

The
WORKS
of the
LORD

52 biblical
reflections
on science,
technology
and creation

EDITED BY
RUTH M. BANCEWICZ



‘For the scientist who is a Christian, the exploration of the natural world is not just the joy of intellectual curiosity but is an act of worship enhancing prayer and the reading of the Bible. In this book we get an insight into that worship which is both inspiring and challenging for our own relationship with Jesus.’

The Revd Professor David Wilkinson, Project Director, Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science, St John’s College, Durham University

‘This book fills a crucial gap by encouraging us to use all that science tells us about our world and universe to help us to worship and pray in a deeper and more informed way. It will be a great help in engaging with the many major developments of our time, such as climate change and AI, in a more reflective and rounded way. It will appeal to a broad range of church traditions and I hope it will be very widely used in private devotions and corporate worship.’

Bishop Richard Cheetham, Member of the Anglican Communion Science Commission, Fellow of the International Society for Science and Religion



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INTRODUCTION

For a long time I have wanted to have a devotional book to put into people's hands that gently brings together insights from science and Christian faith in a way that is relevant for any reader. I am delighted to be able to do that now, bringing together contributions by 43 scientists and theologians. The writers are mainly from the UK, but also include voices from Romania, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Canada, Peru and Hong Kong.

Most of these devotions were originally written for *New Daylight* or *Guidelines* Bible reading notes, published by BRF Ministries. They have been updated and edited where necessary and arranged into sections – each with a brief introduction. Where the Bible passage is just a few verses, it is included in the text; where it is longer, a selection of key verses is included. You will need to get hold of, or download, a Bible, to look up the full passages. Some of the Bible passages are repeated throughout the book, because each contributor is bringing a unique perspective on what may be a familiar passage.

Our suggestion is to use one devotion each week over a year, maybe on a day when you have a bit more time to read, reflect and pray. They might also be useful as starter for a time of reflection during a science-focused event. Preachers might like to use them as a source of sermon ideas or stories to tell to introduce particular passages from the Bible.

However you use this book, I pray that you find its contents both inspirational and challenging, helping your faith to grow deeper roots into God's word.

Ruth M. Bancewicz, Church Engagement Director, The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion





PART I

THE HEAVENS DECLARE

Not many of us are scientists, but we can all enjoy the excitement of learning something new about the world. You might have been fascinated by something you saw on visit to a national park, a new bird appearing in your garden or a nature documentary. Each of us will find that different things provoke our curiosity, prompting us to think of those questions adults often forget to ask: ‘What is it?’, ‘What’s it for?’ and ‘Why?’

We understand far more about the mechanisms of how things came to be than the biblical writers could have imagined. We know about the Big Bang and how living things developed and became more complex over time. We can appreciate the huge diversity and interconnectedness of life on earth. The things we learn about the

Opposite: a Wolf-Rayet star, which is the prelude to a supernova, captured by James Webb space telescope

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world widen our perspective, giving us a bigger picture of creation and the creator. That informed perspective can help us praise God all the more: what a wonderful world he made!

Drawing on a variety of creation passages throughout the Old and New Testaments, in this section we will share just a few of the wonders revealed by science, looking at how this perspective expands and enhances our own view of God as creator. I hope you enjoy the new slant that a little science can give to passages which will be familiar friends to many of us. Let's enjoy exploring God's good world.

Ruth M. Bancewicz



1

GOD AS FAITHFUL CREATOR

READ GENESIS 9:8–11 (NRSV)

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ‘As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.’

This passage describes God making a covenant with ‘every living creature’ and, as was common in the ancient world, it views these as including creatures inhabiting the skies (birds) and the land (domesticated and wild animals). The word here translated ‘covenant’ is used to describe a contract regulating the relationship between two parties. Throughout the Bible there are records of various covenants between God and human beings, alone or as families or nations. As Christians we are drawn

into the new covenant, sealed by Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The covenant in Genesis 9 is unusual, because God here promises something to 'all flesh', that is animals and not just humans.

Why does God not just make a covenant with Noah and his descendants – or perhaps with the humans and their domesticated animals that provide them with items necessary for daily life? The more that biologists uncover of the natural world, the more they become aware of the interdependency within and among all living things. There are highly intricate and dynamic relationships within each living cell, between cells and between organs in bodies, and between animals and plants, both as individuals and as whole populations. We are part of a web of life. God did not create us in isolation but as creatures embedded within a wider created order. Moreover, here and elsewhere in the scriptures we find evidence of the Lord's ongoing faithfulness towards *all* that lives, not just humankind.

Thank you, Lord God, that you care for and continue to support all that you have made. Help us, Lord, to consider how we should live in relationship with your wider world in a way that respects you and all your creation.

Cherryl Hunt, former Biologist, Theologian and Theological Educator

2

GOD'S CREATURES

READ PSALM 104:10–24 (NIV)

He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the sky nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. He waters the mountains from his upper chambers... He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate... The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God... How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

vv. 10–14, 21, 24

We might think of ‘biology’ and ‘creation’ as referring to two completely different ideas, but the Bible sees them woven together. In this theological poetry, all the creatures of the earth are God’s creatures. All they eat and drink, just as all we ourselves eat and drink, comes ultimately from God.

And here there is no hint of a God who starts the universe off with a Big Bang, then withdraws to let the world care for itself. No, here is a God who is upholding and sustaining all biological diversity in all its richness at every moment. This is sometimes referred to as God's immanence in creation. Here we have an involved God, who makes the plants grow and who supplies the food for lions. The earth is full of God's creatures and the immense beauty and complexity of living things act as a constant reminder of God's wisdom in creation.

So what biologists are doing in their research is to understand how God's wonderful world of biological diversity functions. Everything is connected. Everything that lives depends on everything else, and this elegant interconnectedness is brilliantly described in Psalm 104. The scope of biological diversity and complexity is so vast that thousands of biologists around the world still struggle to understand how it all works.

'How many are your works, Lord!' Sadly, those works are considerably less in number since humanity has caused the extinction of so many. Diversity loss due to human environmental abuse is tragic, because this entails the loss of God's creatures. Because all the creatures of the world are God's creatures, this is a vivid reminder for us that we are to care for the world of biological diversity as God intended.

Dear Lord, we thank you for your constant upholding of every living thing in the world, however big or small. Help us to be better carers of your wonderful creation.

Denis Alexander, Emeritus Director, The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion

3

GOD'S GOOD CREATION

READ JOB 38:1–16 (NIV)

'Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?... The earth takes shape like clay under a seal; its features stand out like those of a garment... Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?'

vv. 4–7, 14, 16

God is addressing Job, who had been through a terrible time, losing his wealth, health and all ten of his children. Job just wanted God to explain why the world could be so tough.

God's response is simply to point to the magnificence of creation which lies all around. Job 38—41 beautifully explains God's immense creativity, his power and his sovereignty. Every single thing in the entire universe was called into being by God himself, from the vastness of the stars to the smallest details of the birth of every baby goat (Job 39:1–3). Even the food the animals and birds eat is under God's sovereign care (Job 38:39, 41).

The earth is not just a random lump of rock hurtling through space: God himself is its creator. It is exactly the size he meant it to be. It is exactly where he meant it to be. Its mountains and valleys, its ocean depths and seas are just as he intended. And these things matter: they are what make the earth a habitable planet, a suitable home for people made in God's image.

I know as a geologist that if the earth had been a different size or a different distance from the sun or if it didn't have seas, mountains and valleys, it would almost certainly be a sterile, lifeless planet. We can thank God for his goodness in making such a wonderful home for us, one which God himself declared to be 'very good' (Genesis 1:31).

Lord God, I ask that today you will make me grateful for the wonderful world which you have created for us. Help us to use its resources to serve you and others. Amen.

Robert White, Emeritus Director, The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, and Emeritus Professor of Geophysics, University of Cambridge