The problem of reality in the religion-science conversation: an African-Christian contribution

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Introduction

The history of the tension between religion and science is well documented. The story of the relationship between religion and science is littered with examples of religion's intolerance of scientific discoveries, often leading to acts of violence and even the death of those who seemed to contradict faith-truths. On the other hand, science has also been dismissive of faith-held truths, seeing religion as a conservative subculture, which is not open to progressive thinking. It comes as no surprise that even today, the conversation is marred by an all-too-often imperialistic attitude from both sides, each trying to dominate or even to replace the perspectives held by 'the other'. Generally speaking, it is not uncommon for scientists to engage theologians in order to educate them, while evangelical Christians engage scientists in order to convert them.

This tension has come at the cost of a potentially healthy relationship which could exist between religion and science. Writers such as Gould (2002) suggest that this tension or conflict is a non-issue, a perception which carries no legitimacy. It is Gould's view that religion and science need to see themselves as working from different perspectives, with different methodologies and, in essence, addressing different questions. To speak of a science discourse and of a religion discourse is not comparing apples with apples and so their relationship needs to be defined from the perspective which acknowledges their different points of departure. This tension between religion and science nevertheless has a direct impact on the advancement of human knowledge as it relates to specifically the universe, the world we live in and notions of self and self-worth. In the context of this tension the question can be asked where and how a constructive conversation between religion and science can take place.

Hans Weder states that the conversation between religion and science can only make sense if they share a common subject. Along with him, I choose the notion of reality as this point of departure (Weder 2000:291). But, even to speak of reality as a common denominator between religion and science comes with its own flaws. Referring to reality can only be done in terms of a perspective of reality which is generated by the discipline and context concerned. Religious reality is not the same as scientific reality and

vice versa. One may argue that besides the realities generated by the different disciplines, they both exist within a specific, dare one say, existential reality, from which their own independent realities are shaped. Reality is, for this reason, an enigma. It is something which we can claim to know and which defines the parameters of our 'knowing', but it is so complex that it transcends even our descriptions thereof. It is not an ideal. It is more than a perception, but less than substance. It is not bound to existence, but yet defines notions of being, context observation and awareness. Perhaps our best effort would be to speak of reality through imagery. For this study, I will use the following image: Reality is like a horizon. Our perception of a horizon is an illusion which gives the observer a sense of stability, orientation and even meaning. Without a horizon it is difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate between what is up or down, above or below. It is a necessary illusion, which leads to the ordering of realities which exist beyond themselves.

Without a sense of reality serving as a stabilising factor for what we perceive to be normal, ordered, balanced or acceptable, there can be little to no conversation in the fields of empirical science, ethics or even theology. To speak of religion and science is to speak of different approaches to reality, different horizons defining the parameters of perceived reality. Each has its own principles, understandings and perspectives which dominate and define the way in which its reality is perceived. When disciplines, in turn, proclaim their reality as *the* reality, even arguing that they are realities in themselves, then they fall into the trap of rigid fundamentalism, if not neuroses. By doing this, the disciplines concerned construct their own realities, using a certain set of presuppositions which colour their worlds, determine a set of cause-and-effect rules, with the aim of universalising these realities and turning them into absolutes. As soon as absolutes are created, even with the acknowledgement that these absolutes are 'fluid' (that any change can only take place within the parameters of the laws which determine these realities), one can anticipate the potential for conflict between these disciplines. In our image, it will translate into 'fixing' a horizon. Although foundational principles are set, which serve as the ingredients for fixing a horizon, giving the discipline the confidence of security and control, this is self-inhibiting and denies the discipline the opportunity to explore a reality which exists beyond its own. Horizons are fluid and evasive and although a horizon may create the impression that it has a sense of permanence and absoluteness, it will forever change its shape and remain beyond the control of any person or discipline as long as the observer is moving. Horizons give us a glimpse of the landscape which we will soon encounter, but they do not give us control over the coming terrain.

This said, "Neither Christian theology [read religion] nor the natural sciences are static disciplines" (McGrath 2004:27). This means that their realities are in constant flux. If we were to speak of their realities existing

within an existential reality, which is also in flux (pointing to the phenomena of spontaneity and randomness), it makes it increasingly difficult to pin down the notion of reality as the mediating factor between religion and science. We can, however, draw from generalisations regarding these different fields and their notions of reality in order to speak about their relationship and the influence they have on our knowledge and understanding of that which we claim to know. By doing so, we first need to separate the fields and understand them independently. Gould does so in his argument, stating that religion and science exist as non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA) (Gould 2002). He asserts that science and religion operate in different domains and that although their interests may seem to share certain commonalities, this cannot in fact be the case as their methodologies and points of reference prevent them from ever integrating. Gould's NOMA is not the final say in this relationship, as this paper will explore later, but it does help us to look at the two fields more objectively. Starting from this point, and emphasising an initial reductionist technique, we ask what we mean by the terms 'religion' and 'science'.

Defining terms

What do we mean when we refer to 'religion' and 'science'? The dilemma in the discourse is that terms like 'religion' and 'science' are used as generic terms, without proper definition. We can, however, catch a glimpse of what several different contributors to the discourse have understood these terms to mean.

In his important work *Rock of ages: science and religion in the fullness of life,* Gould (2002) does not offer any concrete definitions of what he means by either religion or science, but places science and religion within a historical framework. This suggests that he is speaking almost exclusively about Christianity and the natural sciences. Most of his references to Christianity are also located in the Catholic tradition. He nevertheless goes as far as describing the role of science as follows: "Science tries to document the factual character of the natural world, and to develop theories that coordinate and explain these facts" (Gould 2002). According to this understanding, the ambit of science's work is limited by its need for an object, an observer and the instruments that can measure certain phenomena, and if proven to be repeatable under certain conditions, lead to the formation of truths. There are things that science cannot measure or treat objectively. To Gould, ethical problems, for instance, cannot be answered by science. The domains of morality and moral formation, to him, come more naturally to religion than to science. Gould, in summary, suggests that science should keep to its practices of observation and discovery, whereas religion should

focus on questions of 'higher truths' while both resist the allure of venturing into each other's domains.

In *Reinventing the sacred: a new view of science, reason, and religion*, Stuart Kauffman (2008) appears to speak of religion in a broad sense, encapsulating all faith traditions. He nevertheless shows his hand by claiming that religion is about an understanding of God, which is derived from the God of the Old Testament, the New Testament and the deist God of the Enlightenment. Regarding science, Kauffman describes traditional scientific thinking as being reductionist by nature, therefore aiming to explain all phenomena "... in terms of the interactions of fundamental principles" (Kauffman 2008: Chapter 1). In this book, Kauffman goes on to suggest that this reductionist methodology is not sufficient in scientific exploration, but that as much as science is given its credibility through reductionism, it needs to take cognisance of emergence, which suggests that what we observe is more than the sum total of all the parts. In short, emergence suggests that each level of being, although dependent on its own sublevels, operates under its own laws, displaying a jump in complexity as levels progress. The liquid water, for instance, has its own form and laws, which separate it from the sum total of the laws of oxygen and hydrogen at the atomic and molecular levels. Kauffman goes on to suggest a relationship between science and religion, which is facilitated by the theory of emergence, but, by defining such a relationship, it necessitates both science and religion to rethink their methodologies, fundamental truths and absolutes.

Perhaps the greatest antagonist of religion in this discussion is Richard Dawkins. In *The God delusion,* Dawkins too fails to provide concrete definitions (although he defines the word 'delusion' very well (Dawkins 2006:5)). When speaking of religion, Dawkins makes sweeping references to Christianity and Islam, portraying these as premodern worldviews which have no place in the modern world. This superstitious tendency of religious thinking leads people to unscientific and ignorant behaviour, often translating into acts of violence. Science, on the other hand, is portrayed as the key which unlocks the basic laws of life, matter and existence. To Dawkins, all things should be seen through the spectacles of science, because all things fall under the authority of basic natural laws which can be described and engaged with through the discipline of science.

These are but a few examples, but they make the point that much of the discussion regarding the science and religion debate works from the contributors' preconceived understandings. The discussion is therefore not a scientific discussion at all, because the subject does not share common definitions, but is based on preconceived understandings. These, in turn, are influenced by biases, personal histories and the propagation of personal theories. This leaves the conversation in a subjective state, where true progression in the discourse is unlikely.

To use generic terms such as 'religion' and 'science' is not specific enough. For instance, there is a marked difference between the doctrines of Christianity and of Hinduism, especially when it comes to their respective doctrines of creation. Would it be just to lump these theologies together in this discourse? If so, what is the justification for such a decision? Furthermore, are all religions equally open to engage science? It does seem that much of the conversation is centred around the Christian religion, but even so, one has to be more specific regarding which tradition of the Christian faith one is speaking about, because different traditions may be in completely different places with regard to their engaging with the scientific community.

Similarly, to speak of science in generic terms is equally vague. The difference between the 'objective' perspectives of, for instance, natural science, social science and humanities may give a divergent range of empirical analyses, based on their individual observations. Which discipline in each of these sciences are we talking about? Do all fields in the natural sciences have an interest in a conversation with 'religion'? Are they all part of the discussion? In this paper, I will limit my reference to religion to that of the Christian faith, and when referring to science, I will speak of natural science with Gould's description of the ambit of science as mentioned previously.

Some approaches to reality in science

So, what is reality from the perspective of science; or the better question is, what defines the reality of science? In this section, I will argue that scientific epistemology presupposes ontology. I will do so by referring to two methodological approaches mentioned before, namely reductionism and emergence.

Reductionism

First of all, the aim of reductionism is to understand a specific object or phenomenon by reducing it to its most basic elements. Once these elements are understood, they together form the basis for the reality of the object as a whole. Reductionism will thus describe the reality of a plant by referring to all the sublevels of the plant's make-up plus the environmental factors which make it possible for a plant to exist and manifest in a seemingly existential reality. Dawkins is particularly fond of this model and so reductionism contributes significantly to his notion of reality. To Dawkins and other reductionist thinkers, the universe and all that is in it exist as a cohesive whole, subject to laws of physics which cannot be altered or contravened. For all intents and purposes, the universe is a closed system and the only reality we need to face.

This model does not speak of different realities or even different levels of reality. Reductionism suggests that science is a sensory observation,

constructing a reality by arranging the observed into a schema, which can in turn again be deconstructed. This closed system implies that reality is encapsulated by physics and so, descriptions such as experiences, feelings, emotions and even beliefs are secondary to this reality. In fact, each of these can, in turn, be deconstructed and explained as resulting from mechanisms which adhere to the basic laws of physics. The question that should then be asked is: If reductionism proves that all things adhere to basic laws of physics, should we not simply discard all other beliefs with truth-statements and absolutise this form of scientific engaging? Kauffman is correct by stating that we owe a lot to reductionism, for it has led to powerful science which has enabled us to understand our universe better (Kauffman 2008: Chapter 1). It has also facilitated the possibility for humanity to do marvellous things, such as what has been achieved through medicine, chemistry, astronomy and engineering. Every aspect of modern living, whether it is commerce, industry, travel or even entertainment, finds its roots in some form of discovery, sparked by reductionist thinking. Although we express great appreciation for the contribution of this form of science, it does not have the final say. Is it truly possible that we can only speak of the reality of physics as the only reality which exists, especially when reductionism cannot explain everything?

Emergence

The second scientific approach is that of emergence, which comes as the counter-balance of reductionism. Where reductionism suggests that there is one reality which is subject to the universal laws of physics, emergence maintains that each level identified by reductionism operates under specific laws, which, although linked to the general laws of physics, are unique to each level. For example, we know that the iron consists of the element, Fe. But a pure iron rod, although being a concentration of Fe atoms, shows properties which raise it above the atomic and molecular levels. It has a certain consistency and pliability, magnetic and conductive properties which are more than the sum total of the particles it is made of. Add oxygen to this atomic structure and FeO transforms the colour, rigidity, pliability, magnetism and conductivity of the material altogether. These changes are not equally valid for the molecular level of this substance. In this illustration we speak only of a two-level differentiation. How much more complex are the changes and the 'emergent' jumps that take place in something like a living organism? Emergence suggests that reality is not simply the sum total of the parts, but that each level identified by reductionist exploration operates with a measure of independence and so a new reality, specific for that level of manifestation, is displayed. Emergence asks different questions from those of reductionism. Where reductionism asks: what makes this what it is?,

"... emergence raises such questions as 'What is an explanation?' 'What is the ultimate cause?' 'What is fundamental?'" (McKenzie 2011:225), while taking cognisance of the differences in complexity between the varied levels and their subsequent realities.

The common feature in both reductionism and emergence is that although reality or realities can be observed and measured, there will always remain that illusive horizon. This presupposes that despite any level of scientific exploration "... reality at its core is beyond the reach of human understanding" (Shkliarevsky 2011:83). A further comment is that "[n]atural scientists thus do not need to make (and indeed, cannot make) any foundational assumptions about the world *a priori*" (McGrath 2004:100). "Scientific realism is an empirical notion, in that it is grounded in an actual encounter with reality. Its justification is not to be found in *a priori* philosophical reflections, but in *a posteriori* engagement with the natural world itself" (McGrath 2004:127). Although science has the capacity to project, such projections are only based on what has been understood up to that point, making projections calculated guesses.

This shows that ontology determines an epistemology which lends itself to a reality or realities confined to the understandings offered by the particular scientific approaches.

Some approaches to reality in religion

It has long been argued that where science asks the 'how' questions, it is up to religion to ask the 'why' questions. This implies that science is concerned with the realities of objects and phenomena, while religion is concerned with the reality of meaning and morality. Take creation theory, for example. This has been, and perhaps still is, one of those small stones over which most people stumble in the conversation between religion and science. Of course, because we live in a world where we have been conditioned to think in rationalist and reductionist terms, something like the reading of the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 can become extremely complicated and a source of conflict. A literal reading of the texts would presuppose a 'how' question. How did everything come into existence? How did this reality of the created order develop? Referring to Genesis 1, 2 or any of the other 40-odd creation narratives in the Christian Bible will not answer this question adequately, for they fly right in the face of what we have come to know through the gift of science.

Admittedly, many, and one dare even say most, Christians themselves engage the text from this perspective. If, however, the question is 'why', it changes the nature of religion's truth-statements. When the texts refer to meaning, as they did in their historical context, then the truth-statements conveyed through these myths make for a reality which is not exclusively

focused on the physical manifestation of our reality, but adds another dimension to reality in the form of identity and purpose. Rightly so, atheists reject the idea that the moral domain (and that of identity, purpose, aesthetics and the like) is only accessible through religion (Clarke 2009:730). In response, Boyer (2008:1038-1039) suggests that religion is an evolutionary aspect of our beings which has contributed to our understandings of these notions, even if we do not adhere to these in the present.

To come back to reality, in religion (remember, we are referring to Christianity in general) there are two driving factors which determine reality. It is shaped first of all by the perception of God, and secondly by the believed response to God, which is often termed 'faith'. To answer the question of perceptions of God, Glennan (2009:155) proposes three distinct understandings which are very helpful. These are three broad categories which do not define explicitly all understandings of religion, but should be seen as a triangular continuum.

First, there is the *people's God*. This God is perceived to be active in human affairs and is the basic cause of what people experience in their reality. The cause-and-effect approach in much of the Bible, where it was believed that good happens to the righteous while evil crosses the path of the wicked, is evidence of this. The whole aim of reality in this approach is to appease God. Science does not play a major role in this perspective. When a person falls ill, it must be because they did something wrong. Similarly, poverty, bad life circumstances, illness, even death should be prayed against as these are understood to be manifestations of evil. Teachings in the Bible, such as those found in the Book of Job and some of Jesus' instructions (e.g. Jn 9:1-7) seem to refute this view of God. Adherents to this view would still rather hold on to the stories of plagues, divine punishment and consider Jesus' pronouncements after performing miracles, like "Go and sin no more" to imply a causal link between sin and suffering.

Then there is the *theologian's God* who is abstract. From this perspective, God is seen as the creator and sustainer of the universe; a God who created the universe with all its laws and who allows this universe to operate within these dimensions. This notion of God is perhaps the one that would appeal most to science as God is not seen as one who contradicts the laws of physics, but who created and participates in a universe rich with complexity.

The last is the *God of the mystics.* Here, it is understood that God draws alongside people and creation, participating in the journey of life. Meaning for the individual is found in a God who transcends the physical realities but who is revealed through incarnation and participation in life experiences (McGrath 2004:58).

All three of these models create very distinct interpretations of reality. They then lead to understandings of reality with which all life should comply. Further to this are the different responses to God, described as faith, but

which in essence describe the person of faith's perceived responsibility towards God. These are by no means linked directly to the understandings of God mentioned, but may lend themselves more naturally to some than to others.

When speaking about faith, Glennan (2009:151) differentiates between three categories. The first is *faith as belief with minimal evidence*. This is, in other words, blind faith, where despite anything that reason or explanation may offer, the person's reality is determined by dualistic notions whereby they would rather be faithful to the Spirit than show allegiance to the flesh. The second is *faith as submission to ecclesiastical or scriptural authority*. Here, reality is determined by the truth claims offered by the Church or the Scriptures. 'The church/Bible says so, therefore I must do it/believe so' has been present all along in Church history, even leading to the creation of new understandings, such as the Reformation traditions. Although similar to the first point, the locus of revelation is different. In the first instance, it stems directly from a person's relationship with God, whereas in the second God's will is mediated through the Church or Scripture. Lastly, there is *faith as expression of ultimate concern.* In this point, faith acknowledges that it cannot contradict science, but that it is concerned with another sphere of reality, namely that of meaning. This perspective does not spend too much energy in trying to either contradict science or to validate religious truth claims in the light of scientific discovery, but directs its beliefs to what it perceives to be questions of the greatest importance. The different forms of liberation theologies are good examples of this.

Reality in religion is therefore defined by the parameters of three notions: dualism, transcendence and personal/contextual spirituality. What does this do for the science-religion debate? Zehnder (2011:84) identifies three responses by religion to science. The first is the *contrarian model.* Here, religion generally opposes science. The people's God combined with blind faith lends itself to this response. Second is the *apologetic model*, which attempts to make theology congenial to science. The theologian's God combined with a mix of faith as submission and faith as expression of ultimate concern will attempt to accomplish this. The weakness with this model, as McGrath suggests, is that "[a]ny theology which is based on scientific theories will find itself outdated with embarrassing speed" (McGrath 2004:29). The third model is the *correlation model* which aims to hold both these disciplines in tension. An illustration by Glennan (2009:157) highlights this tension:

> When I have fallen in love, I now suppose that my brain cells have been flooded with oxytocin that somehow rewires my neural circuits in such a way as to create psychological dispositions to pair-bonding. But even if I were to understand this

> process perfectly in an objective sense, it would not eliminate my experience of falling in love. And it is the subjective experience of love, rather than its neurological basis, that is love for me. If I had not been lucky enough to fall in love, then nothing I could have learned about the neurobiology of love could tell me what love is. For just these reasons, someone with a mystical conception of God may perfectly happily study what's going on in their brain, but doing so won't make God go away

Last are the *synthetic attempts to a grand unification*. The name speaks for itself. The unrealistic propositions offered by Scientology, for instance, speak enough of how unlikely this is as a workable model.

What do we make of reality in the science-religion conversation?

Three possible options come to the fore to help us in this debate. The first is in the stratified reality of Bhaskar (2008). Stratified reality, drawing from the theory of emergence, suggests that one should speak of different levels of reality that together contribute towards an ontological reality. Ontological reality is nevertheless not the sum total of the realities of which it is made up (as pure reductionism would suggest). If we follow this model, one could argue that the realities purported by religion and science should be seen as varying in levels of complexity, owning their own realities and functioning under laws specific to those disciplines. This model, although appearing attractive at first glance, is fraught with questions. Where does religion fit into the greater strata of reality; close to the top, the middle or the bottom? On which level of reality does religion operate; is it exclusive to one level or does it infiltrate varied levels? The same can be asked about science. If stratified reality is hierarchical, then between religion and science, which of these is to be considered the higher form of reality (McKenzie 2011:220)? Bhaskar argues that this model does not imply superiority, simply difference; but if we speak about emergence, we do refer to complexity, which may give the 'higher disciplines' the illusion of being superior to those 'below'.

This leads to the second possibility. Instead of putting these stratified realities in a hierarchy of complexity, we place them side by side, allowing the tension between these realities to create a new synthesis. This model suggests that when two realities, like that of science and religion, are placed side by side, a natural tension between the two spheres will lead to the emergence of a reality which resolves the tension between the opposed realities. This model is not ideal either, for it brings us back to synthetic attempts to a grand unification.

Now, for a third model, namely a dialectical relationship. This is to speak of reality, religion and science in a more Barthian and Kierkegaardian sense. The main difference between this model and the previous one is that science and religion can be held side by side in tension without resorting to a synthesis which requires a 'Yes' or 'No' or compromised response (see, for instance, Barth 1962:302). The tension itself becomes the dynamic factor which determines the relationship between the realities of religion and science. In this way a new reality emerges which brings authentic knowledge in spite of the different approaches offered by the realities of faith and science (McKenzie & Myers 2008:50). Where the former possibility suggests a new reality which resolves the statement and counter-statement of different forces, this dialectical approach guarantees the independence of these fields, while holding them in a constant relationship with one another. The tension which Barth's dialectical approach offers (although he applies his model mostly to the difference between God and creation) is to keep the statement and counter-statement intact, while the new reality is formed, and in this case, gives a new insight into both religion and science.

Let me illustrate. The tension can be likened to that between two magnets. Magnets are independent of each other, yet they exert forces which seek to either repel or attract the other. When magnets attract each other, they will never integrate completely into the other. Where they repel one another, they can never push the other into infinity. When held apart, one becomes aware of the forces which exist between them. Similarly, there will be instances where the pull between science and religion will be so strong that the outcome could be perceived as a mutual unity on certain issues. At other times, the tension needs to be in opposite directions, where unanimity will not be a possibility, at least for the foreseeable future. But even in these moments, the force between science and religion needs to exist, for without this force, the possibility of mutuality (in a parallel sense) will not be feasible.

The question is: what does this look like in 'reality'? To answer this question from an African perspective, we need to ask what is 'real' in Africa. African philosophy is concerned with what is happening, the reality of the here and now. What are these realities? The crucial questions in Africa concern ethics; how does one use or own land, what about economic development, questions about health care, civil conflicts, climate change etc. What if the tension in the realities of religion and science can be directed at the questions offered by the existential realities of this context? Instead of being in conflict with one another concerning their independent realities and truth-statements, a productive relationship can be established through the questions posed by existential realities. Let us take as an example the production of food in a sustainable manner. On the one hand, science can offer concrete steps to enhance the quality and quantity of production, while religion can

play its part in teaching the value of responsible earth-keeping. The way in which ethics can act as the bridge between religion and science can be explored further, but will not be done in this paper.

Back to the first question: How can we nurture a good relationship between religion and science, using notions of reality as a starting point?

Some suggestions for foundational rules

To quote from a religious perspective: "One of the primary laws of human life is that you become what you worship; what's more, you reflect what you worship, not only back to the object itself but outwards to the world around" (Wright 2008:194). Both science and religion can attest to the fact that how we see things colours the way we view the world and, as argued in this paper, these become the building blocks for our perceptions of reality. These views may not be mutually exclusive, but do exist in a tension whereby truth-statements will be tested. Some foundational rules in this regard may assist the conversation.

First of all, there needs to be an acknowledgement that when religion and science interact, it must be based on specific and well-defined problems. Engaging problems or 'the other side' using generalisations will not help the discussion. Generalisations concern an illusion of reality, your reality as I think it is, and misses the point completely. Dawkins is especially prone to this as assertions are made which are not based on fact, but on personal perceptions. For this reason, if a specific tradition within the Christian faith feels that it is in conflict with the views of a certain field of science concerning issue X, that tradition needs to engage this field of science on this particular point. To ascribe such tension as a general conflict between science and religion is a misnomer.

Second is the acknowledgement by religion and science that existential reality is greater than their respective constructed realities. This being the case, religion and science should be humble in their discourses, being open to the possibility that they do not contain absolute truths which can be universalised at the expense of the other. Constructing reality *a posteriori* leaves both science and religion vulnerable to change even through something as intangible as time. Religion will change its mind on certain matters and so will science. Common exploration will only benefit both disciplines if practised honestly, sincerely and openly (see also McKenzie 2011).

Third, the processes of the construction of their realities are different. For Christian theology it is in past-present-future (faith-love-hope). For science, it is through the observe-knowledge-project hypothesis. Hearing each other's language will enable both realities to explore dimensions of their own perceptions which would have been left untouched if they only operated within their own parameters.

Fourth, it does not help to try and find a middle path between religion and science (correlation), nor is it feasible to attempt a unification between the two spheres. They need to be treated as realities, independent of each other, but held in a mutual tension. This means that religion and science need to take each other seriously, for history dictates that if either party acts dismissively of the other, it can have grave consequences.

Lastly, the focus of the religion and science discourse should not be on legitimising either reality at the expense of the other, but to make a contribution in the existential realities in which people function and live, more so, the existential realities confronting us through nature and life in all its complexity. Once again, these contributions will be different. Religion will need to listen to science for explanations of the natural, but does not need to stand back in making a contribution which lends itself to understandings of a different nature; that of meaning, purpose and identity.

Conclusion

In this paper I have described how the science-religion discourse has been tainted by the use of non-specific generalisations. By referring to natural science and the Christian faith in particular, this paper explored notions of reality in both these fields, admittedly also drawing on generalisations of these. Questions were asked about how each of these view their own realities and how these realities stand in tension over-against the other. What does one then do with these realities? Do they offer any constructive input to existential reality? This paper alludes to the fact that existential reality as a third factor can direct the tension which exists between religion and science into a positive force which will serve productively in the interests of those whom religion and science aim to serve. Lastly, suggestions are offered, based on the observations in this paper, which may be instrumental in the science-religion discourse.

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