

Epiphany for a Small Planet

Why Theology & Science Need One Another

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Redemption of Reason Conference

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Overview

- What is the redemption of reason?
- The need to consider worldviews
- The role of Christian Scholarship
- Theology and the sciences
- Example: theology and astrobiology
 - What about life on other planets?



Redeeming Reason: Scripture

- Two Biblical Passages (e.g.):
- We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, **taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ** (2 Cor. 10:5)
- Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, **mind** and strength (Mark 12:30).



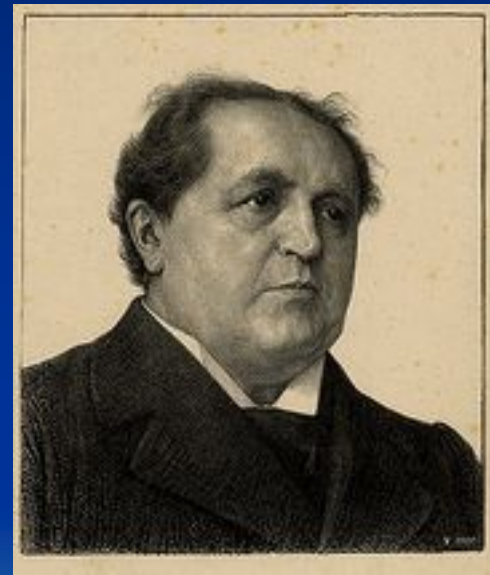
Christian Worldview

- What does it mean to redeem reason?
- 1. Re-orient reason to its proper end/goal.
- 2. Ground reason in reality (spiritual, etc)
- Christians not smarter than others!
- Needed: a Christian Worldview
 - James Orr, *A Christian View of God & the World* (1893)
 - Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism* (1899)



Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

"No single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"



Naturalism?

- Does science itself provide us with a complete worldview?
 - No; complete only in principle, in what they choose to study.
- Scientific materialism IS a worldview
 - Scientism + materialism or naturalism
 - Not the result of the sciences themselves



Theories & Worldviews

Theories and Theory Choice Paradigms

**Academic Disciplines = Traditions of Inquiry
WORLDVIEWS**

- Interpreting theories can only be done by drawing upon larger worldviews or philosophies of life



Christian Scholarship

- Or Christian Learning = the project of interpreting and forwarding arts and sciences on Christian grounds
- Some Examples of Organizations:
 - American Scientific Affiliation
 - Christians in the Visual Arts
 - Conference on Faith and History
 - Society of Christian Philosophers
 - Conference on Christianity and Literature



What is theology?

- Theology seeks to know God, and all other things (creatures) as they relate to God
 - Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*.
- Theology is not a science (English)
 - Greek, Latin, German or French, OK
 - Christian theology is grounded upon spiritual truth and supernatural revelation.
- Three domains or levels:
 - Theology in praxis
 - Theology as worship, preaching, liturgy, prayer
 - Theology as an academic discipline (“science”)



Theology as Worship

- “Divine theology brings into harmony the voices of those who praise God’s majesty.”
 - Diadochus of Photike (*Philokalia*, vol. 1)
- Praise and Worship seeks the truth
 - Unlike flattery or marketing!
- It is lived out in all we do, including our academic callings/vocations



Theology v. Science

- The aims and methods are distinct, as with most academic disciplines (“sciences”).
- Christian Doctrine: Study of God & other things primarily in relation to God.
- Natural science: Study of natural things (living and inorganic) according to natural properties and explanations.
 - Draws upon empirical evidence, natural explanations, laws and principles of nature.



Mutuality of Theology & Science

- Theology needs Christian Scholarship
 - Doctrine of creation, e.g., needs to connect to sciences, art.
 - Theologians need Christian scholarship on the arts and sciences
- Christian scholars in the arts and sciences need theology
 - Christian doctrine helps us to understand, develop and update core concepts in our Christian worldview.



Are We Alone in the Universe?

An Example from Astrobiology

Advent, Christmas, Epiphany

- Liturgy from the “Great Thanksgiving”:

Grateful as we are

For the world we know

And the universe beyond our reach,

We particularly praise you,

Whom eternity cannot contain,

For coming to earth and entering time in Jesus



What about SETI?

- SETI = Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence
- Is there life on other planets?
- Are we alone in a cold, dark, vast swirl of meaningless matter & time?
- Or may the Universe be bio-friendly?
- Could the purpose of the Universe be (in part) to bring forth life in vast array?



Stephen Weinberg

- ◆ Nobel prize 1979; physicist & author
- ◆ "the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless" (*First Three Minutes*)
- ◆ "The more we refine our understanding of God to make the concept plausible, the more it seems pointless" (*Dreams of a Final Theory*)

New Views: Bio-friendly Universe?

- Fine-tuning arguments from cosmology
 - The universe seems pre-programmed for life
- Life found in extreme conditions on earth
 - Glaciers of Antarctica
 - Miles below the ocean's surface, at the deep dark high-pressure bottom of the ocean ("black smokers").
- Life may exist in various forms throughout the Universe (De Duve, Dyson)



ET or Jesus?

- Assume there is intelligent life on other planets, for the sake of argument.
 - What does this mean theologically?
- We don't have to give up biblical Christology, or a real Incarnation.
 - Cf. Arthur Peacocke: radically alter our “traditional Christian paradigms” including the significance of Jesus Christ.
- Why is he wrong?



Christology and Imagination

- Need to enlarge our Christian imagination, and re-think our Biblical interpretation.
- Science fiction explores this already:
 - C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*
 - Maria D. Russell, *The Sparrow*
 - Very different worldviews expressed!
- Christians will insist that the Blessed Trinity is the one true God of all the Universe



The Creator we know in Jesus

- The God we know in Christ is the one true God for all living things in the cosmos.
- Size does not matter to Unbounded Being
 - Nor does the amount of time for that matter
 - A single child may be more valuable than a supernova!
- The immensity of deep time may be necessary for life to evolve
- God will relate to different beings in different ways



Epiphany for a Small Planet

- The infinite God of the Universe comes to us as a human in the womb of Mary
- We don't know how God will deal with intelligent beings on other planets.
 - God is radically free and highly creative
 - We cannot predict how God the Trinity will deal with other intelligent life (cf. angels)
 - Not stuck in an incarnation/crucifixion cycle.
- All of God's actions are and will be fair, just, and life-giving — for we know the true God in Christ.

