

# Book Reviews

I could live under one roof with many other unrelated people. Still, the idea is noble, if perhaps impractical for many people.

I highly recommend this book. It is an easy read, and, more importantly, it will make you think.

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**GOD, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE** by Tony Reinke. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022. 320 pages. Paperback; \$21.99. ISBN: 9781433578274.

The ASA has long opposed the myth that science and Christian faith are incompatible. Nevertheless, ASA members differ on all sorts of issues. With little consensus on biblical eschatology, the greatest differences may be on issues related to the future. If so, then Tony Reinke's *God, Technology, and the Christian Life* is sure to be thought provoking, for its focus is the ongoing explosion in scientific knowledge and its applications.

Reinke, a journalist and author of several books, is associated with John Piper and his Desiring God ministry. He adheres to Piper's Reformed theology and trademark "Christian hedonism," which holds that our chief end is to "glorify God *by* enjoying him forever." So Reinke is not only a Christian hedonist, but also a tech hedonist. Today's gadgets delight him, and he looks forward to more wonders in the future. Even so, Reinke's hopes are well placed; he is "optimistic—not optimistic in man, but in the God who governs every square inch of Silicon Valley" (p. 30), a statement that summarizes the entire book.

A concluding section explains the book's origins (pp. 303–4). To write an introduction for *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*, published in 2017, Reinke found it necessary to "catalog" his "meta convictions about human innovation." He went on to develop his convictions, revise and extend his catalog, do more research, and present his findings to several audiences, both in person and online. Finally, he assembled his lectures to produce this text. Unfortunately, it seems that this process left serious style problems. Individual chapters have a stand-alone quality, to the point they seem disconnected from the rest. Chapter-end summaries belabor the book's main points. Overall, the book's repetitive style obscures its connecting logic.

So what does the book argue?

In the Reformed tradition, Reinke seeks to develop a "biblical theology of technology" (p. 30). He begins with God's sovereignty in creation, and continues with God raising up image-bearers to explore nature and

invent tools. Finally, Reinke argues that God stands over those that "wield" technology, for both good or evil; even their worst acts (e.g., the crucifixion of Christ) are "hacked" by God to achieve our redemption, which was planned "before the foundation of the world." Technology is a feature of history, but it does not drive it. Instead, history always unfolds in accordance with the divine will.

The book is organized around nine people, nine primary Bible passages, and twelve common myths about technology (pp. 25–29). Some subjects are predictable (e.g., Babel), but others are not, giving some depth to Reinke's analysis. Six chapters broadly address key questions: "What Is Technology?," "What Is God's Relationship to Technology?," "Where Do Our Technologies Come From?," "What Can Technology Never Accomplish?," "When Do Our Technologies End?," and "How Should We Use Technology Today?" In Reinke's repetitive style, chapters conclude with numbered lists of "Takeaways" that summarize, and sometimes extend, main points.

So, does Reinke succeed? Is his "biblical theology of technology" sound? Depending on their theological presuppositions, readers will judge differently.

Reformed readers, like me, will appreciate Reinke's emphasis on God's sovereignty. In this view, nature testifies to God's existence and wonderful character, and so does technology, its wonders rooted in the divine attributes, and produced by image bearers that reflect them. Tech demonstrates God's creation of both nature and human innovators, and it plays important roles in the plan of redemption, all to the glory of God.

Readers from other traditions will differ to the extent they look to human agency to shape history and the future. Surely, mature Christians understand salvation is based in God's grace, but then what? Christians should live out their faith, but to what extent do their choices matter? Ultimately, are God's promises fulfilled by him alone, or are they realized somehow through human action, including work in science and technology? In Alfred North Whitehead's *process theology* or Philip Hefner's created *co-creator ideas*, humanity achieves, to some degree, what God has promised in the eschaton. Indeed, such thinking is common among self-identified *Christian transhumanists*.

In Reinke's Reformed view, such hopes distract from life's purpose, our chief end: the glorification of God. Instead, dreams of human self-sufficiency tend toward idolatry. God, jealous for his own glory, has placed that goal beyond our reach, and in our rebellion against God, its relentless pursuit only displays our depravity.

Yes, but even this view calls for boundaries. Where does our misguided quest for self-sufficiency end, and

where do warranted good works begin? Does not scripture authorize the development and use of technology to reduce suffering and to love our neighbors? To what extent can we delight in inventions without making them idols?

Unfortunately, Reinke does not answer these questions; quite the opposite. He criticizes Christians wrestling with such issues for using descriptive labels (e.g., scientism) because, in his view, they limit “thoughtful conversations on technology” (p. 29), yet he is unequivocal in opposing proclamation of a “Gospel of Technology” (pp. 163–73). But again, how should Christians find our limits under God’s rule? This question seems less important to Reinke than simply believing God will make the most of whatever happens.

Yes, the final chapter highlights the necessity of wisdom in *using* technology, wisdom that is available from God alone. But does not God give insight to all people? May we reasonably view science and technology as evidence of common grace, but deny that common grace could affect how society organizes and operates? Reinke praises the Amish for making deliberate decisions regarding technology, suggesting that all Christians would do well to do the same, but what criteria should we choose?

Ultimately, Reinke leaves all the big questions to God. Confident in him, Christians should just do the best they can, and then be content with the results. They are, after all, ordained by God. Surely this is true to some extent, but this leaves Reinke’s “biblical theology of technology” open to the classic criticism of Reformed thought: under its banner, Christians are not fully responsible for the results of their actions.

On this point, deep differences appear between Reinke and other Christian observers of technology development. For example, in *A Christian Field Guide to Technology for Engineers and Designers*, Ethan J. Brue, Derek C. Schuurman, and Steven H. VanderLeest argue that, compared with others, Christian innovators bear a *greater* responsibility than others. Informed by biblical ethics and wisdom, they must go beyond minimal success measures. Engineering leadership means faithful conformance to rules, and then some; supererogation is the requirement. But in the end, the message is the same: follow the rules—expressed in either policy or scripture—and the results will surely be good. Well, history reveals limits to that idea. And again, judgement is required. We must not only recognize that moral choices shape technology and its use, but also avoid an empty and uninformed tech moralism.

We might want clear lines separating good from evil in technology, but neither Reinke nor other Christian

authors can supply them. But to be fair, to what extent do people note and observe the clear lines God gave us in the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and many other passages? Until we leave this troubled world, clearly, we must walk by faith, not sight. So, as we walk through our technoscience-saturated world, Reinke and other Christians with biblical views of technology serve the church well. Surely, many ASA members, from diverse theological traditions, will find *God, Technology, and the Christian Life* interesting—either stimulating or frustrating—as well as contributing to further explorations of technology in the light of scripture.

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**THE END OF THE LAW? Law, Theology, and Neuroscience** by David W. Opderbeck. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021. 260 pages. Paperback; \$31.00. ISBN: 9781498223898.

“It’s not you but your brain.” As this powerful meme has begun to characterise our generation, we encounter children under neurological treatment for their behavioral/mental deficits and seniors losing their self-identity due to neurological degeneration. It is indeed evident that our mental experiences are bound to our brain states—yet are we really nothing else than our brain? Many intellectuals of our day argue so—our psyche is an epiphenomenon of our brain state, and so we have no free will.

Recent advances in neuroscience, especially with non-invasive neuroimaging techniques enabling scientists to “read out” one’s decision ahead of a person being consciously aware of their own decision, have underpinned a new movement called *neurolaw*. According to *neurolawyers*, humans are no longer legally or morally accountable for their behaviors as science leaves no room for the existence of free will; consequently, law should be re-oriented from retribution to treatment of criminals. Indeed, *neurolaw* seeks “to explain and reform the legal system from the ground up based on neuroscience” (p. 2). Despite, or because of, its radicality, the *neurolaw* movement can be an attractive alternate to the legal tradition of Western civilization, which is rapidly losing its Greco-Roman/Christian foundations in law and ethics. It is also in line with the trend that our contemporaries increasingly seek justice through facts/science and empathy instead of transcendent values and rationality.

Although *neurolawyers* optimistically hope that this shift will lead our world from conflicts in subjective