



What Christian parents
can tell their children

ABOUT SCIENCE

JOHN LONG

Earlier this year, parents could not help seeing numerous stories about the Apollo moon landings in the media, the first of which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. Newspapers, TV, and the Internet were awash with stories and pictures of rockets, astronauts, the moon, and lunar modules. It was a great achievement of science and well worth celebrating. Teachers, and my own experience as a father, tell us that space and its exploration are among the top things that get kids excited. What parent wouldn't want to instill in children a wonder and appreciation for science and how it is applied in nearly every aspect of our lives?

Christian parents may wonder, though, how they might help their kids get switched on to science, while at the same time preserving the faith they are practicing and want their children to absorb and retain when they become adults. This is not an easy task. After all, who has not been told, read, or heard that science is incompatible with faith? We hear this almost daily: science is about facts, religion (Christianity included) is about myths. Science is based on reason and experimentation, religion is not. The scientific revolution came about in opposition to the Christian Church, which tried to hinder it.

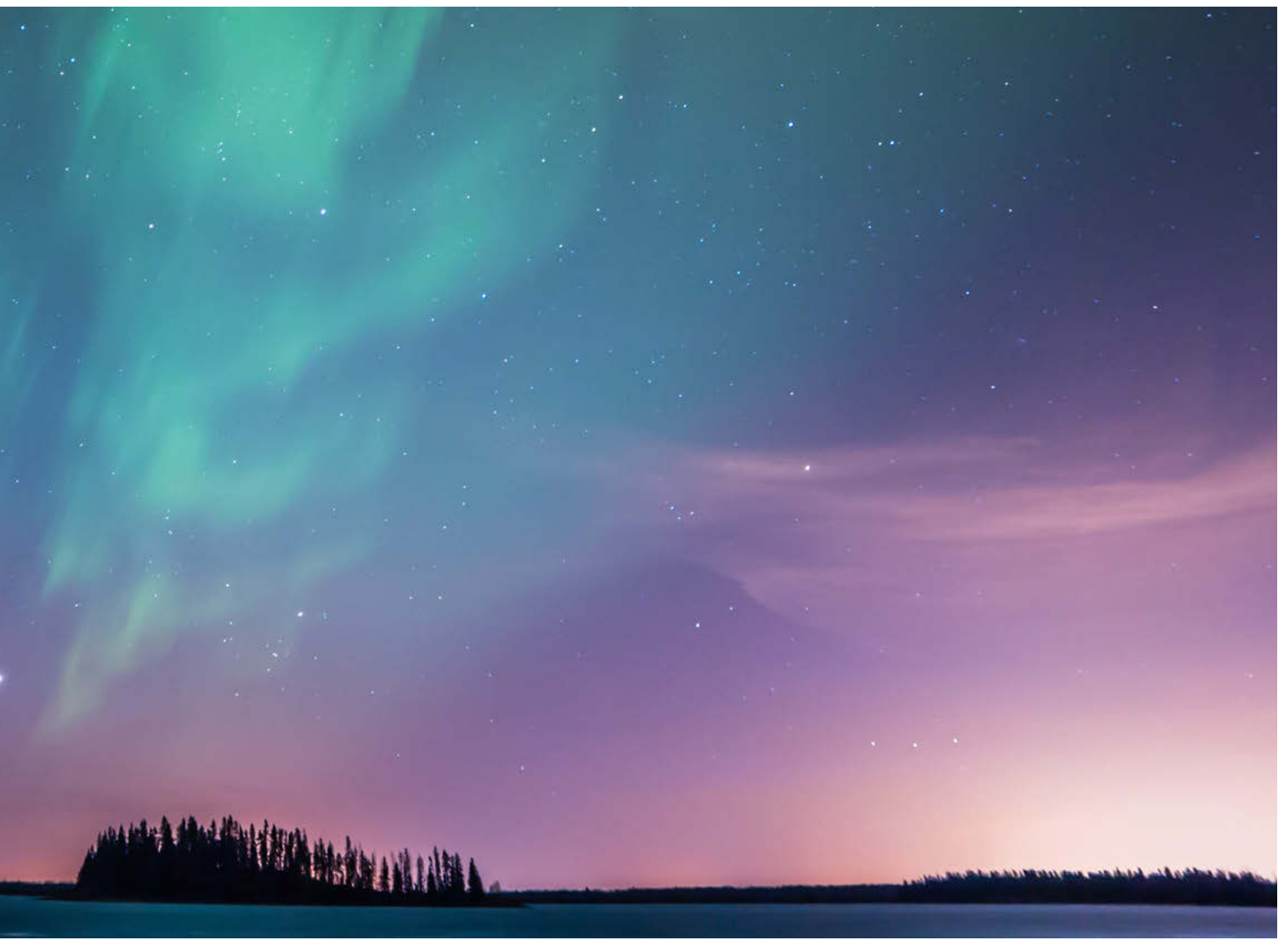
When they get to about Year 9, children begin asking difficult, big-picture questions. Does God really exist? How do we know

if something is really true? Did the Big Bang actually happen or has the universe always existed? Why did the dinosaurs become extinct? What do all the Bible verses we learn have to do with the big picture, so dominated as it is by science? Are science and Christianity compatible or incompatible? So, how might a Christian parent respond?

As a practicing physicist and a Christian parent I might offer a few ideas that could help. Science in general, and physics in particular, have philosophical and historical roots buried deep in the Christian faith. Christianity provided the world with the philosophical and psychological outlook necessary for science to be born as a self-sustaining enterprise, based on rational thought and experimentation, where one discovery leads to the next.

In their daily work, scientists make a series of philosophical assumptions that everyone takes for granted: the physical world is real. What we perceive with our senses is real and trustworthy. It is rational, and can be described with numbers and maths. We can use our rationality to understand how the physical world works.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament testify to these assumptions. For example, God being the master of creation and His faithfulness to His people are expressed in Psalms 19, 89, 104, and 136. Several passages in Jeremiah (for instance, 33: 23-



26) use the regularity of nature as witness to God's love, and a famous passage in famous passage in the intertestamental book 'Wisdom', found in the Aprocrypha, praises God, who "ordered all things by measure, number, and weight" (11:27). This is in sharp contrast to the world view of the Mediterranean at the time where nature was less than rational and subject to the will of the gods.

In New Testament times, Paul's and John's preaching the doctrine that Jesus Christ is co-creator with the Father was aimed at the Greeks and their pantheism: the belief that the universe is eternal and divine. The first chapter of John's gospel illustrates this. John refers to Jesus as the Word. In Greek, the word Logos was used. In ancient Greece the Logos was the rationality of the universe: a divine but impersonal thing. The physical world as we see it was begotten from the divine through the Logos. But if nature is divine and essentially has a will of its own, trying to understand it, let alone apply that knowledge, at the end of the day is wasted effort.

In contrast, John's gospel and Paul's epistles state that the real Logos is Jesus, a man with flesh and blood, who is also God. Jesus is the only begotten Son of the Father, and with the Father through the Holy Spirit, He created the physical world. Thus the universe is not divine but is created. According to the physicist and historian of science S.L. Jaki, the Christian doctrine of Christ

"dethroned the cosmos" and saved the discovery of science at the same time, because mere mortals have a better chance of success in understanding a finite, created, and orderly universe than they do with a divine, animal-like one.

So the next time a child asks a big question, such as how is the Bible related to science and technology, a parent might reply that in the beginning, God created the physical universe from nothing, and saw that it was good—that is rational, consistent, and ordered by measure, number, and weight. Thanks to this ordering of nature and the confidence we have in it as taught by Scripture, we have been able to send astronauts to the moon, and, perhaps unfortunately, put mobile phones in our kids' pockets on which they play far too many games.

This is a much shortened version of a six-part series, "History of Science: Faith and Reason and Father Stanley Jaki", published in *News Weekly*. www.newsweekly.com.au

John has undergraduate qualifications in physics and philosophy from the University of Michigan in the USA, and a PhD in physics from Monash University. His five children (ages 25, 22, 19, 18, and 15) are students and graduates of Covenant College in Geelong.

