SCIENCE AND CHRISTIANITY: POSITIVE HISTORICAL MODELS FOR INTERACTION

Michael K. Wanous
Department of Biology
Augustana College
Sioux Falls, SD 57197

ABSTRACT

Despite the reigning model for conflict between science and religion, there is a rich history of principles developed by Christian thinkers and scientists reflecting a productive interaction between these two distinct avenues in the human search for truth. Starting with the earliest Church Fathers, models were developed over time for positive Christian engagement with natural philosophy and scientific discovery. Contributions were made by Basil the Great, Augustine, Roger Bacon, Francis Bacon and Galileo, among others. Four models that emerged were the Handmaiden Formula; the Two Books; How To Go To Heaven—How the Heavens Go; and All Truth is God’s Truth. Science (natural philosophy) was long regarded as a field providing valuable service to theology, as embodied in the Handmaiden Formula. The Two Books model proposed that God has revealed himself through two books—nature and scripture. These two books, authored by the same person, provide complementary insights about God. Galileo’s famous quote that scripture teaches us “how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go” was an elaboration on the Two Books model, refining what kind of knowledge can be found in the two different books. Finally, The All Truth is God’s Truth model derived from the concept that if God is creator of all, then any truth about nature that is discovered is from God, and should not threaten religion. Of course, reading of both books is subject to human interpretation undergoing continual development, so some lack of harmony is to be expected. These historical models provide valuable perspective for the current interactions between science and religion.
Four historical models of Christian theological engagement with Islam represent a broad spectrum across which Christian theologians have accounted for the church’s relationships with Islamic thought as they have perceived it. The four are the polemical, the Scholastic, the Christian inclusivist, and the dialogical. John of Damascus (c. 655–750), sometimes called the last of the classical church fathers, is a fine example of a polemical model. In the following two chapters, an exploration of five features of the vast histories of Islam and Christianity will bring to the fore the diversity of Islam and Christianities. First, at the heart of both communities we find not only bedrock figures who embody the tradition, but foundational texts as well. Carol Cleland and historical science. Geology has begun to interest philosophers of science. This is notable; for many years, philosophers saw physics as the prototypical science and left philosophizing about geology to geologists (e.g. G.G. Simpson, S.J. Gould). In short, experimental science had failed to live up to its early promise as a model for all science. In other words, scientists are not AI (artificial intelligence) truth machines. Biblical Christianity created the intellectual conditions for science, and only biblical Christianity can save science, since science cannot survive the collapse of normative truth and ethics.