

Scripture and Theology Panel 2021

Abstracts

TUESDAY, 31. August

Benedikt Göcke, Ruhr-Universität Bochum

Analytic Theology and the Philosophy of Science: Toward an All-Encompassing Theory of God, World, and Human Life

Abstract: Analytic theology is theology that is based on the assumption that God revealed Himself to humanity, and that deploys the methods of analytic philosophy to establish an all-encompassing theological theory of God, the world, and human life. Philosophy of science analyzes the presuppositions, aims, limits, methods, and the historicity of a scientific understanding of reality. Analytic theology and philosophy of science therefore refer to each other: on the one hand, because it is the aim of analytic theology to establish an all-encompassing theory of God, the world, and human life, analytic theology needs to engage in philosophy of science to account for this possibility. On the other hand, because the presuppositions, aims, limits, and methods of a scientific understanding of reality may well depend on metaphysical and theological presuppositions, philosophy of science should take account of analytic theology. I argue that based on recent debates in the philosophy of science, the attempt to develop an all-encompassing theological theory of God, the world, and human life that deploys the means of analytic philosophy not only coheres with the historicity, presuppositions, aims, limits, and methods of science, but is a genuine task of the scientific account of reality itself.

Ludger Jansen, University of Rostock

Scripture, Science, and Theology: Three Perspectives from Aquinas

Abstract: This paper describes three meta-theological perspectives to be found in Aquinas: First, theology as a fixed body of knowledge that is logically structured based on first principles that are known through divine revelation. Second, theology is a dialectical practise of teaching the truth and refuting the errors of heretics and non-believers. Third, theology is the practise of interpreting scripture. I analyse the peculiar relations between scripture, science, and theology in these three perspectives. While there seem to be some tensions between the relations identified by these perspectives, I argue that they are complementary and add up to a richer picture of theology and its relations to scripture and science.

Damiano Migliorini, Università Degli Studi Di Verona

Scientific Understanding of Homosexuality and its Challenge to Biblical Anthropology

Abstract: The discussion about homosexuality unveils a conflict between science and theology: many Christian denominations reject psychology's and

psychoanalysis' achievements. In my view, the disagreement is about 'the method' for the formulation of a biblically and scientifically informed anthropology and a correspondent moral teaching. Contemporary method appears structurally hermeneutic, and therefore without an always valid strategy. In the paper I show that theological, biblical, cultural, philosophical anthropology, human sciences, exegesis and moral, form a 'holistic system' in which, the modification of a node, affects the whole network. Homosexuality clearly shows today's difficulty of a synthesis, after the "listening" of the interdisciplinary data (that I will list and comment). Given this, in the paper I outline two models of interaction between Bible, theology and these data, showing why many theologians find it difficult to change model, and why they prefer to reject official scientific achievements.

Jan Levin Propach, University of Munich

The "Bible" of Japan's Underground Christians as an Example of religious Syncretism

Abstract: Tenchi hajimari no koto, the "Bible" of Japan's Underground Christians, is a collection of biblical stories mixed with Buddhist, Shinto, and many Japanese folk elements transmitted orally over three centuries. It is not only an impressive testimony of the history of the Japanese Church which suffered almost three centuries from persecution, but also, an example of syncretism and identity transformation of a Christian community in an ongoing involvement with their religious environment.

Michael Borowski, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

"Being human" in the life sciences: A critical assessment

Abstract: The paper explores the explicit and implicit stances on the nature and ultimate destiny of human beings as conveyed within foundational texts within the life sciences. Furthermore, it critically assesses the methodology both laid out and then applied for the justification of these stances.

It finds that the life sciences implicitly paint a coherent picture of the nature - and eventually even the ultimate destiny – of human beings, yet that this picture is not warranted by the particular methodology the life sciences claim to apply. It suggests that the life sciences are based on a particular cultural climate of "science", one that comes with both benefits and dangers for the praxis of science.

Jeanine Mukaminega, Faculté Universitaire de Théologie Protestante

Do natural sciences edify Scriptures studies? A case of the preservation and restoration theologies

Abstract: Could the preservation and restoration theologies in royal Psalms take benefit from new natural sciences concepts? One of the obvious gaps in the Psalm's studies often pointed out is about its symbols (Quesnel et al. 2018. p. 503-

504). However, incredible discomfort is related to the elucidation of the centrality of the messianic personage, -the king David-, in the Psalm book. Could a new insight which integrates the emerging theistic concepts help to handle these gaps? Otherwise, is it possible to articulate new exegetical inquiries able to meet with the emerging worldview?

Christian Pelz, University of Münster

Have courage to ignite the light of knowledge: Bible and reason as foundation of Christian theology as science in Origen and Kant

Abstract: The question about the relation between scripture and theology is crucial in Christian belief. It is a key topic in the history of Christianity. Two epochs confirm this relation in a special way. First, the relevance of the Bible in theological thinking is one of the most important issue in the beginning of Christian theology. The questions of this time have influence in philosophy and theology till today: Myth or logos? Logos or scripture? Scripture or reason? Reason or belief? Athena or Jerusalem? The discussion about the relationship between scripture and theology is representative for the general discussion about the elementary understanding of Christian theology in its very beginning. This debate about the character of Christian theology beside ancient philosophy and other explanations of the world can be declared as the starting point of scientific theology.

Benjamin Pietrenka, University of Heidelberg

(Re-)Translating Scripture in Early American Protestantism: The Ephrata Cloister and Radical German Pietists in Early America

Abstract: My paper will be devoted to the question of how the revisionary Bible translations of radical Pietism influenced Beissel and Ephrata and how these influences were carried forward by them. One area of interest will be the dynamic interrelation at Ephrata between experiential-spiritual exegesis in the tradition of the Marburger and Berleburger Bibles and a “scripturizing impulse” leading to the inspired production of quasi-scriptural texts. Another area of interest will be to trace the precise influences of apocalyptic speculations and esoterical ideas from the Marburger and Berleburger Bibles on the Ephrata corpus. Their millenarian scheme verged on the question of whether true believers could achieve complete holiness before the onset of the thousand-year reign. Here Beissel’s Sophia mysticism and ideal of perfectionism, with its Böhonian and alchemical/esoteric inflections of spiritual androgyny, contrasts sharply with Cotton Mather’s more Calvinistic Reformed view of an inchoate process of sanctification.

Charles Taylor Q&A Panel

Braden Molhoek, Graduate Theological Union

Integrating Theology and Science: Theology of Nature, Evolution, and Theological Anthropology

Abstract: This paper highlights the effectiveness of a “theology of nature” approach in relating theology and biology. After a brief examination of the approach itself, the focus will turn to utilizing this approach in the context of theological anthropology and transhumanism. This discussion serves as an example of how the biological sciences can inform theological doctrine. The paper concludes with an insight in method from Robert John Russell, specifically in what ways theology might be able to respond to or influence scientific research.

Enrico Beltramini, Notre Dame de Namur University

The Darkness that Comes Before: Semantic Apocalypse through Christian Eyes

Abstract: In this presentation, I discuss the implication for researchers of R. Scott Bakker’s notion of semantic apocalypse (similar ideas can be found in Zizek’s death of the Big Other and in some work of philosophers Paul and Patricia Churchland, Thomas Metzinger, and Ray Brassier). Much of the presentation is devoted to (1) Bakker’s idea of the logic of the disenchantment of Man as sense-maker and (2) the implication of a humanity with no intrinsic value in regard to God and His creation.

WEDNESDAY, 01 September

Elisabeth Maikranz, University of Heidelberg

Systematic Theology between Science and Scripture

Abstract: Wolfhart Pannenberg had a deep interest into the dialogue with the sciences and the scientific nature of theology. The paper will elaborate his understanding of theology as science of God and identify aspects of theology’s scientific validity which will be critically revised and asked whether they are still relevant for theology as being a part of humanities. Pannenberg does not only apply scientific criteria but develops them from within his theological thinking. He thereby establishes theology as being intrinsically scientific.

Brandon Watson, University of Heidelberg

Metaphor, Advent, and Truth: Eberhard Jüngel on the Nature of Theology

Abstract: This essay uses Eberhard Jüngel’s understanding of metaphor, advent, and truth to evaluate the relationship between theological and scientific endeavor. Taking Jüngel’s basic tenet of the experience of truth as being the central event of Christian faith, the argument will first develop a working concept of truth. The essay will then turn to an analysis of theology and its relationship to other academic disciplines. Consequently, the focus will then shift to the internal understandings and critique of the theological disciplines and how the interrelatedness thereof expresses a common truth aimed toward freedom and liberation.

Molly Manyonganise and Kudzai Biri, Zimbabwe Open University & Universität Bamberg

Heading towards the Mark of the Beast? Of Religion, Covid-19 and Vaccinations in Africa

Abstract: The paper intends to examine the way in which Covid-19 has either narrowed or widened the pre-existing conflict between science and religion particularly within the Zimbabwean context. It seeks to find out how the pandemic has challenged the African Pentecostal reliance on faith healing and miracle performance as well as influencing a theology of the end times. Such an analysis enables us to establish causal factors of vaccine hesitancy and rejection arising from a Pentecostal apocalyptic reading of the Book of Revelations especially by New Pentecostal Movements in Zimbabwe. The paper utilises public discourse as presented in sermons and the media, both print and online? Secondary sources will be used to ascertain the contemporary relationship between science and religion and how this relates to the Covid-19 context. The paper adopts the postcolonial approach as a framework to understanding the response of the NPMs to the roll out of vaccinations as mitigatory measures against the pandemic.

Stefanie Beck, University of Bamberg

The Bible and the Maasai in Tanzania

Abstract: The Bible has for the Christians in the East African country Tanzania a very central meaning. They see the Bible as the spoken word of God, which assists them in all their daily competitions. How did the Bible come to Tanzania especially to the Maasai, a nomadic tribe in the Northern part of Tanzania? - It will be given an overview how the first missionaries arrived in the Maasai Reserve and how they approached the warriors, who believe in their deity Eng'ai. Especially the Maasai women converted to the Catholicism and built up their church of women. How do they sing and praise God and Eng'ai?

Torsten Löfstedt, Linnæus University

Spiritual Warfare: A Constructive Approach

Abstract: In this paper I seek to formulate a responsible theological approach to the question of evil spiritual powers for Christians who assume the authority of scripture and who are troubled by the perceived presence of these evil powers. In the process I review problems both with approaches taken by proponents of spiritual warfare and by mainline theology and show some difficulties in moving from scripture to theology. I discuss how best to understand some key biblical passages relating to questions about evil spiritual powers and show how successive Gospels come to focus less on evil spirits and more on sin, and how they come to more clearly explain in what ways the devil is defeated through Christ's ministry, death and resurrection.

Tomas Bokedal, University of Aberdeen

The Early Rule-of-Faith Pattern and Its Links to the NT Canon Formation Process

Abstract: The paper argues that the composing, editing and stabilizing of the New Testament canon emerged in a setting where the early Rule-of-Faith pattern, or *regula fidei*, made an impact upon the text(s). This, it is argued, occurred through reference to the *regula fidei* as a criterion for canonicity, negatively (e.g., by employment of the *regula* as canon criterion), as well as positively (e.g., by directly relating the message of the Gospels with the *regula*). It further took place by close mutual connection between the editorial *nomina sacra* practice and the *regula fidei* through shared vocabulary and textuality. Typical *regula fidei* phrasings (Iren. Haer. I, 10.1; Epid. 6), such as GOD the FATHER, JESUS CHRIST, SON of GOD, Holy SPIRIT and FATHER-SON-SPIRIT, are suggested to be linked to *nomina sacra* configurations in the Scriptures (*nomina sacra* in small caps).

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Fuller Seminary

Original Sin and Fall in Light of Evolutionary Sciences

Abstract: The purpose of my presentation is to provide a critique of traditional account of the Original Sin and Fall in Christian (Western, Latin) tradition and outline a new constructive proposal as to the ways these doctrines could be conceived of after the advent of evolutionary sciences. I argue that while contemporary theology should listen carefully to the basic intentions of tradition--namely, that there is "something wrong" with us and that every new child is born into a world plagued with sinfulness--the way (especially the Christian West's) tradition formulated its ideas of the "hereditary" transmission of sin, apart from the personal responsibility of men and women, is totally unacceptable for the theology of the third millennium. I will offer a viable theological way to envision the "Fall" and "original sin" informed by evolutionary sciences and in hopes of maintaining Christian integrity.

Aaron Goldman, Lund University

Ancient Animals, the "Lottery" of Evolution, and the Destiny of *Homo sapiens*: Implications for (Evolutionary) Natural Theology from Two Paleontologists' Encounters with Burgess Shale Fossils

Abstract: Does evolutionary history have predetermined trajectories? Was *Homo sapiens* destined to evolve? Biologists' theological commitments are at stake in their answers to these questions. Based on their evaluations of ancient animals' fossilized remains from the Burgess Shale, paleontologists Stephen Jay Gould and Simon Conway Morris develop divergent interpretations of evolutionary history and its theological implications. Gould's lesson from these fossils is that evolution is driven by chance-events, leading him to conclude human beings' existence is radically contingent: evolution is a "lottery." In contradistinction, Conway Morris treats the Burgess Shale as a text on which to perform the task of theology. Its fossils demonstrate that traits such as human-like self-consciousness are inevitable.

Based on this, he draws theological conclusions pertaining to human beings' role as stewards of the Earth. Both paleontologists, I argue, engage in novel strategies of invoking evolutionary history for the purposes of constructing or critiquing natural theology.

Roger Revell, University of Cambridge

Seeing Christ in the Old Testament: Reading with and against Barth

This paper contemplates theological exegesis with attention to Karl Barth's legacy. More specially, it focuses on his christological exposition of the Old Testament. In engaging with Barth in this arena, concentration is not primarily given to his various methodological discussions pertaining to exegesis. Rather, attention turns to a representative and instructive example of his expositional handiwork: his interpretation of 1 Kings 3, in which Solomon arbitrates between two women claiming motherhood of one baby (CD II/1). After surveying this case, consideration is given (1) to its merits and the salutary lessons it yields for us, as well as (2) to certain shortcomings its exposes with respect to Barth's interpretive modus operandi. With respect to the latter, a critique is developed in conversation with several biblical scholars who, like Barth, take serious the apostolic claim that Jesus the Messiah is indeed discernible (and should be discerned) in the Old Testament.

Michael Borowski, Tomas Bokedal, Ludger Jansen, Brandon Watson

Moving on – Making Plans for S&T 2022