

BOOK REVIEW

of

Tim Morris and Don Petcher,
Science & Grace: God's Reign in the Natural Sciences,
Crossway Books, 2006.

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

Tim Morris and Don Petcher both teach at Covenant College. Morris is a Professor of Biology and Dean of Science. Petcher is a Professor of Physics and Department Chair. Both obtained their undergraduate degree from Covenant. Morris went on to obtain a doctorate in cellular and molecular biology. Petcher obtained a doctorate in elementary particle physics. Both did postdoctoral work in their respective fields before returning to Covenant. The contents of this book developed over time as Morris and Petcher created a course at Covenant called "Science in Perspective" to fulfill the core science requirement for those not majoring in science, they won course awards from the Templeton Foundation which enabled them to attend Oxford Seminars on Science and Christianity during the summers of 1999, 2000 and 2001, and they wrote papers and gave talks on the subject matter. They explain that their perspective is connected with the Scottish Presbyterian tradition as derived from the Old Princeton theology, from the Dutch Reformed tradition, from the teachings of Francis Schaeffer, and from the southern Presbyterian heritage. They do not write much on specific scientific topics, in fact perhaps intentionally avoid doing so. For example, they do not give their position on hot topics such as creation/evolution, or the length of the days in Genesis chapter one. Rather, they speak in more general terms about how we relate our theological convictions to the world around us, and how should what we believe influence us in terms of involvement in science, or even more generally in our culture. In this way, this book compliments nicely, at least in the realm of science, the book by Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth*, currently being studied in the FLOCKS groups.

The book has three sections and a total of eleven chapters. Section One is titled Science and Christian Belief in the Postmodern Context, and has the following three chapters: The Need for a Theology of Science; Modern Science in a Postmodern World; and A Christian Science?. Section Two is titled Jesus Christ, the Lord of Creation, and has the following three chapters: In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; Supernatural Laws and Natural Miracles; and The Laws of Nature and the Gospel of Grace. Section Three is titled Investigating His Dominion, and has the following five chapters: New Creatures at Work in the King's Realm; A Gracious Revealer and the Making of Scientific Knowledge; "Well Done, Good and Faithful Scientific Servant"; The Kingdom of Christ and the Culture of Science; and Looking to the Future.

The first two sections may seem to be mostly background material and a review of what others think, but Morris and Petcher are carefully setting the stage. In Section Three we get a little more exposed to what the authors think. On page 213 we read somewhat of a summary statement that fits in well, as mentioned above, with the theme of the current FLOCKS study: "Idolatry always leads to death and despair, and the idolatries of Modernism and Postmodernism are no exceptions. The Modernist idolatry of autonomous human certainty leads to the death of human knowledge, as the Postmodern deconstruction of Modernist knowledge illustrates. The Postmodern idolatry of autonomous human subjectivity ultimately leads to the fragmentation of human communities into smaller and smaller self-interest groups constantly at war with one another. Both the Modern and the Postmodern forms of idolatry appear to lead in the end to battered and isolated human selves trapped in lives of 'quiet desperation.'" If we accept the truth of this statement, then clearly having the correct philosophy of life, the correct world view, is of critical importance because one's core values have enormous implications for all of life.

Continuing on the same theme of epistemology, and after favorably quoting Colin Gunton, on page 217 Morris and Petcher state that "Gunton succinctly attacks both Modern and Postmodern pretenses concerning knowledge by claiming that we humans ultimately 'neither control nor create knowledge.' He makes the radical claim that a proper doctrine of revelation holds that it is God alone who creates and controls not just 'religious' knowledge but all human knowledge." Radical indeed, and well worth pondering. Continuing on page 221: "Human knowledge is radically contingent on God and His purposes, as is every other aspect of the created world. God, being who He is, is under no *a priori* obligation to provide humans with His thoughts or to provide humans certain knowledge of the facts in some abstract sense. God is not somehow selfishly keeping His thoughts to Himself. It is just that being God and entirely dominating the category of God's knowledge are of a piece. But in His grace, according to His purposes, He has taken upon Himself certain obligations with regard to humans that have distinct knowing implications. As we've pointed out in previous chapters, His obligations to humans are those according to His covenant promises". Again, echoing the concerns of Nancy Pearcey, Morris and Petcher write on page 224: "In keeping with our emphasis on the unity of revelation and the unity of 'revealees,' we are consciously resisting a fairly common notion that science is narrowly focused on 'general revelation' and, properly done, should go 'as far as it can' on general revelation alone. Rather, everything that we do should be done in view of everything we know." Wouldn't it be wonderful if undergraduate students at Covenant College could truly understand and embrace these ideas!

The reality of sin has not escaped Morris and Petcher, as they write on page 236: "By the Fall, all aspects of human being were corrupted and perverted. The result is that human knowing is truncated, human knowing capacities don't work as they should, and human knowledge is sought and utilized in rebellion against God." However, Morris and Petcher hold out that it is still possible to be faithful, and write on page 251: "We need to be motivated by the spooky fact that we are not alone in the 'seen,' but that the significance of what a Christian scientist does in the lab or in the field is seen and does reverberate through the heavenlies in some fashion." The same, of course, could be said about washing dishes, or anything else we do. Not a sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed, and we are worth more than many sparrows.

This book is highly recommended. But with the caveat that to truly benefit from reading it, it may require some significant reflection.