

Seminar and Prayer at 080808

Notes for Talk

Is the scientific worldview Christian?

The people that began modern science were Christian. People like Kepler, Galileo and Copernicus, though in conflict with the established church were people who clearly and even passionately held to the Christian worldview. The Royal Society among whose members the scientific method was thrashed out, was founded in 1645 by 10 men of whom 9 were Puritans. In 1663 when the first full members were elected 42 out of 68 were Puritan, vastly out of proportion with society at large. People like Boyle and Newton who hammered out the first Laws of physics were self-declared Christians.

They stated the reason for science was:

1. God was creator and we could expect his creation to model and reveal him
2. God is separate from his Creation and therefore study of Creation was not blasphemy
3. God is sustainer and we can expect consistency in Creation
4. God is one and ruler of all, so we could expect unity
5. God is rational and therefore his creation is knowable & would have order and pattern

The scientific method and the belief in absolute truth remains the basis of science it is people's attitudes that have changed.

In what way has Science changed?

Christian → Deist → "natural theology" → agnosticism → atheism

This is not something rationally forced on scientists by their method or what they study. It is the unproven assumptions with which they start to reason. Atheists claim the moral high ground because they assume as little as possible - but this is a disguise: Christians do assume that there is an eternal omnipotent creator, but atheists effectively assume the same about themselves. It is rather as Paul said in Romans 1

What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. Though they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, (v19-21)
They claimed to be wise, they became fools (22)
They exchanged the truth of God for a lie (25)
They did not think it worth while to retain the knowledge of God (28)

NB What God's judgement is: He 'gives them over' to the consequences of their own worldview.

How do we reclaim the scientific worldview?

1. Prayer
2. As scientists we need to re-discover child-like faith and worship.
3. Live what we believe - a scientist whose life denies what he says is just as damaging as that of a minister of religion.
4. We need to discover ways and words to affirm absolute truth, unity and knowability to both the scientific and wider communities that is acceptable to them yet does not compromise or apologise for our Christian worldview.
5. In those areas of dispute be clear what God says and what we think about what God says. Graciously defend the former, but be humble (though rigorous) about the latter.

Notes from Seminar

The first thing that scientists who are Christian to reclaim is the child-like faith, wonder and worship. Usually this the reason they became scientists in the first place and is often the call of God in their lives.

The Christian scientific world has splintered into many views. Though there is a need to affirm the need for absolute truth, we have to be careful of how we present that truth.

I believe the facts that the Bible clearly affirms are:

1. God is solely responsible for making everything **Gen 1-2;Ps 90:2;102:25;Isa 40:26;Jer 10:12;Amos 4:13;Mt 19:4;Jn 1:3;Ro 1:25;1Co 11:9;Col 1:16;Rev 4:11;10:6**
2. He calls all things into existence out of non-existence. Nothing existed before he made it. Creation was *ex nihilo*. **Jn 1:3 1Co 8:6 Col 1:16-17**
3. There was no compelling force for God to create. He did it according to his will, love and grace. **Acts 17:24;Eph 1:4-6;Col 1:16;Rev 4:11;10:6**
4. God sustains creation. All things hold together in him. In him all things have their being **Heb 1:3 Col 1:17 Rev 4:11 Ps 75:3**
5. By a special act of creation God made humanity in his own image - as mutually complementary genders and as his representatives as the sustainer of creation **Gen 1:26-31 2:18-24 5:1-2 Ps 139:14**

That God is creator is a biblical fact. How he did it is interpretation. Though we must defend God's truth, interpretation must be treated with real tolerance, tolerance that disagrees (even passionately) yet still respects the person. The way we say, present or defend the truth must be loving... to represent the King we must resemble the King to bring in the Kingdom.

Finding ways and words to communicate the revelation of God's word: Paper in Nature in 1970's "does the numbers" of the odds of creating a small protein by random accidental change - this concludes that the statistics show that it impossible, or that genes and proteins are not unique.

What about science education? If education is about the impartation of facts then evolutionary theory is not good, however if it about enabling people to think for themselves then challenging beliefs and presenting options is not a bad thing.

Even in debate and certainly teaching what should characterise the Christian is love - love for God first then love for others. But this does not mean the intellect has no place. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your *mind*. It is of not that "mind" was something that Jesus added to the original verse in Deu 6:5.

Science is no longer the battle ground for the hearts and minds of people. It was while the modernist worldview held sway, but postmodernism and a vague 'spirituality' is now the battleground.

Though the scientific community is largely agnostic, there are strongly held atheist and Christian views. Lately there has emerged a theistic (not Christian but affirming design and free will, while rejecting determinism, must come from a Designer) view mostly from sub-atomic quantum mechanics.

Comments about economics from Zimbabwe

Though we may face a storm in the economic world that may bring real suffering, taking away our proud dependence on ourselves. That suffering produces real saints, characterised by joy in suffering, people who really care for and listen to others. Like CS Lewis says at the end of "Mere Christianity"

"Already the new men are dotted here and there all over the earth... Every now and then one meets them. Their very voices and faces are different from ours: stronger, quieter, happier, more radiant. They begin where most of us leave off.... They will not be very like the idea of 'religious people' which you will have formed from your general reading. They do not draw attention to themselves. You tend to think you are being kind to them when they are being kind to you. They love you more than other men do, but they need you less... They will usually seem to have a lot of time: you will wonder where it comes from. When you have recognised one of them, you will recognise the next one much more easily. And I strongly suspect (but how would I know?) that they recognise one another, immediately and infallibly, across every barrier.... In that way, to become holy is rather like joining a secret society. To put it at the very lowest, it must be great *fun*."

That suffering has produced these saints in Africa, Latin America and the Far East. We will probably see the re-evangelisation of the West from these areas.

Prayer

Creator God, I stand with and for those you have called to read and interpret the book of nature, for scientists of all disciplines and every sphere of enquiry.

I thank you for the awe and beauty your creation contains. I thank you for the wonder of the magnitude of the universe - the stars, galaxies and the barely conceivable space between them. Yet am fascinated by the infinite detail of molecules, atoms and subatomic particles with which every part of that massive universe is made. And I revel in the imagination, perfect design and humour with which everything between those extremes is made. In it all is displayed your infiniteness, power and care, written with such profligate beauty that I cannot but worship the author.

Yet I also weep and groan with your creation. For while I see "a world of transporting pleasures, ravishing beauties, and tantalising possibilities," I cannot help also seeing that it is "constantly being destroyed, all coming to nothing" (CS Lewis) and "nature red in tooth and claw" (Tennyson). I see the prints of your fingerprints in goodness and beauty, but they are marred in death, strife and selfishness, masking your love and care. The laws of thermodynamics express the mathematical image of "a good thing spoiled." I weep, for this is the "bondage to decay" to which our rebellion against you has subjected nature, until it is liberated into the freedom of your family (Ro 8:19-22)

Forgive my forebears in science for not considering the knowledge of you worth retaining (Ro 1:20-22,28), relegating you to a remote and passionless "first cause" until now a few of my peers rail against the very possibility of your existence. Forgive me for accepting for myself (and in doing that convincing others to accept it too) a false dichotomy between material and spiritual, revelation through the work of God's hands and through God's breath.

Forgive us for not seeking your face in truth and purity, but allowing your truth to be filtered by our "isms," then arguing with venom and even hatred over the conclusions our presuppositions force.

Restore to us the curiosity, joy in discovery and awe-filled wonder of childlike exploration. Yet may our reasoning, meditation and interpretation in and of that exploration be mature, rigorous and open-minded. And may our communication of our discoveries and thoughts in debate and in publication be scrupulously honest, transparent and respectful of others. May we all, with Kepler, truly "think your thoughts after you".