

Book Review

Why Science and Faith Need Each Other: Eight Shared Values That Move Us Beyond Fear. By Elaine Howard Ecklund. Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2020. 176 Pages. \$17.99. (Paperback).

Although this book is not aimed at an academic audience, the readership of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* might be interested to learn what sociologist Elaine Howard Ecklund has to say to fellow American Christians of all stripes on the relationship between science and faith.

The limitation of the book to one particular faith in one particular country also gives the book its twofold strength: it is full of individual narratives of people interviewed in sociological studies on their real-life practices where science and religion intersect and the author can credibly situate her own life experiences vis-à-vis these narratives. As someone from continental Europe who does not belong to the target audience, I gained valuable insights into both the contemporary American Christian landscape and the obstacles and opportunities for productive science–religion interactions in people’s individual lives.


The book contains 11 short chapters, which are clustered around three themes. The first three chapters belong to a part on “Building Blocks,” with Chapter 1, “From Fear to Understanding,” observing that it is often fear among Christians that drives unproductive science–religion interactions and that such fear might be overcome through an understanding among Christians of how eight virtues are shared between the two sets of practices. These eight virtues, or values, are: curiosity, doubt, humility, creativity, healing, awe, shalom, and gratitude—there is much originality here in Ecklund’s approach to the science–religion nexus via individuals’ appreciation of these values in the different practices. Chapter 2, “Overlapping Communities,” analyzes the overlaps between scientific and Church communities (overlaps that, by the way, are quite sizable in the United States from a European point of view) and documents mutual marginalization as a dominant trend, where individuals effectively hide their multiple identities from the different communities that they are part of. Ecklund pleads for a growth in the number and quality of occasions where scientific and religious communities really engage each other. Chapter 3, “Creative Evolution: Moving Past the Origins Debate,” shows that most Christians find the question of the role that God plays in evolution difficult. Ecklund highlights, for instance, that “many religious believers, especially evangelical Christians, simultaneously hold contradictory views on human origins” (43). She does identify exemplars in how some “committed Christians who are also scientists tackle these issues” (52), focusing in particular on the importance of values such as curiosity and creativity for defining humanness.

The second part of the book, on “Process,” addresses a first set of four values. Chapter 4, “Curiosity,” suggests that “Christian communities can become safe places for the curious about science and faith” (64). Chapter 5, “Doubt,” argues that “[t]he doubts raised by science don’t have to drive Christians away from faith . . . —doubts, if wrestled with prudently and productively in our churches and

Christian communities, have the potential to hone and enhance our faith” (76). Chapter 6, “Humility,” states that humility in both science and religion can help “both sides respect the other’s beliefs and open their minds to learning something new from each other” (90–91). Chapter 7, “Creativity,” highlights that many Christians adopt the “co-creator schema”: “they believe God provides humans with the knowledge and guidance to discover . . . technologies, and thus God is working through these technologies and the humans who use them” (104–05).

The third and final part of the book, on “Redemption,” addresses a second set of four values. Chapter 8, “Healing,” expands on Ecklund’s research finding that “members of both scientific communities and religious communities place high value on alleviating the suffering of others” (112). Chapter 9, “Awe,” flags that “Christians are not aware how . . . the practice of pure science can elicit awe, strengthen faith, and draw Christians closer to God” (130). Chapter 10, “Shalom,” largely revolves around the notion that “[s]tewardship, or caring for the world (especially in the form of environmental protection), is often thought of as a scientific virtue, but it is a deeply Christian virtue as well, a practice that brings us closer to shalom” (135). Chapter 11, “Gratitude,” makes the point that “the experience of gratitude is antithetical to anger and fear, emotions many Christians feel toward some scientific findings and scientists” (151).

This book is replete with quotes from Ecklund’s interviews and also provides deep insights into her own struggles and formation at the science-faith interface. It is good to see that the topics she addresses include technology, for example, reproductive genetic technologies, as well as public policy, for example, environmental policy. All in all, the book provides a rich treasure trove of insights into the complex interplay of values in the variegated practices, and crossing of practices, of science and religion.

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