

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

Book Reviews

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 world-views,” 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