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## **Science or Religion**

Ever since the dawn of the Enlightenment era, Western societies – particularly those in Europe and America – have made the quest for and the teaching of knowledge the central focus of their life philosophy. Science, teaching and research are the cornerstones of modern industrial nations, while rational insight and the belief in the primacy of (technical) progress represent the core elements of Western cultures. The proliferation of knowledge has assumed breath-taking dimensions, access to education is the best possible guarantee of an individual's success in life, and the complexity of modern understanding and knowledge fundamentals is apparent in the almost infinite availability of data and facts. For individuals, however, it is becoming more and more difficult to make proper sense of all this data and select from it the information they need, to see the data in a wider context and make correct use of it.

For many people, this flood of knowledge often appears to be accompanied by an increasing loss of values in our modern societies. Is the classic family form at risk of extinction? Has social alienation already become the rule rather than the exception? The loss of moral parameters in today's predominantly material-oriented society and the lack of spiritual focus and faith have for some years now increasingly dominated the public debate. Apparently contradictory trends (for example, membership of Christian churches is declining yet the number of believers and those seeking a faith is increasing) highlight the need to pursue a new dialog that reflects people's desire for spirituality and scientific knowledge – above and beyond the traditional boundaries of science and religious belief.

The belief in scientific progress as the sole universal remedy in a world full of seemingly unsolvable problems of global proportions would appear to be losing ground just as quickly as the desire is growing for simple, understandable standards and values. In the USA, this discussion has long since found its way into the sphere of education. In some US states, creationism and intelligent design are officially put on a par with the scientific theory of evolution, not least as the result of a widespread (and growing) public belief that the story of creation as described in the Bible is correct (and therefore inimitable). Should the Bible's account of creation be taught in biology classes, as is now also being debated in Germany? Does this mean that Western societies are now backtracking to a time before the Enlightenment? Are science and religious faith compatible in our society, or does increasing knowledge and progress mean that they are mutually exclusive? Can science be a substitute for religious values and norms? Who decides whether the theory of evolution or the story of creation is 'correct', and who in our society will dictate the contents of teaching and research in future? And how do the Western (Christian) and knowledge-based societies react to the growing cultural and religious diversity of their populations and the resulting changed needs for values and beliefs?