to these basic questions. In the process, the reader is provided with a number of stimulating

insights about the relationship between reason, theology, and the natural world.

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David Gregory

Divine Windows: Seeing God Through the Lens of Science

Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2025. 140pp. pb. £12.99. ISBN 9781800393318

David Gregory is well-positioned to bridge the gap between science and Christianity. As a Baptist minister holding a doctorate in Atmospheric Physics and a Master's in Applied Theology, he is well qualified to navigate this interaction in this concise, well-illustrated, 140-page volume.

His central thesis, following sociologist Peter Berger, posits that creation displays 'signals of transcendence'. Through these signals, Gregory hopes to enable his readers 'to journey further through the scientific vision of the world towards divine encounter'. The book focuses heavily on the aesthetic aspects of reality. Gregory explores themes such as imagination, wonder, play, and order, examining how these 'echo' within the natural sciences.

A recurring motif in the book is the British idiom of being 'sent to Coventry'; acting as if someone is not there or giving them the cold shoulder. Gregory argues that for many, modern science has effectively 'sent God to Coventry'. By examining metaphors and the use of imagination, he aims to show that God is not silent. We should not silence Him. God speaks through the creation.

Gregory appears to place his work in conversation with classical theology, specifically the 'Book of Nature' tradition, but offers a twist. Augustine (c.354–430) argued that 'Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things.' He argued, 'Ponder heaven and earth religiously' (see Sermo Mai, 126 in https://inters.org/Augustine-Book-of-Nature). This is what Gregory suggests that we need to do: ponder the cosmos religiously.

Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1096–1141) had written: 'For the whole sensible world is like a kind of book, written by the finger of God—that is, created by divine power—and each particular creature is somewhat like a figure, not invented by human decision, but instituted by the divine will to manifest the invisible things of God's wisdom' (see Didascalion, 7.4 in https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/flor/article/view/19170/20844). Rather than a book metaphor, Gregory uses a window metaphor. He suggests that we look through the physical world to see the divine beyond it.

The first half of the volume serves as a defence of a non-rational form of natural theology, prioritising imagination and the use of metaphors. Gregory draws upon a diverse ecumenical range of thinkers, including Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox voices, such as Bonaventure, Peter Berger, Michael Polanyi, Zachary Hayes, and Karl Rahner. There is no critique of these diverse voices, even though they come from different worldviews and faith perspectives; they are merely included to reinforce his thesis. Given that this is presumably aimed at a popular audience, this is forgivable.

In the final section, he examines eight 'Divine Windows', namely star, moon, Earth, aurora, dust, life, other worlds and cosmos. Each section has a colour photograph with an explanation of the underlying science behind it explained. And then some links to the Scriptures. While some of these connections can feel a little strained at times, the book

remains a fascinating contribution to seeing God's fingerprints in the natural sciences. Gregory successfully 'ponders the cosmos religiously', offering a refreshing vision for those looking to reconcile scientific observation with imagination and wonder.

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Andrew Ollerton

God's Book: An Honest Look at the Bible's 7 Toughest Topics

Hodder & Stoughton, 2025, 352 pp. pb. £14.19. ISBN 9781399806459

The author is a pastor, communicator and presenter who has degrees in Geography, Theology and History, and a PhD in Historical Theology.

This book presents answers to seven key difficult issues in Christian faith. The author is capable of an academic style (as in the publication of his PhD) but this book has a folksier discursive approach. Nonetheless, it generally attempts to be careful in its analysis.

CiS members may be particularly interested in Ollerton's first chapter on science, faith, and Genesis. The author has seen that the YEC of his background is implausible, and tries in a tolerant way to combine the approaches of eg John Walton, Ernest Lucas (who taught him), C J Collins, William Lane Craig and John Lennox. One problem is that for Walton neither the Hebrew asah nor bara mean 'create', to Collins asah means 'appoint' in Gen 1:16 but 'create' in 1:25 and 1:26 (so that chronology is preserved), whilst to others both terms imply create but the six days were not intended chronologically. Ollerton, though, summarises the scientific choice as between (1) Young earth creationism (2) Old earth gap theory and (3) Old earth age-day theory, and finds (3) 'more credible'. Most of his cited authors, however, recognise that the six days do not represent the order of events in geological history, whether taken as long age-day periods or short bursts of divine creative activity. Neither Walton nor Craig see them as chronological, Lucas recognises the pattern of two threes and speaks of the 'literary cultural approach', and Lennox notes what is called the 'framework' theory of non-sequence - noting in the 2022 edition of his Seven Days the improbability of Collins' argument about day 4. Really a 'framework' idea should have been option (4) in Ollerton's options, as it seems taken generally by evolutionary creationists. It might have been useful, too, to note that some (like Craig and Lennox) tend to an ID (Intelligent Design) view that God sometimes added new structures in a way suspending natural evolutionary processes, whilst others do not. On Adam and Eve, Ollerton says 'The teachings of Jesus and Paul imply that Adam and Eve were historical people' (p.34). Well, Jesus in Matt 19 certainly took the Genesis creation account of humanity to show God's intention in marriage, but those who see Adam and Eve as archetypical and corporate also accept this. Paul's treatment of 'Adam' in Romans 5 is also complex. Ollerton does explore such ideas, and his final position is to recognise that Christians who believe in Scriptural inspiration have divergent views on this.

The second chapter in the book concerns the Exodus and OT laws. The plausibility of the Exodus account is defended, and then he looks at the various 'strange' and sometimes 'offensive' laws in the Torah. The cohesive nature of the laws is defended, and the idea that Israel should thereby stand out amongst the nations and ultimately thereby bless them. Some laws were founded in creation itself, but others were either purely temporary or

fulfilled in Christ.

The third section is about the bloodshed in the conquest and war. The book argues that some of the reports of numbers slaughtered may not be literal, and the fundamental intention was to cleanse from idolatrous practice rather than genocide. The author makes as good a shot as he can but it seems doubtful that anyone can fully answer the obvious questions. Where we can all agree is that in the Christian era the aim is to drive the evil from people rather than drive out the evil people.

Section four raises the issue of good people suffering. God did not intend to create pain and suffering, and human sin is the cause of much of it. The author, though, wants to insist that God is fully sovereign, yet natural disasters etc occur. God does not cause bad things, but is in control of them. This is a 'mystery' and we need to 'embrace it without overthinking it.'

Section five looks at miracles and exorcisms, outlining a fairly standard evangelical analysis of these in its own particular style.

Section six concerns sexual ethics. Creation accounts and the teaching of Paul and Jesus are taken as implying sex is to be enjoyed within monogamous, faithful, heterosexual, lifelong marriage. A 'woman' is assumed to be defined by biological sex. The approach is open to a more egalitarian or complementarian view of marital relationships, but not to other diversity of relationships as per LGBT+. The approach does not venture into pastoral advice, but simply sets out a biblical bedrock.

The final section concerns future judgement, heaven and hell. In this, recognition is made of the increasing view amongst evangelicals that 'hell' implies destruction not unending torment - which is explicit in what is actually said by Jesus, Paul, John, Peter and the writer to the Hebrews. Ollerton himself seems to waver between a version of this in which the destruction occurs over finite time and an identification of hades as a hell with 'doors locked on the inside'. The treatment will not aid those who want to look at the actual biblical evidence, but does reflect the present divergence of evangelical views.

The book attempts, as it promises, to address some very hard questions. It is recommended by those with backgrounds as diverse as Nicky Gumbel and Bear Grylls, and is gauged to a thoughtful but non- academic audience. On most controversial issues it takes a conciliatory tone, encouraging mutual tolerance of those with differing views. From the CiS viewpoint, the book sits within the general divergence of views which broadly accept the truth of geological time and role of evolutionary processes.

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