Can You Be a Scientist and Believe in God?
Just Thinking is a teaching resource of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries and exists to engender thoughtful engagement with apologetics, Scripture, and the whole of life.

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“The Grand Weaver Society provides an opportunity for our friends to stand with RZIM for generations to come. Members and their legacies are woven together to create a magnificent tapestry supporting the RZIM mission of sharing the hope and the beauty of the gospel.”
—Ravi Zacharias

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Paying Notice

As the articles in this issue of *Just Thinking* suggest, real listening is a rare gift. How often we form opinions and rejoinders without paying notice to another human being. We speak of “being mindful,” but the focus is on ourselves, on our own words and intentions.

One of the most amazing gifts of the gospel is that God stooped down to regard us and invite us to know his love. Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. Nearly two thousand years ago, a young girl named Mary was first transformed by this holy visitation when the angel Gabriel announced that the Lord was with her and she had “found favor with God” (Luke 1:30). Mary is amazed—God has chosen her, a mere peasant girl, to bear his royal son, the promised Prince of Peace. Her amazement bursts forth in song:

*My soul glorifies the Lord*
*and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*
*for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.*
*From now on all generations will call me blessed,*
*for the Mighty One has done great things for me—*
*holy is his name.* (Luke 1:46-49)

Mary is astounded that God has taken notice of her. The intimate word she uses to express this (“he has been mindful”) occurs only two other times in the New Testament. It means, “To turn the eyes upon,” “to gaze at,” and “to pay special attention.” A few chapters later in Luke’s gospel, a desperate father cries out this same word, asking Jesus to look upon his demon-possessed son (see Luke 9:38). Jesus does, touching and healing him.

In Martin Luther’s commentary on the Magnificat (Mary’s song), he writes,

*Mary confesses that the foremost work God did for her was that He regarded her, which is indeed the greatest of His works, on which all the rest depend and from which they all derive. For where it comes to pass that God turns His face toward one to regard him, there is nothing but grace and salvation, and all gifts and works must follow.*

The wonder of Christmas is not only that God turns his face to look upon a young peasant girl but also upon you and me. Surely, too, this is the greatest gift we can give each other.

Danielle DuRant
Editor
I REMEMBER having a discussion around faith matters years ago with an intelligent person. I met him at an event I was attending with a few friends. On one particular evening, we all decided to have dinner together. Just from the incidental conversations we had before this meal, I knew that he and I did not see eye to eye on many issues.

After the meal finished, the three others got up to use the restroom while he and I sat talking across the table. We entered into a contentious theological issue, and it soon felt as though someone had turned up the temperature in the room. His face became red, and I am sure mine was too.

Eventually he looked at me and said, “Oh I understand now. You are a foundationalist!” If I weren’t so caught up in the emotion of the conversation at the time, I would have asked him what a foundationalist is.

He quickly moved on to his next accusation, clothed in the form of a question: “Tell me, where did you study?” When I mentioned the two universities at which I had done post-graduate education, he dropped his case against me. In hindsight, I am convinced that he was looking to categorize me, but he couldn’t do it because the universities I mentioned simply would not fit the anticipated boxes to be ticked.

As I think back to that intense conversation, I wonder how I could have navigated that situation better and how the Christian faith might inform my frame of mind.

Many of us have been in conversations like this in which we stop listening to the person with whom we are speaking. Lyell Asher, English professor at Lewis and Clark College, proposes a meaningful antidote to this challenge in his American Scholar article. He makes the point that instead of listening for what others might say, we need to recover the art of listening to others. If you have ever been on the receiving end of the listening for conversation, you know what this feels like.

When we simply listen for what another person is saying, we reduce that person down to a stereotype that we already have in our mind. This kind of listening is not really listening. It is merely argument formulation masquerading as listening.

When we listen to others, it is as if the posture and disposition of the conversation...
becomes open-handed. Listening to another person implicitly says, “I want to learn from you even if I don’t agree with you.” As Christians who are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, this strikes me as exactly the sort of thing we are called to do.

Recovering the Art of Critical Thinking

After watching a certain protest in the news recently, I could not help but think that this listening dynamic or lack thereof is contributing profoundly to the great disconnect and anger in many of the cultural conversations today. Just think of the many protests we hear of on a weekly, if not daily, basis.

Regardless of who is right and who is wrong in each particular case, much of the disillusionment and confusion stems from our inability to understand each other. In politics, higher education, and increasingly in sport, the “us versus them” mentality haunts us. Issues that might have once been talked about are simply no-go areas in classrooms, locker rooms, and restaurants. The issues are complex, no doubt, but I wonder if one step in the right direction through this volatile terrain might be recovering the art of critical thinking?

In the foreword for Neil Postman’s book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, there are two portraits of the future painted for the reader. One comes from George Orwell’s *1984* and the other is Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. The author outlines Orwell’s and Huxley’s views of the future and how they both shared concerns with how the truth would be handled.

As he looked into the future, Orwell feared that truth would be concealed from us. Huxley’s concern was that the truth would be “drowned in a sea of irrelevance.” Postman’s book, penned in 1985, sides with Huxley’s view of the future, and as I read it, I could not help but feel that we have arrived in the moment foretold by Huxley.

Day after day in our 24/7, always-on news cycle, we are bombarded with images, stories, and statements that show the outworking of what Huxley feared. Truth, it seems, is drowning in a sea of irrelevance. Huxley believed truth would be lost in a sea of irrelevance through the deluge of information we would be inundated with. The important would get buried in a sea of irrelevant news.

Indeed, this is a real challenge for us today. But I wonder if the problem lies more in our disposition to simply not listen and learn from others. Yes, truth is being lost in a sea of irrelevance, like Huxley predicted, but the bombardment of information is not the only culprit for this trend. I think a greater problem is that we do not really want to think and listen to others.

Social critic Os Guinness tells the story of a person who studied under Francis Schaeffer. On one particular evening in a French bar room, the student was having a drink with a skeptic. The skeptic asked this Schaeffer protégé many questions about faith. To every question came a response that was nearly word for word from Francis Schaeffer. Finally there came a point in the conversation in which the skeptic, who had actually read much of Schaeffer’s writing, looked at the Christian and said, “Excuse me, but do you write with a Schaeffer pen too?”

The skeptic’s point was that while he was asking genuine questions he was receiving stock answers being trotted out mechanically. Each question was greeted by a ready-made response. They might have been good answers in another context, but they did not seem to grapple with the questions being asked by that particular questioner. True and genuine thinking was not taking place.

I confess I am guilty of the same categorization that my friend placed upon me in that heated exchange I wrote about earlier. I have been in conversations with others and have tried to figure out where to place the other person. The problem
with this approach (aside from being disrespectful and ignoring a person’s dignity) is that listening for fails to acknowledge the real complexity of what makes up a person’s opinion and line of argument.

More importantly, simply listening for what a person is going to say models an extremely reductionistic view of the human person. It is as if we are saying that our conversational partner can be reduced to a mere set of lists, categories, and sound bites. But are we as human beings not more complex and more sophisticated than that? Is it not the art and discipline of listening—truly listening—that gives our conversations dignity, worth, and civility?

Listening Is Hard Work

Perhaps one of the reasons many of us find it difficult to listen in conversations is because genuine listening takes more work and critical thought. Worryingly, I am convinced that we have become skilled in learning what to think, but not as strong in learning how to think. We are good at clinging to content and conversations that substantiate what we believe and what works within our view of the world. But as soon as we encounter a contradictory opinion to ours, no matter how intelligent it is, we have difficulty engaging it. The tendency is to move away or to tune it out.

Instead of listening to the other person who is sharing an opposing thought to ours, our default setting is to place them into a category that we can comprehend—a category that will keep our own views and convictions intact.

When we find it hard to understand opposing views and we enter into a mode of thought that seeks to place the opposing opinion in a category, are we not implying that we do not desire the truth? Yes, our views and convictions might survive the conversation, but the end result is that the truth, at least our desire for it, has drowned in a sea of irrelevance.

Recently I was speaking to a group of senior high students who were about to head off to college. During the question and answer time of my session, one particular student expressly disagreed with a point I made in my talk. The room slowly became quiet. Many students turned their heads to the ground. As it became my turn to respond, there was pin-drop silence. The roaming microphone was then taken away from the questioner and I began my response.

I thanked the questioner for his question and comments. I then asked if we could bring back the roaming microphone so that he and I could continue the conversation. I expanded on the points I made in my talk that he called into question, and we had a meaningful dialogue. After the session ended, one colleague came to me and said, “I missed some of your talk, but I loved the way in which you gave the microphone to the person who asked the most controversial question.”

Truthfully, I would not have made that observation on my own. But in hearing my colleague’s feedback, it reminded me that one of the most significant ways we can navigate tough conversations is to ensure that each person in the conversation is heard.

Christianity Speaks to the Challenge

So what might Christianity have to say to these challenges? As I look at the way the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul interacted with others, I find two practical ways their interaction with others can shape how we think about conversations.

1. Be open and willing to engage with those with whom we do not agree.

There are many stories of Jesus in which we see him embodying this attitude. Even when others come to trick him, he still listens to and interacts with them. When
the Pharisees and Herodians come to trap Jesus in Matthew 22:15–22, they ask him whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not. Jesus responds by asking for a coin, and he then asks them whose image is on that coin. They acknowledge that Caesar’s image is on the coin. Jesus famously says, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (ESV).

Matthew’s gospel continues: “When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.” We are not sure if these exact people ever engaged with Jesus again. But just by his willingness and courage to engage with those with whom he disagreed, a meaningful conversation was had.

Commentators often make special note of the question that Jesus asked this politically charged and theologically fierce group. He asked them a question about image. In the ancient world, images denoted authority and accountability. An inscription or a sculpture of a ruler often signified their ruling over a particular area.

When Jesus asks this question to the Pharisees and Herodians, they immediately know the answer because they understand the power linked to Caesar’s image. Yet, as significant as that question was, what is even more striking is that Jesus was willing to have a conversation with people who had opposing views to his.

There is so much to be gleaned from Jesus’ conversational care and thought, but we would do exceedingly well to simply practice and live out his generous willingness to engage with others who did not share in his teaching.

2. Read and understand what others are reading.

In Acts 17:22–34 we read of Paul’s interaction with the Athenians. Paul is explaining and defending the Christian God to a mixed group that included Stoics and Epicureans. Just by doing a bit of study of this story, we soon realize that Paul refers to and cites poetry that had powerfully shaped the religious belief of his audience. His method of evangelism reflects a disposition that wanted to understand the people to whom he was ministering. He was interested in how they thought. He had much to say, but he wanted to show them that he understood them.

There are so many points to draw from this one rich passage of Scripture, but we should not miss the fact that Paul’s citing of poets tells us that he had read the poets! He had read what his conversation partners had read. In our moment in which we have become severely groupish in what we read, what we listen to, and who we spend time with, we would do well to take notes from Paul’s speech in Acts 17.

This does not mean we should immerse ourselves in literature contrary to the Christian faith. It simply means that our reading and learning should indicate a desire to learn from others outside our faith conviction. Paul’s method of evangelism at the Areopagus can provide a guiding light to us on this front.

These are only two points, but if we are serious about wanting to listen and learn from others in our radically misunderstanding time, the Christian faith shows us that a meaningful start begins with a willingness to enter into the hard conversations. No one did this more beautifully than Christ. Paul shows us that reading and engaging what our friends have been shaped by could provide real and practical help to our understanding them, not to mention making our witness of Christ more appealing.

We live in a time in which listening, learning, and understanding each other seems beyond our reach. Yet, Christianity brings encouraging news to us here. May God give us the courage, the care, and the clarity to rise above the challenge of misunderstanding others and do so in his name.

Nathan Betts is a member of the speaking team at RZIM.
“I like to listen,” mused Ernest Hemingway. “I have learned a great deal from listening carefully.”

Hemingway speaks of a significant virtue, lamenting accurately, “Most people never listen.”¹

I wonder if he would feel differently if it were his books to which people were listening.

The popularity of audio books is redefining the notion of reading, and some authors—and readers—are unhappy about it. “Deep reading really demands the inner ear as well as the outer ear,” said literary critic Harold Bloom. “You need the whole cognitive process, that part of you which is open to wisdom. You need the text in front of you.”²
Others who doggedly defend the entire experience of reading—the feel of a book in their hands, the smell of its pages, the single-minded escape of delving into a story—find listening to a book something akin to cheating. “You didn’t read it,” they contest. “You only listened to it”—as if this somehow means they took in a different story.

For those who love the written word and printed page, for those who are elated at the sight of a bookstore, listening to *Hamlet* or *The Count of Monte Cristo* is akin to picking up *CliffNotes*. There is no substitute for books, no surrogate for reading.

I mostly agree. I find myself responding to the question, “Have you read such and such?” with a similar admittance of guilt: “Well, I listened to it” (usually accompanied with a comment about Atlanta traffic). And yet, I am becoming more and more convinced that audio books definitely have their place in learning—with or without traffic. Auditory processing is vital to any learning.

Hemingway was right; listening carefully is a vital skill.

I find that I pick up different facets when I listen to a paragraph rather than what I might have gleaned from reading that same paragraph. C.S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity* is a book I have read many times. When I bought the book on CD, however, I found listening to the work an entirely different, altogether helpful experience. Interestingly, *Mere Christianity* began as a series of lectures for the radio, perhaps amplifying its effectiveness as an audio book.

Of course, much of the Bible has a similar origin, resonating powerfully in both oral and written traditions. The importance of memorization and oral tradition in Israelite culture played a significant role in bringing the collected works of Scripture into being. Listening to narratives, songs, and the Torah being read aloud was an integral part of keeping the name of God and the history of God’s presence before the people of Israel. Throughout the Old Testament, God’s people are charged with the command to remember and to listen. “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Listening carefully was imperative to living before the God among them.

And it still is. In homes where Christians are not violently punished for owning a Bible, in countries where it is not a crime to read these sacred texts, there is a tendency to dismiss the wonder of a God who speaks. As countless translations continue to emerge, it is easy to overlook the authority of words that are strikingly reliable as historical documents, words that continue to come into new generations and change cultures with new influence. Read aloud or studied silently, God’s word is still speaking, crying out for ears to hear and hearts to search. Indeed, Christ himself, the living Word, rises from the pages, revealing that the Bible is always far more than a book.

When Ezra read aloud the words of the law before a generation who had forgotten, the people wept in the presence of the LORD and immediately fell down in worship. When the apostle Paul’s letter was read aloud to the Roman church, its words resounded similarly among the crowd: “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

If the voice of God is still speaking, if the kingdom is among us, the question is a vital one: Who among us will listen?

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*Jill Carattini is managing editor of *A Slice of Infinity* at Ravi Zacharias International Ministries.*


3 Romans 10:17.
CAN YOU BE A SCIENTIST AND BELIEVE IN GOD?

By John Lennox
“Surely you can’t be a scientist and believe in God these days?”

It’s a viewpoint I have heard expressed by many people over the years. But I suspect that it is often the unspoken doubt that stops many from engaging seriously with serious thinkers about both science and God.

In reply, I like to ask a very scientific question: “Why not?”

“Well,” the answer comes back, “science has given us such marvelous explanations of the universe and demonstrates that God is just not necessary. Belief in God is old fashioned. It belongs to the days when people didn’t really understand the universe, and just took the lazy way out and said that ‘God did it.’ That sort of ‘God of the gaps thinking’ simply won’t do any more. Indeed, the sooner we get rid of God and religion, the better.”

I sigh inwardly, and prepare myself for a long conversation in which I try to untangle the many assumptions, misunderstandings and half-truths that have been absorbed uncritically from the cultural soup we swim in.

A COMMON VIEWPOINT

It’s not surprising that this viewpoint is so common that it has become the default position for many, if not most; it’s a viewpoint supported by some powerful voices. Stephen Weinberg, for example, a Physics Nobel Prize winner said,

The world needs to wake up from the long nightmare of religion. Anything we scientists can do to weaken the hold of religion should be done and may in fact be our greatest contribution to civilisation.¹

I hope you didn’t miss the rather sinister-sounding totalitarian element in this statement: “anything we scientists can do…”

This attitude is not new. I first met it fifty years ago while studying at Cambridge University. I found myself at a formal college dinner sitting beside another Nobel Prize winner. I had never met a scientist of such distinction before and, in order to gain the most from the conversation, I tried to ask him some questions. For instance, how did his science shape his worldview—his big picture of the status and meaning of the universe? In particular, I was interested in whether his wide-ranging studies had led him to reflect on the existence of God.

It was clear that he was not comfortable with that question, and I immediately backed off. However, at the end of the meal, he invited me to come to his study. He had also invited two or three other senior academics but no other students. I was invited to sit, and, so far as I recall, they remained standing.

He said, “Lennox, do you want a career in science?”

“Yes, sir,” I replied.

“Then,” he said, “in front of witnesses, tonight, you must give up this childish faith in God. If you do not, then it will cripple you intellectually and you will suffer by comparison with your peers. You simply will not make it.”

Talk about pressure! I had never experienced anything like it before.

I sat in the chair paralyzed and shocked by the effrontery and unexpectedness of the onslaught. I didn’t really know what to say, but eventually I managed to blurt out, “Sir, what have you got to offer me that is better than what I have got?”

In response, he offered me the concept of “Creative Evolution” put forward in 1907 by French philosopher Henri Bergson. In fact, thanks to C. S. Lewis, I knew a little about Bergson and replied that I could not see how Bergson’s philosophy was enough to base an entire worldview upon and provide a foundation for meaning, morality and life. With a shaking voice,
and as respectfully as I could, I told the group standing around me that I found the biblical worldview vastly more enriching and the evidence for its truth compelling, and so, with all due respect, I would take the risk and stick with it. 

It was a remarkable situation. Here was a brilliant scientist trying to bully me into giving up Christianity. I have thought many times since that, if it had been the other way around, and I had been an atheist in the chair surrounded by Christian academics pressurizing me to give up my atheism, it would have caused reverberations around the university, and probably have ended with disciplinary proceedings against the professors involved.

But that rather scary incident put steel into my heart and mind. I resolved to do my best to be as good a scientist as I could and, if ever I had the opportunity, to encourage people to think about the big questions of God and science and make up their own minds without being bullied or pressured. It has been my privilege in the years that have followed to engage thoughtfully with many people, both young and old, in a spirit of friendship and open enquiry on these questions. What follows in this book are some of the thoughts and ideas that I have found most helpful to share with people, and some of the most interesting and unusual conversations I have had.

THE DARK SIDE OF ACADEMIA

I learned another valuable lesson that day: about the existence of a dark side to academia. There are some scientists who set out with preconceived ideas, do not really wish to discuss evidence, and appear to be fixated not on the pursuit of truth but on propagating the notions that science and God do not mix and that those who believe in God are simply ignorant.

This is simply not true.

What’s more, you don’t need to have a great deal of insight to see that it is false. Think of the Nobel Prize in Physics, for example. It was won in 2013 by Peter Higgs, a Scotsman who is an atheist, for his ground-breaking work on subatomic particles, and his prediction, later proved, of the existence of the Higgs boson. Some years before that, it was won by William Phillips, an American who is a Christian.

If science and God do not mix, there would be no Christian Nobel Prize winners. In fact, between 1900 and 2000 over 60% of Nobel Laureates were self-confessed believers in God. 

I want to suggest that what divides Professors Higgs and Phillips is not their physics or their standing as scientists—they’ve both won the Nobel Prize. What divides them is their worldview. Higgs is an atheist and Phillips is a Christian. It follows that the claim of those academics who tried to intimidate me in Cambridge so many years ago—that if you wish to be scientifically respectable you have to be an atheist—is obviously false. There cannot be an essential conflict between being a scientist and having faith in God.

However, there is a very real conflict between the worldviews held by these two brilliant men: atheism and theism.

WHAT EXACTLY IS ATHEISM?

Strictly speaking, atheism simply means lack of belief in God. However, that does not mean that atheists do not have a worldview. You cannot deny the existence of God without asserting a whole raft of beliefs about the nature of the world.

That is why Richard Dawkins’ book The
God Delusion is not just a one-page tract stating that he doesn’t believe in God. It is a lengthy volume dedicated to his atheistic worldview, naturalism, which holds that this universe/multiverse is all that exists, that what scientists call “mass-energy” is the fundamental stuff of the universe, and that there is nothing else.

Physicist Sean Carroll, in his best-selling book The Big Picture, explains how naturalism views humans:

*We humans are blobs of organized mud, which through the impersonal workings of nature’s patterns have developed the capacity to contemplate and cherish and engage with the intimidating complexity of the world around us... The meaning we find in life is not transcendent.*

For Christians, life has a gloriously transcendent meaning. I would like to show you that science, far from undermining this view, strongly supports it. We shall see later, however, that it is **atheism** to which science gives little support. But before that, I’d like to prepare the ground by giving some historical context for how we arrived at this strange position of thinking that science and God do not mix.

Lessons from History

I have always had a facility with languages—mathematics and languages often go together. Indeed, when I was a poor, struggling junior academic in Cardiff, I took the opportunity to earn a little extra money for my growing family by translating research papers in mathematics from Russian to English.

By a curious train of events, I found myself a few years later on a rickety Russian plane landing at the city of Novosibirsk in Siberia to spend a month lecturing and researching at the university there. However backward the technological infrastructure was in those days of communist rule, some of Russia’s mathematicians were world leaders, and it was a privilege to meet with them and spend time with the faculty and students. But they were utterly perplexed by one thing: that I believed in God!

I was eventually invited by the rector of the university to explain in a lecture why I, as a mathematician, believed in God. Apparently, it was the first lecture on this kind of issue to be held there in 75 years. The auditorium was full to capacity with many professors as well as students. In my presentation, among other things, I spoke about the history of modern science and related how its great pioneers—Galileo, Kepler, Pascal, Boyle, Newton, Faraday and Clerk-Maxwell—were all firm and convinced believers in God.
“Men became scientific because they expected law in nature, and they expected law in nature because they believed in a Legislator.”

—C. S. Lewis
When I said this, I detected anger in the audience and, not liking people being angry in my lectures, I paused to ask them why they were so annoyed. A professor in the front row said, “We are angry because this is the first time we have heard that these famous scientists on whose shoulders we stand were believers in God. Why were we not told this?”

“Is it not obvious,” I replied, “that this historical fact did not fit with the ‘scientific atheism’ that you were taught?”

I went on to point out that the connection between the biblical worldview and the rise of modern science was well recognized. Eminent Australian ancient historian Edwin Judge writes:

*The modern world is the product of a revolution in scientific method... Both experiment in science, and the citing of sources as evidence in history, arise from the worldview of Jerusalem, not Athens, from Jews and Christians, not the Greeks.*

C. S. Lewis sums it up well when he says, “Men became scientific because they expected law in nature, and they expected law in nature because they believed in a Legislator.”

Recent historians of science, like Peter Harrison, are more nuanced in their formulation of the way in which Christian thought influenced the intellectual landscape in which modern science arose, but they reach the same basic conclusion: *far from hindering the rise of modern science, faith in God was one of the motors that drove it.* I therefore regard it as a privilege and an honor, not an embarrassment, to be both a scientist and a Christian.

Here are some examples of the convictions of the greatest scientists. Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), who discovered the laws of planetary motion, wrote:

*The chief aim of all investigations of the external world should be to discover the rational order which has been imposed on it by God and which he revealed to us in the language of mathematics.*

This was no expression of mere deism since Kepler elsewhere revealed the depth of his Christian convictions: “I believe only and alone in the service of Jesus Christ. In him is all refuge and solace.”

Michael Faraday (1791-1867), arguably the greatest ever experimental scientist, was a man of profound Christian conviction. As he lay on his deathbed, he was asked by a visiting friend, “Sir Michael, what speculations have you now?” For a man who had spent his life making speculations about a vast array of scientific subjects, discarding some and establishing others, his response was robust: “Speculations, man, I have none! I have certainties. I thank God that I do not rest my dying head upon speculations for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.”

As he faced eternity, Faraday had the certainty that upheld the apostle Paul centuries before him.

**GALILEO**

“But wasn’t Galileo persecuted by the church?” asked another member of my Siberian audience. “Surely that shows there is no concord between science and faith in God.”

In my reply, I pointed out that Galileo was actually a firm believer in God and the Bible and remained so all of his life. He once said that “the laws of nature are written by the hand of God in the language of mathematics” and that the “human mind is a work of God and one of the most excellent.”

Furthermore, the popular, simplistic version of this story has been massaged to support an atheist worldview. In reality,
Galileo initially enjoyed a great deal of support from religious people. The astronomers of the powerful Jesuit educational institution, the Collegio Romano, initially endorsed his astronomical work and feted him for it. However, he was vigorously opposed by secular philosophers who were enraged at his criticism of Aristotle.

This was bound to cause trouble; however, let me emphasize, not at first with the church. In his famous “Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina” (1615), Galileo claimed that it was the academic professors who were so opposed to him that were trying to influence the church authorities to speak out against him. The issue at stake for the academics was clear: Galileo's scientific arguments were threatening the all-pervading Aristotelianism of the academy.

In the spirit of developing modern science, Galileo wanted to decide theories of the universe on the basis of evidence, not on arguments based on an appeal to the current ruling theories in general and the authority of Aristotle in particular.

In the spirit of developing modern science, Galileo wanted to decide theories of the universe on the basis of evidence, not on arguments based on an appeal to the current ruling theories in general and the authority of Aristotle in particular. Galileo looked at the universe through his telescope, and what he saw left some of Aristotle's major astronomical speculations in tatters. Galileo observed sunspots, which blemished the face of what Aristotle taught was a “perfect sun.” In 1604 Galileo saw a supernova, which called into question Aristotle's view that the heavens were unchanging—“immutable.”

Aristotelianism was the reigning worldview at the time and formed the paradigm in which science was done, but it was a worldview in which cracks were already beginning to appear. Furthermore, the Protestant Reformation was challenging the authority of Rome and so, from Rome's perspective, religious security was under increasing threat. The embattled Roman Catholic Church, which had, in common with almost everyone else at the time, embraced the Aristotelian view of the world, felt itself unable to allow any serious challenge to Aristotle, although there were rumblings (particularly among the Jesuits) that the Bible itself did not always support Aristotle's view of things.

But those rumblings were not yet strong enough to prevent the powerful opposition to Galileo that would arise from both the academy and the Roman Catholic Church. But, even then, the reasons for that opposition were not merely intellectual and political. Jealousy and also, it must be said, Galileo's own lack of diplomatic skill, were contributing factors. For instance, he irritated the elite of his day by publishing in Italian and not in Latin, in order to give some intellectual empowerment to ordinary people. He was commendably committed to what is now called the public understanding of science.

Galileo also developed an unhelpfully short-sighted habit of denouncing in vitriolic terms those who disagreed with him. Neither did he promote his cause by the way in which he handled an official directive to include in his Dialogue Concerning the Two Principal Systems of the World the argument of his erstwhile friend and supporter Pope Urban VIII—
Maffeo Berberini. The Pope argued that since God was omnipotent, he could produce any given natural phenomenon in many different ways, and so it would be presumption on the part of the natural philosophers to claim that they had found the unique solution. Galileo dutifully included this argument in his book, but he did so by putting it into the mouth of a dull-witted character he called Simplicio (“buffoon”). We might see this as a classic case of shooting oneself in the foot.

There is, of course, no excuse whatsoever for the Roman Catholic Church’s use of the power of the Inquisition to muzzle Galileo, nor for subsequently taking several centuries to rehabilitate him. It should also be noted that, again contrary to popular belief, Galileo was never tortured; and his subsequent house arrest was spent, for the most part, enjoying the hospitality of luxurious private residences belonging to friends.

**CHALLENGING THE WORLDVIEW**

The main lesson to be drawn is that it was Galileo, a believer in the biblical worldview, who was advancing a better scientific understanding of the universe, not only, as we have seen, in opposition to some churchmen but against the resistance and obscurantism of the secular philosophers of his time who, like the churchmen, were also convinced disciples of Aristotle.

Philosophers and scientists today also have need of humility in light of facts, even if those facts are being pointed out to them by a believer in God. Lack of belief in God is no more a guarantee of scientific orthodoxy than is belief in God. What is clear, both in Galileo’s time and ours, is that criticism of a reigning scientific paradigm is fraught with risk, no matter who is engaged in it—a point that was not lost on my audience of Russian academics living under a totalitarian regime.

Commenting on the Galileo affair (and that other much misrepresented iconic event, the debate between Samuel Wilberforce and T. H. Huxley in Oxford in 1860), historian of science Colin Russell concludes:

*The common belief that ... the actual relations between religion and science over the last few centuries have been marked by deep and enduring hostility ... is not only historically inaccurate but actually a caricature so grotesque that what needs to be explained is how it could possibly have achieved any degree of respectability.*

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2. I did not know it at the time but, oddly enough, Bergson, who was Jewish, in later years moved towards orthodox views of God, and, in his will of 1937, he confessed that he would have converted to Christianity had it not been for the increasing wave of antisemitism in Europe.
3. According to *100 Years of Nobel Prizes* (2005) by Baruch Aba Shalev, a review of Nobel prizes awarded between 1901 and 2000, 65.4% of Nobel Prize Laureates have identified Christianity in its various forms as their religious preference (423 prizes). Overall, Christians have won a total of 78.3% of all the Nobel Prizes in Peace, 72.5% in Chemistry, 65.3% in Physics, 62% in Medicine, 54% in Economics and 49.5% of all Literature awards. Sean Carroll, *The Big Picture* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016), 3-5.
4. Quoted at goo.gl/uPDpNC (accessed 1 August 2018).
INVITING QUESTIONS

By Margaret Manning Shull
RETURNING TO graduate school in mid-life has reintroduced me to the importance of asking questions. There are the all-important pragmatic questions that involve the mechanics and the specifics of various assignments. Should one use a particular style guide in writing papers, for example, or what material will be covered on the next exam? There are the questions of curiosity about a particular topic or subject, and there are research questions intended to take a student deeper into the minutiae of her course of study.

I often find that questions beget other questions, and many are not as easily answered as when I first began “formal” education. Instead, I am often led from one question to another on this journey of inquiry that is only tangentially related to the original question.

Noise often serves as a distraction from truly listening. Perhaps fearful of listening to the tangled thoughts within me, I can sometimes fill my days with the noise of constant movement and activity, so that I rarely pay attention or tune my ears to the stirrings of my own heart and mind.

Silence can be disruptive, as I found out intimately when I lost my husband several years ago. Days would go by without my having spoken audibly to anyone, save my two dogs. I was struck by how loud the silence had become in my own life.

Yet, I was not without sound during this period of my life. I began to pay attention to all the sounds that made up my day-to-day existence. The din of traffic noise, airplanes, and nautical sounds from the harbor all made for a symphony of sound. Because I wasn’t speaking out loud to anyone, I was able to intentionally listen to a whole new world of natural sounds. I heard the wind in the trees and the soft patter of my dogs’ feet as they walked across the hardwood floors. I listened for the distinctive sounds of a variety of birds as they went about foraging for food or calling for a mate. At the time, I did not realize how unique it was to be able to truly listen because I was by myself nor would I have viewed it, as I now do, as a gift.

Paying attention to the world around us and asking questions are some of the wonderful qualities of being human. Anyone who has spent even a small amount of time around young children knows that asking questions about every possible subject preoccupies their early verbal expressions.

When this happens, I wonder whether I am in fact asking the “right” questions that would generate answers. So, perhaps inquiring into the motivation behind the questions is an even more important task. Do I simply ask out of curiosity? Am I asking in order to fill my head with as many possible answers as there are questions? Or might it be that I continually ask questions as a way of blocking answers I do not want to hear or receive?

Anyone who has spent even a small amount of time around young children knows that asking questions about every possible subject preoccupies their early verbal expressions.
sation I once had with a colleague when I began my first position after seminary. We were discussing the nature of heaven. Like many, I had insisted that it would be a place where all questions would be answered and all that was unclear would be made clear immediately upon arrival.

I will never forget his response to me. “Oh no,” he replied. “I don’t think it will be that way at all. Otherwise, there would be no more discovery or learning; no more wonder.”

Instead, he mused about how heaven would be a place of endless discovery and learning. The impediments of finitude being removed, heaven would be very much as C.S. Lewis envisioned in his novel *The Last Battle*. The inhabitants would be taken “further up and further in” for eternity. My friend believed that moving “further up and further in” would involve questions, imagination, and discovery, because the capacity for learning would be limitless and endless.

Interestingly, the kingdom of heaven revealed by Jesus looks a great deal like this. It might come as a surprise—even to those who claim to be Christians—that Jesus asked more questions than he answered, at least as his life is recorded and revealed in the gospel narratives. According to author Martin Copenhaver in his systematic study of the questions of Jesus, Jesus asked 307 questions. Furthermore, he is asked 183 questions—of which he answers three.1 Think of that!

It turns out that asking questions was central to Jesus’s life and to the way he taught those who followed him. More than using didactic teaching, Jesus often explored the reality of the kingdom by asking questions. Other times, he told stories and used metaphors. Far from presenting easy answers, Jesus often left questions unanswered or his teaching unexplained.

But Jesus did not ask questions or leave them unanswered in order to be mysterious or enigmatic. His questions took his listeners deeper into wonder, discovery, and into discomfort:

*Do you wish to get well?*
*What do you want me to do for you?*
*Who do you say that I am?*
*Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord” but do not do what I tell you?*
*Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?*²

Significantly, Jesus’s questions went straight to the heart of the matter. They were piercingly intimate and vulnerable, as when he asked his disciples if they wanted to “go away” after he gave the very complex teaching about consuming his body and blood as recorded in John 6. Far from requiring immediate answers, Jesus asked questions to prompt careful and considered reflection, often inviting wonder and amazement: Who then is this that even the wind and the seas obey him?

Jesus even asked the question that resounds on the lips and in the hearts of humans throughout the ages: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* And through his life, death, and resurrection, he ultimately answered the deepest questions of our minds and hearts.

Surely, there is a time to put away endless questions and to rest. There is a time to pause and simply to be grateful for the human journey of discovery. But when questions arise and they are not easily answered or dismissed, there is a space for them as well. Likewise, Jesus’s questions invite us closer to the One who created us to ask in the first place.

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1 See Martin Copenhaver, *Jesus Is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and The Three He Answered* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), xviii. Copenhaver tallies eight direct answers from Jesus but notes, “whichever count you go with, it is an astonishingly small number.”

² See John 5:6; Mark 10:36, 51; Matthew 16:15; Luke 6:46; Matthew 7:3.
By Ravi Zacharias

**An Indispensable Prerequisite**

Being raised in India while my wife, Margie, was raised in Canada, I have learned that sometimes words and ideas can get lost in translation, even with those closest to you. Often when I am with Indian friends or colleagues, one of them will make a remark in Hindi that elicits fits of laughter among those of us who understand the language.

Margie will invariably ask, “What did he say?” I attempt to translate the humor, knowing very well her predictable reaction: a blank stare followed by, “But what was so funny?”

Language and culture have that unique capacity to open a world of imagination and a wealth of memory. Even though I left India several decades ago, there are some concepts the Hindi language captures for me that English cannot.

Similarly, the same word may mean different ideas to different people. To a professor of philosophy, “reason” may mean a sound argument. To a high school teacher in India, “reason” may mean cultural respect for one’s own ancestral beliefs.

So, whether we are expressing humor or discussing ultimate issues, we are wise to heed the psalmist’s injunction: “Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3). “The tongue has the power of life and death,” wrote Solomon (Proverbs 18:21).

A few verses earlier he cautions, “To answer before listening—that is folly and shame” (verse 13).

With this biblical wisdom, we must keep in mind that behind every belief is a believer and behind every question is a questioner. The belief is part of the worldview, and the worldview is not always well scrutinized by reason. Cultures carry huge connections to the past. Respect must be given.

As I observe the apostle Paul, who was cradled within three cultures (Jewish, Greek, and Roman), I marvel at how he approached his mixed audience. A look at his assumptions and his method at Mars Hill, recorded in Acts 17, is very instructive. We are told, for starters, how he was “greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols” (verse 16).

I have said it before and it bears repeating, even to myself: holy anxiety is an indispensable prerequisite to significant communication and crossing bridges.

You see, Paul recognized that you will never lighten any load until you feel the pressure in your own soul. That distress led him to observe and listen, to dialogue, reason, discuss, and persuade many through the power of the Holy Spirit. Listening is a vital part of responding. The more and the better we hear others, the more and the better others will hear us. This is especially true today when sensitivities run so deep.

Moreover, Paul communicated that the Athenians’ yearning for the divine was a positive trait, but their systems of worship were not good enough if their truths were not tested. He applauded their search for God while also gently challenging them:
“People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. . . . As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill” (Acts 17:22, 28–29).

His positive lead-in is very instructive. It is self-defeating to trample underfoot everything others hold dear before giving them the message of Christ. My mother used to say, “There is no point cutting off a person’s nose and then giving them a rose to smell.” Again, cultures carry huge connections to the past and respect must be given, even as the driving point is toward the truth. Like Paul, we must gently present the gap between what is believed and what is true.

Maintaining sensitivity, Paul also capitalized on his listeners’ lack of understanding of their own beliefs. One of the most surprising lessons one learns in countries where culture is interwoven with religion is that living within a certain framework all the time is, in a sense, the surest way to be detached from it. A Chinese proverb says, “If you want to know what water is, don’t ask the fish.”

Most Hindus know little about Hinduism’s scriptures or its development in dogma. Most Buddhists know little about Buddhism. Religion is much more a culture to most people than it is a carefully thought-through system of truth. Dare I say most Christians know very little about the teaching and history of their own beliefs. So again, to “answer before listening” and assume a person holds certain beliefs because they say they are Hindu or an atheist is both unwise and unkind.

When we seek to share the gospel with others, we want to listen carefully to their own unique assumptions and then move them from what they know and believe to what they don’t know and what they disbelieve. Then the conclusion is inescapable: What I now believe may be good, but it’s not good enough. There always has to be a persuasive element, and that comes from their familiarity with some authority and the ability to identify with that.

Paul had before him at Mars Hill seekers after God who were “very religious,” but they were scanty in their understanding of truth. How did he meet the challenge? It was his allusion to one of their poets that struck and helped him find that soft reach and a legitimate bridge.

Christianity is not a religion or perspective; it is God’s self-disclosure in Christ. It is built on and built through a relationship with our creator. Paul strove ardently to drive this point home. The crowd had gathered to hear what this “babbler” was saying (verse 18), but his message pointed—as ours must—to the person and work of Jesus Christ. The ultimate question is not “What is the answer?” It is “Who will answer?” The cry of everyone’s heart is for a Savior, a Champion, a personal Redeemer. It was this Redeemer whom Paul presented.

At great personal cost, Paul took the gospel to Athens. His sensitivities, his knowledge, his finding common ground, and his presentation of the unique answers of Jesus built the framework of his message. It is little wonder that he changed history by crossing bridges with such effectiveness to the known world. It is literally and figuratively true that he used the Greek language and the Roman road. We cannot do any less.

Ultimately, the change of a person’s heart is God’s work. And in doing our part, we must ever rest in that conviction.

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