

Science and Religion: New Historical Perspectives

John Hedley Brooke's distinguished career—he was Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion at the University of Oxford until his retirement in 2006—has been above all dedicated to overthrowing simplistic generalizations about the relationship of science and religion through a careful examination of its history. His classic work, *Religion and Science: Some Historical Perspectives*, exemplifies the approach, repeatedly showing how the complexities of the past cannot be made to align with any single narrative, whether the “conflict thesis” or its converse.

The book under review here, *Science and Religion: New Historical Perspectives*, includes essays taken from a retirement conference in honor of Brooke. This title of the work subtly reveals its theme: most essays were chosen for inclusion either because they explain the significance of his work or engage the larger historiographical issues with which he grappled.

I will divide the essays in the book into three types. The first are those that give an overview of major trends in the historiography of science, three of which are essential reading for those who would attempt to understand how history might contribute to science and religion scholarship. Peter Harrison, Brooke's successor at Oxford, provides an analysis of the way the categories *science* and *religion* have changed over time, reinforcing Brooke's point that their relationship cannot be stated in universal and timeless terms. Margaret Osler gives an overview of “positivistic” interpretation of the Scientific Revolution and why historians no longer find them tenable. Frank Turner describes the origins and characteristics of the conflict between science and religion that developed in late Victorian culture. These three essays are as fine an introduction into the history of science and religion as one could hope for. Two other essays complete the section but are less helpful to the general reader. Jan Golinski provides an interesting essay exploring Bruno Latour's understanding of the term religion, but it is perhaps better suited for a volume honoring Latour himself. B. Harun Küçük's contribution shows how Islam has often been the foil for persons either praising or criticizing the relationship of Christianity and science.

Essays of the second type attempt to address some of the historiographical issues by Brooke's scholarship. Noah Efron gives an effusive overview of Brooke's historiographical style and the significance of *Some Historical Perspectives*, describing in personal terms its influence on his own scholarly career. Ronald Numbers attempts in his essay to describe some “mid-scale generalizations” that might survive the acid doubt of the historian, arguing that naturalization, privatization, secularization, globalization, and radicalization are legitimate themes drawn from the history of science. Geoffrey Cantor argues that the historian still needs to embrace some notions of conflict in the religion-science domain, even while rejecting the “Conflict Thesis” as it traditionally has been presented. All in this section agree, and so would Brooke himself, that generalizations *per se* are not the problem, but rather over-simplifications, especially for the sake of polemics.

Essays of the final type are recent examples of historical scholarship, illustrating the way that the next generation of historians are building upon the work of Brooke and his colleagues. Three essays deal with the subject of

publishing, showing how the abstract world of ideas gets expressed in the concrete world of books and publishers, which influences the way the ideas are accepted by the public. Two essays deal with creationism, each trying to contextualize the debate by describing its influence in the Islamic world (Salman Hameed) and American and European societies (Bronislaw Szerszynski). The essays of this section were interesting but the hardest to read; one wishes that Brooke's elegance and style were as easy to convey as his ideas.

Overall, I recommend this book highly because it contains a number of excellent pieces by first-rate historians of science. If I were teaching an advanced undergraduate course on science and religion, I would use the book as a helpful supplement to Brooke's *Some Historical Perspectives*.

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