

WHOSE WORLD?

A SERIES IN SIX PARTS

The dialogue between science and religion is more important than many people realise. It is not and should not be the exclusive concern of professional theologians. Science and religion, complementing each other, offer insights into one reality. Too often they are assumed to be opposing viewpoints and it will be a tragedy if education in the sciences and the humanities permits this prejudice to flourish.

“Whose World” examines many of the major issues raised by this dialogue and looks at them from the point of view of both atheists and believers. It is an exciting quest, perhaps the most significant that religious faith has to face today. The scientific world’s view has had immense success and rightly so. Science has great explanatory power and reveals the way things are in this extraordinary and mysterious cosmos: it gives a rational account of the genesis of the universe in the big bang; it describes the birth, life and death of stars and their planetary systems; it shows how the fundamental elements, with which everything is made, are patterned in the periodic table from hydrogen to uranium and beyond; it illuminates the process of evolution by which people have emerged from primitive organisms on the face of this planet; it highlights our dependence on the environment and reveals how vulnerable the environment is to our behaviour. Physicists, chemists and biologists provide us with an integrated and coherent world view of great clarity. People with religious faith may look for the Eternal in this evolving world and some will identify the Eternal with the God of the Christian tradition. They seek their faith within the framework that science describes. Many scientists are deeply and personally involved in this exciting quest. Their voice is heard in these programmes, as is the voice of those who take an atheist view.

The six programmes of “Whose World” follow a logical theme and are designed to be an invitation to the viewer to join and contribute to the discussion. The first programme raises the fundamental question ‘Does God exist?’ This is related to an enquiry into the nature of mystery: some mysteries can be resolved while others remain mysteries even after science has explained them. Before viewing this programme with a discussion group it would be valuable for members of the group to air their own thoughts, views, prejudices and assumptions, about the nature of science. Has the march of science been wholly a good thing? What are the limits of science? Will science one day explain everything? Are there areas of thought (poetry? ethics? beauty?) where science is irrelevant? Can science disprove the existence of God? A preliminary discussion of this sort will prepare the ground for an issue dealt with in the programme - the view that science and religion are inevitably and always have been opposed to each other.

“The Big Bang” (programme 2) looks more closely at what astronomers have to tell us about this vast and ancient universe. In “The Grand Design” (programme 3) we examine the assumption that Charles Darwin did God out of a job, with his theory of evolution by natural selection. What place is there for God in a world where nature seems to design itself? “Behold The Man” (programme 4) focuses on the most remarkable product of nature on this planet - human beings. The human brain is the most complex system of chemistry in the world: it is an elaborate computer. What value do people have? Are they merely chemical machines? “Pain and Purpose” (programme 5) examines an age-old problem: is suffering inevitable in a world created by God? Tragedies and disasters can be great stumbling blocks to belief in God. How is faith to adjust to the experience of suffering?

The final programme, “Discovery Prone” asks whether religious beliefs can be tested in the way that scientific theories can be tested. How do believers know if their beliefs are true? Is God a fact or a comforting fantasy? We are then left with a question about the future. What role do science and religion have to play in helping us to live together on this planet without destroying both it and ourselves?

There are no neat answers to hand out. The aim of these programmes is to provoke discussion: that way some insights into the truth may be found.

PROGRAMME 1.
DOES GOD EXIST?

We begin by examining two commonly-held misconceptions. The first is that science dispels all sense of mystery. Yet science often produces a deep sense of wonder - it may even point to religious belief. The second misconception is that science and religion are inevitably, and always have been, opposed to each other. But, in fact, is this true?

PROGRAMME 2.
THE BIG BANG

The long-standing argument about how the universe began is explored in this programme. The Genesis story in the Bible talks about the world being created in six days about six thousand years ago.

Astronomers Tell a different story. According to them, planet earth is 4 billion years old, part of a vast universe which is itself 15 billion years old. It all started with a Big Bang. This programme offers a clue about how both points of view can be re-thought.

PROGRAMME 3.
THE GRAND DESIGN

This programme is set in the magnificent garden at Barnsley House, in Gloucestershire — a perfect place to discuss questions of order and design in nature. Many 18th century thinkers argued that nature is like a book parallel to the Bible, leading men to insights about God. Everything, they said, pointed to a Designer and a Designer God. But a wind of change blew through biology a hundred years ago, and now we see things differently. These differences are discussed by scientists and theologians.

PROGRAMME 4.
BEHOLD THE MAN!

The great distinguishing feature about man is the fact that he alone possesses the faculty of thought. The human mind is complex and wonderful — we alone on earth understand the process that created us. A new principle called the Anthropic Principle is discussed — it sees human beings as being the key to understanding the universe.

PROGRAMME 5.
PAIN AND PURPOSE

The permanent problem of pain is explored. Natural disaster, human cruelty and suffering, and the dark mystery of it all, are experiences that in one way or another we all experience.

Does this mean that God does not care? Can he not help? Does he even exist? Religion tries to confront these questions using the symbol of the Cross — itself a fearful instrument of torture. What light, if any, does science shed on this central subject?

PROGRAMME 6.
DISCOVERY PRONE

This programme asks what kind of “test” (if any) can be made to prove the validity of religious belief. Throughout the series, men and women who believe in God have spoken, as well as those who hold another view. Is religion all a fantasy, a dream, or is it a real way to understand our world and ourselves? Can we be ‘Discovery Prone’.