

Faith's meaning differs in religion, science

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A religious leader once told me that both Science and Religion depend upon faith. Our English language doesn't normally communicate the differences between the two distinct kinds of "faith" practiced in science and in religion. The two views of faith are so dissimilar that using the same word, *faith*, for both is confusing. That's why most scientists avoid the word "faith" in describing their approach to knowledge and truth.

Religious faith involves a commitment to acceptance and belief in an idea. It usually involves tradition. Hence new statements of faith are carefully worked into the old patterns that are already established in an effort to avoid apparent contradictions with previous dogma or doctrine. Thus religion may change over a long period of time, but not as quickly as can happen in science.

A religious example is the acceptance of homosexual partnerships and same sex marriages or of females in the priesthood. These changes in attitude are slow and partial within religious circles in contrast to science examples. The acceptance of global warming as a human-made problem, or the sun-centred (heliocentric) view rather than the earth-centred model of our solar system are examples. It took the Roman Catholic Church many years to announce the acceptance of the heliocentric model. (Pope John Paul II after 385 years of "study" by Church scholars eventually accepted the sun-centred model.)

Religious faith involves a trusting acceptance backed up by moral suasion. It is one's duty to follow the authorities and not to question. It is considered presumptuous, crude, or showing a lack of respect to question established matters of faith. Beliefs such as whether Jesus was really born of a virgin or whether he actually brought the dead back to life are seldom questioned in religious circles.

Scientists embrace critical thinking. It is not good science to accept ideas on the basis of what an authority said, but rather to ask *what* claim is being made and whether it can be demonstrated to be true. Further, is there sufficient evidence to support the claim being made?

In religion, pronouncements and doctrines are expected to be permanent. Truths are unchangeable. There is comfort in the belief that statements of faith are eternal and immutable "truths" from the past.

In science, on the other hand, the understanding is that "truths" are temporary and tentative. It is expected that new information will be forthcoming and when it comes a new model of reality will emerge which takes into account the most recent information.

Religion relies on deductive method. One starts with the position one expects to end up with, e.g. God is love; therefore, when a tornado kills a lot of people there must be a "good" loving reason why this tragic event happened.. God is just; therefore, there must be a heaven to reward those who serve God, but who appear to have more than their share of unfortunate events

happening in their daily lives.

The method of science is inductive. Through experience and time and experimentation, ideas which are thought to be true are either confirmed or are modified to accommodate new evidence. But there is always the recognition that there may be new evidence presented in the future which will allow science to adopt newer and more accurate models of truth.

Generally the methods of religion include faith, commitment to doctrine, and unquestioning acceptance of religious authority. Science proceeds best when participants are critical thinkers who put a high value on questioning, problem-solving, and on measurable evidence.

The religious domain includes hope, spiritual enlightenment, compassion, wonderment and being in touch with a God that the believer perceives as reachable through prayer. The science domain includes hope, scientific enlightenment, compassion, and wonderment found in nature and nature's laws.

The differences can be expressed in science's trust in humans to solve problems versus religion's trust in God. Science has an allegiance to truth. Religion has an allegiance to God. Science asks what are the laws or rules of nature? Religion asks what are the laws and rules of God?

It is ironic that religion seeks the *one* true view of what's right, but has over 4300 different religions, each claiming a slightly different "truth" If science had 4300 views of what is true about evolution, the theory of gravity, or the expansion of the universe, this would not be very acceptable science.

Science looks for evidence for both its own claims and for religious claims. Religion looks for evidence for scientific claims, but is not very demanding in its search for evidence of religious claims. These religious claims, they maintain, can be supported by strong faith or by the authority of the priesthood, or by religious tradition.

Religion has faith in the wisdom of God; science has "faith" in the ability of people to solve problems that are in the first place often human-made problems. If they are to be solved at all, they will have to be solved by human beings. The problems of over-population, global warming, starvation, disease and war are examples of human-made problems crying out for solutions by human beings.

Thus, when my religious acquaintance, who is a member of the clergy, speaks of religion and science both depending upon faith, such a statement is neither clear nor accurate. The meaning of faith is used so differently in each case that the claim of my clerical acquaintance is either trite or meaningless, or worse still, is meant to be confusing.