

Sabbatical report June to August 2022

Dual study: The relationship between faith and science and Paul the evangelist.

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Paul the evangelist

I wanted to gain any insights into the world that Paul lived in and how he operated to help me in my ministry in general and with evangelism in particular.

I visited two parts of the world that Paul lived and ministered in, namely Rome and Asia minor (Turkey). It was a valuable time and gave me some insight into Paul's world.

In Rome I visited some specific sites related to Paul as well as some of the general ones such as the Colosseum. The Mamertine prison where according to legend Paul (and Peter) were imprisoned was interesting. The exhibition seemed poor but despite this you got the impression of the difficulties that Paul endured for his faith and for evangelism, if not here, then in similar places. I also visited Paul's tomb in basilica of St. Paul outside the walls, this was an impressive place. The basilica was large with his tomb beneath the altar, there was also chains on display which were believed to be the ones that imprisoned Paul. Whether or not they are the actual ones, it again affected me in that Paul suffered for his faith and for evangelism. At the time of our visit there was a very loud sound check going on next to the basilica for a pride festival, there was such a contrast between that and the serenity of Paul's tomb. I also visited other places in Rome and attended the Sunday morning service with the address by the pope in the Vatican. There were huge numbers there, but I did not find it a spiritual occasion. I visited St. Peter's at the same time and again there were many people there. It seemed that there was no intentional evangelism which seemed such a wasted opportunity.

I flew to Istanbul from Rome, and it was interesting staying in an Airbnb right in the centre. The locals were very friendly and keen to sell things, but the security was tight with checks to enter places. Visiting the Hagia Sophia was a highlight, when it was built in the 6th century it was the largest church in the world and Constantinople (Istanbul) was an important Christian city. It is now a Muslim city, but it was interesting to note that that some of the Christian pictures were covered over so that it could be used as a mosque. Our guide was a non-practising Muslim, and it was interesting hearing his views. He thought that there was a large-scale dissatisfaction with Islam in parts of Turkey and he predicted that the current president would be disposed. He said that as the Koran is read in Arabic, most people did not understand it, so that there was great ignorance. In Istanbul we visited the 'Islamic Museum of science', this fitted in with my other study area of science and faith. It was a fascinating place as its sole purpose seemed to be to show that Muslims were prominent scientists in the medieval times. I accept that truth of how in Muslim countries at that time, they were often more advanced in science than in Christian countries, but it

was odd to build a museum to show that. They also, linked science with Islam so any particular scientist was an Islamic scientist. I did some research later and discovered that science did not continue to flourish as it did in the West in the 17th century onwards partly because of the Muslim attitudes. So, the Muslim scientist couldn't look at the result of experiments without mentioning the will of Allah. So, hydrogen and oxygen make water, if Allah wills it, so always questioning the repeatability of science, thus undermining an important scientific principle. In Christian countries the scientists generally saw their discoveries as explaining God's world, some even saw their discoveries as their act of worship.

I then flew to Izmir, hired a car and toured the seven churches of Revelation, this was enjoyable and illuminating. Although all of the sites were just the remains of the towns it gave me a good general impression of the area where Christianity was expanding into and so the places where the apostle Paul did his evangelism. Two general points that I noticed was the difficulties over the distances involved and the problems with language. It seemed a long way in our car on good roads, but Paul would have been on foot with less distinct roads. Also, the problem of language was apparent to us, we did learn a Turkish word, it was 'tea sugar a dream', if you say it flowing into each other quickly it sounds like the Turkish word for thank you! Paul spoke Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic, with probably some Latin too, thus he must have encountered many problems of evangelising in the different languages spoken. We were generally OK as most people spoke at least some English, but we were only trying to communicate on a basic level, not about higher things as Paul would have done. Also, we had google translate! It made me reflect how we can easily see barriers to evangelism as too high. There was one conversation in particular that was interesting, we stopped at a town looking for a café, we entered it, and a man came up to us and invited us to sit down and he ordered us a drink. We then talked in his limited English, and it was very friendly. But then he talked about the Greeks and how barbaric their soldiers had been (a hundred years before). He was so friendly but had a real hatred for his country's neighbours.

The first church on our list was Pergamon, this was an impressive mountain top city which you could see from the ruins was in its day an important place. We took photos and videoed a recording of the letter in Revelation to the particular church where we visited. It helped me to understand that the messages in the Bible was written to real people in real situations, this can then help us to see how the messages apply to our situations today. For example, in the letter to the church at Pergamon there is a call to hold onto their faith and its truth. You can see how impressive the remains of temples to other Gods are and so how it must have been tempting to not follow Christ. The book 'Unearthing the church in scripture and in Turkey by David Winwood' was particularly helpful in understanding more about the letters to the Revelation churches. E.g. at Pergamon he drew out this message of truth and that as a church we should be a place of love, but also truth especially in this time which has been described as a 'post truth' era.

We then travelled to Thyatira and visited a museum and then a kind lady led us to some more ruins in the centre of this busy town. We then moved onto Sardis which was

obviously once an impressive place judging by the ruins. One thing impressed me here, that was the remains of a shop, obviously owned by a Christian as he had carved a Christian symbol on his shop, emphasizing that the idea of whole life discipleship is not a new one!

We called at Philadelphia, but failed to find the few remnants of the town. We experienced the hot springs of Pamukkale and visited the impressive Hierapolis together with the tomb of Saint Philip. Laodicea was very impressive, and the Turkish authorities had renovated the church there to a high degree. At Laodicea I enjoyed a cool drink of coca cola which made me think of the letter to that church and about being lukewarm. Apparently the hot springs mentioned earlier were transported via an aqueduct and I can imagine that the water was luke w. when it reached the town. We visited Miletus, where Paul said goodbye to the Ephesian elders, as other places the ruins were impressive and interesting to see how the harbour has silted up. In the café at Miletus, we met a Christian missionary who shared some stories about his 30 years in Turkey. He had been badly treated and what he was doing was illegal, so he did not want his photograph taken. He did introduce us to the café owner, Ahmed, who shared how he had become a Christian. A small church had just started in a near bye town, so he may get some fellowship. The missionary gave me some tracts in Turkish and when we visited Priene (mentioned in the Bible) I handed some to a café owner, hopefully it will help him to find faith in Jesus. We also visited Colossae (where the book of Colossians was written to). There was nothing there, just a hill with a few stones from buildings visible. It made me think about the transience of life and the need to follow the Lord now. We visited Ephesus and I was very keen to see it after all that I heard about it, but I was disappointed. It was a very hot day which did not help, but you could tell that it had been an impressive city. I was pleasantly surprised with Mary's tomb, I'm glad that I went there, and it was interesting how much the Muslims value Mary. Our final church of the Revelation was Smyrna, now called Izmir. This was the only one of the seven church towns to be still functioning. We also visited the church dedicated to saint Polycarp and it was good to hear his story again.

The visit to Rome and Turkey was a great experience, I learnt and experienced a lot to help me in my ministry and in my exploration of Paul the evangelist.

The relationship between faith and science.

Since becoming a Christian whilst studying for my A levels which were largely science based, this question has interested me. I then studied Engineering at university and was introduced to some more philosophical ideas of science e.g., the second law of thermodynamics. This is an important question, not only for me, but also for evangelism as sometimes if you ask someone 'Do you believe in God', you get the answer 'no I believe in science'. This illustrates that for some there is a choice either faith or science, but is this right? Not in my experience, I have maintained my interest in science whilst growing in faith, but it seems to be true for others.

I discovered that there is a lot of misinformation and ridiculing others' beliefs on this subject without properly engaging on this issue. Even my tutor didn't know of a book that

examined the evidence in a neutral way and so I was frustrated in my studies trying to discern the truth. It is interesting how unscientific many scientists seem to be in this area.

I began my study with the Faraday institute summer lectures. These were in the main very helpful. Professor Alistair McGrath gave an interesting testimony of how he thought that he had to be an atheist to be a scientist as a young man studying for his A levels. Then as he discovered the complexity of science he got interested in the Christian faith. So through science he became a Christian and has written books including 'The Dawkins delusion' is response to Richard Dawkins 'The God delusion'. He made the point that science and religion look at things in different ways, but often compatible ways. Simply put, science looks at how, religion looks at why. An example of this is the answer to 'why is the kettle boiling?' One answer is that the electrical energy heats up the water molecules to reach 100 degrees, another answer is 'because I want a cup of tea!' Both are correct, but look at things differently, one how and another why. McGrath goes further to say that religion and science when taken together help to see the world in a clearer way like bifocal vision. Other speakers agreed with these ideas but felt that some atheist scientists didn't think like this as dismissed religion.

Another big subject that was introduced was evolution and creation. I think that all of the contributors to the Faraday institute are Christian evolutionists who see no conflict in faith and evolution, again it is a question of why and how, the how evolution was. This led to a lot of my research and led to me to examine the evidence for creation. My tutor is a creationist and a Doctor of Chemistry. According to my research it appears that both creationists and evolutionists believe in micro evolution ie dog like things changing into various varieties of dog and wolf etc. But they disagree with macroevolution i.e., an evolutionist would say that everything has a common ancestor, like a single tree branching out into the variety of animals. The creationist would say that God created different kinds of animals, so it is more like an orchard than a single tree. I read and watched videos on this subject, but it was hard to find a good exploration of the scientific facts. There has been some fascinating scientific research which seemingly backs up the Bible e.g., mitochondrial Eve which some say was the mother of all, but is it true? In appendix 1 there are some examples of evidence for creation, one is that there are few (or some say no) fossil evidence of transitional species. Apparently Darwin in his origin of species admitted this, but said that he expects that in time fossil evidence will be found, apparently such evidence has not appeared. Appendix 2, is an answer to this point, but my difficulty is who to believe? No one seems to take an impartial view. However, I have seen enough evidence for creation to put into doubt the evolutionists idea. There are also a couple of associated ideas that are important. One is the view of scripture, evolution believes that all life (including humans) are accidents of nature, this is at odds to the Bible which declares the uniqueness of humans. Another issue is that of morality, many Atheist evolutionist agree that morality is a real issue, where did right and wrong comes from.

Another issues that the Faraday institute lectures introduced me to was that of the origin of the universe, this again led me to much research which was fascinating. It is also interesting how my two areas of sabbatical study overlapped. I was reading a book on the

theology of St. Paul written in 1964 when the author made an interesting statement in a chapter on Paul's view of creation. He said it is not for the theologian to decide whether the 'steady state' universe or the so called 'big bang' is correct, this should be left to the scientists. This is interesting both as the big bang theory had not yet been accepted, but also the divorce of theology and science. According to my research the scientific discovery of the universe and its origins have a lot to do with a believe system rather than pure science. For example, I learnt that there are three problems with the big bang theory a) the universe is flat b) it has a uniform temperature and c) there are no mono poles. In this report I will not attempt to elaborate on these issues, but to say that the scientists have a solution it is called inflation. It states that in a minute fraction of a second the universe expanded about 10 to the power 26 times and then stopped and a slower expansion happened. There is no evidence for this, but it seems to work. Similarly dark energy and dark matter has been described without evidence because it fits the theory. Yet a Christian would be criticised if they said, I pray to God and it helps, there is no proof, but it seems to work! There is a lot of faith and belief for scientists and many are Christians or other faiths, but many have said publicly that they will never accept a theory that includes God ie a closed mind which is not very scientific.

The final area of study was again prompted by a Faraday lecture and that is over the historical narrative of the issue of science and religion. It appears that scientists may be good at science, but not history and they believe what they want to. An example is 'History of the conflict between religion and science' by John William Draper, published in 1874. There is a similar book by Andrew White called 'History of the warfare of science and theology in Christendom'. In these books they give historical examples to show that there is an intrinsic intellectual conflict between religion and science and that religion has held science back. These books were hugely influential and still are to some degree, they are still quoted in the BBC bitesize publications. However, they have been discredited, what they wrote is not true, yet it appears that people wanted and still want to believe this narrative. So, Christians did not destroy the great library of Alexandria because it was anti learning, the church did not ban dissection of dead bodies and so hold back medical discovery, even the story of Galileo is full of lies. In fact, much of the scientific discoveries were encouraged by the church and many Christians were making discoveries and saying that it was part of their worship to discover more of God's world.

So, in conclusion, I do not have conclusions! There is so much to discover and discern, but I am more convinced that the study of science is a faith building rather than a faith harming idea providing that one checks what people are saying and they can back it up. I am to share my research with the churches that I minister and particularly with the youth who are often fed wrong information about science at school.