

Book Reviews

As a coda to this manufactured war, Rudwick provides a brief appendix on the late twentieth-century “young-Earth geology” movement. Having thoroughly documented the hard toil, physical and mental, of sincere and gifted Christians in the recovery of Earth’s deep history, he is taken aback at the “startling reinvention of the idea of a ‘young Earth,’ which the sciences of the earth outgrew for very good reasons back in the eighteenth century” (p. 309). He concludes, “Sadly, creationists are utterly out of their depth” (p. 315; last sentence of the volume).

For its comprehensive scope, intelligibility, delightful illustrations, and at times bluntly personal approach, this volume is a treat. I highly recommend it as a solitary read or as an introduction to Martin Rudwick’s other authoritative works.

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PHILOSOPHY & THEOLOGY

PROCESS AND PROVIDENCE: The Evolution Question at Princeton, 1845–1929 by Bradley J. Gundlach. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013. 374 pages, including bibliography and index. Paperback; \$39.00. ISBN: 9780802868985.

One does not have to be directly involved in science or religion to have been affected by the often divisive discussions surrounding the topic of creation versus evolution. It is a topic that has captivated western culture for nearly two centuries. For the most part, this debate is depicted as a battle between atheistic, rational science versus an antiquated religious folklore about the existence of a higher creative being. Having degrees in biology and geology as well as theology, I have been in the middle—often a target—of both sides of this conversation. The book reviewed herein elucidates how committed Christians have responded to this conflict from the genesis of the controversy.

One of the points of contention is the debate over evolution as a natural process versus God’s directional providence. It is these two supposed antithetical ideas that Bradley J. Gundlach, Professor of History at Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois, draws from for the title of his book *Process and Providence*. Gundlach takes a historical look at the rising cultural interest in evolution beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. He frames his exploration in the context of the variety of responses from faculty at Princeton, both seminary and university, between 1845 and 1929. Princeton was chosen, according to the author, because “Princeton was the most important center of conservative Protestant think-

ing on matters of science and religion in America” (p. 6). Gundlach notes that his approach to history was less of a systematic analysis and more of a historical narrative. He introduces the cultural context in each of the decades, outlining the emerging scientific ideas in evolution and the social implications arising from natural science’s philosophical conclusion that God can be rejected. As the book works through the emerging issues, Gundlach highlights key individuals at Princeton and presents, uncritically, their responses based on letters, lectures, and publications as well as Princeton’s larger reactions through faculty hirings.

Through this process, Gundlach’s book highlights the manner in which professors at Princeton—in the disciplines of both theology and natural science—avoided a reactionary, confrontational clash, but instead sought a collegial, critical dialogue with the direct and indirect issues arising in popular culture as a result of the proposed theory of evolution. Rather than rejecting outright these new proposals, as many Christians were doing, faculty at Princeton sought to affirm the scientific method and consider evolution, while at the same time upholding God’s providence. Even by the late 1860s, in the aftermath of Darwin’s *Origin*, Gundlach points out,

Only reluctantly did the Princetonians describe the relations of science and religion in terms of conflict. After all, their whole apologetical point was that knowledge was no enemy to faith, that the two were neither hostile nor indifferent to each other, but the closest of friends. (p. 51)

Gundlach even notes that the mechanism of progression was embraced, not only for changes seen in plant and animal life but also for interpreting developments in the biblical text as well as culture as a whole.

As thinkers began to draw philosophical conclusions from evolutionary thought, Princeton’s faculty sought to engage the metaphysical and epistemological implications (including the loss of teleology for creation and the rise of atheism along with the deterioration of longstanding morals and values). In an effort to encourage the church to confront the potential sociological ramifications of evolutionary theory, the military metaphor of war was used to describe this struggle. The counter-offensive to “science’s” destruction of Christian foundations consisted of five strategies: watch, detect, expose, confront, and overpower. The remainder of the book explores how this tactic played itself out over the next sixty years, focusing predominantly on the roles played by Princeton’s leading figures—Charles Hodge, James McCosh, and their “Bright Young Men”—as they continued to wage the war for a Christian perspective on evolution by “taking the best that science had to offer and bringing it back ‘under God’ at Princeton” (p. 160).

Princeton was, for the most part, successful in showing how careful thought about evolution did not betray the biblical narrative about God and God's providential role in creation. However, in the early quarter of the twentieth century, a renewed angst toward evolution arose from within the fundamentalist movement. With the death of people like B. B. Warfield and the departure of other Princeton scholars who were open to considering the positive nature of evolution, Gundlach outlines the "highly polarized situation of the 1920s uncongenial to the Old Princeton views of science and religion" (p. 273). He describes the multitude of underlying issues that pressured Princeton's faculty into taking a more conservative stand as the Scopes Monkey Trial neared. Gundlach concludes by recounting how, by 1929, the battle plan which began in 1865 was forcibly ended by the restructuring of the seminary by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America over concerns about denomination strife due to theological error.

Process and Providence excels at elaborating the underlying issues of each time period as well as introducing the individuals who were important contributors to the discussion. These nuances help the reader understand the significance of the discussions that took place as Princeton sought to deal with evolution in a thoughtful, welcoming, but theologically critical manner. Gundlach also succeeds in allowing the historical record of the Princetonians to define and answer the question of evolution at their institution. While Gundlach abstains from offering simplistic answers or a systematized presentation of opinions from the highlighted faculty, it was obvious that despite there never being a clear consensus at Princeton on the question of evolution, the concern for all was finding a balance in the relationship between process and providence. However, even with a close reading of the text, the narrative was, at times, difficult to untangle. To clarify the intricate web of relationships, Gundlach would have done well to include a summary of this information in a series of tables.

Process and Providence is a dense read in terms of quantity of material, which could make reading it overwhelming for the historically, biologically, or theologically uninitiated. While this text would be best suited to those with a specific interest and background in one or more of those three topics as it relates to the question of evolution, it is nevertheless accessible enough to the more generalized reader who wants to explore the topic in greater detail. Furthermore, it could serve as an encouragement for those, like myself, that have found themselves in the middle of what has too often has become a one-side-or-the-other debate. Gundlach reminds us that we can stand on the shoulders of a cloud of witnesses who did

not sacrifice their belief in God's providence in order to accept the possibility of natural processes.

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FROM NOTHING: A Theology of Creation by Ian A. McFarland. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014. 212 pages. Paperback; \$35.00. ISBN: 9780664238193.

In a memorable episode from the hit television series *Seinfeld*, Jerry and George are presented with the daunting task of pitching their pilot for "a show about nothing" to the executives of NBC. One suspects that Ian McFarland may have had a somewhat easier time convincing the editors of Westminster John Knox Press to publish his book, because in attempting to retrieve the classic doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* (from nothing), he has actually produced a book about everything that is and the God who freely creates out of the plenitude of the life that has been eternally shared between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.

From Nothing: A Theology of Creation is a work of "systematic theology" in the best sense of the term. McFarland draws upon a chorus of voices from across the Christian theological tradition (e.g., Irenaeus, Maximus the Confessor, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Karl Barth) to present a nuanced and compelling defense of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. The symmetry and elegance of the book's organization reflect something of both the marvellous ordering of creation and the book's central material conviction that the doctrine of creation from nothing is best understood within the context of the doctrine of the Trinity. The book is divided into two parts and, fittingly, each part is divided into three chapters. The first part is given the superscription *Exitus* (out-flow), as it is primarily concerned with the rootedness of creation within the life of God. The three chapters in the first part are devoted to unpacking in succession the component parts of the statement, "God creates from nothing." Part Two, *Reditus* (return), marks a "shift from creation's rootedness in God to the contours of its existence under God" (p. xiv) and includes chapters entitled "Evil," "Providence," and "Glory." The two parts are bookended by a substantial introduction and a brief conclusion; the latter is followed by a thorough bibliography and helpful scripture and subject indices.

Following an introductory chapter that outlines some of the exegetical, historical, and contemporary challenges associated with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, McFarland turns in the second chapter to the question of the identity of the God who creates from nothing. McFarland's recourse to the doctrine of the Trinity at this point will seem relatively uncontroversial to those