

Dialogues in Science and Faith

Talk 1

Title: The History and Future of Science and Faith
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R. Clinton Ohlers earned his PhD in Intellectual History, focusing on History of Science, from the University of Pennsylvania, where he also served as a lecturer on science and religion. He has been a Henry Research Fellow with the Templeton-funded Creation Project at Trinity International University where he worked on understanding the origins of perceptions of conflict between science and religion. He has completed a book manuscript on that topic, under the working title of *The Birth of the Conflict Between Science and Religion*. He is now a Research Assistant Professor at the University of Hong Kong, working with Faith and Global Engagement and the Faith and Science Collaborative Research Forum. His current research focuses on understanding divine action in light of modern science.

Abstract:

The history of the relationship between science and faith is complex. In the early years of the history of science as a scholarly field, what is known as the “conflict thesis”—the idea of perpetual, inevitable, and necessary conflict between science and religion—dominated historians’ understanding of the past. Today, belief in such conflict dominates the popular imagination in spite of over a half-century of concerted effort by historians to discard the thesis as a historical fiction from its start. Nevertheless, the conflict thesis looms large. In addition, the role of faith also looms large, not only religious faith, but also faith in a variety of conceptions of reality to which the natural sciences are often marshaled for support. Adding further complexity, science as a form of enquiry can be compared with and contrasted to other means of knowing real truths.

Therefore, this talk examines important interludes and figures in the history of science and religion to better understand this complexity. It also considers the widespread belief in the conflict thesis as not merely an obstacle to a better understanding of the two realms, but as a useful guide to determining where the most critical areas of concern lie, and how these may indicate pathways forward to a more fruitful future of engagement between science and religion.