

# Editorial

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## Reflections on the Twentieth Century

The dawn of a new millennium provides an excuse, at least, to reflect on the past century. The late Victorians bequeathed to the 20th century the 'conflict thesis' model for the relationship between science and faith. When the Anglican theologian Charles Raven went up to Cambridge University in 1904, it was this model, as he reported in later life, which reigned supreme:

'No one who was at Cambridge in my day at the beginning of the century, certainly no one who did the crazy thing I did and undertook to study Christian theology and also genetics in the same post-graduate year, finding himself in the position of a circus-rider trying to ride two horses and ignoring the fact that they were going at top speed in different directions . . . would doubt that at Cambridge in that day it was very nearly impossible for an honest and intelligent youngster to be a scientist and a believer'.

Prof. Bateson under whom Raven studied genetics 'saw himself possessed of a religion that should free men of religion'.

But the twentieth century has seen a remarkable reversal of the academic climate which Raven faced at Cambridge in the early 1900's. The predictions of sociologists that religious belief would inevitably fall into decline with the rise of science have proved inaccurate. And whereas the 'conflict thesis' remains popular in the media and in general culture, revisionist historians and scientist apologists have long since picked the thesis apart to reveal its chronic inadequacy as an accurate model to describe the historical or contemporary relationship between science and faith. Furthermore, a 'selection pressure' appears to have been operating over the past few decades, at least in Britain, whereby Christians are more likely to be involved in the sciences than the arts. If Raven read natural science at Cambridge now instead of a century ago, chances are that his lecture theatre would contain a good proportion of Christians and a Christian lecturer to boot.

This shift in academic climate is well illustrated by the authors of the articles in this Issue. Francis Collins, director of what is arguably the most significant scientific project instigated this century, illustrates the Christian commitment to genetics; the current President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Malcolm Jeeves, reports on recent Christian thinking about psychology; Peter Bussey addresses the relation between physics and eastern religions; the environmentalist John Sale tackles biodiversity, and the historian of science Colin Russell reviews a major recent work on science-faith interactions. There is certainly no room for complacency as we enter a new millennium, but at least this century will bequeath to the next a solid corpus of Christian thinking about science and faith. The horses are no longer going at top speed in different directions.