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S&CB Guest Editorial

"Science" and "Christian Belief" come together in the title of this journal with the possible implication that the use of the conjunction "and" rather than "or" indicates compatibility of the two. There are good reasons to encourage acceptance of this implication. Christian believers are committed to seeking and valuing truth wherever it is found in a spirit of humility and openness to reason. Thus, the methods and results of science, based, as they are, on evidence-based reasoning can be welcomed as one aid to understanding and interpreting the Bible. There are, of course, other types of scholarship and experience that can, and should, be used to gain deeper appreciation of the richness and eternal verities found in Scripture, but science has its place. The articles in this issue provide excellent examples of how science can assist faith in its search for understanding. Respect for the honest findings of science, however provisional they may be, can protect the believer from superficial interpretations of ancient texts and steer him or her towards those that are informed by knowledge of the context and culture of the Bible's authors and their original audiences. This is the thrust of the article by Philip J. Senter on the apparent conflict between the Pentateuch and modern science. A similar theme can be discerned in the paper by Graeme Finlay where the evidence for evolution, and the mechanisms driving it, form the background to our understanding of our bodies' immune responses without implying any conflict with the Biblical account of the creation of the human body, male and female. Where some interpreters will object to the very idea of any randomness in God's Creation, the article beautifully illustrates God's wonderful use of randomness to efficiently protect the life He has created. The concomitant diversity of life provides also a helpful metaphor for understanding the life of the Church and gives another example of how science may enhance faith and our understanding of Christian belief and practice. Stephen Williams, in discussing the possibility of thinking machines, incidentally, but effectively, develops the case for compatibility by underscoring the view that the Bible is not primitive science, nor an alternative explanatory discourse, but has an altogether different aim. Christian belief, it is argued, does not have a stake in any particular scientific theory or explanation, but deals with transcendent issues of the purpose and meaning of our lives.

Justifying the compatibility of Science and Christian Belief, or religious faith more generally, is important for reasons other than achieving some kind of intellectual coherence: it can have real world consequences. The way people within so-called "faith communities" react to policies based on science, such as those aimed at combating climate change or countering anti-vaccine misinformation, can be a factor limiting the effectiveness of measures taken

to address the issues. This is recognised by the United Nations Environment Programme with their "Faith for Earth Initiative" aimed at encouraging a Science-Religion dialogue for stewardship of the Earth. Authors and readers of Science and Christian Belief can work with our own faith communities i.e. our local churches, to recognise Science as a gift from God to be used, not only in stewardship of the environment, but to enhance faith and worship of the Creator.

This journal has a justifiable focus on exploring the interface of Science and the Christian religion with academic rigour. Evidence-based reasoning, as with the scientific enterprise, requires subjection of all arguments to critical evaluation. Such intercourse has been central to the activities of Christians in Science since its inception as the Research Scientists' Christian Fellowship. Internal discussions and workshops have stimulated the intellectual life of CiS for several decades and helped to inform a Christian and Biblical perspective on current scientific developments and religious or ethical issues arising from them. However, the time may be ripe for Christian believers who are scientifically well-informed to look outward; to our local church fellowships and to the world beyond. The motivation to engage with the public on science-faith questions comes from a calling to strengthen faith and enhance worship of believers and help unbelievers to come to faith by removing stumbling blocks in their way. In as much as so many people see science as an obstacle to belief in God, we have a responsibility to remove such obstacles. Public engagement will be the theme of the upcoming Spring Conference of CiS, to be held on 7th May 2022 in St. John's College, Durham (https://www.cis.org.uk/conferences). The aim will be to develop collaboration in outreach with other organizations in the Science and Religion field in the UK. One hoped-for outcome of the conference will be a post-pandemic effort by CiS members to encourage local churches to affiliate with CiS as a partner in mission. The compatibility and positive harmony of Science and Christian Belief is good news that deserves to be heard more widely.

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