

but helpfully laced with pastoral insight and sensitivity as well as contemporary political, cultural and social issues. In our atomised times, Stein’s commentary on the Hexateuch is a helpful catechetical work that draws out the bigger themes tackled in these books and places them before us in an accessible but nuanced way. In a time when acres of print attempts to tackle the subject of training for ministry, this relatively slim volume gets to the heart of the matter in ways that are wise, deeply focused on God, yet open to revelation in our own times. Highly recommended.

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Andrew Root, *Exploding Stars, Dead Dinosaurs, and Zombies: Youth Ministry in the Age of Science* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), pp. xv + 292, ISBN 978-1506446745. £14.99

With a title like *Exploding Stars, Dead Dinosaurs, and Zombies* I might have expected the book bearing the title to be a bit too frivolous ‘for a theology book’. I was wrong. Within the covers I found a multi-course meal of dense theology presented accessibly, a historical sketch of science and religion in modernity, and biographical synopses of the ‘movers and shakers’ of the two former items. For those readers who prefer systematic theology, this book works to ground you in the lived realities of youth and their families. For those readers who prefer practical (sad as I am to draw that parallelism!) advice for ministry to young and old, this book works to push your horizons further out, seeing how the great ideas of the past centuries cannot be separated from the lives of the great thinkers who had them. And, of course, there is Jared.

‘Jared’ is an ‘everyman’ youth minister, and it is his story which forms the through-line of the book. What is surprising about Jared, even with the considerable handicap of being fictitious, is that his story and relationships are grounded and feel true. The book is divided into three parts, each of which involves Jared meeting with Aly, Sasha, and

Martin. Yet they are not merely literary devices for conveying ideas, nor do they exist to give the reader a break from the more detailed chapters, but rather work to tie the book together. It should be said, however, that Jared remains in some ways a very American youth minister, reflecting some theological priorities and assumptions that are more peculiarly American than Scottish.

Aly is most concerned with whether faith is immature or mature. It is here we see Andy Root at his most ‘theological’. He sets out some of his most basic positions, from which the rest of his arguments follow. In the first case, he follows T. F. Torrance in arguing that Nicene theology, principally from Athanasius and the Cappadocians (including Macrina!), develops the notion that the universal is hypostatic and personal. This is a point to which Andy will return throughout. In the second, he argues that much of the contemporary debate concerns whether the universe is personal or impersonal, where readers will find names like Richard Dawkins, Neil deGrasse Tyson and Daniel Dennett. Further, Andy helpfully distinguishes between ‘the comprehensive social practice of science’ (what is often meant when people say ‘But Science says ...’) and specific scientific theories. It is to those specific theories Andy turns when Jared meets with Sasha and Martin.

Next, Jared meets with Sasha. She is concerned with the problems of scale. After all, with the invention of the telescope (and later, the microscope), humans started to learn just how big the universe was, and how small are its parts. Andy here interacts with the lives and hardships of Galileo Galilei and Albert Einstein. Andy helpfully militates against some misconceptions of Galileo, while also presenting the real concerns of his life. Similarly, he tells stories of Einstein and the genesis of Big Bang cosmology (including how a derisive comment originally gave birth to the name!). Andy tapers off with some pages sketching out the nature of the ‘fine-tuning’ cosmological position. In it, we find Andy practising what he preaches, giving a face to the movers and shakers and their ideas. But the size of the universe and the size of particles matter less to Martin than they do to Sasha.

For Martin, mass extinctions and evolution are on the forefront of his mind. And thus, for Jared too. Andy moves from Galileo and Einstein to Darwin. This is where Jared’s Americanism is acute,

as so many pages are dedicated to Darwin, evolution, and the neo-Darwinists. Darwin is presented as an upper-middle class child, sickly but able to live comfortably due to the positions his family holds. Darwin is a marked contrast to those who followed him like Thomas Henry Huxley, ‘Darwin’s Bulldog’. In contrast to prior chapters, here Andy spends more time on the biography and lifetime of Darwin and his contemporaries than he does on the movements involved in the specific theories. It is here too that Andy interacts with the *imago Dei* and the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis, diverting in the end into hermeneutical and text-critical arguments about Genesis.

The narrative of Jared and his encounters with Aly, Sasha, and Martin tie the book together, and Andy Root’s research is good, as one will find references to many of the major players in the academic science and religion field (John Polkinghorne, Ian Barbour, Peter Harrison, Arthur Peacocke, Teilhard de Chardin, etc). Yet, it is clear that his principle work concerns (youth) ministry, and only secondarily does it include science and religion. As a handbook for (youth) ministers on the biggest and most immediate topics in science and religion, this is an excellent starting place. The footnotes give readers plenty of texts they can pursue for their own edification.

But there are no zombies. True, there is the occasional reference to *The Walking Dead* throughout. However, there is not engagement to the same degree as with the epistemological, cosmological and evolutionary theories we saw through Aly, Sasha, and Martin. This, I suspect, may be due to the broadly American and Protestant audience of the book, for whom Darwin might be considered a more dire threat than reductive physicalism and philosophical zombies. On the whole, this is not a reason to avoid the book, as its engagement with and presentation of the epistemological, cosmological, and evolutionary aspects of the ‘Age of Science’ make it a very good primer.

For its written style, accessibility, and scholarship, Exploding Stars, Dead Dinosaurs, and Zombies is well worth the cost. It challenges misconceptions, makes relatable the great movers and shakers of science and religion in recent centuries, and offers plenty of out-roads for subsequent study. His emphasis on the hypostatic and personal nature of the universe, and of the task of the minister (youth or not!) reminds the reader that programmes will not change hearts

and minds, but ministry can. I wish there were more zombies, but only to see how Andy Root would weave eschatology and theological anthropology into a handbook for youth ministry. If there's a volume two, I will be getting it.

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