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### I-Search: Are Religion and Science Compatible?

Throughout my life, I distanced myself from debates as I wanted nothing to do with them. This would all change with the pursuit of a higher education. In college, people from all walks of life converge to form a diverse environment. These individuals all have their own backgrounds, beliefs, and goals. This diversity of ideals often clash on the college campus among friends, classmates, and everyday strangers. The two most prominent themes on campus were gay marriages and religion versus science. The latter would become the subject of my search.

I never thought that I would become involved in the conversation until two good friends of mine began a discussion about their beliefs on the subject of religion. The conversation began while the three of us were having a midnight snack in the student café. John argued that science was disproving religion because only one could be the truth while Sam argued that science and religion were two different things that occupied separate niches in life. Both were agnostics. I was the third man that simply listened to the two of them argue. Silently, I analyzed their arguments and compared them with my belief that science and religion were in fact compatible. As the night went on, I slowly began to realize that I needed to find out specifically why I believe that Christianity and science are compatible.

I grew up in a Christian family where practicality and knowledge were taught to me by my parents. From my upbringing, I knew the basics behind the Christian religion. I also grew up with a great interest in science. I know that in today's society, many people believe that science and Christianity are at odds. I assume that they are not; in fact, I assume that they are compatible. I know that the conflict between the two revolve around the Bible, and the faith that believers place in God. I know there are people who despise the word "faith", as it seems blind and foolish to them. I know that people attempt to refute the literal meanings in the religious text by citing science and reason. I imagine that Christianity and science are more than compatible. They justify each other.

I began my search during the first English 100 class's library orientation. There, I began my research. I used the EBSCO databases provided by Palomar College. During that session, I dedicated half of the time to researching articles on the Religion and Philosophy section of the EBSCO database. Typing in "Christianity and Science" into the database search engine, I came across many articles widely supporting the compatibility of Christianity and science. I expected this as I had searched in the religion and philosophy section of the EBSCO database. I chose two articles from this search. The two articles were then analyzed and evaluated for value and relevancy.

The first article I thought contributed to my search was an article called "The gift of Science" by David Livingstone. According to Queen's University, Belfast, David Livingstone is a professor of Geography and Intellectual History and has interests in the "historical geography of science and religion" (Queen's University, Belfast). When I was searching for this article, I had the urge to search for the answer to my first question.

What caused science and Christianity to conflict or at least seem to conflict? Livingstone answered this question by presenting two underlying causes of the split between religion and science: “the Enlightenment project and the professionalization of science in the nineteenth century” (Livingstone). Specifically, Livingstone attributed the Enlightenment to the “supreme confidence in the power of reason” and the professionalization of science to a seemingly “intellectual conflict between science and Christianity [that] was actually a social struggle between scientists and clergy for cultural domination” (Livingstone). I found his article reasonable. This information allowed me to move on in my search.

The second article from the religion and philosophy section of the EBSCO database was “Why Christianity Works: An Emotions-Focused Phenomenological Account” by Christian Smith, “the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Notre Dame” (University of Notre Dame). When searching for this article, I was trying to look for an answer to another question. How has Christianity endured the adversities of time? Smith first considers the sociological possibilities of “moral and emotional uncertainties” arising from transitioning governments and “mass migrations of Latin Americans” to attempt to explain the survival of the Christian religion (Smith 166). He concludes that “[c]hristianity possesses innate and powerful capacities to make life meaningful in immanent and ultimate terms” (Smith 167). Throughout the rest of his article, Smith analyzes each part of the Christian religion. I found that this analysis really explained why Christianity is so appealing. By knowing this information, I could turn my attention to answering my main question.

The rest of my EBSCO database search took place in the science and technology section. When I found the following Time magazine article, I thought I hit the jackpot. The article was “God vs. science” by David Van Biema, an American journalist. This article was basically a transcript of a debate between Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist against religion, and Francis Collins, a “[g]enome mapper...also an evangelical Christian” (Van Biema “Reconciling God and Science”). Collins and Dawkins both agreed that science and religion were not in separate boxes. Collins argued that “God is also outside time and space” and therefore could not be disproven (Van Biema “God vs. Science”). The sentence that I thought summed up Dawkins’s argument was: “[w]hat I can’t understand is why you invoke improbability and yet you will not admit that you’re shooting yourself in the foot by postulating something just as improbable, magicking into existence the word God” (Van Biema “God vs. Science”). I thought Collins presented his argument in a very calm tone. He was confident in what he said. The information in the debate was very intriguing. In contrast, I thought that Dawkins sounded angry in his choice of wordage and tone. The tone in their intelligent argument seemed to be more important than the information itself. This debate reminded me of the debate my friends had. Both their arguments and tone were very similar to that of Collins and Dawkins.

After reading this article, I wanted to find out more on Collins and Dawkins. For Collins, “[r]econciling his belief with his service to genetics proved easier for him than for many of his colleagues” (Van Biema “Reconciling God and Science”). This is rare especially “in a profession [where] only 8% of whose élite admit to believing in a God who answers prayer” (Van Biema “Reconciling God and Science”). In “Thank God for Richard Dawkins?” by Tom Kirkwood, Kirkwood, a professor of medicine, concludes

that Dawkins's advocacy of "[e]volutionary biology can tell us much about why life works but it cannot, of itself, address all the deeper questions about why the universe exists" (Kirkwood). Evolutionary biology presents a very strong argument against literal interpretations of the Christian scriptures. These lines of reasoning give a good indication of how science can be compatible with Christianity.

During the library orientation, I also came across a book called "Science and Christianity: Conflict or Coherence?" by Henry Schaefer III, a professor of chemistry and devout Christian. Schaefer presents an idea that science is not completely objective and Christianity is not completely subjective. What drove me to read this book was the popular argument that faith is blind and based on no objective evidence. Schaefer says "[Michael] Polanyi [a great physical chemist] points out that the observer is always there in the laboratory. He or she always makes conclusions. He or she is never neutral" (Schaefer 13). I felt that this line of reasoning was correct. I felt satisfied with that response. I also was curious. How many scientists were also Christian? Schaefer presented evidence that "[a] less exhaustive but more recent (*The Scientist*, May 19, 2003) survey finds 52% of biologists identifying themselves as Christians" (Schaefer 12). As I read this book, I thought to myself that the fifty two percent of biologists most likely all supported the theory of evolution. This led me to look up Christians who were opposed to the religious idea of Creationism. A major debate is the scientific idea of Evolution versus the literal interpretation of the Biblical book of Genesis, Creationism. I found a website hosted on the California State University, Northridge site. This was the site of Dr. Lorence G. Collins, professor of geology. He is concerned that "Christians may be worshipping the Bible rather than worshipping Christ" because of their literal

interpretations of the Bible. He concludes that “Christianity and science are not contradictory. Moreover, the Bible supports the scientist in his or her search for new knowledge (ask, seek, knock; Luke 11:9) and expects us to understand and use that knowledge” (Collins).

The final part of my search consisted with a personal interview. I went to Pomerado Hospital to visit some of my coworkers during my volunteering days. Coincidentally, I saw the same man that would come in on occasion to the hospital cafeteria. I had gotten to know to man. His name was Mike Riddens, a retired physics professor from Northeastern University. I simply thought to myself, why not interview him. So I asked for his approval. He asked that I would not give out his real name. So we agreed on the name “Mike Riddens”. I think this statement summed up his position and stand on science and Christianity. When asked what makes the two compatible, Riddens responded by saying “nobody knows whether or not a truth today will be a truth tomorrow” (Riddens). This interview finalized my search for the moment.

So what did I discover about Christianity and science? I realized that, despite popular belief that Christianity and science are at odds, they can actually be compatible. The statistic that surprised me the most was how approximately half of biologists identified themselves as Christians. The research revealed things about my own beliefs. Another surprising thing that I encountered was that the debate between two prominent scientists about Christianity and science reflected closely to the debate my friends had. It was like *déjà vu*.

My assumptions were fairly accurate. Throughout the search, I assumed that there would not be any scientific evidence supporting the compatibility of Christianity and

science. This proved true as there is just no real way to test spirituality objectively. I assumed that there was no such thing as complete objectivity. In my research, I found that this was true. Scientific experiments depend on human reason to interpret results and make conclusions. Religious texts require human reason to interpret the meanings. Through this search I was able to connect human reason to both science and Christianity. Human reason has its faults. These faults and limitations affect the way humans judge things. I believe that science and Christianity are compatible because they support one another. They both cover a complex field. I believe with time, the understanding of Christianity and science will be clearer and point to unity.

The only question left is what should be done next? I will continue studying science and my faith. This search has helped me revive my interest in the fields of science and Christianity. This search has taught me a lot about myself. This search has turned my doubts into confidence. I feel that now, I am one step closer to being qualified to speak on the topic.

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