Biology

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UNRAVELLING DNA: Applying Christian Values to a Genetic Age by Christopher Paul Wild. GBJ Books, 2025. 278 pages. Paperback; $17.99. ISBN: 9781068227509.

Unravelling DNA is a book on genetics for a nonspecialist audience that highlights key advances in genetic technology and seeks to equip its readers to assess the impact of these advances, and future ones, within a biblically based ethical framework. Many books and articles have called for Christian engagement on these matters, but none I have read have been as effective as this book in spelling out how to do this. The author, Chris Wild, is a former professor in the School of Medicine at the University of Leeds and a former senior scientist and director at the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in Lyon, France.

The book is divided into eleven chapters with a detailed table of contents at the beginning and an extensive bibliography for each chapter near the end of the book. An appendix provides further background on how DNA specifies the synthesis of proteins and is replicated and repaired. This is followed by a glossary of key terms and a list of abbreviations used in the book. It would have been helpful if an index had also been included.

Chapter 1 provides a background on the nature of DNA and a brief history of major advances in genetic technology and their relevance to society. Wild notes the challenges of identifying and processing the practical, moral, and ethical implications of these technological advances. He dismisses the idea of relying on scientists to self-regulate their activities, instead calling for the involvement of wider society in assessing the effect of genetic technology, including on those holding Christian beliefs. Then the author outlines a strategy he will use in the rest of the book to inform and equip his readers for this engagement.

Chapters 2 to 5 focus on the application of genetics to diverse aspects of daily life in four specific areas: genetic testing, embryonic cloning, genetic engineering, and genetic data storage. In general, I thought Wild did an excellent job of explaining these technologies in language that anyone could understand, and showing why they are important and relevant by giving specific examples. For example, in chapter 2, he points out that pre-implantation genetic testing (PGT) is not only used with *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) to avoid children with disease, but it also allows for the selection of a child with the necessary genetic characteristics to save the life of an older sibling. In chapter 5, he shows how the patenting of DNA (e.g., the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes associated with heritable breast cancer) by companies can restrict options for diagnosis and treatment. Wild also raises important ethical and moral questions in these chapters that are considered in more detail later. For example, in chapter 2: Should genetic profiles be considered in choosing a future partner? And in chapter 4: How far should we go in making changes to the genetic makeup of life on Earth?

Because most of the references cited in chapters 2 to 5 are from 2021 or before, the information feels a bit dated in some areas. More discussion could have been given to precision medicine in chapter 2, induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) and "synthetic embryos" in chapter 3, and gene editing in chapter 4, because of the great strides that have been made in these applications of genetics in the past five years.

Another shortcoming is that the titles for three of these four chapters either do not clearly represent their content or they could potentially confuse nonspecialist readers with the meaning of certain scientific terms. Chapter 3 has the ambiguous title, "Copying the Code: Cloning," which at first glance might appear to be about molecular cloning; using the adjective "Embryonic" in the title would be helpful in clarifying what form of cloning this chapter is about. The title for chapter 4, "Editing the Code: Genetic Engineering," could conceivably lead to confusion about how "gene editing" or "genome editing" are different from other applications of genetic engineering. Finally, using the words "Genetic Data" in place of "DNA" in the title for chapter 5, "Saving the Code: DNA Storage," would make it clear that this chapter is about DNA databases and not about innovations in storing physical specimens of DNA.

The most distinctive segment of *Unravelling DNA* is found in chapters 6–11, which focus on Christian engagement with advances in genetic technology. In chapter 6, Wild introduces the "relationship test," an approach for examining each area of genetic advance in light of the effects on our communal nature. This biblically based ethical framework focuses on four key relationships that the author believes are important and universal in human experience: self, family, society, and world (environment). Each is considered in chapters 7–10, respectively, in order to examine the areas of genetic technology considered in chapters 2–5. Helpful summaries of the ethical analyses by relationship are given in tables 1–4. Chapter 11 focuses on using this relationship test to scrutinize and question future advancements in genetic technology and to engage in constructive dialogue and decision-making with a broad range of people, including non-experts from across society and experts from outside the field of genetics.

Unfortunately, examining multiple areas of genetic technology within each chapter for a specific relationship made it harder to assimilate the line of ethical analysis for a given area of technology because it was spread across four chapters. Organizing chapters 7–10 by genetic technology, rather than by relationship, and considering the four key relationships in each chapter would have made it easier. Nevertheless, I found hanging Christian

values on the framework of relationships to be very helpful in thinking about the ethical implications of different genetic technologies. If I were still actively teaching a bioethics course, I would seriously consider using the relationship test described in this book as a model for how to apply Christian values to all bioethical conundrums.

In summary, I recommend this book for any Christian—whether a specialist in genetics or not—who wishes to engage seriously with the moral and ethical implications of advances in genetic technology, and I urge us all to participate in broad-based dialogue with others in providing input into public policy decisions regarding these advances.

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Chemistry

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CHEMISTRY, FAITH, AND STEWARDSHIP: Uniting Biblical Wisdom with Scientific Practice by Liza Abraham, foreword by Sy Garte, Resource Publications, 2025. 142 pages. Hardcover; $34.00. ISBN: 9798385258062. Paperback; $19.00. ISBN: 9798385258055. e-book; $19.00. ISBN: 9798385258079.

How can we inspire young scientists to be passionate about chemistry while also being good stewards of the beautiful planet God has entrusted to our care? Is it possible to remain attentive to creation amid the many pressing challenges that chemistry seeks to address? Can even the most ordinary objects in nature lead us to marvel at our Creator? If questions such as these capture your attention, then *Chemistry, Faith, and Stewardship* will be a welcome, entry-level read—one that deepens appreciation for chemistry while inviting the reader into a wonder-filled experience of God.

The author has the technical background to speak thoughtfully from a chemical perspective, having earned a PhD in physical organic chemistry and previously holding faculty positions at notable universities. This book, however, is not meant to be a highly technical treatment of chemistry. Instead, Abraham weaves together basic principles of chemistry and green chemistry, articulating them through the lens of Christian faith. Each chapter centers on a particular theme and includes a hands-on activity designed to connect scientific concepts with faith, along with reflection questions. While most chapters maintain a clear scientific focus, a few are primarily theological, with little direct engagement with chemistry—particularly those addressing Sabbath, delighting in God's Word, and living a life anchored in the Bible. Regardless of emphasis, Abraham consistently grounds her claims in Scripture, supplying numerous biblical references that keep the focus on Christian faith.

Although this book is not intended for graduate-level chemistry, it could readily find a place in high school education (including private and homeschool settings) as well as in Christian higher education. Each scientific concept explored in the book is paired with a biblical parallel. For example, in chapter 2, Abraham surveys several prominent trees in the Bible—the shoot from Jesse's stump, the cross, the healing tree at Marah, and the vine and branches—while drawing attention to the biblical call for Christians to be rooted, as trees are rooted. She follows a similar pattern in chapters on water, precious stones, light, and design in chemistry. Throughout, the writing carries a poetic tone that invites worship.

A strong and recurring theme of the book is stewardship, a topic that is often underemphasized in scientific education. Early in the book, Abraham writes, "We are not the masters of the earth, nor are we called to idolize, exploit, or dismiss it. Instead, we are stewards, entrusted by God with the land, its creatures, and its resources—not as owners, but as caretakers" (p. 2). This statement sets the tone for the remainder of the book, as she explores how science points to God, how Scripture speaks to these truths, and how faithful stewardship becomes an act of worship. The result is an invitation to explore the world meaningfully while keeping God at the center of scientific inquiry.

One distinctive feature of the book is its inclusion of activities designed to connect the scientific topic under discussion with biblical principles, often reinforcing the theme of stewardship: for example, creating bioplastics from milk, making natural mosquito repellent using essential oils, dyeing fabrics with water-soluble dyes, examining stones, performing flame tests on various salts, making soap, observing timed color changes in solutions, and evaluating the components of common household chemical products. Some chapters include less tactile but equally effective practices, such as researching the faith of notable scientists, creating a periodic table of God's attributes, or engaging in guided reflection through Psalm 119. These are well suited to homeschool and private school environments, where students are encouraged not only to learn scientific concepts but also to integrate them with faith.

Following each activity, Abraham provides reflection questions intended to prompt deeper engagement with the chapter's themes. For example, in the chapter on light and matter (chap. 5), she asks, "How does the call to 'walk as children of light' (Eph. 5:8) challenge or encourage you in your daily life? In what ways can you reflect God's light to others?" (p. 54). In chapter 9, on chemistry, she asks how the structure and order of the periodic table might reflect both scientific principles and divine intentionality. These questions are not designed to assess scientific mastery but rather to encourage contemplation of how scientific insights intersect with Christian faith.

The book also includes several chapters with minimal scientific content, focusing instead on spiritual formation and encouragement. In chapter 6, for instance, Abraham reflects on rhythms of rest by encouraging meditation, attentiveness to creation as sacred space, and a movement from wonder toward love. Additional themes include examples of faithful biblical figures, reminders that the Bible is not meant merely for intellectual consumption, and encouragement to recognize God's fingerprints in creation. These chapters serve as an important counterbalance to the more science-focused sections, reminding readers that science itself is not worthy of worship.

Overall, *Chemistry, Faith, and Stewardship* is a thoughtful and accessible resource for readers seeking an integrated approach to science, worship, and care for creation. Although neither the scientific nor the biblical content are technically advanced, the book's accessibility, poetic tone, and intentional integration of science and faith make it suitable for a wide audience. When combined with the end-of-chapter activities and reflection questions, it offers a meaningful way to delight in God through the study of the created world, and may also inspire a renewed sense of responsibility for caring for the planet God has given us.

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Christianity and Culture

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AGAINST THE MACHINE: On the Unmaking of Humanity by Paul Kingsnorth. Penguin Random House, 2025. 348 pages. Hardcover; $32.00. ISBN: 9780593850633.

Paul Kingsnorth is an English Christian technology and cultural critic standing in the line of Jacques Ellul and Wendell Berry. Like Berry, Kingsnorth's pursuit of grounded creaturely living led him to relocate with his family to a remote agrarian region, Western Ireland in his case, in about 2020. Around the same time, a spiritual pilgrimage prompted a turn from environmental activism and Wicca to the Orthodox Church. *Against the Machine* is in many ways a synthesis and systematization of Kingsnorth's intellectual and faith journey. Although much of the book's material is a reworking of his Substack posts over the last decade, the arc of the book bears witness to his new rooting in biblically informed traditions.

The essays in the middle section of the book dig into the social and economic history of the West's last millennium, building off the work of thinkers such as Ellul, Simone Weil, Lewis Mumford, Mary Midgley, Philip Sherrard, Stephen Toulmin, Ivan Illich, and Carl Trueman. Kingsnorth argues that until the modern era, the roots of human flourishing, across human cultures, were always understood to rest upon the "4Ps": Past, People, Place, and Prayer. In Europe, for over a thousand years, the biblical narrative provided a firm foundation upon which to build "layer upon layer of meaning, tradition, innovation, and creation, however imperfectly" (p. 5). Yet the trajectory of Western Christendom, since the Middle Ages, has been a turning away from the 4Ps in the ever-accelerating pursuit of a different vision for human flourishing, captured in our modern moment by the "4Ss": Science, Self, Sex, and Screens. The result today is that "We—at least if we are among the lucky ones—have every gadget and recipe and website and storefront and exotic holiday in the world available to us, but we are lacking two things that we seem to need, but grasp at nonetheless: meaning and roots" (p. 13).

The Machine, for Kingsnorth, is the "unprecedented [worldwide] technological network of power and control" that has driven, and continues to drive, this societal transformation (p. 114). Drawing from Lewis Mumford, "The Machine manifests today as an intersection of money power, state power, and increasingly coercive and manipulative technologies, which constitute an ongoing war against roots and against limits" (p. 38). Indeed, "'growth' is the overriding purpose of the 'global economy' which the Machine has built; everything else is of secondary concern" (p. 37). Kingsnorth observes that the "growth has no specific aim and no end in sight," and even if it creates problems, these can be solved by more growth (p. 37). Kingsnorth quotes wilderness writer Edward Abbey that "growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell" (p. 37). The most recent, and arguably most thoroughgoing, examples of this commitment to exponential acceleration can be seen in the transhumanist movement and the global rush to develop AI. Tech entrepreneur Peter Thiel is not mentioned in the book, but one need only listen to him for a few minutes (for example, his June 26, 2025, interview on Ross Douthat's *Interesting Times* podcast) to hear the values and worldview of the Machine, as Kingsnorth has described them.

Kingsnorth notes the hegemonic narrative power of the Machine:

> Across the spectrum from conservatives to liberals, Marxists to fascists, believers to atheists, very little serious criticism of the entwined myths of progress, growth and materialism will ever be heard in the public sphere. (p. 40)

He quotes Mumford: the Machine "feels 'absolutely irresistible … and ultimately beneficent.' Opposition to it is presented as naïve idealism at best, and a dangerous denial of its benefits to the needy at worst" (p. 42). Thus, Kingsnorth argues that "the Machine is not simply a vast, soulless mechanism for accruing material wealth. It is, in some deadly fashion, a sacral object in itself. It is its own enchantment" (p. 39).

Completing the arc of the book, in the last few chapters Kingsnorth invites us to consider the possibility that "principalities and powers," i.e., the demonic, underlie the Machine. Is this diagnosis of our present moment

too extreme? Certainly it will be for those whose working worldview is essentially materialist. But Kingsnorth argues that if we are to actively resist the Machine, or even just to temper the dehumanizing effect it is having on our lives, an accurate diagnosis is essential. And just as the problem is spiritual, so the solutions must be spiritual as well. I appreciated this perspective a lot—in so many evangelical spaces, we who are scientifically or business trained can easily tend to discount the formative power of cool new technologies. When formation, or "discipleship," is presented as mainly about learning new information and new skills, rather than about properly ordering our loves, we may pay little attention to the ways we adapt ourselves to these new tech tools. We may also neglect larger questions of stewardship: how might my use of this tool affect the communities I am a part of, the neighbors I am called to serve and love? Indeed, a temptation to avoid agency by not asking these larger questions, perhaps even feeling that it is pointless to ask them because one is powerless, may be one of the most dehumanizing forces of these powerful tools.

Kingsnorth opens *Against the Machine* with the Wendell Berry quote, "It is easy for me to imagine that the next great division of the world will be between people who wish to live as creatures and people who wish to live as machines" (p. vii). His book is a call for those of us with ears to hear, to choose the former—to start a resistance movement. And yet, Kingsnorth's vision for what effective resistance might look like seems underdeveloped, and his personal parochial path for resistance seems impractical for most people, and highly resistant to scaling in our urban world. Without a doubt, this is the greatest weakness of a book filled with deep insights and powerful turns of phrase.

Even so, as Kingsnorth continues to sink his roots into the Orthodox tradition, I would not be surprised to see suggestions for deeper and richer avenues of resistance emerging as fruit in future years. But, in any case, the task of stewarding embodied human flourishing, which he likens to spiritual warfare, should not be divorced from the vocation of the global catholic church. All of us who confess Jesus as Lord have a calling and therefore sacred duty to join in pondering these types of questions: How does our shared legacy of Nicene theology tangibly speak to our dehumanizing modern moment? How might, for instance, Reformed teaching on human vocation and creation develop these doctrines? And ultimately, in the most organic incarnation of Kingsnorth's vision: What might the embodied, parochial "thick" communities of Christ's global church have to offer our increasingly rootless world?

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WORKING FOR BETTER: A New Approach to Faith at Work by Elaine Howard Ecklund and Denise Daniels. IVP Academic, 2025. 218 pages. Paperback; $25.99. ISBN: 9781514011263.

Questions about calling, the integration of faith in the workplace, and vocational stewardship persist among Christians. *Working for Better* generously offers a contribution to the ongoing faith-and-work conversation by shifting typical questions such as "What is my role as a Christian in a secular job?" (p. 2) to a more complex set of questions and embodied approaches.

The authors, Elaine Howard Ecklund (Herbert S. Autrey Chair in Social Sciences, professor of sociology and director of the Boniuk Institute at Rice University) and Denise Daniels (Hudson T. Harrison Professor of Entrepreneurship at Wheaton College) offer rich data from two mixed-method studies, the "Faith at Work Study" and "Faith at Work Supplement Study," conducted over a five-year period and funded by the Lilly Endowment. Ecklund and Daniels's research includes synthesizing findings from focus groups in three major US cities (Houston, New York, and Seattle), a survey of over 15,000 workers, and in-depth follow-up interviews with 287 people. A more in-depth discussion of their research, aimed at a secular audience, is available in their book, *Religion in a Changing Workplace* (Oxford University Press, 2024), authored along with Christopher P. Scheitle.

The authors' angle, deemed the "radical-embrace perspective," argues that "the exclusive claims of Christianity actually *demand* an embrace of others in the workplace, regardless of their faith commitment, beliefs, or worldviews," and includes the "call on Christians to bring their faith to the workplace" (p. 8). This alters the conversation

> from an emphasis on talking about our [i.e., Christian] beliefs and defending our own rights to empathizing with those who are religiously different, with a particular emphasis on the *imago Dei*—the idea that every person we encounter is worthy of dignity and respect because every person is made in the image of God. (p. 8)

In addition to the *imago Dei* as a foundation, Ecklund and Daniels encourage an intrinsic and extrinsic understanding of the value of work. An intrinsic understanding includes viewing it as "furthering the work of creation" (pp. 46–47), "mitigating the effects of the fall" (p. 48), and "transforming toil" (pp. 49–50), while an "extrinsic value of work" involves "recognizing others as image bearers" (pp. 52–54) and the ways "toil shapes our soul" (pp. 54–55). These key ideas, in combination with their extensive research and practical considerations, move the faith-and-work conversation toward a more expansive understanding.

Pairing chapters together, the authors discuss in each coupling a place of tension, such as in chapter 2, the limits of deeming all work outside of the church as "Secular

Work." In the complementary chapter, "Sacred Work," they provide imagination for a renewed approach, in this case, a framework for understanding work as calling (chap. 3). This framework, demonstrated as a foursquare matrix, visibly denotes the extensive ways workers view calling: the x-axis delineates the meaning of work as *intrinsic* versus *extrinsic* to the work itself, while the y-axis distinguishes the locale of those the work serves as *beyond the workplace* or *within the workplace* (see fig. 3.1, p. 34, emphasis added). The authors offer each quadrant in the matrix as one way to understand calling. For example, if workers see labor as *intrinsically* meaningful *beyond* the workplace, they might articulate calling as serving the common good (e.g., an engineer providing safe water for a city). But if they see work as holding *extrinsic* meaning *within* the workplace, they would view calling primarily as serving others within the particular work context (e.g., a maintenance manager who hires formerly incarcerated individuals). Given that one's work might fit within multiple quadrants, this matrix demonstrates a dynamic understanding of calling as articulated by participants and also lays the groundwork for considering the findings highlighted in the remainder of the chapter pairings.

These chapter pairings include movements from a common perspective of faith-and-work to a renewed approach including the movement from "Protecting Ourselves" to "Protecting Others" (chaps. 4 and 5); from "Focusing [only] on Individual Responsibility" to "Focusing on Systems Thinking" (chaps. 6 and 7); from "Restricted Roles for Women" to "Men and Women Flourishing Together" (chaps. 8 and 9); and from "Talking About Christian Faith" to "Living Principled Pluralism" (chaps. 10 and 11). The arc and flow of the book calls Christians out of a place of status-quo engagement between work and faith, and into a radical-embrace perspective, inviting Christians to consider the *imago Dei* and a hospitable posture toward colleagues, clients, supervisors, or employees regardless of their religious background, gender, race, or ethnicity. This reframes the conversation from how I might protect my rights as a Christian in the workplace to how I might protect my non-Christian colleague, or how I might work toward more just and equitable systems that cultivate flourishing for each person within the system.

In most chapters, the findings are discussed through charts, graphs, and in-depth interviews. Such data-rich evidence is welcomed since it gives voice to the variety of participants interviewed in their study—engineers, grocery store clerks, asset managers, librarians, credit union CFOs, corrections officers, nurses, paramedics, physicians, lawyers, teachers, social services workers, and more—while also encouraging the reader, regardless of his or her profession, to consider questions of calling and faith engagement in the workplace. The reflection questions and suggestions for church pastors and leaders underline the authors' desire that each chapter serve as a catalyst for deeper consideration, whether personally or from the pulpit.

For Christians who have considered the conversation about faith and work from an individual perspective rather than from a systems-thinking perspective, chapter 7 is a needed corrective. The research offered in chapter 8 regarding ways women have encountered restrictions in their work provides important insight and a voice for women who have experienced marginalization. However, at times the discussion of practical implications based on the research findings is limited in scope. For example, the chapter on "Protecting Others" could be improved by adding a discussion on the ways nonreligious workers or those from other religious backgrounds have experienced welcome or hospitality from Christian coworkers.

Who should consider reading *Working for Better*? This book is for people who carry questions about faith in the workplace and want to think deeply about how to live as faithful Christians in their work environment. But it is also for people who want to empathize with the experiences of nonreligious coworkers or colleagues from other faith backgrounds, and consider how others might experience Christians in the workplace. This book is for pastors or other leaders who want to shepherd their congregations to connect faith and work in meaningful ways. It is also for college students, graduate students, or adults in the early career stage and for those who mentor them, providing a catalyst for deeper reflection and conversation. As the culminating stand-alone chapter, entitled "Rest," indicates, it is also for those who long to incorporate rhythms of Sabbath rest into their workdays. The Epilogue summarizes the authors' intent well: "We want to see our scholarship and Christian thinking used to bring true changes to how Christians live out their faith at work" (p. 211). May it be so.

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History of Science

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RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND SCIENCE: A Reference Handbook by Glenn H. Utter. Bloomsbury, 2025. 264 pages. Hardcover; $75.00. ISBN: 9781440881060.

Author and editor Glenn Utter offers a penetrating examination of the contours of the historical relationship between science and religion in the United States, including how that relationship continues to play out in the present day. As professor and chair of the Department of Political Science at Lamar University, he demonstrates his aptitude for political and legal studies throughout the book, looking at religious groups and individuals who

attempt to influence science in contemporary society. He remains critical, but not antagonistic, of the influence of religious individuals and groups on science and presents religion in America in all its diversity and theological variety (briefly including non-Christian religions).

Utter divides the book into seven chapters: "Background and History"; "Problems, Controversies, and Solutions"; "Perspectives"; "Profiles"; "Documents"; "Resources"; and "Chronology." The first two chapters briefly discuss some of the differing perspectives on the relationship between science and religion and the major historical confrontations that continue to unfold in the USA. This relationship is complex and not always appropriately understood or approached by either members of the scientific community or those in religious communities. In some instances, these two communities possess strikingly similar views on certain questions while disagreeing sharply on other perspectives.

Chapter three, entitled "Perspectives," presents five essays by political science and sociology scholars addressing topics such as flat-earthers, religious attitudes toward the COVID-19 vaccine, and belief in extra-terrestrial life. Taken together, these show patterns linking fundamentalist religious beliefs to anti-science views. The reader may choose to skim through chapters four through seven, due to their glossary-like formats. However, these chapters hold a wealth of information about the varied approaches to the relationship between science and religion in America. The latter chapters address everything from concepts such as concordism and non-overlapping magisterium (NOMA), to movements such as the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) and intelligent design (ID). Utter even briefly discusses the American Scientific Association (ASA) and *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith (PSCF)* in chapters four and six.

Repeatedly, Utter uses legal debates to discuss how religion influences science, and vice versa, in the American court system. Through legal cases presented in chapter five, he makes it apparent that fundamentalist Christianity has posed (and continues to pose) a threat to the advancement of scientific research. The fact that the court system serves as an arbiter between religion and science need not jeopardize Christian or religious communities since science operates based on methodological naturalism. Christian groups who have tried to use the court system to "foist [their] religious beliefs on others" (p. 188) often remain more concerned with protecting what they perceive to be a Christian culture than with allowing science to operate as intended.

PSCF readers may find that Utter's use of legal rulings looks amicably at the kind of approach to science and religion encouraged by ASA. For example, Utter quotes in chapter five ("Documents") from the decision of Judge John E. Jones, in the 2005 *Tammy Kitzmiller et al. v. Dover Area School District et al.* trial that "[r]epeatedly … Plaintiffs' scientific experts testified that the theory of evolution represents good science, is overwhelmingly accepted by the scientific community, and that it in no way conflicts with, nor does it deny, the existence of a divine creator" (p. 198). For the religious believer, this legal presentation of science and religious belief proves sobering and even encouraging. Religion, particularly orthodox religion, still retains a significant role to play in helping individuals and communities find ultimate meaning, while science helps people understand the true nature of observable reality.

Religious Belief and Science offers practical resources for Christians seeking to incorporate science-religion dialogue into the lives of their congregations. Chapters four ("Profiles") and six ("Resources") cover individuals and materials that can inspire and serve as discipleship tools. For example, Utter includes Greg Cootsona, who helped develop the Science for the Church web resource and the Science and Technology for Emerging Adult Ministries (STEAM) initiative. Other examples include theologian Ted Peters, who has published extensively on science and religion, and Naomi Oreskes, author of *Why Trust Science?*

The book could expand on the relationship between higher levels of education, religious beliefs, and correlating views toward science amongst the American public. For instance, one of the essays in chapter three addresses "Unitarian-Universalists and Science." Jeffrey S. Victor writes, "The disproportionate level of college-educated membership among Unitarians may account for their positive attitude toward science. Unitarians have the highest percentage (67 percent) of any American religious group (except Hindus) who have a college or graduate school education (Pew, 2016)" (p. 103). Glenn Branch, in his chapter titled "The Evolution of Understanding the American Public's Understanding of Evolution," states, "one analysis found that among those who believe that the Bible is the word of God, 31 percent of those with less than a high school education, but only 10 percent of those with a graduate degree, accepted human evolution" (p. 116).

These two quotes suggest that Utter and the contributors in chapter three see fundamentalist religious beliefs as an obstruction to accepting evolution and other findings of scientific research (e.g., climate change). Although Victor's assessment may seem contradictory to Branch's statement that "10 percent of those with a graduate degree accepted human evolution," they are both describing the idea that more liberal religious beliefs tend toward better acceptance of science. As Victor points out, 85% of Unitarians do not believe that the Bible is the word of God (p. 104). If Unitarians have a positive attitude toward science and higher levels of education, and those who believe the Bible is the word of God and have graduate degrees largely reject evolution, does this mean belief in the Bible as the word of God obstructs acceptance of science? Utter could expand a bit more, then, on whether

one simply must take on liberal religious beliefs to be more open to science.

Ultimately, Christian scientists, laypeople, ministers, atheists, agnostics, and practitioners of non-Christian religions gain a better understanding of the landscape of science and religion in American society by reading *Religious Belief and Science*. It may prove useful for classroom settings, particularly undergraduate or graduate level courses in philosophy, political science, American history, theology, and religious studies.

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Physics

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DECODING THE COSMOS: God, Physics, and the Search for Deeper Explanation by Emily Qureshi-Hurst. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2025. 188 pages. Hardcover; $42.00. ISBN: 9781666785661.

Reminiscent of *Can a Darwinian be a Christian?* by Michael Ruse (Cambridge University Press, 2001), Emily Qureshi-Hurst, philosopher of religion and science at the University of Cambridge and self-declared atheist, neither affirms that science and faith are compatible nor that they are incompatible. *Decoding the Cosmos* is a summary of her reflections on how major Christian doctrines can be addressed by contemporary physics, drawing upon her engagement with respected theologians and scientists. She regrets the unfortunate hostility that has grown out of the harsh rhetoric from New Atheists such as Richard Dawkins. Having studied under Alister McGrath, she respects how scientists can have an intellectually sound sense that science is compatible with Christian faith. However, it seems odd that an atheist would have so much interest in this topic, especially since her audience is primarily Christian. Although I, as an evangelical Christian, agree with many of her assertions, I have significant objections on a few important ones.

The structure of the book is based on concepts central to Christianity: creation, design, providence, incarnation, and salvation. Qureshi-Hurst limits her scientific discussion to developments in modern physics that have implications for how we view these doctrines. Her introduction lays a foundation for an orthodox Christian faith position. However, she warns readers that today's concept of belief is not necessarily one that has always been held and that, to examine the intersection of physics and Christianity, we must rely on contemporary Western theology. This leads her to specify four catchy categories of the science-faith relationship: conflict, contrast, complementary, and complexity, the latter one arising from unclear definitions of each. She suggests that conflicts are typically between personalities, not necessarily between science and faith.

On the doctrine of creation, Qureshi-Hurst makes the strongest case for compatibility with modern physics. God is described as a necessary being who created a contingent universe. She focuses on two interpretive communities: young earth creationism (YEC) and old earth creationism (OEC). Big bang cosmology firmly establishes a cosmos that is about 13.8 billion years old. This conflicts with YEC, which relies on a literal reading of Scripture, concluding that the cosmos is only a few thousand years old. But the author points out that faith does not have to be this way. She groups all Christians who allow for some symbolic reading of the creation account in the OEC camp and then makes a case for compatibility between OEC and modern physics. I was disappointed that she does not differentiate concordist and non-concordist approaches to interpreting Genesis 1; yet overall, she stresses that the doctrine of creation can agree beautifully with prevailing scientific understandings that imply a moment of creation.

On the doctrine of design, Qureshi-Hurst takes on the teleological claim that nature exhibits intelligible design that points to a Creator. She argues that the debate has shifted away from the kind of design challenged by Darwin's theory of evolution via natural selection to a consideration of cosmic fine tuning. Following the weak anthropic principle (the universe must exhibit life-friendly tuning, or we wouldn't be here to observe it), Qureshi-Hurst suggests that the multiverse hypothesis is a compelling explanation for design. She offers an analogy, proposing two explanations for garden vegetables disappearing: a ghost coming at night to spirit them away or squirrels coming to eat them. The latter is more plausible, since we have observed squirrels. Thus, since we are familiar with universes, namely our own, the multiverse explanation is more plausible. This is a flawed analogy, in my opinion. Familiarity with squirrels is not analogous to familiarity with universes, since we are familiar with only one of the latter. I find the argument that simplicity favors a Creator over a multitude of unobserved universes more compelling, although I am aware of several Christian physicists who favor both a multiverse and a Creator.

With the doctrine of providence, Qureshi-Hurst shows more nuance. A personal God would not only create and sustain the universe but would also be active in the lives of humans. Historically, the scientific revolution raised questions about miracles and divine violation of natural law. Even John Polkinghorne, though fully accepting miracles, agreed that God does not act against himself.[1] He and fellow theologian and physicist Robert Russell proposed differing ideas to allow for miracles in a universe governed by God-ordained natural laws. Russell argues for non-interventionist objective divine action, which relies on the probabilistic interpretation of quantum mechanics, in which uncertainty is built into the microscopic realm,[2] whereas Polkinghorne appeals to chaos theory as a way around this dilemma. Qureshi-Hurst finds both approaches problematic; she claims that

Russell bases his theology on a particular scientific model that may prove incorrect, a risky thing to do. However, this is not actually risky because most scientists accept a probabilistic view of quantum mechanics. Further, most theologians do not view miracles as divine violation of natural law, but more like a transcendence of natural law not grasped by our finite minds. Indeed, many questions arise from how God interacts with this world, including the problem of evil and suffering. Qureshi-Hurst rightly argues that any satisfactory view of providence should address such questions.

The fourth and fifth doctrines, incarnation and salvation, involve paradoxes such as how Jesus Christ could be both fully God and fully human, and whether God is temporal or atemporal, subject to time or outside it. Qureshi-Hurst argues that relativity theory favors the "block universe," a four-dimensional space-time in which past, present, and future co-exist in spacetime, and that we only perceive time passing. This implies that salvation does not eliminate past sin, forcing us to accept only a subjective kind of salvation (something I disagree with). The author notes that many theologians continue to endorse the timeless view of God, which is hard to reconcile with a God who acts in time. She ends with a rather unfavorable impression of the compatibility of Christian doctrine with modern physics.

It is difficult to imagine clear answers to questions Qureshi-Hurst raises, but she does not seriously challenge Christian faith, which rests on more than scientific explanations. Although she is not personally persuaded that modern physics supports Christian faith, it is noteworthy that much of her discussion reveals Christian doctrine to be compatible with modern physics: creation and the big bang, design and the elegance and fine-tuning of the universe, and providence and the indeterminism of quantum theory. However, I suspect that her atheist vantage point sours her perspective on the tensions between faith and science. I would recommend the book only for those wanting to explore a skeptical view of the relationship between Christian doctrine and modern physics.

Notes

[1]John Polkinghorne, *Quarks, Chaos & Christianity: Questions to Science and Religion* (Crossword Publishing, 2005).

[2]Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, C. J. Isham, eds., *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Vatican Observatory and CTNS, 1993).

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Science and Faith

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SOME NEW WORLD: Myths of Supernatural Belief in a Secular Age by Peter Harrison. Cambridge University Press, 2024. 482 pages. Paperback; $39.99. ISBN: 9781009477246.

My students are routinely surprised when I explain that biblical authors and their audiences had no natural-supernatural distinction as we understand those terms. Their reaction demonstrates how we tend to read our modern conceptions back into the Old and New Testament worlds. Well-known scholar of science and religion Peter Harrison, in his latest work, thinks that this is a distinctly modern way of carving up the world. He documents his claim by detailing several elements that contribute to the formation of the modern natural-supernatural distinction.

Beginning with David Hume's (1711–1776) arguments against miracles, Harrison argues for the "general thesis that the true foundations of modern naturalism lie not in philosophy or the logic of the natural sciences, but in tacit assumptions about historical progress and an accompanying hierarchy of cultures" (p. 14). Put another way, during the Enlightenment there was a growing prejudice against the veracity of earlier reports of miracles, drawing explicitly on racial and ethnic hierarchy to minimize, if not dismiss, such testimonies. For example, as Harrison notes, Enlightenment texts include phrases such as "ignorant and barbarous nations," "ignorant and barbarous ancestors," and "barbarous Arabians" (p. 16). Hume was no exception to this framing: "Unhappily, in his essay 'Of National Characters' Hume would … remark, albeit in a footnote, on the intellectual inferiority of non-white peoples. Only among civilised white nations, Hume remarked, do we encounter excellence in action and speculation" (pp. 16–17).

Such prejudices remain with us, as Harrison documents. Contemporary arguments supporting naturalism trade on such dubious, if hidden, assumptions. Of course, these arguments do not make explicit reference to racial/ethnic hierarchies and denigration. Instead, these distasteful assumptions sneak in through the back door under the guise of "progress" (chap. 6). And once adopted, such assumptions sometimes become explicit. I concur with Harrison, evidenced in an example in Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (Penguin, 2006), in which he refers to atheists as "brights" in contrast to religious believers who, by implication, are not as intelligent.

A second feature of modern naturalism is the assumption that there are universal concepts and distinctions, such as "natural" and "supernatural," or beliefs as rational assent to propositions, or religions as systems of beliefs. Harrison gives learned discussions of why these modern

Western ways of conceiving rationality and religion are far from universal or even the best way to understand spiritual and material realities in all their richness (chaps. 2, 3, and 5).

If our taken-for-granted conceptual apparatus for analyzing religious experience and practices turns out to be limited in applicability to religious cultures and their expressions, then naturalist arguments against God, miracles, and other spiritual realities are similarly limited in what they can possibly demonstrate. The dismissal of such spiritual realities on the part of naturalism looks more like uncritically assuming "the superiority of our conceptions of reality" than thoughtful, critical assessment and argument (p. 31).

A third feature of modern naturalism, widely shared within Christian circles, is the distinction between belief as intellectual assent to a proposition based on evidence (such as how Christianity is often described as a "system of beliefs") versus trust or allegiance. Harrison has an extensive discussion of how faith is not treated as cognitive or intellectual assent but as trust in what has been proclaimed about God in Christ and allegiance to God for the first few centuries of the church's existence.

In the original context, Christians trusted and lived into the *religare*—meaning to bind or re-tie—that united them with God, with each other, and with God's good. It is later that *religare* gets transmuted into religion as a set of beliefs or doctrinal claims to which one must adhere (chaps. 2 and 3). In their early context, the creeds "are not so much assertions of some truth about the world as the performance of actions that bring into being a new state of affairs" (p. 46). The decrees bring into being a worshiping community as Christians proclaim their trust in the being and promises of the God of the Scriptures.

In continuity with the ancient Hebrews, Christians for the first few centuries of the church focused more on confidence in the biblical proclamation about God in Christ and that God would fulfill these promises. It was only in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries that faith was divorced from belief and knowledge (chaps. 2–4). In modernity, belief and knowledge were transposed into an epistemological framework associated with justified true beliefs and disembodied ways of knowing. Modern naturalism makes much hay using this framework to argue there is no, or only inadequate, evidence for belief in God (i.e., belief in the proposition that God exists).

Contrasting with the modern natural-supernatural distinction, the term "supernatural" first arose in Aquinas's discussion of how humans are naturally disposed toward "faith"—which he identifies as "trust"—versus what is a gift from God (p. 64). The distinction takes a decidedly modern turn in the 1800s into the two-tiered separated realms modernity assumes. This transition is fascinating and has far-ranging consequences for how religious faith comes to be viewed in modern times (chaps. 5–7). Now Western societies struggle to conceive of the natural and supernatural as noncompeting causes or modes of activity. In premodern understanding, there is no firm distinction as it was considered "natural" that God works through the very properties and processes of creation to accomplish divine purposes without violating creation's order.

Many science-faith conundrums could be alleviated by retrieving this older understanding. There is often a false forced choice between either God working apart from the properties and processes of creation, or nature's processes proceeding apart from any divine influence whatsoever. However, the perspective of Psalm 104 offers an alternative: God working through creation's functional integrity to minister to creation. For instance, "You let loose the springs in freshets/ among the mountains they go/ They water all beasts of the field,/ the wild asses slake their thirst (Ps. 104:10–11, Robert Alter, trans.).

The psalmist describes a pattern of creation's operations, such as watering the mountains and beasts, while maintaining that it is God who does the watering and ministering. This pattern recalls that found in Genesis 1 (e.g., vv. 24–25). It is God and creation at work—God working through creation. No false forced choice between the supernatural and the natural. This is the perspective I strive to impart to my students, and *Some New World* gives me encouragement to continue. Although Harrison's book is dense (there are footnotes on every page) and may try the reader's patience at times, the richness of his account and analysis will reward the reader's efforts.

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DOES SCIENCE MAKE GOD IRRELEVANT? by Hans Madueme. Crossway, 2025. 84 pages. Paperback; $8.99. ISBN: 9781433597992.

Hans Madueme, professor of theology at Covenant College, seeks to dismantle the perceived conflict between science and Christian faith for a conservative evangelical audience committed to the authority of Scripture. While he succeeds in challenging the popular "warfare" narrative and affirming the compatibility of science and faith, his theological framework ultimately constrains a fuller integration by subordinating scientific inquiry to a rigid doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

The author's goal in writing the book is for young Christians to see that science and evangelical faith can be taken seriously, and that they are intimate friends. He organizes the book around four areas: (1) debunking the

war between science and faith, (2) Christian assumptions make science possible, (3) science and faith are close allies, and (4) to God alone be the Glory.

Madueme argues that many evangelical Christians have grown up believing that faith and science are inherently opposed. He revisits historical examples such as Galileo and the Scopes Monkey Trial, suggesting how history has been misinterpreted as evidence of conflict, and points to the influential work of John Draper and Andrew White as reinforcing the myth of conflict between science and theology. He further claims that this "warfare" narrative is perpetuated by modern critics of religions such as Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Richard Dawkins, who portray science as the superior path to truth while dismissing Christianity. Regardless of the historical accuracy of these interpretations, Madueme employs these narratives to dismantle the perceived conflict between science and faith since the persistence of this perceived conflict within Christian communities underscores the need for a more constructive and integrative approach.

In the section on how Christian assumptions made science possible, Madueme emphasizes the empirical nature of science, focusing on the hard sciences (physics, chemistry, and biology). At the same time, he argues that scientific inquiry is never purely empirical, since it rests on theological and philosophical assumptions. Also, Madueme believes that Christians assume that the world is knowable, rational, and dependable: assumptions that are basic to science. Even the Fall is related to science in providing a basis for empirical study rather than philosophically knowing the world.

Madueme then presents a thoughtful and accessible defense of the compatibility between science and Christian faith, particularly for conservative evangelical readers who often encounter the assumption that scientific inquiry undermines belief in God. One of the book's strongest contributions is its insistence that Christianity historically provided the intellectual foundations necessary for the rise of modern science. Drawing on figures such as Irenaeus, Madueme argues that belief in an ordered, rational, and fundamentally good creation encouraged scientific exploration by affirming that the natural world could be studied coherently and meaningfully. In this framework, science is not independent of theology, but rather, it has emerged from theological convictions about creation and divine order, to God's glory. This historical argument effectively challenges the narrative that religion and science exist in perpetual conflict and offers readers a constructive vision in which scientific investigation can deepen appreciation for God's creation rather than threaten it.

The book also succeeds in critiquing scientism, the assumption that science alone can answer all meaningful questions about reality. Madueme repeatedly emphasizes the limits of scientific inquiry, reminding readers that science, like all human endeavors, is shaped by finitude and fallenness. His discussion of methodological naturalism further clarifies how science operates within the study of the natural world without making ultimate claims about God's existence. In doing so, he provides a helpful framework for readers seeking to understand how theological conviction and scientific practice can coexist without collapsing one discipline into the other. The book's final section is especially effective in addressing the common cultural narrative that scientific progress inevitably renders faith obsolete. Madueme persuasively argues that scientific discovery does not make God irrelevant but instead points toward deeper questions of meaning, purpose, and human existence that science alone cannot answer.

At the same time, the book's theological framework occasionally narrows the range of dialogue surrounding science and faith. Because Madueme consistently places scientific claims under the authority of a strict doctrine of biblical inerrancy, his approach can at times position science in a subordinate role rather than as a fully integrated partner in theological reflection. Readers from broader evangelical traditions, such as the Wesleyan tradition, may find this approach limiting; particularly those who affirm that Scripture is authoritative in matters of salvation while allowing greater flexibility regarding scientific questions. These perspectives often view reason, experience, tradition, and Scripture as cooperative sources for discerning truth, and therefore approach scientific discovery as a meaningful contributor to theological understanding.

This tension becomes most apparent in Madueme's treatment of evolution and cosmology. In rejecting macroevolutionary explanations of human origins, he gives limited attention to Christian scholars and scientists who reconcile evolutionary theory with belief in divine creation. Likewise, his critique of multiverse theories largely dismisses interpretations offered by Christian philosophers and physicists who view such theories as potentially compatible with belief in a Creator. Greater engagement with these perspectives would have strengthened the book's broader argument for integration.

Nevertheless, Madueme's work provides an important contribution to contemporary evangelical discussions on science and faith, particularly in local conservative congregations. The book succeeds in reassuring readers that Christianity and scientific inquiry need not stand in opposition, while at the same time encouraging thoughtful engagement with the modern scientific world. Although its theological scope remains somewhat limited, its central argument, that science and faith can function as close allies, offers a valuable corrective to the polarized assumptions that often shape these conversations.

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Technology

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AI SHEPHERDS AND ELECTRIC SHEEP: Leading and Teaching in the Age of Artificial Intelligence by Sean O'Callaghan and Paul A. Hoffman. Baker Academic, 2025. 208 pages. Paperback; $24.99. ISBN: 9781540968012.

What should educators and ministry leaders know about artificial intelligence (AI)? How should AI alter the way they carry out their responsibilities? What uses of AI should they avoid? These questions have become more pressing since the release of ChatGPT in November 2022, and this book is one of a number that have been published in response to the need for accessible, scholarly answers.

The authors bring theology backgrounds to the task. Sean O'Callaghan has a PhD in systematic theology and six years as director of the PhD program in Humanities and Technology at Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island. Paul Hoffman has a PhD from the University of Manchester and is an associate professor in the Department of Biblical and Religious Studies at Samford University in Homewood, Alabama.

They start by characterizing AI and acknowledging that there is no single accepted definition for it. The characterization includes concepts such as algorithm, autonomy, generative AI, narrow AI, artificial general intelligence, and artificial super intelligence. There is also a brief history of AI, highlighting Alan Turing, John McCarthy, and Geoffrey Hinton, as well as a survey of AI definitions from several perspectives, including computer scientists and government agencies. Their definition of AI is "A tool to be used for human flourishing, subject to human agency and authority" (p. 174).

On top of this foundation, a survey of thirteen current and potential implications of AI is conducted in the span of one chapter. Thus, the descriptions are brief, sometimes only a paragraph, but there are ninety-six footnotes for those wanting to go deeper. The implications lean toward the social sciences and omit or barely mention areas such as agriculture, manufacturing, and programming. The chapter could be valuable for readers new to AI but less so for those with experience in the area.

O'Callaghan and Hoffman then move on to biblical anthropology structured as a creational narrative starting with the triune God and progressing through creation, dis-integration, liberation, reclamation, and glorification. They touch on the *imago Dei*, the cultural mandate, and original sin of Genesis; the redeeming work of Christ; the current age in which Christians work to bring about *shalom* and flourishing; and the future full glorification when Christ returns. After the model is described, there is a deeper dive into the *imago Dei,* particularly relational and vocational perspectives.

From this theological base, humans and humanity are contrasted with transhumanism (including the singularity), Gnosticism, and technology in the context of current and future AI. There is also an excursion into neural science and genetic engineering applied to humans.

The theology chapters may be the most valuable in the book for a broad audience that spans pastors, church leaders, and lay people who may or may not regularly work with AI. The content will help those teaching and preaching to connect doctrine to current and emerging AI content and methodology. Without intentional spiritual formation related to AI, the beliefs and practices of Christians are more likely to be mis-formed by non-Christian sources such as naturalism, transhumanism, and Gnosticism.

The final section of the book is dedicated to specific applications. The chapter on AI in education is focused on adult education, recognizing that elements can also apply to youth and children. More specifically, O'Callaghan and Hoffman concentrate on AI in relation to truth, the flourishing of the human spirit, the accelerated life, and the family. Rather than focusing on detailed questions of the moment, the authors take a higher-level view that should remain useful as particular tools and instructional methods come and go.

Christian commitment to truth is viewed in light of the misinformation (e.g., hallucinations from large language models) and disinformation that can be rapidly generated by AI and broadly disseminated through social media to audiences targeted by AI. Such posts have led to the increase in people holding to conspiracy theories rather than beliefs that are based on public, traceable evidence. The authors connect conspiracy theories to Gnosticism, which emphasizes secret knowledge available only to a small group of enlightened people.

The authors view AI as contributing to flourishing of the human spirit when used as a tool for cocreation with God rather than as a substitute for human endeavors. There is a need for discernment to identify when AI moves from assisting people to replacing them in key roles. Examples of appropriate cocreation, in the opinion of the authors, include enhancing visual projects, producing advertising content, making templates for communication, and creating music.

The *Lectio Divina* is offered as an approach that counters the accelerated life promoted by AI. Writing without AI is prescribed as a discipline to improve unrushed, deliberative thinking. In moving from private to family activities, intentional abstinence from digital devices is seen as formative. Parents can model this and help children develop boundaries and disciplines.

Narrowing the focus to spiritual formation and discipleship, the authors consider AI to be part of the context and not a central element. They discuss the "Eliza effect,"

which is based on experiences over five decades with a computer chatbot designed to be a therapist. They conclude that human relationships are an essential and non-AI replaceable element for spiritual growth. Following Albert Borgmann and Andy Crouch, they promote "hearth habits."

In their final chapter, O'Callaghan and Hoffman address the question of how ministry leaders should approach AI from a principled rather than tactical approach. They provide three categories: things not to be done, things to be freely done, and things that require caution. Prohibited AI uses include writing or delivering entire sermons of Bible lessons, substitution for interpersonal counseling, and writing entire worship songs or planning entire worship services. They are fine with using AI for media material production, website management, human resource management, and language translation. Activities for cautious use of AI include research assistance and generation of teaching materials. My personal positions and practices are in general agreement with the authors' positions and backing rationale.

I found the book worth the reading investment. Most valuable to me was the connection made between Gnosticism and how some view AI. "These concepts are taking greater import as AI threatens to perpetuate a fresh form of Gnosticism in Western culture, unbiblically dividing and decoupling the physical from the mental-spiritual" (p. 65). I would especially recommend the book to the intended audience of church leaders to introduce them to AI, key theological issues raised by AI, and church applications. The book is not comprehensive but provides an introduction with copious footnotes for further reading. Perhaps more importantly, it can provide basis for conversation between church leaders and congregants who are living on the front lines of AI. From this conversation, specific congregational spiritual challenges and opportunities can be identified and addressed.

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THEOLOGY

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NEW EXPLORATIONS IN THE LOST WORLD OF GENESIS: Advances in the Origins Debate by John H. Walton with contributions by J. Harvey Walton. IVP Academic, 2025. 244 pages. Paperback; $25.99. ISBN: 978-1514004913. Kindle; $25.99. ISBN: 9781514004920.

John Walton, well-known scholar of the Bible and professor emeritus of Wheaton College and Graduate School, returns to his primary study of Genesis and its place within the world of the ancient Near East. This book serves as the eighth publication in his Lost World series, begun in 2009, and as the fourth writing relating that world to "the modern scientific origins debate" (publisher's description). This edition updates previous readings and serves as a digest of the series as well as a summary of the status of the origins debate, all of which provide value to readers interested in these topics.

The target audience is primarily communities within the evangelical and fundamentalist conversation, rather than larger scientific, or academic, communities. Walton begins by describing the intellectual process through which he moved from early default young earth creationism (an uncomfortable position as a teacher) to the realization that there are other ways to think about creation (Genesis 2–4). His discovery of ancient world texts during his early academic studies opened his eyes to the significance of the historical and cultural contexts of the Hebrew Bible, which in turn raised questions about preserving the demands of biblical authority in the face of scientific (archaeological) evidence. We cannot, he concludes, get good answers if we are not asking the right questions. The Lost World series represents a systematic effort to ask the right questions, and this volume represents one more attempt to bring Walton's constituency along with him.

Each chapter follows the same pattern. First, a summary of what Walton previously published on the topic; second, new insights and clarifications; and third, FAQs on the topic, developed out of Q&A sessions during his decades of interaction with evangelical colleges, churches, and conferences. It is abundantly clear that the same questions continue to be asked as those that were raised when he began his project in the 1970s.

The topics arise from the opening chapters of the Bible. Genesis 1 raises questions concerning the creation and "functional ontology," in chapter 3 of this book; the seventh day and its significance as "temple and rest" in chapter 4. Genesis 2 questions cover the garden and the trees as "sacred space and priestly roles,"in chapter 5; Adam and Eve as "archetypes of dust and rib," in chapter 6. Genesis 3 topics include "the serpent and fall" in chapter 7, and "pronouncement and aftermath" in chapter 8). Chapter 9, "Genesis and science," speaks directly to the relation of approaches to origins in religion and science as the contrast between mechanism and agency.

In terms of contemporary scientific discovery, Walton argues that evolution is not incompatible with the Bible. He also offers a long footnote of works by devoted Christian scientists who adopt an evolutionary view of creation. Walton's biblical methodology, to which he devotes chapter 2, remains balanced and largely consonant with broader scholarship on the subject. He frequently couches this method in his own terminology. For instance, he contrasts the existing evangelical reading of Genesis as a conversation about the material origins of the cosmos with his functional ontology. The claims of science address the mechanisms of "how" and "when."

The Bible, he says, remains interested in the "who" and "why" of agency. So, the biblical text addresses a question of "order," an observation as old as rabbinic recognition of the priestly concerns of Genesis 1. This perspective emerges by recognizing the biblical text as literature produced for the people and cultures of its own time and thus answering their questions rather than ours.

Since this argument remains predominantly an evangelical discussion, Walton appropriately writes in language and terminology for the people and cultures of his own time. He is devoted to preserving the evangelical commitment to the authority of Scripture, and to encouraging the readers to embrace other ways to think about creation. This commitment provides the center of the debate. Walton appears to still be answering the same questions about Genesis because of the continuing prevalence among ordinary believers of the view that the inspiration of Scripture consists in the very words verbally dictated directly by God. So, Scripture remains authoritative even in matters of science and history. Walton walks a fine line between his affirmation of biblical authority as "God's authority vested in the human instruments he used to produce Scripture" (p. 17) and of inspiration as both "each word (verbal) comes from God (inspired)" and "the whole message throughout (plenary) comes from God (inspired)" (p. 27). He qualifies this definition with the language of "affirmation": that is, the inerrancy of Scripture in "all Scripture affirms." There is also the language of "reference": all that which is not affirmed is in reference to the perspectives of the culture (pp. 22–25). The line appears very fine between the role of the divine and the human in the production of Scripture, which role will no doubt remain disputed.

There are small faults with this book. Familiarity with Walton's previous work is expected, as indicated by references to a prior publication without explication for the sake of the present reader. There are also frequent mentions of "my viewpoint," as though his work appears original and unique where it is within the scope of scholarly conversations elsewhere. Finally, footnote references are almost wholly to authors within evangelical publishers (e.g., Zondervan, Baker, IVP). These practices might be understood as signs of the internal evangelical focus of this project, and the care with which Walton chooses his language.

Apart from these quibbles, *New Explorations in the Lost World of Genesis* provides a valuable contribution to the origins debate. It serves as a tribute to Walton's patience and long-suffering over the past 20 years with this project. Scholars can find it wearisome to repeatedly face the same questions and criticisms. I admire and respect Walton for the grace and patience he exhibits in our current polarized and contentious cultural and spiritual environment. There is so much more to Genesis 1–3 than clues as to how and when creation came to be. Walton attempts to open horizons of understanding through the culture and peoples for whom the Bible was written. This offering should free readers to ask better questions.

Reviewed by Dwight D. Swanson, Senior Research Fellow at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester UK, and Honorary Research Fellow in Biblical Studies at the University of Manchester.

Letters

A Response to Joshua Harris's View of "Restricted Methodological Naturalism"

In his article, "Against Restricted Methodological Naturalism" (*PSCF* 78, no. 1 (2026): 27–37), Joshua Harris defines Restricted Methodological Naturalism (RMN) as follows: within the domain of science for X to be a valid explanation of Y, X must be natural. In his critique and ultimate rejection of RMN he implies that science must include explanations that include supernatural agents to avoid dead-end explanatory paradigms, or creating obstacles to promising novel explanations. However, he ignores that other domains also have claims to truth. There are good and true explanations that lie outside of science. All truth is not scientific!

A return to the original definition of methodological naturalism by Christian philosopher Paul deVries is helpful. He described the limitations of scientific inquiry as follows:

> The goal of inquiry in the natural sciences is to establish explanations of contingent natural phenomena strictly in terms of other contingent natural things—laws, fields, probabilities. Any explanations that make reference to supernatural beings or powers are certainly excluded from natural science … The natural sciences are limited by method to naturalistic foci. By method they must seek answers to their questions within nature, within the non-personal and contingent created order, and not anywhere else. Thus, the natural sciences are guided by what I call methodological naturalism.[1]

He explicitly argued that this definition serves to give proper intellectual space for theological inquiry; it rejects science as the only arbiter of truth. To remove this limitation on what science can investigate is yielding to a culture of scientism.

Harris pursues two extended arguments against RMN—the "Intelligibility Problem" and the "Truth-Seeking Problem." I will briefly respond to both of these arguments.

Harris sees the intelligibility problem as the inability to define "natural" and "supernatural." He argues that the incompleteness or potential falsity of current theories