

Who is attacking Science?
Posted On:December 31, 1969

The world we now live in is largely the product of science. Thanks to science we have doubled our life spans over just one century: the result of clean water, antibiotics, birth control, and the medical care that keeps women in childbirth (and their babies) alive. We have become so accustomed to this that many people do not even think about such a wonder.

Instead, far too many people are ignorant of how science works, convinced that science is in competition with religion. These two worldviews conflict when religion professes to scientific knowledge: such as enforcing the belief that the earth is the center of the universe or that Evolution is only a "theory."

Science does not venture into religion, except for archeologists whose scientific findings can validate---or negate---religious claims to historicity. One can still have belief without evidence, but cannot pretend that such belief is necessarily true.

Unlike the certainties of literal religious belief, science is a constantly changing discipline. What makes science work is that it is an ever-increasing compilation of knowledge. Scientists comprise a global community of like-educated specialists who explore, propose ideas, test them out, and ultimately come to the best conclusion at the time. When more information (or better tools) arise, these conclusions may change.

Some people, however, need to literally believe that Moses divided the Red Sea, that Jesus rose from his tomb, or that Mohammad took a magical winged-horseback ride with the Angel Gabriel from Mecca to Jerusalem. The latter two beliefs have resulted in centuries of persecution for those who did not believe them. Beliefs do have consequences.

Senator Rick Santorum, a believer in timeless verities (the Bible, the Constitution), expressed concern that university education turns religious youth into Atheists. His solution: do not increase the availability of college for young people because learning science or history could challenge literal belief in religion. One of America's top scientists, Francis Collins, does not agree; he believes in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, which gives him personal comfort, a belief that does not conflict his work on mapping the genetic elements of the human being (human genome project). Indeed, scientists who are increasingly learning about the elegant complexity of creation are filled with awe, and for some, this awe is consistent with a belief in a Creator.

The most troubling attacks on science have come from people who feel threatened by scientific theories, not understanding that a scientific theory is not a casual proposal open to common argument, but is a scientific idea that can be investigated and confirmed with repeatable experiments. The Theory of Evolution explains the evolutionary process of change that transformed the first single-cell creatures to the complexity of human beings, each of us a community of amazing systems that work in ways we are only now beginning to fathom. That we are genetic cousins of the Great Apes does not make us less marvelous than had we been created by the finger of God. Belief in the Bible's allegorical account of creation misreads allegory for reality.

Of course, there are people around the world many who claim to be "educated" who do not have a clue of how science works. The traditional paranoia of the Muslim world furthers the view that when Israelis track bird migrations, they are "spying." There is also the belief that all of our space science (the Moonshot and current Mars exploration) were produced on a movie sound stage. Perversely, however, they don't reject sciences that produce explosive devices, chemical warfare, and (horror of horrors) nuclear weapons.

How many think that turning on an electric light is "magic"? And many nursemaids (I had one such in Iran) complain that "madam believes in invisible things (germs) and wants us to wash our hands." They didn't oblige. And how many oil dictatorships today would know how to invent and maintain their modern goodies without people who have studied Western science? Osama bin Laden got his Ph.D. in Islamic Theology. The world has paid the price for that.

671 words

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