

Talk to Royal Hospital School

Next Sunday evening, John Lennox will be in Ipswich. Who? No - he is not a band! He is **Prof of mathematics at Oxford University.** But he is one of a small band of scientists who have taken up their pens (or word processors) to debate against the **new atheists, such as Richard Dawkins, formerly Oxford Prof of the Public understanding of science.** The new atheists are very vociferous group of scientists and philosophers who, supported by the media, have been very prominent in trying to rubbish Christianity, in particular. **They try to argue that Christianity is a dangerous, harmful belief rendered invalid by science – hence the title of Dawkins' most influential book – the God delusion.**

Now there are some things I do agree with Dawkins: he rightly castigates the **religiosity** that the church can exhibit and **for the terrible things it did in the distant past** - like the Crusades and the Inquisition and the terrible things that were done in its name in our recent past as in Northern Ireland and are still done today in some fundamentalist circles and in its attitudes to women and minorities. **But, Dawkins blames the Bible for this.** To do this he only picks out passages – usually in the old Testament – that suit his argument. He forgets the key teachings on love, forgiveness and service. In the old Testament: **"what does the Lord require of you but to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly before your God"**. In the new Testament: **"love thy God with all your heart your mind and your strength and your neighbour as yourself"**. Real Christianity follows the sayings and deeds of Jesus Christ, not tradition and religious prejudice.

But most of what Dawkins says and writes **I would disagree with!**

Richard Dawkins is anything but scientific in the **choice of material in his book and people to interview in his TV programmes.** The nearest I've got to throwing something at our TV set was during one of Dawkins TV programmes, when he was discussing the amazing developments in our genetic understanding of evolution and the role of DNA analysis in unravelling connections between species, culminating in the **human genome project.** This successfully described an **entire human genome in 2000** as a

result of research by two teams: a private commercial team led by **Craig Venter** in the USA, and an international publicly funded team led by **Francis Collins**. Venter wanted to patent the genome sequence to gain commercial capital from it. Collins, on the other hand, did not. He wanted the benefits to be available to all. Now which one would you have chosen for interview? **Well Dawkins chose Venter**. Why? because **Francis Collins is a Christian**. He is now **director of the National Institutes of Health** - the most important medical research establishment in the USA. Francis Collins has written a very readable book: *the Language of God: a scientist presents evidence for belief*. He shows how genetics provides the clearest evidence of evolution yet, **but that evolution does not conflict with a proper reading of the Bible**. The Bible is **not a scientific textbook** – it never was meant to be. It provides the *meaning*, the *why?* whereas science provides the *mechanism*, the *how?*

As I have said, one of my many criticisms of Dawkins is his **unscientific selectivity in his interviewing**. Nowhere does he interview - let alone comment on the writings of - several of his scientific colleagues at Oxford who are Christians, like **John Lennox**, **Alister McGrath**, or at Cambridge **Prof Sir John Polkinhorne**. Sir John had two careers: first as a particle physicist at Cambridge, becoming a fellow of the Royal Society, Professor of Mathematical Physics and President of Queens College, and then as a vicar in the Church of England. **Even Oxford's most famous atheist, the late Prof Anthony Flew has abandoned his atheism!** Tony Flew and I used to spar on radio Stoke on religious issues when we were both at the University of Keele. Interestingly, **one of the factors leading to Tony Flew's change of mind** has been the increasing evidence that the physics of the universe is perfectly designed to allow human life to develop. There is an **amazingly fine tuning of the constants** that underlie for example gravity and nuclear forces, keeping matter together in the right balance. It's called the **anthropic principle**. For many, for the universe to operate as it does is evidence of God's handiwork. For scientists who are Christians, it represents the **plan of God in bringing forth humanity**. "Thinking God's thoughts after Him" was the founding principle of the Puritan founders of the Royal Society, who **delighted in the regularities they were finding in their science**, evidence for them of a divine loving creator. **As**

Einstein put it: "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is its comprehensibility" It is amazing that the complexities of the universe can be reduced to mathematics! **Dawking ignores all this history.**

Another area where Dawkins lacks credibility is in his **selective treatment of church history**. In his view, the Church is **responsible for the major evils of society**. He conveniently forgets that our **hospitals, social services and institutions, our hospices &c are all products of service** by church members. Even today, we have in Ipswich and Woodbridge **Town pastors** who go round the city on Friday and Saturday nights patching up the wounded when they emerge from pubs and nightclubs; we have a **night shelter for the homeless** operated by the churches in Ipswich during the winter months. **Three of our grandchildren** have gone round the **night clubs in their Cities with their University Christian Unions**, dishing out bottles of water and pasta meals! In **Woodbridge we have a credit union** seeking to offer **low interest loans** and advice to those who are **in debt to the loan sharks who take advantage of them**. Nowhere does Dawkins acknowledge this.

The Bible needs to be read, not like Dawkins with a closed mind, but with an **open mind** looking for truth and guidance. I said that the Bible is not a scientific textbook, but if you like: **it is a textbook about life** – how to live life to the full, to find direction and guidance in life, to find peace and purpose in life. **As St Paul wrote to young Timothy at the start of his career " But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,**¹⁵ **and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God^[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work "** **Let us take full advantage of it!**

Ted Evans 5/3/14

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