reflection of eternal Beauty and Wisdom.”

Sometimes the arguments Knight uses can be reversed to go in another direction entirely. For example, when discussing *The Satanic Verses*, he brings *The Fundamentals: A Testimony* into the discussion. He states rightly that these pamphlets were a reaction by traditionally religious people to a cultural change brought by modernity. Of course, modernity was a reaction to a widespread Christian worldview, and we need to ask whether modernity created a better world. The question of how one secures an arena of discourse between worldviews reveals the problem Knight recognizes, that tolerance does not provide a suitable framework for a discussion, for the battle will be about whose story of the world is the true one. Knight suggests that stories are an opportunity for accommodating other perspectives. But if his perspective is derived from intertextuality, where stories can host what is outside our common experience, surely the question is, “To what end are these other stories helpful?” Is it to gain a wider range of knowledge and experience or to critique a narrow vision others are believed to hold? Perhaps the weakness lies in the writers themselves who, unsatisfied with their own perception of the world, seek something else that is fictive, but a fiction they themselves create. If that is the case, God might be a better Creator than they are. Or, to look at another example, in Knight’s discussion of atonement, should we not ask whether true atonement has to be related to Jesus, and not just be some solution to a problem raised in a novel? Knight concludes this argument (chapter 5) by citing Colin Gunton that eschatological concepts are not understood fully within history. As with other attempts to bring theology to bear on culture, faith should play a part, for understanding is not the only criterion of meaning.

So, in assessing the poems and novels Knight brings into the discussion, we should ask: do we look at the past through the views of the present, or do we look at our own times through the lens of the past, which thus will allow the past to influence the present? Do we read literature for enjoyment or for its critical approach to our world? And, how do we measure the literary quality of a work? Quality cannot be measured by the correspondence of a work with the current cultural flags. And Knight recognizes that by living within the wide timeframe of the works he uses.

One of the strengths of Knight’s work is that it allows these kinds of questions. In fact, the novels and poems he has chosen to be the battleground of the discussion pose all sorts of questions.


Reviewed by Richard D. Blake, Graduate Studies Librarian, Waynesburg University

In response to the fundamentalist atheism of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens in their recent popular books, Ian Markham seeks to “locate [and] understand this skepticism (perhaps even make [their] case with a bit more rigor) and then provide an account of faith that is compelling, readable, and informed” (6). His subtle, concise Christian apologetic is exactly that. Written for knowledgeable lay readers predisposed to the gift

of faith, Markham tackles atheist arguments summarily on two fronts. Dawkins and others are not only wrong-headed in their appreciation of the very science their atheism venerates, frankly they are lazy in their theological study (or lack thereof) that they purport to undermine. Friedrich Nietzsche is Markham’s preferred “last real atheist” from whom this contemporary unbelieving triad well could learn to argue “with a bit more rigor” (6). Markham does it helpfully for them and for us, positing, however, a Christian’s faith in God.

Science itself, modern physics in particular, “seems to vindicate the instinct of theism” (78), Markham counters. Not to be confused with intelligent design and not quite natural theology, the heart of his logic in the chapter “Physics, the grown up science” co-opts the Anthropic Principle to explain the exceptional order of the universe allowing life to happen as if “we were always intended: it looks like we were expected” (69). This theme resounds throughout the book as the fundamental counter to scientific atheism. The fundamentalism of the title, then, refers neither to Markham’s avowed Anglican Catholicism nor to the 1910-15 Fundamentals of conservative Christians, but to Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens satirically. A passing familiarity with these three helps, but Markham gives a credible summation of their theses and methods and their logical and theological shortcomings. Wittily, he invites them to foster their own “religious sensitivity” (63) in order to apprehend the transcendent in the immanent based precisely on the probability for and reasonableness of faith. That insight is perhaps Markham’s best counter-argument. Indeed, the very depth of Dawkins’ moral convictions (“do good and avoid evil”) is, ironically, “the first step in the recognition of the divine” (59).

Having eviscerated their lazy atheism, Markham proceeds to Christian apologetics, addressing these three unbelievers sincerely, but more pointedly for the faithful disturbed by atheism’s popular dismals of God. And not without reason, Markham admits, has modern humanity questioned the probability of God’s existence. Suffering and war — particularly religiously motivated, and, for Harris, Islamic terrorism — belie the benevolent God-myth for doubters living under the “illusion of modernity” (135) — the myth of scientific certainty. Two forcefully succinct chapters, “A revealing God” and “Christianity,” rectify classical and contemporary non-theistic complaints systematically from a biblically-informed divine perspective. Markham reminds us, first, that many ancient and indigenous religious traditions are not as unenlightened as often portrayed, and the sophisticated scientific Western worldview suffers by comparison regarding the spirituality and interconnectedness of the natural world. Quoting John Mbiti, “‘Nature . . . is not an empty impersonal object or phenomenon [as Western science assumes]: it is filled with religious significance’” (82). “Primitive” traditions with transcendent monotheistic groundings may well prove scientifically sophisticated for their age. This spirit-world rootedness, Markham claims, is “the result of God putting pressure on the human consciousness to cultivate a religious sensitivity and to [discern] how best to interpret that realm” (83). Spiritual “rootedness” or nurturing recurs as Markham’s best answer to atheism.

The Hebrew Scriptures themselves begin that interpretation as Markham details in a primer on how to re-read the creation story within the scientific model of its author’s day and ours. “There is nothing primitive about Genesis: it can speak ‘truth’ to our age as it has always done” (84). A God creating ex nihilo by the poetic expression of words, or the Word, which Markham “unequivocally” believes, “is completely compatible with the [creation] narrative emerging from modern science” (85). As to the Eden myth (and as an example of theology, like science, not remaining hermeneutically static), he lauds the feminist reading of Anne Primavesi that “sees the [Genesis 2 and 3] narrative as a ‘growing up’ [from moral
immaturity] rather than a ‘Fall’” (87). Tillich’s point about the ontological necessity of sin underscores further how striving for moral awareness cannot push against a vacuum that denies our creator. “It can lead to hubris . . . and to an unregulated sense of desire. It can lead to murder, mayhem, and wickedness” (89). To be sure, Dawkins objected that “ethnic cleansing began at the time of Moses is brought to bloody fruition in the book of Joshua” (89). To this commonly raised quandary Markham responds by re-telling Deuteronomy’s complex, multi-leveled history that he insists “corrects itself” as the Hebrew scriptures are wont to do, where the “nature of God is not found in one particular verse or text [but] is found pulsating through the text [an overused Markham expression!] in its entirety” (91). Specifically, the concession not to intermarry follows immediately after the dictum to “utterly destroy” the surrounding nations that never were eliminated as other texts, such as Ruth, indicate clearly. Markham, obviously no Fundamentalist himself, accuses Dawkins again of adopting a lazy literalist misappropriation of the Bible. (The issue of intermarriage with a Moabite, however, is not addressed.) The confessional upshot for Markham is that (somewhat too simply) “God cares for all people” (90).

“Christianity” is the central chapter. “[W]e continue to affirm the call of Jesus for transformed living by a different set of values” (95). Again, science and moral response are wed. “Although we do need to disentangle the first-century cosmology,” modern astrophysics also predicts an end of this age “before our sun enters the ‘red giant phase’ in 5 billion years’ time” (95), a scientific fact, according to Markham, unknown (!) to Jesus. Nonetheless, the sense of awe of his eschatologically-primed followers and their first-century communities who affirmed Jesus as Lord are whom we are to trust that this Jesus “is resurrected and still available to us through the Church in the Sacrament” (97). While confessionally satisfying, perhaps, to sophisticated believers today, to bridge the life of Jesus with the pre-existent Word of the Creator and God’s ongoing activity (Spirit) in a functional Trinity, the careful reader may question how this highly nuanced (and High Church) re-presentation of doctrine will ever convince Markham’s triad of fundamental atheists and their readers. And just how does our sun’s “red giant” finale allow for resurrection and the kingdom that Jesus preached expectantly? For those on the cutting edge of contemporary faithfulness, Markham’s re-telling may arm believers better against Christian Fundamentalism’s intransigence, especially his situational engagement approach to ethics which is always wide-open to change including “seeking truth” (101). Markham argues biblically for same-gender marriage and evolution. He sums up his ironic pluralism as: “to be orthodox one should be open” (101). A bright fellow like Dawkins (and Hitchens and Harris), Markham teases, might “try to understand the internal logic and grammar of the Christian faith” (101). Its essence is a “need to trust a revelation of the transcendent” (103) which modern science does not rule out as utterly improbable but, for Markham, “builds on the insights of biologists and physicists” (104). Dawkins and others need to undermine “the total edifice of a revealing God . . . who explains the mysteries of the mathematics of the universe [and who] is putting pressure on humanity [to respond with awe and appreciation and a moral awareness]” (104). Fundamentally, they do not.

Markham’s denouement introduces an unexpected but sensitive chapter on Islam. God is “in deep conversation” with Muslims, Al Qaeda notwithstanding. Markham then treats Sam Harris’ “Islamophobia” skewering an argument for atheism that misplays the terrorism card. Markham then treats “Suffering, providence, and horrid religious people,” “Religion and the Future” and “Faith and Uncertainty: Believing the Truth” forthrightly to answer further issues raised by modern despisers and doubters of God. Answers to theodicy require
understanding causality versus freedom. Markham ties smartly to quantum dynamics via Thomas Aquinas’s “antecedent” and “consequent willing” for God ordering a universe that allows for choices (119). Contra Isaac Newton and Pierre-Simon Laplace, quantum theory sees the cosmos “as an open and emergent system” where human free will and divine agency are not mutually exclusive and “no longer manifestly unscientific” (119). Thereto, the God revealed in the life and death of Jesus is likewise a suffering God who thereby “pressures us” ethically to ease all other human suffering (which Dawkins does not quite get, as Markham reminds us constantly).

Markham’s apologetic infuses contemporary science with classical philosophy, up-to-date theological scholarship, and a pastoral sensitivity to mental, emotional and physical anguish that any life of faith necessarily confronts. Of the many current contra-atheism books suddenly on the market, Markham’s is helpful for its seriousness yet conciseness and accessibility. For such a small book, these 158 pages crisscross the multi-disciplined terrain broadly, yet with clear signposts and summaries for alert readers to follow and discern their own spiritual rootedness. As this review hints, there are logical leaps and reasonings of faith that require fuller clarification. But Markham is consistent in his approach, though perhaps “The Perspective from God” “Interlude” intrudes too soon in his apologetic. For its clarity, precision and wit, the book is certainly accessible for educated laity, like his “imaginary” foils Fred (energetic atheist) and Natalie (Catholic physicist), willing to tackle the big questions and little gaffes that his atheist trinity raises.


Reviewed by Brad A. Lau, Student Life, George Fox University

Written straight from the heart of a parent and with the wisdom of a pastor, Called to be Human addresses big questions on the minds of young adults. Jinkins works hard to do this in a way that does not resort to easy answers or tired clichés. Undoubtedly, at the heart of every Christian parent is a deep and profound sense of responsibility to think meaningfully about how to pass along a strong personal faith to the next generation. This is not an easy task, a reality that Jinkins acknowledges repeatedly throughout a series of “letters” written lovingly and affectionately to his own son and daughter (Jeremy and Jessica). He offers counsel and advice to engage his grown children in dialogue about things that really matter and a faith that is often mysterious but always filled with hope.

As Jinkins considers several big questions that young adults (and others) often wrestle with, there are several prevailing themes throughout his book. First, he argues strongly against a dead religion that is based merely on a set of creeds or beliefs. In fact, he notes that “faith is a matter of trust and reverence more than it is a matter of beliefs and belief systems . . . the older I get, the more I see that life is mystery and the less certainty I possess” (3). Jinkins cautions his children against placing God and their Christian faith in a box that is manipulated and controlled easily. His harshest words are reserved for Christians whose understanding of God is centered only in religious dogma. He illustrates this point by writing: “Give me an aggressively disbelieving atheist any day over either a lukewarm believer or a convinced and unquestioning religionist!” (70). Rather, he reminds his children continually