Faith Exhibited in Religion and in Technology

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There are the stories about a man (Jesus) walking on water and referring to his friend as one with little faith because he was afraid to give it a try. This is a peculiar story, but one that can be paralleled as the case is made about the varying degrees of faith and the possibility that we all could claim some faith specificity. Although, there seems to be no other recent documents supporting similar expressions of faith, it may be worthwhile stating support for these concepts. On one hand, there is the colossally mysterious religious concept of faith, and on the other, the concept of simple acceptance of a set of beliefs. This study will oscillate between these two specific concepts provided by Newman (2004). It is important that faith is clearly defined. Newman (2004) gives us the definitions of faith and religion upon which we will build for this study. Faith is “a general religious attitude or accepted set of personal beliefs” (p.103). She goes on with the definition of religion that rests on this bipod: “….systems or structures consisting of specific kinds of beliefs and practices: beliefs and practices that are related to superhuman beings” (p. 105) for the theological apologists, and “a stable cluster of values, norms, statuses, roles, and groups developed around a basic social need” for the sociological apologists. Emile Durkheim’s assertions have been that “religion promotes shared values, intense interaction, and strong social bonds” (Breault 1986:629).

Spirituality, although not one of this study’s foci but will be referred to, is simply defined as “a state of being” (p. 106). Finally, Volti’s definition of technology as “a system that uses knowledge and organization to produce objects and techniques for the attainment [of] specific goals,” and “….is developed and applied in order to do things not otherwise possible,” will suit this study best. It is upon this foundation that we build the thesis that
the structures of faith in technology and the structures of faith in religion are extremely
similar.

*Faith*

Our systems of belief are cultivated and nurtured from infancy. This foundation
is laid firmly. Early exposure to the meanings of life told by parents and other significant
agents of socialization molds the core of faith that is constantly built upon (Powers 1982
and Westerhoff 1976). To continue in the vein of socialization, Karl Mannheim (1954)
offers, “….the ultimate criterion in truth or falsity is to be found in the object.” But the
examination of the object is not an isolated act; it takes place in a context that is colored
by values and collective-unconscious, volitional impulses.” New understanding is
attainable through critical awareness and control of these objectivities. He points out that
the different ways of thinking are not noticeable unless there is mobility (social).
Although one may think that everything is static, things are constantly changing.
Thoughts about this movement remain the same – that is until this movement shifts from
being routine horizontal movement! Confronted with the challenges of any vertical
movement (ascending or descending), one attempts to cling to their style of thought
(belief system) perceiving intruding styles of thought or belief systems to be “errors,
ambiguities, or heresies.” This is done without examination of inherited thought or the
uniformity of thought in general. It is interesting how different groups within a society
have different belief systems. These systems are constantly shaped by Socratic
(dialectic) engagement – a constant dialogue with each other (often unfriendly) in search
of “truth.”
The development of faith is driven by an interpretation of our experiences. Although we do not constantly test and compile findings in order to acquire faith, we do develop faith in the unknown based on the constructs of our surroundings. This belief system is not binary (the systemic arrangement of zeros or ones – on or off) – there are varying degrees of faith-based conviction and understanding. The content and quality of one’s faith determines the content and quality of one’s life (Powers 1982).

Faith in Religion

In order to sidestep the difficulties in generically discussing religion, we will pivot around this definition deposited by Newman (2004) “….systems or structures consisting of specific kinds of beliefs and practices: beliefs and practices that are related to superhuman beings” for those theologically inclined, and “a stable cluster of values, norms, statuses, roles, and groups developed around a basic social need” for the sociologists. We want to be as inclusive as possible as we massage these definitions of faith and religion – many of the definitions found vary from being age, gender, time, ethnic, and/or worldview specific. It is more important for us to study the practices, social structures, historical backgrounds, development, universal themes, and roles of religion in society – whatever society. Ira Howerth (1903) helps us with specificity as he defines religion as the effective desire (and actions taken) to be in right relation to the power manifesting itself in the universe – this “power” is being referenced ecumenically.

Within the constructs posited above, faith in religion can be deduced into being a system of belief that blooms from life-long processes of enculturation and confrontation. Even though this confrontation can be against a force powerful enough to deliver debilitating blows, one sustains with confidence that all is well (or that all will be well
soon). These thoughts and beliefs, as abstract as they seem to be, have become what is relied upon to make sense of the world. Relations with self, others and the universe become important. In maturity, there is an attempt to consciously decide to commit after exhaustive examinations of faith, religion, and/or faith in religion. We have to be sure to consider the defiance of man in this argument. Even though confrontation can be against a force powerful enough to deliver debilitating blows, one fights with confidence that this power can be defeated until one receives enough debilitating blows. In this case, one develops quite a healthy respect for one’s frailties and reverence for the omnipotence of the universe. The days of tacit commitment to religion become fewer. One believes or has faith in one’s religion because of firsthand experience – not solely on what one has been told. Finally, mature faith in religion offers the believer more days of unwavering harmony with the universe, access to the many powers of the universe, and visions of less conflict, oppression and violence (Fowler 1991).

Religion and faith in religion is and has been significant in the history of mankind. The Neanderthals expressed a reverence to the powers of the universe. This is implied by the fact that they buried their dead. In their lives (much simpler than ours), it may be safe to assert that they reverenced the universe and all of her powers. Their faith in religion intersected with technology. The Stone Age is known for the period of time where humans made tools (weapons) from stone that helped those of this epoch fend off predatory powers of the universe (History World 2007).

Faith in Technology

Technology is applied in order to accomplish what would be impossible to accomplish without it. Humankind, without the endowment of great speed, eyesight,
and/or strength, has developed methods at compensation for these deficiencies (Volti 2006). Unlike religion, where we needed to narrow our scope, we will need to broaden our scope to examine technology. Referred to in the introduction of this study was the story about Jesus walking on water. There is a stealthy message about technology in this story. Jesus stepped from a boat – not the first boat built but built, nonetheless, from passed-on technologies of that first boat. The point is that all too often we think of technology within the constructs of our epistemologies, or as Mannheim (1954) penned it, *Weltanschauung*. How long did it really take discoverers of the Pharaohs’ treasures to marvel at the technologies required to build these monuments? When did we really consider these efforts “technology?” Jonathan Shaw (2003) suggests that the builders of the Great Pyramids were not slaves; therefore, these workers were not a group forced to work and grumble about the impossibilities of their tasks. These workers were skilled who obviously possessed a tremendous belief that 1) something so grand could, in fact, be built, and 2) they could do it based on the designers’ plans, and/or technologies. This is significant. Volti (2006) supports this with, “the belief that solutions are possible and [constant change is] necessary in order to realize them” (p.11).

Technological movement is dynamic and cumulative. Theories are thought and rethought, tested and retested until a product is yielded and thought to be the end result until these theories are rethought and retested. The ethos of this type development is empirical – conviction derived a posteriori. A society can develop a technological epistemology of rationality that empowers them to exercise their faith in this system enough to disregard any other system (even when the faith in a religious system is available). Granted, people will do what they must validated by Volti’s (2006)
illustration where a society faces drought opts for technologies that help deal with these type difficulties – some societies are more equipped technologically than others. As faith in technology grows, so does the swagger in confidence (a sense of pseudo omnipotence) from being able to manipulate nature and the powers thereof.

**Faith and Responsibilities of Religion and Technology**

"We are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants. We see more, and things that are more distant, than they did, not because our sight is superior or because we are taller than they, but because they raise us up, and by their great stature add to ours."

John of Salisbury, Metalogicon (1159)

Immanuel Kant lays the groundwork for distinguishing the gulf between technology/science and religion by penning, “….divine creation cannot be part of any truly scientific theory because [it involves] "unconditioned" realities, while science can only deal with conditioned realities” (Kelley 1996). Faith has been the constant in this study – a thread of commonality that exists in both religion and technology. Once faith in a concept is developed and actively engaged, little can be done to dismantle it. It seems that adversity (or the fear of it) creates the only scenario for reevaluating a system of belief.

*What are the responsibilities of faith?*

Faith is a virtue of ours birthed and nurtured by our significant agents of socialization. These processes create systems of understanding that can influence and this influence is passed on from generation to generation evidenced in Salisbury’s statement above. Therefore; faith in this light would be the “shoulders of giants” upon which we stand. The content and/or quality of one’s faith determine the height of this metaphorical “giant.”
There are several examples of how influential one’s faith can be, but the referenced one below depicts faith and conviction felt strongly enough to justify ultimate sacrifice. Martin Luther King, Jr. (2001) declared in his August 28, 1963 speech:

“This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.”

What are the Responsibilities of Faith in Religion?

Religion is officially recognized as one of five major social institutions. It is distinct from theology and mythology. Man has always been religious spiritually (believing in spiritual beings), which includes a belief in self. As a belief in “the reality of spiritual life,” man develops an attitude toward the universe based on values and feelings. In this sense, one expresses reverence toward the universe and all in it (thinking environmentally) – reverence toward social- and self-preservation, and reverence toward personal and group safety (Ellwood 1913).

It is not absurd to consider religion or a faith in one foundationally stable. No religion changes. William Sumner (1955) mentions the stultification of divine doctrine proclaiming, “[this is] temporarily or contingently true, and [this] shall give way to something truer. [This] is a working hypothesis only.” It seems that religious tragedies like the Branch Davidians, the Heaven’s Gate group, and the group that James Jones led to Guyana, pivot around forgetting these facts (The University of Virginia 1997, 1998 and CNN 1997).
What are the Responsibilities of Faith in Technology?

Unlike religion, we have constant processing and/or massaging of theory along with the possibility that “truth” in science may not exist. We have empowered learned technologists to navigate these technologies so that they can guide the rest of us or baffle us with scientific razzle dazzle. Early technologies were basically task-specific technologies discovered simply in an attempt to make life easier or safer. The responsibilities of our technological “gatekeepers” would be 1) recognizing the faith that society has in technology and the need of such, 2) recognizing the appointment of which society has imbued, and 3) deliver technological products in a manner that would surprise philosopher Diogenes – virtuously, without seeking pleasure, wealth or social position. This model technologist would require the characteristics like Zeno – a consciousness that divine reason directed the world (PBS 2007 and Stanton 1973). There were signs of degeneracy in Plato’s time; nevertheless, learned knowledge was constructed around the “universe, the inner structure of matter, of man’s place in the cosmos, of his divine destiny, of the forces of nature and their control” (Wettermark 1974). This uncovers a good reason for these teachings to be kept strictly secret. Your average “Joe” does not need this much power over the forces of nature no matter how intelligent he or she is.

Conclusion

The fact that God has not been mentioned thus far has not been an attempt at persuading theothanatology. It has been an attempt to sway toward the concepts of spirituality and to include as many as possible in this exercise. We have examined faith in religion and faith in technology attempting to reveal their similarities. The obvious similarity in this study has been faith – both disciplines are populated with those of strong
faith, conviction and dogma. These are excellent qualities; however, there seems another commonality casting a major shadow on these systems of belief and on society at large.

Both religion and technology have been major institutions of humankind – their doctrine is deeply embedded and it is, for the most part crucial that one develops substantial faith in both of these systems. Left unattended, these systems can spiral out of control. Idealistically (or possibly utopistic), apologists for faiths in religion and technology must be responsible for following mores of societies. In the case of religion, followers recognize their personal frailties and place them at the feet of religious technologists – some of which may have only their personal interest at heart, hence the horror stories of religious sects. In the case of technology, we have developed more awe in the razzle dazzle and less in the connectedness that we have with the universe. Technologies will continue to blossom, but there must be an entity that oversees this growth in order to slow the destruction of our environment.
References


