

## Science as a Christian Vocation

Being a priest, missionary, doctor or nurse are all traditionally seen as Christian vocations as their day to day role involves direct service to God or to one's neighbour. Although the latter two do involve science it is strictly speaking more the application of it than science in its purest sense. So what about scientific research, where one spends most of the day neither proclaiming the word of God nor serving one's neighbour? One could argue that scientific discovery benefits humankind so therefore it is serving one's neighbour, or that it helps us subdue the earth – the command given to us in Genesis - but that would put limits on which areas of scientific research are Christian and those which are not. For example the foundations of Quantum Mechanics have been puzzling scientists for the past 80 years, and may still be a great mystery for decades to come. Even if we solve the mystery the applications apply more to communications than saving human lives. Does this make this research secular? We may uncover and understand the laws that govern the universe, and therefore be able to use them for our benefit, but we will never subdue or govern them. I wish to make the argument that all scientific research (within ethical limits), when done by those whom God has called, is a Christian vocation, even if there seem to be no direct links between the research helping to save human lives or subduing the earth.

If we take a look at scientific research, without analysing how it may help humankind or help us to get the most out of the world that we live in, or even how to help preserve the Earth, what is left? - Discovery, amazement, puzzlement, disbelief, understanding, an increase of knowledge and insight.....worship. If one wants to understand a composer one studies their music, if one wants to know what was going through an artist's mind one studies their paintings, if one wants insight into the mind of a poet one reads their poetry, so it follows that if one strives to know the mind of God one should study His work. Not for the sake of the application of the knowledge (although of course this is a good thing), but for the comprehension of a tiny bit more of the mind of the One who created them. A scientist spends all their day studying the mind of God, delving into the clues He left of His "eternal power and divine nature" (Romans 1v20), increasing in "depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Romans 11v33-34).

God created us to subdue the earth and to help one another, but he also created us for Himself – "the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise" (Isaiah 43:21). As a scientist uncovers more and more of God's work it increases their awe and worship of the Creator, and this is not just for their personal benefit. Scientific discovery is shared, the joy and wonder is spread, as are the yet unsolved mysteries. In the Old Testament God prescribed that there should be a community of full time musicians in the temple to worship Him, their living being paid by the other Israelites, which we see today in churches with worship leaders. Can I suggest that worship is more than music? Could a scientist who professes to believe in God say that their livelihood serves for the same purpose – full time worship of God? One can worship God with a song, but one can worship God with so much more. Just as Eric Liddell said "when I run, I feel God's pleasure", I think that God gets pleasure from His children searching Him out, uncovering His mysteries and increasing our understanding that His ways are higher than ours. Every time as a human race we think we

have understood the world we live in, another “layer” is uncovered. In solids there are atoms, in atoms there are neutrons etc, in neutrons there are quarks....and all of this makes up less than 5% of the universe!

Along with research and discovery being an act of worship there are other reasons, more specific to different disciplines, why science can be seen as a Christian vocation. In Genesis 2:19 Adam is given the task of naming the animals. In Hebrew a name is not just a name as it is in English, knowing someone’s (or thing’s) name meant knowledge of their character and being. That task pretty much sums up modern zoology. Also, every green plant was given for food. One could interpret this as meaning that every plant has a use, be it medicinal or culinary, for either humans or animals although of course one must be cautious in interpreting the Bible too literally when it wasn’t written as a textbook. However, unless we research all the different plants we will never know – and if we destroy many of them before we have even discovered them then we lose that knowledge forever. This leads on to the next point – science is a Christian vocation because as a human race we are supposed to take care of the Earth (Genesis 2:15). After having used fossil fuels for hundreds of years we now know that we need to find alternatives with the solutions most likely to be solved by Chemists, Physicists or Engineers, hopefully in the not too far future. Advances in modern medicine (which do have a direct links to helping our neighbours) have arisen thanks to Biochemists, Engineers etc. The list goes on.

The words of Psalm 111:2 “The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein” are inscribed above the entrance to the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge. The idea of a conflict between science and faith has not always been as prevailing as it is today. What a marvellous vocation to ponder the works of the Almighty God!