

Science and Faith: Considerations for a Successful Relationship

John D. Mays, Novare Science and Math
NCEA 2014 Convention

To begin, let's note that skepticism toward faith is falling on hard times:

The tide is turning...

Paul Davies

English physicist, cosmologist, astrobiologist

There is a transcendent reality; the material cannot be all there is. (1)

The decline of materialism...

Thomas Nagel

American philosopher

Critic of reductionism

Not a theist, but insists that "the materialist neo-Darwinian conception of nature is almost certainly false." (2)

Science leads to faith...

Antony Flew

English Philosopher

Followed the evidence where it led

Embraced faith after a lifetime of opposition (3)

We should share these positive developments with our students—they need to know that contemporary science does not undermine faith; in fact, it supports it as never before.

The growing list of indicators that the character of the world cannot be explained apart from an appeal to transcendence:

The anthropic cosmological principle (fine-tuning) (4)	Existence of non-material ideas
Alignment between criteria for life and criteria for exploration (5)	Fabulous capabilities of humans
Existence of purpose	Existence of "triadic" language, self-awareness, love
The "unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics" (6)	The fantastic complexity of life composed of self-replicating molecules
Beauty as a research criterion (7)	Presence of features beyond what evolution would be expected to produce
Universal recognition that the universe had a beginning	

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Science and Faith: 9 Considerations

Truth	Science
Direct observation	Inference from data
Revelation	Best explanation

1. Epistemology is crucial

- Scientific knowledge is provisional
- Good scientists don't make truth claims
- Truth vs. facts; theories as models (8)

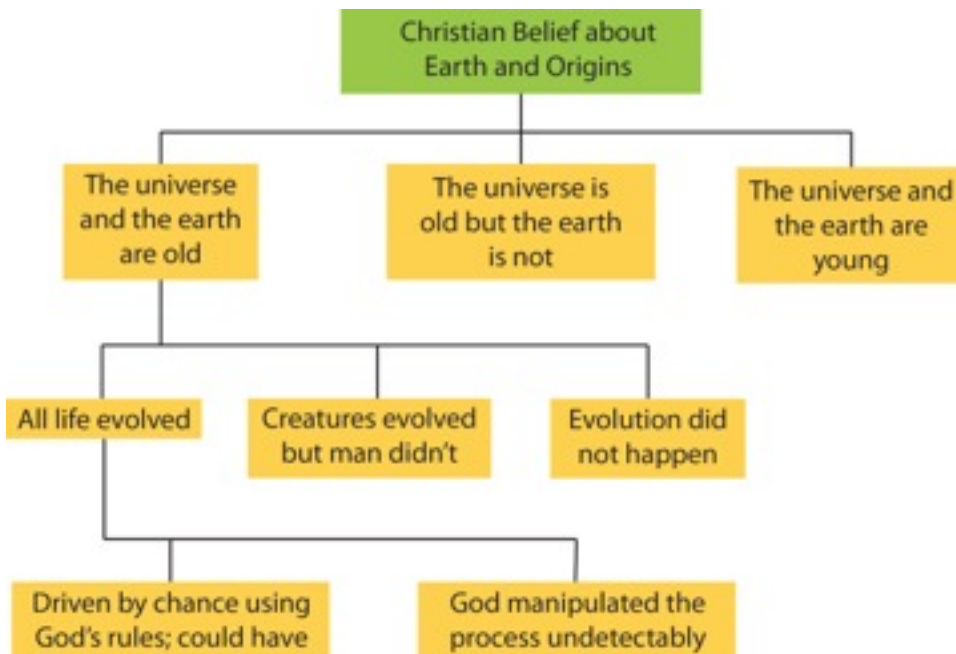
2. Be fearlessly scientific

- There can be no conflict between belief in God and study of the world he made
- There can only be conflict between belief and unbelief

3. Filter atheism keep science

- Scientists aren't out to destroy faith—only a few proud unbelievers are (What else is new?)
- Faith and unbelief: both are faith positions
- Always distinguish between truth and facts, between truth and theories

4. Recognize the big tent



5. Accept limitations on both sides

- Evolution may be a "fact" but theories of *how* continue to develop
- Genesis may not be a scientific document, but scholarship on how to read it continues to develop

6. Discernment and stewardship

- Protecting and caring for the earth is biblical (9)

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- Biblical stewardship of God’s creation should trump politics
- Environmental issues should bring science and faith together, not pit them against each other
- A sample of contested issues:

Climate change	Fracking
Acid rain	Mountaintop removal
CFCs and destruction of atmospheric ozone	Environmental stewardship vs. economic growth, profit, and private property
Continued dependence on fossil fuels	

7. Three interventions
 - The Genesis of the universe
 - The biogenesis
 - The ensoulment of man (imago dei)
8. Other voices (10)
 - The Poets (e.g., Hopkins, Blake, Wilbur)
 - The Painters (e.g., Vermeer, Van Gogh, Wright)
 - The Hymnists (e.g., Babcock, Seiss)
 - The Composers (e.g., Vivaldi, Holst, Grofé, Whitacre)
 - The Writers (e.g., Dillard, Berry, Guroian)
9. Gratitude and Worship
 - The right response to an amazing gift is gratitude
 - Gratitude for creation is expressed through worship of the Creator

References

1. See the many books by Paul Davies, including *The Mind of God* (1992) and *Cosmic Jackpot* (2007)
2. See Nagel’s *Mind and Cosmos* (2012)
3. See Flew’s *There is a God* (2007)
4. See John Barrow & Frank Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (1986)
5. See the film *The Privileged Planet* produced by Illustra Media.
6. See my article, “Why Math Works” in the Novare Newsletter, Vol 1, No 5, October 13, 2010 at novarescienceandmath.com.
7. See John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (1998)
8. See John D. Mays, *Science for Every Teacher* (2013)
9. See earthcareonline.org
10. See my article, “Enlarging the View” in the Novare Newsletter, Vol 5, No 1, March 19, 2014 at novarescienceandmath.com.