

Hello, friends. Welcome to the Church of Inquiry, where we believe **the universe has a creator, that we exist for a purpose, and that there is a path of accessible evidence suggesting the Creator is knowable to us using the methods and practice of science.** This is an inquiry-based religion that brings together the tools of science and faith in our pursuit of the divine.

It may seem odd to integrate science as part of a religious practice directed at achieving a personal experience of the Creator. Science and religion are generally thought to be opposed. Consider, however, that much of science has been about figuring out things in the creation that are beyond our perception, which is a process that requires its own type of faith. Albert Einstein said, “Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind,” and while there is some discussion about what this means, we believe that science and faith can serve the same end with regard to the religious realm. We believe both of these things are among the gifts we’ve been given by the Creator.

In the Church of Inquiry we believe that one can have a direct, verifiable, repeatable experience of the Creator. This wasn’t considered uncommon in millennia past; holy books chronicle numerous people who supposedly had direct contact with God or with a messenger or an angel of the Lord. In the modern world, claims of divine transmission pose a challenge, especially when cited as an excuse for criminal behavior. Fortunately, today we can access a new pathway of transmission by bringing together two tools that are meant to work in collaboration: faith and science.

Humans have sought the divine for millennia. The formation of religion is a recurring human drive that has happened regularly throughout history across most cultures. Yet only recently have we gained the scientific tools that allow us to deepen our search. Monotheistic religions are followed by more than half of our species, so we’ll periodically explore their recurring themes, adding the lens of science in service to their intention as a pathway to the Creator.

We are blessed to be living during the most amazing time in all of history, my friends. This is clear from every objective viewpoint of lifespan, infant mortality rates, antibiotics and surgical techniques, supermarkets with food from around the globe regardless of season, and so on. We live in a time of absolute technological wonder.

Yet to look at the news and the discord in the world, the religious conflicts, social unrest, and battles over the values of science and reason, one might think apocalyptically. We hear almost daily about strife, violence, lying, cheating, creeping immorality, and a “turning away from God.” Some believe that governmental laws should be enacted to reinforce what they perceive as God’s will.

How do we make sense of these confusing times? Because there are those who want to rewrite laws to reflect the Creator’s supposed will, we’re compelled to ask the basis of those beliefs. *All* religions with a god say they speak for that god and that their code of ethics come from their creators. Not one can objectively demonstrate that as true. Humans have argued for thousands of years as to whose god is the right one, pointing only to their books as proof.

Considering that wars have been waged in the name of God — with no proof for the claim — what are we to do? Can the methods and practice of science bring true knowledge of the Creator? We believe so. We believe there is a language woven into the fabric of nature, one not capable of misinterpretation, and it is in this language that we will receive divine guidance.

Until quite recently, there was no understanding of atoms or molecules, viruses or antibiotics, electricity, airplanes, computers, or the Internet. Our ancestors had no knowledge of the unseen workings of their world. It's only recently that the combined minds of humanity have gotten us to where we can see how the "languages" of math and molecules can offer everyone an identical understanding of the physical world. This is the path we have walked. It has been said that if all of science was to be erased from our minds today, every finding would be rediscovered; yet if every religious text was erased, those same stories would not arise again.

We have discovered an amazing amount about the creation and today have such tools and lenses to focus upon the pursuit of the divine as never before known. We believe humans have a purpose within the creation and an obligation to follow what we see as a path of evidence. Why? Because we recognize and honor the unique gifts we've been given and believe that by using them, it is within our power to achieve true communion with the Creator.

Think about that. From before biblical times, religious texts chronicled those who had a direct pathway to the divine. Today, if you say that the voice of the Lord commanded you to a task, skepticism might be the least of your worries. So how can one communicate directly with the Creator and how can science help?

Humans stand alone in a 3.7-billion-year span of life on this planet as the only creature that can literally challenge nature. We've done this in agriculture, construction, medicine, energy, and across many other fields. If one of our ancestors from 2,000 years ago was to be transported into a modern surgical suite or onto an airplane in flight, he or she might mistake *us* as gods. Of course, Judaism, Christianity, and Sufism of Islam all assert that human beings are created in God's image. If so, what does that metaphor imply and what is our obligation?

Science and faith have been mistakenly set as adversaries when really they are inseparable. Like positive and negative charges, they must both exist and interact, through which massive potential is created. Taking science out of the pursuit of the Creator not only dishonors the gift that we've been given, it removes the process of questioning, which makes faith assume a static and defensive role. Far from that, faith is a necessary hope or assumption that allows one to take a second step along the path of inquiry. Faith is an active process; it is something you *do*, not something you have and defend. It's not a rigid structure, it's a living process and a tool to use.

Some people will say that science can never answer questions of faith, that it can only create hypotheses that by their nature are untestable. We believe that science can provide

those answers because science itself is rooted in faith, although not blind faith, and perhaps not faith in a Creator. Scientists have faith in their observations, their inspirations, and their data — to such an extent that they would strap a human into the nosecone of a rocket. Scientists have faith in the scientific method, which makes them tweak, test, adjust, refine, and sometimes scrap their models. Scientists even have faith in their dreams, where the workings of nature were revealed, allowing an advancement of knowledge.

The structure of the modern periodic table, which organizes all the elements of the universe, was inspired in a dream. The chemical structure of benzene, whose secret opened a whole new way to think how atoms bond, came from a dream. The design of the experiment that discovered acetylcholine, the first-known neurotransmitter — the chemical messengers in our brains — also inspired by a dream. Why is this important? Because to follow those dreams along a path of systematic and rational inquiry was an act of faith crucial to revealing previously hidden parts of the creation. Inspiration from the divine exists in more than just books from thousands of years ago if you're open to seeing.

The Church of Inquiry believes the right inquiry can take us anywhere and that there are no limits to inquiry as long as the path is pursued honestly, with rigor, and with an open heart. Can we test right now the hypothesis that God exists? No; but we have faith we'll get there. We believe that if we work together as humble seekers we can lay the groundwork to answer the biggest questions of them all.

The formation of religions and their attempt to explain the unknown happens across the history of our species. Yet the lack of conclusive answers and the seeming baggage and contradiction wrapped within many religions can turn off many spiritual seekers. Religion's need for dogma makes some turn and run, since dogma asks one to turn off the seeking mind for the sake of blind faith. Blind faith demands inflexible certainty, since new information can challenge the dogma and become a threat. This is the path towards ossification, fundamentalism, and ignorance.

Of course, there are those who believe that science is rigid and dogmatic, but structurally, it is the opposite: science is about questioning and testing. Science, like faith, is a practice. It is defined in the dictionary as: “the intellectual and practical **activity** encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment.” The bottom line is that science is an *activity*, and not merely the accumulation of facts and information. Knowledge is ever expanding and being refined — it, like faith, is a process. Science is a way of *thinking* and *being* and *engaging* with the world. It's an alignment or a posture. It's also a toolbox, and one to be used by scientists and laymen alike.

More importantly, it is a toolbox to address contradiction in the face of the unknown. I know of people who belong to a church but still have questions that somehow don't seem appropriate to ask a pastor. Read the Bible beyond the typical chapters and verses and one quickly finds many contradictory things. If we consider the monotheistic notion of an all-knowing Creator, then God wouldn't make mistakes, so how can there be contradictions? Clearly, in that context, the Creator *doesn't* make mistakes — which

means the errors must have been added to the supposed transmission of the Word. We see this clearly, in places like EX 34:30, where early versions claim Moses had horns. It is time to uncover and address these errors, and to separate what should inspire from that which only confuses so these errors don't limit us as seekers.

We have been given a *gift* of living in this amazing time. We have mapped the continents of the Earth and the ocean's floor. We have sent telescopes into space to explore the edges of the universe. We have created machines consisting of mere molecules. And we have inherited a vast body of knowledge and understanding from our ancestors who sacrificed and sometimes died in pursuit of this knowledge. They sacrificed and died trying to better understand the creation. They had faith that they could unravel some piece of the unknown.

Each of us has a place in the ongoing transmission of knowledge and capabilities within our species. This transmission stretches back amongst humans at least 70,000 years if not far more. But only in today's world — *only in today's world* — have we reached the ability to access almost all that is known, easily, just by looking at the smart device we carry in our pockets. How should we honor this gift? How do you...?

Never before have we had the capacity to aggregate so many minds, my friends. Never before have we had such tools and knowledge. We *can* actually tackle the big questions about the Creator, the universe, time, and the after-time. We can create testable hypotheses. We can ask, as have been asked for thousands of years, questions like, *Why are we here?*, *What is the soul?*, and *What awaits us?* — and actually create a pathway for true exploration. The methods and practice of science offer many, many tools to the spiritual seeker, and together we will look at numerous ways to take us closer to the Creator.

Friends, whatever else you do in your spiritual life, join us on this path as well. Together we can learn how to ask better questions, to seek clearer answers, and to reveal all that the Creator has given us and may yet have in store for us.

Let me close by saying:

Thank you, Creator, for all that is possible and your abundant gifts.

Thank you, Nature, for the forces that formed us and shape our reality.

Thank you, Science, for the path and the tools we use to explore and understand both nature and the divine.

Thank *you*, friends and fellow humans, for choosing to walk this path.

Welcome to the beginning of a wonderful adventure.

Honor the Creator. Honor the creation.