

Creation and the Relationship of Theology and Science

Belief in a creator God has had implications for the relationship between theology and science. This has particularly emerged since the nineteenth century. Clifford has identified four streams of thought: (1) theology in continuity with scientific theory, (2) science in continuity with religious belief, (3) theology and science in complete discontinuity, and (4) theology and science as distinct but interacting approaches to reality. These are summarized in the table below.

Creation and the Relationship of Theology and Science				
Concept	Theology in Continuity with Science	Science in Continuity with Religion	Theology and Science as Separate Realms	Mutual Interaction of Theology and Science
History	Traced to the liberal Protestantism of the 19 th and early 20 th centuries	Developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the U.S. by evangelical, fundamentalist Protestants who were also scientists – known as scientific creationism or creation science. It is founded on religious convictions from a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-3.	Emerged from Protestant neo-orthodox theology's criticism of liberal Protestantism's incorporation of a modern scientific world view and its optimism about the progress of history.	Recognized that science and faith never truly conflict – and it critiqued views that hold theology and science to be mutually opposed as false.
Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Articulate a faith in an evolutionary order of reality (or a developmental process). ▪ State it is possible to discern an order of ultimate coherence and evolving process in the activity of God. ▪ Process theology – understand God to be the source of novelty and order, and creation to be a long and incomplete process. The conception of order out of chaos can be a key to interpreting the evolutionary development of the world – and is harmony with the character and purpose of God. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Argue for a science that is in continuity with religious beliefs about creation. ▪ Is militantly anti-modernist. ▪ Oppose explanations of life and its origins in terms of natural evolution. ▪ Stress supernatural intervention in the origin of all things. ▪ Propose scientific explanations for the universe that are compatible with their commitment to the inerrancy of biblical revelation. ▪ Argue that the Bible is a book of scientific merit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Neo-orthodox Protestantism sought to recover the Reformation emphasis of the primacy of divine revelation and of redemption in Jesus Christ. ▪ The relation of God to the world is discontinuous – there is discontinuity between human reason and faith based on the Word of God, and between science and biblical revelation. ▪ Theology and science are seen as radically distinct and separate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Calls for constructive dialogue between theology and science. ▪ Recognizes that conflict occurs only when either science or theology fails to respect the proper domain of the other. ▪ Scientific theories of evolution are acceptable to Christian faith as long as the presupposition of the transcendental relationship between absolute being (the creator God) and finite being (creatures) is not ruled out on scientific grounds.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State that the Creator is the God of evolution – a continuing creation with God immanent in an incomplete world. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Defend the biblical account of creation against intellectual attack and ridicule. ▪ Interpret empirical data in a way that serves their goal of verifying biblical statements about the natural world. 		
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Responsiveness to the challenges posed by science (e.g. evolution) ▪ Divine activity is viewed not in conflict with science, but as behind and within the processes traced by science. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creation scientists draw attention to the dominance of science in our culture. ▪ Creation science in many ways is a reaction to the expansion of evolutionary science in other areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are critically aware of many of the basic assumptions of the modern scientific world view. ▪ Recognize that a theology that accommodates itself to the scientific and prevailing thought forms of the culture will not maintain its identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is desirable for theologians to explicitly attend to science in doing theology because the influence of science is a major factor in determining the meaning and validity of religious discourse.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A tendency to harmonize religious truth with the prevailing spirit of the culture. ▪ Theology in continuity with evolutionary theory too easily promotes an optimistic view about historical progress and about the rational and moral perfectability of humanity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The science of creation scientists does not conform to the canons of the wider scientific community. ▪ The creationists’ treatment of Genesis creation texts as sources for scientific facts ignores the historical context of their formation, their non-scientific intent, and their symbolic and doxological richness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Neo-orthodox Protestant theology fails to attend to the manner in which prevailing attitudes in a scientific culture affect its interpretation of the Bible. ▪ Neo-orthodox theology is not only removed from science and other areas of public discourse; it is also removed from the natural world. 	
Representative figures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Friedrich Schleiermacher ▪ Alfred North Whitehead ▪ Charles Hartshorne ▪ John B. Cobb, Jr. ▪ David R. Griffin ▪ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ William Jennings Bryan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Karl Barth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Karl Rahner ▪ Wolfhart Pannenberg

Source: Anne F. Clifford, “Creation” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, vol. 1, ed. Francis Schussler and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 225-240.