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Editorial: Looking Backwards and Looking Forwards

This year marks the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible. It is therefore particularly appropriate that this Issue looks back at early modern biblical interpretation and the way that impacted on the emergence of modern science, and at the same time reflects on biblical themes that bring science into conversation with Christian faith in ways relevant for both the immediate and distant hopes of humanity.

One of the striking features of science is the way in which it continually stretches the boundaries of the conversation. This is particularly the case with cosmology in interaction with eschatology. As Daniel Saudek points out in his article on this topic, contemporary cosmology does not allow any firm statements to be made about the future physical state of the universe, although the various possibilities currently being mooted do bring physical and theological eschatologies into an interesting discussion. Within the biological realm, also, the conversation between biology and faith is highlighted by Gavin Hitchcock's fascinating comparison between the 'evolution' of mathematics, science and living organisms. The dying of all kinds continually make space for the living, a common thread that underlies these very disparate entities.

An article on the use of nuclear power as an energy source certainly involves looking forward, but might not at first appear to fit the general theme of expanding the boundaries of the conversation between science and faith. But, as Ian Hore-Lacy suggests, the abundant provision of nuclear power resources can be incorporated within a providentialist understanding of the world. Christian stewardship involves not leaving talents buried in the ground (literally in this case), and the author suggests that it is irresponsible not to use wisely all the resources that God provides for human benefit.

The constant traffic of ideas between science and faith shows no signs of dissipating. This is God's universe and God's world, so it is hardly surprising that this should be so. The late Stephen Jay Gould's idea of 'non-overlapping magisteria' as a blanket description of the overall relationship between science and faith never did stand up to close scrutiny, Gould undermining his own thesis by drawing attention to the way in which religious beliefs played integral roles in the thinking of key figures in the emergence of modern science.

As we celebrate the King James Version anniversary, we are reminded of Boyle's famous words: 'As the two great books, of Nature and of Scripture, have the same author; so the study of the latter does not at all hinder an inquisitive man's delight in the study of the former.' To these two Scott Mandelbrote adds a third key element: 'conscience'. This Issue provides yet more examples of the ways in which inquisitive thinkers continue to hold the 'two great books' firmly in both hands, surely in all good conscience.

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