Science & Religion: Friends or Foes?

NACTA Annual Conference 2013*

Four Current Paradigms: Opportunity for Students to Practice Integrated Thinking.
- Conflict – reason vs faith, fact vs feeling, empiricism vs superstition
- Contrast – they ask different questions: how vs why?
- Contact – areas of agreement, reason & passion are complementary (Darwin)
- Confirmation – whenever they disagree, one/both must be wrong, ultimate Truth

Nature of Truth: Scientific Method (Verification, Falsification) vs Revelation. Agriculture students need to understand that there are different types of truth, including agrarian philosophy, poetry, music, sensual, spiritual, historical, tradition, natural law, et al.

Understanding of Science: Modern science is based on the non-provable assumption that the earth/cosmos is rational, orderly, predictable; challenged today by Chaos & Complexity Theories and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle (behavior of electrons).


Framing the Questions: “Creation vs Evolution?” = false dichotomy; Creation ex Nihilo => Big Bang? Real Issue: One's Image of God - Trustworthy or Magician?

Evolution: Micro vs Macro, Punctuated Equilibrium vs Phyletic Gradualism, Why would God allow Extinction (rejected by Thomas Jefferson)?

Intelligent Design (ID): Two Schools of Thought.
- Extraordinary - Irreducible Complexity (M. Behe), “God of the Gaps” Theory, Miracles unexplainable by science; implies that as science advances … evidence of God retreats.
- Ordinary – Science as Revelation (K. Miller, J. Haught, F. Collins, S. Hawking), everyday manifestations of divine activity, beauty, and order, including science.

Nature of Evil: Cosmic Contingency (Randomness/Chance) => Free Will, Altruism (is there ever such a pure motive?) Deism (detach creator God) vs Theism (involved personal God) - having faith in God's protection vs God's love.

Teleology (Purpose): Inevitable Journey to Consciousness? Many Examples …
- Quantum Mechanics: Ratio of Mass of Electrons/Protons => Helium in Initial Stellar Furnace => Heavy Elements (Carbon, Nitrogen, Oxygen) => Life
- Astrophysics: # of Stars (10^22) => Keeps Universe from Collapsing or Dissipating

Abrahamic God of Novelty & Surprise?
- Chaos Theory – Small Events => Big Impacts (Butterfly Effect)
- Complexity – Ecosystem Disturbance => Higher Levels of Stasis, Awareness
- Proper Response – Hebrew Notion of Apophatic Wonder & Silence

* (Rev.) Mike Ellerbrock, PhD, Professor of Agricultural & Applied Economics, Virginia Tech and Vicariate Deacon, Catholic Diocese of Richmond.