

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Learning from science, religion, interfaith dialogue

By Douglas Kindschi

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While in Cambridge, England, I am working on two projects which, in fact, turn out to be very similar. During my years as the dean of science at Grand Valley State University, I pursued the relationship between science and religion. While at Cambridge University, I am a visiting fellow at St. Edmund's College, which houses the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion.

Their extensive programs have made them a major center in this field. I also had the opportunity to meet with John Polkinghorne, considered internationally the



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leading figure in combining insights from science and theology.

Polkinghorne had a distinguished scientific career of more than 25 years in Cambridge, where he worked with Nobel laureate Paul Dirac. He became a professor of mathematical physics and published six science books, plus numerous articles. In his 40s, he studied for the Anglican priesthood and, following his ordination in the Church of England, he served for five years in parish ministry.

He returned to Cambridge as a chaplain, then later as president of Queens' College until his retirement in 1996. He has published more than 20 books on science and religion; was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1997 for distinguished service to science, religion and learning; and in 2002 was awarded the \$1.5 million Templeton Prize.

awarded annually for an "exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension."

It has been a special privilege to meet with him periodically at his home and to be inspired by his intellect as well as by his deep belief and gentle personality.

As I reflect on my efforts at GVSU in the science and religion dialogue, I realize that it was engaging two worldviews that appear to be in conflict, and yet, when properly pursued, we find deep points of convergence and mutual insight.

Now, as I have become more involved in the interfaith dialogue, I realize I am doing the same thing. The various world religions, as well as the secular stance, are different worldviews that seem to be in deep conflict.

While the world religions make significantly different factual claims, they do have much in common when one goes deep

into the values and insights into what is ultimately meaningful.

During our Year of Interfaith Service, we experienced people from a variety of religious and secular perspectives coming together in acts of service — from working to provide housing or food to working on behalf of the environment. As a community and on an interfaith basis, we raised awareness and enlisted volunteers to welcome refugees into our community.

Religions have in common the impulse to make the ordinary life of all people more just and equitable while affirming that life is much more than just physical well-being. The various worldviews have different visions of life's purpose, but they also bring a transcendent perspective to what is truly meaningful.

The various sciences look at reality by asking different questions. The biologist pursues

questions of how life develops and evolves, while the physicist asks about mass, velocity and matter itself.

Our various religious perspectives also ask different questions. Each provides its own lens through which we seek to make sense of the world. We can learn from each other in the sciences and in faith traditions that have taken seriously the questions of life, purpose and meaning.

No one view can claim the whole of understanding. We are enriched by interacting and being in dialogue, both in the sciences and in interfaith efforts, with those whose experiences and questions differ from our own.

My experience of exploring various worldviews and their potential contributions to a more complete understanding of reality is, indeed, an inspiring and fruitful adventure.

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