



CHRISTIANS · IN · SCIENCE

The Bible and Modern Science

A Christians in Science Day Conference

Abstracts

HOW CAN WE KNOW ANYTHING? Or ‘Just because you’re paranoid it doesn’t mean they’re not after you.’

Rev Dominic Smart, Aberdeen

SYNOPSIS

Introduction

The title of the talk takes us immediately to the issue of the justification of knowledge. It requires us briefly to re-visit the tripartite theory of knowledge itself and raise questions about its biblical appropriateness.

Part 1 The Dim and Distant Past

We begin to explore the issues with revisiting the two traditional views of how we justify our knowledge claims: by empiricist inductive verification and by (equally empiricist) deductive falsification.

Part 2 The Old New Dawn

The latter half of 20th century saw several major challenges and radical modifications to the traditional views, from Paul Feyerabend, Thomas Kuhn and Michael Polanyi. We will consider these and then move to the more fundamental challenges posed by postmodernity, particularly relativism, knowability and the ‘dumbing down’ of cultural endeavours.

Part 3 The Obedience of Science

Given that we are Christians, do we have a distinctive approach to knowing that constructively challenges and re-shapes all of the above? We consider our call to approach the world in a way which sees us not ‘under the sun’ (the fool in Ecclesiastes) but ‘under the one who made the sun’ (Augustine). I shall suggest contours of what it means to bring our epistemology captive ‘to the obedience to Christ’ (2Cor. 10:5)

Biblical World Views in the Context of Today's Scientific Knowledge

Dr John J. Bimson, Trinity College, Bristol

How we read certain biblical texts, especially the early chapters of Genesis, in the light of a modern scientific worldview, has become a controversial topic. While some Christians do their utmost to find accurate scientific knowledge within these texts, the so-called 'New Atheists' have a field-day pointing out how primitive, mistaken and irrelevant the biblical world view is.

In reality, understanding the biblical world view (or views) is vital to a proper appreciation of these difficult texts. Their authors could not have spoken directly and clearly into their own context if they had not used the language, concepts and images familiar at that time. This was acknowledged by some earlier generations of exegetes but seems to have been forgotten by many Christians during the twentieth century. The legacy has been sterile debate and an impoverished understanding of Scripture.

This paper will try to show how recent scholarship throws new light on key texts, helping us to understand the world from which they came, the kind of literature they are, and the message their authors wanted to convey.

Recommended reading:

John H. Walton, "The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate", IVP Academic, 2009

Natural Disasters: scientific and scriptural perspectives

Prof Robert (Bob) White, Dept Earth Sciences & Faraday Institute, Cambridge

We live in a world where the same natural processes that make it habitable can turn round and bite us, killing thousands or even hundreds of thousands of people. Natural disasters pull us up sharp and make us face head-on the hard questions of life and death. They challenge humankind's hubris that we can control our environment. For theists they raise the hard question of how an all-powerful, all-loving God can allow such things to happen. I shall address the issues of what causes natural disasters, and to what extent they are exacerbated or in many cases even caused by human actions. I will then go on to look at what scripture says about natural disasters and about the relationship between the creator God, his creation and humans made in his image. This will be illustrated by examples of the responses of three biblical figures to disasters: Joseph, Job and Jesus.

The Bible explains that all suffering in the world is ultimately the result of humankind's disobedience to God our creator: deciding that we want to be in charge ourselves rather than God. The apostle Paul reminds us that God, in his sovereign rule, allows us to make that choice, and hands us over to the consequences (Romans 1:28). We live in a broken world, where suffering often seems severe and arbitrary, and where the wicked prosper at the expense of others. But another mark of God's rule is that this situation will not last forever. God will one day restore justice, fully renew his creation, and bring his children home there forever through Jesus' death on the cross.

How Does God Act in the World?

Dr Lydia Jaeger, Institut Biblique de Nogent, Paris

It is often assumed that contemporary physics is more hospitable to divine action (and human freedom) than classical mechanics. The talk criticizes this assumption on the grounds of both physics and theology. In order to reach a satisfactory account of divine (and human) action, a more thorough rethinking of the scientific worldview is necessary. Most currently discussed models of divine action do not challenge the physicalist assumption that physics provides a true and complete description of nature's causal web. Thus they resemble physicalism-plus-God. Taking up a suggestion from Henri Blocher, I propose an alternative framework for divine action in the world. It takes creation as the starting-point to understand the world and leads to a non-reductionist, multidimensional picture of reality. It accommodates both scientific exploration of the world and the possibility of miracles.

Recommended reading:

C.S. Lewis, "Miracles: A Preliminary Study" (London: Centenary Press, 1947 or any newer edition)

*R. Douglas Geivett, Gary R. Habermas (ed.), "In Defence of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in the World" (Leicester: Apollos, 1997)

*H. Dooyeweerd, "In the Twilight of Western Thought: Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Philosophical Thought" (Nutley; NJ: Craig Press, 1975)

*Lydia Jaeger, "Einstein, Polanyi and the Laws of Nature", West Conshohocken (PA): Templeton Foundation Press, 2010

And possibly:

*Keith Ward, "Divine Action: Examining God's Role in an Open and Emergent Universe" (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2007; first ed. 1990)

*J.M. Van Der Meer (ed.), "Facets of Faith and Science", (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996)

*Clouser Roy A., "The Myth of Religious Neutrality : an Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories", Notre Dame (IN), Univ. of Notre Dame, 2005 (revised).

FAITH IN A WORLD OF SCIENCE

Rev Dr Rodney Holder, The Faraday Institute, Cambridge

Abstract

This talk will address the question as to if and how modern science has changed the way we talk about faith. Today we have to express our beliefs in a credible way to a world in which science is a significant part of the cultural backdrop. This raises significant questions for faith. How do we understand God's revelation in Scripture in the light of science? How is our understanding of God, of creation, and the human person affected by the findings of science? Can we still recite the creeds with integrity? Or is our faith undermined by modern developments, such as in the cognitive study of religion? Is there still a place for natural theology or has that been undermined by Darwin? Can Christian faith claim to be rational in the way that science is understood to be rational and based on empirical evidence? What resources do we have in Scripture and the Christian tradition to address these issues? And on the other hand, what can faith contribute to science? As at the time of the Reformation it will be argued that Christians can indeed return *ad fontes*, to the Biblical sources and classical exponents of the faith, for insight.

Recommended Reading

John Polkinghorne (2008), *Theology in the Context of Science*, London: SPCK.

John Polkinghorne (1994), *Science and Christian Belief: Theological Reflections of a Bottom-up Thinker*, London: SPCK.

Keith Ward (2011), *Is Religion Irrational?* Oxford: Lion Hudson.