



Science, Religion and Man

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Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night.
God said, *Let Newton be!* and all was light.
—Alexander Pope

The divergence of science and religion is essentially a modern phenomenon. Until the 18th century, theology was considered the queen of the sciences and scientists considered that their discoveries allowed them "to think God's thoughts after Him." Then increasingly sophisticated scientific methods led to discoveries that were in conflict with religion, creating a rent that until this day has not been mended.

Western religion, increasingly narrowed and dogmatized through the centuries, did to science what it had done to everything else that threatened its power and position—called it demonic and tried to cast it out. But science was one demon that would not stay exorcised, and once free from religion it grew in power and pride until it became a religion itself, a status it enjoys in much of contemporary society. Science wields nearly as much power today as the church did during the Middle Ages. And it has misused that power at times as much as the church misused its power. The devotion of science to the military in our day rivals the devotion of the Christian Crusaders to the idea of the Holy Grail—and with results

that are equally devastating. As Richard Eberhardt says, modern man "can kill as Cain could, but with multitudinous will,/no further advanced than in his ancient furies."

Today man's scientific knowledge and technical ability are expanding the frontiers of discovery in every aspect of life—from the black holes and exploding stars of outer space to the dark caves and bursting lights of inner space. And yet our existence on the earth hasn't been as perilous since the sea rose up to sweep away Noah's ark. Just as we are on the verge of creating a better world and exploring new worlds, we are destroying the world around us. As we explore the silent wilderness of space and the primal sounds of the psyche, we are wasting the precious wilderness of our lovely little planet.

What we need is a new alliance between science and religion based on mutual trust and a recognition by each of the uniqueness of the other's contribution to man's life. When either science or religion acts as if it has exclusive rights in the domain of truth, it is a guarantee that truth will not be served. Scientists who play God, or priests who speak of God as if, in Thoreau's term, "they enjoy a monopoly on the subject," are not acting in God's or man's best interest.

It is imperative that science and religion abandon their present peaceful but fragile co-existence in favor of a co-operative alliance. This need not happen by obscuring the differences between science and religion or in pretending that those differences do not exist. Although each offers different ways of pursuing and perceiving truth, they have more in common than most realize. For example, each requires faith, intuition and imagination to be truly effective. Recognizing their differences and building on their commonality science and religion can make a synthesis that centers on man and that serves man. It is only in such a cooperative venture that we can hope to survive our scientific knowledge.

Latter-day Saints may have a unique contribution to make to a humanistic synthesis of science and religion. We believe that the Spirit of the Lord which was poured out in rich abundance beginning with the Renaissance and which culminated in the revelations of the Restoration heralded not only a renewal of man's spiritual hope but of his material hope as well—that the modern explosion of scientific and technologic knowledge is also an evidence of God's grace: He reveals both spiritual and material knowledge for our blessing. That Joseph Smith understood this well is seen not only in his declaration that spirit is nothing more than refined matter but in his famous observation that a religion which cannot save a people temporally cannot hope to save them spiritually.

Mormonism's concept of God as an exalted man has profound implications, for if God was once a man as we are then he obviously progressed from partial scientific and religious knowledge to complete knowledge, just as we are promised we may: "He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things" (D & C 93:28); and, "He that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father's kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him" (D & C 84:38).

Thus, though we now understand neither the mysteries of light nor the mysteries of the atonement, we someday will—or at least can through our righteousness and the exercise of our intelligence. Through the epistemology of exaltation we will come to know all science and all religion and know they are one. To apply some lines from T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding":

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time. . .

Mormonism's understanding of man as a potential god who through his free agency can progress eternally can also help in the unification of science and religion. Such a concept focuses on man as a co-creator with God, one who, working with and learning from God, can change his life and his world in a positive way. According to Brigham Young, the real test of our lives here is to see whether we will learn to use knowledge and power as God does. Mormons see God as the ultimate scientist: He knows all laws of the Universe and operates through and by those laws. This is why, as Duane Jeffrey states elsewhere in this issue, "Mormonism [has] a basis for synthesis [of science and religion] that exists in few if any other Western religions."

Mormonism's avowed commitment to and vigilant quest of truth could also help bring science and religion together. But this commitment must first be manifest in the Church before it can be manifest in the world, and this means that Mormons must be more willing to open their hearts and minds to discern and accept truth—even when it goes against cherished myths and traditions. This is what President John Taylor meant when he said, "Our religion . . . embraces every principle of truth and intelligence pertaining to us as moral, intellectual, mortal and immortal beings, pertaining to this world and the world that is to come. We are open to truth of every kind, no matter whence it comes, where it originates, or who believes it."

Our belief that all truth can be circumscribed into one great whole should help us realize that the conflict between science and religion, though real and often of earth-shaking proportions, is after all only a temporary conflict caused by the fact that we now see through a glass darkly. Although our partial understanding of both science and religion prevents our seeing how they are unified, in our deepest selves we undoubtedly sense this unity. As Ihab Hassan has said, "Perhaps this is where science and prophesy meet: in deep fictions of the mind, still locked in emblems of our sleep."

Finally, Mormonism, as a Christian religion, can help foster the unification of science and religion through affirming the central principle of Christ's life—love. The Christian message continually emphasizes the possibilities of new life through love. This is what Teilhard de Chardin calls "Christogenesis," the rebirth and unification of the world through Christ. Teilhard saw this as the last stage in man's evolutionary process. He says, ". . . it is above all Christ who invests Himself with the whole reality of the Universe; but at the same time it is the Universe which is illumined with all the warmth and immortality of Christ [what Mormons call "the Spirit of Christ," which is in all things]. So that finally . . . a new impulse becomes possible and is now beginning to take shape in human consciousness. Born of the psychic combination of two kinds of faith—in the transcendent action of a personal God and the innate perfectibility of a world in progress—it is an impulse, (or better, a spirit of love) that is truly evolutionary." And, one might add, revolutionary. Such a vision may seem radical to most Christians, but it is the ultimate flowering of the Mormon concept of God and man.