

THE PRESENT RELATION  
BETWEEN  
SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Modern Thought  
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SELECTED REFERENCES

Ralph Inge---Conclusion of "SCIENCE, RELIGION AND REALITY"

Havelock Ellis---"THE ART OF RELIGION"

A. N. Whitehead---"RELIGION AND SCIENCE"

## THE PRESENT RELATION BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Although the relation between science and religion has been so widely discussed and has entered the thoughts of so many people that it appears to be "yellow with age", I nevertheless have chosen to write upon this subject because it seems to me, as well as to many other recent writers, that the rift between science and religion is much closer than that of fifty or a hundred years ago. This closer relation has been caused by the fact that the people are beginning to realize that religion is in some respects and in some of its functions the exact counterpart of science. Before continuing to prove the validity of this statement, I wish to disprove the notion held by many people that religion is mythical and of no use whatsoever, while science, on the other hand, is cocksure of its principles. This statement, although widely believed because by definition science means "a systematized knowledge of the conditions and relations of mind and matter", and religion, "a state of love and obedience towards (a mythical) God", is not valid for the simple reason that there are many conflicting theories in science as well as in religion.

An important problem, whose solution has so far baffled all scientific research, is the physical nature of light.

Newton in the seventeenth century stated "that a beam of light consists of a stream of very minute particles or corpuscles, and that we have the sensation of light when these corpuscles strike the retinas of our eyes"; while Huyghen, in direct contradiction, said "that light consists of very minute waves in an all-prevading ether, and that these waves are travelling along a beam of light". Notwithstanding the fact that the corpuscular theory of Newton and the wave theory of Huyghen are contradictory, scientists nevertheless accepted each hypothesis respectively in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At present, researchers have even brought to light phenomena indicating that both theories are logical. Science is in a dilemma and can only wait patiently for a solution of this perplexing problem. Moreover, we find Darwinism, Lamarkianism and a host of other theories opposing one another, each of which tend to disprove the belief held by many people that all scientific hypotheses are invincible.

Then again the notion entertained by many people that religion is of no use whatsoever is also incorrect, for the simple reason that it takes the place of science in many respects. In the first place, religious belief is an important factor in keeping the community together and preventing civil wars; because it teaches the savages that they will feel the wrath of God if they do not obey the laws made by the head-priest. In the second place, myth and science have

the same function in that they try to explain natural phenomena and try to predict the future to the best of their ability; but the outstanding difference lies in the fact that the former continually uses its powers of imagination without verifying its discoveries, while the latter does not. In the third place, magic like science, is resorted to in preventing epidemics and curing diseases. Thus we see that there is a bond of union between science and religion----a discovery indicating that the rift between these two opposing factions is much closer than that of fifty or a hundred years ago. But what caused the rift between science and religion?

Although there are many causes responsible for the present state of affairs between science and religion, there is nevertheless one outstanding factor which dwarfs all the rest in importance and in gravity. This factor is the theory, first expounded by Copernicus (1473-1543) and later by Galileo (1564-1642), that the earth is not the center of all things as the church believed, but instead a small and insignificant planet revolving around the sun. The church held that there is a heaven, above us, where God and the angels reside, and a "hell" where the Devil and his Imps dwell; that the souls of moral people are destined to reach the former place, while the souls of evil people, the latter. This rather mythical belief was thus shattered by the astronomical observations of scientists, but religion still

continued to hold to the traditional and ancient belief. Notwithstanding the fact that a great deal of evidence has lately been brought to light substantiating the scientific observations concerning the position of the earth, religion has nevertheless continued to hold dogmatically to its belief. Then again, the question concerning the age of the world and the manner in which we were formed has also caused much disagreement between science and religion, but let it suffice to say that there will never be any harmony unless science rejects its theories and agrees with religion or unless religion gives up its theories and agrees with science. Dr. Inge, a prominent theologian, states in his writings that the latter course is possible and that there will be no peace unless it takes place. The question arising out of the fact that science and religion are not agreed is of vital importance. Shall we say that they move on different planes and should therefore be entirely ignored, or shall we study the problem carefully and try to discover some fact which will bring them into a closer relationship. I shall now present an illustration taken from "Religion and Science" by A. N. Whitehead indicating that the latter course is generally much more profitable and much more desirable.

This example concerns a chemical experiment undertaken by the late Lord Rayleigh and the late Sir William Ramsay. Their experiments with nitrogen showed that if they obtained

this gas by two different methods, they would always find a slight but persistent difference between the average weights of the atoms in both cases. Here was an unforeseen contradiction. Instead of despairing, as many people have done in respect to science and religion, they continued to experiment until they finally discovered a new gas, which had caused the difference in weights. The discovery of this which was later called argon, led to further experiments and consequently to greater discoveries. Thus we see that beneficial results instead of disaster generally follows a contradiction. Is it not then possible as shown by the foregoing illustration that an assiduous study of the relation between science and religion will not only bring forth some new discovery, but maybe something more valuable than either science or religion. But who knows? The future can only **tell**.

In conclusion I wish to state that although the present rift between science and religion is still tremendous, and the possibility for total agreement very slight because it **does** not seem probable that science will ever give up its theories and agree with religion or that the opposite will ever occur, I nevertheless agree with Dean Inge that sometime in the future "the science of a religious man will be scientific and the religion of a scientist religious".