

Book Reviews

changes to our world picture, such as the Big Bang and a universe of billions of galaxies expanding and accelerating away from each other. Some reflection on how Christians have tried to connect this new cosmology to the Bible would be fascinating.

Finally, there were a number of proofreading or copy editing issues with the book. Thus “more temporary structure” on page 82 should actually be “more permanent structure”; here Greenwood is describing two metaphors that biblical writers used to describe the ceiling of the world: “One appealed to their nomadic past using tent imagery. The other employs the imagery of a more temporary structure.” Then, at the bottom of page 163, “sun” and “earth” are reversed: Copernicus did not shift “the center of movement from the sun to the earth,” but vice versa.

More confusing is that the term “hendiadys,” used twice on page 86. It should be “merism,” although technically a merism is a contrasting pair meant to include everything in between. Here “hendiadys” is used as a comprehensive list of items—five in one case (Ezek. 38:20) and three in the other (Zeph. 1:3).

But these are small details and do not really detract from a most helpful volume.

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SCIENCE AND RELIGION

FAITH AND WISDOM IN SCIENCE by Tom McLeish. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014. 304 pages. Hardcover; \$32.95. ISBN: 9780198702610.

This is the best book I have read all year, and the best I would expect to read for a long time to come. It is a superbly crafted exploration of the relationship between science and faith (yes, another one of those, but stay with me a bit!) by an author deeply conversant with both topics. He is wise enough to discern the foundations on which both enterprises rest, humble enough to offer his observations without offense, and literate enough to do so in a marvelously well-written text. The book flows smoothly from one difficult topic to another, erudite but not showy, scholarly but not dense, bold but not brash.

Tom McLeish is Professor of Physics and, until recently, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research at Durham University in the United Kingdom. His specialty is the molecular theory of complex fluid flow, and stories from his own collaborative research find their way into the text. He is a public intellectual, drawing on his academic reputation to influence

policy decisions regarding science. He is a Fellow of esteemed professional organizations, including the Royal Society. And he is also a Christian. He does not explicitly state that in this book, but his ruminations on scripture are not merely theoretical; they are also devotional. He writes of both faith and science as an insider, as one with investment and commitment to the enterprises they represent and the assumptions on which they are founded.

McLeish would have us do away with any notion that theology and science are distinct entities; he wishes to delete the “and” between those two words and substitute “of.” He illustrates and initiates this agenda by proposing his own rudimentary theology of science, rooted in love.

McLeish is a story teller. He arrives eventually, in his penultimate chapter, at this theology of science by way of a series of small narratives, beginning with stories of natural philosophy, the love of wisdom in nature, which was what science was called before that word was invented in the early nineteenth century. The love of wisdom is a trait that both people of faith and people of science share, for example, Robert Brown (for whom Brownian motion is named), the thirteenth-century Bishop of Lincoln, the seventh-century Venerable Bede, and Macrina, the theologian sister of the fourth-century Cappadocian Fathers. These are fascinating and penetrating vignettes surveyed in chapter 2.

In chapter 3 he explores natural wisdom in the Old Testament, particularly in its multiple creation narratives in the Proverbs, Psalms, prophets, and, of course, Genesis. (A reader might be surprised to discover that the Jewish scriptures contain more than one, or even two, treatments of the origins of the natural world.) This culminates with a marvelous exegesis of the oldest and murkiest wisdom literature of the Jewish/Christian scriptures: the Book of Job. McLeish explores the story of Job through the lens of order and chaos in the natural world—how this is interpreted by his friends, by Job himself, and finally by the Lord speaking from a whirlwind. He then moves to the New Testament explorations of the meaning of the natural world, particularly as found in the themes of creation and reconciliation (to which he later returns).

His purpose in this highly informed biblical survey is to illustrate that the enduring questions of natural philosophy are rooted deeply in the pain and passion of human experience, and therefore they do not belong solely to the rationality of modern science. And science itself is not as rational, orderly, or methodical as its champions sometimes insist:

Science runs far deeper, quirkier and at more fully human levels than we would think from stories of relentless discoveries, spectacular phenomena or the cool application of a fixed methodology. We know better than to swallow an inadequate narrative that portrays science as simply replacing an ancient world of myth and superstition with a modern one of fact and comprehension. Science, as we have framed it with a broader and older “love of wisdom of natural things,” does indeed call on a growing illumination of nature of experiment and imagination, creating understanding where there was none before and opening up the exploration of new phenomena ... But science also emerges from an ancient longing, and from an older narrative of our complex relationship with the natural world. Its primary creative grammar is the question, rather than the answer. Its primary energy is imagination rather than fact. Its primary experience is more typically trial than triumph. (p. 102)

How, then, do science and faith relate? He suggests that there have been three distinct approaches to their relationship, all of which he finds inadequate. The first is to declare them competitors in the search for ultimate explanations about the nature and meaning of the universe. This is the approach favored by the “new atheists” such as Richard Dawkins and also by religious fundamentalists. He finds that in such a “conflict” approach both parties tend to be triumphalist about their own truth claims and both tend to misrepresent the aims and assumptions of the other.

A second approach is to divide faith and science into two entirely different fields of inquiry, and then to call offside when one encroaches on the other’s territory. This is the “non-overlapping magisteria” option of Stephen Jay Gould. McLeish finds this overly limiting on both sides, as science must concern itself with matters of values, for instance, and, as his biblical overview repeatedly acknowledges, faith observes and probes the behaviors of the natural world.

A third approach “attempts reconciliation by comparative methodology, while keeping the objects of enquiry distinct” (p. 169). He specifically acknowledges the work of physicist-priest John Polkinghorne here, who has explicated on numerous occasions the overlapping epistemologies and methods of science and theology. McLeish suggests, though, that this has the effect of “reducing the universal scope of both narratives” (p. 169), and thus diminishes both.

His alternative is to offer his theology of science (he suggests that we would also benefit from a science of theology), and delineates some “common threads” from both narratives, including love, manifested in a mutual commitment to the task of reconciliation.

He writes,

Science becomes, with a Christian theology, the grounded outworking of the “ministry of reconciliation” between humankind and the world. Far from being a task that threatens to derail the narrative of salvation, it actually participates within it. Science is the name we now give to the deeply human, profoundly theological task of participating in the mending of our relationship with nature. (p. 209)

McLeish concludes with a chapter on “mending our ways,” intended to offer practical suggestions on how to live out the relationship between science and faith that he offers here. In a brief epilogue he suggests that the New Testament story of conversation between Jesus and a Roman centurion can inculcate and elucidate the trust required to honor the respective authority found in each of these two enterprises.

It is doubtful that many scientists would instinctively understand themselves as philosophers of wisdom, as McLeish would have them do, much less agree that reconciliation is a primary object of their work. But what if they did? How could the relationship between humans and the natural world be transformed? And what if Christians were to perceive science as a vital aspect of our very human grappling with the questions generated by both the order and chaos of the material universe? What if we were to understand science as a source of wisdom and not merely as an object of contention? These hopes are addressed repeatedly in this journal on science and the Christian faith. If nothing else, perhaps McLeish has given us an opportunity to occasionally replace the “and” in such discussions with an “in.”

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THE TRUTH ABOUT SCIENCE AND RELIGION: From the Big Bang to Neuroscience by Fraser Fleming. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016. 221 + xvii pages, including bibliography and index. Paperback; \$29.00. ISBN: 9781498223294.

The Truth about Science and Religion: From the Big Bang to Neuroscience is a literary buffet serving a bit of everything related to science and faith. Interested in a bit of cosmology, biology, history, philosophy, with a splash of theology? You have found the book for you. Fraser Fleming, a professor and Head of the Department of Chemistry at Drexel University in Philadelphia, writes in a subtle way about science and religion while treating them equally and respectfully. I waited patiently through the 221 pages for a sentence that began with “The truth about science