



Arie Leegwater

Living as Part of the Story

When reading Richard Dawkins' most recent book, *The Greatest Show on Earth* (New York: Free Press, 2009), I was struck by the audacity of the phrase, "greatest show," describing the primrose path to macro-evolution. Questions immediately formed in my mind. How does this story (or show) relate to the grand story or narrative that Christians hold to be the case and that forms the history of all there is: the dynamic cosmic movement from creation, fall, redemption to consummation? It is a story of God, who has done great things in the past and present, and, one may trust, who will do the same in the future. In addition, one can also raise the existential question that N. T. Wright often poses—how do we find our place in this story, in our professional life, in the ASA, and in solidarity with other Christians worldwide?

But to the point in question, how do we fuse these two stories? Is it sufficient, or fully satisfying, to assert that there are no irreconcilable conflicts between science and faith in Christ, a thought often captured by the adage that "all truth is God's truth," in the words of Arthur F. Holmes? This claim is echoed in the recent formulation of the Biologos Declaration signed by a distinguished number of Christian pastors, theologians, scientists, and scholars:

We affirm that the truths of Scripture and the truths of nature both have their origins in God, and that further exploration of all these truths can enrich our joyful and worshipful appreciation of the Creator's love, goodness, and grace.¹

Making these truth claims can be helpful, particularly for a Christian community which often experiences the latest scientific findings as a threat to its faith. Holmes has claimed that all truth is God's truth, wherever it may be found. Consequently, we do not need to fear the truth, because the truth comes from

God and is a coherent whole: "If all truth is God's truth and truth is one, then God does not contradict himself, and in the final analysis there will be no conflict between the truth taught in Scripture and truth available from other sources."² We do not need to be afraid of advances in scholarship and scientific research.

However, weighing the inherent connectedness of these truth claims is a far more difficult, pressing, and problematic issue. Holmes further held that knowing the truth about something is a matter of thinking God's thoughts after him. God has perfect knowledge of everything we will ever seek to know. Although God is not subject to the laws of logic, these laws describe how God thinks. Since we are created in his image, we are to think like God. God's character insures that truth is inherently coherent and that it forms a unity.

For others, these truth claims are less closely linked, since we are dealing with two different sources of revelation. For example, the historian of science Reijer Hooykaas stated,

[T]he founders of modern science strove for a methodological separation of science and religion. With Kepler (a devout Christian), astronomy was made independent of Bible texts, but metaphysical notions still interfered in his method; with Pascal and Boyle (both apologists of Christianity), this separation has become complete. In their scientific work, one does not find a word about religion, although their strictly rational-empirical method certainly formed an organic unity with their Christian faith.³

Although Hooykaas argued for a methodological separation of faith and science, he seems to assume some ontological connection of science and faith, namely, an "organic unity." This phrase was never explicated by him. Once he even described the

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interrelationship between general revelation and scriptural revelation as one of independence: "Christian faith acknowledges two independent sources of revelation: Scripture and Nature."⁴

Another approach, closely related to the position of independence, is one which identifies new discoveries in the natural sciences as adding to, rather than disclosing, God's revelation in nature. In a recent essay, Joseph L. Spradley writes,

A more fruitful and historically accurate approach to the relation between science and Christianity is one of cooperation and convergence rather than confrontation and conflict. This view emphasizes the Augustinian idea that 'all truth is God's truth' and that advances in science should be seen as adding to God's revelation in nature. In such a view, the content of Christian theology will sometimes influence and motivate scientific work, and discoveries in the natural sciences will sometimes clarify and correct Christian thought.⁵

Whichever position one takes on the integrality of truth and its assumed foundation, one thing is clear: we need a far deeper and richer reflection on these matters, as we find our place in the grand narrative awaiting Christ's next advent.

Writing this editorial during Advent and singing advent hymns such as "View the Present Through the Promise,"⁶ I was struck once again by how often our reflection, discussions, and scientific practices frequently do not display a deep sense of the drama that Scripture portrays. We tend to focus on the present with an ever increasing sense of foreboding and despair, resulting in a loss of hope. But the story of the Bible moves to a conclusion in which God's redemptive work restores the whole of creation, even our human cultural and scientific work. The certain hope and promise of a new heaven and a new earth—the culmination of Christ's second Advent—should shape, pattern, and color all our scientific investigations and technological practices. As contemporary Christians we need to inhabit this story, to make it our own, to bear witness to its promise, and allow it to be our life's story. ☉

Notes

¹Biologos webpage: <http://biologos.org/news-events/signed-statement-from-november-workshop-now-available/>

²Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 18.

³Reijer Hooykaas, "Teilhardism, Its Predecessors, Adherents, and Critics," *Free University Quarterly* 9 (1963): 59.

⁴Reijer Hooykaas, "Science, Materialism, and Christianity," *Free University Quarterly* 1 (1950): 60.

⁵Joseph L. Spradley, "How Have Christian Faith and Natural Science Interacted in History?" in Dorothy F. Chappell and E. David Cook, *Not Just Science* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 28.

⁶Thomas Troeger, "View the Present Through the Promise," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) in *Sing! A New Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 2001), #90.

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In This Issue

In brief, this March issue of *PSCF* has four main articles. In turn, James Rusthoven (McMaster University) presents a covenantal perspective on medical relationships, Mary VandenBerg (Calvin Theological Seminary) discusses different understandings of general revelation, Michael Keas (The College at Southwestern) offers a lengthy historical article on "Darwinism, Fundamentalism, and R. A. Torrey," and John Compton (Vanderbilt University) gives a personal account of the scientific career of his father, Arthur Holly Compton. A number of book reviews complete the issue.

As book review editors, Jim Peterson and I welcome Louise Freeman, a professor of psychology at Mary Baldwin College, as the newest member of our book review trio. She replaces Rebecca Flietstra (Point Loma Nazarene University) who served *PSCF* for the past two years. ☉

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