

WORLDS APART: The Unholy War Between Religion and Science by Karl Giberson. Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1993. 224 pages, index. Paperback.

RELIGION CONFRONTING SCIENCE: And There Was Light by Donivan Bessinger. Greenville, SC: Orchard Park Press, 1991. 160 pages, glossary, index. Paperback; \$10.95.

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The desire to help subsets of the Christian community to relate their faith to contemporary science continues to inspire efforts by writers from diverse disciplines. The contributions of Nazarene physicist Giberson and Episcopalian surgeon Bessinger come out of a desire to clarify the science-religion question, first for their church and then for a wider audience. My interest in this review deals with both the subject matter and the strategies used with faith communities who might be expected to have differing attitudes toward science and the Bible.

Curiously, each author finds himself a radical in his community. Giberson (according to the Forward) wants the freedom to follow the canons of science "without being restricted by scientifically untutored theologians" while Bessinger suggests that his approach may "raise some orthodox eyebrows." Bessinger's religious foil is the fundamentalist literalist while Giberson spends much of his book detailing the errors of "creation science" ways. He prefers to develop his presentation along historical lines while Bessinger, with less space available, dwells primarily on current themes.

Each author begins by defining the nature of the *conflict*. Bessinger finds that it stems from a clash of world views while Giberson sees the issue as a clash of authority, notions which are not all that far apart. It is interesting that there would be science-religion *conflict* in the typical Episcopalian church. Both authors argue the ancient notion that when Christian faith is properly understood there should be nothing but harmony with science. This may be a more eschatological vision than an existential one if history is to be believed. Bessinger finds no conflict between a religiously inspired quest for knowledge and the scientific method.

Bessinger describes world views in chronological fashion; the oldest is the ancient notion of *myth*, a sacred story (perhaps historically true) which carries profound psychological significance for human living. Then came the *alchemical* world view of the European middle ages which provided a transition leading to the *scientific* world view of today which has given vast knowledge of nature but has cut us off from the meaning and inspiration of the *mythic* world. Our challenge is to develop a new world view, a *grand synthesis*, which gives full expression to both reason and spirituality. Giberson discusses the elements involved in constructing a Christian world view along the lines of Art Holmes and Nick Wolterstoff in emphasizing the conflict inevitable when competing world views (lines of authority) clash.

Giberson follows his world view discussion with a careful historical analysis of science-religion discussion ranging from the Greek philosophers to contemporary Richard Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene*. He suggests that a contemporary world view should fall between the extremes of scientific materialism and biblical literalism a difficult line for those in denominations where theology dominates the scene.

Bessinger turns from world views to how to read scripture. Literal religionists and literal scientists are at a disadvantage. "There is more here than meets the literal eye. The unusual in scripture must be read with a *mythic* eye which offers a 'deeper and eternally new meaning.'" Moses and the burning bush can teach us "to see God in any bush, or every bush, and perhaps even to hear a divine call." His point is that Moses' spiritual experience does not conflict with what we know about science. The Genesis creation story is viewed in documentary hypothesis terms as the *Priestly* and *Yahwist* stories. The

Priestly account is seen as having more congruence with current scientific views. Discrepancies between texts or with science require us to look for sacred meanings behind the literal interpretations of the words. The strange physics of small particles, the very fine tuning of physical laws to allow the development of physical life, and the probability of a multi-dimensional universe and energy-matter interconversion help to frame a new picture which fits reasonable well with the Priestly account.

Cosmology for Bessinger has had a better relationship with the church than biology. He suggests that current science and the anthropic principle offer a far more complete picture than that found in the Genesis accounts on biological evolution and the interactions among all forms of life. If natural selection makes it difficult to identify design, it may be seen at the level of "life principles." Evolution "pulls" rather than "pushes" the development of life forms. He suggests that a mystical view of religion, more focused on relationships with the divine than on literalistic doctrine, can see the possibility of a triumphant convergence of all things into a divine unity for example, Teilhard de Chardin.

Giberson spends little time on evolution. He accepts the notion that it is the only game in town, yet recognizes that it has many deep problems. He warns his audience against settling for a theological explanation when a scientific explanation is incomplete. He too, is impressed with the anthropic principle seeing it as "but one example of a kind of fruitful dialogue that could exist between science and religion if both could treat their methods as plowshares capable of tilling the same soil." He appeals to the new ideas stemming from physics that force scientists into considering issues which previously were exclusively theological. Giberson adopts a complementarian approach which views the world from two perspectives, one dealing with detail, the other with purpose. One- dimensional approaches such as that of scientific materialism or creationism give only one part of the story.

Bessinger too argues that quantum mechanics is pointing to the existence of a reality beyond the reach of science. He interprets scripture as requiring an intuitive method for sensing the divine rather than a cognitive method of reason in examining the material world.

Giberson writes in an autobiographical fashion as one who has dealt with the issues from within the Nazarene community. Bessinger personalizes his experience in terms of his medical experience.

This reviewer came away from this study with a renewed appreciation for the diversity of ways in which the Christian can develop a world view which takes into account both God and nature. I suspect that Giberson's *Worlds Apart* will be more transferable to evangelicals. Bessinger's *Confronting Science* deals with Scripture in a way that is more acceptable to main-line church communities. Each of these inexpensive works can provide material for Sunday school classes and small group discussions for the lay community.

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DIVINE WILL AND THE MECHANICAL PHILOSOPHY by Margaret J. Osler. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 284 + xi pages, with bibliography, index. Hardcover. *PSCF* 47 (December 1995): 271.

The contributions of Galileo and Newton to the development of mechanics are known by those with even passing familiarity with physics. The present book, subtitled "Gassendi and Descartes on Contingency and Necessity in the Created World," is devoted to two other thinkers of the seventeenth century who were precursors of classical mechanics. Margaret Osler, of the University of Calgary, deals with their differing views on matter and scientific method. She especially emphasizes the ways in