

Discussion:

Read together the handout of Genesis chapter 1 reformatted as an "Affirmation of Faith".

How does publicly proclaiming this statement of faith make you feel when you know science doesn't take what it says literally?

What do you feel it is you are actually (i.e. truly) saying, that enables you to affirm this belief without feeling compromised by the Scientific understanding of creation?



recipe

cookies



gene

protein



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

Theology of Creation

Notes for a Bible Study

October 28, 2020



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CATHEDRAL MINISTRY TEAM

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Views from the Pews: Does science undermine the Biblical theology of creation?

No, quite the opposite. If the world is not good and rational, science is not possible; if the world is not free to be itself, science is not necessary to understand it. The Biblical theology of creation claims that creation is good, rational, and contingent, and that because we are children of a rational God, we are capable of understanding it.

Science assumes that: (1) If the universe is good, it is worthy of careful study. (2) If it is rational, it is predictable and intelligible. (3) If it is contingent, it has freedom to be otherwise than it is, although still coherent and predictable. Science confirms all three claims of Biblical creation theology, so the state of things can be and has to be studied by experiment, not deduced from pure reasoning.

For Newton and many other early members of the Royal Society in London, science was a means of reaching out to God. Their legacy has ensured that, at least in the Protestant west, God's work in creation was open to science from the beginning. The far more recent idea of "creationism" has completely different, largely anti-science origins in parts of USA.

Other cultures had developed systems of organised knowledge, but no ancient science produced advanced technology based on controlled experiments. The Greeks believed that all forms of matter are inferior embodiments of pure rational forms, so that experimenting on them would be pointless. The Chinese had no geometry, and their holistic view of life saw no value in experimenting on the bits separately. Religious authorities and state officials in conservative countries exerted tight control over higher education, in contrast to the intellectual freedom of western universities. God speaks to us in many languages, but only western biologists learned to read the language of the genes. Genes are sets of 3-letter words, which instruct an egg to grow into an adult. Genetic words assembled in different combinations determine most of the body shape and behaviour of all animals. The same language of the genes is there in the inmost parts of every one of us. We are all creatures of words, but best of all, as Christians, we also all belong to the most precious word of all, Christ the Word of God.

Theological reflection

For me, the complementarity between science and religion was encapsulated by a prominent astrophysicist, who was being interviewed on TV. At the end of the interview the interviewer said, "I suppose, being aware that the Universe is so infinitely vast compared to Earth, which is just a tiny spec at one end of an irrelevant galaxy, you would regard belief in God as a foolish fantasy." "Your question", he said "is difficult to answer because it confuses size with significance." He went on to outline three possibilities.

1. If Earth is the only place in the whole Universe where life exists, then the significance of the size relationship lies in its suggestion that it required the universe to be infinite before life could exist on one spec.
2. It may be that life is just endemic to the Universe and is spread throughout it (wherever appropriate conditions exist).
3. Thirdly, in terms of belief in God, the size difference in no way rules this out. It just shifts the significance from the infinite Universe to the tiny spec, which now becomes the more important of the two.

Clearly, there is nothing new in this thinking. Not only does the author of Genesis Ch. 1 affirm the presence of God in that which he created, but the writer of Psalm 19 has personally experienced the ability that contemplation of creation has to draw our attention to the one who created it.

Thus, while science richly informs us about the material reality we call the Cosmos, religion adds to science's description by addressing the "intention related" God questions. Firstly, that creation reveals God's purpose and love for all he has made (Ps 19), and secondly that the size difference which seems important to the human mind, is not a useful way of discerning importance and significance. (I suspect Science would not dispute with religion on the second of these.)