

Limits of Reason and Limits of Faith. Hermeneutical Considerations on Academic Theology

Dr. F. Bestebreurtje, Kampen/Basel

In my contribution I would like to address three main points. First I will offer some remarks on the debate on science and religion, or theology and science, and the conception of time. As my second point, I will introduce a hermeneutical working term which might serve to delineate a limitation both of reason and of faith in regard to the past. Finally, I will mention one serious obstacle for the recognition of theology as a modern academic discipline, the status of Scripture in theology. The hermeneutical conception presented might suggest some lines to overcome the dilemma.

Time conception in the science-religion debate

While reading literature on the so-called science-religion debate¹, it struck me in what abstract terms and discourse it often takes place. ‘Science’ and ‘religion’ themselves are too broad and indeterminate, but also ‘faith’, ‘tradition’, and even ‘Enlightenment’ (the old argument ‘it’s all Voltaire’s fault’) are general notions which one basically is free to interpret. So the first thing to do is try to strip the debate of its abstract character.

This I will attempt by looking at a common conceptual error in both scientific and theological approach. Of course I will be generalising myself here, and some sense of abstraction is inevitable, even necessary. Yet this sense requires a methodological account, and that is what I will try to indicate in the following, with this reservation in mind.

As a starting point, I may perhaps illustrate one main issue by way of an image I came across by chance. It represents the body of an ape carrying Darwin’s head. The caricature is from March 1871 (a month after Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* was published).²

The idea of evolution is depicted ad absurdum here. What is interesting in a hermeneutical context – although I am of course ‘reading’ the image myself in one specific direction – is that the absurdity mainly lies in ignoring the factor of time. Evidently, evolution should be conceived of as a process covering millions of years, and by suggesting the

¹ For a useful overview of the main aspects involved see Peter Harrison (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, Cambridge 2010. See also Michael Horace Barnes, *Understanding Religion and Science: Introducing the Debate*, London: Continuum 2010; the comprehensive volume *The Oxford Companion of Religion and Science*, eds. Philip Clayton and Zachary Simpson, Oxford 2006; and the journals *Theology and Science*, published since 2003 by the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley, and *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science*, published since 1966.

² For a link to the image on WikimediaCommons, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Darwin_ape.jpg.

synchronicity of Darwin and ape, a short circuit is created, symbolising the short circuit evolution theory caused (and still causes) in christian anthropology.

There is a counterpart to this in the so-called Oxford evolution debate from 1860, where the Oxford Bishop Wilberforce supposedly asked the biologist Thomas Henry Huxley: ‘Was it through his grandfather or his grandmother that he traced his descent from an ape?’³ In this remark, too, the element of time is neglected, in order to provoke the image of an absurd descendance and thus discredit the new-born idea of natural evolution. Huxley is said to have responded ‘he would not be ashamed to have a monkey for his ancestor; but he would be “ashamed to be connected with a man who used great gifts to obscure the truth”’.⁴

In both examples, there is a mode of abstraction from time to make a point. Now I don’t intend to stretch my argument by interpreting two random examples from some 140 years ago. And they should not be inflated into a conflict between ‘science’ and ‘religion’. But they do raise an issue which is still undecided. There still seems to be a conflict between a conception of the natural history of species and the world, and that of the spiritual history of humankind, between man as ‘ethical primate’⁵ and man as *imago dei*.

The grounds for conflict may seem straightforward enough. Still, several writers deny that there is a real conflict, stressing the distinct provinces that both science and religion/theology would cover.⁶ Yet as I will point out below, the alleged reconciliation between science and christian theology is found only in abstract terms, not actually tackling the basics of the actual conflict, like the findings of biblical criticism, the problem of theodicy, or the question I will focus on here, the abstract conception of time in both scientific and theological thought.

By way of scientific example, there is the idea of religion (and moral intuitions) as an evolutionary force, a view held by the French anthropologist Pascal Boyer among others.

³ Quoted by Ian Hesketh, *Of Apes and Ancestors: Evolution, Christianity, and the Oxford Debate*, Toronto 2009, 81.

⁴ Quoted in David N. Livingstone, ‘That Huxley Defeated Wilberforce in their Debate over Evolution and Religion [Myth 17]’ in: Ronald L. Numbers (ed.), *Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths About Science and Religion*, Cambridge, MA/London 2009, 152-160, here 153. See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1860_Oxford_evolution_debate. Note, though, that accounts of the controversy are not univocal, and that the debate has its particular setting, in many ways only partly comparable with the current debate. For a ‘demythologising’ of the debate see Livingstone.

⁵ I borrow this term from Mary Midgley, who offers thoughtful reflections on evading the extremes of viewing ethics as a ‘product’ of evolution (epitomised by Dawkin’s notion of ‘selfish genes’), and the exclusivity of a religiously founded ethics (see f.e. *The Ethical Primate: Humans, Freedom and Morality*, London 1994). The work of Midgley would deserve a separate appraisal, which I cannot offer here.

⁶ To mention one example, Plantinga speaks of ‘alleged’ conflicts between science and religion, one being the conflict I mentioned between scientific theories of evolution and the Christian conception of man as *imago dei*. See Alvin Plantinga, ‘Science and Religion: Why Does the Debate Continue?’, in: Harold W. Attridge (ed.), *The Religion and Science Debate: Why Does the Debate Continue?*, New Haven, CO/London 2009, here 94. I will briefly return to this point at the end.

Apart from anything else that may be said against it, such a view implies that Boyer (or an approach like ‘evolutionary psychology’) can oversee and explain developments, mental processes etc. over a time span of thousands or millions of years. To be sure, a study of religion, even a comparative study, may be insightful, albeit not necessarily under Boyer’s paradigm. But any such study would in an essential way have to abstract from human experience and faith, reducing it to psychological-physiological factors (and cultural factors, but Boyer sees these, too, within an evolutionary discourse).

Emblematic may be the opening statement: ‘The explanation for religious beliefs and behaviors is to be found in the way all human minds work. I really mean all human minds, not just the minds of religious people or of some of them.’⁷ But to speak of ‘all human minds’ is only up to a certain extent legitimate and appropriate, for example in the context of medical science and physics. It becomes precisely problematic – and indeed hubristic – when one deals with religion, faith, aesthetics, ethics (or anthropology, for that matter); these require an involvement of the individual rather than thinking in categories of ‘human minds’.⁸

This is not to say that evolution theory is wrong. Nor is it to say that in faith, as in life, there is and has been no psychology etc. involved.⁹ What I am aiming at is the methodological premise from which to assess and understand such factors, and in particular the question of ethics.

But to give an example here is rather like looking for hay in a haystack: the idea of being able to oversee time is inherent to scientific discourse. To take another example, from the context of the science-religion debate: ‘Even sciences that do not seem as historical as evolutionary biology often are. For example, every time we look at the sun, we are seeing light that was emitted from its surface about eight minutes ago. Well, that is not the distant past, but in fact, we know, from our studies of the solar interior, that the light energy actually takes about a million years to get out of the sun after it is released in nuclear reactions deep in

⁷ *Religion Explained*, New York 2001, 2.

⁸ In Boyer, this is due to his cognitive approach; cf. *The Fracture of an Illusion*, Göttingen 2010, 27: ‘A proper understanding of cultural phenomena should start with an understanding of the cognitive processes whereby cultural representations are acquired, stored, and transmitted. In the past fifteen years, various accounts of specific features of religion have converged to constitute what could be called a common or “standard” model of religious thought and behavior, based on the notion that religious concepts are a by-product of ordinary cognition.’ I cannot discuss Boyer’s views in depth here, but at least some aspects of this statement seem problematic, a prominent question being the relation of such anthropological cognitive theory to the past. This is the problem I attempt to outline in this article.

⁹ On this question, too, the thought of Midgley is most balanced and humane; her argument against Dawkins c.s. partly concerns their abuse of biological discourse in the realm of human psychology and vice versa. Her arguments certainly apply to Boyer’s approach as well.

the solar core. Thus, we are literally looking back a million years when we see the sun and study it.’¹⁰

Now on the scientific level, no one may reasonably refute this view (allowing for correction by new future evidence). But philosophically, the *idea* of looking back a million years (even ‘literally’ – but what does that word imply in this context?) voids time of any content, and in history, it is not matter but mind which makes content.¹¹

Strikingly enough, a similar disregard of time as a constitutive factor in understanding may be found in theological scholars trying to accommodate the conception of evolution with christian tradition. Thus, John Haught conceived what he himself calls a ‘theology of evolution’¹², claiming there is no essential conflict between the evolutionary idea and biblical doctrines. But the resulting theology or world-view seems a sort of wooden iron to me. Thus, for example, Haught points to the contribution of the evolution idea to the christian conceptions of creation, eschatology, divine grace, and also of revelation: ‘Evolution also helps theology understand more clearly than before what is implied in the idea of “revelation”.’¹³

Two aspects require attention here. First: what or who is ‘theology’? This is a wrong kind of speaking in the name of the discipline. And secondly, in ‘than before’ some sort of progress or teleology is implied, bringing the whole conception in the stream of process theology.¹⁴ At least the implication is that in the whole of history, individual faith or even salvation did not depend on the level of individual understanding. Now in a sense this may be (theologically) correct, but only if one primarily applies this sense to one’s own thought and theory in relation to the individuals from the past. And does it not imply also that the *theory* of evolution, and the theological *reflection* on it, are in some way envisaged in creation by God? Haught seems not to put this as explicitly as Alister McGrath does after quoting John Polkinghorne: ‘(...) there seems to be some kind of “resonance” or “harmonization” between

¹⁰ Lawrence M. Krauss, ‘Religion vs. Science?’, in: Attridge 2009 (see n. 6), 144.

¹¹ I am tempted here to quote Goethe: ‘Wär nicht das Auge sonnenhaft, / Die Sonne könnt es nie erblicken; / Läg nicht in uns des Gottes eigne Kraft, / Wie könnt uns Göttliches entzücken?’, to illustrate the methodological precedence of mind over matter in historical approach. All the same, of course, Goethe is a highly unlikely spokesman for the Christian case.

¹² John F. Haught, *God after Darwin: a Theology of Evolution*, Boulder, CO 2000. This kind of approach may be found in related movements like process theology, panentheism, and a ‘natural theology’ as propagated by Alister McGrath. To a large extent, the failure of these movements as theology might be displayed by confronting it with the real theological challenge in modernity, Theology after Auschwitz (or for the Russian context, theology after Gulag; see K. Tolstaya, ‘*Theologie nach Auschwitz* as a Mirror for the Reconciliation Process in Post-communist Russia’, in: K. Tolstaya (eds.), *Orthodox Paradoxes: Heterogeneities and Complexities in Contemporary Russian Orthodoxy*, Louvain 2012 (forthcoming; Proceedings from the 1st INaSEC Conference, Amsterdam/Doorn, 12-14 September 2011).

¹³ Haught 2000, 39.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, 126-132.

the ordering of the world and the capacity of the human mind to discern and represent it (...) [Polkinghorne's] appeal to the "rationality" of the creation can be rephrased in terms of the *logos* – the divine "rationality" through which God created the world, and which was incarnate in Christ.'¹⁵

Again, two things strike here. The notion of a certain harmony between the creation and the human mind may not be unfamiliar to Christian thought, although more crucial seems to me the notion of the incapability of the human mind to grasp God and divine creation. And even if such a view would be compatible with the biblical *logos*, the matching of it with the notion of evolution inevitably leads to a short circuit on the level of time, exactly because the 'spiritual' conception of *logos* collides with the 'material' conception of evolution on the *individual* level. And the verb 'rephrase' in McGrath's comment signals quite well that it is also a hermeneutical question, which should be considered far more carefully than does McGrath here.

Now all theories involving some sort of correlation between a scientifically conceived natural world and the divine origin of the human mind – Intelligent Design, Fine-Tuned Universe, the anthropic principle – presume or even postulate this correlation. But – this will be one point below – in fact, any sort of explanatory scientific theory presupposes the adequacy of (scientific) thought to comprehend the past, even if they do not state it as such.

But a more concrete question prompted by such 'evolution theology' is: why bring in the Bible and biblical notions anyway? Most mainstream scientists might invoke some version of Occam's razor, seeing no need to introduce a creator (and certainly not the one from Genesis) in the conception of natural evolution and even the emergence of human mind and consciousness.

Here I touch upon one main issue dividing theology and science, the status of the Bible as Scripture. It does not help either to claim science and theology as two distinct 'languages', each with their own jurisdiction.¹⁶ For apart from the fact that most theologians now would not actually dismiss science as long as it would stay within its own realm, whereas

¹⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *The Science of God*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, 59f. His view is summed up well in the title of his later book *A Fine-Tuned Universe: The Quest for God in Science and Theology*, Louisville, KY, 2009, and most recently, *Darwinism and the Divine: Evolutionary Thought and Natural Theology*, Malden, MA, 2011.

¹⁶ Summarising, see Leen den Besten, *Illusie of Verlichting? Kritiek op en betekenis van religie* [Illusion or Enlightenment? Criticism and Meaning of Religion], Vught 2011, 145: 'Most critics of religion did not consider appropriately that science (what can I know) and faith (what may I hope) are two different languages with their own rules of grammar. [De meeste religiecritici gaven zich er onvoldoende rekenschap van dat wetenschap (wat kan ik weten) en geloof (wat mag ik hopen) twee verschillende talen zijn met eigen grammaticale regels.]' Here the imagery of 'languages' brings the question into the realm of hermeneutics, without duly accounting for it. Cf. Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, San Francisco, CA 1990, 13-16 (the revised edition was not available to me).

mainstream scientists might not accredit christian theology any scientific realm in the first place, such a division of labour does not take away the question. And if one would point to the specific time conception in Christian theology (if that were unambiguous), the question would be on what this conception is based, which primarily leads back to the Bible, being disputed as a source of revelatory knowledge by biblical criticism.

This situation calls for a rethinking of the limits of science and theology, or of reason and faith. And instead of letting scientists and theologians criticise a caricature they draw of each other, it could be useful to let the factor of time delineate one common limit. In this paper I can only start to raise the question, and do not in any way pretend to outline it comprehensively.

As I briefly indicated, failing in the debate is a proper account of individual experience in history, and the relation of the scientist/theologian to this individual experience. As I see it, historical enterprise – as any present-day research on what happened in the past, be it sociological, anthropological, theological or whatever, is necessarily historically informed in its approach – historical enterprise should depart from and return to the individual, and not from general categories.

This may not seem to controversial a premise, but the task is to consequently reflect upon it in methodology. Conceptions of evolution theology do not solve the collision of natural development over millions of years with the individual spiritual moment (to use Kierkegaard's notion). And the scientific view of evolutionary psychology neglects the individuality of religious experience, or rather the methodological implications of the impalpability of individual experience for the researcher.

In order to direct our thought on this crucial point, I will borrow a notion from Charles Taylor.

'Imaginary' as a hermeneutical restraint

In his book *A Secular Age* Taylor has given an exemplary philosophical reflection on the shift in what he calls 'social imaginary'.¹⁷ He tells a 'grand narrative' of the factors involved in Western secularisation, and at the same time offers a methodological reflection on his narrative, which he knows distinct from, say, the Christian medieval imaginary from which his narrative departs. He thus acknowledges history not only as a distance in time, but

¹⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, MA/London 2007, in particular 171-175. For some related essays, see Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays*, Cambridge, MA/London 2011.

primarily as a ‘mental’ distance, which is irretrievable, exactly because of the imaginary we live in¹⁸. Taylor uses ‘imaginary’ as distinct from (or as incorporating) theory and ideology, and thereby succeeds in bracketing off his own reflection in relation to the ‘imaginary’ of historical times. This he elaborates in the development of secularity in terms of ‘conditions of belief’. From a hermeneutical perspective, this is a very interesting and promising approach.

To extend his point, one could ask: how do we, under the current paradigm(s), regard the past given the shift in imaginary? What is the ontological/existential status of one’s knowledge (and of one’s faith, for that matter) in relation to times past? The way Taylor qualifies the main tenets of the shift, from an enchanted world to a disenchanted world, a ‘porous’ self to a ‘buffered’ self, etc. is only part of the story, for this shift has heuristic and epistemological implications.

The crucial notion here seems to me what Taylor describes as ‘lived experience’.¹⁹ Methodologically this serves to indicate the limits of one’s own thought and perspective. For this lived experience is inherently bound to an individual. (Not to deny shared or community experience, but then it is you as an individual who shares in the experience, and: it is still lived experience.) In this expression ‘lived’, the factor time should be considered as decisive. ‘Lived’ is not a biological or materialist category, but of the mind/spirit. It is exactly at this hermeneutical point where no metaphors are allowed, where scientific discourse (including evolutionary discourse) reaches its limits.

Perhaps because the temporal distance towards the past seems so evident, this role of time in historical enquiry and thought seems on the one hand tacitly assumed or explicitly acknowledged, on the other hand not reflected in its consequences.²⁰ For this insight in the limits of reason regarding the past, the lived experience of the individuals in the past, precedes any knowledge one may have, not to deny or devalue that knowledge, but as a sort of denominator, a reminder not to stretch the impact of one’s knowledge. And in another

¹⁸ This may be summarised by his central question: ‘[T]he change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others.’ (Ibid., p. 3) – I do not intend to suggest that ‘imaginary’ is some determinate factor, as if within an imaginary one would not be free in one’s imagination, quite the contrary: imaginary, like ‘context’, rather enables to transcend its limits. This point I cannot pursue here.

¹⁹ See for example Taylor 2007, 10-14, 30f. In the index, one aspect of ‘lived experience’ is properly summarised as being ‘versus theory as basis for understanding moral/spiritual life’ (864).

²⁰ I have tried to sketch the implications of this insight in distance concerning the development of the New Testament canon, where the gap is indicated (though not determined) by the emergence of *interpretation* of New Testament writings with the generation of Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clemens. See my *Kanon als Form. Über die Geschichtsschreibung des Neuen Testaments bei Franz Overbeck*, Bern et al. 2005.

direction, it precedes theological claims in relation to the faith of the other; any theory or theology must be tested on the individual, and, inevitably failing, this is a limit in itself.

Again, one might object that what I called abstraction from time is inherent to any occupation with the past, be it consciously by applying scientific historiographical methods or simply by reading and drawing on works from earlier authors and times. Then it is not peculiar to our modern historical imaginary or paradigm, but an unavoidable and indeed essential part of human thought and culture, enabling reception and understanding of history in the first place. In a way, one cannot but abstract from time. And this capacity for abstraction from time is present in theologies and philosophies from the past no less than in our days.

But such a view already implies the idea of being able to discern and understand the past. On the intellectual level, such an objection may have its justification, but it exactly fails to involve the moment of lived experience in one's assessment of the past. Actually, the fact that this is inherent to historical view does not mean that it has to be taken for granted, rather its implications for historical (and present) understanding should be explicated.

In this regard, a conception of lived experience makes one sceptical of current cognitive theories of religion and conceptions like process theology or radical orthodoxy alike. For the simple imperative applies: what can theory from the 21st century mean for, say, Chrysostom, or Erasmus, or Schleiermacher, indeed any person from history, even if those theories claim to draw on or evaluate tradition? That such theories (or theologies) found the explanatory key or realm which individuals and generations, even cultures sought for? Here the pointlessness of such an interpretation may be apparent, for then the explanation would lie on a plain which is inaccessible to the greater part of humankind, or which they were supposedly unconscious of. It has a very post-Hegelian ring to it, and leads to the anthropic principle, emergence theories etc.

I mean, there is something decisively anachronistic in refuting, say, the traditional christian view of God (even if there were a common denominator here, like benevolence, omnipotence etc., for such qualities have always been explained and interpreted in different ways, and methodologically seen also are bound to past imaginaries and individuals) with arguments from modern science. Not because the Bible were not a 'book of science', but because the first thing to reflect is that such scientific arguments do not apply for the past anyway in the sense of being 'lived', and this includes the argument that the Bible is not a book of science, as used both by critics and apologists of Christianity. For essentially, this conflict between science and biblical theology did arise when in the Enlightenment the status

and perception of the Bible were being challenged by historical research and, in a broader context, by scientific developments like evolution theory. Conversely, a host of the traditional christian convictions do not apply for modernity, albeit in another way.

This reflection, without claiming an absolute status, may preclude illegitimate use of argument from a past imaginary, and illegitimate application of current imaginary on the past.²¹ Having acknowledged your imaginary being different from that of any person from the past, you have to account for your own imaginary (or that of your time, which you can only in general terms) and see that essentially, you do not know the decisive point of the past imaginary, as it is always, no matter in what concepts one thinks, this ‘lived’ which fails in our understanding of the past. Or rather, you see that knowledge is not the decisive point. Here again, the working term of imaginary should not be given too much weight in itself, as it is intended as a methodological constraint on the historical knowledge one does have.

It is not primarily a matter of who is right and who is wrong, but of self-reflection, of humbleness, the insight that in the first place, I may be and am wrong at some crucial point, and both critical science and christian theology share some sort of self-reflection in this sense. In christian thought and faith, self-reflection is primarily related to God (however conceived of in detail), in science, self-reflection is related to the rules and limitations reason acknowledges for itself. In this respect, the division of labour would not be between ‘science’ and ‘theology’, but between personal integrity and common knowledge.

This seems to coincide with the second line, that of individuality (which is not individualism). Implicit in Taylor’s overall approach is a respect for the individual in history, and this individual is never exhausted by ‘contextualising’ him within a certain imaginary or paradigm, nor even – in the case of authors and leading figures – by interpreting and analysing their works. In this regard, one may legitimately speak not just of social imaginaries, but also of individual imaginaries.

In that sense, there are as many imaginaries as there are individuals. But exactly for this reason, methodologically speaking the imaginary of times past – which is more than *Zeitgeist* – precedes this recognition of the plurality of imaginaries in the present. For otherwise one still would equate ideas and opinions of the past with those of our times 1/1.

²¹ Both these forms of improper use of ‘imaginary’ easily lead to ideology or fundamentalism. – Another question is, of course: when is an imaginary past, or when is the past imaginary. The image of Darwin as Ape I started with in this sense shows that in some crucial respects, the current debate hinges on this dilemma, since on a theoretical level it still concerns evolution and (christian) religion and the foundation of human ethics.

Historical Imaginary and the Status of the Bible for Academic Theology

The crux of the debate, then, is not the relation between science and religion,²² nor in the supposed or apparent underlying paradigms, rather the point where one claims faith and knowledge in relation to the past. There one should methodologically conceive of the limits being determined by time. Basically, this is a hermeneutical question: and this also leads back to the question of the Bible as Scripture. And when we speak of theology as an academic discipline, here may be the main stumbling block for the academic and scientific status of theology. There is no basic scientific reason to grant the Bible the status of Scripture, of Revelation, of the Word of God (however one would qualify this)²³, and as long as theology gives no scientifically sound account for why it would take the Bible as source of Revelation, the sciences – and not entirely without justification – cannot take up a serious discussion with theology. Indeed, overall it is still rather the theologians who approach the sciences (including philosophy) than the sciences approaching theology.²⁴

Thus, the scientific challenge to Scripture is not that by modern standards the Biblical writers were poor scientists. That draws the discussion onto an abstract plain again, and is not the real challenge to biblical faith (or to any appeal to the Bible). Here we may see that the science-religion debate is largely a hermeneutical debate, like two dogs fighting for a bone. It seems evident that a reading of Genesis as a story of creation in a scientific sense does not hold. And it seems equally evident that judging the Genesis story according to scientific theories is not appropriate in the first place. Not because the text demands an interpretation on allegorical level or should be seen within the context of narrative theology, for such an approach is already ‘hermeneutical’, departing from tradition and texts, whereas under the premise of historical criticism, one has to acknowledge that one can not claim insight in the ‘lived’ sense crucial to it.²⁵

²² On a similar level of abstraction are the attempts, like those of Nancey Murphy and Alister McGrath, to accommodate scientific and theological methodics. See Gijsbert van den Brink, *Een publieke zaak. Theologie tussen geloof en wetenschap* [A Public Matter: Theology between Faith and Science], Zoetermeer 2004, particularly ch. 6, where he compares the conceptions of scientific theology by Wolfhart Pannenberg and Nancey Murphy, preferring the latter’s approach.

²³ The Bible as the ‘Word of God’ has a very different import in, say, Karl Barth’s conception and in George Florovsky’s conception.

²⁴ Cf. Thomas Dixon, ‘Religion and Science’, in John R. Hinnells (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, London/New York 2005, 459f. for the clear statement that there as yet is no real interchange on an academical level. At least in a broader sense, this assessment is still valid.

²⁵ On some problems concerning the prominence of the hermeneutical/interpretative principle see my article ‘Text and Interpretation in Orthodox Hermeneutics’, in Tolstaya 2012 (see n. 12), as well as Bestebreurtje 2005 (n. 20).

The point, then, is neither to overstate nor to understate historical knowledge. It is more fruitful (or thoughtful) to depart from a sense of not-knowing as implied in my application of the notions ‘imaginary’ and ‘lived experience’. Of course, this not-knowing will have to be qualified. For in the end (to stay with the Bible) at stake is the historicity of the Gospel events. To mention one example: scientifically speaking, Resurrection is not evidenced by the Gospels as testimonies. There simply is insufficient historical knowledge to claim this. Here the fact that one cannot *fully* say it didn’t take place is no argument; or at best a sort of argument from silence, which is the worst case for faith. And on another level of biblical criticism, we do not know who wrote the Pastoral letters, but we may reasonably assume it wasn’t Paul. Again, the lack of evidenced certainty does not allow to leave the question undecided or even stick to the traditional attribution to Paul. For some 1500 years this simply has not been a question; in this respect, too, the imaginary of the past is unliveable for us (though not formally unimaginable, and it is exactly this possibility of formal knowledge of the past which is misleading).²⁶

So to summarise, on the one hand, christian theology should, to remain christian, not accommodate to scientific theories by hyperallegorising the Bible, or by neglecting it altogether²⁷; on the other hand, christian theology can not revert to the traditional understanding of the biblical writings given the hermeneutical shift I highlighted and the findings of biblical criticism.

²⁶ Cf. the assessment of F. Young on the Antiochene school: ‘No Antiochene could have *imagined* [my italics, FPB] the kind of critical stance of the Biblical Theology movement, explicitly locating revelation not in the text of scripture but in the historicity of events behind the texts, events to which we only have access by reconstructing them from the texts, treating the texts as documents providing historical data.’ F.M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, Cambridge 1997, 167.

²⁷ Which, in my view, is the case in conceptions like that of evolution theology. To mention just one example: ‘A more important source of conflict [between religion and science, FPB] has to do with the Christian doctrine of creation, in particular the claim that God has created human being *in his image*. This requires that God intended to create creatures of a certain kind – rational creatures with a moral sense and the capacity to know and love him – and then acted in such a way as to accomplish his intention. It does not require that God *directly* create human beings, or that he did not do so by way of an evolutionary process, or even that he intended to create precisely human beings, precisely our species. (Maybe all he actually intended to create were rational, moral, and religious creatures; he may have been indifferent to the specific form such creatures would take.) But if he created human beings in his image, then at the least he intended that creatures of a certain sort come to be, and acted in such a way as to guarantee the existence of such creatures. This claim is consistent with the ancient earth thesis, the progress thesis, the descent with modification thesis, and the common ancestry thesis. It is important to see that it is also consistent with Darwinism. It could be, for example, that God directs and orchestrates the Darwinian process; perhaps, indeed, God causes the right genetic mutation to arise at the right time. There is nothing in the scientific theory of evolution to preclude God from causing the relevant genetic mutations.’ Alvin Plantinga, ‘Science and Religion’ (see n. 6), 106f. Apart from anything that may scientifically and theologically be said against this passage, for our context here it may suffice to point out that the suggestion God could direct and orchestrate the Darwinian process would require, again, ‘humanity’ (an abstract concept in itself) becoming conscious of this process in *Darwinian* terms (although seemingly by a puppet God dangling on Darwinian strings), in which view time is again voided of any substance. And for another thing, supposedly departing from the Christian doctrine (or rather Biblical narrative?), Plantinga offers no traditional theological or biblical connection in the rest of his argument.

As I tried to indicate, theology may find a response to this dilemma not by dismissing scientific findings, pointing to a supposed ‘ideological’ paradigm of (Enlightenment/secular) science; nor by trying to match traditional christian doctrine with scientific theories and conceptions.²⁸ But as I also indicated, the conception that Resurrection does not fit a scientific world view neglects this moment of not-knowing on another plain. Theology and science alike must first account for the limits of faith and reason in the light of time, of both transience and eternity – a very Christian theme, it seems.

Given this constellation, an academical theological exegesis of the New Testament writings is legitimate only when she seeks this moment of not-knowing both in scientific knowledge and religious conviction, and thinks (and acts) from there. And this seems to me a promising field of encounter between Western and Eastern theology, as it points to the revealed mystery of Christ which is central to both.

²⁸ Bultmanns appeal still has some force here: ‘Man kann nicht elektrisches Licht und Radioapparat benutzen, in Krankheitsfällen moderne medizinische und klinische Mittel in Anspruch nehmen und gleichzeitig an die Geister- und Wunderwelt des Neuen Testaments glauben. Und wer meint, es für seine Person tun zu können, muß sich klar machen, daß er, wenn er das für die Haltung des christlichen Glaubens erklärt, damit die christliche Verkündigung in der Gegenwart unverständlich und unmöglich macht.’ Rudolf Bultmann, *Neues Testament und Mythologie*, Tübingen 1941, 18. [Р. Бульман, *Новый Завет и мифология. Проблема демифологизации новозаветного провозвестия* (trans. G.V. Vdovina), Moscow: Nauka 1994, 302–339, at: http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov_Buks/bibliologia/Article/bultm.php: «Невозможно пользоваться электрическим светом и радио, прибегать к услугам открытий в сфере медицины и хирургии и в то же самое время верить в новозаветный мир духов и чудес. Тот, кто полагает это возможным для себя лично, должен уяснить: объявляя это позицией христианской веры, он делает христианское провозвестие в современном мире непонятным и невозможным.»]