

Are science and faith compatible?

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Our daily life is deeply influenced by science. We become aware of it when we take proper notice of such “common” things as good quality drinking water or a cellular telephone. But faith also has deep impact on our lives. Max Planck, the father of quantum theory and winner of the 1919 Nobel Prize in Physics, witnessed that “... since infancy unshaken faith in the Almighty and Merciful has had deep roots in me. Certainly His ways are not our ways; but our trust in Him helps us overcome the most difficult trials.”ⁱⁱ Impressionist painter Auguste Renoir also acknowledged the importance of faith. While commenting the workmanship of certain great painters, he said: “In the old masters' paintings lies a soft, calm confidence. It springs from unpretentious, simple behavior that wouldn't exist without religious faith as foundation. Modern man, however, banished God - and thus lost security.”

“Banishing God”, as Renoir put it, is one motivation to propagate a false conflict between faith and science. It is forcefully denounced by sociologist Rodney Stark, who demonstrates the inveracity and the strong ideological bias of assertions such as “religious faith is a primitive manifestation that disappears with the diffusion of science and technology”, “religion derives from illusions and neuroses” or “religion is, generically, an instrument of manipulation”ⁱⁱⁱ. Richard Feynman (1965 Nobel Prize in Physics), a non-Christian, agrees that “many scientists believe in science and God, the God of revelation, in a perfectly consistent way.”

In fact we may cite many scientists who consistently combine(d) Biblical faith and top scientific activity. Due to lack of space I will only cite three more.

André Marie Ampère, whose surname became the international unit of electric current, recommends: “Study the things of this world, it is your profession. But look at them with one eye; with the other gaze upon the light of eternity... Write only with one hand; with the other grasp God's garment as a child grasps the garment of the father.”

Louis Pasteur, the great French microbiologist of the 19th century, related the search for truth in science and faith. He stated: “I proclaim Jesus as son of God on behalf of science. My scientific spirit that highly values the relation between cause and effect compels me to recognize that, if He is not [the son of God], I wouldn't know who He is... His words are divine, His life is divine, and it was rightly said that moral equations exist as well as there exist mathematical equations.”

Arthur L. Schawlow (1981 Nobel Prize in Physics) said: “... I find a need for God in the universe and in my own life... We are fortunate to have the Bible, and especially the New Testament, which tells us so much about God in widely accessible human terms, even though it also leaves us some things that are hard to understand.”

In the New Testament, that tells us about God and His visible manifestation in Jesus Christ, the apostle Peter says: “When we told you about the power and the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, we were not telling clever stories that someone had made up. But with our own eyes we saw his true greatness.” This concern with the authenticity and the truth is common to all the texts in the Bible and makes its message so

compatible with the science practiced by scientists such as Ampere, Pasteur and Schawlow.

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- ii The citations in this text stem from a compilation by Dr. Wolf-Ekkehard Lönnig found at <http://www.weloennig.de/Nobelpreistraeger.pdf> (last access 6.11.2005), the book *Das Herz, etwas zu wagen*, Friedrich Bahn Verlag: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2000 (ISBN 3761593031), by Jörg Gutzwiller, a retired chaplain of the Swiss Parliament, and the book *Cosmos, Bios, Theos*, Open Court, 1992 (ISBN 0812691865), by Henry Margenau and Roy Varghese.
- iii Two articles by Rodney Stark and co-authors on this topic are: R. Stark - "False conflict," *The American Enterprise*, pp. 27 - 33, October / November 2003; R. Stark, L. R. Iannaccone, R. Fink - "Religion, science and rationality," *American Economic Review*, vol. 86, number 2, pp. 433-437, May 1996.