

Science as the Servant of Theology: An Appraisal of Alister McGrath's Critical Realist Perspective

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Abstract:

In the last fifty years, scholars have witnessed a massive amount of writing on the relationship between science and theology from both an evangelical and non-evangelical perspective. Alister E. McGrath's completion of the trilogy *A Scientific Theology* represents one of the most significant treatments of the relationship between theology and science by an evangelical in recent time.¹ The significance of his work is partially found in the fact that McGrath is considered by some to be one of the most productive theologians of evangelicalism in the 21st century. Moreover, McGrath's enters this discussion as one who holds doctorates in the natural sciences as well as theology.² This article argues that McGrath's approach makes a valuable contribution to evangelical theology, as well as the relationship between theology and science.

Brief Summary of McGrath's Scientific Theology

As McGrath explains, a Scientific Theology (ST) is based on the contention that “the relationship of Christian theology to the natural sciences is that of two fundamentally related disciplines, whose working methods reflect this common grounding in responding to a reality which lies beyond them, of which they are bound to give an ordered account.”³ He goes on to describe ST:

[ST] an attempt to explore the interface between Christian theology and the natural sciences, on the assumption that this engagement is necessary, proper, legitimate and productive.

Its three volumes set out to explore the manner in which the working assumptions of the natural sciences can serve as a dialogue partner to the theological enterprise, in which there is a genuine interaction and interchange between the two disciplines, to the mutual benefit of both. It is fundamentally a sustained essay in theological method, in the sense of an attempt to explore the contours of a potentially interesting dialogue, not without its difficulties, which promises to be one of the more significant intellectual conversations of the twenty-first century.⁴

He later adds that the “concern throughout this work is to explore the methodological parallels between Christian theology and the natural sciences. How is knowledge gained, correlated and conceptualized?”⁵ Thus, one must realize that McGrath is not primarily concerned with how the different theories and claims of theology and science fit together. Rather, he contends that the basis for dialogue between the two comes from the epistemological assumptions that they share.

McGrath presents the natural sciences as the ideal *ancilla theologiae*: that is, the handmaiden of theology. As he notes, the church has a long standing tradition of making use of various disciplines outside of Christianity, when they serve as helpful tools for theological inquiry. He says, “There is a long tradition within Christian theology of drawing on intellectual resources outside the Christian tradition as a means of developing a theological vision.”⁶ While previous generations made use of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, McGrath believes that the natural sciences are now the preferred dialogue partner for theology.⁷ As he explains, “It is entirely understandable why the natural sciences should be considered a highly attractive dialogue partner for other intellectual disciplines. Wearied by the distortion of theory by prejudice in so many areas of intellectual activity, many have found the objectivity sought by the natural sciences to offer stability and sanity to their reflections.”⁸

In volume one (*Nature*), McGrath offers a critique of the socially constructed concept of nature by showing how it is variously understood by different groups throughout history. For example, McGrath shows how the ancient Greek philosophers’ understanding of

nature included the idea of matter being eternal. In more recent history, nature has been portrayed as a theater and as a mother. Thus, McGrath considers nature to be a highly ambiguous term that is beneficial for neither science nor theology. In its place, McGrath presents the Christian doctrine of creation as a viable alternative for both theology and science, by highlighting the implications of this doctrine for both disciplines. It is here that McGrath begins to unpack his important contribution to a revived and revised natural theology.

The discussion of volume two (*Reality*) centers around the realism/antirealism debate. Here McGrath defends and carefully distinguishes his realist approach from the classical foundationalist, Postliberal coherentist, and postmodern antirealist perspectives. McGrath does this by adopting Roy Bhaskar's critical realist understanding of a stratified reality. In this volume, natural theology receives further development and McGrath ends by outlining his proposed theological method. Generally conceived, ST should be understood as: (1) a response to reality as that which exists objectively, (2) an *a posteriori* discipline, (3) an approach that sees theology as response to its distinctive object, (4) an approach aimed at giving an explanation of reality, and (5) as a postulate, McGrath argues that ST is, and should be, Christocentric.⁹

In volume three (*Theory*), McGrath explores and defends the development and use of theories. He then defends the theological enterprise itself and explains how theology, like natural science, is an *a posteriori* discipline. According to McGrath, theology is an *a posteriori* discipline since it is a response to divine revelation.

Epistemological Value of ST

The philosophical developments of modernity had enormous consequences for the relationship between science and theology in that it sharply divided the two disciplines from each other. As J. Wentzel van Huyssteen puts it, "The dialogue between theology and the sciences has been forced into a rather radical conflict, a kind of modernist 'duel' where 'objective', universal scientific claims were starkly contrasted to conflict with subjective, 'irrational' theological beliefs, resulting in

a relentless pressure toward the absolute polarization of religion and science.”¹⁰ In modernity, the natural sciences spoke with tremendous epistemological authority while religion was marginalized. The famous physicalist John Searle also notes the marginalization of religious belief. In *Mind, Language and Society*, he dismisses the “God question” altogether as unimportant and distasteful. He says, “In earlier generations, books like [his] would have had to contain either an atheistic attack on or a theistic defense of traditional religion. Or at the very least, the author would have had to declare a judicious agnosticism . . . Nowadays nobody bothers, and it is considered in slightly bad taste to even raise the question of God’s existence. Matters of religion are like matters of sexual preference: they are not to be discussed in public, and even the abstract questions are discussed only by bores.”¹¹

As the Western world moved from a modern to a postmodern perspective, absolute objective truth was denied and relativism became all pervasive. In this intellectual environment, neither science nor theology could claim to speak of truth. As Andreas Köstenberger notes, in postmodernity, the “notion of truth has largely become a casualty of postmodern thought and discourse . . . Hence truth is simply one’s preferred, culturally conditioned, socially constructed version of reality.”¹²

Epistemologically speaking, a critical realist perspective, such as McGrath’s, is preferable to the modern and postmodern epistemological perspectives for a number of reasons. First, in contrast to a postmodern perspective, critical realism affirms the existence of an objective reality that is independent of individual human minds, as well as the possibility of gaining knowledge of this reality.¹³ With this, critical realism affirms what is largely accepted as common sense by most people. As David Clark notes, most people “assume that various sorts of entities, beings, properties, or relations actually exist outside a speaker’s mind. Most people, in other words, are metaphysical realists.”¹⁴ Searle believes this is one of the “default positions” which “we hold prereflectively so that any departure from them requires a conscious effort and a convincing argument.”¹⁵ This seems to explain why a realist understanding of reality has been assumed throughout most of history. As Mortimer Adler puts it, “In the history of Western

thought . . . a profound understanding of truth has prevailed from the time of Plato and Aristotle to the present. This understanding rests upon a single supposition; namely, that there exists, quite independent of the human mind, a reality which the human mind thinks about and tries to know."¹⁶ Furthermore, these affirmations have been given substantial intellectual support by the success of modern science. As Benjamin Myers contends, "A basic assumption of both natural science and theology is that there is a reality independent of the human mind, which is intelligible in spite of the 'inescapable historicity' of the human subject."¹⁷

Second, McGrath's critical realist approach affirms a correspondence theory of truth.¹⁸ As McGrath explains on multiple occasions, all theories and doctrines must be accountable to reality. His ST offers "a view of the world, including God, which is both internally consistent and which is grounded in the structures of the real world. It aims to achieve *extra-systemic correspondence* with *intra-systemic coherence*, regarding both these criteria as of fundamental importance."¹⁹ A truth claim is not merely a matter of social construct, but is determined by how well a given proposition fits with reality. Clark describes the validity of this position when he says, "Virtually all people, including those who have never studied epistemology, typically assume something like this notion of truth, it is a *pretheoretic* intuition regarding truth. . . This is pretheoretic in that it is not an idea that *results from* complex theory building about the nature of truth but a belief that people *bring* to their theorizing about truth. It is a basic assumption, rooted in experience. It is something people philosophize *with*, not something they philosophize *to*."²⁰

A third strength of McGrath's critical realist approach is that it acknowledges the mediated nature of human knowledge, which allows him to avoid the dangers of modern/Enlightenment perspectives that naïvely assumed an absolutely objective perspective of reality. That is, he affirms that "reality or realities can be known, however approximately, and that statements which are made concerning it cannot be regarded totally or simply as subjective assertions concerning personal attitudes or feelings. It is possible to gain at least some degree of epistemic access to a reality which exists 'objectively', while at the same time conceding that the manner in which this is

apprehended or conceptualized may, to some extent, be conditioned by cultural, social and personal factors.”²¹ By affirming critical realism and a correspondence theory of truth, McGrath avoids the dangers of postmodernism that lead to relativism. On the other hand, he avoids the naïveté of modernism by acknowledging the mediated nature of knowledge.²² He says, “Theology does not just address history, nor does it just address nature—it addresses *and is addressed* by these and other strata of reality, and has the responsibility of coordinating these different levels of being, and showing how they are coherent with its overall vision of reality.”²³ His ST recognizes the subjective factors that shape human understanding and explanation of what it apprehends. With this, McGrath shows how a critical realist navigates between modernity and postmodernity by accepting the valuable lessons of both periods, without falling prey to the dangers of either.

A fourth strength of McGrath’s ST is found in his acceptance of Roy Bhaskar’s notion of a stratified reality.²⁴ This allows McGrath to affirm a unified theory of knowledge (UTK), while at the same time avoiding reductionism. He says, “A scientific theology is motivated by the quest for a unified explanation of reality . . . the reality that requires to be explained is complex, multilayered and often opaque. We do not experience that reality as neatly divided into separate compartments. . . . Rather, we experience reality in its wholeness and interconnectedness before we develop particular disciplines and techniques to study different aspects of it.”²⁵ Alan Padgett agrees saying, “If there exists a real world, independent of human experience, then our worldview should be aimed at understanding that world as fully as possible. For this fuller understanding we need all the disciplines of the university, including the human sciences and theology. We will expect greater coherence in our worldview because we believe that at bottom there is one reality, which is whole and connected.”²⁶

McGrath’s ST does more, however, than simply affirm a UTK. By accepting Bhaskar’s notion of a stratified reality, his approach avoids the problematic reductionism of other theorists like E. O. Wilson, who also calls for unity of knowledge, but does so at the expense of philosophy, theology and many other important domains of human inquiry.²⁷ In short, McGrath’s approach is better than other theorists arguing for a UTK since it embraces a UTK while at the same time

affirming the stratification of reality. Because of this, each discipline will develop its particular mode and methods of investigation in keeping with the nature of its particular strata of reality. McGrath embraces a UTK that does not result in reductionism and is thus commendable to evangelicals.

Finally, McGrath's critical realist approach is also favorable to a modern perspective since it does not require Cartesian certainty for a given belief to be counted as knowledge. He says, "Traditionally, Christian doctrine has been well aware of its limits, and has sought to avoid excessively confident affirmations in the face of mystery. Yet at the same time, Christian theology has never seen itself as totally reduced to silence in the face of divine mysteries."²⁸

The demands for certainty by modernism can now be seen as highly problematic since very little of what men claim to know can be established with absolute certainty.²⁹ As Davis explains, the "search for absolutely certain statements from which one can (through an absolutely reliable method) warrant statements that were uncertain has indeed thus far proved to be a will-o'-the-wisp. The prospects for Cartesian foundationalism or Lockean foundationalism do not look particularly promising."³⁰ Furthermore, as Daniel Taylor notes, as fallen creatures "our knowledge of any absolute is not only partial, it is distorted. Even if by some stretch of the imagination we could extrapolate the infinite from the finite, arguing that partial knowledge of an absolute demonstrates the existence of the whole, we confront the claim of Christian orthodoxy itself that all our perceptions are at least partially flawed as well as limited."³¹ Instead of accepting the demands for certainty, McGrath proposes a balanced way of dealing with the issue by noting that one can gain varying degrees of closure (certainty) given the nature of the object under consideration.³²

Because of these constructive aspects of McGrath's ST, I suggest that his theological method holds advantages to theologies developed from a modern or postmodern perspective. This is an important consideration since some evangelicals have been willing to embrace postmodernism or revert to a modern perspective. Rightly so, some evangelicals have expressed concern with the postmodern rejection of a correspondence theory of truth and metanarratives. Douglas Groothuis, for example, notes the importance of maintaining

a correspondence theory of truth when it says, “the correspondence view of truth is not simply one of many options for Christians. It is the only biblically and logically grounded view of truth available and allowable. We neglect or deny it to our peril and disgrace. Truth decay will not be dispelled without it.”³³ Mohler makes a similar point, suggesting that “postmodernists believe all truth to be socially constructed, all claims of absolute, universal, and established truth must be resisted. All meta-narratives—that is, all grand and expansive accounts of truth, meaning, and existence—are cast aside, for they claim far more than they can deliver.”³⁴ J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig agree. They say, “In claiming that there are no metanarratives, postmodernists mean that there is no way to decide which among competing worldviews is true, and more importantly, there is no single worldview true for everyone. There are no metanarratives, only local ones.”³⁵ Richard Tarnas also notes the self-defeating nature of the postmodern perspective at this point when he says, “By virtue of that self-relativizing critical awareness, it is recognized that a quasi-nihilist rejection of any and all forms of ‘totalization’ and ‘metanarrative’ . . . cannot on its own principles ultimately justify itself any more than can the various metaphysical overviews against which the postmodern mind has defined itself. Such a position presupposes a metanarrative of its own, one perhaps more subtle than others, but in the end no less subject to deconstruction criticism.”³⁶

On the other hand, there are also problems with evangelicals returning back to a modern perspective. As Tim Morris and Don Petcher point out, in their avoidance of postmodernism, some evangelicals have reverted to a modern perspective. They say, “While some have gone too far in the postmodern direction, most Christians rightly recognize the dangers of postmodern relativism. But many Christians, in their strong rejection of relativism, end up siding with modernism by default.”³⁷ A few possible examples³⁸ of this may be noted. In an essay entitled “The Premature Report of Foundationalism’s Demise”, J. P. Moreland and Garrett DeWeese argue that “the rejection of foundationalist epistemology is a serious mistake.”³⁹ Likewise, claiming that the postmodern critique of modernity is overreached, Mohler suggests that evangelicals should retain a soft form of foundationalism.⁴⁰

In fairness to Moreland, DeWeese and Mohler, however, two points should be made. First, the concerns they raise with postmodernism are certainly valid and show the problems with this epistemological perspective.⁴¹ Second, they are not necessarily advocating a return to the classical foundationalism of the Enlightenment.⁴² Nevertheless, the term foundationalism—whether soft or hard, broad or narrow, modest or strong—comes with philosophical baggage that evangelicals may not wish to carry. The term foundationalism, however it is modified, seems to suggest an affirmation of Enlightenment ideas that are now seen to be epistemologically hollow. This becomes even more problematic when and where evangelicals fail to show how their approach differs from classical foundationalism. In Mohler’s case, for example, he contends for a foundationalist approach without discussing or acknowledging the social and subjective factors of human knowledge. In the end, his affirmation of soft foundationalism is not adequately distinguished from classical foundationalism. Thus, affirming a foundationalist approach without careful clarification and qualification seems to be problematic. As Morris and Petcher put it, “While Christians rightly believe that the postmodern ‘anything goes’ relativism is on the wrong track, combating postmodern relativism by simply reaffirming modernist convictions about scientific objectivism is not the solution.”⁴³

As a third alternative to the modern and postmodern perspective, I suggest that a critical realist model, such as McGrath’s, offers a preferable epistemological approach. As Myers notes, this is because McGrath’s theological method is “able to appropriate the valid insights of both Enlightenment objectivism and postmodern social constructivism, without capitulating to the one-sidedness of either.”⁴⁴

Ontological Value of McGrath’s ST

In addition to the epistemological strengths just mentioned, McGrath’s ST also makes a significant contribution in the area of ontology. In volume one of *A Scientific Theology*, McGrath gives special attention to the Christian doctrine of creation and shows how it is not only essential to the Christian faith, but that it holds significant

advantages for the natural sciences as well. He suggests the concept of creation is preferable to the concept of “nature” since nature is a prime example of a socially constructed concept which is variously understood by different groups.⁴⁵ In his view, replacing the concept of nature with the Christian doctrine of creation is, not only consistent with Christian theology, but also provides an ontological basis for natural science and the dialogue between science and theology.⁴⁶ To be sure, McGrath’s preference for creation is more than just a mere exchanging of terminology. McGrath points to the ontological significance of positing God as the creator of the universe. That is, if the universe has been created by God, then one can expect the universe to possess a genuine rationality which is discernable by the natural sciences and that also partially reveals the divine rationality behind it.

There are at least two distinct benefits of McGrath’s approach. First, from a theological perspective, McGrath’s emphasis on the ontological implications of creation allows theologians to gain insights from creation in the development of doctrine. However partial or incomplete this revelation may be, theologians can affirm that creation reveals God to mankind since there is a correspondence between the works of God and the being of God.⁴⁷ Because of this, natural science—the study of God’s creation—can serve as the handmaiden of theology. In addition to the common assumptions and methodologies that are shared between theology and science, McGrath thinks that natural science can be especially helpful to theology hermeneutically. That is, the “natural sciences can be seen as offering a stimulus to Christian theology, to consider whether it has, in fact, achieved a correct interpretation of its foundational resources on points of importance.”⁴⁸ Thus, McGrath believes that an emphasis on the Christian doctrine of creation reinforces the fact that theology can be informed from the natural sciences.

Second, McGrath suggests that there are also important benefits for the natural sciences in the doctrine of creation. Here McGrath notes how natural scientists assume certain things that they cannot find support for without something like the Christian doctrine of creation.⁴⁹ That is, things like the rationality of the universe along with humanity’s ability to comprehend that rationality is incredibly difficult for natural science to explain on its own. If the Christian doctrine of creation is

posited, however, McGrath shows how natural science is given the ontological basis for some of these assumptions.

As John Polkinghorne says, “A metaphysical question such as why the universe is so deeply intelligible to us, with mathematics the key to the unlocking of its secrets, does not lend itself to knock-down answers of a logically coercive kind. The most we can require is an interpretation that is coherent and persuasive. Theism provides just such a response to the metaquestion of intelligibility.”⁵⁰ By grounding natural science in a Christian understanding of creation, McGrath and Polkinghorne think that natural science is given an ontological basis for some of its most essential assumptions.

Accordingly, McGrath’s emphasis on the Christian doctrine of creation shows how theology and science can be mutually enhanced and encouraged by a dialogue with one another. Therefore, with the use of CR and the emphasis on the doctrine of creation, McGrath’s ST offers the epistemological as well as the ontological basis for a UTK.⁵¹

Apologetic Value of McGrath’s ST

McGrath’s ST also makes a valuable contribution to evangelicalism with its reintroduction of natural theology as a legitimate aspect of Christian theology. To be clear, McGrath has done more than simply rehash the natural theology of the modern period with all of its problems.⁵² McGrath’s revised natural theology is quite consistent with a premodern approach that allows it to function within the Christian tradition⁵³ and emphasizes creation’s ability to reveal the glory of God.⁵⁴ In fact, his natural theology might be seen as an extension of the doctrine of creation and its ability to reveal the creator.⁵⁵ Because of this, McGrath’s approach enjoys considerable biblical support.⁵⁶

McGrath’s approach has other advantages as well.⁵⁷ By repositioning natural theology within the Christian tradition, he abandons the foundationalist approach of the Enlightenment. During this period, philosophers and theologians used natural theology as the basis of justification for Christian theism.⁵⁸ In other words, one had to establish the existence of God before one was justified in holding to theistic beliefs, and natural theology was often used in an effort to

accomplish this. Added to this, the Enlightenment approach demanded certainty from the arguments of natural theology. McGrath rejects this approach and argues that, historically speaking, natural theology is better understood as the “enterprise of seeing nature as creation, which both presupposes and reinforces fundamental Christian theological affirmations.”⁵⁹ Thus, natural theology is not required to yield absolute certainty for Christian beliefs. Instead, it simply gives confirmation to an already existing belief. Therefore, in McGrath’s approach, the unnecessary and impossible requirement of certainty is removed allowing natural theology to play a significant role in Christian theology once again.⁶⁰

Furthermore, even though it is allowed to function from within the Christian tradition—in light of an already present belief in God’s existence—McGrath shows how natural theology has appeal to those outside the faith since it offers “both intra-systemic and extra-systemic insights.”⁶¹ He states, “Christian natural theology is a tradition-specific construal with universal applicability.”⁶² The universal applicability comes by way of the fact that natural theology, according to McGrath, is able to give an explanation of the natural sciences as well as other religious belief systems. Thus, McGrath’s natural theology gives the Christian tradition explanatory power and a point of contact with the non-believer.⁶³ Thus, even though it begins within the Christian tradition and does not require absolute certainty, McGrath’s natural theology has apologetic value for evangelical theology. As Alan Padgett points out, “Evangelical theologians and church leaders would do well to reflect upon McGrath’s defense of natural theology. . . McGrath rightly points out that learned non-Christians will demand some Christian response to the natural sciences and to the ever-popular scientific atheists of our day. To be true to its mission, the church must contend in public for a Christian understanding of the natural order and of natural science.”⁶⁴ McGrath’s approach offers an acceptable way of doing this by reestablishing natural theology as a legitimate and helpful aspect of Christian theology.

Conclusion

Alister McGrath's ST—which is developed in *A Scientific Theology* and *The Science of God*—makes a valuable contribution to evangelical theology. Though very little has been written in response to his ST, the response so far has been quite positive. For example, Keating says, despite the areas “in which one could wish more exactitude, there can be no doubt that McGrath has moved the discussion over the theological value of dialogue with the natural sciences in a new and most welcome direction. In particular, he insists with clarity and sophistication that dialogue with the sciences must and can be in service of theology's ongoing quest to remain subordinated to God's revelation in Jesus Christ.”⁶⁵ Myers concurs, saying:

With immense learning and considerable sophistication, McGrath's *Scientific Theology* presents a theology of nature, a defense of the objectivity and knowability of the real world, and an account of the theoretical representation of reality. The whole work develops its argument through extensive engagement with the history of theology and the philosophy of science, while its most decisive formulations remain grounded in the witness of scripture. McGrath's passionate concern to integrate scientific and theological methods is balanced and enriched at every point by his concern to maintain the integrity of theology and by his commitment to an evangelical orthodoxy deeply rooted in the ecumenical faith of Christian tradition. What emerges is a uniquely sustained and wide-ranging demonstration of the methodological value of natural science as a dialogue-partner for and aid to theological reflection.⁶⁶

Myers later adds, “McGrath's *Scientific Theology* is one of the most sustained and sophisticated theological engagements with natural science yet produced, and one of the most important works on theological method to have appeared in recent years. Its nuanced critical realist vision of the nature and task of theology will offer a valuable stimulus to theological reflection in the future.”⁶⁷ Likewise,

Snyder argues that “McGrath’s work in scientific theology and critical realism, in concert with the tradition of classical Christian theology, has much to recommend it. This approach opens up new avenues for study and discussion in Christian theology, without abandoning historical theology.”⁶⁸ Finally, Edward Oakes says, “Taken together, the trilogy proves that McGrath can now claim to join the ranks of the most significant theologians of this new century.”⁶⁹ Indeed, those who have considered McGrath’s ST so far see it as an extraordinary achievement and valuable contribution to evangelical theology.

Indeed, McGrath’s work stands out as a monumental achievement among evangelicals concerned with developing a theological method that takes the dialogue with natural science seriously. Furthermore, with the adoption of Roy Bhaskar’s CR, McGrath’s ST is better than theological methods that adopt a modern or postmodern perspective. Unlike these perspectives, McGrath’s critical realist approach offers a balanced treatment of the objective and subjective aspects of human knowledge. In addition to this, it regains a UTK without yielding to reductionism. McGrath does all of this by observing the common epistemological assumptions and methods of theology and science. Based on these similarities, McGrath brings theology and science back into dialogue and shows how they can be mutually enhanced by this renewed relationship.

McGrath’s ST also offers important ontological insights for theology and science. By affirming that God is the Creator of the universe, McGrath shows how creation gives theologians an important source of revelation. Likewise, McGrath’s ST shows how the doctrine of creation provides the ontological basis for scientific investigation and demands a UTK.

Finally, McGrath’s ST recasts natural theology in such a way that it is once again allowed to function in a confirming role for Christianity. It is freed from the Enlightenment’s stifling demands for absolute certainty and is now used to support the prior belief that God exists. This, along with the fact that natural theology allows Christianity to offer an explanation of alternative belief systems, gives natural theology explanatory power and apologetic appeal. Therefore, though there are areas that would benefit from further clarification or development, McGrath’s ST offers evangelicalism an appropriate

theological method and shows how science can be used as the *ancilla theologia*.

Notes

1. Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001–2003).
2. McGrath earned his first doctorate (D. Phil) from Oxford in December of 1977 in molecular biology and his second doctorate (Doctorate of Divinity) from Oxford in 2001.
3. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 1, xvii–xix.
4. *Ibid.*, xvii.
5. *Ibid.*, 45.
6. McGrath, *Science of God*, 18.
7. His reason for this is not arbitrary. In his view, the tremendous success of the natural sciences over the last few hundred years suggest that they can be helpful in navigating through changing philosophical climates.
8. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 1, 18.
9. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 2, 246. McGrath gives four distinct reasons for this postulate: (1) Jesus Christ is the historical point of departure for Christianity; (2) Jesus Christ reveals God; (3) Jesus Christ is the Bearer of Salvation; (4) Jesus Christ defines the shape of the redeemed life. See McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, 298–300.
10. J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen, *Duet or Duel?: Theology and Science in a Postmodern World* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1998), 2.
11. John R. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 34.
12. Andreas Köstenberger, Editor's Introduction to *Whatever Happened to Truth*, ed. Andreas Köstenberger (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 9.
13. Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 71–74, and 199.
14. David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 353.
15. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society*, 9.
16. Mortimer J. Adler, *Truth In Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 116.
17. Benjamin Myers, "Alister E. McGrath's Scientific Theology," in *The Order of Things: Explorations in Scientific Theology*, by Alister E. McGrath (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 11.
18. Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), xiv, and 194.
19. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 2, 56. This does not mean that McGrath denies the requirement of coherence. He affirms the need for both in determining truth. For our purposes at this point, however, it is necessary to focus on his acceptance of correspondence.

20. See Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 354.
21. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 1, 75.
22. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 2, 196.
23. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 2, 196.
24. See Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (New York: Routledge, 1998); and *A Realist Theory of Science* (New York: Verso, 2008).
25. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 3, 133.
26. Alan G. Padgett, *Science and the Study of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 30.
27. Edward O. Wilson is a case in point. See Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (London: Abacus, 2006), 9.
28. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 3, 49.
29. McGrath makes this point as well. See Alister McGrath, *Doubting* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 24–25.
30. Stephen T. Davis, *God, Reason & Theistic Proofs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 93.
31. Daniel Taylor, *The Myth of Certainty* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 92.
32. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 3, 43–46.
33. Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 110.
34. R. Albert Mohler, “Truth and Contemporary Culture,” in *Whatever Happened to Truth*, ed. Andreas Köstenberger (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 59.
35. J. P. Moreland, and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 149.
36. Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 401–402.
37. Tim Morris, and Don Petcher, *Science & Grace* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 6.
38. At this point I am not actually accusing these men of being modernists. Rather, I simply cite them as examples of some who continue using modernistic language. I want to urge evangelicals to refrain from such language.
39. J. P. Moreland Garrett DeWeese, “The Premature Report of Foundationalism’s Demise,” in *Reclaiming the Center*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjos Helseth & Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 81.
40. Mohler, “Truth and Contemporary Culture,” 68.
41. Moreland and DeWeese critique the postmodern rejection of (1) the referential theory of language, (2) the correspondence theory of truth, and (3) metaphysical realism. See Moreland and DeWeese, “The Premature Report of Foundationalism’s Demise”, 85–90. Mohler, on the other hand, offers a strong critique of postmodern antirealism. See Mohler, “Truth and Contemporary Culture,” 68–69.
42. See Moreland and DeWeese, “The Premature Report of Foundationalism’s Demise”, 90–93. Here they suggest that reliabilism in some form may offer the key to a modest form of foundationalism.
43. Morris and Petcher, *Science & Grace*, 7.
44. Myers, “Alister E. McGrath’s Scientific Theology,” 10.

45. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 1, 88; and McGrath, *The Science of God*, 36–38. As noted earlier in the chapter, nature is an ambiguous concept which can be understood in a wide variety of way, depending on the social background of its use.
46. McGrath, *The Science of God*, 44–45.
47. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 1, 193.
48. *Ibid.*, 61.
49. McGrath, *The Science of God*, 59–71.
50. John Polkinghorne, *Science & Theology* (London: SPCK, 1998), 73.
51. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 1, 21.
52. During the Enlightenment, Natural Theology seemed to operate autonomously from the Christian tradition.
53. McGrath, *The Science of God*, 113.
54. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 1, 273–274.
55. *Ibid.*, 297; and McGrath, *The Science of God*, 72.
56. I am thinking specifically here of Ps 19 and Rom 1:18–20.
57. One might note at least six specific advantages. His approach (1) affirms creation as a source of divine revelation, (2) focuses on the laws of nature, (3) abandons classical foundationalism, (4) removes the requirement of certainty, (5) has great explanatory power, and (6) can be used as a point of contact with the non-believer. All of these points will not be rehearsed here. Instead, the most significant contributions are mentioned.
58. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 2, 71.
59. *Ibid.*, 73.
60. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 3, 198; and McGrath, *The Science of God*, 89.
61. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 2, 76.
62. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 3, 195.
63. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 1, 303–304.
64. Alan G. Padgett, “A Scientific Theology, vol. 1, Nature,” *Word & World* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 110.
65. Keating, “The Natural Sciences as an *Ancilla Theologiae* Nova: Alister E. McGrath’s *A Scientific Theology*,” 149.
66. Myers, “Alister E. McGrath’s Scientific Theology,” 19–20.
67. *Ibid.*, 20.
68. Snyder, “A Scientific Theology, Volume 2: Reality,” 356–357.
69. Edward T. Oakes, “A Scientific Theology: Volume 3: Theory,” *Theological Studies* 67, no. 1 (March 2006): 200.