



DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS AND THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

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**TO:** Dr. Petr Macek  
Protestant Theological Faculty  
Charles University,  
Prague, CZ

**FROM:** Dr. Warren A. Kay  
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**RE:** Comments on the Dissertation by Mgr. Radak Labaj "The End(s) of All Things:  
Anthropological and Teleological Aspects of Cosmology in the Dialogue of  
Philosophy, Theology and Science"

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***General Comments:***

When I was asked by Dr. Petr Macek to review this dissertation by Mgr. Radak Labaj I was particularly pleased to do so because its subject matter falls into an area of particular interest to me. Having completed my first university studies in science (B.S., biology, 1974) I went on to complete my doctoral work in theology (Zürich, 1992), and I teach primarily in areas related to the dialogue between science and religion.

This dissertation by Mgr. Labaj is a discussion of some interesting and significant aspects of scientific and theological cosmology through an analysis of an often overlooked (at least in Anglo-American academic settings) Russian physicist/philosopher/theologian, Alexei Nesteruk. Mgr. Labaj uses primarily the thought of George Ellis and Jürgen Moltmann as dialogue partners as he explores aspects of Nesteruk's anthropological and eschatological thought. At first I wondered at the selection of these particular men as dialogue partners while excluding other significant scientists/theologians, but Mgr. Labaj adequately justifies that choice.

Mgr. Labaj has divided his monograph into four chapters of uneven length, plus a short introduction and a lengthy conclusion. Labaj sets the stage very nicely in the Introduction where he describes and justifies the organization of the work as a whole, as well as his selection of the work of George Ellis and Jürgen Moltmann as discussion partners with Alexei Nesteruk. In the first, and longest, chapter (about 70 pages) Labaj introduces the reader to some of the basic concepts in the science-religion dialogue in an effort to locate the questions he addresses in chapters two and three, the main focus of the dissertation itself. In chapter two he addresses questions of ethics and morality in a larger discussion of theological and scientific anthropology using George Ellis and Nancey Murphy as dialogue partners with the Orthodox scientist-

theologian, Alexei Nesteruk. Chapter three concerns Moltmann's futuristic theology (hope) in dialogue with Nesteruk. In chapter four Mgr. Labaj makes a use of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology (existential phenomenology) in a discussion of Nesteruk's effort to propose a system to heal the rift in modern understanding (worldview). Then, by way of a conclusion, Labaj brings together the threads of his discussion in order to provide a "wider picture of cosmology."

Throughout this dissertation Mgr. Labaj demonstrates a clear, accurate, and broad knowledge of the basic issues in the science/theology dialogue. He also displays a familiarity with many of the most important primary sources as he develops this closely argued treatise. I believe Mgr. Labaj has written a theological monograph which clearly merits acceptance as part of the requirements for the granting of a doctoral degree.

In what follows I will discuss a few of the issues in greater detail and point out what are for me aspects that should be reviewed and possibly revised before the eventual publication of this significant work.

### ***Specific Comments:***

I was surprised that Labaj relegated to a footnote the quotation from Holmes Rolston on page 21. Those comments and quotation would have made a fitting concluding statement for this Introduction in the body of this dissertation.

In footnote 23, on page 32, Labaj cites a work by Helge Kragh, *On the History and Philosophy of the Twentieth-Century Cosmology* which does not appear in the bibliography (it was a paper read at the *Congresso nazionale di storia della fisica e dell'astronomia* in Florence, Italy, 1996). This is *not the only instance* of a reference in a footnote being absent from the bibliography. This practice violates what I consider to be an important rule of thumb that *if one cites a book or article in a footnote, that book or article must appear in the bibliography.*

Footnote 55, on page 55, reference is made to *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*. The footnote contains only a partial reference and no mention is made of this work in the bibliography (*Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*, "Routledge Companion Encyclopedias," edited by Peter Byrne and Leslie Houlden [Routledge; 2nd ed., 1995]).

On pages 86 and 87 (in the section "Cosmology as a Unified Worldview") Labaj cites controversial author Nancy Pearcey. Ms. Pearcey is not an academic and publishes popular books through non-academic Evangelical publishing houses. I believe the point that Mgr. Labaj is making is *not* controversial, and so to quote from Ms. Pearcey is (at least for *me*) a serious distraction.<sup>1</sup> The point could have been made just as clearly and far more strongly and with less potential negative connotation had Mgr. Labaj chosen from a host of other major authors who are making the same point (or at least a very similar one). Also, Nancy Pearcey is herself citing Martin Marty, Church historian and theologian from the University of Chicago. So rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Pearcey is a fellow of the Discovery Institute, a Seattle, WA, based "think tank" that is most known for its promotion of the pseudo-scientific principle of Intelligent Design. She was a contributor to the highly controversial book *Of Pandas and People*, a high school level biology textbook that strongly promotes Intelligent Design.

citing Pearcey, I believe Mgr. Labaj should have gone to the source of this basic idea, Martin Marty (see: *The Modern Schism: Three Paths to the Secular* [New York: Harper & Row, 1969] republished by Wipf & Stock in 2012).

Further, in this same regard, although they do not discuss the word “worldview” specifically, many discussions of *explanation*, and theories that comprise *best explanation* of phenomena have emerged recently. These discussions of explanation refer to theories that have greater explanation power and unify thought in ways that a worldview does. Norwood Russell Hanson took such an approach. In an article entitled “Is There a Logic of Scientific Discovery” (*Australasian Journal Of Philosophy* Vol. 38, Iss. 2, 1960, pp. 91-106) Hanson suggested a three-step process:

1. The observation of some “surprising” or “astonishing phenomena,” which represent anomalies with existing ways of thinking. This “astonishment” may arise because the observations are in conflict with existing theoretical accounts.
2. The realization that these phenomena would not seem to be astonishing if a certain hypothesis (or set of hypotheses) *H* pertained. These observations would be expected on the basis of *H*, which would act as an explanation for them.
3. There is therefore good reason for proposing that *H* be considered to be correct.

More recently, Richard Swinburne argues that God (or in the context of the point Labaj is making, one could say *the Biblical worldview that contains the hypothesis that there is a God*) is the best explanation for the complex patterns of phenomena that we observe in the natural world. The existence of God, Swinburne argues, may be inferred legitimately and securely from what is observed in the world of everyday experience (how the existence of God is the best explanation for the world and its order, the existence of humans, and miracles and religious experience – that is, a religious/biblical worldview; see: R. Swinburne, *Is There a God?* [Oxford University Press, Rev. ed., 2010]; *The Existence of God* [Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2004]).

I was particularly interested in the sections at the end of chapter two that dealt with the strong and the weak anthropic principles as well as the scientific status of cosmology. Labaj dealt with the main issues with subtlety as he explicated the classic formulation (Barrow and Tipler) and then as those aspects specifically dealing with Ellis and Nesteruk. As with a number of other places in the dissertation, I wish the author had demonstrated a familiarity with a wider range of *literature* in the field, but even so, it was more than adequate given the concentration on the thought of George Ellis and Alexei Nesteruk. Any or all of the following recent discussions would have strengthened this discussion:

- Alister E. McGrath, *A Fine-Tuned Universe: The Quest for God in Science and Theology*, The Gifford Lectures for 2009, (Westminster/John Knox, 2009).
- Paul Davies, *Cosmic Jackpot: Why Our Universe Is Just Right for Life* (Houghton Mifflin, 2007); published in England as *The Goldilocks Enigma* (Penguin).
- Mark William Worthing, *God, Creation, and Contemporary Physics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

I was particularly interested in the sections that explicated the thought of Alexei Nesteruk (i.e., chapters 2, 3, and 4). This central part of the dissertation examines the important contribution of Orthodox theology to the science-religion dialogue, particularly with regard to the experience of the world in a way that one might call sacramental mysticism. In chapter three Labaj indicates that the dialogue of science with theology has to start with an elucidation of the essential philosophical and theological problem of the human self or personhood. Next (chapter four), Labaj explicates Nesteruk's assertion that the universe (scientific cosmology and anthropology) are the "mode of communion with God" (Labaj, p. 192).

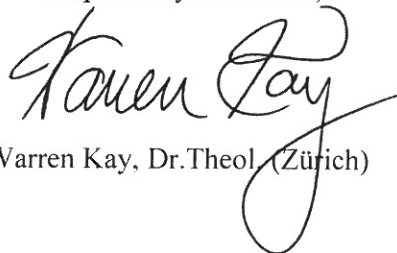
The concluding chapter advocates an anti-reductionism, which includes a transcendentalism as a means of recognizing reality as a whole ("the way the world is" in the words of John Polkinghorne). It is a reality that the science-religion debate has been dominated by establishment western Christianity. This dissertation by Mgr. Radak Labaj is a major contribution to the effort to widen the discussion by recognizing the original contribution of Alexei Nesteruk and Orthodox Christianity.

Finally, I would like to raise an issue of formatting. I was troubled by the use Radak Labaj made of quotation marks around words or phrases throughout this monograph. It seemed to me that the ways in which they were used by Mgr. Labaj often went against English-language conventions of use. Quotation marks should either (a) refer to a direct quotation from another author, or (b) indicate an unusual usage of the word so marked. Mgr. Labaj seems to use them almost arbitrarily. I recognize that this is not a criticism of content or the quality of the research articulated in this dissertation, but it could affect the reception of this dissertation in the greater academic community.

***Conclusion.***

I hope these comments will be taken in the constructive spirit in which they were made. They are in no way intended to detract from the excellent research of Mgr. Radak Labaj. Thank you for this opportunity to read his very stimulating study.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warren Kay". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that loops back under the name.

Warren Kay, Dr.Theol. (Zürich)