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Approaching the Challenges of Integrative Scholarship That Offers Perspectives on Science, Technology, and Christianity

Each article in this issue crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries. This is hardly surprising; perspectives on science and religion are inherently integrative. The regular articles published in academic journals such as *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith (PSCF),* however, must do more than merely integrate; they should add something substantive to scholarly conversations in the science and religion field and, as appropriate, to conversations in other academic disciplines as well.

Expert-level practitioners of science, religious studies, and other disciplines engaged by the articles should appraise the offered perspectives as relevant, rigorous, and defensible. At least one category of specialist should deem the article to have added something new to the work in their field. This is a nontrivial ask. Considering Western contexts alone, over the nearly sixty years since the 1966 publication of Ian Barbour's *Issues in Science and Religion,*[1] the academic discipline of science and religion has produced a vast, complex, and somewhat scattered body of literature. The integrative work required to address some topics at an appropriately scholarly level might also require fostering or furthering dialogue between the ideas of disparate academic disciplines, schools of thought, and sometimes even influential popular thinkers. To do so well takes time, effort, and sustained engagement with experts outside of one's discipline.

This issue's authors have met the challenges of interdisciplinary scholarship in ways that suggest possible strategies for future *PSCF* contributors. Chemist Carey Johnson's approach was perhaps the most ambitious. It involved undertaking significant transdisciplinary learning. He researched the history of chemists' involvement in warfare and attained enough familiarity with recent academic discussions of just-war theory, pacifism, the application of both to military research, and leading viewpoints in Christian discipleship and political theology to examine the question of whether and how Christians in chemistry might approach work with military applications. As Johnson points out, chemists' involvement in military work has and continues to be significant and, for Christians concerned with following the love commands of Jesus in a fallen world, involves fraught choices. Nevertheless, the decisions are analogues of those faced by soldiers and politicians when they decide whether and how to prosecute warfare—and those are questions Christians have grappled with since the days of the early church.

The Christian pacifism and just-war traditions which arose from those conversations can serve as a resource for Christians in science and technology as they evaluate their possible participation in military work. They cannot take for granted that their voices will be either dominant or determinative in the resulting moral dialogue. Thus, drawing on the work of Dallas Willard and James Davison Hunter, Johnson also considers how Christ's disciples might be called to function in a pluralistic society. Throughout his article, he primarily seeks to inform rather than persuade. Johnson is also careful to acknowledge the merit of different arguments, while being frank in his preference for Christian pacifism.

The second article in this issue represents another approach to the challenges of interdisciplinary scholarship: collaboration. Like Johnson's, it considers how Christians in a fallen world might understand and practice science and technology—in this case, through medicine. Jointly written by the physician Joel Cho and the theologian Hans Madueme (who also completed a residency in internal medicine), their "Brief Theology of Medicine" combines personal familiarity with the current everyday challenges of medical practice and the theological resources in Madueme's Reformed theological tradition.

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Madueme and Cho do not shy from describing the difficulty of medicine and the stressors physicians face in the form of medical errors, liability, intimate involvement with the horrors of disease, and the inability to address the inevitability of death. Instead, they offer that Christians should refract medical practice through the prism of a redemptive-historical understanding of the gospel, specifically in terms of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. They offer medicine as an opportunity to participate in God's offering of common grace to our fellow humans, the ultimate significance of which will be fully realized only in the eschaton.

The third article represents another strategy: the acquisition of transdisciplinary expertise through substantive and prolonged engagement with expert voices in scholarly communities. Its author, professor of geology and geological engineering at the University of Mississippi Gregg Davidson, has been active in scholarly discussions within the American Scientific Affiliation and the Evangelical Theological Society, coauthored a book on Genesis chapter one with the Old Testament theologian Kenneth Turner, and hosts a public-oriented podcast series on science and religion.

Davidson seeks to clarify the nature of one topic often in play in conversations about creation: biblical inerrancy. Synthesizing different views in the theological literature, Davidson proposes that the various positions might be better framed in terms of what he calls message and comprehensive inerrancy. He argues that these terms provide pastorally more helpful precision than the categories normally used. Throughout his article, the fruits of Davidson's transdisciplinary efforts are on display: through the detailed examples he uses, in the way he considers the historical development of ideas about inerrancy, and in how he argues that message inerrancy—far from being an innovation designed to shoehorn science into the biblical texts—is how Christians ordinarily read scripture.

Rounding out this issue is a simple and effective approach to interdisciplinary scholarship, the application of one's own disciplinary expertise to inform conversations about science and Christian faith. In his article, the Old Testament theologian John Hilber, an expert at applying the insights of cognitive linguistics to matters of biblical interpretation,[2] considers whether biblical texts should be taken literally as a default. Hilber concludes that while literal reads are viable linguistically, they are not a reasonable default. Meaning is tied to context, so biasing the literal interpretation hazards misinterpretation.

The approaches taken by the authors in this issue have one thing in common: their openness to learning from other experts. In particular, they judiciously revised and extended their ideas in response to peer reviewers' suggestions, criticisms, and concerns. This willingness to learn is an indispensable characteristic of the interdisciplinary scholar.

This issue's book reviews also illustrate the interdisciplinarity of work in science and religion. The topics include the theological and philosophical foundations of science, numeracy in Early Modern England, communication technologies, the interpretation of Genesis 1–11, human health, and global perspectives on science and religion. Two reviews—that of Ted Davis's 2024 *Protestant Modernist Pamphlets* and Jessica Marie Otis's 2024 *By the Numbers*—under the editorship of the interdisciplinary scholar Arie Leegwater, also represent the successful conclusion of Arie's long and faithful period of service to *PSCF*. Currently a professor emeritus of chemistry at Calvin University, Arie served as *PSCF*'s editor-in-chief from 2008–2011 and subsequently as the subject area editor for book reviews in the history and philosophy of science, mathematics, and the physical sciences—subject areas that suggest only some of Arie's polymathic expertise. Thank you, Arie, for your eighteen years of *PSCF* editorship!

One danger of interdisciplinary scholarship is that it is easier to get something wrong or miss something important when working outside of one's home discipline. At *PSCF*, we do due diligence to ensure articles are robust and helpful, but we do not claim to get everything right. What we publish is intended to inform and invite further consideration, including, as appropriate, critique. Scholarly work involves participation in ongoing conversations. It is my hope that this issue inspires additional voices to join the discussion.

Notes

[1]Ian G. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (Prentice-Hall, 1966).

[2]John W. Hilber, *Old Testament Cosmology and Divine Accommodation: A Relevance Theory Approach* (Cascade Books, 2020).

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