

God, Life and Everything The Debate

By now you probably have heard about the great debate between Billy Nye the Science Guy and Ken Ham, founder of the Creation Museum.

Or perhaps the not-so-great debate.

The clunker of a debate maybe.

If you're unfamiliar with this showdown between science and religion (or so it was billed), here's a quick rundown. Ken Ham hosted it at his Creation Museum, a flashy, high-tech showcase for a literalistic reading of the bible. Here's a blurb from their website:

The state-of-the-art 70,000 square foot museum brings the pages of the Bible to life, casting its characters and animals in dynamic form and placing them in familiar settings. Adam and Eve live in the Garden of Eden.

Children play and dinosaurs roam near Eden's Rivers. The serpent coils cunningly in the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

So, if you are into creationism, this is your playground (and kids are free in 2014!).

But back to the debate. Ken Ham argued that the earth is about 6,000 years old, created in an instant by God, and that earth came pretty much furnished, complete - as you read - with dinosaurs.

Bill Nye argued that the universe came into being about 13 billion years ago through the big bang, that the earth eventually formed, and that life evolved here over the course of several hundred million years, ultimately resulting in humans.

I hate this debate. Not because my core beliefs were called into question, but because it was a debate. Debates are contests to see who can outflank the other in order to win, not to find truth.

Sure enough, at the end, both sides were declaring victory. Ugh.

Nobody's mind was changed - nobody was convinced of anything. All it did was turn science and religion into the Hatfields and McCoys who never recognize that they have nothing to feud about.

I hate this debate because the debate format forces black and white thinking - it is either this or that. Science or religion (and not only religion but a narrow, literalistic form of protestant Christianity that *hardly* represents all Christians, let alone all people of faith). It is a false dichotomy.

I hate this debate because it only made it harder for people of faith who love and respect science. The fact is, there are many scientists who believe in God and see no contradiction.

For the record, I believe both in God and in evolution (and climate change for that matter). I have long said that God is the *who* and *why* of the world while science is the *where*, *when* and *how*. For me, to say that God created the universe through the big bang makes sense. And even Bill Nye, when asked in the debate how the atoms that created the big bang got there, answered, "This is a great mystery."

A scientist of integrity is willing to acknowledge mystery. Even those who don't necessarily believe in God can appreciate the possibilities contained in the vastness which we cannot comprehend. Carl Sagan, a self-described agnostic, knew better than to shut out possibilities of divinity. He once wrote:

An atheist is someone who is certain that God does not exist, someone who has compelling evidence against the existence of God. I know of no such compelling evidence. Because God can be relegated to remote times and places and to ultimate causes, we would have to know a great deal more about the universe than we do now to be sure that no such God exists. To be certain of the existence of God and to be certain of the nonexistence of God seem to me to be the confident extremes in a subject so riddled with doubt and uncertainty as to inspire very little confidence indeed.

Conversely, a Christian of integrity will look beyond the mere written record of scripture which was not intended to be a science text or history book (not in our journalistic sense of history anyway). Scripture is a faithful record of human attempts to come to grips with their experience of the divine, to sort out their relationship with God.

This coming to grips happens today as well, and highly intelligent people are involved in it, many of whom are scientists. Yes, there are Christian physicists.

I have no interest right now in trying to convince anyone of the existence of God or the merits of, say, evolution. Getting into an argument like this has proven time and time again to be a pointless exercise akin to banging one's head against the wall.

But I do encourage people of faith who distrust science to reconsider. Likewise, I encourage scientifically-minded people who distrust faith to reconsider. Because when they are at their best, both science and religion have a united goal - finding the truth.