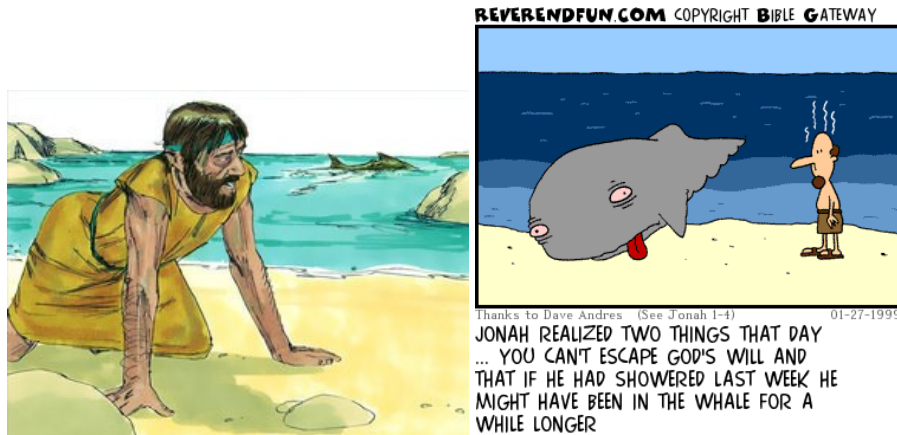


but a story whose purpose is to convey truth and meaning.



Discussion:

Science applied properly is a valuable resource in the Biblical interpreter's toolkit

Science has also contributed much to our understanding of Scripture and theology. However, the question for today is, "Can the same be said for the reverse? Can Christian theology contribute to the scientific endeavour? And what specifically might that contribution look like?"

St Paul wrote. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth. (2Ti 2:15)



THE WAIKATO CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST PETER
Te whare karakia matua o Pita Tapu ki Waikato

Theology of Creation

Notes for a Bible Study 5

November 15, 2020



THE WAIKATO CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST PETER

Te whare karakia matua o Pita Tapu ki Waikato

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Views from the Pews Study 5: How things are and which things matter

All human cultures have developed stories that once were the only explanations of how things were (facts) and which things mattered (values). Most stories were metaphors, like parables, so were not in themselves literally true, but they had essential truth in them. Metaphorical truths keep people together so long as they help people to understand the world around them (how things are) and the moral behaviour expected in it (which things matter) in similar ways.

The undisputed bases of Western facts and values until Copernicus were the two Hebrew creation stories. **Genesis 1 shows how things are in nature.** Contrary to the ancient cosmology of the surrounding cultures, which saw nature as controlled by pagan deities, Genesis 1 insists that God created the conditions needed by a home for humanity. God set the stage and the rules (day/night, heaven/earth, land/sea), and placed the sun and stars simply as time-markers, definitely not to be worshipped. God then created life indirectly by commanding the earth and the waters to be fruitful. Creation was endowed with the freedom to run itself according to God's laws laid down at the start, and it has always obeyed them. Therefore, what matters is that humans should obey, love and rejoice in God, whose service is perfect freedom. **Genesis 2-3 shows how things are among humans:** Adam was formed by God out of the dust of the earth, and Eve by God out of Adam's rib. Therefore, what matters is that human bodies are formed from the earth, but life is given by God. Woman was made after man, and subject to man's authority.

Now science has taken over explaining "How things are", and the values derived from old stories no longer command universal assent. Misunderstanding the shift in authority can bring faith into disrepute. Cartoonists love making faith look ridiculous in the light of science. The solution is to avoid confusing science and faith. **Science takes things apart to see how they work**, like the laws of genetic inheritance, or hydro-electric power. **Theology puts things together to see what they mean**, like Thomas when he saw the risen Jesus. Science and theology both try to make sense of the same world, but in different terms. Both are valid, and both answer our most basic questions, but they are not the same.

Theological reflection

Some years ago, I had an email conversation with a highly regarded local scientist. The topic of the conversation was "Do science and theology overlap, and should they?" The discussion was occasioned by a quote in the media describing, the human eye as an extraordinarily complex and wonderfully designed organ. Was the quote science, or was it theology? To cut a long story short, our conclusion was that science and theology can and do sometimes overlap. When science starts discussing "meaning" and/or "intention", such as the eye being "designed", it overlaps into the territory of theology because "design" implies the existence of a "designer" who had an "intention". And when religion takes a scripture, such as Genesis chapter 1, and understands it as a literal description of "how our physical reality actually is, or became the way it is", then it is intruding into the territory of science.

As Kim put it in today's instalment of Views from the Pews, "Science takes things apart to see how they work, and theology puts things together to see what they mean." A distinction that warns us to tread with care when walking on unfamiliar pathways.

Not being aware of this distinction has made us the poorer because we have mistakenly believed that the two disciplines are opposed and thus have nothing to say to each other. But this is not so.

Take, for example, the book of Jonah. Much fruitless effort has been expended trying to answer questions like "What sort of fish swallowed Jonah?"; "How could Jonah survive unharmed for three days in the fish's stomach?" "How come Jonah 3:3 estimated that it would take three days to walk across the city, whereas archaeology insists that Nineveh was actually quite a small place?" An Iraqi friend of mine from the late 1990s grew up in modern day Nineveh. He told me a person could walk slowly across the entire old city in less than 20 minutes.

A little application of the science of linguistics renders these questions irrelevant. The book of Jonah begins with the word "W'y'hi", literally "And it happened". It was a typical story telling opener like our modern "Once upon a time". Thus, science alerts us to the genre of the book. It is not historical fact