

Harris, Mark, / *The Nature of Creation : Examining the Bible and Science*. Durham: Acumen, 2013. 224 pp; ISBN 978-1-84465-725-4 (pbk) £20.99.

This book addresses the “neglect of the Bible by the science-religion field.” (pp. vii, 9). The author aims to offer a way of interpreting scripture that does not read science into it or evacuates the text of reality (p. 49). To achieve this he aims to “set up the parameters of a new field of scholarship, viz., bible and science.” (p. 2). Space limits my review to these parameters as far as I could identify them. But first I list the remaining chapters.

Following Ch. 1, the next three chapters introduce background, including Big Bang theory and evolutionary theory as examples of science relevant to theology (Ch. 2) as well as creation texts in Genesis (Ch. 3) and elsewhere in Scripture (Ch. 4) selected for having been influenced by science. Harris then asks “how the Bible’s creation texts may be integrated into modern discussions in the science-theology field.” In response he compares how ancient Hebrews and modern scientists think about nature, time and space (Ch. 5) and about the Creator-creation relationship (Ch. 6). The next three chapters apply this approach to the Fall (Ch. 7), evil (Ch. 8) and the new creation (Ch. 9). Ch. 10 synthesises the work.

The first parameter for the study of Bible and science I take to be his hermeneutic (pp. 77-78). Harris takes the canonical approach to scripture interpretation giving priority to theological interpretation, but including historical criticism. (pp. 77-78, 90, 120). Theological interpretation is interpretation of scripture texts within the doctrinal frameworks derived from scripture. One of these is the doctrine of divine authorship. It justifies the interpretation of texts across the entire Bible in terms of each other. For instance, in light of texts announcing a new creation in the eschatological future Harris interprets the work of creation narrated in Genesis as still to be completed.

Harris characterizes his hermeneutic as Trinitarian. This second parameter offers three advantages (p. 78). First, it shapes the interpretation of the work of creation described in Genesis as the work of the three persons of the Trinity. Second, it associates the Logos with cosmic organization and the Holy Spirit – the God who is immanent in the work of creation – with evolution. Third, it stresses that God is actively involved in the world as creator and redeemer.

Harris channels the interaction of Bible and science by analogies between theological interpretation of creation texts and scientific interpretation of nature – the third parameter (p. 90). The categories of *creatio continua*, *creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio ex vetere* illustrate this approach. As theological categories they illustrate his theological interpretation of biblical creation texts (p. 120). They are also the categories in terms of which scientific interpretations of nature can be read as analogous to the theological meaning of the text. Thus they serve as the common ground between the Bible and modern science (p. 90).

For instance, *creatio ex nihilo* is the theological category that refers to God’s decision to bring

the cosmos into existence and to sustain it in an ongoing *relationship* of ultimate dependence (p. 112). Thus it refers both to divine transcendence (p. 115) seen in God the Father (p. 116) and to beginnings, but not to the temporal beginning of the cosmos in the Big Bang theory (pp. 117-18). That is the domain of science. However, there may be analogies between temporal beginning and *creatio ex nihilo* (p. 129). *Creatio continua* is the theological category that refers to God's activity in the cosmos continually creating new things from existing ones. Thus it refers to divine immanence (p. 115) seen in God the Holy Spirit (p. 116). It does not refer to cosmic or biological evolution (p. 118) which is the domain of science. But, there may be analogies between evolution and *creatio continua* (pp. 118-19). *Creatio ex vetere* – creating something new from the old – refers to divine redemptive activity in creation (p. 175), the work of God the Son (p. 176). It does not refer to scientific theories about the end of universe, but the latter may be analogous to the former (pp. 178, 183). Harris associates these three theological distinctions with the persons of the Trinity, but emphasises that they are distinctions within a single work of God (pp. 186-87). Thus, this division of labour among the persons of the Trinity must not be taken too strictly. God the Son was also present as Wisdom when God the Father created the world. God the Holy Spirit is already now at work in transforming people into new creations serving the redemptive work of God the Son not yet completed (p. 183).

Analogy describes the relation between theological categories and scientific knowledge. This characterization aims to prevent the reading of science into scripture such as reading the Big Bang into Genesis 1: 1 or the three-tiered view of the universe into the expression 'in heaven and on earth and under the earth.' Reading modern or ancient science into scripture imposes the literal reading of the book of nature on the book of scripture. But analogy between the two books entails identity and difference forcing an assessment of how the text should be read. Harris hopes this prevents the reading of science into scripture.

The parameters I could identify include a scripture interpretation that is canonical, a theological interpretation of scripture shaped by a Trinitarian framework, and an interaction with science characterized by analogy. They remain largely implicit in the discussion of evil (Ch. 8) and of the new creation (Ch. 9), but I could not detect it in his discussion of the Fall (Ch. 7).

I raise two questions to try and clarify what these parameters imply. First, how does Harris's approach respect the different character of theology and science as disciplines? His distinction between theological interpretation and scientific theory appears designed to do just that. But analogies between the two could undo that distinction because analogies are based on *known* identities and differences. Harris's example of analogy between the beginning of creation in the Genesis story and the temporal beginning of the universe according to the Big Bang theory illustrates the problem. Initially, the Big Bang theory was interpreted theologically by some as referring to the divine creation of the universe. This became problematic for two reasons. First, divine creation includes the creation of time. This places divine creation outside of the competence of science. For another, it was realized that the Big Bang could not be the temporal beginning of the universe because it could have emerged from the collapse of a preceding universe (p. 117). I conclude that the analogy turned out to be in error because there were no

known identities. The error was identified by comparing doctrine and scientific theory and discovering the differences inherent in analogy. Thus, two components contribute to honouring the integrity of the two disciplines: a general methodological distinction between doctrine and scientific theory and the identification of specific identities and differences between a particular doctrine and a particular scientific theory. In the absence of identities the analogy is in error.

My second question aimed at clarifying Harris's approach is how he characterises the reality Scripture offers. Metaphor as reality-depicting and critical realism characterize his approach to exegesis as well as to science (p. 172). Language in Scripture about God or about the eschatological future is necessarily metaphorical because it speaks about the unknown in terms of what we know. Scientific language is also metaphoric for the same reason. I infer that Harris is taking metaphor as reality-depicting (Soskice, *Metaphor and religious language*, 1985) because he writes: "A metaphor is a model, an image, constructed of concrete terms which we understand, of something else which we perhaps do not." (pp. 40, 174). Harris asks, for instance, whether apocalyptic texts should be taken literally or metaphorically (p. 171). His critical realism means that literal interpretations of apocalyptic texts fail to acknowledge the full range of meanings of such texts. Stated positively it means that a 'new creation' may refer to a future historical political event (often judgements in the O.T) or a future universal new creation (Daniel, Apocalypse) as well as to the present renewing work of the Holy Spirit in people (N.T). His metaphorical approach means that these are realities depicted metaphorically.

Other recent books on Bible and science are Lamoureux's *Evolutionary Creation* (2008) and Colyer's *The Prescientific Bible* (2013). Lamoureux emphasizes exegesis and focuses on creation and evolution, Colyer and Harris move beyond creation and evolution with less emphasis on exegesis. Harris offers a clear view of the relation of Bible and science and treats it evenhandedly, features lacking in Colyer. The greatest value of Harris's book lies in the attempt "to regain for those who stand outside the fundamentalist camp the scriptural territory which has been so fundamental for two thousand years, namely the Bible's texts of creation." (p. vii). It is a must read for those who want to develop this ideal.

Word count: 1507 (excluding header).

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