

Name: Isaac Chidlow

University: The University of Bath

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How can we wisely use the Bible and modern science to enhance our faith and studies?

Modern science and biblical faith represent two major cultural forces in the world today. Their dialogue internally and indeed with other disciplines such as philosophy, represent an important intersection for academics and laypersons alike.

A helpful intellectual framework for mapping this relationship is given by Ian Barbour. He envisions a dialogue that leads to an enhanced mutual understanding^[1]. This approach, although limited, offers an important foundation when taken in conjunction with the philosopher Mary Midgley's 'multiple maps' approach to perceiving the fullness of a complex reality^[2]. This employs the helpful analogy of a 'huge aquarium' with each discipline only possessing a small window that stresses the importance of multiple sources of truth and knowledge. With this in place, an engagement between Biblical faith and modern science can occur by exploring each as a map that helps to explain reality. The concept of a map will be used as a sustained dialogue medium to discern conceptual and methodological similarities between the two. This will allow opportunities to explore the possibility for enhancement.

Firstly, a map as a description of a greater reality. Critical realism, as defined by N.T. Wright, affirms both 'the reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower', while also acknowledging the only access we have to this reality is via an 'appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known'^[3]. A map is required to engage with this reality and is the result of probing from different disciplines. The map of modern science, although possessing some variance in methodology, probes uncharted waters with experimentation and analysis. Similarly the map of faith describes how the Christian positions themselves in the historical events of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth and onwards to the New Jerusalem. Both the task of theology and science is to make sense of reality and create a big picture that allows humans to orient themselves in the world^[4]. A synthesis of these maps allows the believer to greater understand God's work of creation, this in turn leads to worship and a renewed vigour to investigate the natural world. This is an example of how the reading of multiple maps leads to an enriched vision of reality that neither could enlighten independently.

Another theme is that of a map as depicting simplicity. The beginner who has not come across contours before will not understand how a two-dimensional set of lines represents a mountain. Comparably both theology and science rely on an agreed set of simplifications to expound concepts and construct theories. An example in science is that of solving the Schrödinger equation for the particle in a box example. It represents one of the few scenarios where an exact solution can be found and is therefore used as a simplification of much more complex systems to gain a partial understanding. A comment on simplicity in theology can be found in the area of Biblical interpretation. John Calvin suggested the Bible should be interpreted in light of the fact that 'revelation presents a scaled-down or accommodated version of God to us, in order to meet our limited abilities'^[5]. Both science and theology rely on simplifications to allow the reality about God or a phenomenon to be probed initially. However, quantum theory and the doctrine of the Trinity represent the limitations of such a methodology. Or to express in terms of maps, there is no real comparison between the contours of Scarfell Pike on a map and the full-bodied experience of climbing its steps and enjoying the vista. A reading of both maps encourages the believer to strive for simplicity in the explanation of their faith to others, whilst always trying to expand their vision of a God beyond understanding.

Lastly, a map as an instrument for discovery. Just as explorers of the past such as Columbus and Magellan wanted to expand the edges of the map of the known world; scientists today want to work on the frontiers of science to propose new theories and explain new phenomena. The

motivation to explore these edges and indeed to do science in the first place has been argued persuasively by Peter Harrison; he notes that the first scientists expected to find order in the universe in light of their belief in a creator God^[6]. This is an example of where a reading of the map of faith was able to shed light on an undiscovered region of the map of science. Furthermore, science often comes across questions that its own map and methodology are unable to shed light upon. This is often demonstrated at the beginning or end of life where ethical and religious maps are needed to provide a truly human and well-rounded response^[7]. In this case, the theme of discovery carries with it responsibility as well as wonder at what is learned.

Therefore both the map of the Bible and the map of modern science allow a path to be walked that both illuminates and enhances the journey of a Christian believer. A dialogue of enrichment encourages a renewed engagement with both science and the Bible to fulfil Paul's vision of 'being transformed by the renewing of your mind'^[8]. This demands the use of the mind as one of the ways in which the reality of Christ changes the Christian's vision of reality. Moreover, just as maps often have keys to guide the user in how to interpret the symbols used, the resources available today are greater now than in any other age to equip the persevering cartographer in whatever discipline they are so inclined.

References:

- 1) Barbour, I.G. (1966), *Issues in Science and Religion (1st Edition)*, Prentice-Hall.
- 2) Midgley, M. (2011), *The Myths We Live By (1st Edition)*, Routledge.
- 3) Wright, N.T. (1992), *The New Testament and the People of God (1st Edition)*, p 35, SPCK.
- 4) McGrath, A. (2015), *Inventing the Universe: Why we can't stop talking about science, faith and God (1st Edition)*, Hodder and Stoughton.
- 5) McGrath, A. (2010), *Science and Religion: A New Introduction (2nd Edition)*, Wiley-Blackwell.
- 6) Harrison, P. (2017), *The Territories of Science and Religion (1st Edition)*, University of Chicago Press.
- 7) Wyatt, J. (2009), *Matters of Life and Death (2nd Edition)*, IVP.
- 8) Romans 12:2