

Editorial

Science, Religion and the Media

Time was (at least in the UK) when scientists used to avoid journalists like the plague and the dreaded ‘popularisers of science’ were viewed with suspicion by their academic colleagues. Some remnants of these earlier prejudices linger on, but the pendulum these days seems to be swinging strongly the other way. The current squeeze on research funding has forced the scientific community to be more aware of their responsibility to tell tax-payers how their money is spent. Scientists are now routinely sent on media courses for training in how to communicate their results to the general public. Interest in the public understanding of science has led to the funding of university chairs, the founding of new journals and a plethora of conferences on the subject, not least that being organised by CiS in London on 27 September, 1997.

Whether the swing of the pendulum has yet resulted in a public which is more scientifically aware than previously, remains in some doubt. That the public at large continues to receive through the media conflicting voices on the subject of science and religion is in no doubt at all. Part of the problem is that Christians active in the sciences have either lacked the training, or the incentive, or perhaps both, to put their heads above the parapet and risk exposure in the public arena of media debate. Hopefully as the scientific community as a whole becomes more adept at explaining their science to the public, so Christians active in the sciences will also become more involved in explaining the relationship between their science and their faith in the media context.

Just before Christmas, 1996, *Science & Christian Belief* dipped its toe into the media waters by distributing a press release reporting the article by Prof. R.J. Berry entitled ‘The Virgin Birth of Christ’ which appeared in the last issue of the journal (Vol. 8 No 2. pp. 101–110). The results were startling. A major article appeared in The Daily Telegraph the following day, followed by other newspaper articles and radio broadcasts, including the BBC overseas service, during the ensuing week. Within days the message of the article had grown from a potential readership of a few thousand up to an audience of many millions. Prof. Berry’s article was provided for journalists on the CiS WWW page (“<http://www.tcp.co.uk/~carling/cispress.html>”), so encouraging accurate reporting.

The media are hungry for newsworthy stories. Journalists work under intense pressure with constant dead-lines to meet. Christians in the sciences should be active in providing them with stories and in helping them to be accurate and truthful in their reporting. If we do nothing to help, we cannot then blame the media for constantly reporting trivia or for getting their science wrong. Our involvement may be something as simple as writing a letter to a newspaper. As the old Chinese proverb says: ‘It is better to light a small candle than curse the darkness’.