

## REVIEWS

# Parallels and Divergences in Christianity and Science

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THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND SCIENCE

Edited by Richard H. Bube

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In its ranks the Seventh-day Adventist church now has a modest number of scientists, nearly all of whom have been raised in the church but have taken their advanced training in public universities or in private universities with no particular religious emphasis. Although few have attained great scientific distinction, Adventist scientists represent a technically competent group capable of experiencing their own encounter between Christianity and Science. The early development of Seventh-day Adventism took place during a period when this encounter was proceeding with great vigor. Consequently, it is not surprising that the inspired counsels of Ellen White include a significant body of material that has served as a basis for the church's historical position in this area.

In the course of their education and experience, today's Adventist scientists have found that this historical position is not always adequate to meet the challenges of current scientific thought and knowledge. Scientists of other relatively conservative or evangelical groups have faced or are facing similar problems. Although published several years ago, *The Encounter between Christianity and Science* represents a response of current interest from one group of competent scientists who are also convinced Christians.

### I

Bube (recently appointed editor also of the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*) is an able spokesman for the viewpoint that he represents. He contributes the book's four opening chapters — "The Nature of Science," "The Nature of Christianity," "Natural Revelation," and "Biblical Revelation" — and in them presents his view of the nature of Science and of Christianity and their relation to revelation.

I enjoyed particularly his discussion of the nature of Science. He says something I have tried many times to say about the so-called "scientific method," but he manages to phrase it much better than I ever have: "A mythology of the scientific method has developed in which 'the method' is pictured as a kind of efficient machine. If observations are poured into one end and the crank is turned, the method automatically produces valid and useful results from the other. There *are* scientific methods. Of more

importance, however, is the scientific attitude or frame-of-mind. The work of science is done by people and not by some automatic process. It is carried on with liberal doses of intuition, frustration, hard work and dogged persistence" (p. 20).

Bube views Science as a way of life that must be lived to be understood fully. He draws a parallel between the scientist as a member of his community and the Christian as a member of his community; and he bases a call for mutual understanding on the many similarities he finds in these experiences. Perhaps one of the most striking parallels noted is that of the constant exercise of faith. The individual scientist accepts much information by faith and many concepts on the basis of trust in the testimony of others. The proposition that the natural world can be described in an orderly fashion through the application of precise language is also viewed by Bube as an article of scientific faith.

Bube challenges the air of finality and assurance often conveyed by the assertion that something is a "scientific fact" or a "scientific law." He emphasizes the tentative and transient nature of some scientific "facts," but claims that this is not an argument against the general validity of scientific endeavor. Further, he makes the point that "normally science is not advanced by the discovery that a whole field of knowledge must suddenly be discarded as completely unreliable" (p. 35). However, he recognizes that a new model may need to be constructed; this is the approach suggested by some Adventist apologists in dealing with several problems in Science and Christianity.

In discussing the nature of Christianity, Bube clearly reveals himself as an evangelical Protestant with a deep personal commitment to Christ: "Success in science is achieved by coming to know things, whereas 'success' in Christianity is the result of knowing a person, that unique person, Jesus Christ" (p. 43). Bube believes in a Jesus Christ who provides deliverance from the power of sin and forgiveness for the guilt of sins — a Jesus who came as God and who died and rose again that man might be restored to fellowship with God.

Bube also discusses what he calls caricatures of Christianity. Among them his discussion of the "God of the Gaps" particularly interested me. "It has been natural for man to assign God as the direct and immediate cause for all the unknown and unexplainable phenomena of his experience. . . . As time passes and knowledge increases, the number of phenomena that defy natural explanation decreases. Thus there is a tendency to push the relevance of God and His activity into ever decreasing orbs of influence, to confine God to the gaps of ignorance" (p. 60). Bube believes that the biblical view is quite contrary to this and that God's power is manifest in every aspect of nature: "If we know that a force called gravity keeps the planets in their orbits, this does not remove God from the picture; it adds the how to the Who" (p. 61). (Ellen G. White's comments are in harmony with this view.<sup>1</sup>) He goes on: "If we suspect that God worked through processes interpreted as evolution by biologists to accomplish His purposes in creation, we have not minimized the creative power of God" (p. 61). Obviously, Mrs. White and Seventh-day Adventists in general would not find this extension of Bube's viewpoint acceptable.

In the third chapter Bube addresses himself to the question of what kind of understanding of God can be obtained through a study of the natural world. Starting from Paul's statements in Romans 1:20-22, he develops what he believes to be a Christian

approach to natural revelation: that there is indeed strong evidence for the power and existence of God in the natural world, but that such evidence may be interpreted otherwise by one who has not yet met God in Jesus Christ. Consequently, he returns to an emphasis on knowledge of God obtained through the Bible and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as the true basis for an understanding of natural revelation.

Part of the groundwork for Bube's resolution of conflicts between natural revelation and biblical revelation is also laid out in the third chapter. Science — the investigation and communication of natural revelation — is held to be "concerned primarily with the immediate or secondary causes of events. The Biblical revelation on the other hand speaks primarily of the ultimate causes of events. Apparent conflicts between the interpretation of the natural revelation (science) and the interpretation of the Biblical revelation (theology) have often arisen because of an attempt to find ultimate causes in nature (i.e., to subordinate the Biblical revelation to the natural revelation) or of an attempt to find secondary mechanisms in the Bible (i.e., to subordinate the natural revelation to the Biblical revelation). The two revelations *are* different in purpose, in scope, and in means of apprehension. Failure to recognize, however, that the two revelations are complementary and not contradictory is a constant source of confusion" (pp. 69-70).

How miracles relate to natural revelation also receives Bube's attention: "The proper way to think of miracles is not as a suspension of natural law by God, but rather as the utilization by God of a mechanism about which we are ignorant" (p. 77).

Bube argues that man does not possess a soul or a spirit that is independent of his body. Rather, man's spiritual capabilities are viewed as the result of complex interactions of the many parts of which man is composed. Although this view has some elements in common with Adventist theology, his further use of it does not. For example, this suggestion is regarded as resolving the question "If man's body was formed through an evolutionary process, when was man's spirit created?"

In his fourth chapter on biblical revelation, Bube comes to the heart of some of the great issues inevitably raised in the encounter between Christianity and Science. Leading men to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is presented as a principal purpose of biblical revelation. To reveal much about the nature of God and the nature of man, and their interrelationships, is also, he believes, the intent of the Bible. Adventists can hardly fault him thus far.

On the nature of biblical inspiration, his position is not much different from that generally adopted by Adventists on the basis of Ellen White's statements.<sup>2</sup> Bube believes that "no single mechanism of inspiration seems to suit all instances of Biblical writing. . . . A kind of dynamic inspiration seems most suitable, a special guidance by God without violation of the individuality or personality of the author" (pp. 89-90).

In arriving at his solution to the major problems of the encounter between Christianity and Science, Bube diverges from general Adventist viewpoints: "Understanding the revelational content of the Bible means getting out of the Bible what God put there by inspiration. Understanding the revelational purpose of the Bible means asking the right questions to find out what God put there. . . . The right questions are essentially theological questions, taking that term in its broadest sense to include ques-

tions about the nature of God, the nature of man, the relationship between God and man, and the relationships between man and man in the fulfillment of the God-to-man relationship. The wrong questions are those that seek to establish natural mechanisms for God's activity by looking for these mechanisms in the Bible; there is no information in the Bible, for example, that is either in favor of or opposed to theories of organic evolution" (p. 97). How a man of Bube's apparently strong Christian convictions can make this last statement is doubtless mystifying to most Adventist-oriented minds. However, we must remember the major impact Ellen White's writings have on Adventist thought on these matters. Of course, our arguments for Sabbath-keeping are also based in no small measure on an interpretation of the revelational intent of Genesis 1 and 2 and Exodus 20, which Bube obviously does not accept.

Inevitably, Bube discusses the classic conflict between biblical revelation and Science involved in Galileo's defense of the concept of a heliocentric universe. "It is clear to us today . . . that the mistake of the church fathers was to ask the wrong questions of the Biblical revelation. Having asked the wrong questions and received a false concept of the revelational content, they were forced to the paradoxical impasse of facing a contradiction between God's Natural revelation and God's Biblical revelation" (p. 100). It is tempting to speculate where Seventh-day Adventists would have stood in this controversy had they been around at the time. However, we should be careful not to exaggerate the significance of this controversy. To my mind, it does not afford a very good parallel to the evolution-creation controversy — either in terms of the extent of the biblical reinterpretation necessary to resolve it or in terms of the implications of such reinterpretation.

Bube concludes this chapter by summarizing his views on the general issues of evolution and creation. He simply accepts what he believes to be well-established scientific positions on the great age of the earth and the special theory of evolution. He is less convinced about the general theory of evolution, which he considers a speculative working hypothesis, and discounts evolutionism as not being a scientific position. He regards any apparent disagreement between his views and biblical revelation as due to failure to ask questions consistent with the revelational purpose of the biblical author involved. Thus, for example, he asks (on Moses): "Is it really consistent with the testimony of the Bible about the purposes for which it was written to demand that the Genesis accounts be intended to convey information about the mechanisms of creative activity? Is it not much more in keeping with the whole tenor of Biblical revelation to see in these accounts the triumphant proclamation of God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and of man as the highest creation of God, destined for a life dedicated to serving God but fallen into the depths of sin by substitution of self for God at the center of life?" (p. 107).

Bube closes with a rather specific statement of his position: "The answers to evolutionary questions are not to be found in Genesis. Present interpretations of the paleontological record may or may not accurately describe the mechanisms involved in the origin of man. But such answers as will be forthcoming on these problems will come from scientific studies. The Christian must not react in fear to the fossil record. The reliability of the Bible and the vitality of a life with Jesus Christ do not depend in any way on the proof or the disproof of even the general theory of evolution" (p. 107). This posture for an evangelical Christian is an intriguing one that easily pro-

vokes various lines of thought leading to vigorous rebuttals, particularly among those of us who hold historical Seventh-day Adventist views.

## II

I have devoted a disproportionate amount of this review to Bube's portion of the book, because he deals in general terms with the major issues which the other authors then amplify in various areas of science. For this reason (though not wishing to do them an injustice), I will not attempt to review the discussions of the other authors in detail but will only comment on some of them.

In the chapter on *astronomy*, Owen Gingerich deals with the problems of the nature and origin of the universe. Adventist thought has developed some solutions in this area, but Gingerich discusses some problems that Adventists have not considered very seriously. Evangelists have often used the wonders of the starry heavens in an effort to impress audiences with the majesty and power of God. This device may be quite appropriate, but usually it ignores interesting questions about God's creative activity which can be raised by many details of our knowledge of astronomy, at least in certain idealized versions of a perfect creation.

The chapter on *geology* by F. Donald Eckelmann is disappointing. There is little real analysis of the geological evidence for evolution; the author tends to appeal largely to scientific authority. He does discuss the evolution of man and concludes that "organic evolution has been verified with sufficient evidence to justify scientific acceptance . . . and applies to man. . . . Adam is representative of all men. The fall represents universal sin and imperfection in humanity. . . . Acceptance of paleontological evidence bearing on mechanisms of organic development in no way conflicts with our personal confidence that the Biblical records are completely trustworthy in all matters of 'faith and practice' " (pp. 168-169).

Again, Walter R. Hearn's chapter on *biological science* is largely uncritical of current evolutionary thought in biology. Rather, it is devoted to a brief and (in my view) unconvincing exposition of the validity of the theory of evolution by natural selection. "In the opinion of the author of this chapter, opposition on Biblical grounds to the theory of evolution by natural selection is unwarranted and actually harmful to Christianity" (p. 220). He regards Henry M. Morris, coauthor of *The Genesis Flood* and author of *The Twilight of Evolution*, as a well-meaning and intelligent Christian who has become convinced by his own arguments that evolutionary thinking is completely contrary to science as well as to biblical revelation. Without necessarily implying endorsement of Morris's arguments, one might suggest that Hearn is also a well-meaning and intelligent Christian — but that he uncritically accepts evolutionary arguments that go considerably beyond the demonstrated facts, and he disregards many major scientific problems of the evolutionary hypothesis.

In addition to the four general chapters, Bube contributes a chapter on *physical science*. He points out that common sense may be adequate as an approach to both the physical and the spiritual world, and he finds interesting relationships between physical scientists and theologians in the way in which they attempt to use ordinary words or phrases to express ideas that transcend common sense. Bube analyzes the collapse of classical determinism and then proceeds to relate the new indeterminism to the questions of chance and providence. A successful analysis of these questions

(in Bube's view) is that of W. G. Pollard in *Chance and Providence*. Bube surveys this book briefly and agrees with Pollard that God's providential activity as commonly viewed by Christians can be better reconciled with the modern evidence for statistical processes in nature than with the viewpoint of classical determinism. In the physical concept of complementarity (particle and wave are complementary when applied to light, for example), Bube finds a parallel to some of Christianity's apparent paradoxes.

The chapters on *psychology* and *social science* also offer some useful thoughts on the relationship of these areas to Christianity. Since I feel much less secure in these sciences, I do not propose to review these chapters. (This should not be construed to imply that I consider myself an authority in the areas I have chosen to examine.)

### III

This review is not the place to elaborate my own views on the general issues raised in this volume, but let me make a point or two in conclusion. Adventist scientists who have looked at the facts and issues raised in this volume are well aware of the many problems raised in the encounter between Christianity and Science. Two types of reactions usually occur, one frequently labeled conservative and the other liberal.

The "conservative" viewpoint tends to accept biblical revelation as being as literally scientifically true as possible within reason and common sense. The approach to apparently conflicting scientific data is to attempt to prove it wrong in some way. This approach is not as unscientific as the "liberals" would tend to suggest — as even Bube more or less concedes (p. 106). Those who have concerns and ideas in these areas should be encouraged and supported as long as they follow sound scientific principles in testing their hypotheses. There is nothing unscientific about testing a hypothesis developed on the basis of an interpretation of biblical revelation. Many scientific hypotheses have been developed on a much flimsier basis!

The "liberal" viewpoint tends to move to various degrees in the direction followed by Bube and his colleagues. Perhaps the greatest significance of his book is to show that such movement does not necessarily require the abandonment of basic Christian convictions. But those who choose to move down this path must surely be concerned about the impact on their own personal Christian experience. It seems to me only appropriate that they should maintain also a frankly critical attitude to the scientific evidence rather than what sometimes appears to be an overzealous espousal of current and possibly transitory scientific views. It should be possible to develop a viewpoint considerably more compatible with current Adventist theology and well-established scientific facts than that offered by Bube's book. In fact, a few such suggestions have been made, but not generally discussed nor adequately analyzed yet.

My greatest concern is that both groups and those who stand somewhere between (where I place myself!) be tolerant of each other in the best spirit of Christian love. Let each man seek truth, but not disparage or disregard the insights of another. And may God guide us all.

### REFERENCES

- 1 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume eight (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1948), p. 259.

- 2 White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1948), pp. v-xii.  
White, *Selected Messages*, book one (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association 1958), pp. 15-23.

## Theology and Comedy

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### THE FEAST OF FOOLS

By Harvey Cox

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More than anything else Harvey Cox wants to get several theological and social movements to sit down at his *Feast of Fools*. He wants the death-of-God theologians to break bread with those propounding the theology of hope, and he wants the neo-mystics or hippies to celebrate with the militants or radical-revolutionaries. He thinks that festivity and fantasy will bring the death-of-God theologians and hippies, who are absorbing the present, into fellowship with the theologians of hope and the militants, who are busy creating a new future.

Because festivity draws men away from their ordinary lives into a new existence, it appeals to the hippies. Because festivity inevitably puts value in the uncommon, the unprescribed, and the disorganized, it undermines authority and so should appeal also to the militant. If the two groups can celebrate together, the hippies will learn to "transform celebration into a way of being *in* the world, not a way of getting out of it" (p. 112), and the militants will learn that "in certain festive and fanciful moments history allows us to taste in the present the first fruits of what we hope for in the future" (p. 119).

Cox glories in the fact that his feast is a *Feast of Fools*. He lectures to the death-of-God theologians that "it is the very oddness, incredibility, and even at points weirdness of traditional faith that makes it interesting to us today" (p. 132). The clash of symbols precious to the past with experience of the present and visions of the future creates incongruities that are the essence of the comic. Cox suggests preserving these incongruities through juxtaposing symbols of the past and future with the activities of present experience. He realizes that fostering discontinuities and incongruities may result in chaos and silliness and that "the juxtapositional approach is a method for theological jesters" (p. 133). He admits there are dangers in a juxtapositional theology, just as there are in any comic style — "when comedy fails it becomes ridiculous." Still, "when comedy succeeds it shakes us into a new stance, it prepares us for new experiences" (p. 137). So Cox invites theologians announcing