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Know the Truth . . .

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There are those who don’t agree with what we are doing in AMCAP. That is, they don’t think they ought to mix the Church with our professional lives. Perhaps some of us have, if only on rare occasions, wondered at the appropriateness of bringing matters of religious belief into our therapeutic activities. The reasons are undoubtedly varied. Perhaps there is a feeling that we ought not to bring to and, by implication, impose values in the counseling setting. Some might be uncomfortable discussing religious questions with clients and would prefer leaving those matters to duly called authorities. Others might not yet have clarified or committed themselves to their religious beliefs, and still others might think their professional knowledge has gone beyond the point where ideas from the Gospel could add anything significant.

A central issue in all of this is, it seems, a reluctance to mix things of faith, spirit, and the heart with those based on reason, experience, and systematic observation. It is, in a way, a reluctance to bring too close together the truths we have achieved by rather different means. Rex Lee, in a recent address to BYU graduates, characterized these two approaches to truth as the rational process and the extra-rational process. (Lee, 1982) On the rational side would be included, of course, thinking and reason, observation, insight and experience as means to discover truth. On the extra-rational side would be found those ways of knowing that center more in feelings than in reason and past experience. These include inspiration, revelation, and perhaps mysticism. Authority would also be included here if the authority is achieved through inspiration and revelation.

It is not surprising that some choose not to mix church with their professional practice. As professionals we want to appear, or better yet to be, objective, well reasoned, intellectually sound, tough minded—true behavioral scientists; that is, to adhere to the rational process. We may fear too much yielding to the extra-rational will dilute the appearance of scientific objectivity.

Historically, mixing truths gained through reason with those gained by inspiration has been somewhat like trying to mix oil and water. It is an understatement to say that there has always existed a certain amount of tension or discomfort between ideas based on reason and those resulting from extra-rational processes. It is the age-old dilemma of science versus religion. Science and religion have stood facing apart, casting sidelong glances at each other, science uneasy at the implied unassailability of the authority upon which religion rests, and religion concerned that science might, through its tools, find fault with some of religion’s teachings or question its authority.

These differing collections of truths that have come into apparent conflict were born out of distinct needs: on the one hand, the need to maintain ties with and get direction from Him who placed us in this mortal state; on the other hand, to understand our surroundings and those who preceded us here.

I’d like to take a few minutes briefly to trace the development of ideas based on these two ways of knowing.

The approach to truth on the rational side of this conflict perhaps found its beginning in the miracle civilization that was ancient Greece. The philosophical thought of Plato and Aristotle laid the foundation for scientific inquiry even though it preceded the scientific method by almost 2,000 years. (Boring, 1950) Philosophy is the mother of scientific thinking because it takes nothing as a given. It looks first to discover what is real and second to know how it is that we gain that knowledge. (Butler, 1957) The Greek philosophers left us a legacy of the use of insight, intuition, and intellectual processes in the pursuit of truth. They also turned the attention of scholars of their day away from the study of nature toward the study of man himself. Aristotle taught us that we can achieve understanding of complex issues through dialogue. In fact, Chessick (1977), in his book Great Ideas in Psychotherapy, credits Aristotle with having conducted the first therapeutic interview.

The Aristotelian approach to truth has persisted upon earth through the decline of Greece and the conquests of Rome into the present day.

It was in one of those conquered Roman outposts that God brought forth the meridian of the fulness of times and with it His plan for the salvation of mankind. Many of the religious truths we cherish now came forth at that time. Christ was born among the chosen of God who had kept a record of their dealings with the Lord, laws and commandments to live by, narratives to inspire and direct their worship—even an account of God’s creations of the heavens and the earth.

Christ’s disciples went forth to preach the joyous word of the fulfillment of ancient prophecy and of the promise of eternal life for man. Some wrote down accounts of Christ’s sojourn among men.

As we know, the church Christ established fell into a state of apostasy, and the power of the priesthood was lost from the earth. Even so, Christ’s words and
teachings were available through the scattered writings of his followers. By about 300 years after his death, these writings were brought together in one volume which eventually became our New Testament. This, and the religious record of the ancients, the Old Testament, were available to guide the religious practice of men, but there was no inspiration or revelation to guide them in that practice. In any event, by about the third century after Christ, the elements for a conflict between rational and religious ideas were in place. There existed by then a body of religious writings and also the beginnings of scientific inquiry in the philosophical legacy left by the Greeks.

What ensued was more a matter of domination than conflict. The apostate church of the day, in fact, showed tolerance for philosophical ideas, but was so deeply steeped in its theology and dogma that it allowed virtually no movement away from strict religious beliefs by any of the church’s adherents. Religious ideas dominated men’s thinking. The scriptures were taken as the word of God and as the final word on all subjects. Men lived their lives focused only on adherence to dogma that they hoped would save their souls from hellfire in the hereafter. The period we are speaking of was, of course, The Dark Ages.

During this period the advancement of knowledge was, in effect, held in suspended animation. Religious beliefs carried the day, or more accurately carried the years, for a total of more than 1,000 years. Theological thought had a firm grip on men’s minds. Those who ventured to understand better their earthly surroundings were called to task if their findings did not match those of the theological authorities of the day. As late as the 15th century, men were put to death for asserting that the world was round when dogma said it was not. (Dyer, 1961)

Historians recognize four or five events that served to free men’s minds from their preoccupation with religion and the afterlife and bring about a rebirth of learning.

The invention of gun powder in the 15th century and its use in wars to break down the feudal system of city states helped to establish larger national units and enhanced the exchange of ideas and trade with other such units. Invention of the printing press in 1440 made possible the mass production and wider distribution of books once held only by an exclusive few. In search of trade routes, Columbus happened upon our hemisphere, thus creating a flow of riches from the New World and making land available apart from that held by kings, the church, and nobles, the powerful of the old world. (Boring, 1950)

We sometimes think of the Protestant Reformation as bringing an end to The Dark Ages, but it was as much an effect as it was a cause. The reformers were as critical of scientific inquiry as was the Roman Church. (Dyer, 1961)

The last event to unleash the Renaissance, the rebirth of learning, was publication of the Copernican theory. Copernicus, a Polish scholar and contemporary of Martin Luther, removed man from the center of the known universe. Had he not died the year his findings were published, he would undoubtedly have been condemned as a heretic. Galileo did suffer condemnation for discovering the four moons of Jupiter which made 11, not 7, heavenly bodies in the solar system, as theologians of the day regarded seven as a sacred number.

Galileo was followed by Newton and other scientists whose discoveries refuted other religious dogma. (Boring, 1950) That, of course, was not their purpose. They set about leaning over their microscopes and into their telescopes, probing, measuring, observing, and dissecting, with the purpose of learning about their surroundings. If we are talking of the apparent conflict between science and religion, science became a force to be reckoned with. The Aristotelian deductive method had been combined with an inductive method proposed by Francis Bacon in 1620 and the scientific method had been born. The 17th century saw significant scientific growth, the 18th century a plateau, which someone called a period of “slightly stunned assimilation.” (p. 14) The development of science in the 19th century progressed with explosive force; it coincided with the restoration of the gospel.

Religion from the Renaissance and Reformation to that time had seen elaboration of the Protestant movement with a variety of sects claiming to have the truth but none of them with divine authority. In a sense, their attention was directed toward and against each other and away from defending the faith from those using rational processes.

The real conflict between science and religion seems to have grown along with man’s increasing willingness and freedom to do more than just think about, discuss, and look to misunderstood authority to understand the universe and man’s mortal condition. It grew with his willingness and freedom to begin testing empirically what pure reason and authority told him was so. The story goes that a group of philosophers were contemplating and discussing how many teeth there must be in a horse’s mouth. They were aghast when one of their number suggested they find a horse and count them. It was when men began to count, measure, and systematically observe that conflict arose between science and religion.

I want now to turn to possible continuing causes of this conflict. Some of these ideas are found in an excellent little book by Lowell Bennion (1959) entitled Religion and the Pursuit of Truth.

A primary reason for the conflict between science and religious thought has been that some religious authorities have taken the scriptures to be the final word on all subjects. Recognized as the words of God, the scriptures have come to be seen by some as the only authority in all matters. We noted that when discussing The Dark Ages. Even today there are those who use scripture as documents of science when they were never meant to be such. Some advocates of teaching “creation science” in the schools, I believe, make that mistake.

Scripture should be recognized as religious writings aimed at helping men and women better understand themselves, their relationship to God and their
fellowmen, and the purposes of this mortal existence. They were written to inspire us “to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.” (Micah 6:8)

When in Proverbs (3:19) it says, “The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up and the clouds drop down the dew,” there is no attempt to describe the universe in scientific terms. The passage is not meant to describe but rather to show the power of God and the wisdom that went into organizing the universe. It was meant to glorify God, written by men of religion, not of science.

A related cause of conflict between science and religion is that those who are advocates and students of one set of truths minimize the significance and contribution of other truths. Since they know little of them, they regard them as we often do the unknown—with apprehension, fear, and suspicion. They malign and ridicule them because they do not understand them.

This might be regarded as yet another source of conflict: the failure to adequately understand the position taken by one side or the other. Jae Ballif (1982), Academic Vice President at BYU and himself a physical scientist, touched on this point in a recent address to the faculty. He said one side stands against a “godless science,” the other against an “unscientific religion,” neither side adequately understanding the other’s stance.

Still another source of controversy is found in those who, too often by self appointment, feel they must defend the faith and restrict teachings they think threaten the faith. They want to defend God’s words, which require no defense, and want to limit the freedom to choose, which is, as we know, the cornerstone of the Lord’s plan. That plan admits choice, error, and correction, but some would try to protect us from error, at least as they define it. (Bennion,1959)

Before we end, I want briefly to look at each side of the alleged science-religion contest to see what contribution each side can make to us as professionals.

Science serves us extremely well in areas to which it is suited. I need not enumerate all it has provided in areas such as health, travel, communication, and so many others. Unfortunately, its benefits have not reached everyone, but hopefully will some day. One small, though not insignificant, example of the benefits of science: science in less than a century has doubled man’s lifespan, the average time God’s children are able to spend on earth. That may be a mixed blessing if one considers the potential glories that await us if we perform well here. Eric Hoffer once said, “Mankind is on a bus, all headed for the same destination, yet everyone is busy jockeying for seats.” Our view would be that if we are on a bus, we are attempting to prepare ourselves to be allowed to exit at the most exalted of a number of possible destinations. Science is providing time for more men and women to make the necessary discoveries during life to bring that about.

Science has helped open men’s minds. It is, I believe, a manifestation of the fact we are sons and daughters of God. We have been created in his likeness and in that likeness, I feel, have been imbued with a natural curiosity about our surroundings. In the process of getting our earthly house in order, it seems appropriate to me that we should be poking around in the corners and on the shelves and in cracks to see just what those surroundings are made of and how they work. The landlord wouldn’t want us to forget Him, but, even so, He has blessed us with a curiosity to find out about this earth-home. In the pre-Renaissance time we spoke of earlier, earth life was seen simply as a means to an end, a time for waiting until one could experience the glories of the afterlife. Now we see in life value in and of itself, both from a scientific and a gospel point of view. Our existence here is part of the eternal plan.

It is good to know. There is satisfaction in understanding. We feel secure and confident when we are enlightened. Christ once said, “Know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32) It seems with each bit of knowledge we gain, we are freed from ignorance, confusion and error. We have seen many of the freedoms we know achieved through our scientific discoveries.

Science, though not directly, has helped man come to a better knowledge of God. Scientists who observe the precise organization of the universe feel compelled to recognize the existence of the Creator. Even though religious authorities were incredulous when Copernicus placed the sun and not the earth and man at the center of the universe, that very act served to humble man and help him see more clearly the powers of Him who organized the heavens, the earth, and the other worlds we are told of.

We need even more rigorous application of scientific principles to our professional activities. We do indeed need to be scientist-professionals. Many of the theories we follow are just that: theories, or even in some cases philosophies, which still need the test of empirical validation. We need science for further discovery and verification of means to assist those with whom we work. Abraham Maslow may have been the one who said, “If you only have a hammer, you treat everything as a nail.” We need more tools to do our work.

If science has done and promises to do so much, why then should we consider bringing religious truths into our professional practice?

Science cannot do everything. It is quite fallible. Although its long-range accomplishments are very impressive, science has made many errors along the way. Science operates on a system of successive approximations. That is, scientists themselves recognize they often miss the mark, but have faith that with each attempt they will come closer to it. As many or more scientific theories are disproved as are proved each year. A scientist once wrote regarding the six basic discoveries in physics made before the end of the last century, “There is not one the universal validity of which has not been questioned by serious and competent physicists, while most of them have definitely proved to be subject to exception.” (Quoted in Bennion, 1959, p. 62-63). Certainly in our science as therapists, we are also involved in the process of successive approximation.
However, we may take far too long to make the corrective maneuvers that will carry us nearer our goal. We may tend to hold onto theories too long because they "work" or because we become comfortable with them and are too busy or lazy to look for something more effective. We could increase the rate at which we move toward scientifically determined therapeutic truths if more of us were actively empirically evaluating our practices.

Another weakness of science is its essential subjectivity. This may sound surprising, since it is religious beliefs that are supposed to be subjective. Even so, any scientific theory not yet established as fact resides in the mind of the theorist, not in reality. This is particularly true in our professions where theories and not factual discoveries abound. The concepts of psychotherapy proposed by Freud, Kelly, Adler, Michenbaum, Satir, and all the others reside in their minds and in ours when we adopt them. But their reality is a long way from being proven. To bring about such proof we need to diligently apply our knowledge of science.

The most important reason science alone will not suffice in our work is that it cannot define ultimate value. That is the most persuasive argument for bringing religious ideas into our therapeutic practice. Science can show us the most efficient way to get from here to there, but it cannot tell us which direction to go. We are aware of the great discoveries of science, but we know also that they are not always used to the benefit of mankind. In fact, too often they are tools of destruction. They sometimes favor the greedy over those in real need. Religion provides the basis for deciding what is good or bad, right or wrong, moral or immoral. Through the scriptures God has provided us instructions as to how we should live this mortal existence. Scripture teaches us how to be at peace with ourselves and our fellowmen and how to feel at home in the universe. It teaches us how to gain our salvation and to assist in the salvation of others. Science cannot respond to these most fundamental questions.

McGill (1967) comments in his book, The Idea of Happiness, that present century philosophers have abandoned the search to define the good life and have turned that search over to psychologists and psychoanalysts. If that is the case, I doubt our knowledge of science will suffice to show us what is true happiness. It seems that more than ever we need the help of the gospel to clarify for ourselves and our clients what the good life consists of. It is certainly something more than the absence of pathology or a flat MMPI profile.

If psychology is indeed defining the good life, a look around us will make vivid the need for more attention to eternal values. What responsibility do we have as a profession for the hedonism we see in what has been called the "I" generation, doing "their own thing" with only passing regard for others and for authority? If we do define happiness, has it led to the new morality with its by-products of hollow relationships, exploitation, and emptiness? Are we responsible for the existential anxiety we see in many of those around us who fail to understand the meaning of their lives? Do we have responsibility for the sentiment expressed in Neil Diamond's song: "Don't think, feel, it's no big deal," that places value on sensory experiences alone, on being high regardless of how one gets there, but unfortunately, often through some chemical means?

We need the guidance of gospel principles to bring sense to the lunacy we too often see about us. We need the strength derived from recognition of our kinship with God, from having firm and not situational guides to behavior; we need to know of the fulfillment gained in sacrificing for others, working for what we get, being responsible for ourselves, and committing ourselves with affection and sensitivity to those around us.

Another very important and related reason to incorporate gospel ideas in our professional practice is that we are in the business of helping the sons and daughters of God find themselves, find purpose, and find closeness with others. The scriptures and counsel from religious leaders center around helping people lead fulfilled and complete lives, devoid of the pitfalls of self-deceit, guilt, excess, isolation, anger, and the other human conditions that bring people to therapists. Burton Kelly demonstrated so well yesterday how the words of Christ can be used quite directly to help people cope with distress and guide their lives along paths that lead to fulfillment.

We also need to admit religious values to our practice because many of those we attempt to assist are believers themselves. This is a point Allen Bergin has attempted to make for a number of years through various national forums. It is a real inconsistency that psychotherapists as professionals are so often irreligious when so many who seek their help hold strong religious beliefs. (Another possibility exists: perhaps there are more religious therapists around than we suspect, but they choose to sidestep issues of value and belief in favor of objectivity. This might take its toll with the therapist. A colleague, Burton Robinson, told our staff that a presenter at the recent APA convention who was promoting the use of values in treatment speculated that therapist burnout may result from therapists doing things they don't believe in.)

By acknowledging our religious beliefs as therapists, we can be attuned to the counsel of our Church leaders with respect to the work we do. A case in point: at general conferences in 1969, Alvin R. Dyer and Ezra Taft Benson both spoke out against certain practices in group therapy. Some professionals felt the brethren "simply didn't understand the nature of group work." Yet within 18 months our colleagues in the helping professions were themselves calling for a re-examination of a field that was approaching chaos. Nude groups, multimedia groups, non-verbal sensory awareness groups, primal groups, and others of more or less face validity were flourishing nationwide. You might recall Jane Howard (1970) spent a year participating in a number of these groups and later wrote a best selling book called Please Touch about her sometimes startling experiences. Many groups were conducted by leaders whose experience consisted only in
having participated in one or two groups themselves. Shostrom (1972) wrote at the time that some of these groups had been “useless, stupid, dangerous, corrupt, and even fatal.” (p. 477) Even Albert Ellis was reported to have recognized some of them as “dirty fun” but certainly not therapeutic. Fortunately, alarm within the profession led to some moderation of radical, invalid practices, but problems still exist.

Church authorities have recently spoken out on other issues pertinent to us as therapists, including abortion, the value of the traditional family, the maintenance of appropriate legal protection for women, and defense issues with direct bearing on Church members. I believe the wisdom of these statements goes beyond the wisdom of men and that time will prove that so. We need to be attuned to such pronouncements in our professional work.

Perhaps the final and overriding argument for including religious beliefs in our practice is that we need a source of knowledge that goes beyond our limited intelligence. Operating as rational creatures, our reason will seldom lead us all to the same decision or conclusion. This is evidence that our rational processes are flawed. When we need ultimate truth to which there is no exception, we must resort to that provided through gospel principles, inspired leaders and personal prayer.

We have talked of the conflict between science and religion sometimes calling it an apparent conflict. A final question remains: is there a real conflict? Are scientific and religious truths irreconcilable? Some say conflict between them is inevitable.

But truth is absolute. Something is either true or it isn’t. If the gospel embraces all truth, it must, therefore, embrace the truths of science. There are no separate truths. As Ezra Taft Benson (1957) once said, “Religion and science have sometimes been in apparent conflict. Yet, the conflict can only be apparent, not real, for science seeks truth and true religion is truth...the gospel embraces all truth...the two are meeting daily...truth is consistent.” (p. 181) Richard L. Evans (1957) said, “Truth is a great thing. It is a thrill to search for it, a thrill to find it. Search insatiably and have patience where there is doubt and controversy for God is not in confusion and one segment of truth is not in conflict with another. If it seems to be, it is simply because we do not know enough.” (p. 180)

If there is conflict, “it is simply because we do not know enough.” We either do not know enough regarding the science we see in conflict with religion, or we have not yet received the religious knowledge we need to answer some questions posed by science.

It is not hard to see how our science could be in error, or incomplete, and thus in conflict with revealed religious truths. We have already shown that science approaches truth in small steps, making errors in the process. It is also subjective and unable to show us what is of ultimate value. It is also dependent on our fallible intellectual abilities.

It is more difficult to understand why revealed truth sometimes does not address questions posed by science. We have already touched on the answer by suggesting scripture and revealed truth have been provided so we can know of essentials we need to understand and, if we choose, to participate in the Lord’s plan for our salvation. There has been little effort made to enlighten us on other matters. Alvin R. Dyer (1961) once said,

“For that which man strives to learn by earthly scientific methods, pertains to laws already established and well known by our Father in Heaven...but supposing these things were revealed to man, what would be the advantage? How would it benefit him in the search for truth that he should learn from his earthly existence. God in his great wisdom has spoken directly to his prophets for the best ultimate good of man to provide for him that which he could never learn for himself without divine intercession.” (p. 27)

Nephi wrote, “and it mattereth not to me that I am particular to give a full account of all the things of my father, for they cannot be written upon these plates, for I desire the room that I may write of the things of God.” (I Nephi 6:3)

Scripture and revealed truth are to treat the “things of God” and provide man “that which he could never learn for himself without divine intercession.” For the rest of our knowledge we have to use the powers of reason that God gave us. With patience as suggested by Richard L. Evans, we will see truths gained by reason and experience merge with gospel truths until we have all truths as they exist. “The two are meeting daily.” Science has yet to discover many truths and there are yet many important things to be revealed. The Lord has said, “All their glories, laws, and set times shall be revealed in the days of the dispensation of the fulness of times.” (D&C 121:31) When they are, we will see truth unified.

So that we can go away with a practical challenge, I suggest we all examine our professional lives to see if there is an area there in which we could function more efficiently. If we find such a “soft spot,” the challenge would be then to focus intently and intensely on the problem much as Newton is reported to have done. Through intense pondering, reading, discussing, observing and validating with our best practical, scientific tools, we will gain confidence and competence. Discovery comes from such intense and persistent focus. However, as we engage in our best scientific behavior, we should not proceed without guidance from the gospel so that the eventual outcome, whatever it may be, will be consistent with the plan meant to bring us eternal joy.

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