

on the Lord's Supper, leading towards a weekly celebration of the Supper: Billings has won his wager! I look forward to what he has next in his line of pastoral theology.

Andrew Root. *Exploding Stars, Dead Dinosaurs and Zombies: Youth Ministry in the Age of Science*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018. (xv + 292 pp.) ISBN: 9781506446745

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American theologian Andrew Root undertakes no small task in this work as he attempts to produce a resource that will equip youth pastors and others who minister to young people with the means to help those young people understand and interpret the findings of modern science theologically. Root's work on this subject was funded by a John Templeton Foundation grant, "Science for Youth Ministry," and he is an excellent choice of author for this subject given his previous works on youth ministry, the implications of secularism for the church, and his strong grasp of various themes in systematic theology.

One of Root's primary challenges in producing this work is the need for him to write it at an appropriate reading level. While his bibliography in this book is impressive, Root admits early on that much of what has been written about the relationship between religion and science falls prey to a common problem: "these conversations often begin at a philosophical altitude that makes the air too thin to breathe, scrambling our minds in confusion" (p. 5). Root wants to produce a work that equips ministers, whilst still referring to the best insights of contemporary authors on this subject.

One way that Root goes about doing this is by situating the key topics of this book within an unfolding narrative about a fictional youth pastor, "Jared," and some of the young people he is working with. Jared is pastor to three young people who pose difficult questions about the relationship between their Christian faith and the scientific. "Aly" is the first of these young people, and she wonders how faith can still be a viable option in the modern world, given the impressive accomplishments and substantial explanatory power that modern science possesses. This then creates space for Root to draw an important distinction between "scientific findings and theories," and "the comprehensive social practice of science" wherein "science" becomes a byword for an all-encompassing worldview that excludes any talk of God. Critiquing the latter of these, Root then goes on to discuss ways in which Christian faith and scientific findings and theories can interrelate. Finally, he returns to the narrative. Aly is experiencing a deep grief, having lost her sister to cancer, and returns to church to be ministered to by Jared and his family. Here Root neatly integrates his overall point, that "while faith and the scientific overlap in their epistemic goals ... Christian faith also seeks something different, something it appeared the scientific was unable or unwilling to search for.... Faith seeks the face, the deep and beautiful mind, of God and neighbour" (p. 112). Root, via his fictional account of Aly and Jared's experience, puts it to us that faith, rooted in the search for the "personal," can hold its own in the face of any overarching worldview that some might offer in the name of "science."

The book then turns to a second story, this time of Jared's interaction with "Sasha," a young woman who wonders how, given what is now known about the size and age of the universe, there can be any plausibility to the idea that there is a God who loves the people of earth. This, Root contends, puts both our theology of the incarnation at risk, ("if God comes to us in human form, what happens if intelligent life comes in many forms?") as well as the simpler question of if Earth and its inhabitants have any special significance, given the expanse of the cosmos. Here, Root uses Sasha's questions to create space to explore the story of Galileo, the Big Bang, and the fine-tuning of the universe and of Earth's place within it. When he returns to the narrative of Jared after this excursus, we see the youth pastor creating space at his weekly youth group for Sasha and her friends to hold a debate about these questions, a debate that Jared facilitates. Root also argues that it is possible to interpret the age and size of the universe theologically, "to see God's *kenotic* (self-emptying) act of loving and slowly molding the universe so it might produce ministers made in God's image who might love God and care for the universe as God does" (p. 196). Here Root does some sophisticated theological work in demonstrating how Sasha's questions need not be perceived as a threat to faith and can indeed fit within a Christian understanding of God's work in the world.

Finally, the narrative considers the concerns of "Martin," a young man who has questions about evolution and the potential (and, according to Martin, inevitable) end of humankind's existence on Earth. Root is able here to explore the story of Charles Darwin and his contemporaries, discuss some of the false assumptions he believes Young Earth Creationist and Intelligent Design thinkers to hold, and consider the question of how a theory of human evolution and the theology of the *imago dei* can possibly co-exist. Jared's response to these issues is to run a Bible study, specifically on the first few chapters of Genesis, and allow his young people the room to freely question and discuss the teaching there. Jared (and, by extension, the reader) by this point is well educated on ways to respond to some of the typical objections to the issues that may arise in such a discussion. Thus, the fictional discussion goes well, and in a touch of self-awareness, Root ends the book there, with the final word going to a fourth young person, "Tegan," who poses an unanswered question about cognitive science and faith. This is Root admitting that he has not provided all the answers in one volume and providing a creative means of suggesting one area where further work could be done.

Overall, this book succeeds in its task, of providing a discussion of the relationship between Christian faith and modern science in the context of youth ministry. However, despite his best intentions, at times Root's own "philosophical altitude" did seem to rise a bit above the level that one would expect this book to be pitched. As a former youth pastor, I wondered how easy it would have been to incorporate some of Root's arguments into my own practice, as I had to read it twice before I felt as though I understood what he was saying at various points. Busy ministers may look elsewhere for works that are more obviously applicable. The narrative woven throughout the book is a brilliant framework for Root's overall task, as it provides a useful exemplar of what a youth pastor *could* do with the various issues proposed, as well as giving the work a natural sense of momentum and flow that a more systematic volume may have lacked. Yet much is still required of the reader here, and while it is clearly not Root's task to be too prescriptive, a few more practical suggestions would not have been too many.