

# Faith and Thought

A Journal devoted to the study of the inter-relation  
of the Christian revelation and modern research

Vol. 91

Numbers 2 and 3

Winter 1959  
Summer 1960

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## Thoughts on a Problem

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### CAN 'SCIENCE' AND 'FAITH' MEET ?

The twentieth century is the century of the specialist, and philosophy is in partial eclipse. This is so not only in the academic world, where the scientist commands more respect than the philosopher, but, far more important, there is less readiness in the minds of ordinary people to accept as imperative the search for a vision of the world and themselves that may enable all that they hold to be true to be related into a single and intelligible whole, and may give meaning to life. There are many reasons for this, but three are specially worthy of mention. Firstly, there are so many specialisms, each of which can be a life study, that he who would try to combine various fields of knowledge is, of necessity, a layman in all but one or two, and is cautious in expressing opinions that may be recognised as ill-founded or naïve by the expert. Secondly, the very terminology used in many scientific fields has become unintelligible to anyone but the expert, and contact has been lost; the specialists working each in his own rarefied atmosphere. Thirdly, theology, once accorded the dignity of 'queen of the sciences', is discredited, and her discarded crown has not been claimed. There is no authority to arbitrate, nor even to take notice, when the assertions of different specialisms are, or seem to be, mutually contradictory.

This is a plain man's attempt to focus thought upon a certain aspect of this present situation. It is an attempt to call attention to something in the relationship between what is usually called 'science' and what is usually called 'faith', that goes to the very root of the challenge to face which is the sole reason for the existence of the Victoria Institute. It is an attempt made in the belief that until the situation to which it calls attention is faced, anything that seems to be done in the way of bringing 'science' and 'faith' into face-to-face relationship must be a futile beating of the air, as in his opinion it has been, for the most part, during the whole of the last century.

The method of science is a method of organised investigation, the accumulation of factual knowledge, the deduction therefrom of generalisations leading to the establishment of 'laws' (wrongly so called—the semantic confusion that has come from the pirating of the lawyer's

word by the scientists has bedevilled a good deal of thought and reasoning). Upon the basis of these 'laws' it is possible to present the universe in which we find ourselves as a place of order in which effects follow commensurate causes, and correct predictions can be made of the results which will follow certain situations or flow from given circumstances. Science has its recognised techniques, its accepted criteria for assessing the validity of observations, and its recognised methods of progressing from observation, through hypothesis to experiment and the formulation of results. All of this constitutes a discipline of which the scientist is at once conscious and very jealous. He demands that, to command his recognition, observations be such that they do not depend upon any subjective imagination on the part of the observer, that they be susceptible of independent verification, and, if at all possible, capable of measurement and statistical expression. He requires that, where experiments are conducted to investigate or demonstrate, they should be conceived in precise terms and be capable of giving the same results irrespective of the experimenter.

Working by these methods and within this discipline the scientist has given a description of the physical universe which—so far as the common man understands it—is accepted by him as a description of reality. So far is this, so that physical matter, possessing mass and dimension, is conceived by the ordinary man in this age as constituting an order of reality which, as it were, is basic and primary, whilst anything non-material (I use the word 'material' as denoting the whole mass-energy system studied by science) tends to be regarded as possessing only a contingent or derived reality. Thus King Alfred was a 'real' person, because it is fairly certain that between certain dates in the ninth century a physical body possessing this name as a label walked the country of England, whilst King Arthur was not 'real' because it is pretty certain that there never was a physical body which sat at the Round Table with Sir Galahad and the others. The effect of this attitude of mind is in no way better illustrated than by the manner in which the Greek 'mythos', which was the concept of profound and transcendental truth set forth in an image which the human mind could grasp, has become our 'myth', something which was never 'real' and which only the simple believe.

Now the scientist, because of his own self-adopted criteria and self-imposed discipline, is precluded from taking account, as scientist, of a vast range of human experience, because it is experience of a nature which obstinately *refuses to be confined within his discipline and to be*

*tested by his criteria.* This range of human experience includes (but by no means solely consists in) that which belongs to 'faith'. This is not to say that scientists do not have faith, but if we are honest we have to admit that the scientist who is an avowed Christian believes a number of things upon evidence which, if tendered to him in the laboratory as observation on which to base a belief about physical reality, would be instantly rejected as grotesquely inadequate, being intrinsically improbable, and completely unverifiable. In fact, if he is ruthlessly honest with himself he will probably admit that he believes as true, because asserted in the context of his own faith, statements which he would reject as superstition if asserted in the context of another faith. He believes these things because they are part of his own faith though depending upon the testimony of remote and unverifiable witnesses, whilst, as a scientist, refusing to take into his purview alleged occurrences in the contemporary world no whit less well-attested than the very occurrences upon which his faith is founded.

An excellent example of the phenomena which refuse to be confined within the scientific discipline and to be tested by scientific criteria are telepathy and clairvoyance. That, as phenomena, they occur is evident from hundreds of outstanding recorded experiences, among them such well-attested cases as the account of the fire in Göthenburg given by Swedenborg while he was a hundred miles away, and many on the files of the Society for Psychic Research. I have myself been given, by a sensitive, information (whether deriving from my own mind or, as claimed, from that of a deceased relative) so accurate as utterly to eliminate chance or guesswork. But the attempts made to investigate clairvoyance and telepathy within a scientific discipline have yielded only the meagre results of Rhine and Soal's statistical evaluations, the significance of which is hard to assess. It is interesting that, when recently, a society devoted to psychical study attempted to establish data on telepathy under test conditions using proved sensitives, the results were inconclusive. Under their usual conditions, when not the subject of experiment, but dealing with human sitters in surroundings and circumstances evocative of human emotions, these same people achieve most veridical results. Under conditions of a 'scientific' experiment their results were unconvincing.

The same kind of story can be told of spiritual healing. Miracles of healing have happened in our contemporary world, as well authenticated as those of the Gospels, with the added advantage that the subjects and witnesses are available now for examination and cross-examination.

But they seldom, if ever, happen under the kind of conditions which the scientist would impose as test conditions. They are not susceptible to that kind of investigation.

Now, if this elusive characteristic of not happening to order and not yielding to classification and objective observation were limited to such out-of-the-way matters as these, it might be plausible, though even so not honestly possible, for the sceptical scientist to dismiss them as being oddities, like the seeing of ghosts or flying saucers, and as belonging to the lunatic fringe and being unworthy of recognition (although of course the lunatic fringe is an authentic part of human experience, challenging recognition and interpretation). But it is often overlooked that this same characteristic is also specific to a much greater range of human experience, one so influential upon human history as to defy anyone to overlook it. I refer to the whole gamut of creative art. Here, just as in telepathy and clairvoyance and spiritual healing, the artist waits on inspiration. In those odd 'psychic' things there is apparent the influencing of the physical world by causative factors which appear to lie beyond the physical world, or by means that do not conform to the laws of the physical world. So in the work of the true artist, by which I mean one who creates and does not merely copy, the physical world is modified and shaped by influences that are outside itself. And this takes place at a point where it can be observed and experienced, which is to say within the mind of the artist. The testimony available regarding the expression of great art by those who have been its channels is of immense spiritual and scientific relevance. For they are conscious of realities beyond the physical world, and sometimes of themselves not as creators in their own right, but as the media through which the extra-mundane and more truly real spiritual world breaks into the physical universe. And this consciousness of theirs is part of human experience, as valid as the scientists' own observation. They cannot produce masterpieces to order, and when their work is not inspired it is mere craftsmanship, a fact that can be easily verified by contrasting the great artist at his best with the same artist at his worst, an informative, though not very edifying exercise. It is certain that they could not produce masterpieces to order, in a laboratory with an observer armed with a stop-watch and cardiograph.

And, let it be repeated, in every creative work of art, and indeed in every conscious act taken on the basis of a value judgment, the physical world is being modified, moulded, and its new forms created by that which is not comprehended within its own system. Thus, primarily in

artistic creation, but also in every act consciously taken as an act of will and not as a merely mechanical act of which the doer is but passively aware, that which is beyond the physical is seen to mould the physical and create new forms in and of it, and in this fact the primacy of what we may call spirit or mind, over what we call physical matter is evidenced. But because all this non-physical reality will not submit to the disciplines of scientific observation, the vital and utterly obvious fact is avoided and occasionally denied in the scientific picture of the universe.

It is the writer's belief, which he does not pretend to be able to prove, but which he thinks is at least hinted at by a consideration of some acknowledged facts, that this same essential process, the moulding of matter by spirit, is not only the common ground of all living processes, but is also present in the vast background of apparently non-living nature; that spirit is at once the womb and the goal of matter and that the whole physical universe is, as it were, a cross-section of an infinitely greater whole which, while fleetingly glimpsed by the mystic, is inapprehensible to the mind which isolates the material from the spiritual and then deliberately excludes the more significant in the study of the less, treating the physical universe as though it were a reality in its own right, able to be studied without reference to anything beyond itself. It may be that such a view leads to pure platonism; if so, so be it. It certainly leads to a very great reappraisal of many attitudes of mind common in our age, not least that toward religion.

But every one of the phenomena which, breaking in upon the ordinary levels of experience, are the foundations of religious belief and equally the spur to spiritual and artistic awareness is, by the discipline of scientific method, excluded from scientific recognition. So long as this is so it is difficult to see how science and religion can either come to grips or come to terms. They move in different media and speak different languages. The individual scientist may be a religious man, but if so it is because beside his scientific faculties, and sharply distinguished from them, he possesses other and higher levels of awareness, and knows that there is a world beyond that which is apprehensible to science. It is in this that the essential difference exists between art and science, for the same cannot be said of the artist. Art is itself the act of the mind reaching out into those higher levels of awareness and bringing home what is apprehended in them. The scientist can distinguish between his science and his religion, but the artist can never disentangle his art from his vision of the eternal.

What then is needed to bridge the gap? The task is one for the philosopher, and as was said at the outset, philosophy is not at its best today, and some philosophers have themselves become so entangled in their own terminology as to become as incomprehensible as a physicist. In fact it is perhaps truer to say that the task is one for a wise man simple enough to see the whole complex as one, and able by his breadth of vision to overleap the self-imposed limitations of scientific method whilst still recognising their value in the quest of limited goals.

But, from the vantage-point of that broader vision, it is evident that the description of the universe proffered by science must be false and an illusion because it is only a description of part, and any description of part *as though it were the whole* is a falsehood. The universe is a *universe*, and nothing can be understood apart from everything.

And the first and most important step must be to open the shutters and to let in the flood of light that comes from the recognition of the non-repeatable event, the apparently capricious, the inspired and the irrational, the world of the mystic and visionary, the seer and the artist. They are valid components of the sum of human experience and any world concept that finds no room for them is inadequate.