

Book Reviews

rightful place and his proper role.” To put it in theatrical analogy: the stage is set and the drama can now unfold. Walton further concludes that the first creation narrative is, in fact, a text of inauguration because, to the ancient peoples, temples required an inauguration ceremony in order to become fully functional under the deity’s direction; the Genesis text begins with a narrative celebrating God’s indwelling of, and ongoing sovereignty over, creation.

The remaining propositions in the book explore the implications of a functional, rather than material, view of this creation narrative. The topics covered are varied; here are a few: taking a “literal” view of the narrative, theological implications, the freedom to let science explore material origins, intelligent design, and public science education. These topics are covered briefly and would spawn a great deal of discussion.

The book, in this reviewer’s opinion, has two minor flaws. First, the topics in the second half of the book are covered very superficially; readers familiar with origins debate issues would certainly crave a deeper analysis of the implications of the cosmic temple inauguration view. It is, however, understandable—and forgivable—that there are space limitations, and an analysis that was too deep might turn away readers new to the origins debate. Second, while the author makes a very concise and lucid point about the difficulties of culture in translation, the author misses the mark slightly on explaining why historical/cultural scholarship is important in this area. Readers new to topics in the origins debate, and quite possibly skeptical of any new interpretation of the first creation narrative, need to be put at ease with the technique; an illustration or two from some noncontroversial passage of Scripture that has been illuminated by a proper historical/cultural understanding would have been helpful.

The book’s strengths are many. The author makes his case for the cosmic temple inauguration view in a lucid and convincing way. His scholarship and depth of knowledge regarding the relevant archaeological data are obvious, yet he does not overwhelm the reader with so many details that the novice would get lost. There are numerous endnotes provided for those readers who want more. Groups choosing to study this book together will find helpful its organization by brief proposition. Also useful is the fact that the author included a brief summary for each proposition, and these summaries provide a transition into the next proposition, contributing to the transparency of the author’s line of reasoning.

This reviewer tremendously enjoyed reading the book and found it thought provoking and paradigm shifting. Naturally, not all will embrace the book’s thesis. Some on the one side, who may have embraced a view that this opening scriptural narrative is merely plagiarized fiction, may not fully appreciate the point. They should know that Walton has a very high view of Scripture and is unwilling to dismiss it as merely ancient storytelling; the narrative is significant, and we must not abandon attempts to deeply understand it. Those on the other side, who may seek to force the text into a set of historical events that occurred during six twenty-four-hour periods, may not readily accept the functional perspective presented. Again, Walton’s high view of Scripture applies

here; he desires to read the text literally, and a true literal reading of the text should be from a functional perspective—that is, after all, how the patriarchs and Israelites would have understood it. For those who wish to translate *yom* (day) as a long period of time, Walton points out that such an interpretation is inconsistent with good translation principles and is unnecessary.

As the author discusses in the latter half of the book, the thesis has tremendous potential to reshape much of the “science-religion” debate. He explains, “Though the Bible upholds the idea that God is *responsible* for all origins (functional, material or otherwise), if the Bible does not offer an *account* of material origins we are free to consider contemporary explanations of origins on their own merits, as long as God is seen as ultimately responsible.” Neo-Darwinism and big bang cosmology may ultimately be replaced by better scientific theories, yet we need not reshape our understanding of Scripture to match the scientific theory *du jour*. Conversely, we need not shape our understanding of science around something that the Bible does not, in fact, specify.

I recommend the book to anyone interested in the origins question and look forward to seeing how these ideas shape origins discussions of the future.

Note

¹Day one pairs with day four (light and lights), day two pairs with day five (heavens/waters and birds/fish), and day three pairs with day six (land and land animals).

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RELIGION & SCIENCE

BUDDHISM AND SCIENCE: A Guide for the Perplexed by Donald S. Lopez. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008. 264 + xiii pages, notes, index. Hardcover; \$25.00. ISBN: 9780226493121.

Popular myths often persist because we ignore the complexities of history. One such myth that has persisted for the past 150 years is the idea that Buddhism and modern science are, without question, fundamentally compatible. In *Buddhism and Science*, Donald Lopez, distinguished professor of Buddhist and Tibetan studies, explores the legitimacy of this view. Lopez rightly points out that the claim for compatibility rests on one of two assumptions. Either Buddhism lacks an essence, in which case it can be interpreted in any way that it might need to be in order to be compatible with science, or Buddhism is very narrowly defined, in which case the narrowly defined version of Buddhism can be shown to be compatible with science.

Against the latter claim, Lopez demonstrates that the historic evolution of Buddhism itself is far too complex to warrant an overly narrow understanding of Buddhism itself. Thus, claims for the compatibility of modern science with say, Zen Buddhism (principally a Japanese tradition), overlook the rich traditions of Buddhism in India, China, Sri Lanka, or Tibet. Taking one strand of the tradition to be

representative of the whole is, for Lopez, unstable ground for drawing decisive conclusions about the compatibility of Buddhism and modern science. At the same time, Lopez recognizes that Buddhism is not infinitely malleable. Thus, while it is unacceptable to understand Buddhism in an overly narrow way, it is equally unacceptable to understand Buddhism in whatever way one wishes. The anti-essentialist view runs “the risk of allowing Buddhism to be everything and nothing.” Says Lopez, “It is neither” (p. 216).

In unpacking these claims, Lopez spends the bulk of his book writing about the rich and complex history of Buddhism—focusing on key encounters between Buddhism and science. The result is that this book is primarily about the history of Buddhism, with a tip of the hat to a smattering of important scientific ideas. Still, the book is a fascinating study in the complexities of the relationship between religion and science generally, and of Buddhism’s ongoing efforts to come to terms with the deliverance of modern science in particular.

Lopez traces this complex history over the past 150 years by focusing on five pivotal historical moments in the encounter between Buddhism and modern science. First, in chapter one, Lopez explores the compatibility of Buddhist cosmology and geography with modern science through the lens of a debate about the existence of Mount Meru—a centerpiece of Buddhist cosmology. The public debate between a Buddhist monk and a Sinhalese convert to Christianity took place in Sri Lanka in 1873. While the debate was thought to be a victory for Buddhism, Lopez explores how the ensuing history is marked by increasing ambiguity—with some Buddhist strands viewing the actual existence of Mount Meru as inessential to Buddhism itself. Second, chapter two treats the historical interaction between Buddhism and the “science of race.” Third, in chapter three, Lopez focuses narrowly on the work of two Tibetan Buddhist monks: Gendun Chopel and the Dalai Lama. In painstaking detail, Lopez analyzes the writings of both to bring out the manner in which the largely isolated Tibetan Buddhists grappled with their encounter with the modern world. Finally, after a chapter on the western, historical study of Buddhism itself (chapter four), Lopez rounds out his study with a brief chapter (five) on recent neurophysiological studies of Buddhist meditation. Given the volume of attention that the latter has received in recent years, this chapter is regrettably brief—focusing largely on the practice of meditation from the Buddhist perspective.

As a work of historical scholarship, Lopez’s book is remarkable. It is dense and detailed. And for a reader who is not acquainted with the intricacies of Buddhism, the details are often excruciatingly complex. In that respect, this book may serve more to induce perplexity than to guide one through it. However, for those with an interest in the relationship between religion and science, or for those who wish to dispel the popular myth that all things scientific have been anticipated by the Buddha, Lopez’s *Buddhism and Science* is a welcome resource.

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GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY by Pranab Das, ed. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2009. 224 pages, index. Paperback; \$29.95. ISBN: 9781599473390.

In an era of globalization, it is increasingly important that we listen to one another. This is the spirit of the Global Perspectives on Science and Spirituality (GPSS) Program, of which the editor of this book is the leader. In recent years he has worked with scholars from around the world to bring their insights on issues relating to science and spirituality to a Western audience. This book contains twelve of the award-winning essays selected from among 150 applicants from over twenty countries.

This book is extremely broad. Authors from Poland, Russia, America, Hungary, China, Korea, Germany, Czech Republic, India, Japan and Slovakia contribute chapters. Chapters are presented from the positions of Christianity, Daoism, Buddhism, psychology, Indian spirituality, process philosophy, and mathematics. The editor has succeeded in bringing a variety of voices to the Western reader, but I am not sure how many readers are conversant or interested enough in this breadth of ideologies and cultural perspectives to remain interested throughout. Each chapter is quite demanding in its complexity.

The book is unique in bringing together scholars from many countries and persuasions. This open approach is a challenge to many Christians who are often guarded in what resources they will draw on in formulating their position. It made me ask to what extent ASA writings might more creatively explore new territory while holding to fundamental truths. I leave it to other readers to decide if the premise of the GPSS is an avenue of new thinking for us evangelical Christians, or not.

The essays in this book lack a unifying position. Most books I have read on science and faith have defended an authentic Christian approach to the issues. This book is open, and advances no particular religion. That is both a strength and a weakness. The strength is that it expands the limits of what can be considered. Furthermore, the breadth of religious perspectives presented reminds us of the complexity of the issues from a global perspective. The weakness is that the book lacks a foundation or guiding approach. After completing the book I was still unclear what the editor hopes to accomplish. I am accustomed to using accepted methods of Scriptural exegesis in doing theology and the scientific method in doing science, and then seeking for positions acceptable to both disciplines as I consider issues of science and faith. The essays in this book rely on such a disparate set of epistemological methods that it is hard to read them critically.

Even though many countries and ideologies are represented, the book is not contextual enough. In these essays, the scholars spend more time wrestling with Western paradigms and their cultural or religious reaction to them than clearly presenting an indigenous position on science and faith. For example, they wrestle with the positions of scholars like Foucault, Barbour, and Freud. Most of the references are to Western authors and in English. This compromises the book’s true globalism. It also feels as if these authors are academics and not sincere adherents of the positions they are presenting. It reminded me