

C H R I S T I A N I T Y and A T H E I S M

3. Science vs. Faith

Introduction

Carl Sagan's "Cosmos" was one of the highest-rated public television documentaries. In this program he taught one of the most important doctrines of what might be called the "religion of science." Sagan said, "The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be." He believed that science was the next step in the process of human evolution. It would replace most, if not all, of religion's role in

society.

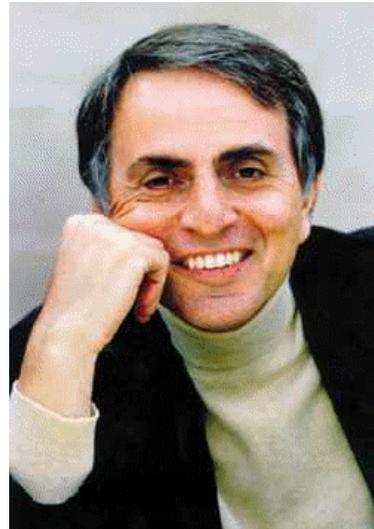
Sir Richard Gregory (1864-1952), said it this way:

My grandfather preached the gospel of Christ;

My father preached the gospel of socialism;

I preach the gospel of science. (The Twilight of Atheism, p. 78)

Today Christians are constantly challenged either to abandon their faith in God, miracles and the truths or the Bible... or at the very least... to conform their faith to the dictates of scientific truth. (For an interesting review of Sagan's *Cosmos*, see <http://www.detwiler.us/sagan.html>)



The Development of This Issue

1. The “War” Between Faith and Science – Today people are often told that Christianity has always stood in the way of science. Copernicus and Galileo are cited as examples. There have been skirmishes of all kinds in the ongoing pursuit of truth. But to say that Christianity deliberately opposes science is a blatant falsehood. Behind the so-called “war” are all sorts of other agendas as the following example shows...



Andrew Dickson White, founder of Cornell University, manufactured the “war” between faith and science to avenge the clergy who opposed the establishment of a new university. In his book, *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896), he claimed that Samuel Wilberforce ridiculed Charles Darwin asking whether it was “through his grandfather or grandmother that he claimed his descent from a monkey?” But a close examination of the reports from that 1860 meeting of the British Association

reflect no such question being asked. The question appears to be an urban legend that can only be traced back to the 1890s. (See *The Twilight of Atheism*, p. 81ff)

2. Advances in Science Have Eliminated the Need for Faith in the Supernatural – There is no doubt that scientific progress has been amazing. One after another mysteries of the universe have been explained by scientific inquiry. But does that mean we are approaching a point at which we will understand all the mysteries of the universe?

In 1925 mathematician Bertrand Russell wrote, “Physical science is thus approaching the stage when it will be

complete, and therefore uninteresting” (*Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays...* p. 49).



Such confidence in the power of the scientific method to answer all questions and to solve all problems seems to tempt many people to abandon their trust in God.

Logical Response to the Problem of Science vs. Faith

1. Christianity and the Birth of Science – Today many people forget that Christianity gave birth to modern science. The Christian worldview made a sharp distinction between the Creator and the creation. The material world was not divine and could be studied and understood. The Christian worldview also stressed the relationship between cause and effect – a relationship that is not stressed in the cyclical worldviews of the East.

Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) said that Christianity is the mother of science because “of the medieval insistence on the rationality of God.” Because of the presupposition that God is truth scientists could pursue the study of the creation with the assumption that they would discover truth.

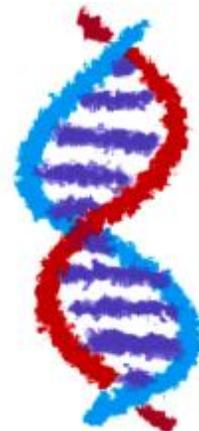


“If you take any introductory undergraduate textbook in physics, chemistry, biology, genetics, physiology, paleontology, etc., it is not hard to point to the knowledge that is indebted to the work of these Christian scientists from Europe. But you would find very little that is indebted to Greek, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist philosophers (aside from tools like

mathematics and Arabic numerals).” (For more on this topic see, *Christianity and the Birth of Science* by Dr. Michael Bumbilus at <http://www.Idolphin.org/bumbilis/>)

2. Science Is “Thinking God’s Thoughts” The great astronomer Johannes Kepler humbly admitted that he was simply “thinking God’s thoughts after Him.” While some might think advances in science eliminate the need for God, others would say it actually proves the existence of God.

Who would disagree with this statement: “The more we know, the more we don’t know”? Did the discovery of DNA bring us closer to the end of biological discovery? Or was it just the beginning of more and more discoveries?



This observation shows that we are not living in a finite universe containing a limited amount of knowledge. We are not closing in on a limited body of knowledge about our universe. Rather, it appears that the design of the universe is based on an unlimited amount of knowledge. Unlimited knowledge points us to the reality of God who is unlimited in His knowledge and creative power.

Biblical Response to the Problem of Science vs. Faith

Genesis 11.1-9 The Tower of Babel – In this account mankind is warned that it is wrong for man to use the gifts of science and technology to glorify himself.

Psalms 19 – This psalm is divided into two parts. In the first man looks to the creation and *should* see that it glorifies God who created it. In the second part man looks to the teaching of God (Torah / law) and *should* see the need for the forgiveness of sin.

Romans 1.18-25 – St. Paul argues that observation of the creation should lead to the fear of God. Instead man chooses to suppress this truth which results in unrighteousness.

People have said that the Bible is not a science book. This is true. God did not reveal to us what we are capable of figuring out on our own. God gave man a mind and the ability to pursue the knowledge that He has placed in this universe. The Bible shows what man, blinded by sin cannot see or understand. The Bible shows us our salvation in Jesus. Faith and science should not be in opposition to each other. Rather, science is a tool that God gives us to see His glory and use in helpful ways to promote the welfare of our neighbor.

Francis Bacon, who formulated the scientific method, described the relationship between faith and science in this way...

There are two books laid before us to study, to prevent our falling into error; first, the volume of the Scriptures, which reveal the will of God; then the volume of the Creatures, which express His power.



Let no man upon a weak conceit of sobriety or an ill-applied moderation think or maintain, that a man can search too far, or be

too well studied in the Book of God's Word, or in the Book of God's Works - Divinity or Philosophy. But rather, let men endeavor an endless progress or proficiency in both.