

[MJTM 19 (2017–2018)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

Paul Copan et al., eds. *Dictionary of Christianity and Science: The Definitive Reference for the Intersection of Christian Faith and Contemporary Science*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017. 691 pp. Hbk. ISBN 978-0-310-49605-2. \$59.99.

What is the relationship between Christianity and science? How does Christian theology relate to scientific inquiry? What are the competing philosophies of science, and are they compatible with biblical Christian faith? Bringing together over one hundred and forty scholars, the *Dictionary of Christianity and Science*, edited by Paul Copan, Tremper Longman III, Christopher L. Reese, and Michael G. Strauss, seeks to address these questions. An extensive and detailed work, this dictionary boasts in its subtitle that it is *The Definitive Reference for the Intersection of Christian Faith and Contemporary Science*. This is surely a bold claim and gives the reader extremely high expectations for the book.

The dictionary contains three types of entries: introductions, essays, and multiple-view discussions. Introductions are short pieces that outline the central facts about a topic in summary form. Wherever interpretive questions exist, simple explanations of the most viable options are presented, with equal treatment being given to each option. In brief, the goal of introductions is to provide a quick and easily grasped overview. Essays are longer entries that begin with some of the same information that is delineated within introductions but include further explorations of the implications and significance of the topic under discussion. References to important figures or works related to the topic at hand are often included, as is any and all relevant supporting information. In the multiple-view discussions, contributors participate in a “debate that delineates the different viewpoints” (11). Entries of all types include a final section titled

“References and Recommended Reading” that lists the main sources referenced in the piece and/or suggested further reading. The number of resources included in these sections varies widely, from two to about eighty.

An interesting feature of the book is that “virtually all of the contributors are evangelical Christians who are experts in their respective fields of study” (11). Of course, evangelical Christianity “does not have a shared mind regarding science. Well-established camps, often with their own publications, organizations, and events, disagree on fundamental issues” (11). As such, those who come to this dictionary looking for settled conclusions may perhaps be somewhat disappointed, as this is not the purpose of the volume. Rather, according to the editors, “the goal of this discussion is to chart the outlines of evangelical thought on science and to suggest a framework for future discussions, not to bring such discussions to an end” (11).

The dictionary is quite wide-ranging, offering information on a wide variety of subjects and people from climate change to the Gaia hypothesis to Stephen Hawking. However, I believe that a number of subjects may have been overlooked, such as black holes, quarks, the steady-state theory, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Individuals who are conspicuous by their absence include Martin Luther, Richard F. Carlson, Denis O. Lamoureux, Phillip E. Johnson, Nancy R. Pearcey, and Eugenie C. Scott. Also, there is not a single entry that begins under the main subject of “Christianity.” Given the volume’s title, I find this omission to be quite striking. Of course, there are numerous articles that directly pertain to the confession of the church, such as “Miracles,” “The Trinity,” and “The Resurrection of Jesus,” but the fact that there is not even a “see also” listed with “Christianity” seems highly imprudent to me.

Another shortcoming of the book is its lack of indices. There is not even a list of articles by category or a list of total entries. Surely the decision to neglect what is usually considered to be essential for scholarly books more than mars the usefulness of this volume as a whole. In my opinion, the lack of these types of helps makes null and void the book’s claim to be *the* definitive reference work on this topic.

Further frustration comes from the fact that the work provides very few guideposts for the uninitiated. Although the boldface cross-references within each individual entry are appreciated, more work could have been done, in my opinion, to make this work more accessible. To illustrate my point, let us say that a person desires to look up the Noachian Deluge of Genesis, that is, Noah's Flood. The person searches for an entry entitled "Deluge," but to no avail, and then finds an entry listed under "Noah's Ark." From there the person scans the article to see the boldface type indicating that there is a specific article entitled "The Flood," which is discovered to be exceptionally short (though very well written). In reading this article, the person sees boldface type indicating that there is yet another article on the very same topic under, inexplicably, the title "Genesis Flood." From there it is almost a matter of chance whether the person will discover that there are several other articles on the Deluge topic as a whole, such as "Atrahasis," "The Firmament," and "The Gilgamesh Epic." Clearly, it is easy to miss important entries, due in part to the book's inexcusable shortcoming of having no indices and no table of contents.

Another critique pertains to the recommended resources and references. As noted above, there is tremendous variation in the number of resources listed. Why the severe disparity? Perhaps a division between the resources that were consulted within the article itself and mere recommendations might have alleviated some of the problem. Additionally, it may have been helpful to use typographical symbols such as asterisks and daggers to identify certain sources as highly recommended, preferred for advanced readers, and so on. Something like this would help inform the reader of the best works and assist the fledging student in his or her research.

Another criticism of mine is that although the editors should be commended for their attempts to provide a resource that pertains to an ever-widening (and, at times, bewilderingly complex) range of topics, the volume seems to be imbalanced in its emphasis on the world's origins. Of the sixteen multiple-view discussions, thirteen pertain to issues of creation, evolution, and the primeval history of Genesis. The three exceptions are "Climate

Change,” “Divine Action,” and “Psychoanalysis.” Surely there are other relevant topics to debate within the field of science. Thus, while I am quite pleased with the editors’ final product, calling this dictionary *The Definitive Reference for the Intersection of Christian Faith and Contemporary Science* seems rather unjustified given the imbalance of subject material.

As a final observation, the text itself is, for the most part, presented in a very pleasing format with double columns, some very well-crafted images and illustrations, and excellent charts, graphs, tables, and figures, some of which cover several pages. However, the book’s formatting can sometimes be irritating, as the biography sections are not situated together, nor are the essays and multiple-view discussions.

All this being considered, the *Dictionary of Christianity and Science*, though far from being the definitive reference guide to the topic, is nonetheless a most welcome addition to the ongoing discussions about Christianity and science. It will certainly equip the reader to engage with this topic in an informed manner, and it will likely appeal to laypersons, students, and clergy alike.

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