

Professor Michael Reiss, an education officer in the Royal Society, suggested last week that so called *creationism* should be taught in schools alongside normal science. He said creationism should be taught in order to show that it is not comparable to the scientific method. For this mild suggestion Professor Reiss has had to resign. Well, there has been so much confused discussion of the whole issue of science and religion in the papers and on television that I thought I'd try to help us see the wood for the trees.

Now at the risk of upsetting any of my gun-toting fundamentalist friends in the American Bible belt, it must be made plain that creationism has nothing to do with the Bible. True, *The Book of Genesis* does say that God made the world in six days and that he rested on the seventh. But only the dumbest exponent of literal-mindedness thinks that story refers to seven days of twenty-four hours apiece. I've got news for the creationists: the writers of *Genesis* themselves did not mean seven days – literally. They weren't stupid. They were inspired poets giving us an imaginative story of the creation.

But there are other sorts of crass fundamentalists outside the Bible belt. We find many of them among today's scientists. They set up experiments such as the Large Hadron Collider which they hope will tell us how the universe began – literally. You see, *literally* – that's why I call these scientists fundamentalists. A moment's calm reflection must lead to the modest understanding that we, who are but part of the whole, can never explain entirely the whole of which we are a part. Scientists claim their method is objective but it is precisely the opposite, for they stand within the system which they are trying to explain. A little modesty might lead these scientists to say: *When we tell you about the Big Bang, we are offering you a modern creation myth to put alongside the creation myth in The Book of Genesis.*

The next problem is that the people who run the newspapers and television have never read any classical literature and so they don't know what a myth is. LOCH NESS MONSTER: FACT OR MYTH? That's the extent of their misconception. A myth is not something which is untrue. A myth is something which helps us get a picture, a glimmer, of a reality that is beyond our understanding. And *necessarily* beyond our understanding because it would be preposterous to suggest that finite beings can comprehend infinities.

But still these scientists persist fanatically with their grandiose claims. Professor Stephen Hawking in his pot-boiler *A Brief History of Time* suggested that physicists were close to producing a unified field theory, an equation which would be the explanation of everything. As he put it graphically, *Then we shall know the mind of God.* There is nothing new in such arrogance. Hundreds of years before the coming of Christ, Jeremiah the Prophet had to tell the hubris-soaked know-all of his own day that the potter shapes the clay: the clay does not shape the potter.

They are always approaching this unified field theory, the scientists. But it turns out to be like the horizon. When you reach where it was, it's somewhere beyond. In a recent book fascinatingly entitled *Not Even Wrong* – a phrase borrowed from the great physicist Wolfgang Pauli – Professor Peter Woit tells us that there has been no

significant progress in theoretical physics for at least thirty years. He says: *Without any new experimental data to provide clues as to which direction to take in order to make further progress, the field has stagnated and worked itself a long way down a blind alley.* The theory of everything is as far away as ever.

I hope what I've said so far has cleared the ground at least a little. Let's try to move on. And let us do so by trying to use the good understanding which science has provided when it sticks within its own discipline and doesn't try to do theology. Modern physics informs us that if gravitational force had been the tiniest bit stronger or weaker than it actually is, if the strong nuclear force had been ever so slightly different, same with the weak nuclear force – then there wouldn't have been anything at all. Modern science says very categorically that there are precise conditions for the existence of the material universe. Why – unless it looks as if the universe was designed?

The renowned astronomer Fred Hoyle put this very colourfully: *As believe that the universe came into being accidentally, you might as well try believing that a hurricane could blow through a scrap yard and leave behind a perfectly formed Jumbo jet.*

Well, the papers and the airwaves have been full of the dispute between intelligent design and the theory of evolution. And again this is an issue that has generated only fog and misunderstanding. Charles Darwin produced a theory to account for the development of the various species on earth. A staggering achievement. Credit where credit is due. But Charles Darwin never tried to do what Richard Dawkins does and that is to claim that the theory of evolution does away with the need for creation. For Darwinism says nothing about the beginning. It nowhere offers an explanation of how something came out of nothing; of how mental activity and consciousness arose out of inanimate matter. It's hard to get blood out of a stone – let alone trying to explain how you get Beethoven out of a stone.

I have not been criticising science, but I have been criticising atheistic materialism which is not science but an ideology, a prejudice. With these ideological atheists who hate Christianity and who are misrepresenting real science in order to discredit our faith we must do battle. We must tell them that in fact science arose out of Christianity – out of the witness of the New Testament which says that God is the Logos, the Word, the rational principle. The great mathematician A.N. Whitehead – who collaborated with Bertrand Russell on the three volume work *Principia Mathematica* – said: *There can be but one explanation for the origins of science and that is in the Christian idea of the rationality of God.*

The supposed opposition of science and religion is an entirely modern misconception. It is not being driven by true believers and it is not being driven by true scientists: it is just a hugely destructive sideshow erected by bigots and ideologues on both sides of the fence.

Let me end by offering just one example of how science and faith can often seem to point to the same truth – and do so very beautifully. In current scientific understanding of the atom we are asked to picture the single atom as something the size of St Paul's cathedral. If St Paul's were the atom, then the only matter inside it

would amount to a few specks of dust: the rest would be empty space. That, say the quantum physicists, is what the atom is like, roughly: a very few electrons moving at immense speed in what is largely empty space.

One of these physicists went on to explain what follows from this discovery. He said that if you take all the matter in the solar system, the sun, the planets, the moons and the asteroids, the amount of visible, tangible matter in the whole darn shoot would be about the size of a tennis ball. Oddly – or not so oddly – the 14th century mystic Mother Julian of Norwich once asked God how big the universe really is. And, in her vision, God put into her hand a single apple.