

## Re-Launching Science-Religion Dialogue

- *Martin Sebastian*<sup>1</sup>

*Science, Technology and Values, Science-Religion Dialogue  
in a Multi-Religious World.* Edited by Job Kozhamthadam, Pune:  
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### Introduction

Many a models have been proposed and ever so many responses have been offered to explain and better the relationship between Science and Religion. Although highly commendable attempts indeed, in these remarkable ventures, the pioneers of Science-Religion dialogue have based themselves on a mono-religious and mono-cultural context. The work accomplished so far in this area focused mostly on Christian theology and the Western culture. The notable involvement of Islam, Judaism and Chinese thought is not left unnoticed or undermined, rather rated as quantitatively insignificant. Scholars and thinkers engaged in Science-Religion dialogue seem to have been operating with an assumption that, because science progresses through the experiments conducted with select and ideal samples in select and ideal situations inside certain specially conditioned labs, Science-Religion dialogue would also advance in a similar manner with select samples such as Western culture, Christian theology, etc. This is obviously not a reasonable assumption, but a false presumption. However, one may perhaps dismiss this analysis as a cynical imagination, and, I myself do not think that the limited domain of Science-

Religion dialogue as solely and purely the end result of a culpable and calculated selection. For, although a deep insight into the pluriform-manifestation of reality were ever present in Eastern religious philosophies, its acceptance by the West has been slow, gradual and relative. (The terms, 'East' and 'West' are employed here to represent more of attitudes than the geographical location of the scholars engaged in the Science-Religion dialogue).

The book under review, *Science, Technology and Values: Science-Religion Dialogue in a Multi-Religious World* edited by Job Kozhamthadam is a very relevant and successful effort to widen the scope and impact of Science-Religion dialogue by giving it, as the editor himself claims in the introduction, "a multi-religious, multi-cultural dimension and extending it to the non-academic world as well" (p. xiv). This book includes the collection of papers read in an international symposium at Pune, India, organized by the Association of Science, Society, and Religion (ASSR), and, this is the second volume of the ASSR Series. Compared to the previous volume of the series edited by the same author with the title *Contemporary Science and Religion in Dialogue: Challenges and Opportunities*, the present work is more update and comprehensive. Unlike the previous volume that responded to the contemporary scientific knowledge from a Western Christian perspective, the present work includes a variety of perspectives such as that of Islam, Tribals, Indian woman, etc. There are fourteen well-researched papers in this volume contributed by fourteen different scholars belonging to different nations, cultures, disciplines and religious traditions. All of them seem to have a very rich and varied experiential knowledge borrowed from Science-Religion dialogue at different levels, at different places.

The strenuous task of situating Science-Religion Dialogue in a multi-religious context is accomplished in this book in three parts. The first part which includes four papers introduces the general issues of interest in Science- Religion dialogue. The second part presents certain valuable studies on the recent developments in various branches of science and it also points out how these developments in science raise certain crucial questions for religion and society. There are five research papers in this section. The remaining five articles constitute the third part of the

book and it contains a few sympathetic studies on some of the responses offered by contemporary religions and philosophical schools to the challenges posed by recent scientific developments.

## **Re-launching on a Wider Web**

It is an undeniable historical fact that there was some estrangement between Science and Religion in the past. The disagreement between the Church and the scientific community concerning the claims of Copernicanism was perhaps the principal cause of estrangement. Besides Copernicanism, Galileo controversy and Darwinian theory of evolution were the other major instances that deepened the estrangement between Science and the officials of the Church in general and certain religious communities in particular. But this is only one part of the story. What is immensely praiseworthy of Job Kozhamthadam's paper, "The Changing Face of Science-Christianity Dialogue, Encouragement, Estrangement, and Engagement", is that he leaves aside the type-analysis of 'Science-Religion interactions' and looks afresh at the enterprise to light up its actual inner dynamism. Highlighting the living and dynamic nature of these two disciplines, Kozhamthadam argues that the relationship between Science and Religion is in fact evolving as they grow. He further identifies three different phases of such an evolution. One can find a brilliant philosophical refinement of the historical facts about the changing fortunes of the relationship between Science and Religion in this paper.

With a thankful heart the world is witnessing today an unparalleled technological progress. But it is also painfully aware on the other hand of the impending dangers posed by 'uncontrolled technology and unbridled human selfishness'. "The very survival of humanity is at stake!" (p. 45). Kuruvilla Pandikattu proposes a way out from the present crisis. In the paper, "Dialogue between Science and Religion for Preserving and Fostering Life", he affirms that only a dialogical approach will equip us to handle the problem. The partners of such dialogue are "the two pillars of human civilization: science and religion" (p. 35). And the real locus of the dialogue must be the life of the persons involved. After having made an exploration into the essence of Science and Religion separately, he critically examines the past attempts at relating the two. The paper makes us deeply aware of the high potentials of Science and Religion to act in

the present day world as the agents that foster and promote life. The enumeration of the various successful current efforts by different persons, organizations, and journals to foster a constructive dialogue between Science and Religion is highly encouraging.

Science- Religion dialogue will be a highly productive enterprise provided we re-launch it on a higher orbit of unified consciousness. But “what thread of unity in human experience and rationality constructs a worldview that respects the fundamentally differentiated nature of science and religion?”(p. 51) is the difficult question at this juncture. Paul Allen in his paper, “Scientific Rationality, Value and the Unity of Worldviews”, assumes that consciousness and rationality are the essential points of reference for integrating Science and Religion within a single worldview, and, with the backing of a thorough examination of the practice of science preceded by a description of ‘scientific rationality as fully expressed in contemporary cosmology’, he asserts that science and religion “are unified by a thread of meaning that wends its way from the success of value-oriented scientific rationality through other natural and human sciences toward religious questions of meaning”(p. 52). Such a process is guaranteed by the very structure of science that is transcendental.

A close examination of the impact of Science and Religion on woman, specially on Indian woman, is a fitting case-study in an attempt to re-launch Science-Religion dialogue in a wider context. “A review of history may have us believe that religion has relentlessly restrained women, while technology seems to have freed them from feminine fetters” (p. 71). Philomina Shinde’s paper, “Indian woman, Science, Technology and Values” initiates a discussion about how badly ‘the tug of war between’ Science and Religion affects women, and, invites men and women to be partners in progress.

## **A Religious Reading of Science**

We cannot always expect a scientific process or a rational process to lead an unbeliever to faith in God. But, can’t some believer use his/her knowledge of science or philosophy to make an attempt to know what his/her God is like? George V. Coyne would answer this question in affirmative, and he does make such an attempt in his paper, “Idolatry

and the Dialogue between Science and Religion,” to know what exactly is the modern understanding of the universe saying about the God who created it and sustains it. After having done such an attempt, he warns us that the knowledge provided by science could perhaps challenge some of our traditional beliefs about God. “If we take the results of the modern science seriously, it is difficult to believe that God is omnipotent and omniscient in the sense of the scholastic philosophers. Science tells us of a God who must be very different from the God as seen by the medieval philosophers and theologians” (p. 89) The next paper, “God’s Goof and the Universe that Knew That We Were Coming”, by Owen Gingerich is a wonderful introduction to a religious reading of new Cosmology. The developments in astronomy and cosmology testify many cases of “fine-tunings” and “unexplained coincidences”. Gingerich makes a moving discussion of certain select issues of that sort.

Three significant attempts have been made in this book to situate Science-Religion Dialogue in the emerging frontiers of Quantum Physics, Molecular Biology, and, Computer Technology. “Quantum mechanics governs the micro level of reality while classical mechanics is applied to the macro world wherein observations are carried out...there is a link between the quantum world and the classical world, established through experiments which are based on questions asked at the classical level” (pp. 107-108). This being the case, K. Babu Joseph argues in his paper, “Quantum Theology - A New Frontier”, that “a similar attitude should be adopted in the case of spiritual questions raised by us. These questions refer to the so-called spiritual level of reality. Existence of this regime is to be deduced indirectly, just as in the case of the micro level of reality” (p. 108). He further examines the Quantum theories of creation of the universe and calls for a Quantum theological model of creation that makes use of what he calls ‘Quantum mechanical intuition’. As regards Molecular Biology, as Philip R. Sloan rightly observes, “western molecular genetics is being offered to the world primarily as a positive good: as an instrument for the cure and conquest of disease” (p. 140). But, all the same it is likely to move beyond these goals. Sloan’s paper, “The Biomolecular Revolution: The Challenge of Western BioScience”, makes a detailed discussion of the basic ethical and philosophical problems related to the recent developments in the areas of Cloning, the Human Genome Project, etc. This paper gives us a set of very helpful suggestions to

retain the curative perspective of molecular genetics. The next paper by Adrian M. Wyard, entitled “Information Technology and Artificial Intelligence: Their Impact on our Worldview and Value System”, discusses some of the ethical and religious issues related to the recent advances in the world of computers.

## **A Rational Reading of Religion**

The developments in modern science and technology have effected a massive shift in the long cherished attitudes of superiority of the two Western institutions, namely, Science and Christianity. Today one can juxtapose his/her culture or ideology with that of the other, without a fear of getting vanquished and, also without the false hope of emerging as the victor. Ravi Ravindra in his paper, “Science and the Sacred, Wandering One Gathers Honey”, explains how the pluralistic attitude that prevails in the present day scientific and theological thinking of the West can facilitate closer interaction and mutual enrichment. K. S. Radhakrishnan assumes an Eastern perspective, especially the Indian, and, argues that the holistic approach of Indian science is a viable alternative to the Western system that believes in bifurcations and binaries. He proposes an ‘Ecocentric Epistemology’ that “admits the coexistence of pluralistic claims together” (p. 198), as a substitute to ‘Anthropocentric Epistemology’ which is the offspring of Anthropocentrism that is “justified by both religion and natural philosophy of Western traditions” (p. 192). He supports his claim with a presentation of important features of Indian *Sastras*, and, the holistic perspective of advaitism (Non-dualism).

The next two papers by two Islamic scholars, S. M. Razaullah Ansari and M. Rafique Sarkhawas, point out that the recent developments in Science and Technology are in agreement with the Quarnic teachings and the Islamic tradition. S. M. Razaullah Ansari has documented the appreciable efforts made by the Muslim scholars to reinterpret Islam in the context of scientific developments. He has also pointed out how the Quranic worldview brings about changes in the attitude of the scientists: “The Quran guides its followers to carry out such scientific activities which are beneficial, not detrimental to humanity. It also guides them to frame policies for the various scientific activities. Moreover, the Quaranic worldview prioritizes scientific activities” (p. 241).

A discussion about the impacts of the developments of Science and Technology on the life and culture of the Tribals is an important aspect of an interdisciplinary and multi-religious approach in Science-Culture Dialogue. In this volume Virginius Xaxa fulfills this task. One can find a detailed discussion of the cultural, social and religious situation of the tribals in India. Being himself a tribal, and having been exposed to the scientific culture of the modern age, and the rites and beliefs of Christian Religion, Virginius Xaxa is able to share with us a very reliable account of the present status of the tribal flock's negotiations with worldviews of modern Science and different Religions.

## **Conclusion**

The contemporary world has acknowledged more than ever the beauty of diversity and the reality of plurality. Therefore, be it may from the part of science, theology, philosophy, politics or else, no serious man in this century will consider an approach to reality and the facts of life as relevant and up-to-date unless it aims at gaining or giving a multi-religio-cultural perspective with interdisciplinary interests interwoven in it.

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