

Giving an Answer - Living Faith in a World of Science

Abstracts

History of Science and Christianity **John Hedley Brooke**

Science and the Christian Tradition: A Historical Overview

Two stories are commonly told about the relations between science & Christianity. At one extreme, the story is all about conflict. The trial of Galileo by the Roman Catholic Church and continuing battles between Darwinians and creationists often make the headlines. At the other extreme, we find the contrary claim that, without Christianity, there would have been no modern science. This sometimes surprising argument has taken different forms but it depends on a simple idea: that a search for laws of nature only makes sense if creation has been ordered by a rational Creator, by a transcendent lawgiver. Isaac Newton saw this connection when he suggested that science had only prospered in monotheistic cultures. The mathematics of the solar system pointed to a deity no less brilliant than Newton himself, or in Newton's own words a "deity very well versed in mechanics and geometry."

The many fine achievements of Muslim scientists from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries are consistent with Newton's remark. Understanding the universe as a Creation certainly did regulate thinking in much of early modern science. But the view that Christianity alone provided the necessary presuppositions is a myth - one of 25 myths recently exposed in a valuable book edited by Ronald Numbers: *Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion* (Harvard University Press, 2009). This is not to deny that Christian theology has repeatedly provided resources for the promotion and legitimation of scientific activity. For historians of science there is a wonderful richness and diversity in the relations between different sciences and different religious traditions. There is no such thing as "the relationship between science and religion" and there has certainly been no such thing as the relationship between science and Christianity. It has been constructed and reconstructed in many different ways within different Christian traditions and in many different social and political contexts. In this brief survey, I shall explore some of this diversity and what can be learned from it.

Natural Sciences and Theology **Wilson Poon**

Laboratory of the cross: a Christian life in science

We all do science without the 'god hypothesis'. My thesis is that this is the most important datum that science gives to theology, and that Christian theology, because of the centrality of the cross, has unique resources to respond to and develop this idea. In my talk, I will develop this thesis with in an autobiographic context, telling my own 'Christian life in science' story with the help of the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the poetry of R. S. Thomas, and the broad sweep of the whole biblical narrative.

Environment and Theology **Michael Northcott**

Climate Change, Scepticism and Ethics in Science

The scientific discourse of climate change suggests the fossil-fuelled material base of industrialism is in conflict with the sustainability of the earth system. But the science is widely resisted in practice and in theory. And 'belief' in anthropogenic climate change has been described as analogous to religious belief in a British legal judgment. Recent contestation of the scientific basis of anthropogenic climate change has fuelled public questioning of the science. And climate sceptics have highlighted what they see as a lack of transparency between data sets and published graphic presentations of temperature changes, and computer models of future changes have both been contested more generally. This

presentation will examine the inconsistencies in the character of physical science as a social practice and the social and policy implications of the scientific account of anthropogenic climate change.

Technology and Theology

Michael DeLashmutt

'Religionless in Seattle: the influence of information technology on religious identity and some implications for Christian mission'

That technology has had a powerful impact in shaping religious identity in the West is undeniable. Many scholars involved in the study of the changing shape of the religious landscape in the modern world have commented on the role played by technology in the process of secularisation. According to the hard-secularisation thesis, as societies become more developed and more modern they resultantly become less religious. It would seem that the rising significance of technology within a given culture roughly correlates with the declining significance of religion a given culture. One could argue that the reason for this decline is 'techno-theology': a technologically-related substitute for religion which provides realisable solutions to the theological problems of eschatology and anthropology. Afterall, what it means to talk about a belief in the afterlife (whether seen as personal, species-based, or cosmic) or human identity have changed radically in the last 50 years in light of technologically derived knowledge. By providing competing (and often compelling) narratives reflected in speculative science and science fiction which seem (on the surface) to be more plausible than traditional theological construals of eschatology and anthropology, techno-theology competes with 'confessional theology' and thus, within the modern world, would seem to conform to the pattern proposed by the secularisation thesis.

What recent research suggests, however, is that religious belief (and therefore secularisation itself) is far more complex than it would appear at first blush. As a result, the impact of techno-theology on individual religious beliefs can be nominal, whilst its impact of techno-theology on the social imaginary can remain significant. The challenge for Christian mission in a technological age, therefore, is to respond with nuance and care to the multifaceted impact of technology and to frame a mission-directed theology of technology within a broader concern for the relationship between technology and the imagination.

Psychiatry and Theology

Rob Waller

The story of psychiatry and theology is one of unhelpful divisions when opposing models have brought to light unhealthy foundations on both sides. The answer lies in a necessarily messy day-to-day practice, but also points to some better synergies that might help shape the future. It is tempting to come up with simplistic answers to what is actually a complex tension. The church can think psychiatry is anti-God - and maybe it has been. Psychiatry can think that the church is a surrogate father/mother-figure - and maybe it has been. Yet the truth is that they both share a lot of common ground, yet also need each other for the times when they do not share.

Future and Theology

Christopher Southgate

'Costing not less than everything' - Christians, the environment and the God of self-giving love

I will begin with a brief review of the ambiguity of the evolutionary process, and conclude that the God who created that process desired the evolution of creaturely selves, and ultimately of a creature in the divine image, a creature capable of giving the self away in the service of others. I will then explore what self-giving, self-emptying love might mean in an era of ecological crisis, an era in when humans are called to co-operate with their God in the healing of creation.

