

Mind overlooks in the authors' effort to prove the existence of the soul.

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SCIENCE AND FAITH

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF12-25Pearce>

SCIENCE AND THE SACRED: Beyond the Gods in Our Image by C. S. Pearce and Philip Clayton. Cascade Books, 2025. 192 pages including notes. Paperback; \$26.00. ISBN: 9781666769951. Hardcover; \$41.00. ISBN: 9781666769968. Ebook; \$9.99. ISBN: 9781666769975.

Protestants for whom neither atheism nor fundamentalism is an option face a declining menu of choices. On the American scene, there was a time when evangelicalism claimed a spot on that menu; however, its generation-long alignment with reactionary politics has rendered it unattractive for some Protestants. For the latter, the only thing left is some species of liberal theology.

Science and the Sacred is one such species. It is for people who want to believe in God but who can no longer believe that God rules providentially and intercedes miraculously. It is, in short, for many Christians who take the results of the sciences with the utmost seriousness. Accordingly, the first part of the writing presents the reader with quick overviews of current cosmology, evolutionary theory, and neuroscience, along with the consequences of these fields for theology. The upshot is twofold: (1) modern sciences make it impossible to hold such traditional beliefs as that God created the world by *fiat* and that humans occupy a special place in the universe; and (2) at the same time, these sciences "offer better opportunities for enlightenment, wisdom, insight, and integration than were possible in previous eras" (p. vii). Scientific knowledge thus takes away but also gives, and the net result is a gain, for this knowledge yields "spiritually promising possibilities" (p. 25).

Two insights from science are especially salient in the text: (1) all things are interconnected; and (2) a better future for humankind is possible, but achieving it depends on us. The first testifies to the vaguely Whiteheadian subtext of this book; the second results from its rejection of divine omnipotence, which is likewise part of the same subtext indebted to Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy. The writing results in a sort of religious humanism: there is a God who is loving but is also not the sort of being who can directly effect change in the world. Therefore, it is up to us humans to implement God's vision for the world and

thus make it a better place. To that end, the sciences provide us with useful knowledge and help us jettison theological concepts (especially divine omnipotence) that no longer make sense from the authors' perspective.

As an exposition of one variety of contemporary liberal theology, *Science and the Sacred* possesses certain virtues: it is succinct and lucid. Within the limitations of its genre—it is not intended to be a technical discussion—it does a good job of making the case that religious folk should take the results of the sciences seriously, even if doing so means modifying or even rejecting some long-held beliefs.

This book does have some weaknesses. Given its short length, *Science and the Sacred* is not able to offer lengthy arguments for its theses. This self-limitation is not a fatal flaw; we need books that are aimed at audiences who lack patience with or background for lengthy arguments. However, 192 pages is not sufficient for the book's scope. For instance, chapter 9 ("Holy Books and Miracles") ventures into Christology. We learn, for example, that Jesus taught "a message of relational love" and that the main point of his ministry was to inspire "a tremendous love and desire to follow his teachings" (p. 107). Readers can judge for themselves whether these features truly capture what Jesus was mainly about. We learn as well that "Jesus did not create Christianity with himself as God; his followers did" (p. 109). This sort of statement assumes that we know more about the historical Jesus and about the origin of the New Testament than seems warranted. The authors have carefully cherry-picked their way through New Testament scholarship to support their view of Jesus and the New Testament—not that they are alone in this strategy.

One of the curious features of this book lies in one of its more subtle arguments, which comes down to the claim that the authors' views are becoming mainstream and will likely constitute a majority view within religious circles. The authors tell us that "a growing number of religious and spiritual thinkers" prefer evolutionary theory to traditional scriptures when it comes to understanding creation (p. 27) and that "a rapidly growing number of us" reject a literal view of Jesus's resurrection (p. 111). Empirical claims of this sort are exceedingly difficult to substantiate. Readers may suspect that they reflect not large-scale demographic trends but, instead, the experiences of people in the authors' circle of acquaintances.

Related to this feature is the claim that the notion of God advanced by the authors "works well within most of the [world's] faith traditions, except in the most fundamen-

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talist branches” (p. 106). This claim makes it appear that Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shinto, and other “traditions” are really all talking about the same thing when it comes to the idea of God. This assertion provides another doubtful claim, but it is part of the book’s commitment to the notion of a perennial philosophy, according to which there are “deep mystical traditions shared by the world’s largest religions” (p. 38). Once again, readers can judge for themselves whether the particulars of a given religion (e.g., traditional Christology) are disposable accretions artificially attached to the universal, mystical core that lies at the heart of every religion—or at least the largest religions.

Who should read this book? Christians with conservative beliefs who read it will get a good sense of the current state of liberal theology. Liberal Christians will find a clear articulation of typical liberal beliefs and modes of argumentation.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF12-25Keathley>

FAITH AND SCIENCE: A Primer for a Supernatural World by Kenneth D. Keathley. B&H Academic, 2024. 160 pages, including subject and Scripture indices. Paperback; \$21.99. ISBN: 9781087771434.

In his latest book, Kenneth Keathley, professor of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, demonstrates that Christian faith and science possess two compatible perspectives of the world. The subtitle of the Introduction, “This Is Our Father’s Supernatural World,” generates interest through the juxtaposition of a beloved hymn title and the term supernatural. The hymn title refers to Keathley’s love of Christian tradition and his deep faith. Supernatural indicates his take on how these two subjects, which many find contradictory, work together to help Christians understand both the world we live in and our Christian faith. This well-researched book progresses through a basic introduction of science and Christian faith (chaps. 1–3), includes an extended treatment of God at work in the origins of life (chaps. 4–8), and concludes by “inviting young believers [to consider] a future in one of the STEM fields” (p. 2). It is written in an accessible style suitable for students and those first encountering the topic.

Keathley starts by discussing how faith and science relate to each other. Following ancient Greek philosophy, he uses an illustration of building a house and

clearly shows that *why* something happens, both the formal planning (the blueprints) and the underlying motivation (desire for a home), provide an understanding of causation that proves different from *how* something happens, including both material resources (the supplies needed) and dynamic/efficient causation (the construction workers). Science tells us *how* God created and sustains the world, and theology tells us *why*. Keathley notes three primary models that govern the faith and science relationship: the Enemies models, the Strangers model, and the Friends model. The author states that Christianity does not tell one everything about everything, but neither does science tell one everything about everything. Keathley debunks two misunderstandings about the church’s interaction with science. First, the Galileo affair did not describe the church against science but rather one faction of the church against another. Second, the Scopes Monkey Trial occurred more as a publicity stunt to discredit Christianity. Keathley also mentions Christians who have been major contributors to science throughout history.

This preliminary overview leads Keathley to his definitions of how God works in the world that serve as a key framework for his argument. Since Aquinas’s time, Christians primarily believe that God works either through general providence, God’s sustaining of all parts of the world in a moment-by-moment basis, or through special providence, God’s working in the world through extraordinary ways (known as miracles). Keathley introduces supernatural events, in which God employs natural law and phenomena in extraordinary ways, the point at which general providence and special providence cross. The author identifies biblical events, which many consider miracles, and re-defines them as supernatural events.

Next Keathley discusses science related to the beginning of the universe and development of life, detailing that he believes many of these happenings remain supernatural. Although many Christians today worry that the Big Bang is contrary to biblical teaching, Keathley shows that the Big Bang provides evidence for the existence of God. The fine tuning of the universe, alongside the intricate craftsmanship of the existing earth, reveals God’s care in crafting a place perfect for human life.

Keathley’s dive into biology and evolution is perhaps the most challenging section. Some Christians feel that evolution undermines their faith, but Keathley describes evolution in a less threatening way, including the definition that it simply means biological change over time. He discusses young-earth creationism, the idea that God