

Some of my most cheerful acquaintances as I go around the City are the street sweepers, cleaning up all the mess. I think I will apply to join their trade union, as I seem to spend much of my time cleaning up the intellectual detritus and philosophical rubbish which dirties all our lives. The biggest issue in public debate today is the relationship between science and religion. It is a difficult subject made treacherous by opponents of the Christian faith who spread lies about both Christianity and science with the deliberate aim of destroying our faith. Here, then, I want to nail some of these lies and make some corrections.

The first big lie is that the scientific revolution of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment banished the gloom and superstition of the Dark Ages and the Medieval period. In fact the so-called Dark Ages were not dark at all: they were a period of astonishing technological progress. For example, the Battle of Tours in AD 732 was the first occasion when knights fought in full armour. They could do so because of the invention of stirrups and the Norman saddle. The ancient Romans had neither stirrups nor an effective saddle, so a knight trying to wield his lance would only fall off.

Developments on the battlefield showed European farming technologists how to invent the horse collar. This allowed the farmers throughout the continent to switch from using oxen to horses for ploughing with the result that there was an immense increase in food production. Also the ancient Romans had shod their horses in sandals – Nero had some made in silver - which slipped off and caused the horses to go lame. The Dark Ages invented iron shoes by which horses could travel over hard ground and cover much more territory without injury.

Other inventions which preceded the Renaissance by centuries were waterwheels, mills, camshafts. Mechanical clocks and the compass.

The next big lie is that it was not until the voyages of Columbus and Magellan that we learnt the world is not flat but round. This is nonsense. Among the scholars of the Dark Ages who taught that the world is round were Venerable Bede – his dates 673-735; Bishop Virgilus of Salzburg – 8th century; Hildegard of Bingen – 1098-1179 and St Thomas Aquinas.

Copernicus is usually credited in the book of lies with overturning the silly flat earth view of the superstitious medieval church. Actually, Copernicus was taught the heliocentric theory by his medieval theological professors. Nicole d'Oresme (1325-1382) wrote: *The earth turns, rather than the heavens*. Oresme was the most outstanding of all the medieval scientists and he saw no conflict between science and religion. You may be interested to know that after teaching science as Rector of the University of Paris, he became Bishop of Lisieux. And the universities themselves were not the product of the Renaissance: they were invented by the church.

Then there is the lie that the Renaissance began with the contributions of Islamic philosophers or Byzantine survivors from the fall of Constantinople who had *rediscovered* classical Greek learning. This is not true either. The reason Greek learning had not been fully assimilated was that the language of the Dark Ages was

Latin. The Renaissance was actually the creation of the church whose scholars for the first time between 1125 and 1200 translated most of the Greek manuscripts into Latin and made them generally available.

Another big lie is that medical science was held back because the church wouldn't allow the dissection of corpses. But it was medieval churchmen who permitted dissection and improved their knowledge of anatomy and pathology as a direct result. The Greeks, the Romans and the Muslims all forbade dissection because the dignity of the human body would not permit it. The church was not so hindered, because of course the church possessed the liberating doctrine of the immortal soul – what St Paul called the *σωμαπνευματικον* - the spiritual body. You want proof of all this? The Christian scholastic Mondino de' Luzzi (1270-1326) wrote a textbook on the dissection of corpses.

Ah but what about the Galileo affair? Everybody knows the church persecuted Galileo. Well, he was disciplined but this was rather for the way he arrogantly presented his ideas than for the ideas themselves. When Galileo published his book *Assayer* in 1623 he dedicated it to his friend Cardinal Barberini who went on to become Pope Urban VIII. Barberini enjoyed it because of the many skits Galileo had included in it about the Jesuits. As William Shea said, *Galileo had no doubts about God. Had he been less devout, he could have refused the summons to Rome – Venice offered him asylum, but he turned it down.* What about Galileo himself then, always presented as a rebel against the church? What were his core beliefs? Fortunately, we have Galileo's his written record and this is what he wrote: *The book of nature is a book written by the hand of God in the language of mathematics.*

Let's turn to Isaac Newton. He wrote a great deal of theology and said nice things about God, but those who hate Christianity tell lies about Newton too: they say he only pretended to be devout for politeness' sake and for a quiet life. Fortunately, John Maynard Keynes bought all Newton's papers in the 1930s and discovered what Newton wrote, not for appearance's sake but in private letters to his friend Bentley. Newton wrote:

The true God is a living, intelligent, powerful being...he governs all things and knows all things that are done or can be done...he endures forever and is everywhere present...

So how about that other controversy, Darwinism and the theory of evolution? It turns out that the severest critics of Darwinian theory are not theologians but Darwinians in our own time expressing doubt about their own methods. So Stephen Gould denied that great bedrock of the theory of evolution – the missing link between old species and new. Gould wrote as follows: *The evolutionary diagrams that adorn our textbooks are based on inference not the evidence of fossils.*

Modern Darwinians and Paleontologists such as Steven Stanley have declared openly that the lack of fossil evidence for the theory of evolution has been suppressed from the time of Darwin himself onwards. Niles Eldridge said recently, *We palaeontologists have said that the history of life supports the principle of gradual transmutations of species all the while knowing that really it does not.*

Please don't get me wrong. I'm not about to sign up to Bible-belt literalism. I think some theory of the gradual development of life on earth is still the best hypothesis available. But Darwinism does not even begin to explain how inanimate matter could have turned into life and how primitive and microscopic life forms could turn into creatures with the mind and consciousness of Bach and Einstein.

There is no conflict between science and Christianity. The conflict is between Christianity and ideological atheists such as Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot and T.H. Huxley, right down to that prince bigot of our own time, Richard Dawkins. These people lie about the history of science as a way of attacking the faith. But in all the statistical surveys of working scientists you find that the majority of them are believers – moreover that those who belong to the so-called hard sciences such as physics and mathematics are the firmest believers.

It is not only that there is no conflict between Christianity and science: without Christianity, there would *be* no science. No other civilisation or culture, ancient or modern has invented science – only the Christianity of the Dark Ages and the Medieval period. This is because Christianity has declared since the opening verse of St John's gospel that God is reasonable. And this reasonable God made the world in his own reasonable image: to be discovered and understood by the rationality he has implanted in us by his Spirit.

Let me end by quoting two authors, one ancient and one modern. A.N. Whitehead, co-author with Bertrand Russell of *Principia Mathematica* says:

There is but one source for science: It must come from the Medieval insistence on the rationality of God

Finally, against irrationality and superstition, from St Augustine:

Heaven forbid that God should hate in us that by which he made us superior to the animals! Heaven forbid that we should believe in such a way as not to accept or seek reasons, since we could not even believe if we did not possess rational souls