

# How science and faith can co-exist



Cosmologist **David Bacon**, from St Jude's, Southsea, looks at the 'conflict' between science and faith

I WONDER what you think when people ask whether science and faith are in conflict? Do you feel equipped to answer this question? Or intimidated? If so, you're not alone.

There are influential atheist voices that suggest that science 'disproves' faith. Most obviously there's the issue of origins: if the universe started with a Big Bang and developed according to the laws of physics, what's the role of God? Then there's the issue of how we know things - doesn't science deal with hard evidence, while religion just makes stuff up?

Plenty of people think like that, but I don't, and I hope you don't either. I'm a professor working in the field of cosmology, the science of how the universe behaves (including early on near the Big Bang - and yes, there's good evidence that it happened).

I'm also an active Christian, often leading sung worship at St Jude's Church, Southsea. Am I a walking contradiction? I don't think so. Here are some points to consider, which are important to me and hopefully of use to you as you think about science and faith.

Firstly, it's worth noticing that the key players in science include many notable Christians. The proposer of the Big Bang theory was a Catholic priest, Georges

Lemaitre. He saw no tension between his proposal that the universe had an energetic dense beginning, and the existence of God who is responsible for the ongoing existence of the universe.

The person who led the Human Genome Project, exploring our genetic code, is an outspoken Christian, Francis Collins. The senior project scientist for the Hubble Space Telescope, Jennifer Wiseman, is also a Christian who has been vocal about her faith.

## 'Both are about confidence in something we find trustworthy'

I could go on and on. Christians are in a minority in science, as they are in many areas of life - but they are making a massive difference to science, and they work hard to bring together the religious and scientific aspects of their life. By and large, religious scientists don't set up firewalls in their brains to keep these two elements away from each other, but rather let them mutually nourish each other.

That may be an unfamiliar idea. How can science and religion nourish each other? I find the scientific discoveries we're making absolutely thrilling and surprising

(for instance, the maps of dark matter in the universe that we're charting for the first time), and they ignite in me wonder and worship. In the other direction, as I spend time each day reflecting on God, the greatest good, this inspires me to be the most enthusiastic and creative scientist that I can be as an act of worship.

Finally it's worth saying that I don't think that science and religion work in totally different ways. In my experience, Christianity doesn't trade in blind faith. We start by encountering Jesus as someone who warrants a measure of our trust, then this trust grows as we discover that his message makes sense of our lives.

Similarly, we gain confidence in scientific theories as we find that they convincingly explain features of the world. So both are about confidence in something we find to be trustworthy, rather than about conjuring up devotion towards something we secretly know to be fiction.

There's a lot more to say about all this. But I hope this provokes you to keep thinking about and discussing this important issue, with fellow Christians and with scientists. After all, science and religion are two key dynamics affecting all of our lives, so there's a lot at stake in the conversation.