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Faith vs. Science

Throughout history there has always been a division between the Catholic Church and science world. The bible served as the textbook for how the earth was created and how everything existed, and was supposed to be accepted by the people. As time passed however and society developed the bible was seen not as a textbook but as a book to be studied and the claims made within it as theories and not fact. The investigation of the bible led to the church to persecute and destroy monumental work from some of history’s greatest minds including Galileo and Da Vinci. The division that was created in the early 1500’s has been exacerbated in the past 100 years, a century which has made remarkable advances in the field of science. The scientific achievements have put the Catholic Church in a precarious position, a struggle between ignorance and acceptance. A struggle that is prevalent in today’s society and is at the foremost of many political and ethical dilemmas and causing modern-day scientists to question the meaning of “faith” and the role that “faith” plays in their life. In the center of the whole issue is the Catholic Church which throughout the whole process has taken an arrogant stance ignoring discoveries but now has to view scientific discoveries as an integral part of a relationship with the church that is complementarity.

The first historically significant event that illustrated the feelings the church had to scientists who published theories and evidence against what was written in the Bible was when Galileo published his research regarding heliocentrism. The church responded immediately and made him rescind his paper and after he failed to support the churches claim of geocentrism he was sentenced to life under house arrest. Hundreds of years later the church officially forgave Galileo and admitted it was wrong to persecute him. This common trend was repeated throughout history. The church would look at science as evil because not all of the discoveries confirmed the Bible’s claims. Leonardo da Vinci suffered a similar fate of having work banned or destroyed by the church that saw some of his inventions and theories as the devils work. The church viewed science and faith as a separate entity choosing to ignore the facts and follow archaic rules and scriptures that lacked the necessary scientific evidence. The scientists in this case believed it was their duty as Catholics to study the bible and show people that it was real and their faith was real. They viewed it as a necessary evil that needed to be explored before the church could grow. The stringent Catholic Church however viewed the work as evil and tried to expunge anyone who opposed the teachings of the church. As time changed however the facts were too hard for the church to ignore and it was forced to adopt many of the teachings they had previously barred.

The most recent large and public spectacle regarding the church and science was in the Scopes Trail, which focused on the right of public schools to teach evolution in classrooms even though it went against the beliefs of Catholics. The case was highly controversial especially in a predominantly Christian community which felt the evolution was wrong and was against the teachings of the church. The church was once again put into a decision where it had to choose between the facts and past precedent, and the Bible which supports the theory of creationism. The church was lucky and the decision was made by the Supreme Court. This bit of luck however did little to further reflect the deep division between science and religion that had grown, but as medical advancements increased the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church became apparent.

With the advancement in health care and medicine came an increased in population and also an increase in average lifespan. This increase allowed people who once had terminal diseases to survive because of advancement in technology. Many families experience hardship and pray that their loved ones return without realizing that by having advanced medicine they are playing god. This ability for humans to play god has become more apparent as stem cell research and gene therapy research have improved. The resulting products are healthier people who lack previously held weaknesses. Although this is beneficial for the families it interferes with religion, because it is no mortal’s right to control who lives and die. In the eyes of the church and the teachings, god has a plan for everyone and with the ability for people to manipulate that plan through science they are hurting their faith. This is also a rare event, where faith is calling on science. Many family members pray to gods asking for a miracle cure to de discovered not realizing that that drug could have ramifications that contradict the church and its practices. To this point this has never happened but one day it will; someone will use faith to advance science and in the end hurt the faith that they hold. They will seek and strive to find something out of self fulfillment and self satisfaction not comprehending the ramifications of what they are doing.

One current author has chosen to address the struggle that the church and also the scientific community faces when revealing new studies that have implications in religion. Dan Brown’s series focuses on fictional events that have are based on real possibilities and real problems. In his most recent book he discusses the impact of research into dark matter. Dark matter is hypothesized as an integral part of the formation of the earth and our galaxy. The research also discusses string theory and the ramifications associated with it. In the book the church is confronted with the fact that all of the teachings about how god created the universe are in jeopardy due to the work of one scientist that appears to have discovered dark matter. The research is actually being conducted by an ordained father who supports the conclusions creating an interesting plot line. The movie continues to focus on the battle between science and religion and culminates as the entire Vatican City is saved from a dark matter black hole. Although somewhat farfetched the premise of the story reflects the need for the church not only to accept science but to embrace it as an opportunity to strength the relationship that they hold with god and their religion. The book addresses a key social conflict created as a result of the church which continues its archaic manner by being reluctant to change.

As with any book only so much can be learned however; Dan Brown’s main message is something that was addressed in the Grinnell book; the idea of a complementarity relationship between the church and the scientific community. Ideally in Grinnell’s opinion science and faith will go hand in hand. It will be acceptable to test theories within the bible and not worry about going against your religion. Most importantly is the fact that the church should embrace change and understand that as time moves on society matures and grows and that is something that must be done by the Catholic Church too. By being more accepting of the principles of science the church would be able to seem more modern and open to new ideas. This will attract the less religiously devoted members because the church will be seen as more progressive and less archaic. The Grinnell book also addresses the fact that science has to do a lot with religion. In science you put your faith into your tests, that they will work, that they will be able to provide accurate results, and that they will yield answers to questions never asked. Even if the test are done to prove the church wrong they are still requiring faith to complete their mission. By describing the relationship as complementarity Grinnell is expecting the church to be more progressive and accept science as a necessary part of faith because it is a way to extend the knowledge that in the past was provided by the bible.