

The God question: A tale of two adverts

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Alistair McBay examines the PR campaign behind an educational resource that seeks to bring creationism and intelligent design into the science classrooms of Scotland.

Further to my two previous blogs on the God Question which you can read [here](#) and [here](#), I have now received the DVD and the study guides.

I have started to examine these in depth, but here for the moment is a very quick review of some of the advertising for this resource, which as you will remember claims to be an objective and balanced look at 'the evidence' such that the reviewer is left to draw their own conclusions as to whether science eradicates the need for a God (in this case the Christian God), or whether the hand of God or a 'designer/creator' can be detected in addition to, or behind, the science.

At the general product launch I attended in Glasgow, the promotional advertisement carried two questions:

"Are we the product of chance or intention? Where does the evidence lead?"

However, I recently attended a conference on education, entitled "Out of the Silent Church" put on by the [Solas Centre for Public Christianity](#), the programme for which also carried a similar A5 advertisement for the God Question. One of the quotes on the Leader's Manual comes from the Reverend David Robertson, a founder of the Solas Centre and a minister of the Free Church of Scotland. The Reverend Robertson proclaims "The God Question is a fantastic resource to enable Christians to answer the questions that people are asking". The basic premise is the same on each advert, that here is "a vitally important new DVD series in which theists and atheists clash on the biggest issue of all". However, the advert in the Solas Centre conference programme carries the header "Out of the Silent Church by exploring the God Question" and has these words in place of the two questions above:

"An apologetics resource and an evangelistic opportunity for the church"

"Curriculum resources for schools"

"An educational experience for all"

Now the advertising and PR types among you may be inclined to put that difference in emphasis down to targeted messages according to the appropriate audience segment. I am inclined to interpret these latter statements as a more accurate description of what the God Question really is, namely a Trojan Horse for creationism and intelligent design in the science classroom, as the Catholic Church in Scotland has already shown itself to be undertaking. I am also not inclined to believe that the Free Church of Scotland, which states on its website that it "accepts the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God" would endorse any package that undermined in any way such an unstinting belief in a creator God. Can anyone really believe that a self-proclaimed "apologetics resource" and "evangelical opportunity for the church" is going to be balanced and objective?

Turning to the study guides, a quick scan of the Leader's Manual carries some other interesting statements. It claims that very attempt is made in the package "to be scrupulously open, honest

and free of propaganda" and that "Belief should be founded on evidence and truth, as far as it can be ascertained". That will come as a surprise to those who thought religious belief was founded on non-evidenced faith in the veracity of ancient texts and supernatural phenomena. Another statement leads on from this to claim that viewers are being invited "to see that the crucial issue is not science versus religion, but how scientific evidence is interpreted".

So there it is in a nutshell – according to the God Question, scientific evidence is open to interpretation either in favour of there being a creator or designer, or not. In relation to science and God, a plea is made to leaders to remind the learning groups that science is not "the royal road to truth" and goes on to state: "This is a crucially important factor to recognise especially when, in debates about the existence of God, science might be presented as the only way to establish reliable information. There are many questions which science is unable to answer. Other forms of evidence are also important."

Other forms of evidence? And where is the balancing statement to the effect there are so many questions that religious belief has been unable to answer, yet science has? At one point, the Leader's Manual has as an aim: "To reflect on what the science of genetics, together with the fossil record, contribute to an understanding of Darwin's theory (of evolution) but also to consider how it might provide evidence for God". Another aim in the same section is "to consider the view that there is direct evidence of Intelligent Design".

Alarm bells should be ringing very loudly indeed by this point!

It is also interesting to see the series claim that it is "testing the thesis that belief in a creator is intellectually weak and scientifically naïve".

So this in summary is what we are being asked to believe. The God Question is:

- a school resource that places alternative interpretations on scientific evidence as for or against a creator / intelligent designer;
- devised, produced, marketed and distributed by Christian evangelists;
- lauded by the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Catholic Church;
- already propelled by the Scottish Catholic Church into science classes in its 'faith' schools;
- promoted as 'an apologetics resource and an evangelistic opportunity for the church'
- and so (and here's the fascinating bit) will ultimately lead school children to the objective conclusion that believers in a creator or designer are indeed "intellectually weak and scientifically naïve".

Colour me sceptical!

Alistair McBay is the NSS spokesperson in Scotland. The views expressed in our blogs are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the NSS.

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