

Science and Religion

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Religion and science have had a contentious history. Each side has often promoted itself as the sufficient tool for the advancement of society. Unfortunately, as the saying goes, “if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” Is it possible that we need *both* tools?

Baha’i writings state that “... science and religion are the two inseparable, reciprocal systems of knowledge and practice by which human beings come to understand the world around them and through which civilization advances; ... religion without science soon degenerates into superstition and fanaticism, while science without religion becomes the tool of crude materialism...”.

To scientists these writings point out that “... although material civilization is one of the means for the progress of the world of mankind, yet until it becomes combined with Divine civilization, the desired result, which is the felicity of mankind, will not be attained. ... Material civilization is like a lamp-glass. Divine civilization is the lamp itself and the glass without the light is dark. Material civilization is like the body. No matter how infinitely graceful, elegant and beautiful it may be, it is dead. Divine civilization is like the spirit, and the body gets its life from the spirit, otherwise it becomes a corpse. ... Without the spirit the world of mankind is lifeless, and without this light the world of mankind is in utter darkness.” Given the current negative perception of religion, it is not surprising that “much of what is propagated in the name of science denies the spiritual capacities cultivated by religion.”

Religious people are also reminded that “... religion must reconcile and be in harmony with science and reason. If the religious beliefs of mankind are contrary to science and opposed to reason, they are none other than superstitions and without divine authority, for the Lord God has endowed man with the faculty of reason in order that through its exercise he may arrive at the verities of existence. Reason is the discoverer of the realities of things, and that which conflicts with its conclusions is the product of human fancy and imagination.”

In order for both religious teachings and science to be relevant to society such that neither is dismissed by the other, and for both to be seen as complementary and necessary tools for the advancement of civilization, both must advance together. Referring to the past century, these same writings say, “... in this world of being, all things must ever be made new. Look at the material world about thee, see how it hath now been renewed. The thoughts have changed, the ways of life have been revised, the sciences and arts show a new vigor, discoveries and inventions are new, perceptions are new. How then could such a vital power as religion—the guarantor of mankind’s great advances, the very means of attaining everlasting life, the fosterer of infinite excellence, the light of both worlds—not be made new? This would be incompatible with the grace and loving-kindness of the Lord.”