
Introduction

You may be among those who have religious beliefs which you value dearly, and have been trained in the method of science and scientific knowledge for which you have great respect. These two systems of thought often seem not just non-supportive of each other but actually contradictory. It is for you especially that this book is written. I believe that the attempt to integrate these two systems should be made, and I believe that I have been at least partly successful in this attempt. If so, the concepts here outlined and the evidence behind them should come as a relief to you.

You may have come from a background where science was valued and religion, or at least theology, much less so. If so, you may be surprised to learn that theology has something worthwhile to say to science, and that it can make testable predictions (some of which actually have the weight of evidence supporting them, and which would not have been made from a point of view which only values the current “orthodox” view of science). I believe that the book makes a reasonable case for this statement.

You may have been taught that science could not usefully supplement the truths of revelation, or perhaps the subject was not even addressed and it was simply assumed that theology had no real need for science. I intend to reasonably demonstrate that science, and in particular scientific methodology, can make a real contribution to theology. But first I should point out that such a contribution needs to be made.

It is tempting to say that all we must do is to believe. The question then comes, believe what? We can believe what our particular denomination says. But how do we know that our denomination has the truth, rather than some other? And what do we do if our denomination splits into two or more parts? Does the majority vote win? Do we go with the one which our particular congregation chose? Most of us would not be satisfied with these kinds of answers. There must be some more objective way of deciding the question.

Perhaps we should follow the Bible, and go with the denomination that most closely follows its teachings. But then how do we interpret the Bible? That question is one of the major driving forces behind the splintering of Christianity into denominations. And why pick the Bible at all? Why not use the Vedas, or the Qur'an (or Koran), or some other holy book? Or why not, as secular humanism has done, dispense with holy books altogether?

In asking the questions, I am not saying that there are no answers, or even that we cannot find them. But I am pointing out that they need to be addressed, and that we cannot simply assume the validity of the Bible without further discussion as to why and in what way it is valid.

There is another way of dealing with the problem of what one should believe, especially tempting to those who are sick of all the fighting, bigotry, greed, duplicity, and assorted evils that often attend religious controversies. It is to say that what counts is to be decent people, and that church doctrines really don't matter and fighting over them is a sin. I'll believe what I want to believe, you believe what you want to believe, and if we just treat each other like Christians, we'll all be just fine.

There is a lot of truth in this. I believe that if we spent as much time watching the tone in our voices when we discussed doctrines or church politics as we do defending the positions we took, we would be far ahead of where we are now. Many debates would change into constructive sessions, and we could find solutions for most of the problems that divide us.

But there are some serious flaws in this position. First, and easiest to remedy, is the fact that the idea that we should treat each other like Christians is nothing more or less than a doctrine. Most Christian churches profess this doctrine. At least one doctrine must be allowed. In order to avoid this criticism, the position must be modified, somewhat like this: The only really important doctrine is that we should treat each other like Christians. Any other doctrine is not worth worrying about. You can believe whatever else you like as long as you treat your fellow humans decently.

But now a second flaw must be considered. What does it mean to treat each other like Christians? We will get different answers from different Christians. For example, some fundamentalists will say that we should not engage in premarital sex, but it is all right to pass laws demanding the death penalty for certain crimes, whereas many more liberal Christians would say that premarital sex can be a very positive experience, and the death penalty is as unchristian as you can get. Clearly, they both can't be right. If one is to mean anything by the call to act like a Christian, one must specify what Christian actions are. We cannot treat each other like Christians without a system of ethics.

Nor will a common perversion of the Golden Rule — "Do unto others as they wish to have it done unto them" — suffice for the foundation of ethics. First, it is not Christian. Jesus Himself said some things to the Pharisees and lawyers in Luke 11 that I am sure most of them did not want to hear. Second, it is not practical. There are many times when people have conflicting wishes, and this ethic gives us no guidance in choosing the proper course of action in these instances. Third, it is not humane. There are times when, for example, an alcoholic should not be given what he obviously desires at that moment, because his desires are not in line with his own future happiness, let alone anyone else's. We have to do unto others, not as they wish, but as we would (or more properly, should) wish to have it done to us if we were in their place. That is, we should work for their best good. But this concept requires us to have some idea of what is good for people. We have discovered that philosophy enters the picture.

This brings us to the final flaw in the position we have been examining. It assumes that other doctrines have nothing to do with whether we behave like Christians. I think this assumption is highly improbable. How do you, for example, urge good Jews

and good Moslems in the Middle East to “act like Christians” without changing their theology? The concept of holy war is a part of both systems.¹ As William Hordern put it so succinctly, “Christian theology is nothing more or less than the attempt to change the thinking of men so that they will act as Christians.”² We do not have the choice between theology and no theology. If we wish to have any kind of morality, we only have the choice between muddled theology and theology that is more clearly thought out.

So we really cannot avoid tackling some controversial theological questions. Does God ever intervene in history? How dependable is inspiration? Is Evolution compatible with the Bible? If so, how? If not, which is right? What is the relationship between divine foreknowledge and human freedom? What must I do to be saved (or can I be saved)? Does God torture people in Hell forever? If so, how can this be justified? If not, what does God do?

It may not be possible to settle all of these questions to the satisfaction of everyone. I am certain that it cannot be done in the space that follows. What I will do is to introduce you to a method of solving such questions that can provide a basis for action, while still allowing for the possibility of future correction. It can also allow one to see marked similarities in apparently contradictory theological positions, while highlighting differences which at first seem minor. The rest of this book will describe what I choose to call scientific theology and to explore some applications. Then you, the reader, may judge whether this method is worthy of your trust.

¹ The current peace process demonstrates, if anything, the decline of the power of both fundamentalist Moslem and Jewish convictions, and at least in part demonstrates the rising power of a secular humanism somewhat influenced by a Christian understanding of love to one’s neighbor.

² *A Layman’s Guide to Protestant Theology* Revised edition. London, The Macmillan Company, 1968, p. xv.