
Book Reviews

Theology

2014, Vol. 117(3) 208–237

© The Author(s) 2014

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0040571X14522949

tjx.sagepub.com



Cynthia Crysdale and Neil Omerod, **Creator God, Evolving World**, Fortress Press: Mineapolis, 2013; 184 pp.: 9780800698775, £11.99/\$18.00 (pbk)

Two main aims appear to lie behind the writing of this book. One is to offer an introduction to issues in science and religion; the other is to defend a Thomistic account of the creator's relationship to creation, which is held to be wholly transcendent and totally omnipotent and omniscient. As far as the first aim is concerned, there is a degree of variation in the demands made on the reader. On the one hand, one is given an almost painful degree of elaboration of the really rather simple distinction between deterministic and statistical laws of nature. On the other hand, there is at times a certain breathlessness about the discussion of other ideas, for example, Bernard Lonergan's concept of 'finality'. I think that this unevenness of treatment will not be very helpful to the novice reader.

As far as the second aim is concerned, it is of course certainly the case that the concept of the wholly transcendent God of classical theism has, over the centuries, had many supporters of the highest intellect and integrity. However, our knowledge today that the universe has had an evolving history of 13.8 billion years, in the course of which its character has changed radically from the initial ball of energy after the Big Bang to the diverse and fertile world of today, has encouraged many people, including the present reviewer, to take a different view according to which the creator of such a world of irreducibly temporal character will know it and interact with it in accordance with its given character, that is to say, temporally. This encourages the concept of a dipolar divine nature which combines eternally steadfast and unchanging divine faithfulness with a condescending willingness to engage with creation according to its temporal nature. Those who take this view believe that it offers many valuable insights, not least in relation to the apparent ambiguity of a creation which appears both fertile yet subject to suffering and loss. This alternative view deserves serious attention and it is not adequately addressed in the book, which takes process theology as its sole representative. Many of us find A. N. Whitehead's metaphysics, with its picture of a God who is *necessarily* limited in power and knowledge is not acceptable theologically. Instead, we look to the concept of creation as a freely chosen kenotic act of the creator who, as the expression of love, creates a world in which creatures are given the gift to be themselves and 'to make themselves' (to use Charles Kingsley's striking phrase in response to

his friend Charles Darwin). It is surely essential that this kenotic view of creation is given a fair representation, even in an elementary introduction.

John Polkinghorne

Queens' College, Cambridge

David Wilkinson, ***Science, Religion, and the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence***, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2013; 240 pp.: 9780199680207, £25.00/\$49.95 (hbk)

What would the impact of the discovery of extraterrestrial intelligences be on the Christian faith? And how likely is it that such a discovery might be made? These are the key questions of Professor Wilkinson's beautifully written, scholarly and fascinating book. As an astrophysicist, the author is in a very good position to relate the details of the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI), which is now not just a science-fiction fantasy but a well-established scientific research project. He does so with such clarity that the book should be required reading for anyone interested in this subject, or in the more general issue of the relationship between science and religious faith.

After sketching the surprisingly long history of speculation about life on other planets, he turns to the scientific perspectives underlying the contemporary SETI project. The vast size of the universe, containing 100 billion stars in our galaxy, 100 billion galaxies in the observable universe, and an unknown number of galaxies, and perhaps other universes, beyond that, has completely altered our view of the place of humans in the universe. We are no longer the centre of things, but tiny specks somewhere very peripheral in the great scheme of things. In contrast, the conditions required for intelligent life are so many and so improbable that there may be no such life within hailing distance.

Chapters follow on the discovery of other planets, the origin of life, results of SETI research so far, anthropic and design arguments, the nature of human beings, and the creation and origin of the universe. These provide a painless and authoritative account of these topics, so that what may look like a rather wacky science project turns out to throw light on a whole range of deep scientific programmes.

Wilkinson is strongly in favour of continuing the search for life, but rather pessimistic about it too. He is impressed by the Fermi paradox – if aliens existed, given the laws of evolutionary development and the size of our galaxy, they would be here. So they are probably not in our galaxy, anyway – though there are many other galaxies where they could be! Finally he considers how Christians can fit belief in Christ as saviour of (this small) world into the expanded cosmos of SETI. Running through most available options, he opts for the view that we may be unique in our galaxy, that any other beings are likely to be 'good, fallen, and looking for grace', that God may ultimately transform the universe into a new