

Science in Theology: Encounters between Science and the Christian Tradition. By Neil Messer. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020. xii + 191 pages. \$22.95 (paper).

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Several years ago, I took part in a summer seminar that brought together Russian and American theologians and scientists to discuss the relationship between science and religion. By the end of the day, we realized, to our great frustration, that our discussion had gone nowhere because we each had a different starting line—some insisted we needed to agree first on a philosophical framework, whereas others were committed to a concrete scientific question, and others to a doctrinal stance. These differing lenses had kept us talking past one another.

In 2000, Ian Barbour suggested four ways in which religion and science could relate (conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration). Since then, numerous academics have proposed differing typologies for the interplay between these two very disparate fields. In *Science in Theology: Encounters between Science and the Christian Tradition*, Neil Messer suggests instead that we first identify the starting line for each author or discussant. He sees four possibilities: (1) only science has a legitimate voice, (2) the scientific voice predominates and shapes the encounter, (3) both voices have an equal role, (4) the Christian tradition predominates and shapes the encounter, and (5) only the Christian tradition has a legitimate voice. According to Messer, science and theology are not “distinct domains of enquiry, like territories on a map, which might be separate, overlapping, merged or whose border might be a conflict zone. Instead, theology is concerned with the biggest picture possible,” whereas science deals with “particular aspects of reality.” Thus, the title *Science in Theology* rather than *Science and Theology*.

Messer illustrates his typology by examining three concrete questions or test cases: (1) Is there divine action in the world? (2) How do we explain the suffering inherent in the evolutionary process? and (3) Why are humans religious? For each test case, Messer summarizes the work of scholars in each of the stances in his typology, from those who see only one field as relevant, to those who begin from science or theology but allow the other a voice, to those who look for a delicate balance between the two. He generally rejects stances 1 and 5 as too limiting, and finds 2, letting science have the last word, to be problematic in that it promotes a “God of the gaps” mentality. He prefers either equal dialogue or a stance rooted in faith but allowing for a scientific voice. He sees a role for scholars from these to stances to critique each other as a “mutually stabilizing pair.”

Science in Theology takes a comprehensive look at the academic scholarship relevant to his three test cases that is both deft and sensitive. The comprehensive nature of his research is obvious in both the text and an excellent concluding bibliography. *Science in Theology* is clearly written and Messer's argument is easy to follow; he begins each chapter with a summary of his argument, divides chapters into clear subsections, and concludes each with salient observations. Introductory and concluding chapters suggest how a reader might use or extend his typology to examine further questions in science and religion or to bring in other voices, such as philosophy or the arts.

The book's strength is also its weakness. *Science in Theology* is an excellent text for a graduate student seminar or for early scholars in the field. For one who already has some knowledge of the scholars whose work Messer engages, the book provides a clear map of who is starting where. A general reader, however, might easily get lost in the thickets of nuance and names. This is an academic book—about academics and for academics—and, thus, likely to have a somewhat limited audience. Still, Messer has made a valuable contribution to the toolbox of typologies and written a work that will go a long way toward “helping students and researchers position their own work” and make explicit “their own understanding of what they hope to achieve.” Had we had this book on that long-ago summer day, our seminar could have been saved from a day of wrangling and confusion.

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Reading Revelation at Easter Time. By Francis J. Moloney, SDB. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020. xix + 197 pages. \$24.95 (paper).
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I am somewhat embarrassed to admit that I know less about the Book of Revelation than almost any other biblical book that regularly appears in liturgy or in study. As a priest who prays the Liturgy of the Hours, I would try to hold the main message in mind as I prayed the Office of Readings during the Easter season: the Lamb who was slain is victorious, inaugurating the New Jerusalem. I just did not know what to make of the dragons and beasts, the bowls and seals, the falls of the woman and Satan, as well as the different colored horses and locusts that behave like scorpions. Francis Moloney's book has turned the tide for me, providing a framework for the entire work, innumerable insights into individual verses, and clear explanations of all of what had been mysterious to me. Knowing that I was to review this book, I decided to use it as an accompanying text during the