

Guest Editorial – The Science/Religion Conflict

The present conflict between science and religion impacts on many areas of our lives. What do we do when the Bible (for instance) tells us one story of human origins and dignity, while science provides a completely different account? What is the scientist supposed to think when she/he is faced with two completely different worldviews or cosmologies; one arising out of religious faith, and the other originating in empirical observation of the natural world?

Very often, the response is to compartmentalise our lives so that we are “scientific” persons most of the time, except for those moments of religious devotion. Yet, the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures see humans as holistic beings (eg, Gen 1:26-28; 2:7; 1 Cor 6:19–20). And, contemporary postmodernism rejects the scientific metanarrative as a too narrowly defined worldview (Grenz, 1996, 46–49). What we do in one sphere of our lives influences our responses in other arenas. Thus, as humans, we are rational (well, some of us are some of the time!) and spiritual. And we are physical as well as social. This means that we will usually be unsuccessful in building walls between the rational and the religious.

So, what happens when there is conflict? Kevin de Berg, in our feature article, offers a number of models which might assist in both under-

standing the fractured relationship between science and religion, and in relating them more constructively. Obviously, some people view the two disciplines as completely separate, but viable in and of themselves. Still others attempt to integrate science and religion, perhaps with the creation of a quasi-scientific religion or pseudo-religious science. Of course, many on both sides allow walls of suspicion and conflict to build between the two activities. On the other hand, de Berg maintains that a model of interaction “allows science and religion their independent existence but believes they interact at key points to illuminate the human condition” (p 18). One clear advantage of this approach is that dialog continues between the two disciplines.

Nowhere is the variation in views more stark in the debate between religion and science than in the area of the origin of the world and of life itself. As expected, there is no meeting of the minds between those who follow the path of conflict. But, perhaps, unexpectedly, there is little unanimity even between Christians who hold to distinct views. J P Moreland and John Mark Reynolds edited (and umpired) a fledgling dialog between young earth creationism, old earth (progressive) creationism, and theistic evolution in their *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (1999).

Their conclusion is less than optimistic regarding the present status of play: "The problem is that we want to consider the scientific evidence fairly and without prejudice, but it is hard to do that when so many scientists insist on looking at the evidence only through the distorting lenses of naturalistic philosophy" (p 277). However, Moreland and Reynolds maintain that if we could get "an unbiased scientific picture, neo-Darwinism will collapse and we will be in the midst of a scientific revolution so profound that everything will look different" (p 278).

Are naturalistic (even agnostic or atheistic) scientists really to blame for the present conflict? Or, do religious people have something to answer for as well? For me, there seems little to be gained through the "sledging" of science in the name of religion. Kevin de Berg points to many examples of the marriage of good science with genuine spirituality, but perhaps presently "the ball is in the court" of religion. Can religious people look carefully at the evidence?

I don't mean merely that religious people must look again at the scientific data. But, rather that those who hold the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures as sacred must acknowledge that both nature *and* the Bible require interpretation. That interpretative process involves the construction of models and metaphors which are

able to handle paradoxes. Light, for instance, as de Berg explains, can be construed as wave and/or particle. Again, he is correct in proposing that the "trinitarian unity of the Godhead (God as Father, Son, Spirit) likewise, assists in understanding the relationship between the divine and human aspects of God's nature" (p 14).

Now, I could respond to de Berg's foray into theology with the retort: "You'd be better to stick with your physics and chemistry than to come wandering into my field of theology!" But, he would most likely want to say that he's only scraped the surface of knowledge regarding light as wave or particle (and that's not just because his major interest is chemistry rather than physics!). That's the way I also feel about the Trinity. You see, it's not that I don't believe in the Tri-unity of God, but that I understand it so little.

Then, there's the practical question of how much scientific diversity religion and religions can allow before faith and spirituality begin to erode. But, perhaps that is a topic for a future edition. We hope that you will not only keep the discussion going between religion and science in your own mind, but that this edition of the journal will build some bridges between scientific and religious people as well.

REFERENCES

Grenz, Stanley J (1996). *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Moreland, J P, and John Mark Reynolds, eds (1999). *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.

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