

**Geoffrey Fulkerson and Joel Thomas Chopp**, eds., *Science and the Doctrine of Creation: The Approaches of Ten Modern Theologians*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021. 256 pp. \$28.00 , ISBN: 9780830852802.

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Evangelicals do not have a reputation for wise and irenic engagement with modern science. Scholars at The Henry Center at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School have been trying to change this characterization of hostile defensiveness, especially through their “Creation Project” that has brought evangelical scholarly focus to the doctrine of creation over recent years, of which this book is one result.

The goal of the book is to examine the “reception of the natural sciences among Protestant theologians in the modern era.” (1) The editors picked ten influential theologians from various Protestant denominations over the past two centuries in Europe and America to analyze the way they have dealt with science. Each chapter starts with a brief biography and historical context before describing major theological themes of the subject’s theological scholarship that intersect with science. I will briefly describe each before offering an evaluation at the end.

Fred Sanders writes the first chapter on William Burt Pope, perhaps the preeminent Methodist theologian of the nineteenth century. Sanders explains the way Pope distinguished between primary and secondary causation and used that distinction to engage the sciences. Sanders finds Pope to be helpful when theologically engaging science, but I am less optimistic. Pope’s use of the distinction is less developed and consistent than that found in contemporary Thomists (e.g., Kathryn Tanner, Michael Dodds), and Pope, as Sanders shows, defensively leans towards fideism in his engagement with modern biology.

The second chapter is written by Craig Bartholomew on the Dutch polymath Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper argued for an antithesis between the Christian and Enlightenment worldview,

though the existence of common grace should cause one not to dismiss secular thought completely. Scientists who are Christians differ from their secular colleagues in assumptions and expectations in their scientific research, even though there are many areas of science where theological differences make no scientific difference. Bartholomew critiques Kuyper by saying that common grace gives too much epistemological independence to modern science.

Bradley Gundlach's chapter on the Princeton theologian BB Warfield was one of the strongest chapters because of the way he carefully analyzes Warfield's theology to help settle recent debates on whether he was an evolutionist. Gundlach shows that Warfield was not always consistent, believing both in the transmutation of species while denying that "God created by evolution."

In chapter four, Joshua W. Jipp examines the work of the German New Testament professor Rudolf Bultmann. He shows how Bultmann wanted to free Christians from the mythological statements (including the creation narratives in Genesis) found in Scripture that could not be accepted in the modern era. Rather than eliminating myths from the Scripture as untrue, the goal of Bultmann's program was to interpret them for their views on human existence, to emancipate theology from its cultural wineskins. Jipp does not think Bultmann's strict separation between cosmology and the biblical message works.

Katherine Sonderegger tackles the work of Karl Barth in chapter five. She explains why Barth found it unnecessary to engage science when writing his famous systematic theology since for him the doctrine of creation concerns itself principally with scripture. The doctrine of creation that, in Sonderegger's summary, speaks of "a history that escapes historical observation, a chronicle of real events that cannot be measured by ordinary instruments of empirical reality." (105) No finding of science can thus undermine the truth of the Christian "saga," a term that is

meant to capture something beyond ordinary reality. Sonderegger closes the chapter with Barthian reflections on the proper relationship between science and theology, where science is a companion to theology that does not try to explain away the sense of purpose and morality that is inherent in creation.

The sixth chapter on the English theologian T.F. Torrance was written by Kevin Vanhoozer. The key to Torrance's theology, says Vanhoozer, was the idea that "ontology (what there is) determines epistemology (how it is known)," (122) meaning that science should always proceed based on experience. Torrance is key to emphasize how modern physics (especially Einstein's work on relativity) overcomes the dualism originating from the early modern period back to a more holistic understanding of the universe and ourselves that is more consonant with early Christian theology. Though influenced by Barth, Torrance thought it was valuable to engage science through the eyes of faith. One important question raised by Vanhoozer: if the goal of both theology and science is to respond to "reality," how then do we account for the persistent interpretive disagreements that exist in both communities?

Jurgen Moltmann, a Lutheran German theologian, is the subject of the next chapter, written by Stephen N. Williams. Williams shows how Moltmann increased his scientific engagement over the course of his career, although he focuses more on the broad picture presented by the sciences (e.g., evolutionary pictures of the cosmos) rather than individual theories. Rather than embracing a mechanistic conception of the universe, he proposes that God the spirit is the animating principle of the universe, with all things coming out of and sharing in the Trinitarian life.

Christoph Schwobel covers the German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg in the eighth chapter. More than any other theologian in the volume, Pannenberg's theology seeks a two-way

conversation with the sciences. This is seen in his attempt to reimagine the Holy Spirit as a field of force to overcome the eviction of God from nature because of the mechanistic cosmologies of the Scientific Revolution. Schwobel at the end of the chapter asks what Pannenberg's theology would look like if it pressed beyond engagement with classical physics.

The subject of the ninth chapter is Robert Jenson and is written by Stephen John Wright. Wright shows how Jenson is key to critique two false notions of created reality: reality as a fine-tuned mechanism or a cosmos with all things headed for transcendence. Because science deals with reality, it can spur theologians to new ideas, but Christians should not simply accommodate the reductive materialist views commonly associated with the sciences. Jenson creates space to engage the science in a low-key manner, focusing on gospel proclamation rather than creating a "scientific theology."

The last chapter covers the English theologian Colin Gunton and is written by Murray Rae. Gunton rejects Enlightenment thinkers who think science can provide a path to objective truth without assistance of revelation. Knowledge is a gift of grace made possible, in part, by the guidance of antecedent beliefs. One example of this is the way Christian assumptions about the nature of material reality (e.g., is not divine) made the emergence of science possible. Overall Gunton is a critic of scientism but is interested in finding points of congruence between theology and science.

Overall, this is a rich book that provides useful summaries of the way different major Protestant thinkers engaged the sciences. I came away from the reading the volume with two major questions for future theological scholarship. First, it is interesting that most of the theological objections in the book were not to evolution but to picturing the world as a mechanism. When trying to explain things in terms of their parts, many key aspects of human

nature (i.e., consciousness, freedom) are lost. I think this theological worry is valid, but it is also difficult to see what theologians are asking scientists to put it its place. It is easy enough to object to mechanism, it is much harder to suggest a different explanatory strategy since mechanistic explanation is essential in many sciences. Does it make sense for scientists to cease appeal to natural causes and explain phenomena as the “habits of God” or the direct action of the Spirit? Moreover, if mechanistic understandings of nature are theologically problematic, why have so many Christians in the sciences promoted it as a scientific picture friendly to theism (i.e., Clockwork universe means Clockmaker)?

The second point: I was struck by how little wrestling in the book with the ancient cosmologies that one finds in scripture (e.g., stars falling from the sky no longer makes sense on our scientific picture of the world). The chapter on Bultmann raised the issue, of course, but the response by Jipp was to argue the legitimacy of miracles rather than dealing with the ancient science. Likewise the editors assert (2), without evidence, that references to pillars and foundations in the Old Testament are “far from naïve cosmology” but metaphors that refer to material things like trees and forces like “gravity.” But this ignores all the excellent evangelical biblical scholarship on ancient views of nature by authors such as John Walton and Kyle Greenwood. Thus my question is: it is easy enough to agree with these theologians that Christians should start with revelation, but how do we know what is revelation and what is culturally embedded beliefs reflecting ancient viewpoints? Barth takes the easy way out by his concept of saga, which is said to refer to something both real and beyond ordinary observation, but evangelical theologians have tended to not go this route, seeing more possible intellectual overlap between theology and science. I look forward to more Creation Project publications dealing with these sorts of problems.