

Modern Science: A Product of Christianity

by Dr. Jay L. Wile, Ph.D.

Qualifications

- Ph.D. in Nuclear Chemistry
- University Professor 1990-1995
- NSF-sponsored scientist with >\$200,000 in research grants
- Published over 30 articles in nationally recognized peer reviewed journals
- Currently writes junior high and high school science curriculum for homeschoolers

There Are Those Who Say That Science and Christianity are Incompatible

“It follows that science is incompatible with religion. Why is this? It is because once you attribute any particular event to a supernatural agent, a proposition that cannot be disproven by observation or experiment, then science becomes both irrelevant and impossible.”

[John Ellise (2010), *How Science Works: Evolution: A Primer*, p. 3]

“Science and religion are incompatible in the same sense that the serious pursuit of knowledge about reality is incompatible with [expletive].... Religion makes smart people do stupid things, and scientists do not like stupid.”

[Dr. PZ Myers at the 2010 Global Atheist Convention, recording at

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfXbnygJirc&feature=player_embedded]

There Are Others Who Strongly Disagree

Carolus Linnaeus is the father of biological taxonomy. While he was alive, the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau sent him this message: “Tell him I know no greater man on earth.” He described his science this way:

“I saw the infinite, all-knowing and all-powerful God from behind...I followed His footsteps over nature’s fields and saw everywhere an eternal wisdom and power, an inscrutable perfection.” [Dan Graves (1996), *Scientists of Faith*, p. 82]

Who is Right?

In 1938, Dr. Joseph Needham asked a famous question: “Why was China overtaken by the west in science and technology, even though ancient China was advanced compared to ancient Europe?”

His detailed study of China’s scientific history led to a 24-volume series called *Science and Civilisation in China*.” It was named one of the 100 Best Nonfiction books of the 20th century by the Modern Library Board.

He gave three answers to his question. The first two dealt with Chinese law and bureaucracy. This is his third reason:

“...the autochthonous idea of a supreme being, though certainly present from the earliest times, soon lost the qualities of personality and creativity. The development of the concept of precisely formulated abstract laws capable, because of the rationality of the Author of Nature, of being deciphered and re-stated, did not therefore occur.”

[Joseph Needham (1991), *Science and Civilization in China: History of Scientific Thought*, Vol. 2, p. 582]

The Concept of God as the Law-giving Creator Was Essential to Science

“...the Christian belief in the Creator allowed a breakthrough in thinking about nature. Only a truly transcendental Creator could be thought of as being powerful enough to create a nature with autonomous laws...Once the basic among those laws were formulated science could develop on its own terms.”

[Stanley Jaki (2000), *Christ and Science*, p. 23]

But There Was More to It Than That:

“The Christian idea of creation made still another crucially important contribution to the future of science. It consisted in putting all material beings on the same level...Unlike in the pagan Greek cosmos, there could be no divine bodies in the Christian cosmos.”

[Stanley Jaki (2000), *Christ and Science*, p. 23]

Since divine bodies are capricious, a world full of divine bodies is not one that behaves in a repeatable manner. If you do one thing one day and the same thing the next, there is no reason to expect that you will get the same result both days.

And One More Thing..

“Finally, man figured in the Christian dogma of creation as a being specially created in the image of God.” This image consisted both in man's rationality as somehow sharing in God's own rationality...Man's reflection on his own rationality had therefore to give him confidence that his created mind could fathom the rationality of the created realm.”

[Stanley Jaki (2000), *Christ and Science*, p. 23]

Those are the METAPHYSICAL Assumptions Necessary for Science, But They Aren't Enough

Islam, for example, has the same basic view of God as the Creator, no divine beings in nature, and Man being made in the image of God.

“Muslims once led the world in various intellectual endeavors, notably mathematics and science. But there was such a decline after this ‘Golden Age’ that of the age itself there is scarcely any trace left in the Islamic world...In the Islamic world, Allah killed science.”

[Robert Spencer (2005), *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)*, pp. 92-96]

How Did Islam Squelch Science?

1. It discouraged openness of thought because of the reverence with which Muslims view the Qur'an. Because the Muslims had a book that was Divine, they didn't need input from infidels!
2. It claims that God is bound by NOTHING! Al-Ghazali was a very influential Muslim thinker in the 12th century. He claimed that the whole concept of natural laws was an attack on God's sovereignty.
3. It provided no institutional support for inquiry into the natural world. Philosophy, of which science was a branch back then, was not even taught in Islamic schools.
4. It encouraged the destruction of many sources of knowledge. Under Caliph Umar, for example, soldiers destroyed the contents of the libraries of Alexandria and Persia.

So Science Needed The Right Metaphysical Assumptions AND the right religious climate

- It needed the concept of an almighty God who is constrained by His nature.
- It needed religious support for the idea that we can learn from those with whom we do not agree.
- It needed universities that had good financing to support not only education in science, but also new scientific inquiry and the opportunity for scientists to debate one another.
- It needed an environment that encouraged writing new ideas down so that they could be communicated to subsequent generations.

Where Do We Find That “Perfect Storm” of Metaphysics and Institutional Support?

We find it in the Medieval church! It had the Biblical foundation of a God who was constrained by His nature; it actively encouraged study of pagan philosophers; it built and financed universities, and it encouraged books to be written and copied.

While This Might Contradict What You Have Heard, It Is Nevertheless Quite True.

Dr. James Hannam, who earned a physics degree from Oxford and a PhD in the History and Philosophy of Science from Cambridge, wrote a book entitled *The Genesis of Science: How the Christian Middle Ages Launched the Scientific Revolution*. In this book, he makes a very strong case that modern science is specifically a product of medieval Christianity.

But Didn't The Medieval Church Say Things Like The Earth Is Flat?

No! Christian philosophers from the early 500s wrote about the earth being a sphere!

“The myth that a flat earth was part of Christian doctrine in the Middle Ages appears to have originated with Sir Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626), who wrongly claimed that geographers had been put on trial for impiety after asserting the contrary.”

[James Hannam (2011), *The Genesis of Science: How the Christian Middle Ages Launched the Scientific Revolution*, p. 28)

Didn't The Church Ban Human Dissection?

NO! Pope Innocent III (who was pontiff from 1198 to 1216) is on record ordering a forensic examination of a murder victim.

An illustration from a 15th-century textbook that was used in church-run universities shows an illustration of a dissection taking place in a classroom.

Didn't the Medieval Church Use Torture Devices Like the Iron Maiden To Ensure Orthodoxy?

NO! In fact, while many historians incorrectly call it a “medieval torture device,” the iron maiden was not invented until the late 1700s or early 1800s!

Didn't The Church Kill Scientists Who Disagreed?

NO! “No scientist, to our knowledge, ever lost his life because of his scientific views, though, ... the Italian Inquisition did incinerate the sixteenth century Copernican Giordano Bruno for his heretical *theological* notions.”

[*Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion*, edited by Dr. Ronald L. Numbers (2009), p. 6]

Where Did These Myths Come From?

“The myth that the Church held back science dates from the “enlightenment” when Voltaire and other French philosophes invented it to attack the Catholics of their own day as impediments to political progress.”

[James Hannam, <http://dailycaller.com/2011/03/20/10-questions-with-the-genesis-of-science-author-james-hannam/#ixzz1TEsKaLJs>]

“The crude concept of the Middle Ages as a millennium of stagnation brought on by Christianity has largely disappeared among scholars familiar with the period, but it remains vigorous among popularizers of the history of science - perhaps because, instead of consulting scholarship on the subject, the more recent popularizers have relied upon their predecessors uncritically.”

[Michael H. Shank (2009), *Galileo Goes to Jail*, p. 20]

“...it is no coincidence that science sprang, not from Ionian metaphysics, not from the Brahmin-Buddhist-Taoist East, not from the Egyptian-Mayan astrological South, but from the heart of the Christian West, that although Galileo fell out with the Church, he would hardly have taken so much trouble studying Jupiter and dropping objects from towers if the reality and value and order of things had not first been conferred by belief in the Incarnation.”

[Walker Percy (1983), *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book*, pp. 198-199.]