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Topic #3

How do you respond to people who question your belief in God and participation in the life of the Church?

How do you respond to those who challenge your faith in God?

In this modern world, we encounter challenges to our faith every day: from simple things like envy and anger, to complicated things like science and technology. Our faith is being constantly tested. Yet through these challenges our faith does not diminish, but strengthens.

So what is faith? Webster's dictionary defines faith as "a firm belief in something for which there is no proof." Perhaps Saint John the Evangelist illustrates it best in John 20 where he describes Christ greeting Thomas after His resurrection. Thomas, who just one week earlier refused to believe without physically seeing, falls to the ground and exclaims, "my Lord and my God". To which Christ replies, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." So faith is believing without seeing. Based on that definition, you might then say that science, with its reliance on reproducible data and facts, is the opposite of faith. While faith is believing without seeing, science is believing only after seeing.

This is personal conflict for me because I consider myself to be a scientist. Ever since I was young, I have worked in a lab alongside my Dad, who is a chemist. As I learned more about the science of the world around me, my faith as an Orthodox Christian has not been shaken, but strengthened. I used to be worried that I might feel conflicted if science were to make me question my faith. But upon further examination, I began to learn that religion and science really don't contradict each other. They are not that different. They both acknowledge that there are things in our created universe that we don't understand. Religion accepts them, and science seeks to understand them.

Albert Einstein was arguably one of the world's greatest scientists. But most people don't think of him as religious. But listen to this quote from later in his life: *"Everyone who is seriously engaged in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that the laws of nature manifest the existence of a spirit vastly superior to that of men...and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble"*.

Albert Einstein spent his life studying the physical world, only to realize that the ultimate answers lie with the divine. A topic that is hotly debated today is the creation of the universe: God in 6 Days, or the big bang over billions of years? Scientists can now trace the origins of the universe back to a split second after it began, 13.8 billion years ago. But what continues to perplex the greatest minds is what occurred during that first billionth of a second - before the big bang? Scientists describe this as "a place where all laws of physics break down - where all the matter, energy, and time that ever existed or will ever exist was packed into an

infinitely small, and infinitely dense packet of energy.” For lack of a better term, scientists call this the “singularity”. Perhaps the word they are looking for is “God.”

This controversy between religion and science is not new. Saint Basil the Great addressed creationism way back in the fourth century in his patristic writing called the Hexaemeron, or “six days”. In it he makes the point that “The world does not begin in time, but in God's will and word. The six days of creation are not 24 - hour days, but long epochs.” His excellent point was that there is no definition of a day until the sun and earth are created, which is on the fourth “day”. Therefore, science is not in conflict with religion at all, but consistent with it. Orthodox Perspectives on Creation stress, "In the beginning" the Holy Trinity created the world (Heaven and earth) "out of nothing" and not out of preexistent matter.

Now think about this, it was less than 100 years ago when scientists began tracing the steps of the universe back towards its fiery creation. It seemed as if this explosion that created everything...had come out of nothing. As a scientist, I feel that this significant discovery is a true feat of human ingenuity. But as an Orthodox Christian, I'm just happy to see that the scientists are finally catching up.

The scientists have now proven that the universe had a starting point. A creation. And it was created out of nothing. They also know that this creation is not on a random trajectory, but following a complex, engineered path, or design. If there is a design, then there must be a designer. A highly intelligent one, according to Einstein.

So, what do scientists believe?

They believe in one Singularity.

The Designer Almighty!

Creator of the stars and the planets, and of all things visible and invisible.

And I believe in One God.

The Father Almighty.