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On Teaching the Coherence of Religion and Science in A Secularizing Culture, A Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract

The tension between religion and science remains a pressing issue for administrators, faculty, and students at universities, whether secular or religiously affiliated. This issue is particularly significant in institutions where religious instruction is part of the curriculum, as it introduces an element of compulsion and, to use Michel Foucault's phrase, the "unpredictable and contradictory outcomes of power." The way in which issues of faith are taught can have a profound impact on the student experience. This paper argues that the interrelation of science and religion in general, and the reality of revelation in particular, is best taught by engaging the student's theological imagination. A methodological approach is needed to guide students in formulating their own questions and embarking on an inward journey that stimulates the mind and opens the heart to wonder. Among the many possible approaches, this paper models the applicability of the phenomenological method to structure teaching in the Faculties of Arts and Sciences. This methodology, which crystallized in Europe during the second half of the 20th century, is used across multiple academic disciplines.

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Introduction

The relationship between science and religion continues to be a vital theme of discussion, research, and practical application in universities. Many institutions today, including some of the highest ranking in global accreditation, honor faith and encourage religious belief. Nevertheless, as a Christopher Scheitle has demonstrated, demonstrable bias remains against religious belief and practice in the training of scientists and medical professionals.[1] But whether at a secular or religiously affiliated university, the tension between religion and science remains pressing issue for administrators, faculty, and students. This is particularly important in institutions where religious instruction is part of the curriculum, as this brings forth the element of compulsion and, to use Michel Foucault's phrase, the "unpredictable and contradictory outcomes of power."[2] Regardless of the institution, the pedagogy matters. The way issues of faith are taught can make a significant difference in the student experience.

In this paper, one contends that the interrelation of science and religion in general, and the reality of revelation in particular, is best taught by engaging the student's theological imagination. Effective teaching in higher education requires more than simply giving the right data or making the strongest argument. A methodological approach is needed to guide students to formulate their own questions, and to commence an inward journey that engages the mind and opens the heart to wonder. Of the many possible options, one models the applicability of the Phenomenological method to structure teaching for courses in the Arts and Sciences. This is a methodology that crystalized in Europe during the second half of the 20th century and is used across multiple academic disciplines. In essence, the method charts a pathway for students to transcend the perceived opposition of religion and science by understanding the history of core ideas and by exploring the lives of great thinkers. I conclude that the interrelation of science and religion is ultimately a question of epistemology, or of how one knows about the cosmos. We commence by examining the intellectual context, and then proceed to survey they method before concluding with some theological considerations.

Let us begin by considering modernity as a historical construct. Central to our theme is the idea of the gradual recession of the transcendent in post-Enlightenment thinking. This is what Charles Taylor termed as the closing of the immanent frame.[3] Philosophers have long questioned the interplay of faith and reason and the process by which the Divine interacts with the created world. A significant shift, however, occurred in Europe during the 19th century, leading to the Age of Doubt, where great value was placed upon the bold questioning of traditional beliefs

[1] Christopher Scheitle

[2] Brookfield, S. (2001). Unmasking Power: Foucault and Adult Learning. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 15(1), 1–23. Retrieved from https://cjsae.library.dal.ca/cjsae/article/view/1905

[3] Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 25.

governing the universe and society.[1] Amos Funkenstein, in his classic study *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* explored the way in which the leading thinkers questioned the created order, the necessity of a Creator, and the possibility of continuous revelation.[2] Namely, if there is a Creator who established the workings of the cosmos *ex-nihlio*, then does the Creator continue to create or to the laws of nature accomplish this through contingency or simple cause and effect. The positivist view common today advocates a functional – if not stated – belief that all is contingent. This is a mechanized of cosmology, like a clock or an algorithm, that proceeds automatically without external intercourse.[3] Building upon 17th century philosophical debates and the works of thinkers like René Descartes (d. 1650) and Thomas Hobbes (1679) on the nature of the moral self, pivotal thinkers like Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) resolved that humans were their own supreme law givers, foreshadowing the atheistic positions of Friedrich Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell, and Richard Dawkins. But there were also those who sustained a theocentric worldview like Blaise Pascal who would inspire others like Miguel de Unamuno, Jacque Maritain, Paul Ricouer, C.S. Lewis, and Francis Collins. These resisted the "closing immanent frame" and held to belief in a divinely ordered universe. Pascal's heirs advocated the cultivation of contemplative (*ergetic*) knowledge, whereby the imagination makes room for mystery and poetic knowledge, and ways of knowing beyond logic. These stood their ground, though often on the backfoot, defending theistic faith in a highly secular world. One theme central to their works was the importance of theological imagination whereby the mind is spurred to ponder a universe whose very structure inspires the soul and defies scientific explanation.

These issues were addressed within Continental philosophy, and this led to the development of Phenomenology. Pondering the nature of reality, being, and of time, thinkers like Edward Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Marcel Merleau-Ponty, John Hick, and Mircea Eliade, to name but a few, were concerned with Truth, and to this end turned to the study of religion. A means was sought to observe the realm of religion in a way that was scientific and consistent with the intellectual tradition. Though some of these regarded religion as a human construct, as part of the human psyche expressed in culture, the Phenomenological method was intended to be applicable and accessible to all.[4]

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[1] Christopher Lane, *The Age of Doubt: Tracing the Roots of Our Religious Uncertainty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

[2] Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton University Press, 2018),

[3] Funkenstein, 116, 325, 346.

[4] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

1. Methodology considered

The Phenomenological method (differentiated from phenomenological philosophy) was designed to explore complex questions of faith through experience rather than argumentation. The observer, in this case the student in the class, is asked to (1) bracket *a priori* assumptions and enter another *narrative community* to cultivate an insider view as one in that group would perceive themselves and the surrounding world; and then (2) step back into one's own worldview to incorporate the discoveries from the experience. Phenomenology postulates a journey that begins with describable phenomena, something that can be seen and observed, but that goes beyond this to personal participation and then on to the hermeneutical task of interpretation. The journey has many possible outcomes, and the journey is itself a destination because the practice stimulates the capacity for theological imagination. Religion and science are often presented as a polarity whose differences are ultimately intractable. Imagination enables the learner to move beyond intractability and to behold the mystery of the unknown and the paradoxes of faith.

The method, as the name implies, draws from the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who sought to focus purely on phenomena and to elucidate meaning through intuition. Husserl offered a descriptive study of consciousness for the purpose of discovering laws by which experience comes about, whether of the objective world or the pure imagination. Later European scholars like Max Scheler, Rudolf Otto, and Gerardus van der Leeuw applied Husserl's approach to the study of religions belief and practice. The aim was to describe the perception of ideas, acts, and institutions, whether theological, sociological, or metaphysical. The method crystalized in the pioneering work of social scientists like Bronislaw Malinowski, who insisted that in order to understand a religious worldview, an observer must have a "sympathy which makes him almost a believer, but with an impartiality which does not allow him to dismiss all religions as erroneous whilst one remains true."[1] Emile Durkheim carried this forward by noting that whereas theology and philosophy are normative, phenomenological investigation proceeds along descriptive lines according to the social sciences. In essence, it was a call for *conceptual intentionality,* as Frank Whaling stated, "a conscious attempt to be true to the human experience and to overcome the sterile assumption that the world and its people can be objectively studied from remoteness."[2] This method took seriously the discrepancy between dogmatic or scriptural religion, and recognized the broader processes of social memory, devotional practice, and popular myth that shape the lived experience of people everywhere.[3] The interpretative aspect

[1] Branislaw Malinowski, *The Foundations of Faith and Morals* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936). Gavin Flood, Gavin, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999).

[2] Frank Whaling, *Theory and Method in Religious Studies* (New York: Mouton de Gruynter, 1995), 33.

[3] Afzar A. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 8.

is crucial to the methodology. Having seen and described the phenomena, in this case a scientific or religious view different than one's own, the student returns and ponders their original perspective.

The return takes seriously the view, as Paul Ricouer posited, that consciousness is emergent and developmental. "What has been understated is how I have knowledge of myself, not merely relative to others, but in relation to others."[1] Consciousness, which includes self-awareness, is accomplished not primarily through self-reflection, which is one's evaluation of phenomenon, but rather through encounter with others. One's sense of identity, or personal consciousness, is discovered through the experience of encountering others. For Ricouer, these persons are like cultural "texts" the interpretation of which provides context for understanding of oneself. It is in relation to others that one becomes more cognizant of the self. Through these encounters, the story of "another" becomes inextricably intertwined with one's own. Identity, therefore, is not a matter of logical assertion, but rather of relationality.

Building upon Ricouer's understanding, David Brown explained that the link between personal identity ("I") and collective identity ("we") is a narrative accomplishment. In other words, identity is connected to narrative, the story in which one inhabits. In the context of teaching in higher education, many students live in the social polarity already noted above among different hues of religious and secular affiliation, a distance which can take the extreme form of phobia. Identity occurs "at the point of confrontation between the person as a potential speaker/actor and the system of discourse that enables and constrains speaking/acting. Narrative is that mode of discourse through which human action is interpreted as meaningful agency."[2] It allows for those feeling excluded, and those who exclude, to imagine full participation and shared belonging. As Brown explained, "One experiences 'belonging' to the extent that one can interweave interpretations of self with the interpretations of others through narrative discourse. Such a notion of belonging sheds light on the phenomena of political consciousness and social movements and may be a prerequisite for collective action."[3] Identity is bigger than belonging to a shared taxonomy of categories, such as of a particular nation, religion, age, or socio-economic circumstance; identity is also tied to agency, or the power to contribute towards a result and to have a place in the story. Otherwise stated: creating a learning environment that calls for choice, or that awakens learners to the possibility and power of choice is an essential aspect of identity formation. "I belong because I helped made the decision." If the learning

[1] David R. Brown, "On narrative and belonging," in Morny Joy, ed. *Paul Ricouer and Narrative: Context and Contestation* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1997), 110.

[2] Brown, narrative, 111.

[3] Brown, narrative, 109.

experience is to be transformative, it must succeed in empowering students with a sense of agency.

Harvard Psychiatrist Robert Coles emphasized the link of between stories and memory. Stories draw listeners into the imagined action.[1] The listener of a story, unlike that of a lecture, participates through the mind's eye. A story evokes memories, and it plays out in scenes from within one's own frame of reference. The internal participation engages a more profound interaction with the images or imagined events. The learner becomes aware of her own journey of encounter and perception. The opportunity to become more aware and to recount one's own stories, that which has shaped perspective, begins to unlock the possibility of change. As Coles observed, a central feature of this approach to learning is the experience of locating oneself within the story. It is a narrative arc that preceded this time, includes this time, and that invites each person to exert agency in shaping the upcoming sequences.

Phenomenology posits learning as a journey. The process does not begin with ultimate questions of religion, like "is there a Creator?" Rather it begins with the observable, the phenomena. The difference here is that the student is not in a laboratory looking at DNA, bur rather she explores the experiences of people, such as the lives of scientists who reject religion, or of fellow students who have a religious belief, or express forms of agnosticism or nihilism. The application of this learning approach assumes that people use a universal structure or essence to make sense of their experience, a structure accessible to one who seeks to know.

2. How Does It Work?

University courses follow a syllabus. There are courses that specifically address the interrelation of religion and science, but what is being considered in this paper is a methodology that also can be applied to courses that are not directly related but that promote the importance of foundational worldview issues. The syllabus states the purpose and parameters of the course, and the interrelation of religion and science can be listed within as a sub-theme. This alerts students to the inclusion of discussions, readings and activities that will be woven through the course. The first two or three class meetings are given to meet the students and to introduce the course and its activities and to introduce the methodology or theoretical framework.

Education specialist Etienne Wenger has designed a framework for thinking about teaching within the broad elements of reification, participation, and imagination.[2] Wenger's basic premise is that reification, that is the way the classroom setting is arranged, and the time and activities are structured can promote participation, that is the sense of being part of a "community of practice." Participation fosters a greater openness and commitment to the

[1] Robert Coles, *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1989).

[2] Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 177-179.

process of learning, and this combination facilitates conditions whereby learners are more prone to apply the moral imagination. The engaged moral imagination has greater potential of making the learning experience transformative. Whereas each of these three elements are important, due to space constraints I have focused our discussion upon the one that I found to be the most important for the subject of this paper: imagination. More precisely, we are interested in the interplay between narrative and the moral imagination.

To set the stage, the introduction to the course is a natural time to discuss the issue of bias and social conditioning. There are excellent resources available, but one might suggest a reading from Christopher Scheitle's *the Faithful Scientist*, mentioned already above, to problematize the issue.[1] This is a study drawn from over 1,300 PhD students in the natural and social sciences. The book shows that a core challenge is not contending with contradictions between faith-based beliefs and scientific knowledge, but rather with bias that intimidates exchange of ideas and threatens the opportunity and acceptance of scientific because they are religious in the US. The book offers empirical data and provides insight into what it means to support and foster religious diversity in science. Class discussions or journal reflections can invite students to express their experience in this, and even to note their personal opinions and no narrate how they came to hold this view.

The issue of bias calls for an exploration of the historical tension between faith and science. Students can be assigned readings that present different perspectives. Again, beware of argumentation. Argumentation, with its noted point and counterpoint mostly perpetuates bias and hardens positions. To promote imaginative exploration, students can be encouraged to describe a side that is most distant from their own with regards to the interplay of religion and science. Sample texts like Larry Shapiro's *The miracle myth* challenges the rationality of belief in the supernatural, that is an open immanent frame cosmology.[2] Shapiro underscores the inconsistencies of many, such as the 4 out of 5 Americans who claim to be believe in miracles despite their inability to reconcile this with reason. The course instructor can problematize the inconsistencies, and guide students to identify their own view. This text can be paired with a work such as Michael Guillen's *Believing Is Seeing*, or Eric Hedin's *Canceled Science,* who as scientists make compelling cases for theistic faith. Again, class presentations and reflections allow students to articulate the competition of ideas present in society and to note their experience in reading and discussing these ideas.

[1] Christopher Scheitle, *The Faithful Scientist: Experiences of Anti-Religious Bias in Scientifc Training* (New York: New York Univeristy Press, 2023).

[2] Larry Shapiro, *the miracle myth: why belief in the resurrection and the supernatural is unjustified* (New York: Columbia, 2016).

Moving forward in the progression of the course, students explore the biographies and life experience of representative thinkers. A reader by Keith Thomson, *Private Doubt, Public Dilemma* provides several.[1] Charles Darwin, for example, is well known to students due to his work on evolution, and Thompson emphasized "Charles Darwin was never just a scientist; he was fascinated by metaphysics and tormented about religion."[2] This could be the life of a scientist or philosopher who pondered faith, and students can make presentation not only about their central ideas but also about their journey and process of resolution, and of reaching a personal reconciliation of religion and science. Francis Collins, head of the Human Genome Project, is a helpful example. In his 2006 bestselling book, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*, Collins argued that scientific knowledge complements rather than contradicts belief in God.[3] In a similar vein, Stephen Meyer's *The God Hypothesis* argues that science evidences a transcendent, intelligent and active creator.[4] These can be contrasted with the works of Daniel Dennet (Breaking the Spell), Stephen hawking (*The Grand Design*), and Victor Stenger (*God: The Failed Hypothesis*) who take the opposing side. Again, it is important to ascertain the key ideas, but also to narrate the life of the author. Collins, for example, details a journey from indifference to curiosity and on to faith. Recall, however, that the aim is for students at this stage to select a thinker who is dissimilar to their own position and to listen seriously. As the course progresses, there will be a movement from description of another view and some degree of empathetic observation, towards the synthesis of the learning. In class a "Socratic circle" or other guided discussion would allow students to describe the positions in a positive way, as if it were their own, allowing ample time for the view to be discussed.

Moving towards interpretation, texts can be introduced that acknowledged the polarity between religion and science but that also move the conversation forward. R. Kirby Godsey, *The God Particle*, for example does not directly seek to prove the occurrence of the supernatural, but rather to introduce foundational question of origins of the universe and the strong evidence from Physics for something other than chance and chaos for the order seen in the natural.[5] Godsey explains that "both theology and cosmology begin with the siren call of mystery." Students are instructed to observe nature and to be amazed by its complexity, order, power, and beauty. Students can locate an example of this from the natural world and identify a question evoked by this experience, and even to describe the mystery therein.

[1] Keith Thomson, *Private Doubt, Public Dilemma: Religion and Science since Jefferson and Darwin* (New Haven: Yale, 2015).

[2] Thomson, ix.

[3] https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2008/04/17/the-evidence-for-belief-an-interview-with-francis-collins/

[4] Stephen C. Meyer, *The Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries that Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe* (New York: HarperOne, 2021).

[5] R. Kirby Godsey, *The God Particle* (Macon, Mercer, 2006)

Progressing to the resolution of the course, having opened the dialogue of religious and scientific worldviews, one leads the course towards some practical outcomes. Regardless of one's cosmology, there is a call for all in education to the moral life. The work of Peter Harrison points to the lived and habitual practices that reflect belief.[1] Recounting the history of science in the West over the last 300 years, and how the domains of material facts became seen as separate from the realm of moral and religious values, Harrison described the realm of science and religion as two territories: the nature of the physical universe and its operations, and the goals of human existence and the source of our moral values.[2] Regardless of the particulars of one's faith or lack thereof, there is a moral responsibility required of the citizen, the adult member of society, that is consistent with the purpose of the university. Regardless of the student's position on religion and science, there is a morality required of "both territories." In other words, as paleontologist Steven Jay Gould explained, science and religion represent "non-overlapping magisterial" where science has an authoritative voice about what goes on in the physical world, and religion has an authoritative voice with respect to ethical issues. In theology there is a human yearning for cosmic reconciliation that has been part of the impulse from the beginning to understand one's place in the world, and to live rightly within it."[3] There is a standoff, however, between those locked in the oppositional binary of religion and science and this is limiting their ability to cooperate in matters of public good.[4] Public debates are filled with false assumptions based on bias, and this has very real consequences for society and public policy, particularly with regards to the environment and global warming, and also in matters of immigration, social justice, and the value of life. These are practical ethical concerns, but they proceed from a theological worldview.

George F. R. Ellis, in his book "Why the Science and Religion Dialogue Matters" has argued that dehumanizing views of nature lead, inevitably, to the dehumanizing treatment of people.[5] In exploring the nature of existence, cosmology, and the *anthropic question,* why this planet has human life, he underscored the fact that science is fundamentally unable to touch their core. There are boundaries to what science can explain. He noted three tendencies that guide action: (1) what rationality suggests – calculus of benefit; (2) what emotion sways us, (3) what our values tell us we ought to do. True consilience, he argued, is the awareness of spiritual

[1] Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015)

[2] Harrison, *Territories,* ix.

[3] Harrison, *Territories,* 56.

[4] John H. Evans, *Morals not Knowledge" Recasting the Contemporary U.S. Conflict between Religion and Science* (University of California Press, 2018), 164.

[5] George F. R. Ellis, "Why the Science and Religion Dialogue Matters" in Fraser Watts and Kevin Dutton, eds. *Why the Science and Religion Dialogue Matters*: Voices from the International Society for Science and Religion (Templeton Press, 2009), 24.

dimensions of life and the interconnectedness of dimensions of existence (22). This is the call for exploring the spiritual or inner-universe and the relational connections with others. This is particularly important in the current political climate because, as Jennifer Baldwin, has argued, much of public debate is "post-truth" and draws on "alternative facts"[1] Though religious practice may be seen as private, faith motivates action, voting, and policy. Without a nuanced view of others, and a commitment to moral virtue, belief can hinder one's ability to discern fact from fiction and cause one to act in ways that are consistent with one's beliefs.

3. Analysis: Theological imagination applied

Etienne Wenger theorized that students have an "infrastructure of imagination."[2] This is a symbolic scaffolding that explains the nature and purpose of what one is doing in each setting. Students select courses for many reasons; however, once in class, the instructor can make a difference in shaping this "infrastructure." The way a course is taught can make a great difference, particularly with regards to matters of faith. Theological imagination refers to the possibility of visualizing a new and creative alternative to a dilemma in light of one's faith tradition.

Engaging the imagination is the key to transformation. This teaching approach is gaining traction across academic disciplines and is applicable to the experienced conflict of religion and science. Seldom, for example, do students enter a Literature class with such negative or defensive attitudes towards the subject matter. Students enter the classroom with a cosmological "Grand Narrative" that maps the contours of identify and purpose. As Samer Ali observed, "The formation of cognitive maturity, and thus sociability, depends on one's trained capacity to see one's own reality as a single perception among a valid plurality."[3] Christine Counsell, a specialist in education at Cambridge, has emphasized the importance of "doing history," that is of training students to think like ethnographers and practical historians. "Engagement in history," Counsell explained, "must be understood as a disciplined practice – as opposed to a fixed, transmitted story." [4] Students must learn to discern the constructed nature of history, and so be less vulnerable to the "dangerous assumption that the stories they receive have ontological reality rather than being narrative crafted from selected facts. By engaging in questions of

[1] Jennifer Baldwain, ed. *Navigating Post-Truth and Alternative Facts* (Lanham: Lexington Press, 2020).

[2] Wenger, *Communities*, 273.

[3] Samer Ali, *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages: Poets, Public Performance, and the Presentation of the Past* (South Bend: Notre Dame Press, 2010), 3.

[4] Counsell, Christine. *"Generating Historical Argument about Causation in the History Classroom: Exploring Practical and Teaching Approaches"* in *Learning and teaching history: Lessons from and for Lebanon*, in R. Ghusayni, R. Karami, R. and B. Akar eds. (Beirut: Arab Cultural Center, 2012), 86;

D. Shemilt, "The caliph's coin: the currency of narrative frameworks in history teaching," in P. Stearns, P. Seixas and S. Wineburg, eds. *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 83-101.

cosmology, the student is exploring the narrative which they inhabit and becoming open to the possibility of growth and change.

Teaching at a Christian university, I am challenged to help students not only address tensions such as that of religion and science, but also to progress towards a more mature faith. All major religions have their own ways of understanding the complexities of the cosmos. Conveying this knowledge requires going beyond simple facts and to connect the mind and the heart. In Christian theology, one traditional framework to explore the nature of God, who is other and outside of creation, is through the interplay of the eternal Word and eternal Spirt. This is the language to account for how the divine is active and powerfully present throughout creation and all time. It is the singularity of the Christ (the eternal Word manifest in history) who walked the earth as a man, and the ever-presence of the Holy Spirit. As Clark Pinnock explained, "The life-giving Spirit of God works in the world and in all of history. See the order of the world, the structure of things. The world is not chaos, it is good." Again Pinnock, "Spirit is not an esoteric 'ghost' but an empirical power that breaks forth in perceptible ways. This is the power that called forth life from nonlife and power drawing humanity to God. The Spirit struggles against the evil that pulls us downward and strives to bring creation to completion in God (Augustine *Confessions* 13.7.8)."[1] In teaching, one explains that Spirit works ceaselessly to persuade humans to trust and open themselves up to love. Those with eyes to see can discern the Spirit's activity in human culture and religion, as God everywhere draws people to friendship. As stated in the Holy Bible (1 Timothy 4:10), "God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." (Acts 10:34-35). These words suggest that faith is more than assent to theological propositions. It involves a relationship of trust in God which can be seen in godly living. This is stated by Jesus Christ in saying, "You're not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the 'wind-hovering-over-the-water' creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it's not possible to enter God's kingdom. When you look at a baby, it's just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can't see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit" (John 3:5-6).

Similar theological explorations can be seen in an Islamic context. Mohamed Gamal Abdelnour, for example, has written about the nature of "truth" in exploring the higher objectives of theology (*maqasid al-aqida*). Drawing from the works of Malek Bennabi (d. 1973) and Abou El Fadl, he described an "imbalance" in modern discourse where there is an over-reliance upon ethical-juristic reasoning (*fiqh*).[2] He advocates the need to recalibrate discourse

[1] Clark Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press, 195).

[2] Malek Bennabi, *Conditions of a Renaissance* (*Shurūṭ al-nahḍa*); Abou El Fadl, *The Search for Beauty in Islam*. (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi,1948)

to include the theological (*kalam*) and the spiritual (*irfan*). Abdelnour seeks to engage these three aspects in order to grapple with questions of reality, contingency, and epistemology in a manner useful to articulate the coherence of religion and science.[1] Joseph Lumbard, student of Syed Hossein Nasr, notes the necessity of "epistemic sovereignty", that is the need for Muslim scholars to go beyond Western constraints of language and sources on the nature of God and the ontological status of the Quran. This is an exploration of the relationship between revelation and reason, and inspiration (*ilhām*) and unveiling (*kashf*), and the "cognitive cartography" whereby the links to these were understood.

At the heart of these discussions, there remains the issue of the supranatural. For the religious, the aim is not merely to cultivate morality and ethical behavior, but also to promote belief and greater encounter with the divine grace (*baraka*) active in creation. As Mohamad Ali Amir-Moezzi chronicled, "Without the Imam, the universe would crumble, since he is the Proof, the Manifestation, and the Organ of God, and he is the means by which human beings attain if not knowledge of God, at least what is knowable in God. Without the Perfect Man, without a Sacred Guide, there is no access to the divine, and the world could only be engulfed in Darkness."[2] This is theological imagination, whereby an intimately inhabited spiritual realm is unfolded. This is a worldview that has many similarities with that of mine in the Christianity of Jesus the Messiah, the occulted yet active living Spirit and Word. For to speak about the Quran and Science, one must speak of miracles, of the supra natural in the world past, present, and future, whether in the divine word as Quran for Muslims, or the divine Word as Messiah for Christians.

Conclusion

In this paper I have presented a method used in class design that has been useful to promote the integration of religion and science. This is a humble step in a long journey for students who are are at a crucial time in their intellectual, social, and spiritual development. Theistic religions, particularly the Abrahamic, have a long history of reasoning the coherence of religion and science, and it is our responsibility to present this to the coming generations. For many students the issue of religion and science often is answered not by logical proposition or demonstrated evidence, but rather through the emotional intelligence, and the interplay between will and morality – what I should do, and what I can do, or should do.

Socrates, the teacher to the teachers, thought death marked an entry into a vast nothingness or else a profound sleep. I disagree. In a response akin to that of some of the greatest living scientists today, I echo the response of poet Mary Oliver, "What does it mean, say the words,

[1] Mohammed Gamal Abdelnour, *The Higher Objectives of Islamic Theology: Toward a Theory of Maqasid Al-Aqida* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

[2] Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 8.

that the earth is so beautiful? And what shall I do about it? What is the gift that I should bring to the world? What is the life that I should live?"[1] Questions are the tools of instructors. Questions are a mercy. The human inability to solve every problem and to find every answer is itself testimony of our need and dependence upon God. Again, in humility one says, "God knows better."

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