

Wonder

Volume: 1 Number: 4 Theme: **Can We Coexist?**

Title: **Coexisting with Science** Author: **Alexis Boyd**

Hello, my name is Alexis and I'm a scientist. If it sounds like I'm beginning the meeting of a support group, sometimes I feel like I should be. I am an Orthodox Christian, and I am a scientist. For many people those two things are incompatible — two separate facets of my personality that obviously are separated by an impenetrable brick wall. I have been repeatedly asked both from fellow scientists and fellow Christians about how I reconcile these seemingly polar opposite viewpoints. In fact, it is surprisingly easy. I do not feel that there is any conflict or wall I need to break down, hurdles to jump over or opposed viewpoints that I need to reconcile. The further I have gone along in my scientific career, the more convinced I am of God's infinite power and glory. The wonders of His creation come alive under a microscope and are sometimes best viewed when you can't see them.

I believe that bringing my faith into my work allows me to appreciate the science on a whole different level: to constantly be awed by what I see in the lab. I am not saying that other scientists do not feel a sense of awe when confronted with the perfection of DNA replication, but for me, my faith in God adds another dimension of wonder as if I get to watch a tiny little piece of creation happen right in front of me. That being said, as an Orthodox Christian, I do believe that certain research is wrong and that just because we can do something does not mean we should do it. While my faith has enhanced my understanding of science, I believe that science has enhanced my faith as well. I absolutely bring my analytical mind and scientific reasoning into my faith. To me, this is not detrimental to my spiritual growth. My ability to question allows me to explore my faith and grow spiritually without compromising the mystery of the Church. And, as anyone who has done molecular biology knows, believing what you can't see is part of the course.

One of the more intriguing aspects of being an Orthodox Christian scientist is the conversation that happens with both groups. There can be a high amount of misunderstanding as well as misinformation present all around — in this I include myself, of course. I remember being in a group of graduate students discussing religion. One student was saying how we couldn't take everything in the Bible literally because we weren't working with a full translation, and since we can't speak Aramaic we can't read the Bible in the original language. I very nicely pointed out that there were many scholars of various faiths who can translate from the Aramaic so the translations are likely very good and that the Bible is mainly written in ancient Greek. Joking aside, I hope that people of both communities stop viewing each other as the "dirty word." You never know who is a Christian and you never know who is a scientist. We are called to practice right speech but you would be amazed how many people will speak about issues of faith or science in a derogatory fashion as if everyone would naturally agree with them. I've done a few "um ... I'm Christian" and "well, that's not exactly what the science means or what the scientist intended."

I am not alone in my views on the intersection of science and faith. Gregor Mendel discovered inheritable traits and the laws that govern them. Mendel was also a priest. Dr. Kenneth Miller, a

professor of biology at Brown University has said, “Creationists inevitably look for God in what science has not yet explained or in what they claim science cannot explain. Most scientists who are religious look for God in what science does understand and has explained.” Dr. Francis Collins, the current director of the National Institutes of Health, is an outspoken scientist and man of faith.

As I move forward with my career, I would pray that people stop asking me these questions all together and that being a scientist of faith becomes accepted as completely natural by both the scientific community and the religious community. Fortunately, I have seen more and more acceptance and it lightens my heart. Of course there will always be individuals who believe that science and faith go as well together as oil and water. To those individuals I would suggest that they look up what a surfactant is and practice a little patience and understanding. For me, I am a scientist and I am an Orthodox Christian and I get to go into work and try to understand God’s creation. I am so blessed to have that opportunity.

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Discussion Questions:

Are Science and Faith mutually exclusive? Can you think of examples of scientific minds who also led lives of faith?

Have you ever felt a conflict between scientific thought and your faith in your life?

Do you ever feel pressured to keep your faith to yourself?