

## Can you be both a scientist and a Christian?

**The Limits of Science.** “You can be a scientist and have religious beliefs, but you cannot be a real scientist in the deepest sense of the word, because they are such alien categories of knowledge,” so says British chemist, Peter Atkins (New York Times, 9/27/05).

Atkins overreaches, even though it is strikingly true that most scientists are not religious. To be precise, sixty percent of scientists generally are atheists or agnostics. Moreover, the more prominent a scientist is, the less likely he or she is to be religious. Of the elite that belong to the National Academy of Sciences, ninety three percent are atheistic or agnostic. The least religious among NAS scientists are the biologists – only five percent of them believe in a God to whom one may pray.

Atkins, however, overreaches when he says “a scientist in the deepest sense” cannot be religious because this assertion implies that science and religion, although “alien categories,” nevertheless address the same questions. In fact, they don't.

Science and religion deal with different questions. Science deals with the “what” and “how” of life. Religion deals with “who” and “why” and “meaning.”

Science has limits. Under the microscope meaning and morality disappear. A \ telescope cannot see the “why” of life. When science attempts to answer questions about origins and evil, it becomes a religion. Sin doesn't show up in a petri dish.

Thus, for example, when your kids come home from school and report that they learned evolution proves that things developed by chance, their science teachers have overstepped their limits. Science, in this case, has become a religion – Dogmatic Darwinism.

**The Limits of Religion.** The proper arena of religion includes questions of “who” created life and “why,” of the origin and end of life, of meaning and morality.

Yet religion overreaches when it intrudes into the natural sciences. The church, unfortunately, has a bad record of saying “No” to discoveries in science. For example, when Jenner discovered how to vaccinate for smallpox in 1798, both the Catholics and the Protestants denounced him: If God wanted you to have smallpox, doctors should not interfere.

Today some Christians want to use the Bible to answer questions about the “what” and the “how” of how life has developed on planet Earth. But this attempt is a category mistake. It yields either a God of the Gaps who is doomed to recede as scientific knowledge increases, or an Intelligent Designer who is a cold substitute for the true God of holiness and salvation.

**A God We Can Trust.** The message of the Bible is that God sent his Son to die on the cross to save us from sin and death. Instead of getting caught in controversies about evolution, Christians are called to the battle of getting the Word out. This Word judges as inadequate all claims – scientific, political, and philosophical – to ultimate knowledge and wisdom. This Word frees men and women to investigate the “how” and the “what,” whatever that might be.