

Astrobiology and Christian Doctrine

In recent decades, powerful telescopes have enabled astrophysicists to uncover startling new worlds and solar systems. An epochal moment took place in 1995, when an exoplanet – 51 Pegasi b – was located orbiting another star like our own sun. This discovery profoundly changed perceptions of the universe. Since then, thousands of planets have followed. These astounding findings have transformed understandings of the cosmos and have renewed speculation about the potential for extraterrestrial life.

Drawing particularly on Thomas Aquinas, Andrew Davison considers a succession of fascinating questions that challenge Christianity's traditional focus on earth and human beings. Does the possibility of life elsewhere compromise human value? Would other creatures be subject to the same story of sin and redemption? Might God be incarnate elsewhere? Thinking about these topics helps Christians to prepare for a time when other life might be detected. In the meantime, by approaching familiar themes from new angles, Davison's volume stretches and enriches our existing theology.

ANDREW DAVISON is the Starbridge Professor of Theology and Natural Sciences at the University of Cambridge, where his work has inspired the arts and humanities programme at the groundbreaking Leverhulme Centre for Life in the Universe. One of the foremost scholars working between theology, philosophy, and the natural sciences, he is fellow in theology and Dean of Chapel at Corpus Christi College, University of Cambridge. His work on life elsewhere in the universe has been covered by news outlets around the world, in more than twenty languages. Davison is the author of *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics*; *Blessing: The Love of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy for Theologians*; and *Why Sacraments?*

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ANDREW DAVISON
University of Cambridge

Astrobiology and Christian Doctrine

Exploring the Implications of Life
in the Universe



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Theological principles tend to become torpid for lack of exercise, and there is much to be said for giving them now and then a scamper in a field where the paths are few and the boundaries undefined; they do their day-by-day work all the better for an occasional outing in the country.

–Eric Mascall¹

Christ in the Universe

–ALICE MEYNELL²

With this ambiguous earth
His dealings have been told us. These abide:
The signal to a maid, the human birth,
The lesson, and the young Man crucified.

But not a star of all
The innumerable host of stars has heard
How He administered this terrestrial ball.
Our race have kept their Lord's entrusted Word.

Of His earth-visiting feet
None knows the secret, cherished, perilous,
The terrible, shamefast, frightened, whispered, sweet,
Heart-shattering secret of His way with us.

No planet knows that this
Our wayside planet, carrying land and wave,
Love and life multiplied, and pain and bliss,
Bears, as chief treasure, one forsaken grave.

¹ E. L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science: Some Questions on Their Relations* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956), 45.

² Alice Meynell, *Collected Poems* (London: Burns & Oates, 1913), 114–15.

Nor, in our little day,
May His devices with the heavens be guessed,
His pilgrimage to thread the Milky Way
Or His bestowals there be manifest.

But in the eternities,
Doubtless we shall compare together, hear
A million alien Gospels, in what guise
He trod the Pleiades, the Lyre, the Bear.

O, be prepared, my soul!
To read the inconceivable, to scan
The myriad forms of God those stars unroll
When, in our turn, we show to them a Man.

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