



Reviews



Greg Cootsona, *Mere Science and Christian Faith: Bridging the Divide with Emerging Adults* (Inter-Varsity Press: Downers Grove, Ill., 2018), pp. 192, ISBN 978-0830838141. £14.99

This slim volume is a helpful collection of reflections on a perceived need to bring science and Scripture into fruitful dialogue amongst young people in the church. Cootsona makes a positive case for seeing science and Scripture as different types of material, but refuses to make them opponents. In this, and much of the book, he makes a case for the evangelical churches to reassess their hermeneutics, opening Scripture to more nuanced scholarly approaches that recognise such issues as social, political, cultural and literary contexts, whilst also stepping away from an obsession with historicity. He uses the core paradigms of Creation and the story of Adam and Eve amongst his case studies. His approach reflects the audience for this work: pastors working with young adults whose church context has been shaped by an approach to Scripture which sees it as a completely historical document.

A key argument is that the church should not selectively ‘baptise’ the arguments of scientists and their insights. That is a kind of intellectual theft, or ‘cherry-picking’, not dialogue, particularly where the scientists are not people of faith. Instead, in the course of the volume he makes a good job of outlining key issues and areas, such as the ‘Big Bang’, ‘cosmic fine-tuning’ and neuroscience, where Christians can be particularly involved in a discussion that explores how these areas of enquiry bring Christians and scientists onto such common ground as T=0 (some kind of moment of Creation) and a shared appreciation of ‘fine-tuning’ (the intricacies of Creation) that support theistic arguments for an intelligent designer.

Cootsona helpfully outlines the key areas of Young Earth creationism, intelligent design, and approaches to Scripture which see it as paradigmatic rather than historical, particularly on the question of Adam and Eve. He takes a respectful line, but rejects each of these positions as problematic. The first two positions are unsupported by

science, and therefore given the premise of this book cannot play a part in work amongst young Christians. The third is problematic because in its fullest expression it seems to turn Scripture into an entirely false document. Where will the journey end if a fully metaphorical approach to Scripture is embraced? Adopting such a standpoint would surely relegate this volume to the waste-bin of the evangelical churches. Instead, the author shifts the focus. Why are we focusing on Adam? Yes, Paul did, but actually, the main focus should be on Christ. We don't doubt the historicity of Christ, and if we look at Scripture through that end of the telescope we can salvage something valuable from the stories of Genesis. If we put all the weight of proof on these stories, we risk their complete destruction due to their vulnerability to the forensic analysis of science.

At times, there is a feeling of entering into a parallel church universe. His chapter "Calling Out the Good in Technology" is aimed at disentangling science and technology as separate but related phenomena. We should not reject scientific enquiry because we are suspicious of the effects that technology can have on our lives. Equally, we should not reject technology because we are suspicious that it is a device of science to destroy religion. We need to be clear that technology has both positive and negative aspects, but that we can harness it for the good of religion. Here, it seems that he is addressing an urgent and prominent issue for some parts of the church, concluding that there are valid critiques of technology but that we should not reject it, instead challenging it with a strong incarnational theology that pushes real human connection into the foreground of our lives.

Writing as someone who is completely on board with seeing Scripture in the terms which he outlines, I found this volume to be a breath-taking reminder of the gulf between many parts of the global church when it comes to handling Scripture. However, this volume is not intended for people like me. A number of times I found myself saying 'better late than never'. Seen in its own terms, this is a very helpful volume for its target audience to find a way to positively bring a science-Scripture dialogue into play for young Christians, and so should be welcomed as a useful, accessible, and nuanced resource.

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