

Isaac Newton's Greatest Discovery

Does modern science have a blind spot toward
the most preeminent scientist of all time?

by Ariel A. Roth

THIS IS NO ORDINARY PLACE. This is Westminster Abbey, England's most famous church. Here England's kings and queens and other notables have found their final resting places. Here is Charles Darwin's grave. His evolutionary ideas have severely challenged many a person's belief in God.

Paradoxically, just a few feet away lies Sir Isaac Newton, considered by many to be the greatest scientist of all time - and also a man with a profound reverence for God. I mused about the disparity between the lives of these two world-renowned scientists, their relationship to God, and their contrasting legacies. Newton reflects a prowess that exemplifies how science and religion can work together; he was passionately dedicated to both God and good science.

Newton was born in England on Christmas Day in 1642. His father's death three months earlier was one of several events that created a difficult childhood. Because of circumstances associated with his mother's second marriage, Newton was reared mainly by relatives and friends. He loved books and showed an insatiable desire to improve all kinds of mechanical devices, such as kites and sundials. Newton had few friends and was not always well understood or appreciated. Described as being "never at rest," he tended to work very intensely on his various projects, sometimes forgetting to eat or sleep.

Newton the premier scientist

At Cambridge, Newton immediately distinguished himself and soon became a renowned faculty member. The novel kind of telescope he invented was received with great enthusiasm by scientists at the Royal Society of London. He sent the Royal Society thoroughly prepared documents about the properties of light and color that were likewise much appreciated. Being reticent to present his new ideas, he often waited years before releasing them. He published only a little of

his work, but each was an imperishable monument to his genius.

It is probably inevitable that the arrival of a young, inexperienced but brilliant scientist should quickly draw criticism from the old guard. Several feuds continued for years, reaching international proportions. While Newton tended to avoid confrontation, he could be a formidable foe with those who felt free to evaluate his ideas but did not understand them.

Newton was also kind and showed great concern for others. When his mother became seriously ill, he left Cambridge to take personal charge of her care, sometimes staying up entire nights giving treatments to lessen her pain. After her death, he saw to it that she was buried next to his own father, whom he had never seen.

Principia

Newton eventually published the results of some of his most important findings in the three-volume *Principia*. This work has been hailed as "perhaps the greatest event in the history of science - certainly the greatest till recent years."

Furthermore, "no living person could challenge its originality or power. Newton had become the admitted dictator of scientific thought, and there was no one able to cross swords with him."

Principia is full of mathematical deductions about gravity, celestial mechanics, comets, the moon, tides, and associated laws. Its most significant contribution is the introduction of an unprecedented and high level of observational and mathematical rigor, dramatically improving respect for science. *Principia* also reveals some of his religious fervor as he concludes that "this most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the council and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being. This Being governs all things, not as the soul of the world, but as Lord over all."

Many honors were bestowed on Newton. At Cambridge, his mathematical prowess won him the title of Lucasian Professor of Mathematics, an honor now held by famed cosmologist Stephen Hawking. During the last 24 years of his life, he was president of the Royal Society. The Academie des Sciences in France elected him as a Foreign Associate, and Queen Ann knighted him. There is little doubt that Newton possessed one of the greatest minds of all time.

Newton, the servant of God

Especially remarkable is that this premier scientist also had a profound devotion to God and a deep interest in religious matters. He helped distribute Bibles to the poor and was a member of a commission to build 50 new churches around London. At least a third of his voluminous writings deals with religious topics. Newton was especially interested in biblical prophecies, and he studied all available materials, whether written in Greek, Aramaic, Latin, or Hebrew. The relation of prophecies to history prompted him to prepare a manuscript that was published shortly after his death under the title *Chronologies of Ancient Kingdoms Amended*.

Newton's analytical approach is revealed in his series of 15 "Rules for interpreting the words and language in Scripture." A favorite topic was the two prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation. A few years after his death, these writings were published as the book *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John*. To Newton, the study of God's nature and His Bible were all part of his overwhelming desire to know God.

Newton's religious fervor brought him many admirers. A renowned Frenchman tried to establish a Religion of Newton church, and another Frenchman severely criticized England for not giving due respect to Newton's divinity. In his view, the calendar should be changed to start with Newton's birthday, and a church should be built at Newton's birthplace. This was about the world's leading scientist!

Newton had a deep reverence for God, commenting that "the supreme God is a Being eternal, infinite, absolutely perfect." To him God was a very personal Being who loves us and whom we should love and respect. There is a ring of simple sincerity as Newton urges that "we must believe that there is *one* God or supreme Monarch that we may fear and obey him and keep his laws and give him honour and glory. We must believe that he is the father of whom are all things, and that he loves his people as his children that they may mutually love him and obey him as their father."

The implications for modern science

The scientific community has not followed Newton's example in combining faith and science; instead it has followed Darwin. In Newton's time, God was an integral part of science. Now many scientists still believe in God but exclude Him from scientific explanations. Today's science is a secular worldview that tries to

explain most of reality within a limited materialistic (mechanistic, naturalistic) outlook. In rejecting God, science has become a closed system, unwilling to find truth wherever scientific investigation may lead. Science cannot find God as long as it excludes Him! At present, science has replaced God as the creator with evolution, but scientists are finding serious flaws with the theory.

Science indulges in all kinds of speculative ideas and does not seem to have a sound basis for excluding God because a lot of scientific data points to God. As was the case for Newton, science can be a study of the nature and the laws that God has created. Newton clearly demonstrated that one can be a preeminent scientist and also include God in one's conclusions. Sir Isaac Newton had it right!

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