



what can an honest scientist believe? It's impossible, some people say, for a scientist to be truly Christian and a Christian to be truly a scientist. A good Christian must quarantine his faith from science; he can-

What can an honest scientist believe? Do deep-rooted conflicts occur between his work and his belief? By James Hefley

not be completely honest. A good scientist must put all on the altar of his laboratory; a good Christian must put all on a spiritual altar.

These ideas are held by many Christians today who still think that science as well as bartending are two vocations in which a Christian must compromise too much.

Recently I had a chance to talk to ten evangelical Christians who are competent scientists. Six were professors, five of whom were serving on "secular" university faculties; one was a psychiatrist, one a surgeon, one a research nuclear physicist and one a space scientist.

I was determined to get their answers to this problem which many Christians have. To do it, I asked each of them four crucial questions.

1. *Do you feel that the Christian faith is outmoded for today's scientists?*

Each man answered negatively, although some said they knew scientists who held to this belief. Dr. Irving Knobloch, a professor in the department of natural science at Michigan State University, declared, "I do not think there are today any more atheistic scientists than there are atheistic laymen." Out of his personal experience he added, "The Christian scientist sees a further purpose beyond this life. His faith in the after-life gives him a mental lift and puts meaning into his daily living. A pure mechanist has no ultimate goal to live for."

Dr. John H. Martin, a research physicist at Argonne National Laboratory, said that he had "heard a few prejudiced people claim the Church doesn't offer them a thing." He continued, "But I could not function as a scientist without being a stable human being. And one is not this until he has a right relationship with his Creator. Right relationships with God produce wholesome relationships with one's co-workers. Take the spiritual ingredients out of our lives here in this lab and we could not function together as a working team."

I asked Dr. Martin if he and his fellow-researchers discussed spiritual things while studying the nucleus of the atom. He replied, "You'd be amazed at some of the conversations that go on here during our lunch hour. We do discuss matters of faith and religion

among ourselves. We scientists are vitally interested in what lies beyond our limited capacities of understanding. We realize that there is a spiritual void in our lives which, I believe, only God can fill."

Walter Burke, general manager of the Mercury-Gemini Space Project for McDonnell Aircraft, and a Lutheran Sunday school teacher, said that modern advances in science had made him "think more of God's purpose for my life." He testified further, "In space circles I find men discussing spiritual things more than ever before. There's hardly a day passes that I do not have the opportunity to give a word of personal witness for Christ." When I asked if current space successes had made space scientists arrogant, he replied, "I think the opposite is true. The scientists I know are awed and stand in reverence of God. I think that today's scientist has a greater view of the laws of God and of nature than ever before."

Several of the scientists spoke—almost emotionally at times—about the need for God's presence in their personal lives. One said quietly, "In the problems of life, I've found a response to my personal need when I looked to God for help." This man told of the reality of God's presence when his five-year-old daughter died suddenly from encephalitis, then added, "The spiritual revelation is much more important to me than the natural revelation."

2. *Can a scientist believe in God and the supernatural and still maintain inward intellectual integrity?*

In varying ways the men agreed that one could. But several emphasized that the supernatural could not be "proved" through experiments or equations. Dr. Robert Fischer, director of laboratories for the University of Indiana and associate professor of chemistry, said, "In chemistry we deal with the natural realm. God is supernatural. I don't expect to prove God in an experiment."

Dr. John H. Martin also talked about the "absurdity of trying to prove the existence of God by mechanical means." He cited the claims of the Russian cosmonauts who scoffed that they "couldn't see God." "What did they expect God to look like?" Dr. Martin asked. "A ball of fire, a picture? This is a typical gouge at saying God is purely physical."

Although Dr. Martin, a Methodist, disliked the term "proof," he suggested a way of answering scoffers. "Since we cannot prove God's existence by mechanical laws, we must use a different set of laws in understanding God. This is quite consistent with what we have found inside the atom's nucleus—a different set of laws from what we are accustomed to in the physical world."

"If we think of God as personal," he continued, "we must consider personal things and relationships. Some-

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times I ask doubters, 'How do you know there are such things as beauty, music appreciation, and love?' ”

Interestingly enough, Dr. Martin thought that “more scientific education will lead Communist scientists to belief in a Higher Power.”

Dr. Howard Hamlin, prominent Chicago surgeon and Nazarene lay leader, cited examples of apparently miraculous healings. Yet he emphasized that “Christians who become ill should do all that is humanly possible to speed recovery.” He and the psychiatrist interviewed, Dr. David Busby of Park Ridge, Illinois, both considered themselves as “only God’s tools for healing.”

Dr. Fischer, the chemist, stressed the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian scientist in accepting the supernatural. “The non-Christian may see design but not be *willing* to accept the Designer,” he said. “In the natural realm man gets knowledge through five senses. In the spiritual realm knowledge comes through a spiritual sense. The non-Christian has lost the spiritual sense through sin. Only through the salvation experience can he come alive.”

3. *What are some weaknesses which you have observed in current preaching and teaching?*

The scientists seemed eager to correct what they considered to be “pat answers” on difficult questions, unjust criticisms of scientific effort, and popular perversions of the gospel.

SPACE PROBES CONDEMNED

Walter Burke, the space scientist, discussed “critics who maintain that space probes are against God’s will.” Shortly before our interview he had received a 14-page letter condemning his work on the Mercury-Gemini project. Burke, a former professor of aeronautical engineering at the University of Michigan, said that the breakthrough in space exploration had spurred him to read the Bible more. He declared, “I have found nothing there that leads me to believe we’re working contrary to God’s will—if we use our creative ability with God’s glory in mind.”

Psychiatrist David Busby mentioned erroneous teaching that “presumes a mentally ill person to be guilty of some sin. Personal sin,” he asserted, “is often related to mental suffering, but not always. It is naive to assume that some personal disobedience of God’s spiritual law is the cause of a mental illness. There are always many causes.” Dr. Busby went on to say that this type of teaching is a “major factor” in Christians having guilt feelings about consulting a psychiatrist.

Dr. Busby also criticized what he called a “non-biblical view of the peace of God.” He said, “The peace of God is not a state of mind that lets Christians

float through life without ever getting disturbed. Many times Jesus Himself was agitated and disturbed. We need peace and serenity in these troubled days, but we also need to be disturbed and anxious about meeting spiritual needs around us.”

FAITH HEALING

Dr. Walter Hamlin, the Nazarene surgeon, voiced his suspicions of “some so-called faith healers.” “I recommend the services of sincere and honest ministers,” he said, “but one should ask some hard questions before getting into a healer’s line, such as; Is he conducting a religious circus? Does he give priority to preaching the gospel? Are his financial affairs and methods above reproach?”

Dr. Conrad A. Blomquist, assistant dean of the College of Pharmacy at the University of Illinois’ Chicago campus, and a Baptist, felt that “in many instances the Church has failed to get across to its youth the importance of spiritual ideals.” He cited the growing problem of cheating, then added, “Many—not all—college students are motivated towards the materialistic goals of our society—social status, a good salary, etc. Yet most of the students here are affiliated with some church or denomination. I think this is because too many churches are concerned mainly with materialistic goals—big and luxurious buildings, organized programs, big budgets, etc.”

Dr. Russell Mixter, professor of zoology at Wheaton, and Dr. Irving Knobloch of Michigan State talked at length about the “evolution controversy.” Mixter referred to the “fixity of the species” concept which originated with Linnaeus in 1758. “Even today,” Professor Mixter said, “we still have people saying that the Bible teaches fixity of the species. It does not.”

Dr. Knobloch declared that the number one question he hears from freshmen at his school who come from conservative churches is, “Can I believe the Bible and also believe in evolution?” His answer: “Natural selection and changes have occurred within orders and classes. If you call this evolution, then evolution is a fact. But this need not conflict with the biblical ‘after its kind.’ ”

4. *In your opinion, are there basic conflicts between the Bible and science, and if so, how can they be solved?*

Dr. Edson Peck, former associate professor of physics at Northwestern University and a student of Hebrew and Greek, thought that the blame for “certain controversies between the Church and science lies in both directions.” He said, “Some Christians have jumped to conclusions that a careful study of Scripture will not justify. Some scientists proclaim mere theories

as dogmas. Often the two directions meet and then there is a conflict." Dr. Peck mentioned the earth's age as a recurring subject of conflict. "The Hebrew word for day in Genesis is *yom*," he remarked, "and *yom* is used elsewhere in the Bible to refer to periods of time other than a day."

The validation of miracles was mentioned by three of the scientists as another subject of conflict. Dr. Robert Fischer, the chemist, thought that "we should be hesitant in ruling out miracles on purely natural grounds." He posed this analogy: "Suppose someone 100 years ago had said that the president of the United States would one day be seen and heard in Europe by the medium of television. We shouldn't say something is impossible just because we don't understand it. Man may be able to understand certain miracles a hundred years from now." Then he quickly added, "To deny miracles is to deny a supernatural God. This comes first with me."

Dr. Fischer suggested three basic approaches in facing "apparent" conflicts between the Bible and science:

(a) *Re-examine the evidence available.* He illustrated by referring to the differing inscriptions on the cross. "The Bible doesn't say each was a whole," he said. "Put together, they might make the complete inscription."

(b) *Gather additional evidence.* "To get a more complete record of the kings of Israel, for example," he suggested, "we should examine closely the prophetic



"I have made an exceptionally tragic mistake," said a Philadelphia railroad worker who took his family to settle in Russia. David Johnson had believed the Communist promises of a paradise in the Soviet Union. But it took only one week in the U.S.S.R. to thoroughly disillusion him.

To others who have been misled by Soviet propaganda, Johnson has this advice, "I suggest they go to Russia and see what's going on. Ten days would be enough for them to find out."

To many Americans, life is "an exceptionally tragic mistake," but they find out they have believed the devil's promises, too late. The Bible says, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 16:25).

and poetic books of the Bible."

(c) *Suspend judgment as becomes necessary.* "I see nothing wrong with saying, 'I don't know,' or, 'I'm not sure,'" he said. "In the conflict over the age of man, the Bible seems to say that man has not been here as long as science claims. I don't know. But I'm willing to wait, and while I'm waiting I will not throw away either the Bible or science."

Along this line of thought, Dr. Frank A. Crane, University of Illinois botanist, felt that "too many Christians and scientists speak before all the evidence is in." He described the example of a farmer who sees erosion taking place on his land, takes a quick survey, and decides that the cause is flooding. "But," Dr. Crane pointed out, "there may be other causes—wind, cutting down of trees, or removing of roots and grasses that hold down the soil."

Dr. Crane, a Sunday school teacher in the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Wheaton, Illinois, thought that "future findings of science will not weaken my faith. The God I know does not make mistakes," he said. "I'm looking forward to when we can understand the present mysteries of the universe. Eventually I think there will be perfect accord between faith and science."

Several of the men interviewed expressed the feeling that Christianity and science are complements of each other when science is used as a tool of the Church. Three of the scientists referred to the command "have dominion over," (Gen. 1:26, 28) as being a divine mandate for scientific research and work. Dr. John H. Martin, the nuclear physicist, used the term "stewardship" in referring to the awesome potential of nuclear power.

"Man is both a natural being and a spiritual being," Dr. Robert Fischer asserted. "The Bible can meet his spiritual needs and science can meet his natural needs." Then he suggested that "ministers and Bible teachers can be challenged by scientists to look to sources for answers, instead of relying upon a doctrinal creed or upon what someone may say."

Almost every man stressed the importance of Christian education. "This is a scientific age," Dr. Fischer said. "If we are to be God's ambassadors we must be up-to-date. Our Christian education must be of the highest quality. We must encourage our youth to study science." To this, Walter Burke added, "If Christians stay out, technology and science will be directed by non-Christians. They will not seek to glorify God."

I came away from these interviews with a new respect and admiration for men who serve God and humanity through science. The ten scientists with whom I talked had set before me an example of humility, dedication, and reverence of God and His works that I shall not soon forget.