

Minds, and the Laws of Physics, cried out to be followed by his *Shadows of the Mind: A Search for the Missing Science of Consciousness* (by which he meant “self-consciousness”), which search remains “missing” for reasons that frustrate those wedded to naturalism but not those possessed of biblical faith. The latter are aware that human beings are human, ultimately, in that they are the recipients of God’s address. According to scripture, the characteristic of God is that God speaks. Humans, then, are characteristically those who hear (and from whom God both invites and mandates a response). God is person par excellence; humans are person inasmuch as they are “personned” by the Person. Finite human self-consciousness, on this understanding, is an aspect of the image of that God who is possessed of infinite self-transcendence, and who therein allows us to know him truly and adequately yet never exhaustively.

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SCIENCE AND RELIGION

PARANOID SCIENCE: The Christian Right’s War on Reality by Antony Alumkal. New York: New York University Press, 2017. 256 pages. Hardcover; \$35.00. ISBN: 9781479827138.

I was visiting Harvard University and could not resist the temptation to peruse the Harvard bookstore. After an hour or so of browsing science titles, I picked up some classic books on science, and this one caught my attention. Now that I have finished reading it, I have mixed feelings. First, I feel bad for this group of siblings in Christ (called here the Christian right) who are claiming to do apologetics by misusing science. Second, I am worried that several “normal” Christians are now paranoid.

Alumkal, Associate Professor of Sociology of Religion at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado, writes with a strongly critical tone (as the book subtitle suggests) against the Christian right. But several of his critical affirmations could also be applied to mainstream Christianity. The book’s thesis is that the Christian right in the United States, which he defines as a political movement of conservative evangelicals, uses a manipulative technique to influence society. This technique is defined as “Paranoid science.” As a sociologist, the author describes how the Christian right misuses, fabricates, and misrepresents current science concerning origins, sexuality, bioethics, and environmentalism to fit its agenda, which is political control based in conservative Christianity. The Christian right’s main point is to keep the Bible, or

their interpretation of the Bible, as the rule for these topics. Any scientific affirmation against their view is considered a product of conspiracy, fraud, or an attack on moral values. Herein lies the paranoia.

The book is divided into four chapters, each one describing and criticizing the groups affiliated with the Christian right and concluding that they are paranoid and seek to spread their paranoia to the public to maintain political control. In the introduction, the author explains his approach and analysis. In chapter one, he critiques the intelligent design (ID) movement, particularly the views of Phillip Johnson. According to Alumkal, this movement considers its members to be loyal supporters of the truth and its critics to be biased due to their hatred of God. He concludes that ID is not just a pseudoscientific movement, it is a paranoid movement of neo-creationists.

In the second chapter, the discussion is on human sexuality and about the ex-gay movement, which considers homosexuality not only a sin, but also an aberration of human nature. They want to justify that affirmation not with the Bible alone, but also with science. After explaining the origin of this movement, he provides data that describes their wrongdoing by misusing the results of psychological studies. For Alumkal, it is impossible to change sexual orientations, and the movement’s arguments to the contrary cause much damage to the LGBT community. Alumkal points out that some former leaders of the ex-gay movement are now detractors.

The third chapter is about bioethics. Alumkal muses on the discussion concerning the humanity of the embryo and the ethics of euthanasia. He argues that the claim that human life starts at conception, and the opposition to stem cell research, are based upon inaccurate data. While well-known evangelicals Charles Colson and Joni Eareckson Tada have argued that allowing abortion and euthanasia would collapse American society, Alumkal dismisses their beliefs as unfounded, just paranoia.

The fourth chapter deals with anti-environmentalism. Here Alumkal’s focus is on the Cornwall Alliance and its leader, Calvin Beisner, with their aggressive campaign of “resisting the green dragon.” For Alumkal, the efforts of moderate evangelicals, such as those in the Evangelical Environmental Network, to convince their fellows to become conservationists, have failed. He portrays Beisner and his association as hypocritical for accepting money from big industries to push a Christian right agenda on the environment. The opposition to climate change is not really scientific in nature, so they incited paranoia by calling on evangelicals to oppose those who put nature above God.

Book Reviews

The dominion rule to subdue the earth should be “business as usual” for the Christian right.

In the conclusion, I was perplexed that Alumkal criticized Rick Warren’s book *The Purpose-Driven Life* as a supporter of the false science of the Christian right. I read that book and also studied it in my congregation without noticing anything related to science or the Christian right. His criticism focuses on Warren’s affirmation that the Bible is inerrant, which (to Alumkal) implies denying human reason. Furthermore, Alumkal quoted Mark Noll’s books on the evangelical mind and affirmed that not much progress has been made. In conclusion, the Christian right is backing its affirmations with false science, promoting paranoia, and thus is highly detrimental to American society.

Christian readers (not just those sympathetic to the right-wing) will find some of the claims made in this book impossible to digest. Any conservative Christian who holds to the Bible as authoritative should note Alumkal’s more liberal presuppositions about God, the Bible, and moral issues related to human sexuality. Sadly, Alumkal omits the moderate evangelical scholars who actively contribute to the conversations about these issues. After reading this book, anybody who is not familiar with Francis Collins, D. Gareth Jones, Mark Yarhouse, or Katharine Hayhoe would consider all evangelicals who comment on science as paranoid supporters of the Christian right. One wonders whether the author himself is, ironically, promoting an unfounded paranoia concerning evangelical Christians.

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TECHNOLOGY

TO BE A MACHINE: Adventures among Cyborgs, Utopians, Hackers, and the Futurists Solving the Modest Problem of Death by Mark O’Connell. New York: Anchor Books, 2017. 256 pages. Paperback; \$16.95. ISBN: 9781101911594.

Mark O’Connell has produced a folksy account of his interaction with numerous leaders in transhumanism, “a liberation movement advocating nothing less than a total emancipation from biology itself” (p. 6).

Most of the book consists of accounts of visits with individuals and organizations representative of various emphases within this movement. The Alcor Life Extension Foundation is the world leader in cryonic preservation of a person’s body (or just the head) after death, in anticipation of a time in the future

when technology will exist to “resurrect” the person by uploading the pattern of neural connections in the cryonically preserved brain. (At the time of O’Connell’s visit, it was preserving 117 “patients,” including the head of baseball legend Ted Williams.) Carboncopies is representative of those seeking to develop “substrate-independent” minds, a technology that seeks to upload a person’s mind into an emulation running on a computer. Grindhouse Wetware is representative of groups developing implantable technologies to enhance human sensory and other capabilities. (Even DARPA—the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency of the Department of Defense—is supporting development of technologies to enhance the natural abilities of soldiers, such as exoskeletons.) Aubrey de Grey is representative of those working on radical life extension strategies that regard aging as a curable disease, making four-digit lifespans possible. The author also briefly discusses the idea of “the Singularity,” an anticipated time when artificial intelligence will have surpassed human intelligence (somewhere around 2045 in the predictions of its most vocal proponent, Ray Kurzweil).

Though the emphases of those identifying with transhumanism are diverse, all look to technology to deliver them from the limitations associated with our physical bodies, including (but not limited to) aging and death, and hold “a conviction that we can and should use technology to control the future evolution of our species” (p. 2). Many view human beings as information currently encoded in a biological substrate that is a product of the vagaries of evolution, but which can (and should) be replaced by a superior version that is the product of technological design. Virtually all are devout atheists, looking to science rather than God for deliverance. As one put it, “Science is the new God ... Science is the new hope” (p. 208).

O’Connell makes it clear that he is not a transhumanist, stating this explicitly at both the beginning and the end of the book. But he acknowledges a fascination with the ideas and aims of the movement, arising “out of a basic sympathy with its premise: that human existence, as it has been given, is a sub-optimal system” (p. 2). While his basic approach is objective, there are numerous places where his sense of the strangeness of it all comes through.

Why should a reader of *PSCF* be interested in this subject? I admit that, as a reviewer, I approached reviewing this book with something of a sense of “why am I doing this?” Clearly, the foundational beliefs of the movement are directly antithetical to fundamental Christian beliefs about God, the good-