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McGrath's "Enriching our vision of reality: Theology and the natural sciences in dialogue" (book review)

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Book Reviews



McGrath, A. (2017). *Enriching our vision of reality: Theology and the natural sciences in dialogue*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press. 215 pp. \$14.95. ISBN 9781599475349

Alister McGrath serves as the Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion and as Director of the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion at Oxford University. His thesis in *Enriching Our Vision of Reality*, is that “both the sciences and theology *on their own* run the risk of offering us a limited and deficient account of our world, lacking any sense of depth” (p. viii). In support of this thesis he asserts that the aim of the book is “to help both theologians and scientists to integrate their ideas into a richer whole, allowing them a stereoscopic view of a rightly textured and complex world” (p. viii). Moreover, he desires that the cultural perception concerning the relationship between science and faith would change.

The intended audience is not an academic or professional immersed in the fields of science and theology. Instead, McGrath desires to reach a wider audience, particularly “scientists with an interest in theology and theologians aware of the importance of the natural sciences” (p. viii). For McGrath “science and religion are so important that they can’t afford not to talk to each other” (p. 183).

McGrath describes that 1971 was an important year personally as atheism no longer was the only viable intellectual option for determining truth, in fact, Christianity “made much more sense of things than atheism” (p. vii). Arriving at such a claim was surprising given his devotion to molecular quantum theory and biological sciences as a student at Oxford University. During this year, he asserts that, “I began to see things in a new way, as if my eyes had been opened” (p. vii). For McGrath, tension between science and Christian theology would remain, however “more often they could enhance each other’s grasp of reality and open up a deeper vision of life” (p. vii). This book is a traveler’s guide to the new world he discovered in the 1970s.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part is devoted to answering questions as they relate to the relationship between natural science and Christian theology, which includes creating a space that “allows the nature, limits and benefits of their [natural science and Christian theology] interaction to be grasped” (p. 3). Part two considers three individuals that have made a significant contribution to the

discussion concerning science and theology: “The theoretical chemist Charles A. Coulson, the theologian Thomas F. Torrance and the physicist John Polkinghorne” (p. 26). Part three considers six areas of dialogue where natural science and Christian theology “can open up a richer and deeper vision of our world and our place within it” (p. 78).

In order to address the conflict between the natural sciences and Christian theology, McGrath appeals to the wisdom of the “European Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which saw the natural sciences and Christian theology, when rightly understood, as offering different yet potentially complementary insights in the nature of reality and the place of humanity in the universe” (pp. 77–78). This book achieves its agenda and provides a helpful resource for anyone seeking to further understand the relationship between the natural sciences and Christian theology. In addition, McGrath has provided detailed and thorough endnotes which support his various claims and provide resources for further study.

Reviewer

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