

Has science made Christianity obsolete?

Conflict

□ Our society loves conflict, the movie industry demonstrates this. Our courts embrace the adversarial system of justice and even couples feel that surviving their first row is a milestone. So when science and Christian theology are presented to us as mortal enemies that are in an eternal conflict it seems plausible. However, it isn't really accurate to paint that picture, in fact historically the Christian church has been a sponsor of science and many of the great names in science would also describe themselves as theologians.

Great names

□ Isaac Newton, Johannes Kepler, Blaise Pascal, Galileo Galilei, Francis Bacon, Gottfried Leibnitz, Antoine Lavoisier, Joseph Priestley, Anton Ampere, Michael Faraday, Charles Babbage, Joseph Lister, Louis Pasteur, Lord Kelvin, Werner Heisenberg, Werner von Braun, and Tim Berners-Lee just to name a few! (I figured that you didn't want to hear me calling out names for the whole half an hour!)

The fact that the Christian church was responsible for wide access to education gives you a clue – that Christians are lovers of truth and lovers of creation, so are always open to science as it develops.

Physicist Prof. Tom McLeish, now based at the University of York, is working to restore the strained links between science and theology, because like so many he sees no conflict between his scientific work and his personal faith.

The real conflict is between those whose faith is in God and those whose faith doesn't allow for a deity – it is a conflict of faiths rather than a conflict about science.

The Bible

□ The Bible, the sacred writings of the Christian faith is not now, nor ever has it ever been a science book, it is work of theology. Isaac Newton who referred to himself as a theologian knew this and theologians today know this too. We are in error when we try to argue about science from a theological text. The Bible gives us insight into God and also into the human condition, our relationship with Him.

Science can no more disprove the existence of God than it can prove it. (a position that is accepted by the widest range of scientists and theologians together). God is spirit, whereas science is primarily about the physical realm.

Before & After

□ I started out as a physics student here at York University, but the degree on my business card is a Masters degree in Theology – why the change? Because as much as I loved science and still do, it wasn't answering the questions that I was asking. □ I found that true Christianity wasn't a religion, but a relationship and it was something that had a huge positive impact on my life. Christianity is a life changing and exciting pilgrimage through life,

not just a Sunday visit to a cold building with hard pews and liturgy that is harder to follow than theoretical physics. I didn't need a list of do's and don'ts in my life – but I did need to get to know God.

Obsolescence?

Science answers many fundamental questions and can tell us almost everything about our bodies, our physicality, but it cannot answer the basic questions about the unseen. This may influence you to assume that there is therefore nothing that is unseen. Because of this unseen nature of the spiritual realm, I can no more prove the presence of God to you than a scientist can disprove it. Science is a system of knowledge about the world and its behaviour, whereas religion is about morality, God, and the afterlife. Thus, Christianity and science cannot conflict, because they are addressing different sorts of questions. People have a perfect right to not believe in God or believe in some other deity, but in an age in which Christianity is growing on every continent in the world to at least 2.3 billion people out of 7.6 billion (30%), interest in other deities/religions is growing too.

Christianity hit bottom in the UK around 1980 and although the old established traditional churches are largely still in decline, more contemporary shades of Christianity –
□ Pentecostals like Elim, the Apostolics or Redeemed Church of God, and □ New Church groups like Ground Level, Pioneer, Ichthus, New Frontiers, New Community, Vineyard, Covenant Ministries and Salt & Light, are showing growth. The number of Christians has been growing in the UK since the mid 80's so you can hardly support the idea that science is killing Christianity off. Another growth area is being "spiritual" and this covers all sorts of imported religions from the eastern world as well as devised ones from the west.

Spirituality

□ People who might in another generation have gone along to the state church in an effort to satisfy their spiritual hunger are now looking into meditation, crystals, reiki, Buddhism, scientology, and the seemingly endless list.

Science hasn't made Christianity obsolete – it has made people question it, which is not always a bad thing, but some people have had their faith shaken and moved on to other belief systems. Some have become so passionate about their unbelief in God, that has become their religion, and many of those people have become an embarrassment to the agnostic majority.

Science and Christianity are providing answers to very different questions. □ Modern-day theoretical physicist and theologian, John Polkinghorne, says there is more than one answer to the question of "Why is the water boiling in the kettle?" The scientific answer might be "the water is boiling because at this temperature it undergoes a phase transition from liquid to vapour." Another acceptable, though non-scientific, answer is "the water is boiling because I put the kettle on." A third answer might be "the water is boiling because my friend is coming over for tea." None of the answers is wrong; rather, each gives a different perspective on the question. The scientific answer does not tell the whole story. Science cannot answer questions like "Is my friend trustworthy?" or "Is this poem well written?"

Science is tremendously successful in understanding the physical world, but we should not let that tempt us to think it can be used to understand everything in life.

Big Bang Theory

The significant problem that many people (Christian and non-Christian) have wrestled with is that of first things – creation. □ Science tells us lots about a big bang and processes that may have led to life and evolution being the driving force that brought mankind to the level of intelligence that we can debate these matters today. As a Christian I don't particularly argue this point, but I do believe that the Bible correctly tells me that God was behind the whole thing. I choose to believe that God is my creator and I thank him for that. When the bible says "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" – was this a big bang? Was a bit of evolution involved along the way? Maybe so, but I choose to believe that my Father is my creator, the God I walk with day by day, the God I talk to each day and who talks back to me.

Wind

I cannot scientifically prove to you that I have a relationship with God through Jesus and that the Holy Spirit lives within me, long term observations may suggest that there is something about me that is inexplicable, but no one can prove the contrary – because I know Him! □ The original Greek Bible talks about Spirit with the same word that it uses for breath and for wind, in fact in one place it tells us that just like you can't see the wind you can't see spirit either – but you can sometimes see evidence that they have both been there!

As Christians we need to be open to science and all the interest it can bring into our lives if we allow it, but I would suggest that we all need to be open to Christianity because a life spent with Jesus is a fulfilling life. The Bible describes God as Spirit – something which is by definition immeasurable. To decry something that you cannot disprove is bigotry of the highest order and in a day in which we are all very conscious of the protected status of some human characteristics, we ought to remember that our faith is one of those.

Perhaps being a voice in the public arena that stands against bigotry might be a starting point where scientists and Christians might meet?

Thirst

□ What we cannot deny is that with all the education and exposure to science that we experience, people are still thirsting for some spiritual experience – the unscientific and immeasurable – with all our civilisation the truth is that the demand for spirituality is growing and with it the demand for Christianity.

□ Why does science have to fear from Christianity? Only the fear of the unknown...

What does Christianity have to fear from science? The same....

If the real difference between Christianity and Science is as simple as whether God is man-made or man is God made then the answer you choose will always be one of faith – your

belief in science alone or in God alone – but there is surely room for science and Christianity in all of our lives?

Boring

□ If there is a problem in our educated western world it is a lack of understanding. Everyone should be taught maths and science at school, but also we should educate everyone in what Christianity actually is. One problem in schools is that the standard of science teaching doesn't always hit the mark, the other major problem is a block in our children's minds that science is boring.

One problem in our society is that those who teach Christianity themselves are not always brilliant at the job, may not always be believers themselves and the hearers also have a block that what they are about to hear will also be boring!

The scientific method

□ To a degree I cannot hope to fully persuade you about the value of Christianity in 30 minutes, but most Christians have employed a specific method – the Christian method when approaching God for the first time. Why not try praying? Lots of people can testify to the power of it. Why not give it a try.

Will you pray with me now?

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