

Pondering Science, Religion, and Truth

Most of us in Logan Senior High School's Class of '58 were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons). At our 50th class reunion this summer it was interesting to see how many different directions life had taken us and the effect on religious faith. Our brilliant classmate **Kip Thorne**¹ became a world renowned astrophysicist. He told us about his experiments with gravity wave detectors to see if "ripples of warping of time" can be observed when black holes collide. At a previous class reunion (1998) he told us that his Mormon heritage had given him his sense of ethics, but he had left our church. In contrast, our senior class president, **Quinton Cook**² became an attorney but his life's path was also filled with lay religious leadership service. With strength and encouragement from his classmate/wife, Mary Gaddie, he accepted one church calling after another. Eventually he was called to be a "general authority" in the Church. Less than a year ago he was called to be a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, an ultimate Church leadership role. In our church we revere apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators.

Also this summer I had a science/religion discussion with a house guest about **Truth**. He believed divine revelation, as recorded in Holy Scripture, to be absolute truth. If science conflicted with what he read in scripture, the science must be wrong. To me, conflicts between science and religion should be ascribed to inadequate understanding of science, religion, or both. My religion embraces all truth, regardless of its source.

Science primarily describes the nature of existence, with only incidental capacity to imply anything about the purpose of existence. Science starts with our current level of ignorance, uses the scientific method to lead our understanding from one useful concept to the next, and rejects failed hypotheses along the way. Experiment by experiment, theory by theory our comprehension of nature expands into the infinite details that can be discovered. Science also invents useful observational tools (e.g. microscope), which in turn yield more discoveries (e.g. causes of disease), which can enhance our wellbeing.

Religion primarily reveals the purpose of existence, with only incidental reference to the nature of the world around us. True religion starts with absolute truths revealed by an omniscient God. Our ignorance of those truths begins to fade as we enlarge our acquaintance with God's purposes and gain life experience. "Line upon line, precept upon precept," we understand bits and pieces, which begin to fit together into an enlightened view of the larger whole. We benefit by becoming more proficient in making choices, which have the eternal propensity for good.

We do not have perfect knowledge of all things. So when I study science or religion and encounter an apparent conflict between them I can't simply reject one or the other. As comprehension increases, apparent conflicts begin to dissolve away.³ **Truths** from science and religion will converge into one grand body of perfectly compatible truth, comprising both the purpose and the nature of existence.

¹<http://www.cco.caltech.edu/~kip/>

²http://www.lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?vgnextoid=2354fccf2b7db010VgnVCM1000004d82620aRCRD&locale=0&sourceId=da877e6832ce8110VgnVCM100000176f620a_&hideNav=1

³<http://www.southwickresearch.com/Ponderings/Ponderings.htm>