

# Does God need Science to leave the room while we talk?

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# My background

- Professor of Statistical Genetics in the Population Health Sciences Institute (Faculty of Medical Sciences), Newcastle University
  - BA in Mathematics from Cambridge University (1990)
  - MSc in Applied Statistics from Oxford University (1992)
  - DPhil (PhD) in Mathematical Genetics from Oxford University (1995)
- My research involves [analysing](#) and [interpreting data](#) from genetic studies of complex disease (diabetes, liver disease, kidney disease etc. etc.)
- I work within academia (specifically within medical science)  
...and I am also a Christian

# Early years



By Jim Linwood from London -  
Former Church Converted Into  
Flats, Little Green, Richmond -  
London. CC BY 2.0

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  - My father was not a churchgoer
  - So religion was not really part of our family life
- I grew up “believing” in God (sort of) – but it didn’t make much difference to my life
  - And I had little knowledge of whether there was actually any **rational basis** for my belief, and what the **evidence** (if any) was for the existence of God, or the claims of Christianity

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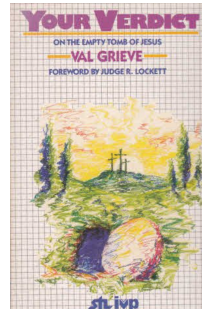
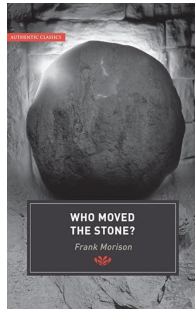
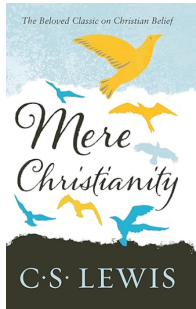


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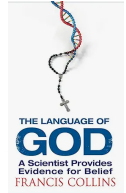
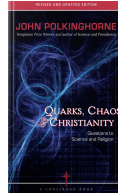
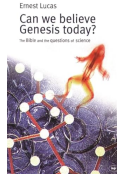
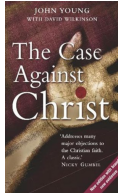
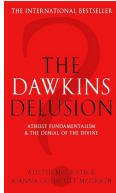
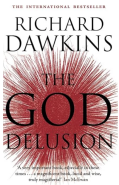
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- This changed during my late teens and early university years...

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# Influential books



# Science versus Faith



- Other resources:
  - Christians in Science: <https://www.cis.org.uk/about-cis/>
  - Solas Resources (including videos):  
<https://www.solas-cpc.org/?s=science>
  - <https://www.bethinking.org/search?q=science>

# Aren't science and faith mutually incompatible?

- Surely science is about **facts**, while faith is about (unsubstantiated) **beliefs**?
  - Actually, many believers would say their faith is not “blind faith”, but rather faith based on **evidence**
  - While science itself often involves **interpretation** of ‘facts’ (data)
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    - John Polkinghorne writes “I do not believe that I shift gear in some strange intellectual way when I move from science to religion”
- Science and religion could be considered as two sides of the same coin
  - Both are concerned with the search for “truth”
    - Science primarily deals with the realm of **how** things work - what are the natural laws that are operating in our world?
    - Religion primarily deals with the realm of **why** our world is how it is – is there a greater purpose to life?

# What about the Big Bang?

- There have been enormous advances in physics over the past  $\sim 150$  years
  - This reflects the nature of science, in which theories tend to evolve, and be (somewhat) self-correcting
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- Most physicists and cosmologists now believe that the universe began at a single moment, commonly known as the Big Bang
- Why is this controversial? Does this disprove God?
  - Not if God is seen as being 'outside' the universe (as being in fact the **creator** of the universe)
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  - Should Genesis be interpreted as literal scientific text? Or as history? Or figuratively – more like allegory or poetry?

# What about Evolution?

- Like the Big Bang, the biological mechanism known as 'evolution' is not something that can be experimentally verified
  - But, while originally quite controversial, most biologists do now consider evolution to be the most likely mechanism by which modern humans (and other organisms) came into being
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  - Culminating (at least so far) with humans, who have the ability to relate to God
- Controversy between faith and science is not new
  - Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) was persecuted by the church of his day for arguing that the earth is not the centre of the universe, but rather revolves around the sun...

# What about Miracles?

- The word “miracle” covers a variety of events of different kinds
- The original meaning is simply something **astonishing**
  - E.g. the ability of calculating prodigies to multiply together large numbers in their heads seems astonishing to those of us endowed with more modest skills
    - This is a miracle in the sense of provoking astonishment, but not in the sense of being something contrary to nature
    - Unexpected healings from illness might be considered in this category
- Another class of “miracle” concerns **meaningful coincidences**
  - Two things happen together, each perfectly ordinary on their own, but carrying significance and causing amazement because of their simultaneity
- Finally we have **genuine miracles**, in the sense of things being contrary to nature
  - The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, as propounded by many Christians, would seem to fall into this category

# Can a scientist believe in miracles?

- John Polkinghorne points out that science cannot exclude the possibility that God (if he exists), can, on occasion, do particular unprecedented things
  - After all, God is the **ordainer** of the laws of nature, not someone who is subject to them
- However, we do live in an orderly world
  - Such genuine miracles might therefore be expected to be **quite rare**
  - And have a particular **purpose** (perhaps theological), justifying their lack of consistency with the normal rules of how our world works
- One could argue that the whole of creation – the universe and its natural laws – is itself a “miracle”

# In conclusion

- Does God need Science to leave the room while we talk?
  - Not in my opinion...
  - I do not find any great incompatibility between my belief in God (and Christianity) and in my general acceptance of current scientific theories
    - Bearing in mind that scientific theories do themselves evolve and adapt, in the light of new data (evidence) and hypotheses
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    - What scientists believe now may not exactly match up with what they believe in 50 or 100 years' time
- In particular, like John Polkinghorne, I do not feel that I need to shift gear in some strange intellectual way when I move from science to religion
  - I can bring the same logical mindset to both arenas
- Both science and religion are, at their best, a quest for the “truth”
  - I'd urge you to take the time to look in more detail at the [evidence](#) for the different points of view, and make up your own minds...