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BOOK REVIEW

Dennis Ngien, ed. *The Interface of Science, Theology, and Religion: Essays in Honor of Alister E. McGrath*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019. x + 234 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-5326-4334-7. $24.00.

The Interface of Science, Theology, and Religion is a *festschrift* in honor of Alister E. McGrath's sixty-fifth birthday. I bought my copy at the editor's installation ceremony as the inaugural Alister E. McGrath Chair of Christian Thought and Spirituality at Tyndale Seminary. As a professor of science and religion at Oxford, McGrath is engaged in a wide range of scholarship in the disciplines of theology, science, and religion. The editor, Dennis Ngien, has done an excellent job of collecting essays that span the breadth of McGrath's scholarly interests and have been contributed by experts in their respective fields.

In the first essay, Anthony N. S. Lane reviews the evangelical understanding of conversion. According to Lane, there are four essential elements in Scripture in cases where a "full account of the conversion of a person or group" is given, namely: "repentance, faith, baptism, and receiving the Holy Spirit" (13). Besides criticizing evangelicals for silence on the role of the Holy Spirit, Lane also chides them for ignoring the role of baptism in Christian initiation. Lane labels the "altar call" a "direct surrogate baptism" and calls the "sinner's prayer" a subtle way of replacing baptism (27). In my opinion, Lane overemphasizes the neglect of baptism by evangelicals. The resources he mentions in support of his claims against evangelicals demonstrate how to pray in faith to receive forgiveness of sins and begin one's Christian walk. However, some of the resources include baptism as part of the discussion and there is never a statement that claims baptism is not necessary.

In the second essay, Patrick S. Franklin grounds the mission of the Church in "the God who loves" (30). Thinking "about the church as a manifestation or outcome of God's mission," while theologically correct, overly focuses on the functional (33). Franklin attempts to frame the understanding of the mission within the Trinity. As the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in a relationship, so the Spirit, which is the bond of love, brings humanity into that relationship to be united with God. I find Franklin's emphasis helpful because the success of the Church's mission is not to be measured by society's standards of success but by the motive and attitude of the heart.

Among other things, Alister McGrath is a noted Luther and Reformation scholar. Thus, the third essay in the *festschrift* is entitled "Luther's Providential God." In this chapter, Robert Kolb shows that Luther's understanding of God as a provider is multifaceted. He asserts that the ordinary and mundane are saturated by the presence of God. Consequently, the way in which bread is produced by natural means is a greater miracle than the feeding of the multitude by Jesus. God is provider and protector. As provider and protector, he uses humans as agents with functions to fulfill his plan. These functions are *Lehrstand* (teaching), *Wehrstand* (protecting), and *Nährstand* (providing necessities). According to Luther, God is almighty and responsible for what happens in the world and he works his wonders through nature and the human beings around us. Included is a call for all to engage in God's work.

In the fourth essay, another Reformation scholar, Randall C. Zachman, compares the views of Luther and Calvin with regards to the purpose of Christ's death on the cross. Both agree that an exchange takes place. On the cross, Jesus bore the sin of the believer, who by faith has his or her sin exchanged for the righteousness of Christ. Calvin holds that Christ appeased the wrath of God the Father toward humanity through his suffering on the cross. Conversely, Luther suggests it was not the wrath of God but the love of God that caused the penalty of the law to be borne by Christ for us.

In Chapter 5, Sung Wook Chung explores the global implications of Luther's and Calvin's concepts of Christian freedom.

For Luther, salvation implies such a degree of freedom that a Christian is "a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none" (87). Yet, at the same time, the Christian is to be a willing servant of all, dutifully fulfilling his or her obligations and societal functions. Similarly, Calvin asserts that a Christian is free from the law, above and beyond it. Yet, Christians are to strive for godliness "in accordance with the principle of the law" (93). As Christianity spreads, Chung hopes that Christian freedom, as it produces private and public adherence to ethical principles, will transform the global community. I share Chung's hope for ethical transformation as long as ethical transformation is not equated with Western democracy and tradition, and Scripture is allowed to speak into the context of the culture in need of transformation. To this point, it would have been advantageous for Chung to make it clear that Western democracy is included within the description of cultures which are in need of transformation.

Chapter 6 addresses the Edwardsian Quandary. Jonathan Edwards claimed that although Christ took the guilt of sinners upon himself, he remained blameless. How can this be if only the guilty party is punishable? How can Christ be the reconciliation for our guilt if he is innocent of our sin? According to Oliver D. Crisp, rather than claiming "that Christ is *punished* in the place of fallen" humanity, Christ's suffering of "the *penal consequences* of human sin" suitably addresses the quandary (114, emphasis original).

In the seventh essay, Jonathan R. Wilson discusses reality. In conversation with Richard Rorty, T. F. Torrance, and Roy Bhaskar, Wilson engages the second volume of Alister McGrath's *A Scientific Theology*, entitled *Reality*. Wilson points out that seeking an epistemological answer to the question "What is real?" is a mistake. He explains that the answer must be sought in Christian community as worship and discipleship take place. He further asserts that in order to do theology the theologian must be self-involved as part of the worshipping community. Although one cannot wholly define the transcendent God, one can reliably refer to him. In this way, theology moves "beyond a 'critical realism' to a participatory realism" (136).

Chapter 8 is written by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. His essay presents parameters of what a constructive eschatology should look like. Although not always recognized as such, eschatology can be found in scientific, religious, political, and cultural worldviews. Eschatological hope is often marginalized in post-Enlightenment liberal theology. After a survey of eschatological aberrations in theology and philosophy, Kärkkäinen discusses several fruitful Christian eschatological concepts. He then proposes that a comprehensive constructive eschatology includes "hope not only for the human future but also for the transformation and renewal of all creatures and the cosmos itself" and "hope for both persons and communities," and "hope for both the afterlife and the life-before-afterlife" (147). Why this must be the case is not clear. I find Kärkkäinen's survey of Christian eschatology to be incomplete since there is no mention of common theological concepts such as amillennialism, postmillennialism, premillennialism, etc.

In his book, *Re-Imagining Nature*, Alister McGrath extrapolates the necessity that the Christian *theoria* of nature must be better aligned to systematic theology. In Chapter 9, Graham Ward asks "What is nature in natural theology?" (154). He summarizes the conclusions of the Council of Chalcedon and the insights of Gregory of Nyssa, Basil of Caesarea, and others. Ward also discusses human nature, divine nature, and Christ's nature, which was not two natures but one nature, fully divine and fully human but without sin. Notwithstanding the advances of psychology, medicine, and science, human nature is still not fully understood. Likewise, divine nature is also beyond our comprehension. However, in the same way that one can get to know a person, even if human nature is not completely comprehended, one can also get to know God without being able to grasp the transcendent. To comprehend the nature of Christ, we need a measuring stick able to measure the relation between the human and divine natures, which we do not possess. So, there is no answer to the question, "What is nature in natural theology?" (173). Nonetheless, it is helpful that Ward points out that there are still productive ways of discussing related questions without using reductive methods.

Truth is often envisaged in terms of factual accounts or investigations. Yet, fiction surprisingly provides an approach to "deeper truth in wider areas" (175). In Chapter 10, Benedicta Ward examines fact and fiction in children's literature. Both fact and fiction convey truth. Even historical documentaries are reproductions of the past adapted to the comprehension of the viewers. This involves improvisations that necessarily distort some of the facts. However, this often enhances our understanding. She argues that *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan or the parables of Jesus are exemplary in their ability to portray certain truths better than facts. This essay justifies McGrath's interest in children's literature.

In Chapter 11, Bethany Sollereder proposes the use of an intercultural model rather than an epistemological model for understanding and negotiating the interaction between theology and science. Her assessment is that scientific theories are inclined to develop from the abstract into simpler, more visual models that aid comprehension; whereas theological discourse frequently begins with revealed models and analogies and diverges to complexity and mystery. Similar to the gulf of understanding between the disciplines of science and the humanities, which can be represented as two cultures, science and theology can also be envisioned as two cultures. Here, it is suggested that insights from anthropology and cross-cultural missions can be applied "to crossing the cultures of science and theology" (187). Sollereder believes Alister McGrath is one example of a person who is fluent in both these cultures.

In Chapter 12, Michael Lloyd discusses theodicy and what he perceives to be McGrath's view of the problem of suffering and evil. Of the following six propositions about God and evil, at least one must be considered false in order to avoid a contradiction. The propositions are: "God is omnipotent," "God is wholly good," "Evil exists," "There are no nonlogical limits to what an omnipotent thing can do," "Evil in the world is not logically necessary," and "A good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can" (205). In order for McGrath to maintain logical consistency, he must reject one of these statements. Lloyd believes it is the last proposition that McGrath rejects. In his book, *Suffering*,

McGrath explains that God has granted humans the freedom to make decisions. Since humans are free to choose, God will not force his will upon them. Consequently, suffering and evil can result from the freedom to choose what God has not willed. Although this explains moral evil, it does not explain suffering and disasters which have not been caused by human actions. McGrath demonstrates that good can come from suffering, and thus, that it can be instrumental to God's purpose. McGrath also concludes that eliminating suffering "is to eliminate life itself," which identifies suffering as inevitable. Notably, Lloyd points out that there is always a pastoral component in McGrath's work when addressing suffering.

In the final essay of the *festschrift*, Jeffrey P. Greenman lauds McGrath as an exemplary theologian—evangelical, Anglican, and ecclesial. This final chapter reads like hagiography. The other essays take an area of study that McGrath is interested in and contribute by interacting with different viewpoints, joining McGrath's conversations in those areas. In the final essay, Greenman upholds that McGrath is best known as an evangelical scholar and that "North American readers from across the denominational spectrum" are attracted to his work (225). This certainly has merit, yet I find it troubling that McGrath seems oblivious to and totally ignores the writings of John Wesley, who provided the foundational framework for the many evangelical Christians in North America that have Wesleyan roots, and despite the fact that Wesley, like McGrath, was Anglican and an Oxford scholar. Notwithstanding, Greenman's essay comparing McGrath to other Anglicans such as C. S. Lewis and J. I. Packer concludes a *festschrift* that is well worth reading.

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