

<https://readingreligion.org/books/tt-clark-handbook-christian-theology-and-modern-sciences>

When reviewing the *T&T Clark Handbook of Christianity Theology and the Modern Sciences*, one should first ask: what are handbooks for? What purpose do they serve for the academic community? One common answer is to give an overview of a field. Handbooks, companions, and dictionaries survey topics that are commonly debated in the literature, thus providing a convenient summary for those who are finding their way in the discipline.

Judging from this standard, this handbook edited by John P. Slattery is only partially successful. Some articles provide excellent overviews on topics of general concern: the articles on Augustine, John Calvin, Protestant theology, Orthodox theology, theology and the biological sciences, and theology and the social sciences are nice summaries of their subject matter. The article on theology and the psychological sciences did not include a discussion of the cognitive science of religion, which is a major theme in theology and science, but was otherwise strong. I will consider assigning these articles to my students.

But other articles were less useful for someone trying to understand the contours of modern debates about theology and science. The article on Catholic theology discussed major Catholic thinkers in the 20th century but provided little narrative tying them together, reading more like a biographical dictionary. Other articles were too specific to be of much value to specialists, much less someone entering the field. For example, the article on Aristotle focuses specifically on the relation of Aristotle's metaphysics to natural philosophy. This article would have been more appropriate in a companion to Aristotle. Similarly, there was a chapter on Catholic neo-scholastic reactions against evolution in the 19th century and a chapter on how a debate between Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr on quantum mechanics resembled an earlier theological debate on whether humans could understand God's essence. The scholarship was generally excellent but only a limited range of readers would profit from these articles.

Another editorial choice that limits the usefulness of the handbook: most of the historical chapters focused on individuals rather than subjects or disciplines. While this allows for more scholarly precision, the tradeoff is that many important topics are unaddressed. For example, no chapter in this handbook dealt with the scientific revolution or the rise of Darwinism beyond Catholic neo-scholasticism. The narrow concern of many of the articles, along with important theology and science topics that are missing, should be taken into account when considering it as a secondary resource in a theology and science classroom. Similar works from Oxford University Press or Routledge might be more valuable for that role.

But another standard to judge this handbook by is where the editor would like scholarship to go in the future. Rather than introducing students to conversations in the field, it charts new areas that deserve more scholarly attention. As Slattery writes in the introduction, "The central goal of this volume is to bring new voices, perspectives, and conversations to the foreground of the Christian theological engagement with science, and to highlight the wide-ranging but often unheralded engagements today" (1). From this standard the handbook is more successful. The handbook was especially keen to promote new scholarship in two areas that have been

underrepresented in the field of science and religion: race and ecology. Four of the twenty-four articles deal directly with ecology (with the theme touched on by other articles) and two with race and racism.

The chapter on the way racial “science” was used to justify white supremacy and how George Washington Williams, Frederick Douglass, and Maria Stewart used both science and theology to develop narratives of black excellence and resilience was illuminating. The misuses of the authority of science in the past provide important cautionary lessons for theologians who wish to engage science today. The article on the involuntary modernization of Black music was less helpful because it did not attempt to explain the relevance of the subject of its scholarly focus (“the epistemic hegemony of Eurocentrism” in the reception of Black music) to theology and science scholarship (305). The subject of the chapters that address environmental concerns is Coptic Orthodox liturgy as an ecological resource, “lived religion-and-science” in an urban Chicago park, a survey of the field of ecotheology, and an analysis of the anthropocentric assumptions that can underlie the planetary environmental movement. These chapters illustrate a developing trend in theology and science scholarship to move away from solving intellectual puzzles created by the sciences and towards drawing upon theological resources to shape human engagement with the natural world.

For theologians and educators who seek examples of what one might call “socially aware theology and science,” this volume will be a valuable resource.

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