



Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe that theology was once considered the queen of the sciences. That's because we live in an age that believes science and religion are at odds with each other. The pitting of science against religion can be traced to the Enlightenment period (late 1600's-1815). In reaction to the religious wars in Europe, intellectuals rejected Scripture and church teachings as the magisteria (authorities) for knowing God, life and the universe. Instead, they turned to human reason to determine what is real, true and good.

Christians have also contributed to the notion that science and religion are incompatible by reading the Bible as though it is a scientific textbook. This is especially the case when it comes to creation. Genesis 1 teaches that God created by his word alone (John 1:4; Hebrews 11:3). God creates out of nothing. As Augustine wrote, "Does anything exist by any other cause than that you exist?"[1] The truth is, we have no scientific category for creation out of nothing. It is beyond human explanation.

So, how should Christians understand the relationship between the truths of the Christian Faith and science? Stephen Jay Gould, a famous palaeontologist and evolutionary biologist, claimed that there was no overlap between the magisteria (authorities) of science and religion. He wrote:

The net of science covers the empirical universe: what is it made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The net of religion extends over questions of moral meaning and value. These two magisteria do not overlap, nor do they encompass all inquiry (consider, for starters, the magisterium of art and the meaning of beauty). To cite the arch cliches, we get the age of rocks, and religion retains the rock of ages; we study how the heavens go, and they determine how to go to heaven.[2]

So, why was theology treated as the queen of the sciences for many centuries? A brief history lesson may be helpful. Today, we think of the university as a secular institution. However, Western universities originated from the medieval church. They were established as places of learning, primarily to train Christian clergy. That's why many older universities still have theological faculties and some still train people for ministry.

It was because theology was considered the queen of the sciences (sciences understood more broadly as human knowledge rather than knowledge derived empirically) that these institutions were called 'universities.' There was no separation between theological knowledge and other intellectual disciplines like philosophy, law and medicine. The reason is, theology entails the study of God and all things related to God. The conviction was, you can only truly understand the world and human life if you know God.

So, the purpose of academic study was not primarily for earning a living or personal interest. It was directed to good ends. The reason for studying medicine is not a cushy lifestyle, but to restore and heal for human well-being. The reason for studying law is not to drive around in a BMW but the pursuit of truth and justice. Similarly, study of the natural sciences ought to be informed by biblical truths – like, humans are not just material beings but embodied souls possessed of an inherent dignity so that life is sacred, or that the non-human world is a gift from God to be cared for in such a way that it benefits all creatures and future generations. In other words, all knowledge is to be directed to a good end, that informs how we apply that knowledge in our work and relationships. Which is why we need theology.

[1] Augustine, Confessions, tr. R.S Pine-Coffin (Penguin: London, 1961), 257.

[2] Stephen Jay Gould, "Nonoverlapping Magisteria,"

https://caspar.bgsu.edu/~courses/4510/Classes/48A078B0-8402-4995-9161-A2C418612C75_files/Gould_97.pdf, accessed 19 May 2023.

God Bless,
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