

The eye of faith and the eye of science: Regin Prenter and Niels Henrik Gregersen on God's creation

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Abstract

On the one hand, Regin Prenter gets it right theologically: creation and redemption belong together. On the other hand, Prenter's method is visually impaired; he looks at God's creation with only one eye, the eye of faith. If he would open his other eye and look at creation as a scientist sees it, his doctrine of creation would be broader, deeper, and more textured. This is what two-eyed Niels Henrik Gregersen does when he incorporates into his theological vision the scientific idea of autopoiesis—that is, nature's own creative advance.

KEYWORDS

Autopoiesis, creation, Gustaf Aulén, Niels Henrik Gregersen, Regin Prenter, science

1 | DIVINE GRACE IN CREATION

From creation to redemption and back again. Only when redeemed will the world be fully created so that God can say, "Behold, it is very good." Despite our need to wait for eschatological fulfillment, God's consummate future can be discerned now, in the present. At least, if you are Danish.

Happy Danes hear God today in the bird's song, feel God in the forest breeze, see God in the starry skies, smell God in the flower's scent, and taste God in the elixirs of life. Creation is God's gift, a sacramental gift that embodies its giver. Divine grace in creation is mediated by nature and revealed to us by the poet. In "Minstrelsy," Nikolai F.S. Grundtvig discerns Eden all around us:

*The garden that God gave us here below
Borders on the Lord's Eden,
In spirit to us wafted
Through the openings of lattice;
And by surmise we catch
Perfume from what is therein.
Rejoice thee tremblingly, O skald!
As thy choice is and they calling;
Through thee must be imaged
What thou sawest in life's spring.¹*

Has God so graced human ears that we humans can hear God's quiet melodies sung in nature? Or, is the divine message limited solely to inspired eyes that read the pages of Holy Scripture? Must we first don the eyes of faith like corrective lenses before we can see what we otherwise are blind to? Or, can we rely upon our material senses to guide our path through nature to the divine origin and destiny of all created things?

These are questions every creation theologian must pose. These are questions I would hope those reviving Scandinavian Creation Theology (SCT) in the Lutheran tradition would pose.² I applaud today's retrieval of Knud Løgstrup (1905-1991), Regin Prenter (1907-1990), and Gustaf Wingren (1910-2000). I would add the patriarchs of Lund, Gustaf Aulén (1879-1977) and Anders Nygren (1890-1978), as well. This generation of post-World War II Nordic scholars turned our gaze from heaven back to earth, so that we might realize more intensely the grace of heaven. God is already present in the gift of life and in our vocation to human co-creativity, they averred.

According to the Scandinavian creation theologians, you do not go to church in order to meet God for the first time. Rather, building on a primal relationship with God already embedded in nature and in our universal humanity, we attend worship to be released, forgiven, and restored as a full human being within the already resplendent order of God's creation.

1.1 | One-eyed faith

Still, I demure. Something is missing in this renaissance of SCT. Access to creation through the creation itself is actually denied by one strand within SCT, the eye-of-faith creation theology of Aulén and Prenter. In Barthian fashion, one can see divine grace within creation only when looking through the eye of faith.³ Without the eye of faith, we natural human beings are blind to mediated grace. At least, this is my reading of SCT.

One implication is this: a Scandinavian creation theologian need not—dare not!—appeal directly to nature interpreted through science to round out the doctrine of creation.⁴ The entire domain of human knowing through scientific means is relegated by the eye-of-faith theologians to the shadows, to a realm outside the theologian's field of vision. Here is the problem: if science reveals reliable knowledge of the cosmos within which we live, then what eye-of-faith creation theologians describe is not the cosmos within which we daily live and understand ourselves. In short, SCT unnecessarily ghettoizes God's created world from the very world commonly seen through scientific lenses.

To illustrate, I examine briefly two Danes, Regin Prenter and Niels Henrik Gregersen. Prenter belongs to that brilliant generation of Nordic scholars who, a half-century ago, set an ambitious agenda. Gregersen is Prenter's academic descendant, a twenty-first-century scholar who, whether deliberately or inadvertently, has broadened the vision of faith to include what the eye of the scientist sees through microscopes and telescopes. The result is a doctrine of creation—including a theology of nature—that applies to the actual cosmos in which we daily live.

I recommend that the theologian look at creation synoptically: through both the eye of faith and the eye of science. In effect, this synoptic vision is what Niels Henrik Gregersen, a theological optometrist of sorts, has prescribed.

2 | REGIN PRENTER: CREATION WITHOUT COSMOS

Central to the renaissance of Scandinavian Creation Theology is its vision of the created world as our home. Christians are not to be considered as aliens in the world. Nor are Christians pilgrims on their way to another world. Christians do not move into a foreign land when speaking the common language of everyone. The world is God's creation. This is where God has placed us and wants us to be. To live an ordinary human life among other living creatures involves participating in God's life.⁵

Would the University of Aarhus professor, Regin Prenter, embrace this position fully? To my reading, he would

not. Because of his methodological commitment to a theology based solely on what can be seen through the eye of faith, his theological construction cannot benefit from knowledge gained in the scientific laboratory. Let me demonstrate.

On the one hand, Regin Prenter gets it right theologically: creation and redemption belong together. On the other hand, Prenter's method is visually impaired; it prevents him from constructing a world picture wherein God's creative and redemptive work apply to the very world within which we live.

I gladly follow Prenter when he adroitly combines creation with redemption. Rather than ghettoize creation to a pre-fallen past that leaves us in the present waiting for a future redemptive return, Prenter foresees redemption historically as the fulfillment of the divine purpose already present in ongoing creation. "Creation and redemption belong together. Creation is the beginning of redemption, and redemption is the consummation of creation."⁶ My own way to say this is similar: once the world has been redeemed, it will have been created and God can accurately declare, "Behold, it is very good."⁷

So far, so good. But, Prenter then takes a methodological turn away from the actual world in which we daily live, the world of nature described by science. The model for relating faith and science Prenter adopts is what Ian Barbour calls *independence*, and which I label the *two-language model*.⁸ "There is no real problem with respect to the relationship between natural science and faith in creation. The two do not deal with the same questions, unless one or the other fails to keep within its own proper field."⁹

By keeping both theology and science within their "own proper field," they have nothing to say to one another. Each engages in a monologue, not a dialogue. Prenter justifies this separation of fields by relying on special revelation to the exclusion of natural theology, and by describing all worldview construction as human hubris engaged in self-justification. According to Prenter, the basic problem with worldview construction by philosophers or scientists is that they are unavoidably monistic, unavoidably self-serving and God denying. "They are [humanity's] attempt to determine the place of both God and himself in the cosmos. And he who would himself determine God's and his own place in the cosmos can only be a person who would also justify himself before God through his own works."¹⁰ Any attempt to construct a comprehensive worldview based on scientific knowledge constitutes human self-justification, hubris, idolatry.

Prenter has another way of looking at the problem. Outside the theological circle of faith, any secular worldview would be inescapably monistic. Such monism contrasts with dualism, the very dualism bequeathed to faith by special revelation. "Faith's picture of the created world is not monistic; unlike the world picture of natural science, it does not seek to fit all

phenomena into one scheme. But it is dualistic; in its dimension of height it places an impassible gulf between the two planes of heaven and earth."¹¹ To place one's faith in the transcendent God of the gospel requires a dualistic grasp of reality that cannot be resolved by any secular worldview that must, by definition, be monistic. The net product is this: Prenter's theology of creation and redemption has "no direct cosmological interest."¹²

2.1 | Yearning for understanding

I find Prenter's method unnecessarily limiting, even self-ghettoizing. Why? Because there exists within the human psyche a yearning for understanding that comes to expression as ontological thirst, the thirst for reality.¹³ To be human is to be *Homo religiosus*. This produces at the cultural level worldviews and self-understandings that place the individual within a context of the totality of reality, at least to the extent that speculation permits.¹⁴ Prenter even registers sympathy for *Homo religiosus* when affirming the universality of Friedrich Schleiermacher's notion of the feeling of absolute dependence.¹⁵ Yet this natural feeling does not elicit respect in Prenter for natural reason, for science. In sum, worldview construction will go on outside the church and inside the church despite any of Prenter's attempts to sideline it.

Prenter's method is self-defeating, because even people of faith are fated to construct worldviews. Saints Augustine and Anselm, both of whom depended on revealed theology to ground their faith, still sought to understand what they believed: *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding). The construction of a worldview founded on faith ought not to be avoided, let alone forbidden.

It is my methodological recommendation that Christian theologians today attempt to draw a picture of reality in its widest and deepest scope that shows how all things are related to the one God of grace.¹⁶ Gregersen says this same thing with force. In the case of Christian theology, "everything is related to the belief in God as the omnipresent creator, and as the liberator and redeemer of nature and humankind in Christ and Spirit."¹⁷

This means, among other things, that knowledge of the cosmos gained through scientific research should be incorporated into this worldview.¹⁸ No scientific worldview could be final or unchanging, to be sure; because science is so fluid and so varied in what it thinks knowledge is. Yet, we people of faith cannot understand ourselves meaningfully unless we understand ourselves within the context of reality in its most comprehensive scope, even if tentatively envisioned.¹⁹ The whole-part dialectic is indispensable to human meaning, especially to understanding the relationship between self, world, and God.²⁰

3 | THE EYE OF FAITH IN GUSTAF AULÉN AND ANDERS NYGREN

Swede Gustaf Aulén, like his junior Dane Regin Prenter, relies on the independence or two-language model for relating faith to science. This model silences science so that it can say nothing to the ears of faith. "Christian faith has testified boldly that the God about whom it speaks reveals [God]self *only to the eye of faith and not apprehended by any human reason.*"²¹ Or, "revelation can be perceived by *the eye of faith alone.*"²² Or also, "God is not found by telescopes and chemical experiments."²³ And, according to Aulén, God's relation to the world—as revealed to the eye of faith—is dualistic. "The divine will as it reveals itself is continually subduing and overpowering opposition."²⁴ It appears that what happens in Aarhus happens also in Lund.

With special reference to the doctrine of creation, this independence or two-language model turns a deaf ear to all stories of origin. "Even if such a theory of origins could be theoretically demonstrated, which is impossible, this whole conception is completely meaningless to faith, since it has no religious character. The various theories about the origin and development of the universe that might be suggested by natural science cannot encroach upon or exercise any influence on the convictions of faith regarding creation."²⁵ In short, the theologian need not look through microscopes or telescopes to understand nature as God's creation.

Since reliable confirmation of big-bang cosmology in the 1960s, the scientific community has showered in a cascade of exciting speculations, debates, and controversies regarding the origin of our cosmos. Cosmological, first cause, *kalaam*, and design arguments for God's existence as creator have become regular fare in both scientific and theological circles. Yet, neither Prenter nor Aulén would allow this exciting discussion to influence a contemporary *fides quaerens intellectum*. Eye-of-faith theologians disinvite themselves to the secular party.²⁶

The gate to science is not as firmly shut in the work of Anders Nygren as it is in Gustaf Aulén. One needs to tread gingerly, though, because *science* means something more specific for Nygren than it does in common parlance. Nygren embraces his own aggressive philosophy of analysis, called *scientific philosophy*, which analyzes the presuppositions in every world scheme. "Scientific philosophy analyzes presuppositions."²⁷ Even with this very specific definition, Nygren also respects science in its more commonly understood fashion as empirically based rational argumentation. "We can speak of science where, and only where, there is a possibility of objective argumentation concerning a stated idea or opinion."²⁸

He also reminds us of the fluidity and changeability of scientific knowledge. "The sure progress of science does not depend on its ever achieving definitive results or its never

needing to take a step backwards ... It is in this methodically critical way that science goes steadily forward; it is this that puts firm ground under its feet."²⁹ Science, as Nygren understands it, should pose no problem for the theologian, at least in principle.

One need not ask science to reveal God in order to justify incorporating science into a theology of creation. Our knowledge of God as gracious creator and redeemer can come only from special revelation, to be sure. Yet, science can tell us quite a bit about the world God has created and continues to create. The picture of physical reality painted by scientific brushes will provide the person of faith with a context for meaning, an understandable world in which to feel at home.

4 | NIELS HENRIK GREGERSEN: GOD'S CREATION OF CREATIVITY

The method of Niels Henrik Gregersen is quite different from his Nordic predecessors, especially Prenter.³⁰ Rather than insulate the theology of creation from the scientific interpretation of the natural world, Gregersen steps into science like a firefighter steps into a hazmat suit.

*What are the scientific options for seeking an answer to the riddle of biogenesis? And, most important in our context, How could one from an informed Christian perspective think consistently about God's relation to a universe that seems to be self-organizing, if not self-creative? Could it be that God has so created the material world that it has an innate ability to form life out of matter and thus give rise to new emergent phenomena such as perception, feeling, and consciousness?*³¹

Gregersen is taking two giant steps forward here. First, methodologically, he is stepping beyond the perceptive horizon of the eye of faith in order to see things through the eye of science. Second, what he comes to see through the eye of science—creativity within nature—then qualifies if not edifies the doctrine of creation he sees through the eye of faith.

4.1 | Hypothetical consonance

First, Gregersen's methodological step. Whereas Prenter preceded by Aulén presuppose the independence or two-language model for relating faith to science, Gregersen elects a different model. Gregersen's method seems to employ my model of *hypothetical consonance*, according to which there is consonance between "what can be said scientifically about the natural world and what the theologian understands to be God's creation."³² Perhaps Gregersen even goes further,

entering what Barbour refers to as the *integration* of science with theology.³³

However, Gregersen's method falls a little short of the one proposed by Robert John Russell, the *creative mutual interaction* (CMI) between science and theology. CMI describes the "development of research programs in theology and science that make moves from theology to science as well as standard moves from science to theology."³⁴ For Gregersen, the movement goes only one direction, from science to theology. What we learn about nature's creativity enhances and embellishes what we know through the eye of faith about God as creator. What Gregersen does not do is ask the theologian to stimulate a research program to be pursued by the laboratory scientist. In short, Gregersen stops short of full integration or full interaction. Yet the important point is this: what we learn about nature through science informs what we know about creation through the eye of faith.

Second, theologically, the doctrine of creation becomes enhanced, deepened, and expanded when Gregersen incorporates from science the idea of creativity within nature. We understand more about God, argues Gregersen; we now see the God of faith as the God of creativity. Rather than merely mold a passive clay to become objects in the physical world, our creator God mixes soil with spirit (Gen 2:7) to become something living, self-directing, and innovative.

4.2 | Autopoietic processes

Here is Gregersen's thesis: God is creative by supporting and stimulating autopoietic (self-creation or self-production) processes.³⁵ When expanded, it becomes "meaningful to say that God is active as Creator in these autopoietic processes by supporting their inner dynamics and possibly by stimulating their dynamics in certain directions."³⁶ By declaring that the creation is itself dynamic and creative, the relevant science tells the theologian that what God has made is not reducible to a pre-determined causal grid. Nor is the creation without direction, even if it is at least in part self-directing.³⁷

Gregersen uses the biblical term *blessing* to identify God's gift of freedom and creativity to the creatures. "We might say that the blessing of God is a structuring principle at once transcendent in its origination and immanent in its efficiency."³⁸

What Gregersen has learned from the sciences is that autopoietic processes apply only to ongoing creativity, to *creatio continua* or providence, not to the origin of the created world itself.

The incorporation of natural creativity into the doctrine of creation affects neither the Genesis account of six-day creation nor big bang cosmology. Already from this theoretical outlook it is obvious that the concept of autopoiesis is not designed to discuss either cosmological

*beginnings (in terms of Big Bang theory and its rivals) or ontological questions related to the theological doctrine of creatio ex nihilo. Rather, it is a general theory for systems that are already in the game, one way or the other, and that will have to cope with the demands of self-formation vis-à-vis an unpredictable environment and an even more unpredictable future.*³⁹

We see here a judicious incorporation on Gregersen's part of relevant scientific insight into his doctrine of creation, a careful assessment of the shape of each piece as it fits into the theological puzzle. Gregersen avoids either inundating theology with a deluge of science or putting a patch over the eye of faith in order to see strictly through the eye of science.

Now, I have said that Gregersen's method seems to fit most snugly in my model, hypothetical consonance. Yet Gregersen may be asking for a bit more. He makes a furtive move from theology toward science, asking the laboratory researchers to confirm or disprove his idea of God as structuring creativity within nature.

*Nonetheless, the idea of divine action as a structuring cause has a family likeness in thought structure to the theory of autopoietic systems. In both cases, a new mode of operation and coordination of energy means a real change of being: esse sequitur operari. A structuring cause thus effects real changes in the world, though no physical energy has been added or taken away. The structuring model, as expounded here, is open for scientific falsification if a bottom-up deterministic ontology should prevail.*⁴⁰

Does this suggest that Gregersen would like something more than mere consonance? Might Gregersen grant that at points science is in a position to falsify some theological assertions? If so, then Gregersen has bravely exited the protected citadel of Aulén and Prenter and made theology vulnerable to extra-theological sources.

The value of science in theological method is to tell us about the world, about the cosmos. We do not ask scientific reason to substitute for faith or to replace special revelation. The world picture drawn by physical cosmologists or evolutionary biologists tells us indirectly that God creates creativity.

5 | NATURAL THEOLOGY VERSUS THEOLOGY OF NATURE

A synoptic vision that looks at creation through both the eye of faith and the eye of science need not embrace natural theology. If by *natural theology* we intend a revelation of

God within nature apart from Scripture, then natural theology is not required by today's synoptic theologian. Rather, the incorporation of insights from science into the theological vision would lead instead to a *theology of nature*. Sweden's Archbishop Antje Jackelén illustrates such a method that leads to a faith-informed theology of nature. According to Jackelén, theology's vision of creation approaching new creation "can be reconciled with the findings from the field of natural sciences, but it cannot be derived from them."⁴¹

Barbour dubs this position *theology of nature*. A theology of nature "must take the findings of science into account when it considers the relation of God and [humanity] to nature, even though it derives its fundamental ideas elsewhere."⁴² What this means is that a Swedish or Danish theologian could add scientific knowledge to her doctrine of creation without blindfolding the eye of faith when looking through microscopes and telescopes. Science can sharpen the theological vision without patching over the eye of faith.⁴³

6 | SEEING SYNOPTICALLY

Among the significant figures undergoing revival in the new Scandinavian Creation Theology movement, I have selected Regin Prenter for special attention. On the one hand, I contend that Prenter gets it right theologically when he brings together creation with redemption. On the other hand, I argue that Prenter's method is visually impaired. He looks at God's creation with only one eye, the eye of faith. If he would open his other eye and look at creation as a scientist sees it, his doctrine of creation would become broader, deeper, and more textured. This is what two-eyed Niels Henrik Gregersen does when he declares that God is the creator of creativity, and when he describes creativity in scientific terms. In our era, I believe the theologian should look at reality synoptically, adding to the eye of faith another eye that occasionally looks through microscopes and telescopes.

ENDNOTES

¹ Grundtvig, N. F. S. (1952). *Minstrelsy*. In H. Koch, *Grundtvig* (p. 187). (L. Jones, Trans.). Yellow Springs, OH: Antioch Press.

² The central insight of Martin Luther incorporated into SCT is understanding creation as God's gift. Although Luther respected scientific knowledge, he emphasized via faith the graciousness of God as creator. "The astronomers are the experts from whom it is most convenient to get what may be discussed about [the sun, the moon, and the stars]. For me it is enough that in those bodies, which are so elegant and necessary for our life, we recognize both the goodness of God and His power, that He created such important objects and preserves them to the present day for our use." See Luther, M. (1955-1967). *Lectures on Genesis 1-5*. In J. Pelikan (Ed.), *Luther's works*, American edition (Vols. 1-30). St. Louis: Concordia Publishing. See also Luther, M. (1955-1986). *Luther's works* (Vol. 1, p. 41). H. T. Lehmann (Ed.). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

- ³ The "eye of faith" (*oculus fidei*) "is a seeing eye only in virtue of the unveiling in revelation itself." Barth, K. (1936-1962). *Church dogmatics* (Vol. 1, p. 58). G. W. Bromily & T. F. Torrance (Eds.). Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.
- ⁴ This may not apply to Wingren and Løgstrup as it does to Prenter. Nor does it apply to Elisabeth Gerle, who follows Irenaeus, Grundtvig, and Wingren on embracing the body in material creation. "The history of Christianity is a tapestry of incompatible threads. Some filaments in the fabric encourage a reverence for the body and the material, while others pull in an opposite direction, towards, if not a contempt for the body, then a view of the material as something to be transcended in pursuit of something superior and more heavenly." She prefers "the strong affirmation of the body and the material." See Gerle, E. (2017). *Passionate embrace: Luther on love, body, and sensual presence* (p. 7). Eugene, OR: Cascade.
- ⁵ This is the recurrent theme in the many chapters of Gregersen, N. H., Ugglä, B. K., & Wyller, T. (Eds.) (2017). *Reformation theology for a post-secular age: Løgstrup, Prenter, Wingren, and the future of Scandinavian creation theology*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.
- ⁶ Prenter, R. (1967). *Creation and redemption* (p. 200). (T. J. Jensen, Trans.). Minneapolis: Fortress. From this axiom, Prenter draws an unwarranted inference, namely, creation becomes gospel. "Against Prenter's phrase 'the gospel of creation' a strong demurrer must be entered. The New Testament uses the word 'gospel' to describe the good news of what God has done for the sinner ... The gospel announces the comforting truth that 'there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus'. The expression 'gospel of creation' can lead to a misunderstanding and tends to remove the uniqueness that the New Testament associated with the word *euangelion*, which always refers to God's willingness to forgive men their sins *propter Christum*." Surburg, R. F. (1968). A Danish Lutheran dogmatics in English garb: A review article of Prenter's *Creation and redemption*. *Springfielder*, 32(3), 5-30 at 20.
- ⁷ Luther also anticipates an eschatological transformation of present creation. "All nature will be changed in the end." Luther, M. (1955-1967), Vol. 1, p. 31.
- ⁸ See Barbour, I. G. (1997). *Religion and science: Historical and contemporary issues* (pp. 84-89). New York: Harper; and Peters, T. (2003). *Science, theology, and ethics* (pp. 18-19). Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.
- ⁹ Prenter (1967), 226.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 236.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 228.
- ¹² Ibid., 193.
- ¹³ "This religious need expresses an unquenchable ontological thirst. Religious man thirsts for *being*." See Eliade, M. (1959). *The sacred and the profane* (p. 64). (W. R. Trask, Trans.). New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World. On the one hand, Prenter extends the tradition of N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) of placing the *imago Dei* within the more comprehensive category of the what is naturally human. Human first, then Christian. On the other hand, nature as scientifically understood is locked out of the theological yard. "In der Natur, in ihrem siegreichen Kampfe gegen die zerstörerischen Kräfte des Todes zeigt sich das Göttliche. Wer ein echter Christ sein will, muß erst versuchen, ein echter Mensch zu sein. Gott ist der letzte Ursprung des Lebens, der durch Sterben und Vernichtung hindurch, immer wieder überraschend, neu, spontan, das Leben zu neuen Höhepunkten und zur Vollendung führt. Das Leben bejahen, bedeutet Gott zu bejahen....In der Theologie Prenters kommt es zu einer Begegnung zwischen den oben erwähnten Spezifika der dänischen Theologie, vor allem der Tradition Grundtvigs, mit der reformatorischen Tradition, was sich in seinen Lutherstudien niederschlägt." See Radler, A. (1987). Der einfluß des theologischen workes von Karl Barth auf die skandinavische theologie. *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 29(3), 267-293, at 281.
- ¹⁴ "I consider the religious impulse to be a part of the human makeup; the search for cosmic understanding is a much a part of the religious impulse as the search for cosmic belonging." See Smith, H. (2003). *The way things are: Conversations with Huston Smith on the spiritual life* (p. 96). P. Cousineau (Ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- ¹⁵ Prenter (1967), 20-30.
- ¹⁶ This is a Lutherized version of theology as understood by St. Thomas Aquinas. "But in sacred science all things are treated of under the aspect of God, either because they are God Himself, or because they are ordered to God (*sub ratione Dei*) as their beginning and end." See Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, I:1:Q.7.
- ¹⁷ Gregersen, N. H. (1998). A contextual-coherence theory for the science-theology dialogue. In N. H. Gregersen & J. Wentzel van Huyssteen (Eds.), *Rethinking theology and science: Six models for the current dialogue* (pp. 181-231, at 185). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans.
- ¹⁸ "Theology cannot measure up to its own standards if it is not able to relate the Christian belief in the omnipresent God meaningfully to the theories of the empirical sciences." Gregersen (1998). Arthur Peacocke defines theology as "the reflection on that reality which is ultimate to both nature and humanity," and it "operates on a level of integration incorporating all other levels of complexity: social, human, psychological, physiological, biological and physical." See Peacocke, A. (1996). *From DNA to deen: Reflections and exploration of a priest-scientist* (p. 167). Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press.
- ¹⁹ "Theology is the quest to hold the stories of one's life and kin, of societies and cultures; of humankind, of otherkind, of the Earth, and of the cosmos in one breath with the mystery that some call God." Moe-Lobeda, C. D. (2013). *Resisting structural evil: Love as ecological-economic vocation* (p. 7). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- ²⁰ Prenter appeals to an unusual—existentialist?—theory of meaning. See Prenter (1967), 234. He believes human meaning derives from the tension in human experience between eternity and time. Søren Kierkegaard, after all, had said that the self constitutes itself or chooses itself in confrontation with the eternity of God. Here, Prenter sides with Gustaf Aulén on the matter of meaning. "Christian faith finds the meaning of existence in the fact that every moment has eternal significance, since it involves a decision for or against the will of God." See Aulén, G. (1960). *The faith of the Christian church* (p. 161). (E. H. Wahlstrom, Trans.). Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press. Instead, I prefer a hermeneutical understanding of meaning: meaning derives from memory and expectation interpreted within one's historical context. With the latter theory of meaning, each of us requires a meta-worldview and a specific historical context for our individual life to have meaning. "...without context, no meaning." See Nygren, A. (1972). *Meaning and method: Prolegomena to a scientific philosophy of religion and a scientific theology* (p. 228). (P. S. Watson, Trans.). Minneapolis: Fortress. Italics Nygren's.
- ²¹ Ibid., 11, italics added.
- ²² Ibid., 24, italics in original.

- ²³ Ibid., 89.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 38.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 156.
- ²⁶ Prenter (1967), 199; Aulén (1960), 156.
- ²⁷ Nygren (1972), 192.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 67.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 69.
- ³⁰ Might we think of Copenhagen's Hans Larsen Martensen (1808-1884) as a forerunner? "Dogmatic theology nears its goal just in proportion as it satisfies equally the demands of science and of the church." Martensen, H. (1890). *Christian dogmatics: Compendium of the doctrines of Christianity* (p. 2). (W. Urwick, Trans.). Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.
- ³¹ Gregersen, N. H. (2001). The creation of creativity and the flourishing of creation. *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 28(3/4), 400-410, at 400.
- ³² Peters (2003), 19.
- ³³ Barbour (1997), 98-105.
- ³⁴ Russell, R. J. (2006). *Cosmology from Alpha to Omega* (p. 132). Minneapolis: Fortress Press. Gregersen locates a problem here: "Theological explanations of reality are so to speak parasitic on scientific developments, so that we theologians take in what we can from scientific explanations, but give nothing in return to the sciences. Insofar as this is the case, there is not really a mutual, critical interaction going on between science and theology." See Gregersen, N. H. (2015). What kinds of questions are explained in theology? In C. R. Jacobson & A. W. Pryor (Eds.), *Anticipating God's new creation: Essays in honor of Ted Peters* (pp. 69-78, at 72). Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press.
- ³⁵ Gregersen, N. H. (1998). The idea of creation and the theory of autopoietic processes. *Zygon*, 33, 333-367, at 334. Perhaps Harvard's venerable astronomer, Owen Gingerich, would side with Gregersen. "A powerful Creator God could perhaps by nature or by deliberation have set in motion an undetermined universe whose detailed outcome remained unknown. But note that chance and accident on one level could still be consilient with intention and purpose on another, just as the randomness of the card shuffles in a casino nevertheless leads to handsome profits for the casino operators." See Gingerich, O. (1998). The universe as theater for God's action. *Theology Today*, 55(3), 305-316, at 316.
- ³⁶ Gregersen (1998), 335. Langdon Gilkey sees in Gregersen's courageous proposal a version of Paul Tillich's notion of *theonomy*. "Theonomy refers to a conception of the divine presence—or action—as undergirding, making possible, and bringing to perfection the creature's autonomy, self-creativity, and creativity of culture." See Gilkey, L. (1999). Gregersen's vision of a theonomous universe. *Zygon*, 34(1), 111-115, at 112.
- ³⁷ "A powerful Creator God could perhaps by nature or by deliberation have set in motion an undetermined universe whose detailed outcome remained unknown. But note that chance and accident on one level could still be consilient with intention and purpose on another, just as the randomness of the card shuffles in a casino nevertheless leads to handsome profits for the casino operators." See Gingerich (1998).
- ³⁸ Gregersen (1998), 352.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 339. Rudolf Brun tackles an important problem challenging all those who wish to integrate science with theology, namely, the problem of purpose or teleology within nature. Nature, seen through the eyes of science, sees no teleology. Teleology can be discerned solely through the eyes of faith. Because God loves the world, argues Brun, God makes freedom and self-direction within the world a gift of this love. Yet, Brun almost returns to the position of the mid-twentieth-century Nordics. The point is that eternity and time are neither congruent nor parallel but are, so to speak, perpendicular to one another. Linear time, the time of history, runs from beginning to end. Eternity, however, transcends time yet is present within each moment." See Brun, R. B. (1999). What shall we make of complexity science? Responses to Niels Henrik Gregersen. *Zygon*, 31(4), 93-138, at 138.
- ⁴⁰ Gregersen (1998), 62.
- ⁴¹ Jackelén, A. (2005). *Time and eternity: The question of time in church, science, and theology* (p. 221). Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press. "Theology is not an attempt to explain the world scientifically. It is a way of interpreting human experiences from all possible sources in the best way possible and building on the sources of tradition as well as the sciences." See Henrickson, J.-O. (2013). Distinct, unique, or separate? Challenges to theological anthropology and soteriology in light of human evolution. *Studia Theologica*, 67(2), 166-183, at 168.
- ⁴² Barbour, I. G. (1966). *Issues in science and religion* (p. 415). New York: Prentice Hall and Harper. See Peters, T. (2012). Theology of nature. In H. D. Betz, D. S. Browning, B. Janowski, & E. Jüngel (Eds.), *Religion past and present: Encyclopedia of theology and religion* (Vol. 12, pp. 651-652). Leiden and Boston: Brill. See also Peters, T. (2017). Cult books revisited: Ian Barbour's *Issues in science and religion*. *Theology*, 120(3), 163-171. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X16684417>.
- ⁴³ Both Gregersen and I find the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg instructive in developing a theology of nature. See Gregersen, N. H. (2008). Introduction. In W. Pannenberg, *The historicity of nature: Essays on science and theology* (pp. vii-xxiv, at x). N. H. Gregersen (Ed.). West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press; and Peters, T. (1993). Editor's introduction. In W. Pannenberg, *Toward a theology of nature: Essays on science and faith* (pp. 1-14, at 9). T. Peters (Ed.). Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox.

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