

# Preface

THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE CAN exist in their own separate domains, and some have argued persuasively that this is as it should be. Others have argued just the opposite, that theology and science are better served when they share a common commitment toward building a body of knowledge consistent with the whole of reality. During the last half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, an unprecedented rapprochement has taken place and as a result we can speak of a new tradition of cross-disciplinary exchange and learning. Across this country in both religious and secular institutions and filtering down to a broad-based population is an established appreciation and practice of dialoguing together.

This book charts the course, principal players, and themes of this new rapprochement. It also seizes the historical moment to critically assess what has been achieved and where we go from here. With its roots in the groundbreaking theologizing of Teilhard de Chardin and Alfred North Whitehead and its revitalization in the persons of Ian Barbour, Alfred Peacocke, and John Polkinghorne, the new rapprochement signals a self-conscious movement beyond the centrifugal forces that pushed theology and science to go their separate ways and claim for themselves a superior way of knowing.

After Darwin's publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859, one could still be a Christian and a scientist but it was no longer possible to do so without reexamining one's beliefs. This defining moment proved to be divisive in that new wine could not be kept in old wineskins, while at the same time giving rise to an opportunity for Christian theology and modern science to enter into a truly contemporary engagement. Having reached something of a status quo plateau, we are now in a position to examine the basic suppositions of this rapprochement, and some of the questions I raise include the following.

First is the observation that the conversation between theology and science has been asymmetrical. The motivation and impetus has come primarily from theology, which means there is a substantial degree of suspicion and resistance from what scientists can learn from theologians.

I ask whether theology has been bent out of shape by chasing science's methodological success. Has she lost her distinctive voice? And can she establish a place at the table of secular issues of importance without a firm grip on what she does best, or what makes her methodology distinctive and legitimate?

What disquiets me is the possibility that Christian theology may have sacrificed a critical distance because she speaks a peculiar word arising from a faith in a peculiar subject. One has to wonder if liberal Christian theology has been so eager to disown the conflict syndrome of the past that it shies away from engagements that are not aimed at reconciliation.

I also pursue the thesis that in the attempt to find common ground between theology and science in a postmodern context, the new rapprochement has bowdlerized long-standing and substantial differences between the two disciplines in order to pursue a course of consonance. Drawing out this somewhat arguable conclusion, we will examine the thesis that in the last century, but particularly since the introduction of process theology, Christian theologians have been trying to reestablish theology's stature as a credible source of authentic and valuable knowledge by adopting a scientific mentality.

Lastly is the question concerning how we move the conversation to a new level if the participants are satisfied with maintaining the status quo. Notwithstanding the various research projects and exchanges that continue to take place, the lack of debate about fundamental differences regarding governing interests and methodological approaches prevents a deeper kind of exchange.

This, then, is not a book that seeks to advance the exchange between science and theology beyond a critical examination of the exchange itself. What you will not find is a review of familiar arguments that may have run their course. I have no desire to add to the long list of books that examine their history of mutual support, explore further the best model for dialogue, extend specific points of interfacing, or paint a promising picture.

The book's focus is the new rapprochement with science, and necessarily so because it constitutes a foundation from which we cannot retreat. One observation, though, is immediately worth mentioning. Over the years the conversation between the two disciplines has been muddied unnecessarily by pairing science with religion and by casting the opposition to be science versus Christian faith. Religion and science do belong to different realms of inquiry for all the usual reasons. Religion and faith are diffuse, un-disciplined, and highly personal. On the other hand, science and theology are appropriate dialogical partners because both represent well-established disciplines along with the structure and professionalism required of them.

With this in mind, I will clear away the debris and focus on the issues, as I believe they should be defined.

The outline of the book is straightforward, though it is helpful to see how the main arguments unfold. The first chapter is historical in nature because a rereading of the history of science and theology with an eye on irreconcilable differences is necessary for the project at hand. The second chapter charts the development of the new rapprochement with science from its antecedents to a description of its principal arguments. The third chapter is more philosophical and theological in nature by following through with questions lingering from the first two chapters about specific suppositions that are normally taken for granted. Chapters four and five constitute a unit since they attempt to identify the integrity of science and theology, and this is done to further elucidate what constitutes a realistic expectation for future interdisciplinary intercourse. Chapter six is the last step in bringing together the pieces in order to suggest what needs to be done to move forward in the years ahead.

Hopefully this book will satisfy two readerships. The first are those who are finding their way through a century or more of intentional interfacing between those who have felt the tug to explore where their interests converge, or where they inevitably clash, or where they just go their separate ways. Second is a readership already engaged in cross-disciplinary conversations. They are in position to critique my evaluation and add their experience toward exploring new possibilities.

On a personal note, this is the book I should have written first. In two previous books I have been suggesting but not developing a thesis regarding the interplay between theology and science. In *Competing Truths* (2001) I recast the history of their relationship as one of sibling rivals. This is not only a different interpretation of their history together but also a different assessment of how they are presently positioned. If one were to characterize their relationship as sibling rivals during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the twentieth century was a “cold war” of siblings preoccupied with establishing and defending their own domains. One way to view the publication of *Eden’s Garden: Rethinking Sin and Evil in an Age of Scientific Promise* (2006) is to see it as a case study of what a rivalrous engagement would look like regarding a specific issue, namely sin and evil. Here again I broached the subject of how theology and science might understand their role as working toward the common good by counterbalancing each other. And again I argued for the integrity of each discipline as doing what the other discipline is not equipped or prepared to do. Let the two disciplines continue dialoguing together as intellectual rivals, and find mutuality where they can. Let there be more collaboration at the practical level concerning

the pressing social and political issues of our times. But until now I did not tackle the issue of rapprochement directly.

Throughout the book I have tried to be as reader friendly as possible. Where a citation is straightforward it is included in the text with a full reference in the Selected Bibliography. When a citation is unwieldy and is enhanced with further comment, a footnote is found at the bottom of the page. Any references not found in the Selected Bibliography, because they are secondary, are fully cited the first time they are used but not in the Selected Bibliography.

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