

## **Views from the Pews: Three stages of our understanding of creation through the ages**

1. In the ancient world, the Biblical picture of the universe assumed a divinely ordered world filled with God's glory, and guided only by divine actions and wisdom. This stage provided essential reassurance for rural communities needing to be able to see God's fatherly hand controlling the seasonal cycles of their crops, and defending their homes and families against disaster. This innocent faith has no modern equivalent except among extreme literalists.
2. The second stage began in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, when the sciences asserted their independence, and theology reduced its doctrine of creation to a personal belief in God as Creator rather than in the things that have been created. After many struggles, the two disciplines established their own identities on either side of accepted demarcation lines, and achieved a peaceful co-existence based on mutual irrelevance.
3. In the third stage, which is developing now, the sciences and theology are becoming companions in tribulation, under the pressure of the ecological crisis and the search for new directions in both which must be found if humanity is to survive at all. In this newly co-operative atmosphere, the mutual demarcation lines are becoming unnecessary. In a global situation where it is one world or none, science and theology cannot afford to divide up the one, single reality. It is becoming easier now to see science and theology as partners to be taken seriously.

This stage brings great hope for the future. Science emphasises the dynamic aspect of creation which theology had temporarily forgotten, and at the same time is raising all sorts of questions which are outside its own province to answer. Both science and religion use symbolic language and imaginative models to describe the abstract truths they wrestle with. Both science and religion are community enterprises, and their steady working to improve their common understanding of any new idea can drive progress, in theology as in science. For example, modern science encounters many life-or-death dilemmas in which science and ethics cannot avoid meeting, yet neither can solve alone. For example, anyone anxious about cruelty to animals should be consoled to know that Institutional Ethics Committees have to find solutions based on moral decency, which, whether they recognise it or not, is ultimately rooted in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Ultimately, all that is required for irrationality to triumph is that those who can think remain silent.

*Kim King*