

Common Ground-

Reconciling Faith, Science and the Paranormal

By

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The purpose of this article is not to preach or suggest this is only one correct point of view. Every person has different values and beliefs that dictate how they perceive the world. I can only speak from the point of view of my own values. Having given this topic much thought, I believe that a similar objective approach can be taken regardless of your individual beliefs or values.

Faith, science and the paranormal are three disciplines that have been in conflict with one another through the centuries. The arguments have taken many forms from Charles Darwin and creationism vs. evolution to the Salem witch trials where the church burned accused “witches” at the stake. It is a conflict that has raged through the ages and is not likely to end any time soon. Is there any way to find some common ground between these three? I believe there is and they have more in common than most would think.

First, let me preface my view by discussing my background. I was raised Christian in a Southern Baptist church. I have always remained true to my faith but I cannot abide hypocrisy, and there is plenty of it to go around in all the major religions of the world. I began questioning some church dogma when I was a teen. Specifically the stance that dancing or even just taking a little sip of alcohol is a sin. Anyone that has studied the Bible, the Torah or Koran knows that this is a contradiction. Every religion without exception has denominations that take scripture out of context to suit their individual agendas. I know that will make some angry but the truth is that all are guilty of it including the Baptists. Contradictions such as these started me on the path to objective thinking when it comes to all practices that come along with faith. It leads me to the realization that I need to take everything I hear with a “grain of salt” and do my own study on the subject. One of the primary teachings that it seems all religions have is that science has no place in faith and vice versa. I believed that for many years until I went to college. In college I had a biology professor that presented me with a new way to think of things and have inspired me in my endeavors with science. He taught evolution, like every biology class does, but he presented it from another perspective. My professor called it “evolution through divine intervention”. This theory holds that evolution occurred but it was influenced by God. If you look at the creation story in

Genesis, which was written many millennia before we had any scientific notion of evolution, it follows almost exactly in the steps that modern science believes that evolution took place. The path in Genesis states there was a void and shapeless earth, and then there was light with a sun and moon to “rule” the darkness. Next, the land and seas were created and closely followed by grass and plants. Then the seas were given life, followed by animals on the land and, finally, mankind. The theory of evolution through divine intervention also states that the 6 “days” that it took to create the world are not literal 24 hour days as we know them. There was no concept of time when the earth was formed, therefore the days were put into the account to give early man an understanding that they could comprehend. There is a passage in the Bible from (2 Peter 3:8) that states “1,000 years is like a day to God” which leads us to conclude that God operates on a different time than we do. In comparison, the scientific theory states there was a “big bang” that formed the earth, planets and stars including our sun and moon. It goes on to state that life started in the oceans, then evolved into animals on the land and the finally evolved into modern man. Whether you subscribe to the religious aspect of creation or not, there is no dispute that they follow the same path in the order of things. The only difference is- was this caused by random chance or by some divine influence? That is open to each person to interpret for his or herself. But I believe it is undeniable that there is definitely some common ground there.

Next, let's discuss the common ground between faith and the paranormal. Without a doubt the common theme here would be the “soul” or “spirit”. The Bible clearly states that everyone has a soul that continues on beyond the death of the physical body. Paranormal investigation's main charter is to investigate claims of souls or spirits, “entities” that still dwell in a building or area. Both would initially seem to be on the same page so why all the conflict? There are many points of view in organized religion on to what happens to the soul after death. A few branches of Christianity believe in purgatory, which is kind of a “waiting room” between this world and the next, while many others from Christianity, along with Judaism and Islam, teach that the soul goes straight to heaven upon death of the body, while other believe the soul is in a state of sleep or “stasis” until the end of time. Hinduism and Buddhism both believe in a reincarnation of the soul to higher levels of existence. I personally find the verse in 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 of the *King James version of the Bible* most compelling in that most religious authorities seem to overlook it: “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. ***And the dead in Christ will rise first.*** Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” For me personally, the line “the dead in Christ will rise first” is the most compelling from a religious perspective to suggest that our souls remain

here in some capacity until the end of time. This belief would be consistent with the objectives of paranormal investigation. The bottom line is that all major religions believe in the soul and paranormal investigation is more or less in search of scientific proof of the soul.

To bring our three way common ground together, let's discuss the aspect of the soul from a scientific perspective. In our limited scientific understanding there is no way as of yet to definitively prove or disprove the existence of the soul. That having been said, I believe the common ground here lies in the Law of the Conservation of Energy. This law states that energy cannot be created or destroyed; it can only be changed from one form to another. This law has evolved from the work of many scientists over the centuries but the modern postulation first came about in 1844. William Robert Grove postulated a relationship between mechanics, heat, light, electricity and magnetism, by treating them all as manifestations of a single "force" (energy). Grove published his theories in his book *The Correlation of Physical Forces*. In 1847, drawing on the earlier work of James Prescott Joule, Sadi Carnot and Emile Clapyron: German scientist Hermann Von Helmholtz arrived at conclusions similar to Grove's and published his theories in his book *Über die Erhaltung der Kraft (On the Conservation of Force, 1847)*. The general modern acceptance of the principles of the Law of the Conservation of Energy stems from this publication. Most scientists would probably agree that every individual has a life force or "energy" about them that dissipates upon death of the body. According to this scientific law, it is not gone or destroyed at death but has changed to another form. Whether this energy is the soul and has moved on to another existence or has just gone on to be ambient energy in the environment again is open to the interpretation and beliefs of the individual. I believe this is an area where *legitimate* paranormal investigation comes in to help science have a better understanding.

Why did I emphasis legitimate? As most of my readers will be aware, there are literally thousands of paranormal groups that spring up daily. There are as many different styles of investigating as there are groups. Many paranormal groups use mediums or psychics as part of their investigation tools. This is one area where common ground can be lost very quickly. To approach this from an area of faith, most major religions warn against psychics or mediums primarily because you open yourself up to deception from a negative entity (aka demon) or deception from the individual providing the "reading" or "communication" with the "spirit world". From a scientific perspective, there is absolutely no validity to *any* information a psychic or medium provides us. A medium can claim there is a spirit present and they "see" them in the room. In every case you would have to take their word for what they are claiming. I'm sorry but that is just not good enough if you want to approach paranormal investigation from an objective point of view. The only way to bring all three disciplines together is to collect paranormal data in a scientific format. Then, and only then, can you bring your findings to both the scientific and religious communities and expect to have any credibility and common

ground. I believe it is possible some day, but it is going to take a larger effort by the legitimate paranormal researchers.

Why do I bring religion into the debate? It is a fact that 84% of the world's population claims an affiliation with some religion. The fact of the matter is that most people's beliefs and prejudices are influenced by their religion. The simple math of it is that a large percentage of scientists, which I include legitimate paranormal investigators in that genre, have their own religious beliefs. If they are not involved in religion they have their own individual core values that they draw from. Either way the scientific community has its own beliefs and prejudices amongst its members. I will always remain true to my faith and nothing will change that. I have personally received criticism from the religious community on my involvement with paranormal investigation. This was not at all totally unexpected. But through my years of experience, I understand the importance of science in aiding our understanding of the universe and improving the quality of life of mankind. I have found my common ground and hopefully if you are willing to step back and take an objective, open minded view; you will find your common ground as well.