

Science and Faith

APOLOGETICS

A Balanced Outlook

How should a Christian approach science? Is science something a Christian should be uncomfortable with? Is it a threat against his or her faith? What are the boundaries of science and religion? Do I use my Bible to prove science? Do I use science to prove the Bible? Do Orthodox Christians agree with the concept of blind faith? Did the Early Church live a blind Christianity?

Because of the rapid advances in science and technology during the last few centuries, some people have become convinced that science is the answer to everything. There are also other individuals that hold the belief that people of faith have no need for science. God is the only resource needed and the Bible the only knowledge one needs to study. Most people would fall somewhere in the middle of these two opinions. Science and religion are two distinct things. They are not at odds with one another, they can only complement and clarify one another. It is crucial for Christians to approach science with a balanced perspective, acknowledging both its strengths and limitations. While science has made significant contributions to our understanding of the natural world, it is essential to recognize that it operates within specific boundaries. Science deals with the realm of the physical and observable, utilizing empirical evidence and logical reasoning to formulate theories and explanations. However, there are aspects of existence that transcend the scope of scientific inquiry. The boundaries between science and religion become evident when we consider questions that extend beyond the realm of empirical evidence. For example, science cannot answer questions related to the existence of God, the nature of the soul, or the ultimate meaning of life. These questions fall within the realm of faith and religious belief.

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According to the Bible, human beings are created in God’s image, which includes a capacity for curiosity, reasoning, and learning, among other things. When King Solomon asked God for wisdom, God was pleased and granted him understanding of trees and animals—the natural world—among other things. The Bible places great value in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding: “Happy is the man who finds wisdom, And the man who gains understanding; For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, And her gain than fine gold.” (Proverbs 3:13-14). The early church fathers are well known for their intellectual pursuits, engaging in philosophical discussions and apologetics to defend and explain their faith. They sought to integrate their religious beliefs with the intellectual and cultural currents of their time.

Science and its limitations

Science is supposed to be concerned with objective facts and observations. In science, we measure things, we observe things, and we speculate about things. We speculate about matter, its properties, and its behaviors. We are concerned with how things work in science. More specifically, we are focused on physical things that are observable in the natural world – either by the naked eye, or through tools that we develop to measure those things.

Science answers what is the universe, what is a human being made of, how did the universe come to be, etc. So science answers the what and how but has no authority on the who and why.

Science is a powerful tool for understanding and explaining the mechanisms and dynamics of the physical universe. But science cannot examine or explain the purpose of the universe. That is a question that falls under theology. The scientific method applies ONLY to the physical universe that we can observe with our senses.

Science is one of God's greatest gifts to humanity. He gave us the tools and the mechanisms to create and repair. He has given us a mind to comprehend the order of the universe that He designed, and it testifies of His own characteristics and Person. This can help us enormously in our spiritual lives and in our Theology.

Science, however, has its limitations. Scientists can only study phenomena that can be observed, measured, and tested. This means that science cannot investigate matters that are beyond the reach of our senses or that cannot be quantified. For example, science cannot tell us whether there is life after death or whether God exists. It cannot answer the question "Does God exist?" Science studies the natural world, not the supernatural. No amount of scientific testing or theorizing could prove or disprove the existence of a supernatural creator. The claim that "God exists" is a metaphysical one, not a claim about nature or physical laws.

Another limitation of science is that it is always evolving. Our understanding of the natural world is constantly changing as new discoveries are made. This means that scientific theories are always subject to revision. For example, the theory of evolution has been modified over time as new evidence has emerged.

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As Orthodox Christians, we should not be afraid of science. Science can help us to understand the natural world and appreciate the wonders of God's creation. However, we should also be aware of its limitations. We should not expect science to answer all questions or to provide us with a complete understanding of reality. Instead, we should see science as a tool that can help us to explore the natural world and to learn more about God's creation while being open to the possibility that there are some things that science cannot explain. These things may belong to the realm of faith and God. By understanding the limitations of science, we can avoid being misled

by its claims and can appreciate the value of other means of knowledge, such as faith and revelation of God.

How Religion relates to Science

Religion is supposed to be concerned with belief about why things are, why they came to be, what kind of meaning does a thing have. In other words, in religion we might look at the same material that a scientist looks at, but instead of trying to answer what it is, we use religion to ask why it is. It is a different set of questions than what the scientists ask.

The Bible is not intended to explain science. It is the word of God spoken by His Holy Spirit to His servants. Not only that, but it is the truth; Jesus said: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17). Additionally, the word of God is revealed to all people, from all ages and until eternity; Jesus again says: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." (Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33).

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The Bible is not intended to be a scientific or historical text. It does not aim to provide comprehensive explanations of the creation of the world or specific historical events. Instead, the Bible serves as a narrative that focuses on the relationship between God and humanity throughout history. This aspect is of great significance, as it presents a unique perspective that differs from purely scientific or historical accounts. Rather than attempting to provide detailed explanations, the Bible offers a simple and profound statement: "In the beginning, He made it."

Scripture tells us that there is a reality beyond this universe. This reality has not been observed by science but that does not mean it is any less real. It takes faith to interact with it. While the Bible is not a science book, whenever it makes a statement relating to a scientific principle or fact, it is completely accurate. Many archaeologists have explored the land of Palestine. Has any one of those scientists ever discovered anything which disproves the Bible? No. Many archaeological discoveries have confirmed the Biblical record. However, none has ever contradicted the Word of God. The Bible never claims to be a science textbook. Nevertheless, the Bible claims to be "true from the beginning" (Psalm 119:160), so every specific reference about science must be accurate.

Atheist Scientists Who Believed Because of Science

Alister McGrath was a professor of science and religion at Oxford University. He was a biophysicist and theologian. He became an atheist in his mid-teens and was drawn toward Marxism. But encounters with what he calls 'articulate Christians' at university began to weaken his stance. Reflecting on his time as an undergraduate at Wadham, McGrath has written, "I was discovering that Christianity was far more intellectually robust than I had ever imagined. I had some major rethinking to do, and by the end of November [1971], my decision was made: I turned my back on one faith and embraced another."

He passionately believes science and Christianity complement rather than conflict with each other. He was a leading scientist and a strong believer that Christianity and science are compatible.

He says, “If you believe that God made the world, you can get additional insights into God by studying nature. Science can’t answer the big questions such as “Why are we here?” or “What’s life all about?” Science is neutral. It does not presuppose or imply atheism. Darwin’s theory of evolution is not by definition atheistic. Some people just interpret it that way. Science does not in principle exclude God. Science simply says we are not going to bring God into things.’ He also says, “‘There is more to life than the physical world and God urges us to find it,’ he says.

John Lennox is professor of mathematics at Oxford University. He has written many books on religion, ethics, the relationship between science and faith like *Has Science Buried God* and *Can Science Explain Everything*, and has had public debates with atheists including Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens.

Professor Lennox argues that all science is deeply dependent on an act of faith, that is, a firm belief in the fundamental intelligibility of the universe. From an atheistic perspective, there is little reason to say why human reason, derived from brains that are the end-product of mindless evolutionary forces, should be a trustworthy tool for understanding reality.

Lennox addresses the conjecture that science depends on reason, but Christianity doesn’t. As he puts it: “God is not anti-reason. He gives us the highest-level encouragement possible to use our minds; and not only to use them to think about him but to think about the natural world we live in.”

Lennox believes that the Bible repeatedly upholds the importance of rational thinking, not least when Jesus states that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Reasonable Faith vs. Blind Faith

Our Christian faith is not blind. When Christ told St. Thomas “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,” He meant that it is fitting to have faith. And those that have faith will be blessed. But faith is not the same as blind faith.

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“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” St. Paul says. And “hope that is seen is not hope.” In other words, you cannot have faith or hope in something you see. So faith and hope imply not seeing what you hope for. But since you are born in the image of God, He gave you a mind to think. Faith therefore uses this mind to hope for the spiritual things that are not seen; however, blind faith cancels the mind God has given you. Blind faith means believing although what you perceive doesn’t make sense. Blind faith abandons the pursuit of truth—ultimately the pursuit of God Himself.”

When we look at how the early Church Fathers lived Christianity, we can clearly see that they did not adopt the concept of blind faith. On the contrary, they were extraordinary systematic theologians, and they didn’t shy away from embracing philosophy and science and they were able to fit all the pieces of the puzzle together when they perceived philosophy and science from a Christian lens. For example, did you know that St. Justin

Martyr, who was born a pagan in the year 100 AD, did not remove his philosopher's cloak after baptism. Actually, he believed that it was only after his baptism that he was worthy to wear it, now that he has found the Truth in Christ.

Similarly, St. Clement of Alexandria, born to a pagan family around the year 150 AD, esteemed philosophy very much, although he understood its limits. Being the disciple of his great master St. Pantaenus, who was a convert to Christianity from the Stoic school of philosophy, St. Clement essentially believed that philosophy guided people to the truth of God. In his work *Stromata*, Book 1, chapter 5, he says: "Accordingly, before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it becomes conducive to piety; being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith through demonstration...For God is the cause of all good things; but of some primarily, as of the Old and the New Testament; and of others by consequence, as philosophy. Perchance, too, philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily, till the Lord should call the Greeks. For this was a schoolmaster to bring 'the Hellenic mind,' as the law, the Hebrews, 'to Christ.' Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ."

St. Basil also, in his *hexameron*, a detailed work on the six days of creation, uses the science of his time as a means to demonstrate the truth and beauty of God and how a Christian ought to live. He was a master rhetorician and his sermons led many to repentance.

"As for the question of precisely how any single thing came into existence, we must banish it altogether from our discussion. Even in the case of things which are quite within the grasp of our understanding and of which we have sensible perception, it would be impossible for the speculative reason to grasp the "how" of the production of the phenomenon, so much so that even inspired and saintly men have deemed such questions insoluble. For instance, the apostle says, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen are not made of things which do appear."⁷ ... Let us, following the example of the apostle, leave the question of the "how" in each created thing without meddling with it at all but merely observing incidentally that the movement of God's will becomes at any moment that he pleases a fact, and the intention becomes at once realized in nature." – St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*.



Review Questions

1. True or false? The Bible is a scientific book. (A: False)
2. True or false? Our Christian faith is not blind. (A: True)
3. True or false? Christian should be uncomfortable with science. (A: False)
4. True or false? Science is supposed to be concerned with objective facts and observations. (A: True)
5. Name a scientist who was atheist and became a believer. (A: Alister McGrath.)

6. A balanced outlook on science and faith might include:
 - a. **acknowledging that there are things that science cannot explain.**
 - b. accepting that science is the only way to understand the world.
 - c. believing that science and religion are incompatible.
 - d. All of the above
7. Which of the following is not a limitation of science?
 - a. Science cannot answer questions about the meaning of life.
 - b. Science cannot tell us what we ought to do.
 - c. **Science cannot be used to predict the future with certainty.**
 - d. Science cannot be used to prove or disprove the existence of God.
8. A balanced view of science acknowledges that:
 - a. Science is the only way to understand the world.
 - b. **Science has limitations, but it is still a great way to understand the world.**
 - c. Science and religion are incompatible.
 - d. Science is not as important as religion.
9. Which of the following is a good definition of blind faith?
 - a. A belief that is held without evidence or proof
 - b. A belief that is based on emotion rather than reason
 - c. A belief that is accepted as true without question
 - d. All of the above
10. Faith is the ____ of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.
 - a. Belief
 - b. **Substance**
 - c. Evidence
 - d. D. All of the above



Books & References

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