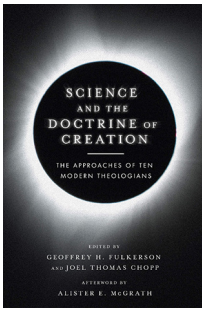
Book Review



Geoffrey H. Fulkerson & Joel Thomas Chopp (Editors).
Science and the Doctrine of Creation: The Approaches of Ten Modern Theologians
IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL. March 2021.
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Reviewed by Matthew Wong, King's Evangelical Divinity School

The text comprises well-researched essays on how ten influential modern Protestant theologians discuss the doctrine of creation in light of key developments within the natural sciences of their day. The editors instructed the writers to largely avoid discussion on origins to place greater emphasis on other, often neglected, aspects of creation[1] and to produce some much-needed research on how theologians have engaged with "particular theories or developments in the natural sciences" (p.1) without reducing the discussion to an antagonistic science versus religion debate.

Each chapter features helpful introductory, contextual and biographical information on each theologian. These are, in chronological order: William Burt Pope [Fred Sanders]: *distinction between primary and secondary creation*; Abraham Kuyper [Craig Bartholomew]: advanced worldview analysis; B.B. Warfield [Bradley J. Gundlach]: "*theologically appropriate form of evolution*" (p. 5); Rudolph Bultmann [Joshua J. Wipp]: *distinguishing myth from science, the latter "[speaking] of the world rationally and from a distance*" (p. 6); Karl Barth [Katherine Sonderegger]: avoidance of "*conversation or quarrel with the sciences*" (p. 6); T.F Torrance [Kevin J. Vanhoozer]: "*kataphysical" theology* (p. 7); Jürgen Moltmann [Stephen N. Williams]: *the inextricable links between theology and science and the eschewal of [encumbering] scientific minutiae* (p. 7); Wolfhart Pannenberg [Christoph Schwöbel]: *theology of nature that shuns both mechanistic naturalism and theological scientific disengagement* (p. 8); Robert Jenson [Stephen John Wright]: *science and theology serve each other symbiotically* (p. 8); and Colin Gunton [Murray A. Rae]: "*science as a human cultural enterprise," "the nature of knowledge," and creation ex nihilo amongst other foci* (p. 9).

Overall, the book presents several helpful insights, such as Kuyper's worldview analysis that couches the natural sciences within a paradigm that involves faith (pp. 42, 55), Pope's distinction between primary and secondary creation, and the complementarian approaches of Moltmann and Pannenberg. It is apparent, however, that the selected theologians come from particular confessional backgrounds, mainly Lutheran and Reformed, which comprise nine out of the ten featured theologians. Whilst this is perhaps unsurprising, given the volume's focus on exploring the theological nexus between faith and science (not constructing a dogmatic "normative" theology of Christian

1. Fulkerson and Chopp are interested in expounding a "distributed doctrine" of creation – one that "appears throughout the dogmatic corpus, from theology proper to anthropology and eschatology" (p. 3).

engagement with the natural sciences [p. 1]), it would nonetheless have been helpful to broaden the book's theological appeal by also featuring the insights of evangelicals and biblicists. It could be that the editors sought to avoid the 'risk' of turning the book into one that *primarily* grapples with the conflict between Darwinian evolutionary theory and the biblical account of creation.

No featured theologian rejects Darwinian evolutionary theory *outright*, rather the book presents subtle gradations of acceptance, or at the very least ambivalence, ranging from tacit non-disavowal and 'theoretical' agreement to fully fledged theistic evolution. Along the way, irresolvable tensions exist as to how a form of evolution can be embraced yet simultaneously denied its full expression, and how such belief squares with the biblical account of creation. Pope, for example, though critical of "the materialist philosophy of evolution" (p. 24) nonetheless "accepts the idea of development broadly" (p. 28). This obvious tension is seen in the writings of Kuyper, Warfield, and Gunton who all affirm a belief that evolutionary theory, at least in its abstract/theoretical form, is permissible and congruent with orthodox Christian faith, yet oppose strains of dogmatic or "thoroughgoing" (p. 67) evolution.[2] The unexplained reasoning behind such opposition to "thoroughgoing" evolution, which appears to be the logical outworking of theoretical adherence to evolutionary theory, is not robustly addressed by the respective authors. Greater interrogation is required to distinguish between strains of *unacceptable* Evolution ("a grand theory…that explains everything") (p. 50) and those deemed "*permissible*".

To offset the range of attitudes towards the doctrine of creation, there is a need to include the theological writings of leading theologians with a demonstrable scientific background. Though Kuyper, Moltmann and Pannenberg are rightly recognised for their complementarian approach to theological engagement with the natural sciences, there is a need to hear the voices of those able to grapple with both the theology *and* science of the doctrine of creation. It is necessary to show the reader that serious theologians have and continue to present valuable insights concerning the doctrine of creation that reject Darwinian evolutionary theory on both theological and scientific grounds, a perspective this book lacks. The call for a multi-disciplinary approach, acknowledged by McGrath (p. 241), is apt as none of the featured theologians are scientifically trained and therefore lack a credible voice outside their respective areas of expertise. If, as McGrath asserts, bridges are to be built between theology and the natural sciences (p. 242), a wider selection of theologians, including those scientifically trained, is required.

By focusing on how Protestant theologians have explored the doctrine of creation in an age of increased scientism, the book makes a

2. For example, Kuyper embraced theistic evolution (p. 50) but according to Bartholomew maintained that "Evolution as a metanarrative ultimately leads to nihilism" (p. 52). Warfield espoused 'theistic evolution' as acceptable to orthodox Christians (p. 65) though contradictorily warned against "a thoroughgoing evolutionism" (p. 67). According to Gundlach, "Warfield never repudiated the doctrine of evolution. He never endorsed it outright, either. He *allowed* it, and in my opinion expected the transmutation of species to be proven eventually…" (p. 76). In a similar vein, Rae recorded that "Gunton has no objection to Darwinism as a theory about adaptation and evolution of species, but he objects strongly to Darwinism being turned into an all-encompassing dogma about the origin and essential nature of all life" (p. 219).

welcome and refreshing contribution to the existing body of literature that is replete with critical Christian appraisals of evolutionary theory. However, the conscious decision to analyse theological attitudes to creation in isolation from human and cosmological origins is puzzling. It is questionable whether the doctrine of creation – in its full sense – can be studied, in any meaningful way, without concomitantly exploring Christian engagement with the scientific claims of origins. This is because evolutionary mechanisms directly impinge upon the formulation of the doctrine of creation. McGrath, for example, notes: "There is much more that needs to be said about the relation of the natural sciences and the Christian faith than the doctrine of creation…" (p. 248). Though he acknowledges this doctrine as a "wonderful" starting point (p. 248), he asserts that the concept of the image of God "…is an aspect of the doctrine of creation that is ripe for further exploration" (p. 245). This indeed would be a fruitful facet to explore as any discussion of *Imago Dei* would likely address the question of origins.

It must be noted that the doctrine of creation is bigger than origins and encompasses such subjects as: the nature and image of God, mankind's ontological standing in the created world, attitudes towards the natural environment including resource use and preservation, animal rights and population growth to name but a few. These issues have their roots in the doctrine of creation because living beings' responsibilities are shaped by their ontological status as God's handiwork alongside their hierarchy in the created order. Such topical subjects as these are ripe for discussion, yet no chapter specifically addresses them in any detail. Pope, for example, shows how the wisdom or "ordered, sequential dynamics" of 'secondary creation' manifests God's love (p. 20). He notes that the invisible attributes of God are clearly seen in creation (Rom. 1:20) (p. 21, 32) and argues that created beings have divine worth precisely because they are works of God. He therefore lays the groundwork for a Christian environmental ethic that would indeed have much to say on the aforementioned issues. Unfortunately, the implications of his distinction between primary and secondary creation are undeveloped and would remain so until the birth of the modern Christian environmental movement in the 1960s.

Readers should understand the text's focus on epistemology, ontology and philosophy of science make it best suited for seminarians pursuing theological degrees. Moreover, the featured theologians are not scientifically trained and therefore do not make pronouncements on scientific issues. The text's uniqueness lies in the authors' purely theological (as opposed to biblical or scientific) engagement with the doctrine of creation that largely avoids origins. Though this approach makes for a stimulating read, overall, it fails to equip readers to confront the most challenging questions faced today in an increasingly secular world that is hostile towards the biblical account of creation – namely how to counter the claims of Darwinian evolution whilst holding fast to the creation narrative *in both a biblical and scientifically credible manner*. There is scope for the editors to include a more diverse range of theological positions to include both Creationist and Intelligent Design standpoints, and to more critically address the ambiguities and inconsistencies evident in some apparent, though non-stated, quests to

formulate theologically 'acceptable' strains of evolution.

Though the implications of ancillary aspects of the doctrine of creation, such as mankind's ontological status (and attendant responsibilities) in the created order could have been explored in more detail, what has been identified as a weakness of this text, namely an overtly theological and non-constructive approach, is also an indisputable strength: the invitation for readers to draw their own conclusions and to wrestle with the "assumptions, claims, and methods of the natural sciences" (p. 1) as they pertain to this important doctrine.