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**“Science: Christianity’s Long Lost Child”**

Such was the main result of this long war…The efforts of Eusebius, Basil, and Lactantius to deaden scientific thought; the efforts of Augustine to combat it; the efforts of Cosmas to crush it by dogmatism; the efforts of Boniface and Zachary to crush it by force, conscientious as they all were, had resulted simply in impressing upon many leading minds the conviction that science and religion are enemies.

* Andrew D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, Vol. 1: 109

My explanation is that the faith in the possibility of science, generated antecedently to the development of modern scientific theory, is an unconscious derivative from medieval theology.

* Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 13

Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind.

* Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, 46

**Introduction:**

Virtually every school- aged child has learned the story of Christopher Columbus and how in 1492, he proved that the earth was round against prevailing opinion. They also are generally told that Columbus endured years of opposition from the Roman Catholic Church who adamantly refused to believe that this planet was flat, a teaching that was firmly inscribed in the Holy Scriptures. Fortunately, the celebrated explorer defied the ecclesiastical authorities and an era was launched in which the anti-scientific dogmas of Christendom would be challenged and overthrown by objective, empirically-based investigation. Sadly, instead of embracing the scientific prowess of her “sons,” the Church demonized the likes of Copernicus, Vesalius, and the most well-known of the “persecuted,” Galileo. And did not Darwin put a final stake into the creation story of Genesis not to mention belief in a divine creator, altogether?

This is the story that we have grown accustomed to hearing. However, the above citations from Whitehead and Einstein suggest a very different story—and relationship between Christianity and science.

* Baylor sociologist, Rodney Stark contends that we may very well be experiencing:

a *return* to the traditional relationship between science and theology… [that] demonstrate that God is a necessary element in any comprehensive explanation of the universe…a long tradition, one that the Darwinian Crusade sought to terminate. It might even be legitimate to say that this renewed relationship is a return to “normal”…

(*For the Glory of God*, 1970).

**Thesis: Rather than being “mortal enemies,” the Historic Christian Faith and Modern Science are inseparably linked –historically and philosophically…and for the good of the “child,” need to be reconciled. In truth, Science is “Christianity’s Long Last Child.”**

1. **The Parent-Child Relationship: A Long Historical Narrative**

* **The history of the development of science undeniably took place in the**

**Christian West**…a narrative noted by Whitehead as well as persons like the distinguished historian of medieval science, Lynn White, who stated that “the [medieval] monk was an intellectual ancestor of the scientist”( “The Significance of Medieval Christianity,” in *The Vitality of the Christian Tradition*, 96).

* One can see the beginnings of modern science in the “Dark Ages” (a designation coined in the 19th century and now largely dismissed by historians). During this period of time, Europeans developed the horse collar, the horse shoe, and cannon to fire *explosive powder* –ammunition first devised by the Chinese but never applied to gunnery. Stark comments: “Christianity did not plunge Europe into an era of ignorance and backwardness. Rather, so much technical progress took place during this era that by no later than the thirteenth century, European technology surpassed anything to be found elsewhere in the world” (R. Stark*, For* *the Glory of God*, 33).
* A **“Who’s Who” of Early Scientists** reveals that the vast majority of these were persons of faith, many of whom were professional clergy.

1. Johannes Kepler (1571-1630)—wrote numerous scientific treatises; discovered elliptical movement of planets; developed/confirmed three astronomical laws; established heliocentric theory
2. Galileo (1564-1642)—first to use telescope to study the skies; saw lunar mountains, discovered Venus
3. William Harvey (1578-1657­)—discovered the circulation of blood
4. Robert Boyle (1627-91)—Boyle’s Law: volume of gas varies inversely with its pressure
5. Isaac Newton (1642-1727)—discovered the law of gravity; credited with inventing calculus independent of Leibniz (also a believer)
6. Joseph Priestly (1733-1804)—discovered oxygen
7. John Dalton (1766-1844)—discovered atomic theory; diagnosed color blindness
8. Georg Ohm (1787-1854)—formulated “Ohm’s Law”; intensity of an electric current equals the magnetic force driving it, divided by the resistance of the conductor
9. Michael Faraday (1791-1867)—discovered electromagnetic induction
10. Louis Pasteur (1822-95)—founded microbiology; discovered bacteria and nullified spontaneous generation
11. Gregor Mendel (1822-84)—laid foundation for modern genetics

[Adapted from A. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*, 240-42, and R. Stark, *For the Glory of God,* chapter 2]

* …and this is but a partial listing. This is not to imply that all of the above were monolithic in their understanding of the Christian Faith. Some were Catholic, others were Protestant. Some were strongly orthodox, others were less so (Newton’s mildly heretical views of the Trinity). However, all of these men claimed Christianity and saw their science as a legitimate extension of their faith
* **So where did the “Anti-Christian Science Narrative” originate?**

1. **Enlightenment—**Voltaire (1694-1778), Rousseau (1712-17878),and John Locke (1632-1704) in various degrees, became harsh critics of religion (especially Roman Catholicism) and champions of the sufficiency of **autonomous human reason.** They refused to give religion any credit for the rise of the “new science,” and began to denounce the Scholastics as purveyors of trivial theological concerns and not the scientific pioneers that they actually were. Newton’s aberrant Christian beliefs were exaggerated to the point that his science had essentially repudiated religion, and he only returned to his theological ponderings (he actually wrote more words on the Bible than on science!) after he lost his intellectual prowess in old age. Unfortunately, some devout Christians were complicit in the “Newton as Unbeliever Myth,” in attempting to gloss over or deny Sir Isaac’s departures from orthodoxy. Consequently, Newton, himself, became “deified” by the secular elite and his devout faith was reduced to an Enlightenment-like deism.
2. **Darwinian Crusade of the late 19th-20th Centuries—**While Charles Darwin (1809-82) turned his back on the Christian Faith, many of his early supporters were actually evangelical Christians. Notable amongst these were Harvard botanist, Asa Gray ((1810-88) who hailed Darwin for solving the most difficult problem with the Design Argument; i.e., many imperfections and failures revealed in the fossil record. However, there was a likewise enthusiastic cadre of Darwinian supporters—**militant atheists**—who sought to cast the scientific criticism of evolution in terms of Darwin vs. Biblical Literalism. Chief among these ‘secular crusaders” were Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-95), nick-named “Darwin’s Bulldog,” Herbert Spencer (“social Darwinism”), and Ernst Haeckel. The “Evolutionary War” was defined as a conflict between belief in God and atheism—something that was not demanded in accepting the premise that life evolved but now set in the equation by Darwin and his zealous apostles. Fairly competent critics of this atheistic version of evolution—S. Wilberforce and P.M. W. Gladstone—were unfairly ridiculed and portrayed as religious opponents of science. This fictive struggle, consequently, became indelibly inscribed in…
3. **Revisionist history of science –“Science vs. Church” by Andrew Dickson White (1896).** In a two-volume work that still “defines” the intellectual terrain, White (1832-1918), the founder and first president of Cornell University, re-wrote the history of science in the best (worst) of the militant Darwinian tradition. He virtually made up the well-known Columbus story, credited Magellan for “crushing” the prevailing theory of a flat earth, greatly exaggerated the Church vs. Copernicus and Galileo narratives (conveniently ignoring the tumultuous context of the Protestant Reformation as well as in the case of the latter, theological arrogance). White admitted that a primary motivation in the composition of his “history” was retributive -- to get even with Christian critics of his plans for Cornell (cf. J. B. Russell, *Inventing the Flat Earth: Columbus and* *Modern Historians*, 26).
4. **“Orthodox Christian” Blunders:**
5. Scopes Trial (1925): William Jennings Bryan “defends” the manner and timetable of creation instead of the “real target,” *materialism*
6. “Scientific Creationism” (1960-s--; 1987 Supreme Court case against the compulsory teaching of “creation science” alongside Darwinian evolution))
7. 1990’s--Uncritical acceptance of Intelligent Design Theory as the antidote to atheism
8. **The “DNA” Evidence is In: Christianity is the “Birth Mother”**

* From its inception, historic Christian orthodoxy has rooted itself in the ontological reality of a Creator God and his cosmos. There is an objective status to reality—affirmed in the opening words of the Bible (“In the beginning God created the heavens and earth”). This statement posits the existence of an eternal, independent, and infinite Creator who is ontologically distinguishable from the finite universe that owes its existence and sustenance solely to him.
* The Triune God created a cosmos that reflected his innate “goodness” in its order, diversity, coherence, and perceptible rationality.
* Whitehead has commented: “There seems but one source for of its (science) origin. It must come from the medieval insistence on the rationality of God, conceived as with the personal energy of Jehovah and with the rationality of a Greek philosopher” (*Science and the Modern World*, 12).
* Moreover, God’s crowning creation, **humankind** (itself a reflection of the “communitarian” God) is uniquely designated as his “image” (Gen. 1:26,27) and given a distinctive mandate to exercise dominion over the rest of the Lord’s creation, both animate and inanimate (v.28). The Bible in actuality, is virtually giving a command to “do science.” This inquiry will never be exhausted given the finitude of human beings (even in their unfallen, pristine state) and the immensity of the cosmos. After the Fall (Gen. 3), such procedure will be further complicated by sin’s distorting influence. The point of this is to stress that biblical and historic Christianity never placed stress upon the sufficiency of human reason but clearly saw human knowledge as a growing, self-corrective enterprise. Humans could understand creation with accuracy given their “imageness,” but unlike God, their knowledge would always be partial—and exercised with humility.
* This rational structure of the cosmos set forth in Genesis 1 is clearly picked up and expanded upon in the NT’s presentation of the **“Cosmic Christ.”** Mathematical physicist/theologian John Polkinghorne has perceptively noted that Christ is identified as:

The Word (much more than rational principle but surely including the idea of such a principle) without whom ‘was not anything made’ (John 1:3); the One of whom it can be said ‘all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together’ (Colossians 1:16-17); the One ‘through whom also [God] created the world’ (Hebrews 1:2). What greater encouragement could there be for the scientific exploration of the *rational structure of the* *physical world*, what clearer indication of its value? (*Reason and Rationality*, 70).

* *Cosmic knowability* is seen all through the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, as Israel is called to view the heavens and the earth as the ordered creation of her redeeming God rather than as the playground of capricious deities (cf. Isa. 40:25-26; 42:5; 44:24; etc.). This world was under subjection to Yahweh and to a certain extent, still subject to his fallen, human “stewards, although their created purpose to exercise “full mastery” would only be realized at the *eschaton* as a result of a relationship with Jesus Christ (cf. Ps. 8; Isa. 11; Rev. 22). The Incarnation demonstrates God’s on-going concern with creation, its value, redemption and renewal (especially seen in the Resurrection). Jesus’ “this-worldly” concern witnessed in his acts of compassion and miracles, became the model and “charge” for his disciples and subsequently every generation of the Church (cf. Acts).
* The early Christian creeds pick up this biblical (critical) realism, confessing that all reality begins with God (“the Father Almighty”), whose independent (pre) existence, in turn, gives definiteness, objectivity, and rationality to the world around us. This “God-first” ontology gives us insight why human beings can “trust” their limited perceptions into reality—and also clues us why the lack of this starting place can degenerate into something like postmodern relativism (cf. Acts 17:22-31). In short, biblically-driven, historic Christian theism provides the **necessary** **worldview (and especially the epistemological component)** that makes full-blown science possible…and in fact, produced the historical narrative described in the previous section. (It should be noted that we are defining **science** in terms of **“a method utilized in organized efforts to formulate explanations of nature, always subject to modification and correction through systematic observations**” (Stark, *For the* *Glory of God*, 124).

The noted historian/philosopher of science, Stanley Jaki, has observed that a number of ancient cultures (Hindu, Chinese, Greek) had some of the “buds” of a beginning science but all became “blind alleys” for the development of a “live-birthed” discipline due to “the distinctive theological tenet of *eternal cycle*” (Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God*, 18). Only the biblical narrative provided a linear process from an absolute beginning (as well as the ability of the human subject to know such a process) that enabled the “buds” to fully bloom. In might be noted that although many contemporary scientists would categorize themselves as Naturalists (i.e., “nature is ultimate reality”) such a worldview actually stymied scientific development in ancient history. In more recent times, the atheism of the late Soviet Union did not produce a scientifically-superior culture but actually one that lapsed into mediocrity. While *Naturalism has been a dominant* ***WORLDVIEW*** *of Western science for the past 100+ years, it should be recognized that its “a-theological tenets” are essentially inimical to scientific inquiry. The current demise of interest and competency in the discipline in the West may actually be more the result of atheism than religious suppression.*

1. **Reconciling the Family: Some Modest Proposals in Bringing the Estranged Parties Back Together**

While it may appear that Islam has a view of God conducive to scientific advancement. However, Allah is not seen as the lawful creator but rather as a very active God who intrudes on his world when he deems it appropriate. Historically, this led to a major theological position that condemned all attempts to formulate natural laws in that this would in effect, deny Allah’s freedom to do as he pleased—tantamount to blasphemy. This was justified by the *Qu’ran*: “Verily, God will cause to err whom he pleaseth, and will direct whom he pleaseth” (cf. Sir. 6:95-99 ). Given this understanding of God, the cosmos may not be very lawful at all. Consequently, Jaki notes that the “Muslim notion of the Creator was not adequately rational to inspire an effective distaste for various types of pantheistic, cyclic, animistic, and magical world pictures which freely made their way into the Rasa’il” (*The Savior of Science*, 207).

* **Counsel to the Scientific Community:**

1. Re-visit the history of the development of modern science “*sans* White.”
2. Do not automatically assume that evolution demands atheism. Consider the fact that many of Darwin’s original defenders (e.g.; A. Gray, G.F. Wright, J.D. Dana) were theological conservatives who had little difficulty in reconciling their faith to the “new” evolutionary theories.
3. Become better students of philosophy—especially paradigms of reality or world views—which will enable them to critique the epistemological cracks in the “preferred model” of Naturalism. *Autonomous* human reason has been shown to be fallible, myopic, full of hubris, and ultimately not capable of supporting its own trust in accurately perceiving the universe.
4. Avoid caricatures of Christian believers—even those who naively approach science and the Bible.
5. Become more knowledgeable about the *Bible’s actual cosmological claims* (or lack of them) and recognize that the Scriptures invite and promote an open and honest investigation of the cosmos without fear of contradiction.

* **Counsel to the Christian Community:**

1. Interpret the Bible according to its purposes, historical situations, genres, etc., and refuse to let it be co-opted by alleged “scientific discoveries” (cf. Augustine, Luther, Calvin). Genesis 1 is intended to be a polemic against pagan (animistic) cosmologies not a detailed description of how this universe was made. The Creation Account provides the theological/philosophical foundations for doing science not a “scientific explanation” of the cosmos.
2. Refuse to be drawn into discussions that equate belief in evolution with a rejection of Christian orthodoxy.
3. Reject caricatures of evolutionary theory, specifically, and science/scientists in general.
4. Recognize that such theories as “Intelligent Design” (ID) are not necessary to maintaining a high view of Scripture and a sound doctrine of Creation.

**Conclusion:** Although the “Received View” of the history of science is steeped in anti Christian polemic (cf. the works of R. Dawkins, S. Harris), the truth of the matter is that without the historic Christian Faith, there would likely be no science narrative to speak of. More basically, there would not be a worldview that could supply the presuppositions necessary to produce a view of reality that would allow people to investigate a supposedly orderly yet trans-sensible universe—and trust their perceptions. Finally, without this theological underpinning, Western Science could well experience a gradual disinterest and descent into mediocrity since the development of the discipline was spurred by “the glory of God”—a magnificent obsession” that transcends mere pragmatics and/or economic gain. In short, Historic Christianity birthed and nurtured the scientific enterprise. In fact, this philosophic history may provide the Faith with one of its most convincing apologetic argument; i.e., what other worldview could have done the same? (And none did!). It is time that the “Big WHITE Lie” be put to rest—as well as irresponsible Christian biblical interpretation and pseudo-science—and the “Lost Child” returned to its rightful and most nurturing home.

*Soli Dei Gloria!*

**Recommended Reading:**

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