

Introduction to Christianity and Science: Fresh Perspectives Special Issue

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In opening, I wish to express my great appreciation to the editors of the *Religions* journal for inviting me to serve as guest editor for this Special Issue on Christianity and Science. As the founding director of one of the few graduate programs in the United States on science and religion, I have had the opportunity to study and interact with a wide range of views in this interdisciplinary field. As many positions are already well represented in both scholarly and popular works, for this Special Issue, I invited contributions from scholars whose prior peer-reviewed works (and articles here) present fresh perspectives to stimulate dialogue and to encourage further progress.

Christianity and science have an extended and rich interaction, much more deep and profound than what contemporary stereotypes capture. Historians of science have shown that the popular warfare model is overly simplistic and incorrect in many details, and that a largely collegial dialogue between theologians and scientists has been ongoing for centuries (Ferngren 2013; Numbers 2009). This issue seeks, in a small way, to expand upon and promote these findings.

Michael Keas (Keas, 2021) explores the contemporary perpetuation of the warfare myth, documenting the distorted depiction of Christianity and science in mass media and popular culture, such as the *Cosmos* TV series. He notes that the core tension which fuels the warfare thesis involves scientism (the belief that only the sciences provide true knowledge for rational belief) versus theism. He documents popular scientism as a competing religious view promising a future utopia, and even a savior of sorts through contact with advanced extraterrestrial civilizations who will help us solve all of our problems and, perhaps, even enable us to live forever.

Recognizing that the current tensions between science and Christianity are fundamentally religious in nature is not new to this Special Issue. Michael Ruse (Ruse, 2021) has written to this point on several occasions (Ruse 2003, 2017) and, in this issue, he offers a personal reflection on the scientific questions that he, as an agnostic, finds challenging to both traditional and personal Christian beliefs.

Other contributions to this Special Issue offer a fresh perspective on critical science and theology questions. Michael Flannery's article on Alfred Russel Wallace (Flannery, 2020a) seeks to clear the fog and misrepresentations surrounding the forgotten co-discoverer (with Charles Darwin) of natural selection, and highlights his little-known role as a natural theologian and proponent of intelligent evolution. Wallace's perspective is especially interesting, as Flannery's second article (Flannery, 2020b) expands, because the notion of direction and purpose in nature (teleology), even at strong levels, was thought to be banished by Darwin, but still is influential and functional in biology today. Perhaps an approach more reflective of Wallace's, rather than Darwin's, metaphysics would be more fruitful in biology?

Although science purports to be religiously neutral, Cornelius Hunter offers two examples where this is not the case: The first (Hunter, 2020) is Darwin's own assumptions in *Origin of Species* about what a Creator would or would not do, which he contrasted with natural selection to power his thesis. The second (Hunter, 2021) covers contemporary examples where theistic creation models are defeated by Darwinistic models that make strikingly naive assumptions about how a Creator would work. Once recognized, these straw man (or rather, "straw God") arguments appear to lose their force in eliminating any role for a Creator to influence nature.

The final two papers in this Special Issue offer a perspective on what a Christian worldview offers the scientist. Dana Johnson (Johnson, 2021) documents the little-known scientific work of the famous American theologian Jonathan Edwards, illustrating how Edwards' expectation that God's order, beauty, and goodness should be evident in Creation, can be applied fruitfully in modern chemistry research. Hugh Ross' review (Ross, 2021) of astrophysics research into supermassive black holes illustrates the Anthropic Principle: the expectation that our environment is specially crafted and protected for human life to flourish. While often dismissed by secularists who say, "if it were not this way, we would not be here

to wonder about it”, the increasing levels of fine-tuning that we are discovering seem to beg for another interpretation.

My hope as guest editor of this Special Issue is that readers will appreciate that the study of nature is fundamentally both a religious and a scientific quest, whether undertaken with materialist, theist, or other theological assumptions. Both historically and in modern times, this range of theological perspectives generated—and generates—a complex diversity of views that should caution us about accepting the simplistic, dismissive stories we often hear in textbooks and media. Moreover, I hope that this issue encourages others to welcome a variety of perspectives on Christianity and science for the fresh insights they offer, as we seek to better understand the world around us and its significance.

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