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A Short History of Christianity and Science

Four free lectures sponsored by the Pennsylvania Chautauqua and the
Central Pennsylvania Forum for Religion and Science

Featured speaker: Dr. Edward B. Davis, Distinguished Professor of the History of Science, Messiah College



Many Americans assume that science and Christianity are engaged a war of ideas—a war lasting thousands of years that science is winning. Modern historical scholarship has shown that this is actually a highly misleading “myth.” In these lectures, profusely illustrated with slides, Dr. Davis explains the origin of the myth and provides some specific examples of a more accurate, up-to-date history of science and Christianity.

Thursday, July 1, 2010. Why History Matters. The myth of an ongoing, inevitable conflict between science and Christianity remains prevalent, despite the fact that historical scholarship has thoroughly discredited it. In this lecture, Dr. Davis shows how and why this myth arose in the United States after the Civil War. He also explains the criticisms of modern historians, closing with a famous example: the false story of Columbus and the flat earth, which Washington Irving invented as anti-Catholic propaganda.

Thursday, July 8, 2010. The Galileo Affair: What Really Happened. In 1633, the Italian mathematician and astronomer Galileo Galilei was tried for heresy by the Roman Inquisition.

No event in the history of science is more famous than this. The Galileo affair is typically offered as the premier example of “warfare” between science and Christianity; some people erroneously believe that Galileo was tortured, imprisoned, or even put to death for claiming that the Earth moves around the Sun. In this lecture, Dr. Davis reviews Galileo’s scientific discoveries, places them in the cultural and political context of Renaissance Italy, and shows that personalities and politics were perhaps the most important factors leading to this famous trial.

Thursday, July 15, 2010. Robert Boyle’s Religious Life, Attitudes, and Vocation. One of the most important features of the “Scientific Revolution” of the 17th Century was the creation of the modern scientific method. The great English chemist Robert Boyle had a major role in this. Nature can be understood best, he argued, by studying the God-given properties of matter in the laboratory. In this lecture, Dr. Davis focuses on Boyle’s religious life and attitudes, explaining how and why he chose to make science his Christian vocation.

Thursday, July 22, 2010. Religion and Science in Modern America. For much of the past century, Americans have disagreed with one another about evolution: Is it true? If so, what are the religious implications? Does modern science mean that God does not exist? Does evolution lead to immorality and unbelief? To explore questions such as these, Dr. Davis goes back to the time of William Jennings Bryan and the *Scopes* trial, using cartoons in religious magazines from the 1920s to explain why many American Christians have opposed the teaching of evolution in public schools. He then comments on the ideas of some leading Christian scientists from our own day—biologist Francis Collins, astronomer Owen Gingerich, and physicist John Polkinghorne—in order to see whether anything has changed since Bryan's day.

Each lecture begins at 10:00 am and lasts about 90 minutes, including time for questions and answers. A free-will offering will be collected at each lecture. Location: Chautauqua Hall of Philosophy, Mt Gretna, PA.

Dr. Edward ("Ted") Davis is Distinguished Professor of the History of Science at Messiah College. With the English historian Michael Hunter, he edited a complete, 14-volume edition of *The Works of Robert Boyle*. He has also written dozens of articles about important aspects of the history of Christianity and science for academic journals and popular magazines, including an essay on modern Jonah stories has been featured on two radio programs from the British Broadcasting Company. In his spare time, he enjoys cycling, films, and baseball.

The Central Pennsylvania Forum for Religion and Science is based at Messiah College. For details about all Forum events, please visit <http://www.messiah.edu/godandscience/> or contact Dr. Ted Davis (tdavis@messiah.edu), 717-766-2511, ext 6840.