

“Has Science Killed God?”

a talk by Dr Sharon Dirckx

Faringdon Corn Exchange, Thursday 12th October 2017, 7.30pm

For the first of a series of four talks under the overall heading of “Science and Faith: Big Questions” (arranged by All Saints’ Church) Faringdon Corn Exchange was full to capacity with nearly 200 people attending from a wide area. The Revd Dr Stephen Bellamy, the Vicar of All Saints’ Church, welcomed everyone, whether of a scientific background or Christian faith, or neither. The Mayor, Mike Wise, then gave a brief introduction from his own perspective as a metallurgist, having worked with microscopes on inanimate objects, then later using electron microscopic scanners on organic matter, all of which cannot help but raise questions of faith.

Dr Dirckx introduced herself as neuroscientist by training and now an Academic Tutor at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics, who helps people address all kinds of difficult questions. She has broadcast on television and radio, and won the 2014 Christian Book Award.

She said that, as a teenager, she was given a copy of “The Selfish Gene” by Richard Dawkins, which seemed logically to question whether humans are merely gene carriers. At Bristol University, however, following an early foray into “Grill a Christian”, where Christian students answered questions from sceptical freshers, she gradually formed the conclusion that science and a faith in God are not mutually exclusive. Science is rational and demonstrable, but from earliest times “miracles” were used as explanations for the inexplicable.

At the heart of her talk Dr Dirckx spent time comparing quotes from Christian and agnostic/atheist writers such as CS Lewis and Francis Crick, and covering points such as the logic of the Big Bang Theory. A particularly powerful defence of the existence of God as an intelligent creative force was the statement that if gravitational force were changed by a factor of just 1 in 10^{40} (1 followed by 40 noughts), matter such as stars and planets would fail to coalesce. She commented that scientists try to match data to hypotheses, and be open to new ideas, but no scientist can factually answer the question of whether God exists.

Moving on to the life of Jesus, Dr Dirckx quoted St Luke, an early scientist and writer of one of the Gospels, who recognised the uniqueness of the Resurrection. People have come to put their faith in Jesus’ strength, love and actions, just as much as people have faith in evidential science, proving that you can be a thinker and a person of religious faith.

A lively session of answers to written questions followed the conclusion of the talk. Subjects such as the contribution of Islam to scientific progress, Galileo’s struggle with religious orthodoxy, and the development of Artificial Intelligence were courteously dealt with. An important thread through these questions was to distinguish between the brain and the human mind, where aspects of memory, feelings and morals come into play, which have no scientific substance.

Following a vote of thanks from Revd Bellamy, the meeting closed with a warm round of applause.

The next talk in the series will be by Dr Denis Alexander on Friday 3rd November, in Faringdon Corn Exchange at 7.30pm, on the topic “Creation or Evolution: do we have to choose?”

Jonathan Mapley