

is science opposed to religion?

Bernard Palmer says 'NO!'





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'Science and religion cannot be reconciled,' Peter Atkins, an Oxford Chemistry Professor boldly pronounced. How we need to rebut this view with good arguments to help those who think that science and the Bible are in conflict!

An Orthodox Jewish scientist was living in a village near Mount Carmel in Israel. He taught his son that God had revealed himself in the ancient Jewish Scriptures. As a scientist he delved into modern physics, helping to unravel the secrets of the universe; as a Jew he tried to understand God's revelation of himself as taught in the Bible.

On the slopes of Mount Carmel several large caves were being excavated and some bones of Neanderthal man, a prehistoric human were found. Analysis of these bones revealed virtually no carbon-14, suggesting that these bones must be over 50,000 years old. The geological strata in which the bones were found gave an age of 60,000 years. Yet a literal reading of the opening chapters of the Bible suggests that the world was created around 6,000 years ago. This discrepancy caused the scientist some problems. Is there really a God who has authoritatively revealed himself in the Bible? Is science reliable? Must he make a choice between science and acknowledging a God who has revealed himself? Are science and the Bible compatible? The scientist recognised that there are massive problems if there is no authoritative revelation from God. What was he to teach his son? Similar dilemmas face many thinking Christians today.

Scientific understanding suggests that the universe is about 13.79 billion years old, and the earth 4.56 billion years old. This challenges those in the church who hold that the earth is young. Saint Augustine's estimate was that the universe began 5,000 years before Christ. In 1650, Archbishop Ussher calculated from the genealogies in the Book of Genesis that the earth began at 6pm on Saturday

22 October 4004 BC!¹ Until 1910, Bibles printed by the Oxford University Press had Ussher's dating printed alongside the text.

Fossils reveal that very different types of animals once lived on this earth. The wide variety of dinosaurs were estimated to have become extinct 65 million years ago. Ancient human-like fossils suggest that hominid beings were on this earth for over a million years. Questions have been asked as to whether they were really humans and whether the dating is accurate. Modern *Homo sapiens* probably first appeared around 100,000 years ago.

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'evolution'

There has been much misunderstanding over the meaning of the word 'evolution'. For some Christians, the word 'evolution' causes a strong reaction.

'I don't believe in evolution!' a student told me.

'Don't you think that dinosaurs once lived on this earth? Don't you think that England was once joined to Europe?' I asked.

'Oh yes, I can accept those things.'

'Then you are an evolutionist in the original meaning of the word, as all evolution means is that changes have occurred both in biological species living on earth and in geographical arrangements. Originally evolution only meant "change".'

The word 'evolution' is derived from the Latin - *volvere* which means 'to unroll'. Clearly, there has been an 'unrolling' or change over the years in the world we live. The boundaries of countries, governments, the shape of continents and dogs have changed. The fossil record shows that wild



plants and animals have changed. These varied changes in the world seem incontrovertible. In this respect we are all 'evolutionists'.

When biologists say that biological evolution has been proved by science, they are saying that science gives strong evidence that radical changes have occurred. The confusion comes when people also use the word 'evolution' to mean neo-Darwinism, which is a theory to explain how all these changes took place naturally.

What are the possible causes for these biological changes? Today, we are constantly told that the only plausible mechanism for these changes of living organisms is neo-Darwinism. This teaches that random genetic mutations occasionally produce advantageous changes and that these accumulate to produce altered characteristics, some of which give survival advantages. Natural selection does the rest. Some use the word 'evolution' as being synonymous with neo-Darwinism theory. Yet more and more scientific problems are appearing, concerning this theory.

The Bible begins with the story of the world being created in six 'days'. Has modern science discredited the Bible and is the Christian faith therefore discredited? Can people fairly use

'science' to reject the Christian message or have we misunderstood something?

disunited worldviews

In my first year at university, I was introduced to a Christian teacher who encouraged us to start thinking more clearly about contemporary issues. His name was Francis Schaeffer. In one of his earliest books, *Escape from Reason*, he gave a historical overview about the growing tendency over the last few centuries to dissociate the spiritual world from the physical world. He argued that the 'spiritual' has increasingly been separated from 'normal life' to the extent that in some areas all links had been broken; the 'spiritual' was becoming irrational and the rational world unspiritual. Francis Schaeffer's plea was that this tendency should not be accepted. He argued that the one God who made us with our emotions, aesthetic senses and love of logic, also made this physical world with its physics, chemistry and biology. On this basis, all true revelations of God must be compatible with the rational world he has made. We can test the spiritual by rational means. All 'true truths' must be coherent. It is therefore just as acceptable for Christians to be interested

in science, art or philosophy as in theology - what matters to God is that we investigate everything with integrity and honesty.

The medieval astronomer, Galileo Galilei, used his telescope to investigate the stars and came up with different conclusions to those of the church of the time. What should he have done? Could he accept both worldviews at the same time? Or was one worldview wrong? How was he to determine what was true? He decided that God had given him a mind to try and answer the dilemma. He was to use that gift to try and understand what Scripture, God's book, was saying and to arrive at honest scientific conclusions. He said,

*'I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.'*²

evidence

There is much evidence for God creating this extraordinary world and the life in it. We do not know how this occurred, but there is now very good evidence from a wide variety of scientific disciplines for God's involvement. How were all the constants of the universe set so precisely that life could occur? How could the precise language of DNA that defines species have come about by chance? If God was instrumental in creating the cosmos and forming living organisms, it should not be surprising that he would want to rule in his creation. Jesus claimed to be this same God come down to earth in the flesh.³ There is good historical evidence supporting Jesus' claims and some of this has been discussed in my book *Cure for Life*, published by CMF.⁴

Every person inevitably comes to new ideas with preconceptions. These influence the way we look at information and so prejudice the acceptance of new ideas and concepts. The search for truth has

many moral undercurrents. So many of us have concepts derived from previous experiences or desires that can poison a true analysis of the evidence. Most people's thinking is based on core beliefs. Our logical deductions depend on these foundations. All too rarely, do we question these core beliefs.

The chemist Linus Pauling used the broad definition that 'science is the search for truth.'⁵ He is the only person ever to receive two unshared Nobel Prizes for Chemistry (1954) and for Peace (1962). Indeed, searching for and living by 'the truth' is our responsibility.

science

Science is possible because we can see design, pattern and order in the universe. One of the principles of science is that there is a unifying concept called 'truth'. This is also the principle behind Judeo-Christian teaching. We should be searching for truth both in science and theology. The Bible teaches that this unity will ultimately be found in the God who has made us. It teaches that everything - science, history, philosophy, theology and even quantum physics will eventually be unified in the truth of God.

'...to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ...' (Ephesians 1:10)

Christians need to understand that there is a unity between what God has taught us in the Bible and what God is revealing to us through science. Once we have settled this, we can move on from endlessly debating intellectual tensions and go out into God's world, persuading people about the importance of the Lord Jesus - it is a relationship with him that really does matter. ■

1. Smith M. Conflict myths: Bishop Ussher and the date of creation. *Bethinking* 2010 bit.ly/2KYYYnr [Accessed 27 November 2019]
2. Galilei G. *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina of Tuscany* (abridged) 1615. Stanford University stanford.io/33iPngs [Accessed 27 November 2019]
3. John 1:14
4. Palmer B. *Cure for Life: A prescription for life with a meaning*. London: Christian Medical Fellowship, 2017.
5. Pauling L. *No More War!* New York: Dodd, Mead and Co, 1958: 209