

Anti-Intellectualism and the Alleged Conflict Between Christianity and Science

Kenneth J. Coughlan

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A common perception of Christianity is that it is anti-intellectual. Because science is often viewed as the most reliable mechanism for discovering truth, the belief that Christianity is anti-intellectual goes hand in hand with the view that it is also at odds with scientific discovery. Regrettably, some of these views have crept their way into the Christian church. For example, a 2020 survey conducted by Ligonier Ministries found that 17% of U.S. evangelicals either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “modern science disproves the Bible.” While these figures were down from 25% in 2018, approximately 1 in 6 evangelical Christians continue to believe that science is contradictory of the Christian faith.¹

Douglas Groothuis points out the flaw in the claim that the Christian faith opposes the intellect. He states, “While some have pitted faith against reason, the Bible does not endorse blind leaps of faith in the dark but rather speaks of the *knowledge of God* gained through various rational means. Instead of a *leap* of faith, it commends a well-informed and volitional *step* of faith.”² Jesus Himself, for example, said the greatest commandment was to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”³ Not only is Jesus not opposed to the use of the intellect, He commanded that we incorporate the mind in our love of God.

The claim that Christianity is opposed to science is not only ignorant of the historical relationship between science and faith, but it also fails to recognize the necessary presuppositions

¹ Ligonier Ministries, “The State of Theology,” accessed September 18, 2020, <https://thestateoftheology.com>.

² Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 96.

³ Matthew 22:36-37 (NIV).

of the entire scientific endeavor that cannot be justified by naturalism but make perfect sense under a Christian worldview. Del Ratzsch points out, for example, that the scientific enterprise depends upon the presupposition that the universe operates with uniformity.⁴ However, most modern philosophers of science fail to appreciate that the origin of this belief in uniformity for astronomers such as Copernicus, was grounded in their Christian beliefs. James Hannam observes that Copernicus believed the heavens must be a reflection of the God who made them. As a result, he found Ptolemy's conception of the cosmos too messy and strove to find God's order in a heliocentric system.⁵ Far from pushing people away from scientific discovery, history is filled with such examples in which Christian foundations inspired scientific discovery.

The belief in uniformity is not the only presupposition of science that finds grounding in a Christian worldview. Ratzsch also argues that scientific investigation must also assume the universe is intelligible and that we can draw conclusions about unobserved astronomical entities based upon what we see in those we can observe.⁶ If naturalism is true, these presuppositions must be regarded as merely brute facts. They are fundamental assumptions of nature. Because naturalism does not permit any explanations beyond nature, it can go no further. However, if Christianity is correct then these presuppositions may be grounded in God's creative act.

For instance, while naturalism cannot ground the intelligibility of the universe, order is commonly recognized as resulting from intelligence. Thus, a creative act of the intelligent mind

⁴ Del Ratzsch, *Science & Its Limits: The Natural Sciences in Christian Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 58, 66.

⁵ James Hannam, *The Genesis of Science: How the Christian Middle Ages Launched the Scientific Revolution* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2011), 330.

⁶ Ratzsch, *Science & Its Limits*, 14-15.

of God can provide grounding for the order seen in the universe. If God created this universe then we should expect to find it to be orderly because it was created by an orderly mind.

The path to change, then, both within the culture and within the church, begins by engaging in the academy with an intellectual defense of Christianity and continues by committing to educating our congregations about these false historical narratives and philosophical deficiencies of competing worldviews. Positive results will not be seen instantaneously, but at least among evangelicals, the trends seen in the recent Ligonier Ministries survey point to the beginnings of a cultural movement in the right direction.