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**PROTESTANT ECUMENISM, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, AND
THE THEOLOGY-AND-SCIENCE DIALOGUE IN
CONSERVATIVE AMERICAN THOUGHT:
A LITERATURE REVIEW¹**

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Introduction

American perspectives on the theology-and-science dialogue remain a mystery for many interested observers, particularly in its fundamentalist expressions. This religiously conservative American approach to science is frequently tentative and seems, at times, to prefer U.S. federal and state law to decide its validity rather than the laboratory.² By taking the debate concerning religious

¹This literature review is the beginning of a new research project into the background of American views on theology-and-science. The literature reviewed in this article provides valuable background information regarding both the history of early American thought and the impact that two World Wars and a host of other social and political challenges had on twentieth-century evangelical biblical hermeneutics, which, in turn, had its own bearing on American theology and its orientations toward the natural and human sciences.

²The most famous argument, *State v. John Scopes* (20 July 1925), was a test case for the constitutionality of Tennessee's antievolution statute (for a brief overview of the case, for a more in-depth treatment of the subject, see Edward J. Larson, *Summer of the*

and scientific argumentation to the courtroom rather than the laboratory,

Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion, new afterword [New York: Basic Books, 1997, 2006]). For more introductory view, see Douglas O. Linder, "State v. John Scope ['The Monkey Trial']" [<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/scopes/evolut.htm>]. Ten other major court cases concerning evolution and creationism include: (1) *Epperson v. Arkansas* (1968) 393 U.S. 97, 37 U.S. Law Week 4017, 89 S. Ct. 266, 21 L. Ed 228 (U.S. Supreme Court invalidation of an Arkansas statute prohibiting the teaching of evolution); (2) *Seagraves v. State of California* (1981) Sacramento Superior Court #278978 (class discussions of origins and science in general should emphasize questions of "how" and not "ultimate causality," and that all speculative statements in class or text should be presented conditionally rather than dogmatically); (3) *McLean v. Arkansas Board of Education* (1982) 529 F. Supp. 1255, 50 U.S. Law Week 2412 (balanced treatment of creation-science and evolution-science in the public-school system violates the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution because [a] creation-science is not a science, [b] the statute was stated in language unique to that of creationism, and [c] the teaching of evolution is not a violation of the Establishment Clause because it "does not presuppose either the absence or the presence of a creator"); (4) *Edwards v. Aguillard* (1987) 482 U.S. 578 (U.S. Supreme Court found Louisiana's "Creationism Act," in which the teaching of evolution in public schools must be accompanied by the teaching of creation science, to be unconstitutional); (5) *Webster v. New Lenox School District* (1990) #122, 917 F. 2d 1004 (the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals found that school districts may prohibit teachers from teaching creation science and that to do so is not a violation of free speech as creation science is "a form of religious advocacy"); (6) *John E. Pelozza v. Capistrano Unified School District* (1994) 37 F. 3rd 517 (the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld court finding that "a teacher's First Amendment right to free exercise of religion is not violated by a school district's requirement that evolution be taught in biology classes"); (7) *Freiler v. Tangipahoa Board of Education* (1997) 94-3577 (the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana "rejected a policy requiring teachers to read aloud a disclaimer whenever they taught about evolution" that evolution is not a religion and that intelligent design proposals "are equivalent to proposals for teaching 'creation science'"; the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the decision of the early Court ruling [1999] and U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the School Board's appeal [2000]); (8) *Rodney LeVake v. Independent School District 656, et al.* (2000) Order Granting Defendants' Motion for Summary Judgment and Memorandum, Court File Nr. CX-99-793, District Court for the Third Judicial District of the State of Minnesota (the Court found that LeVake "did not have a free speech right to override curriculum [by providing evidence both for and against the theory of evolution], nor was the district guilty of religious discrimination [by prohibiting him from providing such evidence]"); (9) *Jeffrey Michael Selman et al. v. Cobb County School District et al.* (2005) 05-10341-I (the Court found that the label warning against evolution required in Cobb County textbooks was a violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment; appeals by the school district to the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals and the Court's subsequent remand to the district court for clarification of the evidentiary record [2006] resulted in the school district agreeing not to "disclaim or denigrate evolution" in written or oral form); (10) *Tammy Kitzmiller, et al. v. Dover Area School District, et al.* (2005) Case No. 04cv2688 (the Court ordered the Dover Area School Board to "refrain from maintaining an Intelligent Design Policy" in any of its district schools, as the teaching of Intelligent

such approaches speak more to the rhetorical and metaphysical—particularly the morally self-evident—aspects of natural theology than they do to the experimental and the natural sciences, thereby following closely on the heels of the traditional methodological approaches of natural theology.³

The historical reasons behind this deeply conservative approach are complex and must be gently teased to the surface. In this article, I will examine three significant factors that have helped to shape conservative American perspectives on the relationship of theology and science: (1) the desire for religious freedom and the right of individual freedom of expression; (2) the rise of Protestant ecumenism, with its expectation of an earthly kingdom of God; and (3) a turn from early American views of the natural sciences as a tool for building this earthly kingdom, such as held by Cotton Mather and other founding fathers,⁴ to the American fundamentalist perspective, according to which “theological discourse about creation [must be made] immune from criticism by the natural sciences.”⁵ This latter view was developed especially in the German thought of Karl Barth and held to varying extents by members of the Confessing Church in the period leading up to and including World War II. This view has been widely debated and influential also in American thought in the World War II and post-War eras. As I shall discuss in more detail below, according to the first view, natural law is an important element of Christian doctrine and as such facilitates Christian doctrine in being self-evident to all people, in all times, and under all circumstances. The second view arose as a result of the misuse of the first, particularly in the century leading up to World War II in which the National Socialist party’s Volk theory concerning the divine destiny and appointment of the German people was believed to be self-evident in history and nature.⁶

Design is a violation of the Establishment Clause, and that because Intelligent Design is unable to “uncouple itself from its creationist, and thus religious antecedents,” it is not science) (see Molleen Matsumura and Louise Mead, “Ten Major Court Cases about Evolution and Creationism” [<http://ncse.com/taking-action/ten-major-court-cases-evolution-creationism>], 2007).

³See Stephen Tulmin’s discussion of the use of rhetoric (*Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* [New York: Free Press, 1990], 26, 30ff; see also Alister E. McGrath’s call for a new approach to natural theology, which moves beyond the traditional foundationalism of classical and modern theology (*A Scientific Theology: Reality* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], chap. 7, “Rationality and Knowledge in Theology and the Natural Sciences,” 3ff).

⁴Cotton Mather, *Biblia Americana*, vol. 1, *Genesis*, ed. Reiner Smolinski (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck and Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

⁵Rodney Holder, *The Heavens Declare: Natural Theology and the Legacy of Karl Barth* (West Conshohocken, PA, 2012), 127.

⁶The Confessing Church played the leading role in condemning this view. See, e.g., Rudolf Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology*, The 1955 Gifford

In order to orient the discussion of these three significant factors, I will begin by examining three historical models on the rights on individual freedoms of conscience and expression and consider the relationship of these views to the role of theology and the natural sciences.

*Setting the Historical Context: Three Historical Models on
Individual Freedoms of Conscience and Expression*

Church historian and lawyer Nicholas Miller suggests in *The Religious Roots of the First Amendment* that American government and society have a deep and often unacknowledged religious tradition that undergirds the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment.⁷ He thus questions the popular view that pragmatism and secularism alone drove the early American approach to the separation of church and state. Instead, he suggests that while secular views about government and society played a role, there is a more fundamental motivation that drove the American founding fathers to this perspective—the cherished conviction that individuals possessed the free rights of conscience. What drove this conviction, Miller suggests, is the right of the individual to read and interpret Scripture for himself or herself.⁸

In order to better understand this American phenomenon, he turned to world history, discovering a long tradition of appeal for freedom of conscience that extends unbroken from the early days of the Protestant Reformation. This tradition begins with Martin Luther, who first raised the twin challenges of who was better able to interpret the Scriptures—the church or the individual—and who was better equipped to enforce Christian belief and praxis—the magistrate or the individual.⁹ Ironically, the later Luther moved away from his earlier position on tolerance and accepted some help from the civil magistrate in overseeing religious behavior. Tragically, he was also to become highly intolerant of the Anabaptists, who, as Miller points out, became, after their initial period of violent behavior, highly receptive of the early Luther's position on tolerance and his principle of *sola Scriptura*.¹⁰

Lectures (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), and chap. 5 of my dissertation, *Toward a Holistic Interdisciplinary Model of Human Being: A Hebraic-Christian Perspective of the Human Observer and Its Beneficial Impact on the Theology-and-Science Dialogue, Society, and the Environment* (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2012).

⁷The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

⁸Nicholas P. Miller, *The Religious Roots of the First Amendment: Dissenting Protestants and the Separation of Church and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

⁹Ibid., 20-27.

¹⁰Ibid., 27.

Miller traces the early Luther's position through history, ending his investigation with the formation of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment. This tradition of freedom of conscience and the foundationalist view of Scripture upon which it is built, he suggests, is carried forward in ever-increasing intensity from Luther to the Anabaptists and on to the English Baptists, Quakers, Puritans, and even some Anglicans. From there, these ideas became a part of the groundswell that drove dissenting American Protestants, as Miller terms those who held such perspectives in contrast to their magisterial Protestant brethren, to help make possible the formation of a new type of constitution and amendment that would eventually guarantee the rights of all individuals to practice religion in their own way.¹¹

Miller demonstrates how dissenting Protestant views on the reading and interpretation of Scripture by individuals helped, for instance, to make the Netherlands a virtual haven of toleration in an otherwise religiously war-torn Europe.¹² It was here that notables such as John Locke took refuge, giving him and significant others the opportunity for the publication and dissemination of dissenting views on the relationship of religion to society in general and civil governance in particular. And it was also here that the English Puritan fathers of America launched their tiny ship upon a seething ocean of religious intolerance, persecution, and religious warfare in order to create a "more perfect Union."

Miller thus assigns a foundational role to dissenting Protestantism in the grounding statement of American views on religious freedom and tolerance, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. His position is part of a refreshing new trend of returning to the roots of early American thought on religion and freedom of conscience for better understanding the present. He concludes that while current American society has become increasingly polarized between conservative Christians and skeptical unbelievers, there was once a middle way between these two positions that gave American society a unique place among world governments. "There is," he states, "a moderating position between the so-called religious right and secular left, one based on the dissenting Protestant heritage that came to be forcefully expressed at the constitutional founding."¹³ This moderating influence has, unfortunately, in recent years been forced increasingly into the background as so-called "red" and "blue" parties move inexorably toward opposite poles: the "red" toward Christian fundamentalism and the "blue" toward liberal secularism, or as Stephen Toulmin describes in his *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, the movement from one scientific paradigm to another—the movement from

¹¹Ibid., chap. 5, "Theologian and Politician: John Witherspoon and James Madison Make a National Principle," 133ff.

¹²Ibid., 29.

¹³Ibid., 156-157.

modern Newtonian physics to Darwinian biology. Newtonian physics is built upon the notion that the physical laws that govern the inanimate processes of the universe, such as planetary orbits, provide stability and are the basis of not only cosmology, but also of church and state. Darwinian biology is grounded upon the notion that the laws that govern life processes are random and unstable and thus are more true to the chaotic way in which government and church should be understood.¹⁴

For the purposes of my research, I argue that while Miller's historical portrait of the path from Luther to the First Amendment is well written and argued, it is his final chapter, "Epilogue: Back to the Future of Church and State," that is his real contribution to American studies, particularly as they relate to present issues regarding theology-and-science dialogue. In this summary chapter, he demonstrates through historical examples the profound differences between three approaches to the "individual, church, state, and God"—(1) a semitheocratic model; (2) a separationist model based upon the right of private judgment; and (3) a secular, liberal separationist model.¹⁵ Significantly, these three models continue to be reflected in contemporary American society. Understanding how these approaches have played out in the past, he proposes, provides a window into how the present and future are taking shape under the command of these same controlling hermeneutics.¹⁶ An examination of these three positions also helps to demonstrate the relationship of ecumenism to the concept of individual freedom and the role that natural law and the theology-and-science dialogue play in forming conservative American thought.

Pufendorf and the Semitheocracy

Representative of a semitheocratic position, which Miller points out is based upon the medieval concept of feudalism and ecumenism, the Saxon Samuel Pufendorf (or Puffendorff) proposed an "anemic" religious toleration that returned "spiritual powers and oversight to the 'Christian' ruler," who is ultimately guided in his reign by the church.¹⁷ Miller notes that according to such a view,

the importance of the individual is minimized, because of one's need to go through the organs of church and state to obtain truth, whether spiritual or civil. It represents the world of the divine right of kings and popes, where no individual rights exist, but only privileges extended by the rulers. It is one where church and state are distinct entities, but play a role in cooperating to

¹⁴Toulmin, 194-198.

¹⁵Miller, 157.

¹⁶Ibid., 168ff.

¹⁷Ibid., 158, 157. See Samuel Puffendorff, *Of the Nature and Qualifications of Religion in Reference to Civil Society*, trans. J. Crull (London: A. Roper, 1698).

civilly enforce the majority religious beliefs and practices of society. Under this system, the church in theory has a superior position in society, as kings and rulers are subject to the superior spiritual authority of church. Bishops and popes at times provided legitimacy to the claims of leaders to civil authority, at times crowning them, as Pope Leo III did for Charlemagne.¹⁸

Thus, according to this view, there is a hierarchy, descending from God to church to state to individual: God speaks to the church, the church speaks to the state, and the state dictates the actions of the individual. This stabilizing hierarchy is self-evident to, and thus unquestioned by, all. Pufendorf proposes that the dictates of natural religion are contained within Christian doctrine “and all of them imply a profound Reverence to be paid to the Supreme BEING.”¹⁹ The reason for this, he suggests, is because “it is beyond all question, that those that act against the very Dictates of Reason, ought to be subject to Civil Punishments, since they strike at the very Foundation of Civil Societies.” Such actions that are punishable by the civil authority are those that are self-evident to all including “Idolatry, Blasphemy, Profanation of the Sabbath; where nevertheless great care is to be taken, that a due difference be made betwixt the Moral part of that Precept concerning the Sabbath, which is unalterable, and the Ceremonial part of it.”²⁰

However, the civil sovereign is not to require blind obedience to Christian doctrine.²¹ If a person believes some doctrine to be in error, he should have the ability to argue his case before

the best and ablest Judges; *and, if by them he be legally and plainly convicted of his Error [sic]*, then, and not before, ought he to be silenced. To force People into the Church by the bare Civil Authority, must needs fill the Commonwealth with Hypocrites, who cannot be supposed to Act according to the Dictates of their Consciences. For, since in Religious Matters an absolute Uniformity betwixt the Heart and Tongue is required, how can it otherwise be, but that such as profess a Religion disagreeable to their Opinion, should never be satisfied in their Consciences, when they consider, that they impose upon God Almighty.²²

So, it would appear, in this model the church has no value for coerced belief, but, paradoxically, allows for no real dissent. One may request a hearing, but one must, in the end, either come to a knowledge of one's errors and be silent from then on, or not recant of one's errors and be silenced by whatever means necessary. The basis for such stringent measures is that there is no excuse for error in a system in which such beliefs are clearly

¹⁸Miller, 158.

¹⁹Puffendorff, 128.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., 129.

²²Ibid., 129-130, emphasis supplied.

self-evident to all. Such was the situation in which, for example, Galileo found himself as he sought to demonstrate the validity of the Copernican cosmology. In this approach, science was to fortify the church's dogma and when it did not, the individual could be called to account. While Galileo made off comparatively lightly in terms of punishment—house arrest in his own home just around the corner from his beloved daughter's convent²³—fellow astronomer Giordano Bruno, who chose to give a new and heretical theological explanation to the Copernican heliocentric model, was burned at the stake.²⁴

In a riveting new book, Cullen Murphy details the way in which the medieval institution of the Inquisition suddenly opened the door for such possible means of punishment for the unrepentant erring one.²⁵ Murphy notes that while religious and ethnic hatred existed long before the Inquisition, it was not until this institution was unleashed in the Middle Ages that “the ability to sustain a persecution—to give it staying power by giving it an institutional life—did not appear until the Middle Ages. Until then, the tools to stoke and manage those omnipresent embers of hatred did not exist. Once these capabilities do exist, inquisitions become a fact of life. They are not confined to religion; they are political as well.” What gives this type of institution staying power is that

when the stakes seem very high, and when the people who want to do the torturing believe fervently that their larger cause has the full weight of morality on its side, then all other considerations are irrelevant. If you're absolutely certain that your cause is blessed by God or history, and that it's under mortal threat, then in some minds torture becomes easy to justify. The Inquisition tried to put limits on torture, but the limits were always pushed.²⁶

It was from such tyranny that dissenting Protestants fled and against which the secular liberalists of France fought, but while the initial goals of finding freedom from tyranny might have been shared by dissenting Protestants and French secularists, their approaches for accomplishing this endeavor were very different.

²³Dava Sobel, *Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith, and Love* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 355.

²⁴Ingrid D. Rowland, *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher/Heretic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²⁵Cullen Murphy, *God's Jury: The Inquisition and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

²⁶Cullen Murphy, Interview on amazon.com (http://www.amazon.com/Gods-Jury-Inquisition-Making-Modern/dp/0618091564/ref=sr_1_14?ie=UTF8&qid=1351527183&sr=8-14&keywords=the+inquisition+catholic).

John Locke and Dissenting Protestants

According to Miller, the position of the individual in relationship to God, church, and state was different from that of Pufendorf's semitheocracy. For dissenting Protestants, the beliefs that each person could access God through prayer and the study of the Scriptures and that all Christians belonged to the priesthood of believers "vaulted the individual to a position above the church and the state, with direct access to God and truth."²⁷ In this new perspective, Miller notes, there was a similarity to Pufendorf's medieval model in, for example, accepting God's existence and the belief that some truths were self-evident in both natural and spiritual things. Where they differed, he proposes, is that

the new, Protestant view placed the individual above church and state. Each person now had the duty and right to seek this truth from God, through both the Bible (especially about spiritual things) and nature (especially political matters and civil morality). The church and the state existed to support and protect the citizen of the temporal world. There was a separation between these two powers, since their jurisdiction was limited to their separate spheres of concern, whether spiritual or civil. It was a separation of equality and mutual respect, with each entity respecting the sovereignty of the other in its own sphere.²⁸

This "political expression of the priesthood of all believers," in which "one's rights against the state as an individual, in turn, derived from the duties one owed to God,"²⁹ served as "robust foundation for individual rights" and was "an important part of the impulse to disestablishment in colonial America."³⁰ Further, it was, as will be seen below, an important element in a healthy relationship between theology and science—science served as a tool for demonstrating the existence of God, for helping to establish a balanced dissenting Protestant ecumenism and world government that would be based upon the natural rights of the individual.

Pierre Bayle and the Secular Liberalists

In comparison to the two preceding views, the secular, liberal separationist model is represented, Miller suggests, by the French skeptical Calvinist Pierre Bayle. Miller correctly places Bayle far outside the general ranks of Calvinists, finding him more "an heir of Pyrrhonius and an ancestor to Hume, Voltaire, Rousseau, and eventually Franklin and Jefferson."³¹ Due to his skeptical

²⁷Miller, 159.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

Calvinist background, Bayle brought a wide range of views that, in a variety of ways tied him to and divided him from both Pufendorf and Locke in his understanding of the individual, God, the church, and the state. Bayle was in accord with Pufendorf's understanding of the subjection of the individual to the state; thus he rejected Locke's proposal that a "reciprocal contract between ruler and people, denied the right of rebellion, and upheld a strong duty of obedience to the ruler."³² As a skeptic, Bayle, however, was suspicious of speculative truths, including religion, which he referred to as "reputed," as opposed to "actual," truth. Because of the uncertainty of knowing actual truth, Bayle defended the rights of individual conscience, even if individuals believed something in error. This, in turn, meant that the state's duty was to tolerate religious differences.

Miller notes that for Bayle "tolerance" stems "from the logic that if truth cannot be known, then no one can or should enforce it. The real threats to this system are those who claim knowledge of absolute truths."³³ Under this purview, an enemy of the state was anyone who claimed access to absolute truth, such as religion, which was based upon the notion of special and indirect revelation from God. Church and state were then to be completely separated and, in fact, religious people were to be relegated to the fringes of society. Further, Bayle proposed that the only appropriate truths for the marketplace of ideas were those based upon mathematical and empirical foundations.³⁴ Thus he effectually separated the natural sciences from theology. The individual could know empirically the natural realm of which he was a part, but one could never know the mind of God.

To summarize these three positions, Pufendorf proposed a view of God, church, state, and the individual that promoted the theological pronouncements of the church above all other forms of declaration, especially that of the individual. On the other extreme, Bayle sought freedom from absolutes, making truth relative. In both Pufendorf's and Bayle's systems, the individual was made to choose to exercise individual free-will and given the freedom of expression, but the right to live freely was largely a farcical caricature of freedom as the only real freedom granted to the individual was to choose to conform. Rudolf Bultmann comments on the outcomes of Bayle's secular liberalist position, noting:

The powers which rule as fate over man are not only foreign powers opposed to his will and plans but often such as grow out of his own will and plans. It is not only that "the curse of the wrong deed ever must beget wrong," as Schiller said, but good intentions and well considered beginnings also have

³²Ibid., 160.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 160-161.

consequences which no one could foresee and lead to deeds which nobody wanted to do.³⁵

The lesson that Bultmann gleans from history is that “willed actions reach beyond the mark of their intended goal, thus revealing an inner logic of things which overrules the will of man.” In the French Revolution, what was intended to result in “a liberal constitution and a federation of free nations” led instead to military dictatorship and the death of countless innocent bystanders; “it intended peace, and it led to war.”³⁶ The question at stake, then, is “whether our personal existence still has a real meaning when our own deeds do not, so to speak, belong to us.”³⁷ If history is a mere coming to be and passing away, in which humanity is “a ball in the play of the waves,” then history can be nothing more than the playing out of fate.³⁸

The third, and mediating, way between these extremes was that of the dissenting Protestants and Locke, who chose a bounded sense of freedom of expression that called for individual and public protest against the onslaught of tyranny. It also called for a Protestant ecumenism that was grounded upon evidence, garnered from the human and natural sciences, and interpreted through the normative guidance of the Scriptures. In order to understand this approach, I will discuss first the notion of Protestant ecumenism and then the relationship of theology and science in creating an evidentialist hermeneutic.

*Puritanism, Pietism, and the Rise of
American Protestant Ecumenism*

The rise of American pietism in the early days of British colonialism is a second significant factor in understanding late nineteenth- and early-to-mid-twentieth-century conservative American perspectives, particularly in regard to the rise of American Protestant ecumenism, with its expectation of an earthly kingdom of God. As I will argue in the following section, Pietism also helped to lay the foundation for early American opinions about the relationship of theology and science.

To serve as guides in understanding this unique expression of the Pietistic movement, I will turn to two major publications, spearheaded by Reiner Smolinski: the first volume of Cotton Mather’s *Biblia Americana*, which Smolinski edits, and a series of essays in reappraisal of Mather’s significant contribution to American thought in the early days of British American colonialism.³⁹ These two works provide a profound contribution to current

³⁵Bultmann, 2-3.

³⁶Ibid., 3.

³⁷Ibid., 4.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Cotton Mather, *Biblia Americana*, vol. 1, *Genesis*, ed. Reiner Smolinski (Tübingen:

knowledge not only of Cotton Mather and his previously unpublished Bible commentary *Biblia Americana*, but of the cultural milieu from which the United States of America emerged. As was seen in the previous section, religion played a critical role in determining American culture, government, and society.

One of the key figures in this process, Smolinski and his team of researchers discovered, is the Puritan preacher, writer, and scientific researcher Cotton Mather, whom Smolinski et al. hoped to rescue from a long history of disdain in American cultural history due to his perceived actions in the Salem Witch Trials.⁴⁰ What the research team uncovered was not the horrid, narrow-minded Mather of popular legend, but a complex polymath, who allowed himself to be influenced by the wide gamut of biblical, religious, philosophical, scientific, historical, and medical perspectives of not only his own time, but also that of the ancients. This Mather would author more than 400 publications, serve as one of America's outstanding preachers and cultural voices, and become one of the first colonial Americans to become a member of the Royal Society of England for his contributions to the study of American nature and medicine and an influential member of the Republic of Letters.⁴¹

As Smolinski et al. argue, a significant factor in these endeavors was Mather's encounter with Halle Pietism. His correspondence with August Hermann Franke not only helped to bridge the gap between American Puritanism and Continental Pietism, but greatly broadened Mather's views on ecumenism and the use of science and natural philosophy and theology as tools for building a Protestant cosmopolis—God's divine kingdom on earth.⁴²

It is little wonder that ecumenical views such as Mather's also helped to build the notion of American historical destiny as a nation divinely appointed by God. As John L. O'Sullivan proposed in his manifest destiny of 1839, "our national birth was the beginning of a new history, the formation and progress of an untried political system, which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only; and so far as regards the entire development of the natural rights of man, in moral, political, and national life, we may confidently

Mohr Siebeck and Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); Reiner Smolinski and Jan Stievermann, eds., *Cotton Mather and Biblia Americana: America's First Bible Commentary: Essays in Reappraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

⁴⁰Jan Stieverman, "Cotton Mather and 'Biblia Americana'—America's First Bible Commentary," in *Cotton Mather and Biblia Americana*, 14-16.

⁴¹On Mather's publications, see <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/mather.htm>. On his induction to the Royal Society, see Smolinski, "Editor's Introduction," *Biblia Americana: Genesis*, 14. On the Puritan Republic of Letters, see Oliver Scheiding, "The World as Parish: Cotton Mather, August Hermann Francke, and Transatlantic Religious Networks," in *Cotton Mather and Biblia Americana*, 131, n. 1.

⁴²Scheiding, 132.

assume that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity.”⁴³ So the rallying cry of Pietists and dissenting Protestants alike became, long before Horace Greeley, “Go west, young man.”

When one first considers the potential relationship between eighteenth-century colonial American Puritans and Continental Pietists, the first response is often that they would view each other with “suspicion.” However, Francis J. Bremer “makes the case that Mather’s ecumenical interests were actually the product of a long history of puritan contacts with Continental reform.”⁴⁴ Bremer argues that from the very beginning of the Pietistic movement, Anglican, and later Puritan, clergy saw the movement’s potential as a force for uniting Christendom, the geopolitical secularization of Christianity, for “the creation of a ‘holy and happy society.’”⁴⁵ Bremer points to the efforts of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and others who “were committed to the search for Christian unity.” When invitations were extended by Cranmer to Martin Bucer to serve as Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge and Italian Protestant Peter Martyr to sit as the Regius chair of Divinity at Oxford, the influence of Continental Pietism upon English Christianity was secured. “Both [professors] became actively involved in trying to shape the English church in ways that drew it towards the Continental Reformation.”⁴⁶ In order to understand the influential force that Continental Pietism wielded upon British and American thought, it is necessary to provide some definition of it.

From the beginning, Pietism was a Protestant ecumenical movement. Although Miller, in the previous section, never names Pietism, nevertheless he helps to trace its trajectory from Luther to England and America, for Pietism began as a Lutheran attempt to bridge the gap between itself and the Reformed churches, with their joint emphases on individual piety and the Christian life, and was an influential force within Anabaptism. The express purpose of this ecumenism was to create a new Protestant Christendom,⁴⁷ the culmination of which must surely be the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, with its disestablishment of religion and the insistence upon the individual’s right of conscience and the interpretation of Scripture based upon the self-evident nature of divine truth, which has come to be known as “evidentialism.”⁴⁸

Thus constructed, the integration of Continental Pietism with American Puritanism helped to serve as a leavening influence on early American views

⁴³John L. O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” *The United States Democratic Review* 6/23 (1839): 426-430.

⁴⁴Francis J. Bremer, “New England Puritanism and the Ecumenical Background of Cotton Mather’s ‘Biblia Americana,’” in *Cotton Mather and Biblia Americana*, 113.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷See, e.g., Sheiding’s essay, esp. 131-132, nn. 2-3.

⁴⁸Stieverman, 5.

of government. As was seen with Pufendorf's model of Christian society, Calvinist Puritans tended to view government as a divinely appointed enforcing agent. However, the influence of Continental Pietism, which Miller presents as dissenting Protestantism, was, as he argues compellingly, to emphasize the role of individual choice to do good in society by setting individual conscience above the magistrate and God's word above the authority of the church.⁴⁹ With influences such as the acceptance of the First Amendment, it is little wonder that Americans came to view their place in history as divinely ordained by God and to believe that America's task was to serve with practical piety the needs of the greater world. Oliver Sheiding notes that the shared goals of second- and third-generation Continental Pietists August Hermann Franke and Johann Henrich Callenberg and Puritan-Pietist Mather were "informed by a belief in a continual improvement of life through religious education" and it was this common point that "formed the starting point as well as the center of their transatlantic conversation." Their correspondence shows evidence that they considered themselves partners in "matters of church reform" rather than as mere "kindred spirits."⁵⁰ Thus the shared goals of Franke and Mather were meant to establish the foundation of good government, guided by an underlying Protestant ecumenism, that would result in "a holy and happy society." The American colonies must have appeared to these men as the perfect ground upon which to establish these ideals.

That piety was considered to be a valuable tool in the establishment of a divinely ordained government is evident in the fact that piety was never meant to be a merely abstract proposal. Rather, works of practical piety were called for. For example, Franke had an established reputation as a missionary for Pietistic Lutheranism, having "re-converted" Duke Morritz Wilhelm of Saxony-Zeitz to Lutheranism (1718). He was also responsible for the creation of a press that published some 300 books, including translations from English or Latin into German and covering topics as wide-ranging as religious piety and mysticism and chemistry and medicine.⁵¹ Theologically, Franke was prompted to perform his missionary and publication efforts because "God wants all people to be saved and to reach knowledge of the truth,"⁵² a position that stood in contrast to the Calvinist understanding of divine election and predestination, in which a person's destiny and fate were sealed by God from the depths of eternity.⁵³

So, too, Mather believed strongly in the Pietistic spirit of evangelism, proposing to share his views on Scripture not only with his fellow Protestant

⁴⁹Miller, 17.

⁵⁰Sheiding, 139.

⁵¹Ibid., 143-145.

⁵²Ibid., 162.

⁵³See my discussion of this point in my dissertation, 140ff.

brethren, but with others outside the Christian fold, especially Jews and Native Americans. Jan Stievermann notes that

Mather's extensive commentaries on Genesis show that he was a guardian of the orthodox belief in mankind's common origin, universal consanguinity, and spiritual unity in Christ, a belief which rendered phenotypical diversity largely insignificant. He defends this position against both the older theories of polygenesis and a new kind of racial thinking which had begun to arise under the impact of developments in early Enlightenment natural philosophy. Moreover, he refutes any theological theories or popular myths, such as the curse of Noah, in which biblical stories were taken as proof that Africans or Native Americans had been expelled from the community of God's children or relegated to perpetual social subordination. . . . Mather's simultaneous condemnation of the slave trade and defense of the institution of slavery were both a direct outgrowth of Mather's conservative theology and his biblical literalism.⁵⁴

Thus Mather saw an organic unity between the practical activities that stemmed from moral obligation and spiritual and national unity. As with Franke,⁵⁵ Mather also believed that the resources of the world had been laid at the feet of Christianity and were to be used judiciously for the purpose of building God's kingdom on earth.⁵⁶ Thus one must use the natural sciences wisely, both to preserve the worth of all human beings and to care for the greater environment. It is to this third significant factor in conservative American views on theology and science that I now turn.

*Theology-and-Science Dialogue: The Natural Sciences as a Tool
for Building the Earthly Kingdom of God*

There is a deep relationship in American thought on the relationship between the Bible, theology, and the natural sciences. This relationship manifests itself in a number of ways; here I will be concerned with two—Mather's understanding of biblical criticism and of the natural sciences, which has come to be known as "evidentialism," and the later twentieth-century fundamentalist position that came to dominate conservative evangelicalism for the better part of the century on these same topics.

Mather and the Relationship of Theology and Science

In his *Christian Philosopher*, Mather reveals his enthusiasm for Newtonian science. Smolinski notes that Mather's understanding of this science was

⁵⁴Stieverman, 47.

⁵⁵Sheiding, 144.

⁵⁶Adriaan Neele, "Peter van Mastricht's Theoretico-practica Theologia," in *Cotton Mather and Biblia Americana*, 172-173.

“barely distinguishable from the arguments of early Deists.”⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Mather’s overall plan was to use science, and every other discipline, as tools for understanding the Scriptures. His references throughout his writings are

international, interdenominational, multilingual, historically encompassing, and, as we should say today, transdisciplinary. He not only cites the Church Fathers and medieval commentaries, rabbinic literature, ancient history, classical and modern philosophy, philology, and the natural sciences of his day, but also Reformation and post-Reformation theologians of all denominations, including Roman Catholics and Jesuits. Indeed, an ecumenical impulse to transcend old party lines is one of the “Biblia’s” most conspicuous features.

Thus Mather was committed to leaving no stone uncovered in his quest for knowledge. In regard to the natural sciences, his goal was to embrace every scientific perspective that “traced God’s providential hand in the physical universe.”⁵⁸ Nothing that uplifted Christian belief or that demonstrated the hand of God in history and nature was to be overlooked, and indeed, was put to his use.

Mather’s Deistic bent demonstrates how closely tied he was to the “rising tide of modern historical-contextual criticism, which had its origin in the mid-seventeenth century and came to a climax first in the English debates between Deists and orthodox apologists in the early eighteenth century.”⁵⁹ His entry into biblical criticism came through biblical philology and his “overriding goal” was to “safeguard the Bible’s absolute authority in affirming the general reliability of the canon and the received modern texts.”⁶⁰ His desire to preserve biblical integrity stemmed from attacks on religion and the Bible by Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan*, 1651) and Benedict Spinoza (*Tractus Theologico-Politicus*, 1670).⁶¹ He wanted to use a new kind of biblical criticism, to help Christians build faith against such attacks by turning to “reasonable methods, namely by explicating and thereby making transparent [the Scriptures’] time-bound forms of expression, unveiling the universal truths they carried.”⁶² This foundationalist method has come to be called “evidentialism,” which stood in contrast to the scholasticism of the medieval period and the magisterial

⁵⁷Smolinski, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Biblia Americana: Genesis*, 14.

⁵⁸Smolinski, “Section 2: ‘Biblia Americana’ in the Context of Early Enlightenment Science: How to Go to Heaven, or How Heaven Goes?” in *Biblia Americana: Genesis*, 77.

⁵⁹Stievermann, 6.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹For a thorough description of the Radical Enlightenment and the significance of Hobbes and Spinoza to it, see Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). For a different perspective on this same time period, see Toulmin.

⁶²Stievermann, 7.

Protestant theologies of revelation.⁶³ E. Brooks Holifield comments: “Deeply informed by parallel patterns of thought in England and on the European continent, this evidentialist position consisted of the claim that rational evidence confirmed the uniqueness and truth of the biblical revelation. Such a claim stood behind the rise of ‘evidential Christianity.’”⁶⁴

In contrast to much of contemporary theology-and-science dialogue, Mather did not look to science to simply inform theology, but rather sought to also find the theological in the natural sciences. Therefore, while Mather draws on all the best scholarship from ancient and contemporary sources, he never loses sight of this goal.⁶⁵ “Although he closely attends to the scientific theory of light [for example] he also urges readers to allow such contemplations with ‘devout Thoughts’ or ‘Lessons of Piety.’”⁶⁶

Mather was not alone among the American founding fathers to value the message of Scripture and the need for applying it in the everyday realm of science and politics. Thomas Jefferson, though he came from a more secular position and did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, nevertheless treasured the philosophy of the historical Jesus to such an extent that he created his own polyglot version of the Gospels.⁶⁷ In his Gospel, he carefully rearranged the texts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John into what he considered to be the proper chronology and cut away all references to supernatural events in order to find the philosophy of Jesus. His reason for this was not simply to provide himself with devotional reading, but to find a basis upon which to ground his political and personal views about the role of ethics in society, especially in terms of religious freedom. It is said that he read from this polyglot Gospel every evening.⁶⁸

It is an amazing experience to leaf through the carefully prepared pages of Jefferson’s Bible, knowing the value that he placed upon its message, or to read through the hundreds of pages of Mather’s commentary on Genesis and

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 5. Also on evidentialism, see Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

⁶⁵Smolinski, “Section 2: ‘Biblia Americana’ in the Context of Early Enlightenment,” 79.

⁶⁶Neele, 172.

⁶⁷Brent D. Glass, “Foreword,” in *The Jefferson Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth Extracted Textually from the Gospels in Greek, Latin, French and English*, Smithsonian ed. with “Essays” by Harry R. Rubenstein, Barbara Clark Smith, and Janice Stagnitto Ellis (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2011).

⁶⁸Harry R. Rubenstein and Barbara Clark Smith, “History of the Jefferson Bible,” in *The Jefferson Bible*, 14–15.

realize that these carefully developed perspectives helped to shape a nation, but what happened to this honest encounter with theology and science? Under what conditions did American religious fundamentalism develop so that by the early twentieth century it became reluctant to consider the role of science as a helpful tool in biblical interpretation? It does not seem to me as I have studied Mather's understanding of the role of science that he in any way wanted to call into question the authority of Scripture or to do away with its normative role in divine revelation—in fact, I find the opposite. In order to understand this problem, it is once again necessary to examine history.

American Fundamentalism and the Relationship of Theology and Science

American fundamentalism grew up under the clouds of civil and world war and violent social change. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries presented a list of problems so great that it is virtually impossible to grasp their impact upon society and church.

First, there were the continuing aftershocks of the religious wars of the seventeenth century that continued to rain down an aftermath of growing disregard and lack of respect for organized religion and a continuing search for a new, natural mode of certainty. Toulmin notes that Descartes was the man of the seventeenth-century hour, arriving in a time of great instability in the wake of the Thirty Years War with his ideas about geometrical certainty and “clear and distinct” ideas that gave his philosophical approach a “new conviction.” Newton was no less exceptional, with his validation of Copernicus's heliocentric system and its accompanying sense of order, stability, and hierarchy. Both provided justification and a model for the development of the modern nation-state that, as we have seen, sought to liberate itself from the constraints of medieval superstition and religion on one hand, and complete atheism and moral relativism on the other.⁶⁹ As Toulmin also notes, this quest for certainty could and did renew itself again in the wake of World Wars I and II.⁷⁰

Accompanying this was a growing skepticism about the foundation upon which Christianity had been built and a questioning of the way in which Christianity's foundational document, the Scriptures, had come to be interpreted,⁷¹ particularly in terms of how humans had come to be defined and whether the existence of God could be found within the natural

⁶⁹See Toulmin, 62, 131.

⁷⁰Ibid., 177.

⁷¹For background to these issues, see, e.g., J. Samuel Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Henning Graf von Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); and Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Bible Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

realm as a self-evident fact available to all people, at all times, and under all circumstances.⁷²

Such turmoil began to shove individuals away from the center and toward opposite poles. The results were the rise of higher-critical thinking and skepticism about everything, not simply the Bible. Jonathan I. Israel proposes that the impact of Enlightenment thinking, and not just the radical type, completely changed the flow of world history, noting that

the Enlightenment—European and global—not only attacked and severed the roots of traditional European culture in the sacred, magic, kingship, and hierarchy, secularizing all institutions and ideas, but (intellectually and to a degree in practice) effectively demolished all legitimation of monarchy, aristocracy, woman’s subordination to man, ecclesiastical authority, and slavery, replacing these with the principles of universality, equality, and democracy.⁷³

Such skepticism also prompted epic battles over the role of education, and eventually the teaching of Darwinian evolution in public schools, in American society.⁷⁴ Miller points to the importance of dissenting Protestant and moderate Enlightenment views to the structure of early American higher education, which was to promote the foundational views upon which the new nation was built.⁷⁵ Halle Pietism is also an important.⁷⁶

Slavery, while technically outlawed in most places throughout the British Empire in 1833-1834, dragged on with some exceptions for the purpose of accommodating the wealthy plantation owners’ transition to other types of labor. Adrian Desmond and James Moore comment that “the slaves had been forced into ‘apprenticeships’—ostensibly to prepare them for freedom, but the reality was a further four to six years of forced labour on the [British] colonial plantations.”⁷⁷

In the United States, the Thirteen Amendment to the U.S. Constitution formally abolished slavery only in 1865.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, as Stephen Jay

⁷²See my dissertation. I do not argue for traditional foundationalism in my dissertation. However, I do argue that all disciplines, through the acquisition of knowledge relevant to their particular fields of inquiry, do help to make obvious and enlarge the meaning of what it is, e.g., to be human when understood cumulatively in interdisciplinary studies. This approach seems to me to be methodologically evidentialist in nature.

⁷³Israel, vi.

⁷⁴See Linder and n. 1 above.

⁷⁵Miller, chap. 6, “Revolutionary and Governor: William Livingston Opposes Anglican Control of King’s College.”

⁷⁶See, e.g., Sheiding.

⁷⁷Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin’s Sacred Cause: Race, Slavery and the Quest for Human Origins* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 116.

⁷⁸The Thirteen Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states: “Neither slavery nor

Gould clearly delineated in *The Mismeasure of Man*, a new workforce was indeed found in the poor, formally uneducated, largely non-English speaking immigrants from less-desirable parts of Europe (i.e., Catholic-held territories and nations) and from the continued for-all-intents-and-purposes forced labor of the African American population due to the rise of Jim Crowe and share-cropping.⁷⁹ To help keep these individuals under control, Gould notes the rise of scientific racism presented these immigrants and former slaves as psychologically and physically subhuman, morons, and idiots.⁸⁰ Many of our own American forbearers worked long days in dangerous situations in the newly designed sweat shops of the Industrial Revolution, and even children as young as 8 and 10 and 12 worked alongside their parents to keep the wolf of starvation at bay in those early days of the twentieth century.⁸¹

Then there was the reality of a world war so technologically advanced that battles which had previously taken long and grueling months and even years to wage could now, with the release of agents such as mustard gas, bring the battle to a halt within hours, even minutes. When confronted with such enormously complex moral dilemmas and overwhelming obstacles, individuals such as Thomas Henry Huxley, the foremost supporter of the new biology, proposed that the only way forward through such moral morasses was to treat society as a garden by tending those desirable traits with tender care and regard and those undesirables as weeds. Don't be afraid to pluck the weeds, he said. Weeds are not meant to grow in a garden.⁸² His chilling words were taken to heart only too earnestly in the first half of the twentieth century. What is even more chilling, as Gitta Sereny graphically reveals, is that the Church in Germany (and elsewhere by silence) seemed to be in compliance with the Nazi's weeding of the nation's garden.⁸³

involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by proper legislation.”

⁷⁹Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996).

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 188ff.

⁸¹See the photo essay of child laborers, produced between 1908 and 1924 (Beth Stebner, “The Faces of Lost Youth: Haunting Photos of Child Oyster Shuckers Show Inhospitable Working Conditions Borne by Thousands of Children before Revolutionary Labour Laws were Passed,” *Daily Mail Online*, 26 March 2012 (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2119875/Lewis-Hine-Child-oyster-shuckers-inhospitable-working-conditions-borne-thousands-children-labour-laws-passed.html>).

⁸²Thomas Henry Huxley, “Prolegomena,” in *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays* (New York: D. Appleton, 1897), 1ff.

⁸³Gitta Sereny, *Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983).

What was conservative evangelicalism's response to these same problems? Conservative evangelicalism was, largely, to go into hiding and to create a fundamentalism so strict that it left no room for uncertainty or ambiguity.⁸⁴ Rather than attempting to bring the church back to a healthy view of natural theology, many, such as Karl Barth and the Confessing Church in Germany, Switzerland, and the United States redefined the concept of *sola Scriptura* to exclude natural theology.

Barth and his fellows proposed that Germany's ills lay in the fact that what they had thought to read in natural law of their own genetic greatness, granted to them by God, was a horrible lie.⁸⁵ Accordingly, Barth and his fellow Confessing Church theologians chose to err on the side of caution and thereby rejected natural theology—God does not speak through natural law; he speaks only through Jesus Christ as presented in the Gospels.⁸⁶ Scripture, in this case, was not normative for understanding the world around us—as in helping us to see God's handwriting in nature or in the experience of one's life or that of others—and allowing those things to lead us to a deeper reality that is revealed in the Scriptures. Rather, it was the rejection of all traditional definitions of revelation except that which speaks alone of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures. Such a view leaves a very narrow window of opportunity for those outside the bounds of Christianity to become introduced to God as there is little or no concept of general revelation to bridge the gap between belief and unbelief.

Scientist and theologian Rodney Holder, in *The Heavens Declare: Natural Theology and the Legacy of Karl Barth*, rightly criticizes such an approach. While there is much to be said for Barth's understanding that "God's revelation is to be found in Jesus Christ as attested in Scripture,"⁸⁷ nevertheless, Holder contends, "if God is the author of nature, then we should expect to discover *something* of him through nature. This approach is not hubris and is not denying God's grace, but is a consequence of God's common grace to all mankind, enabling the Christian, including the theologian, to connect to the outsider. It also accords with Scripture which, contra Barth, contains natural theology."⁸⁸

Holder proposes that Barth "denies to us the means for rationally evaluating what is purported to be revelation. Barth says that only faith awakened by God can lead anyone to an acceptance of God's revelation in

⁸⁴It is true that many individuals stood for the right of conscience during those difficult years; however, the vast majority of the Christian world simply carried on with their own difficulties and attempts at survival.

⁸⁵For a good description of this trend in Christian theology, see Holder.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 13.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 233.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 234.

Christ as reliable knowledge.” “But,” Holder muses, “it seems to me that historical-critical study can help furnish grounds for belief, provided it is not engaged with too narrow a conception (such as that of Troeltsch’s principle of analogy) of what might be found.”⁸⁹

It seems to me that Holder is on target with his critique of Barth. While Barth and the Confessing Church may have had no other recourse but to deny the twisted meaning that natural theology took on in the dark years leading up to and including World War II, this need not be prescriptive for those living today. What is needed is a better understanding of the meaning of revelation, with clear distinctions between the special divine revelation of Scripture that describes God, humans, and the worldview and culture that his believers are to become active participants of, and the general revelation found in nature and in the shared experiences and stated positions of faith of the body of Christ throughout the ages. As the author of the epistle to the Hebrews intones:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:1-2, KJV).

Reflections on the Reviewed Literature

The literature reviewed in this article provides compelling descriptions of the history of thought that lies behind American perspectives on religion, ecumenism, and the theology-and-science dialogue. This reviewed history is complex and diverse, reflecting only a small part of the great diversity of the American people themselves. But it is an important part that points to the continuing need for reappraisal of those ideas that made the United States of America unique among the nations of the world. As Thomas Jefferson understood only too well, if we do not often reflect upon this heritage of freedom and the roots from which it sprang and take steps to consciously preserve it, we will only too soon lose all sense from whence our forebearers came and the sacrifices that prompted them to seek a new land and constitution.⁹⁰

This review of literature also reminds the reader that there once was a time in American history in which the Bible, theology, and the natural sciences

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Rubenstein and Clark Smith, 14.

worked in accord with one another, with Scripture serving as a normative and authoritative guide for understanding humans' role in nature. Mather's balanced perspective is a role model for our own unbalanced times in which theology and science either become hopelessly muddled together or, more typically, become completely separated. As Holder contends, if God is the creator of all, there should be, at the very least, some shadow of his passing by.

However, it is problematic to expect the so-called secular disciplines, such as the human and natural sciences, to discover God's presence and mark upon the world because these disciplines have intentionally chosen to focus upon explicit and narrow ranges of reality. Too often, practitioners of one discipline push other disciplines to focus their own approaches upon matters that fall outside of their chosen parameters. Theology has, at times, pushed the natural sciences to acknowledge scientifically the existence of God in the world as an intelligent designer; the natural sciences have responded by demanding that theology attend only to the spiritual realm.

The result of such demands is the perception that science is meant to be the controlling discipline in science-and-theology dialogue, meaning that theology should acquiesce to the findings of science, especially in regard to physical reality, thereby effectually denying theology to be connected directly with physical reality. As I argue in my dissertation, there is an organic unity of the physical, spiritual, and moral aspects of being human and the social constructs that humans create do indeed have an impact on their relationship to the environment so that what one believes about being human impacts the way in which he or she approaches the environment.⁹¹

However, the theology-and-science dialogue is not about merely making room for notions about God and artificially inserting such claims into interdisciplinary dialogue. Rather, the role of theology in the dialogue with the natural and human sciences is to serve as the voice of conscience to its sister disciplines by helping to provide a worldview that brings structure and moral acuity to disciplines that claim to be amoral and atheistic in their methodological approaches and, therefore, are incapable of determining whether their experiments and technology should be unleashed and in what ways. It would seem that disciplines that are intentionally amoral and atheistic cannot, then, police themselves because they deny themselves the ability to create moral paradigms as part of their governing methodological presuppositions. Climatologists and environmentalists, for example, claim that human behavior is wreaking havoc on the environment. While I agree, upon what basis do they draw their deeply ethical and moral conclusions when they have purposely placed these factors outside of their methodological scope of studied reality?

⁹¹See chap. 6, in which I provide historical examples of how definitions of human being brought about racism, slavery, and the Shoah.

Theology, whether biblical or philosophical, is the *only* discipline that intentionally and organically makes morality, both spiritual *and* ethical, the foundation of its disciplinary approach, and, further, consistently claims that there is a deep and necessary connection between the so-called spiritual/moral elements of human nature and physical reality in general. As such, it is then called upon to understand and speak to the technological and scientific advances of the time because technology and scientific activities carry, in spite of their protest to the contrary, profoundly moral and ethical connotations.⁹²

If theology does not answer this need, then one can expect to find a continuing decline in morality in the world. In a theologically-free ethical worldview, one can hope for nothing greater than *pro ton kairon*, that is, “as the occasion demands,” because there is no absolute governing principle and thus no limits upon human behavior.⁹³ Toulmin proposes that humans live, since Darwin, in an intentionally chaotic and unstable world because instability is the true foundation of nature’s governing hermeneutic and, thus, society’s as well, because society is a natural construct. Since human understanding of nature has moved from a primarily Newtonian worldview to an Einsteinian, that is, a relative view of reality, and a Darwinian ecological, that is, chaotic and random view of reality, our societal constructs must change as well to mirror this evolutionary view of the world.⁹⁴

While I agree in principle with Toulmin’s assessment of how secularism has sought to reshape society in the image of its latest scientific paradigm, I do not agree that it is necessary to base our worldview upon the changing opinions of science. However, I also do not believe that theology should remain static and uninformed by other academic disciplines. Theology is, as Alister E. McGrath proposes, at least partly a human construct⁹⁵ and thus, as my own religious tradition proposes, a continuing quest for deepening knowledge of both the things of God and nature. But while this theological quest for learning may, from time to time, require updating one’s statement of

⁹²See my dissertation, especially the final chapter.

⁹³On this point, see chap. 4 of my dissertation.

⁹⁴Toulmin discusses the break-up of Newtonian-based foundationalism in chaps. 4, “The Far Side of Modernity” and 5, “The Way Ahead.”

⁹⁵Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Nature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). In chap. 1, “The Legitimacy of a Scientific Theology,” McGrath examines the role and challenges of science as the handmaiden of theology and lays the ground for understanding theology as a partly social construct upon which he then builds his theological construct of nature as creation. He, 138, notes that “to speak of ‘nature’, as we have stressed, is to speak of an *interpreted* entity, which is mediated through a series of social constructs. Only if ‘nature’ itself is interpreted in some specific manner, and if that interpretation is then improperly designated ‘nature’, can there be a tension of such a type. ‘Creation’ is a specific way of viewing ‘nature’, which stands opposed to certain other ways of reading nature.”

belief, there are certain nonnegotiable elements, such as the divine inspiration of Scripture, the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding the community of faith, and the existence of God as the Creator of the universe, including the creation of human beings in his image. Such beliefs help to provide stability not only to theological constructs, but, significantly, to governing social paradigms.

Miller summarizes this position well in regard to the relationship between religion and state, noting that “the founders [of the United States of America], including Madison and Jefferson, viewed the notion of God and a sacred realm as important, perhaps even indispensable, to a view of limited government and preservation of individual rights. In their view, if there was no authority outside the state, there would be no theoretical limit on the powers of prerogatives of the state. Thus, it was a conception of God that placed limits on government, rather than creating new prerogatives for the state.”⁹⁶

Such a perspective, I believe, also extends to the role and limits of all the academic disciplines, including theology and the natural sciences. This type of balance saves the notion of Protestant ecumenism from the clutches of a medieval, feudalistic approach such as Pufendorf endorses, in which the sciences may speak only to the dominant religious perspective and all challengers must be silenced. It also keeps society from deteriorating into situation ethics that has only relative value to a particular culture, period, or circumstance. Mather’s evidentialism provides a working methodology for Jefferson and Madison’s proposed view of the relationship between theology and the state, extended in Mather’s thought to the academic disciplines, particularly theology and science.

An evidentialist approach, then, respects the context, questions, and methodology of each discipline, but it also makes theology to serve as the voice of conscience in the process of creating social constructs; that is, it places a limit upon the prerogatives of any particular discipline by making that discipline a part of a community of disciplines.⁹⁷ Significantly, it recognizes the limits of freedom of expression. These were the ideals that the Pietistic movement underscored and that the dissenting Protestants of early American thought ran toward and embraced with deepest affection.

The literature reviewed in this article, whether philosophical, theological, or historical, provides valuable insights into the complexities of American perspectives on the relationship of theology and science.

⁹⁶Miller, 168.

⁹⁷See chap. 1 of my dissertation.