AUC: Asian Journal of Religious Studies
66/2 Mar-Apr 2021, ISSN 2249-1503 | 29-40
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo. 4558510
Stable URL: http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4558510

What Do Scientists Really Think about Religion?

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Abstract: The book *Science vs Religion* by Elaine Ecklund clearly demonstrates that we must move beyond general statements, to a nuanced view of questions around religious attitudes towards science… Science Vs Religion; what do Scientists Really think? Explores the religious views of some of the Popular scientists from U.S. research universities. And it is recommended as a very important book for those who pursue in science and religion. Elaine presents the true findings of what Scientists actually think and moreover their views about Religion. We come across some of the interesting findings, portraying their religious faith and how very few scientists keep the balance between their faith lives and work. Seeking creative ways to work with the tensions between science and faith outside the society.

Keywords; Science and Religion, Elaine Howard Ecklund, Galileo, Faith-Based Thinking.

Cite as: Carmel Raj, D. (2021). What Do Scientists Really Think about Religion? (Version 1.0). AUC: Asian Journal of Religious Studies, Mar-April 2021(66/2), 29–40.
http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo. 4558510

Introduction

Science vs Religion is a century old debate. Some argue even today there is an existence of irreconcilable difference between science and religion. But we have scientists from religious background and non-religious background. Therefore, we can't say that they live in conflict with their religion or that they avoided religion because it conflicts with their science. Perhaps, we need to ask them why they walk the paths they do. In her book *Science vs Religion; What Scientists Really Think?* Ecklund (2010) reveals how scientists and believers are struggling to engage with the increasing number of religious students in their classrooms and argues that many scientists are searching for boundary pioneer to cross the picket lines separating religion. Perhaps, this book is a dose of reality to the science and religion debates.

1. A Long History of the Alleged Conflict Paradigm

Galileo, the father of modern science, insisted that the earth revolved around the Sun not the other way around, but according to the church, this contradicted the holy scripture (Machamer, 1998). The scientific findings did not conflict with religion, unfortunately, the people in charge did not agree. The idea that religion and science are necessarily in conflict has been institutionalized by some of the nation's elite universities. And the idea that science was oppressed by religion and would over time even replace religion was nicely encompassed in the title of White's (2009), landmark volume, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*. Over the past hundred years, scholars have continued to find that scientists are generally less religious than other Americans, pointing to this as proof that religion and Science remain in conflict.

The God Gene, embryonic stem cell research, teaching evolution in public schools the religion-science conflict narrative is upon us again, returning with a vengeance in the early twenty-first century. The debate propelled by current controversies label higher education as the enemy of religion and the friend of science. And there is some evidence that the more educated individuals become less likely they are to be religious. Highly religious individuals especially those Christians who believe that the Bible must be taken literally, tend to

have a more adversarial relationship with science, particularly evolutionary theory (Ecklund, 2010: 2). Increased knowledge of science does seem to suppress some traditional religious forms, just as Galileo's discovery forced a re-reading of the Old Testament's claim that the earth cannot be moved. Scientists need to do a better job of communicating the importance of science to religious people. And to the content that religion could be a resource to motivate people to study science in order, for instance to better care for God's creation, this resource should not be left untapped. If the public thinks that to be a successful scientist, you have to be either anti-religious or clueless about religion, this can only deter scientific progress and public funding (Ecklund, 2010: 2). "Since, the dawn of the scientific revolution there have been religious challenges to science, and there will be more in the future. Scientists have usually taken a defensive posture in these threats, but they need to go the offensive. They can begin by examining themselves" (Ecklund, 2010: 23). This book engages scientists in a virtual conversation with one another. Looking inside their own lives and the lives of their peers to better understand their collective forms of religion and spirituality and where these differ from and overlap with those Americans.

> We depend too much on science and not enough on faith. And that scientific research these days doesn't pay enough attention to the moral values of society. The message of this book for Americans of faith is that even the most secular of scientists often struggle with the implications of their work for religion. Especially in that many of them look to religious communities for the moral education of their children or for guidance in ethical matters, moreover, there are scientists who share your faith and who work to maintain their traditions in the midst of the demands of their scientific carrier (Ecklund, 2010: 9).

2. The Voice of Faith

This important book examines the lives of scientists who do not have any religious beliefs, with particular focus on their reasons for not being religious. To explain this better Elain brings a physicist named Arik. At the age of 13 itself, he was very drawn to scientists and their stories. He is an easy-going person, but when discussions come to religion, he becomes passionate. Arik truly believes that religion should not exist. He was raised Jewish and he abandoned Judaism in any format sense over what he views

as its meaningless rituals and anti-intellectualism. He describes religion as a form of intellectual terrorism. And so, he has raised his children non-religiously. He remarks proudly that his children have been thoroughly and successfully indoctrinated to believe as he does, that belief in God a form of mental weakness (Ecklund, 2010: 13).

To Arik religion opposes science; it's a tool to wield power over those who are not intelligent enough to know better. He often applied the metaphor of a virus to describe religion or faith as a child, he was infected by religion or faith. "As a child, he was infected by religion, but now he is immune. He believes that this sort of view is shared by other scientists, and he explains that we have this viral nature of faith-based thinking because parent infect their children and there is a new generation and they go on to infect more" (Ecklund, 2010: 13). In contrast, science holds almost a magical quality for Arik.

> He and his colleagues view science as a dear product of human minds. He is furious that others do not understand the importance of basic science. For example, Arik does not see why mother Teresa got more attention that MRI machines and doctors; in his irritation, too many people believe in the power of prayer over the power of science. He assumed as science continues to make further advances in the pursuit of knowledge, they reasoned it is going to be harder and harder for religion to have peace in the society. It is clear that these scientists have a very particular notion of what constitutes science. Science is fact, those who adhere to this unwavering conflict position hold religion under the lamp of what they see an empirical reality. In this light religion is vacant. However, today scientists have many reasons to reject Religion. And there are also scientists who maintain their faith irrespective of demanding careers (Ecklund, 2010: 14).

From the research of Elaine, it is very clear that the majority of religious scientists were raised in homes with a faith tradition. And the survey shows that 50 per cent of those from a protestant tradition retained religious beliefs and practices of some type. Unsurprisingly those who said that religion was important in their family when growing up were less likely to say that they currently see no truth in religion, do not believe in God, or do not attend religious services.

On the other hand, just because scientists were raised with faith and eventually retained faith does not mean that they went through their lives without experiencing a personal struggle between religion and science. There was a tremendous struggle for those connected with faith and still had an interest in science (Ecklund, 2010: 23). These struggles often brought scientists to a deeper understanding of how science and religion connected for them personally. From here Elaine moves on to discuss what religion is. Elaine speaks of occasional public faith, regarding this there is controversy among religious scientists about how outspoken they should be about their faith. Some think that being open about faith practices and beliefs are paramount to what it means to be a practitioner of their tradition and Elaine shares about a few scientists and about their faith. "She refers to a person called Jack who is a biologist in his late forties when she asked him about religion, he immediately referred to the Latin root word, as 'that which keeps us together'" (Ecklund, 2010:49). Jack thinks that being raised a catholic made him the person that he is, but became frustrated with some of the teachings of the Church and went through a period he described as 'very worldly'. Further, he explained that many of his beliefs are consistent with evangelicalism although he stressed that is not a fundamentalist and that his church would not really be called evangelical (Ecklund, 2010:51). When Elaine asked Jacks about personal beliefs, he held, he replied, I ask myself, how we should live and what should be the guiding principles! I think Jesus Christ provided them. Even though Jack was a biologist he was open about his faith. Although we think that most other biologists would prefer not to talk about religion. Jack went on to say with a sense of humour; some of my friends on the faculty actually try to persuade me against religion. They tried to put religion down and then to get me to renounce it. Realistically speaking today, we have scientists who hold the double-sided view (Ecklund, 2010: 53). Henceforth, we shift our focus on how science and religion are, in fact, being practised in universities and centres of higher education.

3. No Place for God in the Academy?

Historian George Marsden, in his eloquently titled book *The Soul of the American University; From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (Marsden, 1996: 97) argues that the modern American university began with a soul that sprang from religious roots and was later trammelled by movements to secularize the academy. Over time,

Americans began to see science less as a cultural threat and more as a saviour, with the ability to ensure the place and prominence of the United States on the world stage. The connection between religion and science was a central concern of what sociologist Christian Smith calls the movement to secularize the academy. Smith has argued that this institutional shift in the model of the modern university as a shift; in other words, universities ought to become complete with funds and institutional leaders who wanted to bring about more secular education (Ecklund, 2010: 87-88). The efforts of professional associations (such as the American Sociological Association) and benefactors were a huge success; religious concerns were redefined as irrelevant to the educational mission of universities. As a result, religion was pushed to the outskirts of university life, to take place only in chapels, divinity schools, religious study departments, and specialized campus ministries. After years of researching university and college ministries across the country, they find strong evidence that indicates a new story needs to be told about religion in the academy, one that recognizes the resilience of the study of the sacred in a secular institution. And foundations such as the Teagle Foundation have committed resources to the specialized mission of developing models of character in higher education. Princeton University like Duke and Emory might be more open to integrating religion into the curriculum because they are located in the South, amid a populace that is more likely to be religious (Ecklund, 2010: 88-90).

Models of University Life

This lack of commitment among scientists in talking about and responding to religion on their particular campuses come for both religious and non-religious faculty from particular models of the university. When a university is seen as a place that should be religion-free, the result is an institutional separation of religion from the rest of intellectual life and, in some cases, actual suppression of religion. For him, to accept religion in university life would be to support opinions that he sees as dangerous to the mission of science in the university. In this topic and the next, we are moving beyond scientists' abstract views about religion and science to discover what place they think religion ought to occupy on their particular campuses

as well as in universities more generally. This topic delves into the views of scientists who think that religion is irrelevant or even dangerous to the mission of science within universities (Ecklund, 2010: 90-91). Before we explore the activities of scientists as right or wrong it is worth studying why religion is seen as a threat!

Why is Religion Seen as a Threat?

Scientists come to their views about religion in the midst of what they see as religiously based opposition to their freedom of speech movements, led by David Horowitz and others, who argue that universities are overrun by liberal academics' who are hostile to religion. Given the decrease in public funding for science, the need for greater science literacy among the general public, a growing fear that faculty will be attacked if they appear to malign religion, and recent court cases that threaten to give religion more place in public life, scientists feel they have good reasons for thinking that religion might threaten science education. And since elite universities are the places that train the next generation of top scientists, it makes sense to some scientists that they should do all they can to constrain or marginalize religion. Increased discussion about religion at major U.S. research universities is seen in an increase in the number of religious studies departments, societies for the scholarly study of religion, and scholarly institutes devoted to dialogue between religion and science. Besides, because religious scientists often have a closeted faith, their nonreligious colleagues might find little reason to question their assumption that there is simply no place for religion in the academy (Ecklund, 2010: 91-92). We turn to the activities of scientists by moving beyond the classrooms.

Given the decrease in public funding for science, the need for greater science literacy among the general public, a growing fear that faculty will be attacked if they appear to malign religion, and recent court cases that threaten to give religion more place in public life, scientists feel they have good reasons for thinking that religion might threaten science education.

4. What Scientists Are Doing Wrong and How They Could Turn it Right

This topic moves beyond classrooms and universities to examine how scientists see themselves as addressing religion-science controversies in their interactions with the rest of the U.S. populace. Some think scientists should not waste their precious research time talking about issues of science and faith with the public, that religious America will never be won over to science and scientific understanding. And those who think that imparting better scientific understanding to members of the American public is a central goal for scientists are sometimes at a disadvantage. The ones who are the most religious sometimes see themselves as having a special disadvantage at the same time the ones who are the most religious sometimes see themselves as having a special responsibility to help religious people better understand that religions and sciences do not have to be in conflict. Here, Elaine synthesize the voices of scientists themselves as they comment on this role in shaping public understanding of the relationship between science and religion. If that is a goal, scientists first need to develop a more indicate language and set of frameworks for religion and for the relationship between religion and science regardless of whether they personally identify with a religious tradition. Here we both examine the impediments to scientists taking a role in shaping public understanding of possible science-religion intersections and shed light on some of the best practices in which individual scientists are already engaged. (Ecklund, 2010: 127-128).

What Scientists Are Doing Wrong

If scientists believe that religion in general and some forms in particular might be a threat to the advancement of science in the United States, then what are they specifically doing to engage with religion so that it does not halt the advancement of science. Now we hear from scientists who in response to their colleagues who are fearful of religion's threatening encroachment would argue that the onus is ultimately on scientists themselves to advance the cause of public science through more thoughtful dialogue with members to the general public. Some scientists, Elaine talked with, would say rather critically that a biologist like this one should use his position as a

platform for convincing the general public about the value of science and science education. They feel that scientists talk mainly to one another about issues of public science, leaving them with little direct familiarity with members of the public and little ability to relate to those outside of academia, especially when important religion-and-science issues come to the fore. Scientists coitized their colleagues in very specific ways, challenging them to reorient their sense of what it means to be a scientist in a university setting and what their responsibilities are to the public. We have heard the voices of scientists who think that religion in the general public is dangerous to science. We have heard the voices of those who think that scientists themselves ought to be doing more to engage nonscientists about issues related to religion and science. Now we will hear from some who have ideas about what their colleagues could do better to advance the cause of science among a religious public (Ecklund, 2010: 131-132).

What Scientists Are Doing Right

Scientists have a tremendous ability to affect the public perception of science and is something about which all scientists should develop nuanced views.

Scientists have a tremendous ability to affect the public perception of science and is something about which all scientists should develop nuanced views. We might think of the dialogue scientists enter into with the public about issues of religion as having distinct stages, not hierarchical stages, wherein all scientists ideally proceed from one to the next, but stages where scientists might choose to enter and remain or to progress from the next, depending on their own backgrounds and propensities. This base stage would be for scientists to recognize that there is a diversity of religious traditions and that different traditions intersect with science in distinct ways. The third stage especially for scientists who are religious would be a willingness to talk publicly about the connections between their own faith and the work they do as scientists. This engagement would provide models for religious members of the public who might be otherwise unwilling to entrust and endorse (Ecklund, 2010: 133).

5. Recognizing Religious Diversity

It will be especially important to open a dialogue with the broader public about issues of religion and science because of the increasing diversity of the nation as a result of recent immigration. (more Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists are coming to the united states, and Christian immigrants are changing the racial and ethnic composition of established American Christianity). And their religious colleagues are critical of them for not recognizing the diversity in religious perspectives that exist both in their midst and within the broader public. But public-minded religious scientists, in particular, think their colleagues still need to understand the variety of religious traditions that are in the broader world and stop promoting stereotypes about religious people. She suspects that this same politicization might be happening in the United States; there are a lot of people using religion to back their political views, and these folks may not be the most religious. An economist, talking about the place of religion in the broader American public, explained that there are certainly places where it's a negative force, but there are millions and millions of people who try to do good, and partly the reason that they do so is because of their religious teachings. Scientists thought that more ought to be done to dispel misconceptions that some in the general public have about the incompatibility of religion and science. She thinks that an essential part of the work scientists must do to reach out to the religious in the general public is to help them know that there are scientists involved in religious communities, such as those who have managed to integrate their faith with their work as scientists.

Addressing Religious Challenges to Evolution

A few of the Scientists whom Elaine interviewed would agree that it would have a minimal impact on science curriculum and the teaching of evolutionary theory to state that school provides a model for how scientists could actively and productively respond to those who have religious views that appear to contradict and sometimes even stand in the way of science. In his sense of things, scientists should be engaging more with the public about issues related to religion and the public transmission of science, and he feels that educating high -

school science teachers is a good place to start with. He believes instead that science and religion can coexist quite happily and what scientists are doing wrong instead of doing right. A kind of religion that is in conflict with science is a very narrow religion, for example, requires a seven-day creation in order to be true. In his own tradition of Catholicism, he finds little if any conflict between religion and science. His personal agenda, he said, which is shared by a lot of people around here, is that "the scientists who are using evolutionary biology as a club against religion are really doing a lot of harm. What this biologist is doing is also helping to create a sense of best practices for dialogue between religion and science that others can learn from. Having seen the challenges to evolution, it is also worth to see some of the best practices that would help science and religion" (Ecklund, 2010: 143-144).

Having seen the challenges to evolution, it is also worth to see some of the best practices that would help science and religion.

Implementing the Best Practices

Even religious scientists those we would think would be the most invested in seeing their coreligionists think more about the connections between religion and science also mentioned doing little in the way of outreach efforts. For him, the group is a place to talk about the specialized challenges to people of faith in the academy. The biggest challenges that scientists with faith face, he said, do not have to do with reconciling science and religion, because most elite scientists seem to have reconciled these well before they came to their current posts. Still, he feels the pressure of their disapproval; in fact, some of my colleagues think I am crazy for devoting any time to this at all in two courses over the period of seven years. What does this biologist say to those colleagues who think he is engaged in something not worth the precious time of a high-level science researcher? (Ecklund, 2010: 146-147).

Conclusion

From the above review and reflection, we came to know better the lives of the scientists as well as better understood the relationship between science and religion. We highlighted some of the relevant topics in science started with classroom and concluded in laboratory. We also explored and

critically looked at what scientists are doing as well as what are they not doing and eventually concluded by suggesting some of the best practices that scientists could implement in their field of science. As we have seen in this review that sometimes science may seem to contradict religion but often, they have been complementary to each other and the relationship has been dynamic. Science and religion are both important facets of modern life.

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Article received: Dec 29, 2020: Accepted: Feb 02, 2021. Word count: 4020

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