

## Mutual Illumination

BRIAN S. BULL

62

### SCIENCE AND CHRISTIANITY — A PARTNERSHIP

By Robert E. D. Clark

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"There, immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love . . . and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body."<sup>1</sup> As you read these familiar lines, did it strike you that in the New Earth the reactions of the redeemed scientist to "fresh objects" and of the redeemed saint to "the mysteries of redeeming love" are indistinguishable? It is the thesis of Robert Clark that the same can be said of science and Christianity here and now.

Many people view science as a monolithic body of irrefutable, experimentally proven facts and Christianity as a compilation of ecclesiastical statements; hence, they cannot conceive of any similarity. However, a closer observation of the individual scientist as he struggles — sometimes failing, sometimes winning, always learning — will reveal that the emotions he experiences and the faith he must exercise are very like those of a Christian pilgrim.

Throughout *Science and Christianity — A Partnership* Clark compares the experience of the individual scientist with that of the individual Christian in their mutual search for understanding. In the first chapter he shows how modern science arose and how it quite possibly could have arisen only from a Christian world view. In chapters 2, 3, and 4, by references to the scientist's own description of the discovery event, he documents the fact that reason plays a minor role in the early stages of scientific discovery. In chapters 5, 6, and 7, he shows that faith — such as the Christian would recognize immediately — is all important. In the final chapters, he appeals as a practicing scientist to other scientists to treat Christian beliefs in the "kindly" manner previously reserved for their scientific ideas.

A telling argument in favor of his position appears in chapter 6, where the heuristic theory is distinguished from the hypothesis. A hypothesis is a tentative explanation

that is killed or modified if not supported by experiments. A heuristic theory is a totally different matter. It partakes more of the nature of a warm feeling deep down in the heart — a firm conviction that is virtually immune to negative experimental evidence but that exercises a profound effect on the scientist who holds it. It is present in all successful scientists, although it is not always acknowledged by them.

In an attempt in 1850 to prove that electricity and gravity were related forces, Michael Faraday closed his paper thus: "Here end my trials for the present. The results are negative; but they do not shake my strong feelings of the existence of a relation between gravity and electricity" (p. 69). Ten years later, in the last paper he wrote, he used almost exactly the same words. Albert Einstein spent much of his later life looking for the same relationship, but he too died without securing any positive evidence. This "strong feeling" was obviously not a hypothesis to be discarded in the face of negative evidence, not when two of mankind's most brilliant scientific minds failed to prove it true and yet returned again and again to the attempt. In any non-scientific context, such an attitude would most certainly be labeled *faith*. Faith it is, and virtually all creative scientists seem to possess it in abundance. Scientists who do not, in most cases, are merely technicians.

Thus Clark disposes of the idea that faith is the exclusive province of the Christian. He next comes to grips with the concept that reason is to be found in its finest form only among scientists. Reason as the mainspring of scientific discovery takes quite a beating at the hands of Clark, himself a chemist and inventor: "There is nothing like clear thinking to protect one from making discoveries" (p. 35). And he quotes C. S. Lewis's barbed opinion on the limitations of reason: "If we are in a dark room and someone screams, I cannot by reason reckon that I am in agony and then find that I have made a mistake" (p. 36). Clark does not suggest that reason has no place. In both science and Christianity, once the initial step has been taken, reason is of inestimable value. However, it is no more vital to one pursuit than to the other.

The very emotions which accompany both the search and the discovery in science would be easily recognized by the Christian. Clark illustrates this point by quoting notable scientists. Claude Bernard wrote, "The joy of discovery is certainly the loveliest that the mind of man can ever feel," adding that "those who do not know the torment of the unknown can never have the joy of discovery." In Frazer-Harris's words, "The joy of scientific discovery is one of the most exalted human emotions" (p. 53).

The similarity between science and Christianity even extends to the ease with which man overlooks the demands of science as he does those of religion. "Today many trust in science, if they still trust in anything at all, rather than in God. But . . . scientific knowledge of the effects of alcoholism does not stop people from drinking more than is good for them. Scientific knowledge of drugs does not cure the addict, nor knowledge of overeating, obesity. . . . There is little or no evidence that social science makes men socially minded. . . . More often than not those who object to religion because they prefer a 'scientific attitude' do not permit their science to penetrate to their private lives" (p. 145-146). It is a sad commentary on the perfidy of the human race.

The idea that nature and revelation speak with one voice is not a new one to most Seventh-day Adventists. The unique aspect of this book is its brilliant delineation of

the thoughts and emotions of a scientist who is also a committed Christian. The Christian finds concord — not conflict — between science and theology. Each illuminates and complements the other. Clark's is a book that belongs in the library of every Seventh-day Adventist who is also a scientist or who counts among his friends scientists, Christian or non-Christian.

#### REFERENCE

- 1 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1950), p. 677.

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