SCIENCE AND GOD

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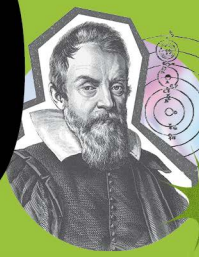

Do You Have to Choose?

JOHN C. LENNOX
KATY MORGAN

"This is an engaging, compelling and accessible book on one of the most significant topics today. John Lennox and Katy Morgan show us that, rather than science discrediting belief in God, belief in God actually provides a reason and motive for science. This is a book which will make all of us think, whether we're scientists, Christians, both or neither. Highly recommended."

SAM ALLBERRY, Author, *Why Does God Care Who I Sleep With?* and *Why Bother with Church?*

"This is the sort of book I wish I'd read as a teenager: a clear, thoughtful and brightly written take on the relationship between Christianity and science. John and Katy don't doesn't duck the tough questions, and they handle them with insight and wit. Bravo."

ANDREW WILSON, Author, *Remaking the World* and *God of All Things*

"Here is crystal clarity on an issue that confuses and deters many would-be believers. This book is so worth reading and passing on to your science-loving friends—whether you or they are a Christian or not."

GLEN SCRIVENER, Author, *The Air We Breathe;* Author and Presenter of 321course.com

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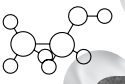

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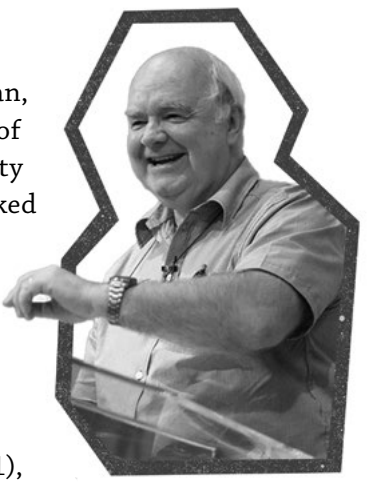
INTRODUCING THE AUTHORS

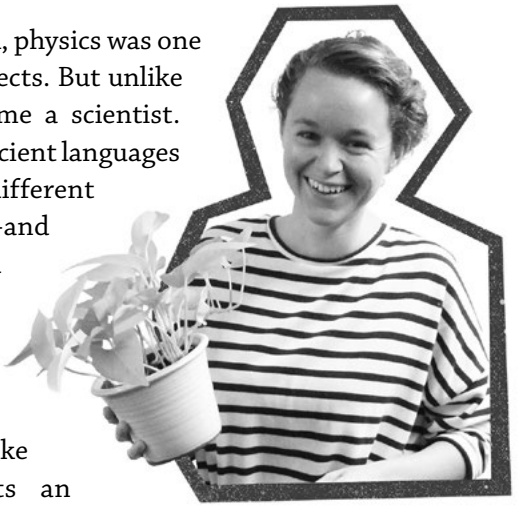


Hello, I'm John.

I'm a scientist—a mathematician, to be exact. I am Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford, and I've also worked at universities in Wales and Germany. I'm also a Christian, and I've always been interested in the relationship between my passion for science and my faith in God. Ever since I was a teenager (as you'll read about in chapter 1), I've been having conversations with very clever scientists about faith, science and God. I've taken part in big public debates with world-famous atheists like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, and I've written several books.

My whole life has been shaped by science, and by my faith in the God of the Bible. To me, the two work perfectly together. But don't just take my word for it—read on!

And I'm Katy.



When I was at school, physics was one of my favourite subjects. But unlike John, I didn't become a scientist. (I actually studied ancient languages at university—a different type of geekery—and now I'm a writer and book editor.) Like John, I am also a Christian, and I've always thought it is important to make sure everyone gets an opportunity to have a proper think about whether God exists, and what he's like if he does.

I spend lots of my spare time volunteering with children and teenagers, and I've written several books for those age groups. When John asked me if I would write this book with him, I was delighted! It was an opportunity for me to learn a lot more about science—but also a chance to help people like you think through some big questions about life, the universe and everything. Which is one of my favourite things to do.

The two of us wrote this book together, but all of the stories and examples come from John. So when you see the word "I", it's John you should imagine!

WHY READ THIS BOOK?

I wonder if you've ever thought much about the universe.

I mean this whole, huge, mind-blowingly enormous, deeply mysterious world.

Did you know that there are more stars in the universe than there are grains of sand on all the beaches on Earth?*

And that an average cloud weighs around a million tonnes?**

And that there's a planet somewhere out there that is mostly made of diamond?***

Thinking about our marvellously mysterious universe is something that two groups of people have in common: scientists and religious people.

You might be used to thinking of scientists and religious people as entirely distinct from one another.

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* That's at least a billion trillion.

** This is assuming that it is about a kilometre (0.6 miles) high, wide and deep. How can such a heavy object float? It's because a cloud's density (how closely the particles are packed together) is lower than the surrounding air.

*** It's been named 55 Cancri e.

But in reality, scientists and religious people *do* have a lot in common (not least because, sometimes, they're the same person).

They both want to know the truth about the universe. They're both curious about the mysteries of how this world works and how it began. They're both full of wonder at the world around them and excited to find out about it.

Perhaps you are, too?

A lot of people in our world think that you can't believe in God and in science at the same time, and you have to choose between them. Sadly, it's no surprise if you have got the impression that believing in God is a bit old-fashioned and silly—so you don't want to hear about religion or engage with it. It's also no surprise if you've got the opposite idea: you've heard that science could undermine your faith in God, and so you don't want to think about science or engage with it more than you have to.

Or maybe you're not sure what you think about either!

This book is an invitation to be curious, no matter what your current beliefs are. It's an opportunity to engage with *both* science *and* God at the same time, and see what happens. It's a book that, hopefully, will make you more excited about science and more curious about God. Or more curious about science and more excited about God. Or more curious *and* more excited about both—with a dose of wonder thrown in as well.

We'll start by thinking about what science and faith actually *are*—what they're for and why they're important. We'll discover why many scientists do

believe in God and think about some of the evidence for the existence of a Creator. Then, starting in chapter 5, we'll look specifically at Christian beliefs about God, the universe and everything. Once again, we'll consider the evidence and come face to face with the most curious questions.

Think of it as an experiment. We're not in a lab, but that doesn't mean we don't have an opportunity to find out something—something that really matters.

So… are you ready to explore the mysteries of the universe?

Galileo Galilei
1564–1642

Chapter 1

THE TROUBLE WITH GALILEO

Can you be a scientist and believe in God?

Galileo Galilei was in serious trouble.

It was 1633, and he was on trial. An astronomer who studied the stars, Galileo had been a bit too noisy about his view that the earth revolves around the sun. (Which, of course, it does—but most people didn't know that at the time.) The Chief Inquisitor of the Roman Catholic Church had forced him into court. And what was the verdict?

Guilty. Or, to use their words:

We pronounce, judge, and declare that you, the said Galileo ... have rendered yourself vehemently suspected by this Holy Office of heresy.

Galileo's ideas about the planets went against the official teaching of the church (which, at the time, said that the sun revolved around the earth). That's what "heresy" means: going against the church. The court banned one of Galileo's books and sent him to prison.

Science and religion were in conflict.

Or... were they?

Do God and Science Mix?

Galileo's story is often mentioned today when people want to say that science and religion are enemies of each other. They say things like this:

Galileo was treated appallingly, all because he was brave enough to speak up for scientific truth. The church was obstructing science—and that hasn't stopped. It simply is not possible to be a genuine scientist and a religious believer. God and science just do not work together.

This sometimes leads to scientists saying things like this:

`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.`

That's a quote from the American theoretical physicist Stephen Weinberg.*

When respected scientists say things like that, many people start to think it must be true that God and science are enemies.

So you might be surprised to learn that Galileo thought they *do* mix! He believed in God and the Bible all his life, both before and after his trial in 1633. To give you an example, he once wrote:

> *The laws of nature are written by the hand of God in the language of mathematics.*

You might also be surprised to learn that a letter Galileo wrote in 1615 reveals that the debate around his scientific claims didn't start in the church at all. The first people who disagreed with him were other scientists (or natural philosophers, as they were known at the time), and they seem to have persuaded the officials of the church to intervene.** Galileo's theories didn't just contradict the teaching of the church—they contradicted what most other scientists thought. And those scientists didn't like that. (It has to be said that Galileo's talent for irritating people may have had something to do with his arrest, too.)***

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* Stephen Weinberg, *New Scientist*, Issue 2578, 18 November 2006.

** Galileo wrote about this in his *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina.*

*** It's also worth mentioning that, far from being tortured and left to rot in a dirty prison cell, Galileo was allowed to spend his imprisonment in the luxurious houses of his friends. You can see that saying, "Galileo was treated appallingly because he stood up for science against religion" is not actually true!

So this wasn't really a conflict between science and religion. It was a conflict between scientists.

Galileo wasn't alone in being a scientist with religious faith. Look at a list of Nobel Prize winners between 1901 and 2000, for example, and you'll find that more than 60% of them were Christians.* Many scientists have believed in God, throughout history and also in the modern day.

Let's hear from three of them now.

Introducing...

Sir Ghillean Prance is a botanist and ecologist: he studies plants. As well as having been the director of Kew Gardens in London, he has spent time living in the Amazon rainforest, where he identified more than 350 new plant species, and has written about what conservationists can learn from the Amazon tribespeople. He describes his Christian faith this way:**

> *For many years I have believed that God is the great designer behind all nature … All my studies in science since then have confirmed my faith.*

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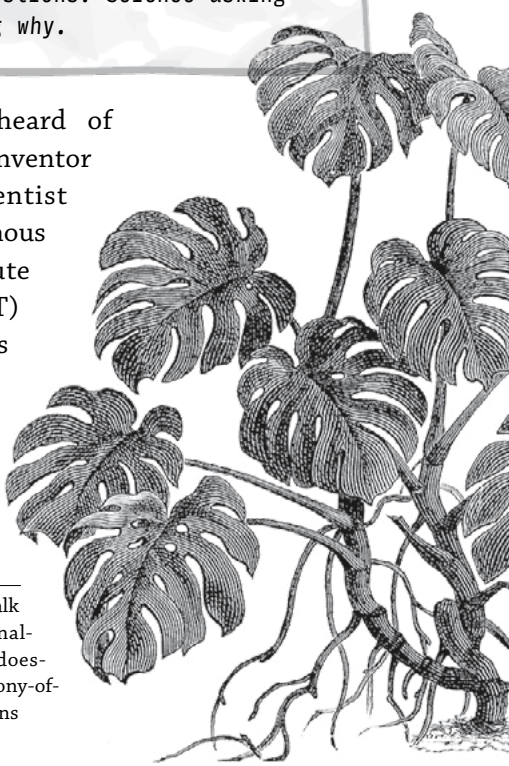
* According to *100 Years of Nobel Prizes* by Baruch Aba Shalev (Atlantic, 2003), 65.4% of Nobel Prize Laureates between 1901 and 2000 have identified Christianity as their religious preference. Overall, Christians have won a total of 78.3% of all the Nobel Prizes in Peace, 72.5% in Chemistry, 65.3% in Physics, 62% in Medicine, 54% in Economics and 49.5% of all Literature awards.

** He wrote this in a booklet called *God and the Scientists,* compiled by Michael Poole in 1997.

Then there's Francis Collins, an expert in genetics who served as the head of the Human Genome Project for many years, and also had a stint as Science Advisor to the President of the USA. Collins played a major role in a huge scientific achievement: mapping the DNA of human beings. He became a Christian in his 20s. Collins once said in a talk:*

> *For me, faith [in God] and science always – from the time of my conversion – seemed incredibly complementary … They were two ways of knowing, but knowing different things and asking different questions. Science asking how, faith answering why.*



And you may have heard of Rosalind Picard, the inventor and computer scientist whose work at the famous Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has influenced robotics research, autism research and emotion research. Like Francis Collins, Picard was raised as an atheist

* You can read the whole talk here: biologos.org/personal-stories/is-there-a-god-and-does-he-care-about-me-the-testimony-of-biologos-founder-francis-collins

(not believing in God) but became a Christian as a young adult. She wrote:*

> *Both science and religious faith are important parts of the age-old human quest to find out what's true and what's good.*

So it seems that science and faith in God *can* mix after all.

But that leaves us with a head-scratcher. Why do some scientists say they *don't*?

No Room for God?

When I was a 19-year-old university student, I once found myself sitting at a dinner next to a Nobel Prize winner. I'd never met such an important scientist before, and I was keen to make the most of the conversation. In particular, I was interested to know what his studies had led him to think about the existence of God. But when I asked about this, he was obviously uncomfortable with the question.

I changed the subject quickly. But after the meal was over, this eminent scientist invited me to come to his study to continue our conversation. There were some other professors there too, but I was the only student.

"Lennox," the Nobel Prize winner said in a forbidding tone, "do you want a career in science?"

"Yes, sir," I replied nervously.

"Then," he told me, "in front of witnesses, tonight,

* From *101 Great Big Questions About God and Science,* edited by Lizzie Henderson and Steph Bryant (Lion Hudson, 2022), page 112.

you must give up this childish faith in God. If you do not, then it will cripple you intellectually. You simply won't make it as a scientist."

Talk about pressure!

This highly respected scientist had more or less the same view of things as the physicist I quoted earlier—the one who said that scientists should do anything they can to get people to stop being religious. And there are a lot of scientists out there who think this. They say that Christianity, and religion generally, is fundamentally opposed to the practice of science. They say that science leaves no room for God.

But although it is scientists *making* these statements, these are not *scientific statements*. They're not based on science—otherwise no scientists would be Christians. They're based on something else.

Stephen Hawking and Taylor Swift

Let's imagine for a moment that the great physicist Stephen Hawking is still alive (he actually died in 2018)—and you, yes you, have a chance to meet him. Hawking is renowned across the world for his research on black holes, and he's coming to your town to talk about it.

Hawking delivers a short talk that completely blows your mind. He talks about time, space, and the history of the universe. Wormholes, black holes, time travel, quantum mechanics—he touches on it all.

But then Hawking starts talking about the music of Taylor Swift. It becomes clear that he's only ever listened to two of her songs, but that doesn't stop

him from delivering a whole bunch of opinions about each of her albums.

Which topic are you most likely to trust Stephen Hawking on—black holes or Taylor Swift?

Stephen Hawking
1942–2018

Obviously, black holes. That's what he's spent his life researching. He knows more about black holes than most people know about *anything*. Whereas he has no expertise at all in Taylor Swift songs.*

You can see that there's a difference between *statements made by scientists* and *statements based on science*. A scientist can have all sorts of opinions about all sorts of things—and we'd be right to listen to them as much as we listen to anybody else. (It's only polite.) But we don't need to assume that everything a

* I don't think Stephen Hawking would ever actually have given a lecture on Taylor Swift. But he did give his opinion on God. His friend Martin Rees, another important astrophysicist, didn't think Hawking was right to do so. He said, "I know Stephen Hawking well enough to know that he has read little philosophy and less theology, so I don't think his views [on God] should be taken with any special weight" (*The Guardian*, Wednesday 6th April 2011).

scientist says is definitely the truth simply because he or she is a scientist.

When one scientist says they find that science and faith in God work beautifully together, and another scientist says that they think science and faith in God are incompatible, we can assume that it isn't actually the science that is making them disagree. It's something else.

To understand what that something else is, we need to delve a bit further into this relationship between science and faith. We need to ask: what is science *for*?

In Short

- People often give Galileo as an example of the conflict between science and religion—but Galileo was a Christian, and his story is more complicated than it sometimes seems.
- Many scientists have a religious faith—60% of Nobel Prize winners between 1901 and 2000 were Christians. It's perfectly possible to believe in both science and God.
- When we hear some scientists say that you can't believe in both science and God, we should remember that not everything a scientist says is actually based on science.