Khemaran Dinh Challenging Assumptions

Understanding Religious Intolerance

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Christian Science: Compatible in the Metaphysical

Is it at all possible for modern science and Christianity to ever find common ground between theory upon theory and the good book? Take the theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin in 1859 for example, as the nature of the origin of species challenged our not so central existence on this earth was no doubt first met with social controversy by the church and by theist scientists. Take the age of the Earth as another example or the fact that earth revolves around the sun. Again and again, science has thrown a millennia of dogma out of the window and continues to step further away from our anthropocentric worldview of the universe. In today’s America, the church and state are separate, yet the theory of evolution being taught in our schools is still very controversial due to our Christian upbringing. And when it is taught, there must include a disclaimer that this is in no way telling you what to believe as if teaching science is now proselytization. With this Christian sentiment still lingering, how was it that the new religious movement of Christian Science come to make its debut in America, and why is there still little overlap with modern science?

In this essay I will reveal what my initial thoughts and assumptions were on what I believed Christian Science to be, based on my background as a scientist. My assumptions arise on the basis of those two seemingly contradictive words. I’ll define science in its historical sense and also in its modern sense to understand what we mean by modern science and how this can mislead one at first sight of a Christian Science. Like many assumptions, mine were also wrong while their use of the word science still stands. My fault was in framing science to be only in the physical sense. Christian Science is indeed a science, but it is rather a science of the mind and of the spirit.

I assumed that Christian Science is some pseudoscience similar to the Creationists’ principle of Intelligent Design. Intelligent design is a self-feeding principle stating that natural phenomena are too complex to have arisen by natural means and that there must be some intelligent designer to mediate all of this complexity. One in science cannot call it a theory because it would have to be a testable hypothesis. And since the intelligent designer has yet to be found, i.e. God, to explain everything for us, there is no argument to be made against it. They are neither wrong nor right. But in science, in practice, we are more wrong than right, and the absolute truth is unsurprisingly rather elusive. Intelligent design has the upper hand in never having a chance to be proven wrong, which gives to its appeal. There is in fact a multimillion dollar Creationist museum not far from Cincinnati and after the leader of the Creationist movement, Ken Ham, gained further media spotlight by debating long-loved children’s show scientist, Bill Nye, his support has only grown. Having watched the Ken versus Bill debate, having worked in a natural history museum, and having studied the controversy surrounding Darwin’s theory of evolution, I already have a bias against any claims of Christianity marrying with science. In the biological species concept, they are two different animals, that cannot procreate and of which together nothing will ever come. For me, Christian Science was already thrown in the same loony bin as the Creationists.

How could Christian Science make science so sectarian? Is there also Catholic science, Muslim science, or Buddhist science? I thought it certain to be a school of pseudoscience. Well, what is science? Most people akin science to biological, chemical, physical things, or subjects that we study in school. Science is to many people, some sort of laboratory experiment or a frog dissection. In reality, science is all of these things. Merriam-Webster defines science from the Latin ‘Scientia’, meaning ‘having knowledge’. And it is, but it is only obtained through the *process* of science via the scientific method, a continuous revising cycle of questioning, experimentation, and conclusion. Understanding this process renders ideas like Intelligent Design a pseudoscience. It is understandable the reasons to claim Christianity to be based in science, for science has done many things for mankind. Science is a deduction of our ability for pattern recognition, a design driven by hunger and survival, which has led to the reading of the stars, fire making, cooking, hunting, agriculture, the industrial revolution, the tech revolution, so on and so forth. It is a credible process that eases the difficulties of our animal existence and brings about new, human ones. As religious belief becomes overturned by a lack of god’s causal influence on peoples’ personal lives and by scientific discovery, the world is losing grips with religion. The pseudoscientists are merely fighting fire with fire by claiming that God invented everything, science included.

After only a brief research, I quickly realized that I was very mistaken in my assumptions of Christian Science. ‘Scientists’ or followers of the Church of Christ, Scientist, are a sect of Christianity. They are Christian because they believe in the teachings of Jesus and their main scripture is the Bible; however they also have another scripture: *Science and Health with Key* by Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the sect. The Scientist belief system focuses on a “spiritually-based health care”. It’s called science because “it uses the laws of God, and when systematically applied to any situation, brings about expected results.” Healing through prayer is a large part of the practice. This is healing of both the body and mind, both physical and mental ailments, is based in “the nature of God as good and in each individual’s relationship to God. It is the progressive understanding of this fact—that one can never be separated from God and God’s love—that brings healing of anything that needs healing” (*Baltimore Sun*). The word science is used correctly as the healing through prayer is the scientific method in this context. They do not believe in faith healing, that is, the belief that prayers for healing by God will relieve any ailments. For that to happen would be to make the assumption that the results, good or bad, are God’s will. Again, they believe that God’s will is good. They are in this sense, always optimistic. However, if you have a terminal illness, metaphysical science may not help you much, or at least not enough to physically cure you. It is up to the individual to seek medical treatment and it is not looked down upon in the church, especially for these special cases. The Scientists aren’t without their pious members who absolutely do not seek medical treatment, however. This has led to many controversial instances of prosecutions of parents who withhold medical care for their children that would have otherwise saved them. These parents get charged with neglect, even murder in some cases. As Christian Science gained more popularity in the late 19th century their beliefs were becoming increasingly known and in 1895, the American Medical Association declared war on Christian Science by labeling them as baby killers. In the 1990s 50 Scientists were prosecuted for the death of their children, though most were acquitted, the controversy continues.

Christian Science has been compared to Scientology by use of similar names and under first impressions they may seem like sister religions. Aside from both believing in the power of healing through prayer, they aren’t necessarily linked to each other. Scientology does not specifically teach about God, which is sort of really central to Christian Science. They do share similar ideas from the New Thought movement and Science of Mind. Mary Baker Eddy was actually healed by the founder of the school of New Thought, Phineas Quimby. Quimby, who had claimed that intense feeling briefly cured his tuberculosis, was very interested in how the mind effected the body (Certain Trumpets). He became interested in mesmerism, the idea that all living things emit a life force that can have physical effects, particularly healing effects (Mesmerismus). This led to his New Thought idea that an “infinite intelligence or God, is everywhere, that the spirit is the totality of real things, true human selfhood is divine, divine thought is a force for good, sickness originates in the mind, and "right thinking" has a healing effect” (New Though Beliefs).

There are real ramifications for the stigma tied to Scientists’ refusal of medical care for minors and nascents. Many faith-based groups liken a refusal of care to abortion because it is an active decision to deny treatment that would save the life of a child. Many see this as against the pro-life campaign, while Scientists merely see it as a right to religious practice. In other instances, people believe that Scientists should vaccinate their families in order to prevent the spread of disease. Is this their moral obligation or should they have the right to refuse when it poses a public threat? Should society dictate how you provide for your families? These are not easy questions, and there are arguments for the rights and safety concerns for both sides. Many could view Scientists as a threat to public health which puts them at risk for marginalization and unfair targeting of public health campaigns to conform and compromise their freedoms to healthcare and to religious practice.

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