

## **Parallel Pursuits of Truth**

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### *Science and Faith – the Intersection*

**St Paul's Cathedral**

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My life rests on two books. The Bible and *The Origin of Species*.

I believe the Bible to reveal great truths about God, our humanity and our unfolding relationship with God.

I am a Christian. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I believe he was miraculously born into this world, provided a template for our lives, was crucified to reconcile us with God, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. I believe in miracles. I believe that the influence of God is pervasive in this world and in my life.

I am also an evolutionary biologist. Darwin's theory of evolution via natural selection is the foundation upon which my research is built. I study insecticide resistance. In the laboratory and in the field my research team has been able to repeatedly observe evolutionary events. Insects that were once susceptible to insecticide poisoning, become totally resistant. This is due to new mutations in their DNA and selection. The fittest ones, that is, those that are resistant - survive and reproduce, increasing the frequency of resistance in the population – just as Darwin proposed.

Based on 32 years of research experience and, considering the overwhelming evidence assembled by scientists over the last 150 years, I echo the sentiments of the great geneticist Dobzhansky who suggested that - nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution.

As a Christian who happens to be a scientist I am distressed by the polarization of the Christian faith and science. It has not always been the

case. In times past science was encouraged by the Church and many extraordinary scientists freely spoke of their faith in God.

While there are still many scientists today who are Christians, it is increasingly suggested that the Christian faith and science are incompatible. I totally reject this and point to five common elements I see as being shared by science and the Christian faith.

### **1. Science and the Christian faith both quest for truth**

Jesus said, I am the Way, **the Truth** and the Life. God is the truth. God knows all of the truths of this Universe and of the world in which we live. He knows all truth and encourages us to seek it.

Good science reveals truths already known by God. As far as I know God is the only totally honest being in the Universe. He does not lie to us. He does not hide truth from us. He does not mislead us. So what we learn of life on this earth using intellect, reason and experimentation is truth. With a conviction that God does not mislead us, and seeing the massive weight of evidence accumulated to support it, I am convinced that life evolved on this earth.

### **2. Science and the Christian faith deal in long time frames**

John Pilbrow has just told us that this world is 4.5 billion years old, but God is much older. God is eternal!

Some say that creation of life took six 24 hour days. Others say it took billions of years. The reality is that 4.5 billion years is not even the equivalent of 6 seconds in the life of an eternal God!

In viewing evolution as part of the unfolding plan of God for life on this earth, my sense of awe is not diminished. It is expanded. I am blown away that an eternal being could see it all this from beginning to end. And I am stunned that his love for us could be central to it.

As it is my lot to study the way in which species adapt, I think what wonderful provision. What a wonderful strategy it is, that allows life to survive and thrive.

Clearly, whether you are a 6 day creationist or an evolutionist with no belief in God, we should all be strongly united in preserving the beauty of this earth and the amazing web of inter-dependent life forms that live on it.

### **3. Science and faith both rest on reason.**

It should be self evident that Science rests on reason. It may be less evident that the Christian faith does also. In the interests of keeping this brief, I can only say that my faith, has a body of underpinning facts and logic to it. It is not all about gut feeling. So much of what I believe to be true in the Bible is historically verifiable. And reason fills some gaps. For example, speaking personally, logic tells me that if so many of Jesus disciples died under torture refusing to renounce the truth of his resurrection, that they believed it to their core. I see them as the most reliable of witnesses.

### **4. Science and faith advance through experiments**

Experiments are an every day experience for the scientist. We have an idea. We think of an experiment that would test the truth of that idea. We do the experiment. Based on the outcome, we reflect on the truth of our idea and our understanding grows. This should also be the daily experience for Christians. We hold on to truths about God, his written undertakings and directions for our lives. We put those ideas to the test daily in the things that we do. These are our *experiments*. Our growing understanding of God and ourselves is dependent upon them.

### **5. Scientists and Christians should be comfortable with their ignorance**

As a scientist I feel deeply satisfied with what I have discovered. But if I pause for a moment to list the things that I want to know but do not, the list becomes enormously long. I know so little. There is so much more to be discovered.

I reckon God to be eternal, all powerful and all knowing. As a Christian I take delight in what I know of God, but the list of things I do not know and cannot yet know is without end.

The polarization of faith and science has been due, in part, to the fact that Christians and scientist alike often forget the boundaries of their knowledge. At times we are all a bit arrogant.

It has not been my purpose to push my views upon you today. I do hope that you will be more favourably disposed to my view that faith and science are parallel pursuits of truth. They need not be at odds.

I wish you a good day and hope that you will attend many other events in *Evolution – the Festival*.