

Editorial

Geography and the Science-Faith Debate

One of the great attractions of the science-faith debate is its multi-disciplinarity. There is virtually no academic discipline that cannot be drawn into the discussion in some shape or form. And just as the debate transcends disciplinary boundaries, so equally does it cross geographical and religious boundaries. Different religious traditions and different theological strands within the same religion bring a diverse array of perspectives. Differences in language, economy and culture provide yet further layers of complexity.

The choice of even one single domain, the English-speaking world, well illustrates this point. Those who have taken sabbaticals in the USA, UK or Australasia will be only too aware of the very different perspectives towards science-faith relationships that they encounter as they move between these areas. Those coming to the UK sometimes remark on the homogeneity of perspective when compared to the much wider diversity of opinion encountered within the USA. The reasons for this are not too difficult to discern. Information flow within the UK is rapid and the academic community relatively small. An established church (Anglican) contributes to homogeneity of opinion, at least on this topic, whereas the lack of an established church in the USA promotes diversity. Denominations in the USA can be so enormous that their own theological colleges and publishing houses establish perspectives that can be quite different from other denominations. The wider American public's interest in spirituality and religion has also ensured an exotic flowering of beliefs about the relation between science and faith that exist but struggle to flourish in damper and more secularised British soil. Perhaps most importantly of all, a significant body of scientists in the UK has contributed extensively, and in a very positive way, to the growing literature examining the science-faith debate during the past 50 years. Whereas there is obviously diversity of opinion within this literature, the consensus is far more striking, thereby providing a solid body of relatively homogeneous Christian thinking to nurture a new generation of scientists.

On a global geographical scale the fact of extensive diversity might easily lead to the idea that consensus in the science-faith debate is impossible or that it is only achieved as the lowest common denominator and at the expense of radical or original thought. The three main contributions to this Issue, coming from three different continents, all help to establish the point that diversity has to be constrained by certain boundaries: Roger Trigg reminds us that the justification of scientific knowledge itself is a religious enterprise; Graeme Finlay faces us with some brute genetic facts with which we all have to reckon; and John Greene provides a historical account in which the predictions of one protagonist turned out to be right and the other wrong.