
Gregersen, N H, Drees, W B & Gorman, U (eds) 2000 – The human person in science and theology

T&T Clark: Edinburg. 218 pages. Price: Unknown

Reviewer: Prof J Buitendag (University of Pretoria)

This volume is the product of a joint effort by scholars from a variety of disciplines, for example scientists, philosophers and theologians. The interdisciplinary body, *The European Society for the Study of Science and Theology* (ESSAT) hopes to establish a constructive debate between science and theology in order to solve mutual problems. Some of the plenary lectures of its *Seventh European Conference on Science and Theology* held in Durham, United Kingdom, are published in this edition. The theme of this conference was “The Person: Perspectives from Science and Theology” and the different lectures were selected on the basis of their understanding and exposition of the theme of *the person*. Hence the title the editors chose for the publication.

What is important about this endeavour is that dialogue between science and theology is no longer confined to discussions on physics, cosmology, biology or history. Neuroscience, psychology and sociology come to the fore in this regard as well. All these can be understood in terms of the common denominator of the *person* demarcated by community. Cultural matrices thus play a heuristic role in the construction and interpretation of scientific theories. The idea of *personhood* points to important subject matter for scientific investigation.

The book argues primarily for a holistic understanding of reality for a synergy of brain and culture in terms of the evolution of the human body and human societies. This understanding might be called a *bio-cultural paradigm*. Human persons not only have bodies, *but also* are bodies; human persons do not live in private space, *but also* in natural and moral space. From here it is a short step to understand the human person as rooted in a network of relationships between God, world and Thou (Philip Hefner). The human person must become the *imago Dei*, which means he/she has to portray or reflect God’s presence in

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this world. (The attempt to derive a theological understanding of the human person from the doctrine of the Trinity remains very dubious, however.)

Niels Gregersen's noteworthy argument is that Eucharistic theology offers a model for understanding how the Godly presence is mediated through the interplay of physical substructure, mental apprehensions and socially shared meanings (cf the three interacting worlds of Karl Popper!). In other words, the material elements, apprehensible signs and words and a specific social setting may illuminate the relation among nature, person and God. Holistic supervenience (as opposed to intervenience) is then understood as occurrences that originate *from within* a given setting, namely God's interaction with human beings which takes place in the public sphere of words, signs and social settings. The Cartesian dualism of mind and matter is thus being overcome not only in philosophy but progressively so in theology.

This book can be recommended to scholars of various disciplines who have an interest in understanding reality. Except for literally one typing, one grammatical, and one terminological error, the lectures are well written, neatly printed and properly published. The one interpretative problem I encountered is the commonly made mistake that evolutionary determinism should be ascribed to Darwin.
