

**FEATURE: Why Did Science Develop in a Christian Culture?
(Last in SERIES of 2)**

VOICE: Professor, did the Bible *poison* the ground and make it harder for science to develop?

PROF.: No. To the contrary, the Christian Bible *fertilized* the intellectual soil – and made science thrive.

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

PROF.: On our previous program we discussed the question, “Is Science at War with Christian Faith?”

VOICE: We discovered the answer was “no.” But that brings up the question, if science and Christianity are not in warfare, how do science and Christian faith relate to each other?

PROF.: We could ask that question from a different angle: Did the Bible *poison* the ground so that science could not develop in countries where the majority of people believed it? Or did biblical beliefs *fertilize* the soil, to make science grow better?

VOICE: Dr. Ian Hutchinson does some of the most advanced scientific research in the world. He is chairman of the department of Nuclear Science and Engineering at the world-famous Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Today we continue discussing a lecture he gave at the “Redemption of Reason” conference at the University of Chicago.

PROF.: He continued, “Now I turn explicitly to what I take to be the main thrust of this conference on Redeeming Reason. Is there such a thing as a...natural science, ...that is distinctively Christian?”

“In thinking, over the years, about this question with students and other Christians, I soon came to two conclusions. The first is that there are many aspects of science that are obviously the same whether pursued by Christians or atheists. It is not possible, I hold, to solve a differential equation by techniques that are different for a Christian than for someone else. Some knowledge and thought is truly common, regardless of conviction. Scientific knowledge perhaps more than any other discipline, is common, because of its methods of investigation.”

VOICE: That makes sense.

- PROF.: His second conclusion is that science performed by a Christian does not mean “an approach to natural science that seeks scientific data in the scriptures or some other religious authority rather than in nature itself...” He said, “I hold that the Book of Nature contains different aspects of revelation than the written Word of God. God intends the unwritten book to be read, as he intends the Bible to be read: on its own terms...”
- VOICE: Then is there any way that the Bible and Christianity have either benefited or hindered scientific advance?
- PROF.: Yes. Dr. Hutchinson sees several ways that belief in the Bible has benefitted science. He says, “First, we should recognize that modern science is built upon the foundational work of people who more than anything else were Christians. *Christians were the pioneers of the revolution of thought that brought about our modern understanding of the world.*”
- VOICE: (SURPRISED) Did I hear that correctly? Did he really say, “First, we should recognize that modern science is built upon the foundational work of people who more than anything else were Christians. Christians were the pioneers of the revolution of thought that brought about our modern understanding of the world”?
- PROF.: Yes. He finds evidence of that every day when he walks across the campus from the parking lot to his office.
- VOICE: Dr. Hutchinson does his research at one of the world’s most famous scientific institutions, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- PROF.: Yes. He calls it “the high-temple of science and technology in the United States.” Speaking about its campus, he says, “The fluted columns are topped...with the names of the historical heroes of science...”
- VOICE: Is he implying that many of these “historical heroes of science” were Christians in the sense that the Bible uses that term?
- PROF.: Yes. He elaborates, “A rough assessment was carried out by a few of us some years ago of the fraction of the people listed there who were Christians. The estimate we arrived at was about 50 to 60%.”
- VOICE: That surprises me. Who were they?
- PROF.: He answers, “Any list of the giants of physical science would include Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Boyle, Pascal, Newton, Faraday, Maxwell – *all of whom*, despite denominational and doctrinal differences among them... – were *deeply committed to Jesus Christ.*”

- VOICE: Those scientific pioneers are all dead and buried. What attitudes do *living* scientists have about God?
- PROF.: Dr. Hutchinson answers, “I observed over the years in my interactions with Christians in academia, that far from scientists being weakly represented in the ranks of the faithful, as one would expect if science and faith are incompatible, they are strongly *over*-represented. There are more scientists than non-scientists among Christians in academic communities.”
- VOICE: You’re surprising me again. Did he really say, “There are more scientists than non-scientists among Christians in academic communities”?
- PROF.: Yes. He admits it’s impossible to obtain statistics for the entire world. But he notes that recently sociologists have done systematic studies in the United States. He reports, “For example, Robert Wuthnow [WUTH-now]... established that..., among academics, scientists were proportionally *more likely* to be Christians than those in the non-science disciplines.”
- VOICE: So a larger percentage of scholars and intellectuals in the sciences were Christians than scholars and intellectuals in non-science fields?
- PROF.: That’s right. So the common idea that scientific knowledge forces a person to be an atheist, doesn’t hold up when it’s researched.
Dr. Hutchinson summarizes, “If it really were the case that science and faith were inevitably at war with one another, then surely one would expect it to be rarer for scientists to be Christians than other academics. In fact the opposite is true.” The common misconception that scientists are inevitably moved away from the Christian faith by their science is simply false.
- VOICE: At the beginning of the program, you asked, “Did belief in the Bible *poison* the ground so that science could not develop? Or did it *fertilize* the soil, to make science grow better?” Does Dr. Hutchinson have an answer to that?
- PROF.: Yes. He began that part of his lecture by asking, “Why did modern science grow up almost entirely in the West, where Christian thinking held sway? There were civilizations of comparable stability, prosperity, and in many cases technology [in other parts of the world]. Why did they not develop science?”
He answered, “More particularly, if Andrew White’s portrait of history, that the church dogmatically opposed all the ‘dangerous innovations’ of science, and thereby stunted scientific development for hundreds of years, why didn’t science rapidly evolve in these other cultures?”
- VOICE: How did he answer those questions?

- PROF.: He said, “A case that has been made cogently by Stanley Jaki [STAN-lee YAH-kee], amongst others, is that far from being an atmosphere stifling to science, the Christian worldview of the West was the fertile cultural and philosophical soil in which science grew and flourished. He argues that it was precisely the *theology* of Christianity which created that fertile intellectual environment.”
- VOICE: Does he explain *why* Christianity stimulated scientific discovery?
- PROF.: Yes. The Bible teaches that the world is the *creation* of a rational Creator – that God had free choices about how the world was to be. Such a teaching implies that the world can't be understood simply by theoretical philosophy, in the way that the Greeks thought it could and should. *We need to do experiments to find out how God chose to create it.* Experiments are the foundation of modern science.”
- VOICE: How does Christianity encourage experimentation more than other worldviews do?
- PROF.: Dr. Hutchinson analyzes, “The Bible teaches that God *declared the Creation 'good.'* So it is worthy of detailed study and investigation on its own merits.
“The Bible teaches that the world is not itself God. That permits Christians to investigate the physical and biological universe without fear of violating the divine.”
- VOICE: So God allows humans to research and experiment, to discover how nature works.
- PROF.: Yes. God not only *allows* humans to research and experiment; he *encourages* it.
The professor continues, “The Bible teaches that humans have been given a degree of authority and responsibility over the Creation. Therefore it is permissible to probe its secrets, provided we are truly acting as stewards of it, and respecting God's creatures.
“The Bible teaches that our rationality is in the *image of the creator.* This gives encouragement and expectation that we are capable of understanding the creation. These are *theological* encouragements to the work of empirical science.”
- VOICE: So belief in the Bible *did not poison* the ground so that science could not develop in countries where the majority of people believed it.

PROF.: Instead, biblical beliefs have provided a fertile the ground, an intellectual atmosphere in which science could grow and mature.

Dr. Hutchinson says, "...[M]odern science is already in a very serious sense Christian. It germinated in and was nurtured by the Christian theology of creation, it was developed and established through the work of largely Christian pioneers, and it continues to draw Christians to its endeavors today."

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

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To contact us:

E-mail:

Worldwide: truthtest@truthinthetesttube.org

From India: testtube@radio882.com.

Postal mail:

Worldwide:

Truth in the Test Tube

TWR

P.O. Box 8700

Cary, NC 27512-8700

U.S.A.

From India:

Truth in the Test Tube

P.O. Box 4320

Bangalore 560043

India

Telephone:

In India 91-984-561-6412.