

A Christian manifesto of science education

A review of:
Science in Faith, A Christian Perspective on Teaching Science
 By the Christian Schools' Trust
 Science Curriculum Team,
 ed. Dr Arthur Jones
 Published by
 Christian Schools' Trust,
 Romford, 1998.

David Green

The Science Curriculum team of this Christian Schools Trust in the UK has set out to assist in the development of curricula in the teaching of science and to provide stimulus to teachers as they consider the presentation of scientific approaches to origins in particular, and the universe in general.

As well as it achieves its aim, in my estimation, the team, under its editor, does far more than just this.

It would be a relatively simple matter to construct a curriculum guide that repeated the views of those authors that provide, from a Christian perspective, a critical response to atheistic science. By this, I mean authors who set out to consider the scientific details of various disciplines within a framework of a recent and rapid creation by God as revealed in the Bible.

The authors very much adopt this groundwork, but they quite remarkably place science teaching within a broader, indeed an all-encompassing, religious and philosophical framework. Thus this book provides a perspective on the teaching of science, and indeed, thinking about science generally, which has a very clearly developed Christian view of how science might be presented in classrooms today. More generally, the book also provides to those outside science education a view on the presentation of science and

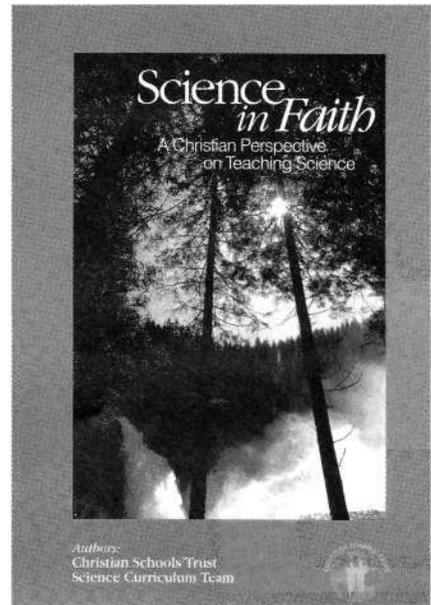
the exposure of the current ideological straightjacket promoted within the popular and professional media. In consequence, it seeks removing from science its recent and inappropriately **given role of 'telling us who we are'**, to return it to the role of enabling humanity to understand and manage the creation for the benefit of all creation and thus to the glory of God.

The authors however, are not merely critics, although as critics they do a thorough, considered and carefully worded job. Their criticism gives rise to an integration of science teaching in philosophical, religious, social and environmental contexts. Rather than science teaching being about only method or clusters of facts organised for the convenience of indoctrination (if they are evolutionary biological 'facts') or pedagogy (everything else), they present it as being far larger, showing our knowledge of the environment, or creation, co-ordinated with our use and management of it as social and biological beings.

That is, they encourage the teaching of science as part of the whole activity of people rather than something isolated in a laboratory, while not discounting the need for laboratory or analytical work. They state,

'A central aim of Christian education is to help our children find their place in a biblically and personally meaningful world. In particular, that means finding their place in the great biblical story of Creation, Fall and Redemption. It also necessarily means recognising the secular story told by our Western culture as a modern justification of idolatry.'

For instance, they take us **'behind the story'** of a **couple** of illustrative moments in science to demonstrate the operation of social

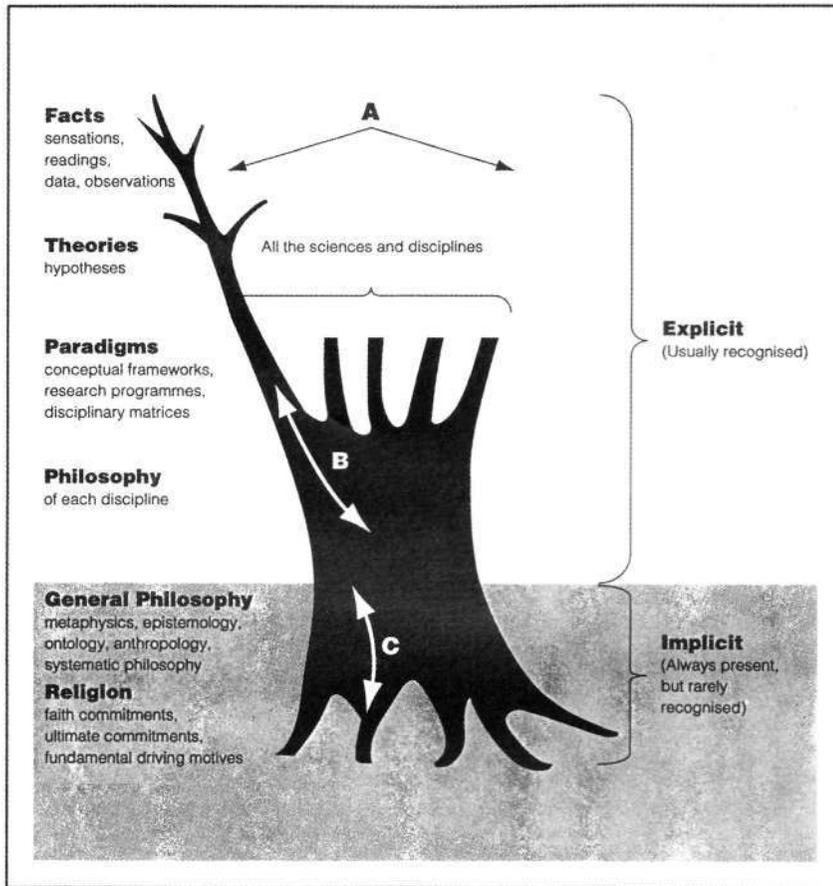


and other factors in the application or frustration of scientific discoveries. This is done lest we fall into the error that what we do can be divorced from who we are.

The approach is not limited to the impact of social factors on science, but is expanded to show how scientific knowledge is not acquired and used in a vacuum. While science is traditionally considered as a number of disconnected disciplines, the authors make the point that these are but approaches to a unified creation. Thus science education from a Christian perspective sets out to elucidate the connections between disciplines, as well as to do that which science education would hopefully always do. That is, lead to understanding of how we might examine, and then manage, our surroundings in pursuit of the creation mandate (Genesis 1:28).

Arguably, the long history of breaking up the world into different intellectual compartments is one contributor to modern environmental degradation and habitat destruction. This ultimately makes this world less of a home for people in addition to the injury to that for which we are to care.

The authors take upon themselves the task of sketching a starting point for what might be a biblical philosophy of science, considering aspects of creation as existing in a network of



story telling. They then identify the generalities that underpin evolutionary discourse and subject those to examination. This section ends with a lengthy discussion of *'homology and logic'* and a broad look at some of the other lines of evidence thought to substantiate belief in evolutionary speculations.

As one would expect in a book designed for those teaching science, it is thoroughly end-noted and has an exhaustive bibliography. Many readers will be pleased that the bibliography is annotated with what amounts in several cases to a mini-review of the book in question. A wide range of topics exploring the ideational background to the author's approach is covered, including history and philosophy of science, the religious roots of modern science, secular critiques of science, Darwinian studies and works directed specifically to science and evolutionary criticism. This bibliography does not just serve this book, however. It would also provide a comprehensive reading list for anyone serious about understanding the issues surrounding science, evolutionary thought and philosophy.

Science in Faith is a book that could be recommended to anyone who teaches science, irrespective of the type of school they work in or their own beliefs about science. But it is also a book that could be recommended to a much wider readership: those interested in the implications for Christian faith and for proclamation of contemporary science discourse, including those involved in pastoring churches or teaching Christians. Or indeed to any who want a thoughtful and succinct overview of a Christian approach to science.

Reference

1. 'Ecological' used in the broadest sense of our relationship to our surroundings, including the animals and other life which inhabit the surroundings and the various non-living processes that occur within the environment.

relationships within a whole reality. This extends from a philosophical position to one having practical implications in science education, where science topics are shown to be component processes within a creation that gives them various levels of human or 'ecological'¹ significance.

The first chapter of the book sets the scene by considering, in some detail, what might constitute a Christian approach to studying the sciences. Refreshingly for such a book, the authors are clear about the notion that scientific thought exists only within a 'worldview' and things are always taken back to that social-intellectual 'frame of reference'. They discuss Christian and 'secular' (I would say 'pagan') worldviews, and their clash in education. Particularly as a secular worldview pretends to place its 'faith' in 'reason' and the ontological and epistemological autonomy of humanity; whereas the Christian one identifies 'reason' as subject to the fall of humanity in Adam and Eve and human autonomy as

entirely fictional.

This chapter ends with what one might regard as a Christian manifesto of science education; locating science explicitly within the world of faith-in-God-as-Creator, and our understanding of science topics as elucidating real relationships within the creation, not the fictional relationships produced by those who presume a deist or non-existent god.

For those interested in the critique of modern evolutionary beliefs, the second chapter offers much.

It generally provides overviews of the significance of our understanding of origins, the religious nature of much contemporary rhetoric that is given the appearance of 'science' by its proponents, and the nature of theories. It mentions, briefly, the oxymoronic idea of *'theistic evolution'* before discussing the evidence put forward for evolution with the emphasis on homology.

The authors find the evidence for evolution to be unconvincing and amounting to little more than elaborate