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Critical Examination of Solomon as a Scientist

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Critical Examination of Solomon as a Scientist

Abstract

This article opens with introduction and then goes on to assess Solomon as a scientist using the scientific methods of observation and illustration, scientific law of regularity and universality, rationality and logic, mathematical application for dimensions and measurements, the legitimacy of theory within Solomon's scientific theology, as well as relevance to reality and complementarity. This examination of Solomon's sayings is followed by a conclusion that calls attention to further reflections of scientific methods in theology.

Keywords: *observation, illustration, models, universality, regularity, rationality, mathematical application, logic*

Introduction

This paper will critically examine the possible merits in Poythress' description of Solomon as a scientist through the application of some identifiable scientific methods while reviewing some of Solomon's sayings. It is true that both science and theology have a shared value in the pursuit of truth that will positively shape the world and bring illumination. Gerald Birney Smith in his 1912 article engages the essence of truth and identifies "some of the consequences of the employment of biblical criticism" in "so far as it affects the tasks of the theologian."¹ (p.236) First, he admits "that such critical study led one away from the dogmatic interpretation of scripture".² In essence, one will no longer take a biblical text as a dogma or authoritative tenet without adequate grounds. This approach will help raise a red flag for readers of biblical texts and caution them against going to town with any old beliefs of a text that lacks any verifiable and reliable reasons. Second, Smith says "critical study" as in or akin to scientific method "introduced a historical point of view which compels us to regard the utterances of the Bible in their relation to the circumstances which occasioned them."³ In this case, and to be fair in our application, we must not completely divorce a text from its context in order to guide our subsequent use or application of that particular text in our contemporary day-to-day activities. This is why Smith submits that "The meaning of any scriptural passage is thus discovered when we ascertain what place it had in the experience of the man who uttered it."⁴ This means that in

¹ Gerald Birney Smith (1912), *Theology and Scientific Method*. *The Biblical World* 40(4), 236-247. Published by The University of Chicago Press.

² Ibid, p. 236

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

addition to the contents in a text, the life experience of the person who uttered a statement will also help us in knowing the proper context. Third, Smith says investigating an experience leads to some discoveries such as coming “upon elements of thinking and upon specific practical problems which were very real to the biblical writers, but which may be quite unfamiliar to us.”⁵ In other words, we might be misusing a term or concept if we do not truly come to terms with the challenges faced at the point the concept was used. Smith poses an important question that will encourage the search for answers: “How, then, shall we find out what to believe?”⁶ He goes on to pose another important question: “If we give up this objective test of truth, men ask, shall we not be involved in hopeless confusion as the many minds of our varied civilization give their many answers to the problems before us?”⁷ One can easily connect with Smith regarding his concerns and good intentions. The Bible regards Solomon as a wise king who authored a lot of wise sayings that communicate truth, applicable and timeless facts that are relevant to human reality across time spectrum, irrespective of civilizations.

The role of integrity of unassailable honesty cannot be divorced from the business of searching for truth to which both science and theology pursue. A statement originally made by President Henry Churchill King is critical in examining Solomon’s sayings, and in determining whether he fits the bill as a ‘scientist’. King authored "*The Ethics of Jesus*", and quoting King (1910), Smith (1912) submits that “It is *prima facie* evidence that a theology which follows the spirit of scientific honesty is not likely to become anti-biblical in its influence.”⁸ It is interesting

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid, p. 237

⁸ Smith (1912), p. 242

to note that this statement was made over a century ago; yet, its truth remains unassailable till date. One can conclude that scientific honesty is synonymous with biblical truth in the sense that both science and theology pursue, proclaim, and defend truth no matter how bitter, unpalatable, or unfavorable to one's personal preference. In doing critical examination or analysis of Solomon's sayings, this article will only use some scientific approaches in its assessment.

Empirical Observation and Illustration

Poythress, a man who holds doctorate degrees in both Mathematics and New Testament uses his academic training to integrate science and theology. As a mathematician and a theologian, he is specially positioned to do a good job of scientific method in theology, and his conclusive description of Solomon as a scientist is worth a brief academic review. Poythress' reference to Solomon as a scientist, despite being the king of Israel, is very instructive. He refers to Solomon's "gift of wisdom" as outlined in 1 Kings 4:29-34, specifically pinpointing how "he spoke of trees, of beasts, of birds, of reptiles, and of fish"; and how this act "sounds like the beginning of descriptive science."⁹ He goes on to say that "Perhaps Solomon's speech merely used the animals as illustrations for human behavior, in the way that Proverbs 6:6 urges the sluggard to "go to the ant." He goes on to say that "Even this illustrative use requires some observation of the animal or plant world." He calls attention to the element of biodiversity in Solomon's scientific approach when he says, "But the language of 1 Kings 4:29-34 seems to describe a much more concerted focus on the plants and animals, and not just for the sake of illustrating human life." (Poythress, 2006, p. 157) One can connect this approach to the creation

⁹ V. S. Poythress, (2006). *Redeeming science: A God-centered approach*.
Wheaton: Crossway Books, p. 157

story in Genesis that gives the idea of intelligent orderliness, as well as a symbiotic creative reliance of plants and animals for collective perpetuation. Poythress (2006) continues to submit that “Solomon’s discussion of plants and animals appears to be in addition to the 3,000 proverbs, proverbs that make observations about human life.” (p. 157) Allusion to Solomon’s insightful observations is synonymous with science’s empirical observation of recorded accuracy in pattern of creation. Dahl (1933) calls attention to the scientific method of accurate and valid observation and deduction. It is a common knowledge that scientific method relies upon replicable and reliable patterns. Poythress then says, “Wisdom, in the ancient Near East, included wisdom not only concerning human life but also concerning the natural world.¹⁰ Solomon’s accuracy in illustration based on empirically observed reality gives Poythress the confidence to label Solomon as a scientist. Just as scientists have a lot of respect for accuracy in description, disciplined observation of cause and effects, integrity of facts based on thorough analysis and evaluation, Solomon’s conclusively accurate descriptions of plants, animals and human behavior, based on God-given wisdom, earned him the title of a scientist that Poythress gives him. To dispel any misunderstanding surrounding his bold claim, Poythress says “As far as we know, Solomon did not have a lot of technical experimental apparatus.” (2006, p. 157) He then goes on to assert that “But science does not start with its present fund of apparatus. It builds gradually.” (p. 157) This is a fair comment as scientific methodology has evolved over the years, particularly in the natural sciences, with advancements that have progressed over time to include faster planes, use of cell phones, and even the discovery of audio-visual zoom software among many others.

¹⁰ Ibid

It is on record that what biologists eventually evolved into may have some direct influence from Solomon's concept. Poythress says, "The beginnings of modern biology included much work in detailed observation and classification of animals and plants (especially Linnaeus, whose system of classification continues in use today, with appropriate modifications and enhancements)." (2006, p. 158) It is therefore no surprise to see Poythress conclude that "Solomon's utterances may well have begun explorations in this direction."¹¹ The Bible makes reference to Solomon's statements in the Book of 1 Kings 4:32-33: "Solomon composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke of trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop growing in the wall, and he taught about animals, birds, reptiles, and fish." (2006, p. 158) This may have encouraged Poythress' statement that "I have found that science offers a wonderful window onto God's wisdom"; and that "it provides extraordinarily beautiful and wise and profound exhibitions of God's glory."¹² The call to search for the truth in the word of God (Bible) is buttressed by the uncompromisingly strong value of science in pursuing truth based on observable and replicable reality. Howson (1933) says an interest and a question precedes any scientific collection of facts, and that such collected facts should be satisfactorily relevant to the interest as well as the question that triggered the search for truth. In the Book of Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes, Solomon's interest in wisdom, in loving relationships, and in the values and vanity of life with all its pleasures and treasures gingered his questions that produced his bundle of facts.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 158

¹² Ibid, p. 159

Scientific Law of Regularity and Universality

Poythress confirms that “the work of science depends constantly on the fact that there are regularities in the world” and that “Without the regularities, there would ultimately be nothing to study”; and “that still more regularities are to be found in the areas that they will investigate.”¹³ One can easily conclude that science therefore has a law of regularity meticulously observed, measured, and consistently found to be true at all times in order to adopt such so that anyone else anywhere can replicate the same model. This is what Poythress refers to as the “Universal Applicability of Scientific Law”.¹⁴ For example, when Proverbs 6:6 says, “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!” one can see the scientific law of regularity and universality in this simple but true statement. In fact, Proverbs 6:7-8 will unpack additional truth that can withstand the test of regularity and universality when the Bible says of the ants, “Without a commander, without an overseer or ruler, it prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food at harvest”. It is on this basis that Poythress affirms that “Scientists think of laws as universal in time and space.”¹⁵ Just like science, theology’s position regarding the word of God as having universal applicability appears to be a great argument in support of how like science and theology also rely heavily on the law of universal applicability. While this argument sounds impeccable, one must raise the issue of contexts. Should one factor the context within

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 16

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 17

which the word of God was made? Should one bring the changing culture, mores, beliefs and traditions of different generations and civilizations into the mix? These are pertinent questions worth pursuing. Poythress brings up the immutability of the law of God just as “The very concept of scientific law presupposes immutability.”¹⁶ When one reflects on Solomon’s saying in Proverbs 10:4-5, one will realize its truism and immutability: “He who works with a lazy hand is poor, but the hand of the hard worker brings riches. A son who gathers in summer is wise, but a son who sleeps during gathering time brings shame.” This is a statement of truth that has evolved over time, to the point that some see it as ‘an idle hand that becomes devil’s workshop.’

In terms of “the power of the law”, Poythress points out that “Scientists formulate laws as descriptions of regularities that they observe” just as miracles “take place in accordance with his [God’s] predictive and decretive word” which is consistent with “The real law, the word of God” which “brings forth miracles.”¹⁷ In other words, consistency in outcome based on a carefully observed pattern over time continues to be a shared value both by science and theology. In this instance, Poythress identifies the “divine attributes of law”¹⁸ as in the unchangeable truth of God, no matter the changes in season, phase, or face. He also refers to “the power of the law” because it holds true anywhere, and at all times, and because “the human scientific formulation follows the facts”, it is based on one in which “a law or regularity must hold for a whole series of cases” before scientists approve such a law for universal application, just as “The real law, the word of God, brings forth miracles.”¹⁹ For example, Solomon’s statement in Proverbs 12:1 simply says,

¹⁶ Poythress, p. 17

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 18

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 17-18

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 18

“Whoever loves strong teaching loves much learning, but he who hates strong words is foolish.” Today, this has metamorphosed into an all time-saying: ‘If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.’ The law of regularity and universality is also observed in Proverbs 13:30: “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the one who walks with fools will be destroyed.” Solomon’s timeless statements remain true as evidence abound that confirm how innocent people become drug addicts by mingling with the wrong crowd. When Poythress says “Scientists also assume that laws can be articulated, expressed, communicated, and understood through human language”²⁰, one is quick to see the divine law articulated, expressed, communicated, and understood through human language as unpacked by Solomon in the Bible through the Books of Proverbs, King, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. Encyclopaedia Britannica reinforces the importance of the scientific method of regularity when it says “Law of nature, in the philosophy of science, [is] a stated regularity in the relations or order of phenomena in the world that holds, under a stipulated set of conditions, either universally or in a stated proportion of instances.” (n.d., para 1) Solomon shows how wisdom gives life in the Book Proverbs, how wisdom, honor and humility provide strong leadership in the Book of 1 Kings, how romance, love, and appreciation of a loved one deepens unbreakable marriages, and how the duration of each human individual’s life and time on earth is short while all the pleasures and the treasures of this world are vanity. The regularity of these facts is clearly obvious today as they were when Solomon penned them down.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 20

Rationality and Logic

In connecting science and theology, and in connecting the importance of stability, rationality, and logic, Poythress says, “Scientists, whether Christian or atheist, rely on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They rely on the Father as the source of stable law.” (2006, p. 175) This may not offer any comfort for anyone who has no idea of who the Holy Spirit is. However, Poythress goes on to insist that “They [scientists] rely on the Son, who is the Word of the Father and the true Law of the universe, the true source of rationality and logic.” (2006, p. 175) The importance of rationality and logic cannot be underestimated as Solomon’s assertions possess these elements. Poythress presses on to say that “They [scientists] rely on him also for providing, through his sacrifice, benefits and blessings that they do not deserve. They rely on the Holy Spirit to teach them.”²¹ A critical examination of Solomon’s assertions possess the principles of truth, coherence, rationality, integrity, dignity, discipline, sacrifice, as well as deep wisdom, insight and power to live a successful life. Just as science operates in facts rather than fiction, Solomon, through his theological insights, unpacks theologically sound doctrines that are rational and logical. For example, Proverbs 12:9 says, “Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than pretend to be somebody and have no food.” This simple statement passes the test of logic and rationality as anything contrary in today’s parlance will be described as delusion of grandeur. In 1 Kings 3:16-28, the Bible records the story of utmost rationality and logic as king Solomon identifies the guilty and the innocent in a very delicate case while adjudicating the story of the two mothers laying claim to a child.

²¹ Ibid, p. 175

The necessity for precision and absolute truth, coupled with the drive for excellence as displayed by Solomon are in sync with science's core values of pursuing incorruptible truth and undisputable facts that Christ and Christianity stand for. In other words, scientific method in theology will not compromise the integrity of truth in its doctrinal statements or positions on issues. Drawing from the position of God being the impartial, generous, and unbiased giver of all wisdom, knowledge, understanding and insight, Poythress affirms that "God provides scientific insights and scientific and technological success even to those who rebel against him."²² One can quickly assess Solomon's statement in Proverbs 15:1 that says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." From a practical perspective, the last four years of the American presidency (2016 to 2020) have witnessed the president's harsh rhetoric, divisive languages, abusive statements and false conspiracy theories that created the highest level of tensions and fear that drove the largest number of voters to the poll in the 2020 election, each side fearing the worst if they chose not to vote. President Trump's harsh words stirred up anger that forced people to vote for him or against him, depending on those he demonized and those he idolized. One can therefore see the depth of logic and rationality in Solomon's Proverbs 15:1. Siegel (1989) explains that "science has traditionally been seen as the apex of rationality"; as it is "guided only by reason, patiently observing, experimenting, following the evidence wherever it lead", and "entirely on the basis of evidence and reasons." (p. 9) From a general analysis of Solomon's sayings in the Books of 1 Kings, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes, one can say that his conclusions were guided by sound reasoning that appears to be a product of consistent and patient observation of true life patterns consistent over time, with outcomes that have rational and logical evident for all to see.

²² Poythress, 2006, p. 176

Mathematical Application for Dimensions and Measurements

It is necessary to subject any of Solomon's relevant actions to mathematical application that may have promoted measurements, the values of precision, and integrity. This is on the basis that theology postulates what scientific methodology can measure – and Poythress outlines these, and they include the rising and the going down of the sun, rain from the heavens, the flourishing of vegetation that produces fresh air, and the abundant existence of body of water (seas) that sustains life. In this, there is logical orderliness that theology (Bible) captures. Poythress goes on to say that “the word of God includes a control of the mathematical aspects of the world”; and “the coherence between mathematical expressions and physical laws”, making it clear that “the word of God is a harmonious whole, and produces harmony between physics and mathematics.”²³ While affirming that “The tabernacle as a model of God's macrocosmic house also shows numerical and spatial beauty and harmony”,²⁴ one can assume that Poythress sees Solomon or theology using scientific methodology of dimensions and measurements and hence promotes the values of precision and integrity. The Bible records Solomon's accomplishment in 1 Kings 6:2-6 that shows the specification of the temple: “The temple that King Solomon built for the Lord was sixty cubits long, twenty wide and thirty high.” It goes on to say “The portico at the front of the main hall of the temple extended the width of the temple, that is twenty cubits, and projected ten cubits from the front of the temple.” Also, “He made narrow windows high up in the temple walls.” In addition, the description of the architectural masterpiece says, “Against

²³ Ibid, p. 317

²⁴ Ibid

the walls of the main hall and inner sanctuary he built a structure around the building, in which there were side rooms.” Continuing, the Bible says “The lowest floor was five cubits wide, the middle floor six cubits and the third floor seven. He made offset ledges around the outside of the temple so that nothing would be inserted into the temple walls.” This will explain why Poythress says “The tabernacle model shows that mathematics in its roots originates from God. Both the spatial and numerical aspects of the tabernacle are an integral part of the structure of imaging or modeling.”²⁵ While Solomon may not necessarily be the creator of the dimensions here, he is the one that has the privilege of receiving the directive, and actualizing it.

Through Solomon, as expressed in 1 Kings 6, Poythress draws out the scientific implication when he says “the Holy Place is an attenuated “image” of the Most Holy Place, which in turn is an “image” of the macrocosm and of God’s dwelling in heaven.”²⁶ In other words, the concept of shape, size, diameters, height, and depth are no strangers to theology as unpacked in 1 Kings 6 when God commanded Solomon, and Solomon follows the dimensional specifications to the letter. It shows that theology epitomizes scientific methods and originated the concept of divine creativity. In adding his voice to factors with which critical examination could happen, McGrath seems to embrace the concept of “*Naturwissenschaften*” which “deal with precise descriptions, analyses and measurements”, and opines that “the human understanding of nature is objective, external and detached, and is based upon the logical and rational investigation of physical objects with which we have no direct affinity or sympathy.”²⁷ The importance of logical and rational investigation of physical objects is relevant to 1 Kings 6.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 322

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Alister McGrath (2001), *A Scientific Theology: Nature*, Volume 1, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. p. 29

McGrath goes on to say, “A scientific theology is concerned with knowledge of God and the world.”²⁸ He refers to certain principles: objectivity, truth, and humility – all hallmarks of both theology and scientific methods. He identifies other shared characteristics such as coherence to external reality as well as the possession of empirical and logical criteria. He also highlights the place of rationality and shared knowledge. He emphatically states that “Yet a scientific theology is able to maintain the public accessibility of the natural world, while fully recognizing the tradition-specific nature of the process of observation and interpretation.” Solomon’s wise judgment, sayings, and the temple architectural layout symbolize the natural world that is open to public accessibility. Also, a view of reality within the framework of rationality is obvious based on the statement that “For a scientific theology, a Christian natural theology represents a tradition-mediated view of reality, which possess a created capacity to function as a trans-traditional framework of rationality.”²⁹

It is interesting to see McGrath engage what he calls mathematical realism and the mind of God, saying “Mathematics enables the order within the world to be identified and seen as an aspect of the harmony within the creation, grounded in the being of God.”³⁰ The specific outlay of the temple, the exactness of the architectural piece, and the measurable specification of the length, depth, width, and breath all confirm the scientific component of theology as it pertains to Solomon. Tal (2020) says “Measurement is an integral part of modern science as well as of engineering, commerce, and daily life” (para 1); and it involves accuracy and precision as well as

²⁸ Alister McGrath, (2002), *A Scientific Theology: Reality*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, p. 3

²⁹ Ibid, p. 54

³⁰ Ibid, p. 170 (Alister McGrath alludes to Saint Augustine’s *Recherches augustiniennes*, vol. 1, Paris: Erudes augustiniennes, 1958, 113-48.)

standardization. In addition to the 1 Kings 6 specifications, one can also deduce accuracy and precision in Solomon's sayings about wisdom and folly, good and bad, life and death, righteousness and wickedness, hard working person and a sloth.

The Legitimacy of Theory within Solomon's Scientific Theology

Writing on "Scientific theory", Encyclopaedia Britannica (n.d.) defines it as "systematic ideational structure of broad scope, conceived by the human imagination, that encompasses a family of empirical (experiential) laws regarding regularities existing in objects and events, both observed and posited." (para 1) In other words, it is not just a mere broad scope of random human imagination but one that has the power of empirical or experiential regularities. Can one claim that some of Solomon's wise sayings are today's theories within the scientific sphere on the basis of human imagination that is backed by empirical and experiential realities? The answer to this will be "Yes". Solomon's 1 Kings 6 judgment is a classic case of imaginative understanding of human psychology. Solomon's writings displayed observable patterns over time, the consistent human response to diverse issues of life, and the window to the ultimate end of created beings. McGrath submits that "Within the parameter of the Christian tradition, humanity is to be seen as the height of God's creation, whose life is shaped by the overwhelming radiance of the vision of God." (2003, p. 3) He says, "The church is called into being through its apprehension of this vision of God", and he "argued that the supreme task of theology is to keep this sense of wonder alive", and "as the process of unfolding the object of wonder and worship

proceeds – in other words, as apprehension gives way to reflection, and supremely the formulation of theory.”³¹ Theology’s theory is preceded by vision of God, apprehending the radiance of that vision, reflecting on it, and coming up with a theory that will capture the experience and put it into a written form that others can access and assess. Proverb 10:4 says: “Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.” This, for example, may have formed the foundation upon which many recent dignity-of-labor quotes came from. McGrath says “Reflection on observations of the natural world leads to the generation of theories concerning the world, through the intellectual digestion and assimilation of what is observed.”³² In this case, one has to observe first, and then reflect upon the observation to identify patterns over time before one can arrive at a consistent, reliable, and valid position. For example, he identifies the theory in biology and says “The history of the biological sciences demonstrates the irresistible trend from observation to theory.”³³ Solomon’s wise sayings show reliable observed patterns over time, and could be seen as theories to guide mankind.

As well, McGrath refers to theory in physics, and says “The transition from observation to theoretical reflection is equally marked in the physical sciences.”³⁴ Regarding Christian theology, McGrath identifies Christian doctrine as theory.³⁵ Doctrine, according to McGrath, “entails a sense of commitment to a community of faith”, and it “is an activity, a process of transmission of the collective wisdom of a community, rather than a passive set of deliverances”;

³¹ Alister McGrath (2003), *A Scientific Theology: Theory*, Grand Rapid, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, p. 3

³² Ibid, p. 11

³³ Ibid, p. 15

³⁴ Ibid, p. 16

³⁵ Ibid, p. 24

and he also says “The views of theologians are doctrinally significant, in so far as they have won acceptance within the community.”³⁶ Doctrinal views of theologians would have come from observed patterns over time, thus becoming a theory that others will use to make assertions. Solomon’s over 3,000 wise assertions have become theories or doctrines. He goes on to say that “Doctrine may thus be provisionally defined as communally authoritative teachings regarded as essential to the identity of the Christian community, in which the community tells itself and outsiders what it has seen”, as well as “what it has become in response to this vision.”³⁷ Solomon’s wise sayings have become such relevant authoritative teachings even for unbelievers around the world today. One thing to add to the above is that it also captured observable experiences and feelings that could be the outcome of human behavior when people undergo certain decisions and experiences. McGrath identifies the representation of reality through words,³⁸ through propositions³⁹, and through images⁴⁰, and these are ways conveyed through the theories of scientific theology. All these words, propositions and images are fully contained in Solomon’s sayings.

McGrath comes up with three traditions through which scientific theology makes its explanation clear. According to McGrath, the third “tradition must be capable of seeing the world through theoretical spectacles in such a manner that it is able to offer explanations which

³⁶ Ibid, p. 28

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid, p. 84

³⁹ Ibid, p. 90

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 94

may reasonably be regarded as appropriate and convincing to those within that tradition.”⁴¹ One can therefore see Solomon’s creative wisdom saying as theology’s theoretical explanation of an orderly and coherent explanation of a life of peace, joy, abundance, and love if one is diligent and righteous; or a life of chaos, sadness, rift, inadequacy, and conflict if one chose to be lazy, proud, boastful, dishonest and unreliable. In the words of McGrath, “Theory represents an attempt to express in language the corporate beholding of a reality.”⁴² A theoretical basis of revelation in theology may use “a number of different levels of social construction”, and these could “be identified within the complex aggregate of texts, ideas, images, values, communities and events”.⁴³ In Solomon’s wise sayings, life-giving and insightful lessons are in the texts, ideas, images and values therein. These are the theoretical ways of conveying meaning, including “patterns of worship”⁴⁴ as well as “institutional structures”⁴⁵ like the details in 1 Kings 4, “distinctive vocabulary” and “religious experience”⁴⁶. One can therefore identify wisdom for marriage, for leadership, for relationship, for being a successful employee, son, daughter or parent from Solomon’s wise sayings or theories/doctrines. Polkinghorne submits that first is the experimental dimension of theology like any scientific approach that is preceded by theory-making acts of self-disclosure which is followed by reflective interpretation⁴⁷. Second is the revelatory component that is synonymous with experiential dimension of scientific methodology.

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid, p. 139

⁴³ Ibid, p. 146

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 147

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 148

⁴⁷ John Polkinghorne (2009), *Theology in the Context of Science*, New Haven: Yale University Press,

On both fronts, appreciable scientific methodology reflects in theology: theory-making acts, and reflective interpretations. Solomon's insightful sayings become the theoretical foundations from which reflective interpretations emerge.

Relevance to Reality and Complementarity

Writing on "the character of reality", Trigg (1993) says "Religion has undoubtedly played its part historically in providing an intellectual climate in which modern science could flourish." (p. 9) Solomon's ideas and wise sayings in the Books of 1 Kings, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes are intellectually sound and applicable to reality – in the areas of leadership, wisdom for life and living, romance and loving relationships, as well as on the brevity of life and the purpose for living. Solomon is a classic example of one who provided sound ideas upon which modern science flourished. To McGrath, asking two questions should help people to grasp the connection between science and religion. He asks the first one: "Do science and religion relate to the same reality?"⁴⁸ He also goes on to ask the second question: "Are the insights of science and religion contradictory or complementary?"⁴⁹ In apparent response to the two questions, McGrath submits that "science and religion are convergent"⁵⁰. One can go ahead to ask the question: Can one claim that the wise sayings of Solomon are relevant to reality or not? Can one also conclude that Solomon's sayings run contrary to common sense, to decency, to expectations, and to give life? It is clear that Solomon's wise sayings are relevant to reality of his time as well as today, and for all times. Polanyi (1967) says "the purpose

⁴⁸ Alister McGrath (1999), *Science & Religion: An Introduction*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Inc., p. 44.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 49

of science is to discover the hidden reality underlying the facts of nature.” (p. 177) He points to the need to acknowledge “a feature of reality” each time “precise mathematical relationship” leads to “data” that are of value to science (Polanyi, 1967, p. 177). Solomon’s wisdom for ethical healthy living will lead to long and successful life.

McGrath’s reference to Polanyi’s position “that all knowledge – whether it relates to the natural sciences, religion, or philosophy – is personal in nature”⁵¹ is important to reflect upon. McGrath goes on to say that “Although knowledge involves concepts or ideas, it also involves something more profound – a personal involvement with that which is known, which Polanyi refers to as “the fiduciary rootedness of all rationality.”⁵² One can conclude from the position here that religion is scientific and imbued with scientific methods as long as it seeks or unpacks knowledge that is rational, relevant to reality, personal and involving in as much as it is experiential. Solomon’s wise sayings are relevant to reality, insightful, timeless, and life-giving.

The concept of creation and time is also important. Solomon’s wise sayings focus on creation and time. According to Solomon, any creature that decides to be lazy and not learn from the small ants who gather up for winter during summer, such an individual must be ready to suffer. It is believed that “the basic contours of the religious idea of “creation” focuses especially on its Christian statements, which are known to have been of major importance to the development of the natural sciences in western culture.”⁵³ The order in creation is a

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 84

⁵² Ibid, pp. 84-85

⁵³ Ibid, p. 111

cosmological foundation that is obvious here. The artistic expression⁵⁴, the concepts of creation and time⁵⁵, the concept of creation and ecology⁵⁶, the concept of creation and the laws of nature⁵⁷ – the idea of night and day, and that of light and darkness are exceptionally important in this discourse. So too is Solomon’s insights on the idea of good and bad people, wise and foolish people, hardworking and lazy people, those who will live and those who will die. McGrath goes on to conclude that “This brief survey of the relation of the doctrine of creation and the “laws of nature” brings out the remarkable manner in which the sciences and religion converge on the issue of regularity and ordering within nature.”⁵⁸ Going by all that Solomon wrote, one can clearly see the concepts of artistic expressions; creation and time; creation and ecology; as well as that of creation and the laws of nature give room for measurement, for observation, and for the rational analysis of the orderliness. Solomon’s use of models and analogies are potent tools of scientific significance in theology.

According to McGrath, “One of the most intriguing aspects of the interface between science and religion is the use of “models” or “analogies” to depict complex entities – whether the entity in question is an atomic nucleus or God.”⁵⁹ He refers to this concept as “visual aids” that are common in science and religion. To him, what models do in the natural sciences is synonymous with what analogy and metaphor do in religion. Under this model or analogy

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 117

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 119

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 122

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 126

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 144

approach, McGrath points to the importance of complementarity by posing the question: “What happens if the behavior of a system is such that it appears to need more than one model to represent it?” He goes on to say, “In religion, this situation is well known. The Old and New Testaments, for example, use a wide variety of models or analogies to refer to God, such as “father”, “king”, “shepherd”, and “rock”.” Further, he says “Each of these is regarded as illustrating one aspect of the divine nature. Taken together, they provide a cumulative and more comprehensive depiction of the divine nature and character than any one such analogy might allow on its own.”⁶⁰ Solomon uses complementary words to emphasize the life lessons he taught, and he drills it down to ensure permanent retention based on approach. McGrath sees complementarity as a way to get a full picture or idea of someone with enough evidence from various sources. It is also a way in which different approaches or definitions help identify the undisputable identity and character of a subject. He compares why complementarity is applicable to religion as well as to science. He says, “It is also instructive to ask why complementary approaches were adopted in the first place in relation to both quantum phenomena and Christology.” He then concludes that “The pressure for clarification of the nature of quantum phenomena came from experimental observations which precipitated a theoretical crisis, demonstrating that existing conceptualities simply could not account for the phenomena.”⁶¹ In short, in order to avoid controversies and get the clearest picture of a concept, models and analogies give people the opportunity to have complementary body of evidences that will also give people absolute confidence of the truest identity or definition of a person or phenomenon.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 165

⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 173-174

Conclusion

It is necessary to reflect a little on the insightful position of Hanes and Masarik (2016) when they submit that “Theology is not a science, if by science we mean: (1) exact and controlled experimentation, (2) prediction of future events, (3) generally accessible knowledge.” (p. 12) One may ponder on the possibility of experimenting the theories deducible from Solomon’s sayings – for example, set up experimentation of Solomon’s romantic ideas in the Song of Songs with two couples, one practicing the principles of Solomon, and the controlled sample, in this case, the other couple, unexposed to Solomon’s romantic principles. It is also possible to predict the future events of these two couples as one couple may likely turn out to be more romantic than the other. Solomon’s romantic principles in the Book of Song of Songs are accessible to the discerning. Hence, on the basis of this explanation, one may venture to say that Solomon is a scientist through the theology that can lend itself to scientific methods. In the same vein, one can whole-heartedly affirm that “Theology is a science, if by science we mean: (1) critical thinking, (2) justification of knowledge by experience, (3) logical system of knowledge.” (Hanes & Masarik, 2016, p. 12) If one uses the example of Songs of Songs or Solomon’s sayings in the Book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, one will realize that in addition to Solomon’s personal experiential reflections, the sayings are embodiments of “logical system of knowledge”, products of “critical thinking”, and “justification of knowledge by experience”. The approaches used in this article are not exhaustive, hence, there is a need to do further research work on this topic.

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Sunday Akin Olukoju

Book Review 1

Into the Depths: A Chaplain's Reflections on Death, Dying and Pastoral Care
Written by ROSIE DEEDES and Published in 2019 by Sancristy Press, Durham, UK

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What does it mean to enter the depth of despair and darkness with someone who is in the throes of death and hopelessness? At a time when selfless care and compassion for the dying and the vulnerable may be too overwhelming, what keeps some people going on resiliently, journeying with the distressed, the depressed and the hopeless in prisons; as well as the dying in hospices and the bereaved families of the dead, without getting stuck in the rut? Rosie Deedes, the author of the 2019 book, *Into the Depths: A Chaplain's Reflections on Death, Dying and Pastoral Care* unpacks a lot of details. The author, a Christian, a priest, and a chaplain, is also a wife and mother of three children. Deedes' chaplaincy career covers many women's and male offenders' prisons, hospices, and a university. The chaplain's solid academic training in theology at Birmingham University, and her training for ministry at Westcott House, Cambridge prove to be a testament to her rigorous and vigorous grooming, as well as her firm grounding on the subject matter.

The book's main thesis is not only to unravel the essence of pastoral journey into the depth of suffering and the fear of the dying, but it also provides a window into the work and gift of pastoral care that offers love, compassion, understanding and acceptance to the most vulnerable. This book's title, "Into the Depth" turns out to be an attention grabber that catches one's attention quickly, especially as those three words sound familiar, and traceable to the Bible. This book is loaded without redundancy and heavy without a boring moment. Yet, the book is heavier in width than in depth. The ambition of the book to cover so many areas in one book appears to limit the author's opportunity to dig deeper, to share more about other first-hand encounters with those dying in prisons and in hospices. While the author poses some fundamental questions, she does not have adequate space to drill down well. For example, in chapter two, she asks some usual questions: Why is God letting this happen to me? Where is God now? How can a good person deserve this suffering? It would have been good if the author shows any local, sub-regional, continental, or global statistical figures of those seeking answers to these fundamental questions, and from what parts of the world. The author focuses on her own personal work, and this may be powerful as first-hand testimony that has the qualities of empirical evidence. However, Deedes does not cross-reference the similarity of experience with others in pastoral care in other parts of the world. The author's theoretical framework that situates the role of pastoral care as one that stands on the edge, peering into the depth of human suffering, despair and misery vividly captures the burden of responsibilities the chaplain carries. In terms of strengths, the recency and relevance of contents to the reality of the twenty first century, the primacy of empirical facts of a primary source

directly from the practitioner, experiences over time, the use of narratives with clarity and simplicity of communication, the solid academic training and professional qualifications and experiences of the writer, the use of themes and sub-themes, the book's orderliness in the logical organization of contents, the book's easy accessibility online via kindle purchase, and the book's concluding theological reflections on the various issues in almost all the book's chapters make the book to stand out, giving empowering tools for practitioners. The drawback includes the absence of statistical data from around the world on the subject. The author's decision not to compare her work with few others in the field takes away the benefit of knowing what works and where. The book appears to stretch itself thin while covering this wide subject in prisons and in a hospice. The author may do well to devote the entirety of one book to pastoral care in the hospice; and endeavor to gather a longitudinal study of pastoral care in various hospices locally and globally to identify the accomplishments, what areas may need adaptations, or changes in approach or collaboration, and how best to improve the work of pastoral care.

Overall, it is not out of place to conclude that this book will engender further research in this field. It will also ginger some practitioners to take their work of pastoral care more seriously, while the younger generation of potential pastoral carers will read this book as an invitation to keep the high standard and improve upon it. The book's use of theological reflections will help readers to think through the issue of suffering from Jesus' lens, and to accept the reality and prepare for the eventuality. A good take-away from the book are the seven components of establishing a safe pastoral relationship: attentiveness, active listening, accompaniment, authenticity, compassion, containment, and challenge. A note of caution might be to also factor in the people, the environment, constant prayer, and communion with, and immersion in the word of God. Based on this summary, this is one book to recommend to students and practitioners of chaplaincy and pastoral care; as well as to anyone who likes to know how to care for the vulnerable, the dying, and bereaved families.

Sunday Akin Olukoju

Book Review 2

How to Talk with Sick, Dying, and Grieving People: When There Are No Magic Words
Written by PATRICK RIECKE and Published in 2018 by Emerald Hope Publishing House

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The opening preface of this 171-page book reminds readers that there is “no magic words” (p. 1) to answer the tough questions of the bereaved, or to sooth their pain, or quell their level of anger. The author, Patrick Riecke, is an ordained minister with a master’s degree. He is “the Director of Chaplains, and Chairperson of the Ethics Committee for Parkview Health, Indiana, US”, who, “for twenty years”, “curated the best methods for helping people and families” (p. 2). Riecke says this book is a tool to help those grieving in dealing with “hard times” that affect “the mind, heart, and spirit in ways that are mysterious” (p. 3). The author successfully unpacks the “three phases of spiritual growth” and “practical tips for leaders who care about people in grief, trauma, or crisis” (p. 2), thereby fulfilling the promises in the opening preface of the book. One quickly notices that this book does not solidly identify the basis or the main source of the core values driving the recommendations. The role and influence of Scriptural texts deserve more space and attention than one sees in this book. Woodland (2018) reminds readers to be rooted to the word of God while writing on *Ministry Amidst Completing Values: Pastoral Care and Medical Assistance in Dying*: “Ministering to the suffering and needy is rooted in the biblical text, which encourages Christians to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2a RSV, passim)” as well as treating “the least of these” (which includes the sick) as if they were Jesus (Matt 25:40)... not excluding those wrestling with end-of-life issues”. (p. 145)

The book’s suggestions to remain silent and not force prayer on the dying or the bereaved have strong backing from Ramsey (2011) who suggests that “we are midwives, not magicians” (p. 63). Although the book would like to help readers with tools and resources to support the dying and the bereaved, Ramsey’s (2011) advice to pastoral caregivers to see “the Bible as our resource” is very instructive. Ramsey warns caregivers never to “create something clever and new to bring into a sickroom” but “know the word [of God] and know it well”; and not only that, but to also “believe in its power with heart and mind, and then get out of the way and let the Spirit create something new.” (p. 63) The book omits telling readers about the importance of the power and the help of the Spirit of God in providing the necessary tools and resources for helping the dying and their bereaved family members. The author makes good his promise to give useful tools that pastoral caregivers can employ in assisting the dying and their families. The use of case studies of real-life people connects readers to the situation. The simplicity of terms, and the clarity in presentation give any reader easy access to the tools and ideas. The author’s education and his two decades of hands-on work experience at the director level confirm his expertise on the subject matter. The relative recency of the publication, the specificity of the topic

on pastoral care for the dying and their grieving families, the relevance of the topic to everyday reality, and the book's orderliness in logical organization, as well as its theological reflections on some tough questions make it a good resource. This book raises some tough questions about life and living, about dying and death, about pain and regrets, and about the importance of planning for any future eventuality. While the author comforts readers with his "no magic words" comment, it will also reduce or eliminate the guilt many may feel when they sit in silence while visiting the dying or comforting the bereaved. The author uses themes and sub-themes, case studies as well as anecdotes to craft his clear prose while unpacking useful tools and resources to help the dying and their bereaved families. The book is more of practical and hands-on than mere academic theories. An average person can offer some aspects of pastoral care after reading this book. The author also uses reflections and briefly alludes to the story of Job and his friends in the Bible to communicate the historicity of silence and active presence during pain; and confirms the importance of ancient insights as tools of comforting or helping the dying.

However, this book alludes to very few scientific sources. The author focuses more on his personal work experiences without any corroborative or collaborative evidence. The author omits citing similar experiences of other pastoral care givers whose work may corroborate or support his own work outcomes in other areas or jurisdictions. The author should at least add a little data about the death rate, the percentage that successfully access pastoral care over time, the possible benefits to the patients and families, the likely areas that may need additional work or any potential complaints that pastoral care givers should investigate and offer possible suggestions of what they can do differently. Although the book alludes to the study of the University of Kansas nursing department, more of such scientific findings are missing in this book, thus reducing some of this book's recommendations only to the authenticity of the author's limited world of practice. The author assumes that readers will only be western consumers whose culture, tradition, beliefs about dying and death, grief, bereavement, and afterlife, are similar or close in comparison. The usability of the tools will only apply mainly to people within the national or regional geographic jurisdiction of the author's practice. The book ought to compare pastoral care practice and experiences with those from other cultures, particularly on the issue of miscarriage or stillbirth. It is necessary to know if revisiting a forgotten stillbirth experience can re-open a healed wound or complicate one that is in an advanced stage of healing. This book warns readers of what helping professionals should avoid in order not to complicate matters for the dying and

their families. The tools and resources, although may be culture or jurisdiction restrictive or specific, are nonetheless, empowering, and an average reader will know what to do when there is a need to care for the dying and their families. On this basis, and because of its user-friendliness, recommending this book to others will be very ideal.

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