Natural theology no longer commands the respect that it once did. Heavily influenced by the Enlightenment and a new reading of Paul’s “Areopagus” speech, seventeenth and eighteenth-century Anglican scholars sought to base their apologetics on the best science of the period. They fell short, and popular works such as Richard Dawkins’s *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986) are often cited to suggest that their approach was simply wrong. As Alister McGrath argues in this new series of lectures, the apologetic approach to natural theology is also inadequate even when considered on strictly theological terms. It does not take into account post-modernist insights about our relationship to what we observe. It promotes heterodox notions of God, most notably Deism, and, as Karl Barth observed, it undermines the necessity for revelation. Nonetheless, McGrath argues the field is not a dead end. In the 2009 Gifford Lectures he proposed a new way of thinking about natural theology, one which emphasizes “seeing” nature from a uniquely Christian perspective.

McGrath’s argument should not be taken as a scientific defense of “intelligent design.” Design, he notes, is an inference one makes, not an observation proper. The inference, in turn, derives from faith. He does, however, suggest that such inferences are a legitimate subject of theological inquiry. Modern natural theology must accept the post-modernist suggestion that nature is not some objective whole that is separate from us. Instead, scientists and theologians view nature through an interpretive lens that allows them to make sense of the world. Following the insights of the American pragmatist Charles Pierce, McGrath suggests that the scientific enterprise should best be viewed as a process of abduction, or a leap to the best inference or explanation of our observations. Trinitarian theology has much to contribute to such an enterprise because Christian theology offers a worldview with considerable explanatory power.

Using Augustine’s commentary on Genesis as a guide, McGrath suggests several ways that theology can offer useful interpretations to scientists and vice versa. As the title implies, a focus of these interpretations concern the remarkable fine-tuning of our universe. A “creation” as implied by Christian theology is certainly one valid inference. Is it the most useful? McGrath also considers suggested alternatives, such as the “multiverse” hypothesis proposed by string theorists like Leonard Susskind.
complex relationships with Frederick of Saxony, Philip Melanchthon, Pope Leo X, and the Emperor Charles V. Gritsch is likewise strong in describing the development of early doctrine. Later chapters devote attention to the spread of Lutheranism throughout Europe and especially into the Scandinavian countries, Lutheran interaction with the reformed movements, seventeenth-century confessional identity, eighteenth-century pietistic developments, missionary efforts, and the rise of ecumenism. A final chronology provides significant dates in Lutheranism juxtaposed with events in world history.

Gritsch notes that his intention is not to focus on histories of individual churches (xiii). This is likely the only manageable approach to the study of a diverse global communion in a single volume. However, the result is that his treatment of developments in any particular country can seem cursory, especially after the eighteenth century when Lutheranism expanded beyond Northern Europe. For example, Gritsch’s treatment of the spread of Lutheranism to Africa and Asia through missionary efforts is welcome; however, one might wish that more detail about the character of the churches in these areas was provided. As it is, he provides helpful membership figures and a few highlights, but little description.

Careful readers, especially those concerned with Anglican-Lutheran relationships, will notice some errors in Gritsch’s facts. In describing nineteenth century revival movements, he writes about the Oxford Movement and Anglo-Catholicism, offered as a parallel to various Lutheran renewal developments. However, he provides an odd date for the Oxford Movement’s establishment (1860) and does not seem to understand the nuances of its arguments vis-à-vis Roman Catholicism (1868-87). He should be forgiven, given that his purpose is not a history of Anglican thought. There are likewise minor errors in his description of late twentieth-century Lutheran-Anglican ecumenical developments (245-47). Despite slight factual concern, Gritsch’s overall point is made: there have been significant strides in ecumenical understanding through the establishment of full communion relationships.

A History of Lutheranism provides the first definitive presentation of global Lutheranism. It is a major accomplishment and would make a welcome addition to any library as both a handy reference guide and a compellingly written history of an important international communion that has shaped the Christian religion profoundly.

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