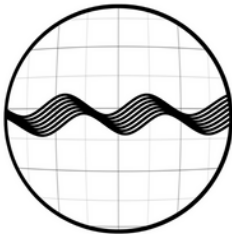


BAPTIST PERSPECTIVES ON SCIENCE AND RELIGION

24 and 25 September 2025

Programme

A two-day conference at
Regent's Park College, Oxford



EQUIPPING
CHRISTIAN
LEADERSHIP in an
AGE of
SCIENCE

SCIENCE AND RELIGION IN THE BAPTIST WORLD

A Science for Seminaries project at the Centre for Baptist Studies

CENTRE FOR
Baptist Studies



Regent's
Park College
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Abstracts and biographies

History: The Scientific Lives of Key Baptist Figures

John Weaver: An Overview of Baptist Contributions to Science

Since the early nineteenth century Baptist theologians and church leaders have had an uneasy relationship with science, especially in the United States of America and parts of central and eastern Europe. There have been strongly held views, based on a literal understanding of scripture, which are often in conflict with the discoveries of science. Others have recognised the complementary relationship between science and faith.

While Baptists have not always given positive support to the research and discoveries of modern science, especially amongst some in the ranks of the Southern Baptist Convention of the United States, there have nevertheless been Baptists who have made significant contributions to our understanding of, and care for, the natural world.

This paper explores examples of some key Baptists in various scientific fields: in medical science, in natural science including evolution, and in environmental science particularly climate change, which demonstrate the range and significance of the contributions that they have made.

John Weaver was previously Senior Lecturer in the Division of Geology, Derby College of Higher Education (now University of Derby) from 1971-1978. He trained for Baptist ministry at Regent's Park College, University of Oxford and served as minister of Highfield Baptist Church, Rushden, Northamptonshire from 1981-1992. He went on to teach at Regent's from 1992-2001, during which time he received an award from the John Templeton Foundation. From 2001-2011 he was Principal of South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff. He has written four texts on the dialogue between Christianity and Science and has also served as Chair of the John Ray Initiative: Connecting Environment, Science and Christianity, and is now one of the JRI Vice Presidents.

Saptarshi Mallick: William Carey and Botany

Western science and Christianity were active tools of the colonial rule's civilizing mission. William Carey's engagement with Botany seems to advocate a theology of nature that converts could meditate on nature and come to God's character. Carey's engagement followed a Christian constructive orientalism. It involved a dialogue between Sanskrit/Hindu science and Christian science, leading to an attempt to resuscitate the former within the latter. This is hinted at in Carey's

engagement with Roxburgh's works and in some of his letters to the Baptist Missionary Society, but is more vividly evident in Ward's account. Carey's aim was more to initiate Serampore as a centre of science with its association with the Midlands, over London – interrogating centre/margin binaries of colonial science. Where the engagement with science was involved, Serampore Mission needed to prove to the East India Company their worth and financial independence. It seems that Carey followed a dual policy with them due to their generally unsympathetic attitude towards the Serampore Missionaries. It localized the practice of science in Serampore similar to the community life of the Protestant Moravians. This paper will document Carey's engagement with Botany and show how Serampore emerged as a contact zone where Indian botany got enriched and appropriated.

Saptarshi Mallick is Assistant Professor at the Department of American Studies, University of Graz. He was a Charles Wallace India Trust Fellow and an UK-IERI Fellow (doctoral) in the UK. He was an Ernst Mach Fellow (postdoctoral) at the Karl Franzens Universität Graz and a Visiting Fellow to the Bodleian, University of Oxford. His publications are Connecting Spaces: The Travelogues and Letters of Lady Abala Bose (Routledge, 2024) and Finding Philosophers in Global Fiction: Redefining the Philosopher in Multicultural Contexts (Bloomsbury, 2024). He is an Associate Editor of Gitanjali and Beyond, an open access e-journal of the Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies, Edinburgh.

Karen Smith: Ellen Farrer and Medicine

Ellen Margaret Farrer (1865-1959) was appointed in 1891 to serve as a medical missionary by the Ladies' Association for the Support of Zenana Work and Bible Women in India (later known as the Baptist Zenana Mission or BZM). A devoted physician, Farrer worked tirelessly to care for women and children in Bhiwani (in the state of Haryana) until she retired in 1933. Known for her down-to-earth and practical approach, as well as providing surgical and medical care for many patients each day, Farrer encouraged the education of nurses and midwives, and established a hospital in Bhiwani. Significantly, during her many years of service in India, she wrote hundreds of letters and sent regular reports of her work to Baptists in Britain. She also kept a diary of her work which offers insight into her personal life and overseas service. Using these original materials, this presentation will explore the approach to medical practice and education of this remarkable British Baptist woman.

Karen E. Smith taught Church History and Christian Spirituality at South Wales Baptist College and in the School of History, Archaeology and Religion at Cardiff University, Cardiff, Wales, UK from 1991 to 2018. She has written widely in the area of Baptist History and Christian Spirituality and, since 2013, she has served as Co-Editor of the Baptist Quarterly, the journal of the British Baptist Historical Society.

Andrew Kaiser: Timothy Richard's Use of Science During His Early Years in China

Welsh Baptist missionary Timothy Richard incorporated his abiding interest in science into his evolving approach to Christian mission during the first half of his 45 years of ministry in China. Whether advocating for the scientific development of China or demonstrating the miracles of science to China's elites, Richard's use of science in mission reflected his recognition of the implications of the kingdom of God for this world, his belief in the apologetic efficacy of "moral evidences" of the superiority of Christianity, and his instrumental rather than evangelistic motivation for engaging with China's ruling elites.

Andrew T. Kaiser is an independent researcher who has been living and working in Shanxi since 1997. He is the author of The Rushing on of the Purposes of God: Christian Missions in Shanxi since 1876 and Encountering China: The Evolution of Timothy Richard's Missionary Thought (1870-1891).

Sarah Qidwai: Baptist Missionaries, Empire, and Science

This paper explores how Baptist missionaries engaged with science in the nineteenth century through their educational and evangelistic work in India, Singapore, and New Zealand. It examines how scientific practices such as botany and medicine, as well as education, were employed to support missionary goals, while also reflecting broader theological and denominational rationales for scientific engagement. By comparing these case studies, the paper highlights both the distinctive features of Baptist science and their entanglement with colonial knowledge systems.

Sarah Qidwai is a postdoctoral research associate working with the ECLAS project. Her research specialties and teaching interests include the history of science and religion, British Imperialism in the long nineteenth century, science and colonialism, and the history of evolutionary biology.

Bethany Sollereeder: Response

Bethany Sollereeder is an Associate Professor in Science and Religion at the University of Oxford. She specialises in theology, evolution and the problem of suffering. Bethany received her PhD in Theology from the University of Exeter and taught at the University of Edinburgh. She is the author of God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering: Theodicy without a Fall (2020) and Why is there Suffering? Pick your own theological expedition (2021).

Issues: Baptist Perspectives on the Sciences

Denis Alexander: Biological Science: A Baptist Perspective

Three key Baptist doctrines provide a framing and worldview within which the biological sciences flourish: first, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers nurtures a culture that recognises the value of each individual contribution to the research enterprise; second, the practice of adult baptism places an important focus on the freedom of individual choice, a freedom that is supported rather than opposed by the most recent research in genetics; third, the doctrine of creation arches over everything else, providing the nomic regularity that renders science possible and the matrix within which biology blossoms, evolutionary biology in particular. These claims will be discussed, illustrated by data from recent research in the biological sciences.

Denis Alexander is an Emeritus Director of The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, Cambridge, where he is Emeritus Fellow of St. Edmund's College. He is a past Chair of the Molecular Immunology Programme and Head of the Laboratory of Lymphocyte Signalling and Development at The Babraham Institute, Cambridge.

Hannah Gray: Environmental Science: A Baptist Perspective

The science is unequivocal: we are in a global environmental crisis. Temperatures are rising, biodiversity is crashing, pollution is proliferating, resources are dwindling, and poor people are suffering the greatest effects of environmental damage. There are stark warnings from scientists – if we don't act quickly and sufficiently, life on this earth will become very difficult for humanity and the other species we share the planet with. Are UK Baptist churches aware of the current global environmental crisis, and are they responding?

In this paper, I explore Baptist responses to the creation care crisis, both national and local, and evaluate their effectiveness. I analyse the differences between Baptist churches and other denominations using participation in the Eco Church scheme as a metric and explore reasons for differences in approach and efficacy through structured interviews and surveys. Finally, I make recommendations for future activity within the Baptist family to raise the profile of creation care and encourage individual churches and Christians to act.

Hannah Gray is an environmental professional who has been working in the sector for over twenty years. Her career has spanned water management, nature conservation and sustainable development in the UK and globally. She currently works for Water Resources East as Programme Manager for Nature-based Solutions. Hannah coordinates the Baptist Union Environment Network in the Eastern Baptist Association (EBA) and is a volunteer speaker for A Rocha UK.

Andrew Steane: Physical Science: A Baptist Perspective

We discuss the structure of scientific reasoning, showing that it is not structured like a tower in which each level is explained by the one below, but as a network in which different terms of discourse mutually inform one another. We then consider the nature of the physical world. Scientific models of physical process, such as Newtonian physics and now quantum mechanics, have an algorithmic character: the world evolves by means of a large number of small processes, each of which is automatic or mindless. One is tempted to conclude that every physical process is like that. We give reasons to think such a conclusion would be wrong.

Andrew Steane is a Professor of Physics at Oxford University. He discovered the Steane code and Quantum Error Correction, and established the ion trap quantum computing work in Oxford. He is the author of several books in the area of science and faith. He received the Maxwell Medal (2000) and the Trotter Prize (2020).

Sally Nelson: Artificial Intelligence: A Baptist Perspective

A recent survey of evangelical church leaders in the US found that a majority of respondents viewed AI as a neutral tool in church life. We do not currently have comparable data for UK Baptists, but it would be difficult not to be impacted at some level by AI in everyday church and ministry, given the ubiquity of AI assistants and the AI focus of the UK government. Are there particularly Baptist questions that we should ask of our digital companions? And, as a gathered people, might AI affect our congregational dynamics and the way we interpret and inhabit our Baptist principles?

Sally Nelson is a Baptist minister with research interests in theological anthropology, suffering and disability. She is currently Lecturer in Pastoral Studies at Trinity College, University of Glasgow.

Alistair Ross: Psychological Science: A Baptist Perspective

Psychology has provided one of the dominant discourses of meaning from its origins in the 19th century and has grown exponentially throughout the 20th century and onwards. It is focussed on human nature and functioning by paying attention to patterns and processes. It shapes the intellectual and cultural landscapes that contemporary theology speaks into. There is a vital role for Baptist perspectives by drawing on key aspects of its own DNA applied in wider cultural contexts. These include, first, 'non-conformity' seen in the acceptance of alternative ways of engaging with human nature and functioning expressed

through the creation of meaning (counselling and psychotherapy) as opposed to symptom reduction. Second, 'the priesthood of all believers' seen in embracing the 'lived experience' of people challenged by a wide range of health conditions, disabilities, differences and diversities and how their voice is heard.

Alistair Ross is an Associate Professor in Psychotherapy at the University of Oxford. He is an accredited therapist and supervisor. He has written on Freud, and is currently writing a book on ethics for therapists working with people from religious and spiritual traditions.

Mark Harris: Response

Mark Harris is the Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion at the University of Oxford. As a physicist working in a theological environment, he thinks of himself as a theologian of science, interested in the complex theological underpinnings of the physical sciences. His current research focuses on the interpretation of quantum mechanics. Mark also directs the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion, and serves as President of the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology (ESSSAT).

Theology: Baptist Theology and the Sciences

Ernest Lucas: Biblical Studies and Science

The first part of this paper will report the result of a survey of the contribution of Baptist biblical scholars to the discussion of science and Christian faith in the UK, Canada and the USA. Despite there being several notable British Baptist biblical scholars in the last one hundred years only Henry Wheeler Robinson and Ernest Lucas made published contributions and only Bristol Baptist College has offered a course on the subject. No contributions were found from Canadian Baptist biblical scholars in recent decades. Only Toronto Baptist Seminary mentions the topic in its courses or Doctrinal Statement, which affirms a young-earth creationist position. The few American Baptist scholars who have published in this area have come from Colleges of the Southern Baptist Convention, which adopts and promotes a young-earth creationist position and explicit rejection of evolution. The second part of the paper will suggest what the contribution is that biblical studies can make to the discussion of science and Christian faith, especially in the interpretation and understanding of the relevant biblical texts.

Ernest Lucas is Vice-Principal Emeritus, Bristol Baptist College, and has doctorates in Chemistry and Oriental Studies. He was a research biochemist before studying theology and being ordained.

Ed Kaneen & Rosa Hunt: Baptist Ecclesiology and Science

A search for the keyword 'science' in the index of the Baptist Quarterly only comes up with four articles with 'science' in the title (excluding 'social science'), and, of these, three were written in the 1930s. The 1930s in Europe were, of course, a period of acute political, financial and cultural instability. This paper argues that now, a century later, Britain and Europe find themselves in a similar position where geopolitical and economic turmoil are causing a renewed urgency in the search for stability, and the fear that truth may be undermined by developments in society. Given what we discern as a clear parallel between 'then' and 'now', we want to think about the ways in which the scientific community and the Baptist community have historically discerned truth.

In this article, we will examine different epistemological bases for truth. We argue that, when the existing world is threatened, people look for an authority that can be trusted. This key question is asked at a number of levels from the popular press/social media to academic institutions: "On what basis can we believe or know that something is true?"

In this paper, we start by arguing that both religion and science address this same question in a society where the world order is being threatened. We go on to make the observation that, for both scientists and Baptists, discernment is not a solitary activity but one that is pursued, discerned and tested in community. We then break the process of truth discernment down into three stages:

- (i) Crisis (where a long-held 'truth' is challenged, because experience clashes with held belief);
- (ii) Formulation of Trust (where the scientific and religious communities state the authorities by which they will evaluate the truth claims of experience), and,
- (iii) Communal Testing (where the scientific and religious communities collectively discern the truth of any new claim).

We argue that Baptists are particularly well-placed by virtue of their ecclesiology to engage in communal truth-discernment, and that, therefore, for Baptists, the relationship between faith and science should be one of dialogue, as both communities share a desire for truth and a way for discerning it in community.

Rosa Hunt's first degree was in Natural Sciences, winning a prize for her dissertation on mediaeval scientific discourse. She went on to teach Mathematics before hearing God's call to Baptist ministry. She trained at Cardiff Baptist College and then did research in patristic hermeneutics, gaining a PhD from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, through IBTS. She is minister of Tabernacl Welsh Baptist Chapel, and an honorary tutor at CBC and lecturer for Cardiff University. She is a regular contributor and presenter on BBC Radio, and has covered such scientific topics as artificial intelligence, the Big Bang and the relationship between mathematics and faith.

Ed Kaneen studied Computer Science to master's level before going on to work in computer science research in industry, publishing in the area of artificial intelligence (specifically, natural language processing). Having been called by God to Baptist ministry, Ed trained at Regent's Park College and, after 8 years with a church, studied for a PhD in New Testament at Durham University. Ed is Principal of Cardiff Baptist College and Programme Lead for Theology for Cardiff University.

Dave Gregory: Covenant Theology and Science

The historically Baptist shaping of the notion of covenant as a triangle of relationships between God, individuals and human community limits appreciation and engagement within Baptist life with wider cultural ideas, including the sciences. Focus has been primarily upon topics that foster the deepening of human and divine relationships. For example, insights from the human sciences such as psychology and sociology have been employed within pastoral theology and practical ecclesiology. While in missiology, a limited range of scientific issues has been corralled within apologetic discourse with the aim of defending traditional theological notions against paradigm shifts in scientific perspective over the past 150 years, seeking to maintain an openness to the idea of God in the face of science's dominant technocratic world view. It will be argued that a widening of the notion of covenant to include divine and human interactions with the natural world not only more adequately captures the Biblical notion of covenant but enables a more confident engagement with the insights that science provides. Such a paradigm shift enables wider missional discourse with a range of scientific issues, such as climate change, to be valued within Baptist mission and discipleship. Entwining science within covenant relationships also brings the possibility of exploring the sacramental potential of scientific perspectives to facilitate spiritual encounter and to re-evaluate theological perspectives in the light of new scientific understanding of the cosmos at its largest and smallest scales.

David Gregory is a Baptist minister and missionary for science and environment. With a background in physics and astrophysics, along with research in the fields of meteorology and climate, he convenes BUEN (the Baptist Union Environment Network). His theological research has explored spiritual engagement through nature and scientific imagery. He is the writer and presenter of the God Saw That It Was Good film series (www.gstiwg.co.uk) and the author of Divine Windows – Seeing God through the lens of science (BRF, 2025).

Richard Weaver: Contemporary Mission and Science

We wonder at the beauty of nature and the universe, and we live in an age where science and scientific discovery shape our communities. Science is involved in a rational exploration of the universe. It is a search for understanding of the nature and patterns of the physical world. It is only effective because it describes things the way they are. Science is about discovery, and the search for meaning. The one goal that drives scientific investigations is the desire for knowledge, to understand better the way the world is. The paper explores what the nature of scientific research can offer to theology and the practice of contemporary mission. This includes the importance of observation and being attentive to what is going on in a particular context, and the importance of collaboration with others. This also includes the imagination to see and explore new possibilities, and the expectation to discover new things and have ideas and thinking challenged and changed. The paper examines how both contemporary mission and science expand our understanding of God and God's mission and actions in communities and in the world. The paper proposes that both science and theology, and its practice in mission, can be brought together. Both are seeking to make sense of the world that they experience, and their methodologies are not totally different. Science is not content with current understandings and situations. Likewise, mission as seeking justice is not content with how things are, and seeks to discover more of God's desires for communities and nature. The paper proposes that learning from science and a renewed focus on wonder and discovery could lead to a stronger Baptist ethic for the practice of social and environmental justice, such as in response to the climate crisis and environmental devastation.

Richard Weaver is the Tutor for Community Engagement at Cardiff Baptist College. He takes a leading role in the college's teaching and research on science and faith. His first degree was a BSc in Cell Biology from the University of Manchester. Richard's PhD, from the Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam, focused on developing a stronger Baptist theological ethic for the practice of social justice. Richard worked for 16 years in International Development until 2016, leading campaigning on climate change, environment and disasters, and on HIV and AIDS. He was a trustee of the John Ray Initiative from 2008 to 2012.

Paul Fiddes: Response

Paul S. Fiddes is Professor of Systematic Theology in the University of Oxford, Emeritus Principal of Regent's Park College Oxford, and now a Senior Research Fellow of the College. He directs an inter-faith project for The Study of Love in Religion, whose most recent publications (edited by him) are: Loving the Planet. Interfaith Essays on Ecology, Love, and Theology and One Earth, One Love. Orthodox and Baptist Theologians in Conversation about the Natural Environment.

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Notes:

PROGRAMME



Regent's
Park College
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Wednesday 24 September

11:00 Check in opens

12:00 Lunch on arrival

12:45 Introduction

History: The Scientific Lives of Key Baptist Figures

13:00 Papers from John Weaver, Saptarshi Mallick and Karen Smith

14:30 Tea & Coffee

15:00 Papers from Andrew Kaiser, Sarah Qidwai
and response from Bethany Sollereder

16:15 Q&A Panel on History

16:45 Tea & Coffee

Issues: Baptist Perspectives on the Sciences

17:15 Papers from Denis Alexander, Hannah Gray and Andrew Steane

18:45 Finish

19:15 **Conference Dinner**

9:00 Papers from Sally Nelson, Alistair Ross
and response from Mark Harris

10:15 Q&A Panel on Issues

10:45 Tea & Coffee

Theology: Baptist Theology and the Sciences

11:15 Papers from Ernest Lucas, Ed Kaneen & Rosa Hunt and Dave Gregory

12:45 Lunch

13:45 Paper from Richard Weaver and response from Paul Fiddes

14:30 Q&A Panel on Theology

15:00 Conclusion and depart

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