

## 3 physicists come out on God's side in creation debate

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BY THE WINDSOR STAR    MAY 30, 2008



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Three scientists from the University of Windsor, professors Gordon Drake, Mordechai Schlesinger and Tim Reddish of the school's physics department, have stepped gingerly on to the slippery rocks of the discussion, coming out -- some might say surprisingly -- on the side of God.

The religiosity of the three scientists may be surprising, since some statistics, including a Scientific American study in 1999, show that, while up to 90 per cent of the general North America population profess some belief in a God, only about 40 per cent of scientists do. And the numbers of scientists believing in God keep dropping, particularly among "eminent" scientists, with as few as 10 per cent believing.

However, poll results on the topic vary. A Rice University survey in 2005 demonstrated that only 38 per cent of natural scientists polled considered themselves to be "non-believers."

"Why should a physicist, studying the laws of nature, countenance a belief in God?" asked Drake, a practising Anglican, recently named principal of Canterbury College. "Because, as physicists, we're more aware of what we don't know. And the book of the unknown keeps getting larger."

Added Schlesinger, a Jew: "You can look at it another way. Our modest success in scientific research allows us to marvel at God's handiwork."

Reddish, a Christian with a Protestant background who does not adhere to any particular denomination, said God gave him a mind to use and "it would be a disservice to not use it to the fullest extent." His rumination, he said, leads him back to God. "My faith

enhances my life.”

Their declarations of faith out of the way, the three doctors of science sat down recently to state their case.

Drake began by suggesting the latest flareup in the old debate has its roots in the terrorist attacks of 9-11 on New York and Washington.

The fact the suicide pilots claimed to be acting out of Islamic fundamentalist zeal led to a backlash against all religion as an abomination to mankind, leading to intolerance, violence and war, he suggested. The backlash resulted in a spate of books such as *God is Not Great* by Christopher Hitchens, *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins and *Letter to a Christian Nation* by Sam Harris.

The atheist point of view has become ever more visible on cable news and talk radio, usually countered by an equally animated “believer’s” position.

“The debate has existed since creation,” said Drake. “But 9-11 intensified it, gave it focus, the idea that religion could do more harm than good, that God could make you fly into a building.... But should you throw out religion because of 9-11? It’s the same as asking should you throw out science because of the atomic bomb.”

They said that the debate has been framed on the premise that science and religion are polar opposites used to explain existence and the two ideas cannot be reconciled. But, they say, that premise, put forward in Dawkins’ book, is flawed.

“Dawkins sets up science and religion as opposites and asks the reader to choose one,” said Drake. “The point is they are not extremes. They exist in a different dimension. They are not opposed at all, just different, answer different questions.”

His point was taken up by Schlesinger: “Science answers the question ‘How?’ Religion answers the question, ‘Why?’ The two are complementary.”

He said the value of religion is that it has resulted in the basic morality of humankind and suggests how we should conduct ourselves in the natural world. Science is neutral. Religion is not. Science concerns natural law. Religion is concerned with morals and ethics.

“Religion explains why God can make demands upon us,” said Schlesinger, “why God can command you not to commit murder.... I believe God exists and can put demands upon me.”

Reddish said the current debate about creationism versus evolution is a case in point. He said the Christian fundamentalist assertion that the literal interpretation of creation, that God created the world in seven days, be taught in schools as fact or theory is a “misguided attempt to defend against a perceived threat” to their beliefs.

The Bible is the means of conveying God’s word through metaphor, said Drake.

That is why, he said, it is silly for atheists to try to put believers on the spot by asking if they really believe in stories like Jonah and the Whale or David and Goliath.

“It’s not intended to be literal,” he said. “You look for the message in the story. Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* may not be historically accurate. But that doesn’t make it less true as literature or as a reflection on human nature.”

Reddish, who believes in an afterlife and the resurrection of Christ, said interpreting the Bible in a too-literal a manner is a kind of childish oversimplification. “The idea that God is like Santa.... As you get older, you grow out of it.”