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Every Friday from 10 am to 4 pm, a handful of students sit at a table near the entrance to the MIT student center and hand out free candy, pamphlets, and books to any interested passers-by. They enthusiastically converse with anyone who stops to ask a question or say hello, but they also let those who quickly and quietly sneak an item from the table to do so without reproach. For these students, who are members of the MIT chapter of Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC), the Friday outreach table is just one of many ways of sharing their faith in God with their academic community. It may seem paradoxical that students at a school like MIT, with its strong secular emphasis on science and engineering, can also find room in their lives for the sacred, but members of MIT's strong Christian community have very little difficulty reconciling their scientific expertise with their belief in God. A more difficult reconciliation, however, is that between their internal understanding that science and faith can coexist peacefully, and the external expectation that science (as it is currently conceptualized in the West) and religion (especially Christianity) are antithetical to each other, and that people like them, brilliant scientists and engineers but also committed Christians, embody a contradiction. Through six formal interviews with Christian MIT students, three who are active members of CCC and three who are not, and a series of casual conversations with numerous other Christian students, I have attempted to piece together a small fraction of what it means to be a Christian at MIT - how Christian students identify themselves as such to others, live in a secular institute, strengthen their faith through science, and, ultimately, reconcile their membership in two seemingly incommensurable cultures: one based on hard evidence, and one based on faith.

Identifying Oneself as a Christian

I would say that all of my friends know that I'm Christian...I don't explicitly tell them when I meet them, 'Oh, I'm Christian, by the way,' but...I think because it's such a big part of my life, I do a lot of activities with it, when I talk to people, I can't eliminate it from what I say...It's definitely not something I try to hide. I mean, it affects every aspect of my life...my friends find out about it pretty fast.

None of the students I spoke with said they had ever felt the need to hide their identity as a Christian from others during their time at MIT; however, none of them said that it was something they

explicitly told others upon meeting them, either. Rather, like the student quoted above, most felt that their Christian identity was something that, as an important and often defining feature of their lives, eventually “just comes up” in conversation with friends. As another student explained:

I don't...go introduce myself, 'Hi, I'm a Christian,' that's not how it's done. I think it's, well I guess I don't hide the fact that I do go to church on Sunday. I invite some of [my friends] to events that our fellowship has. I think just when you get to know a person you get to find out what their interests are, and that's how people would find out about it.

Others felt that the pervasiveness of their Christianity through other aspects of their lives identified them as Christian to others even without intentional disclosure:

I don't know how, but usually people are pretty good at identifying someone's, like, even without me saying anything, it seemed like usually people were pretty good about figuring out where my religious background was. Perhaps because of, I dunno, the subjects I bring up or the music I listen to or whatever. I don't know.

Still other students wear external markers of their Christianity, such as a cross necklace or a CCC tshirt, in addition to engaging in practices that identify their faith more subtly, such as attending Church on Sunday mornings. Just as the students do not go to church for the purpose of identifying themselves as Christians to others, most also deny wearing Christian items explicitly to alert others to their faith:

I wear a cross, but I don't intentionally do it to advertise, or not consciously. I think it's just nice to have a cross to remind you, you know?...I think tshirts are cool. I mean, all groups have tshirts, so if you're in a small group or a large group you should be able to have one too.

I guess for me it's more of, wearing a cross is more personal, my mom gave it to me, I guess it means a lot to me, personally, that I wear it.

Most of the time [I wear Christian shirts] because I like the shirt, because I already have the shirt, I wear tshirts all the time, I'm wearing a tshirt right now, so it just kind of comes up in my laundry...all the shirts that I have that are Christian shirts are ones that are saying, 'Campus Crusade for Christ' on them, so that's really telling people that I'm part of a student group.

However, since objects such as clothing “function as signifiers in the production of meaning” (Hall 1997:37), a cross or a Christian tshirt does serve to alert others to a Christian identity, regardless of whether or not that is the intention it is worn with, a fact that the students are not unaware of. For instance, the same girl who wears her Christian tshirts when they appear in the laundry may modify

her wardrobe if she feels that making her Christianity explicit might be problematic in a particular circumstance:

There have been a couple times where I've been like, 'Ah, this is probably not the most opportune day to wear my Christian shirt,' like when we were doing...surveys [for a cognitive science class] and I was like, 'oh, I don't want it to affect data results, if they think that I'm gonna judge them because I'm wearing a Christian shirt.' So I am aware of the fact that other people might see me differently because I'm wearing a Christian shirt.

Or, she may make a point to wear one when she wants her Christian identity to be obvious:

[Sometimes] I'm wearing it for a CCC event. Like, when we have Campus Preview Weekend, you know, Orientation, or things where we want people to know that there are Christians on campus. Because there's freshmen that come in that are Christians, and they want to know that they can connect with the Christian community here, so, we're more identifiable if we're wearing a Christian shirt.

While wearing her CCC tshirt may signify to her simply that it was on top of her laundry or that she is a member of a student group, she is also very aware that it may signify different things to other people, be they positive (there is a Christian community on campus that incoming students can connect with), or negative (as a Christian, she is going to "judge" other people's actions).

The "judgmental" or "hypocritical" Christian stereotype came up with surprising regularity when I asked students about wearing Christian clothing or jewelry, because they are acutely aware that people who wear Christian articles will be identified as Christians first and foremost by others who observe their actions:

To me, the big thing that always jumps into my mind when I think about someone who wears a Christian tshirt or puts a Christian bumper sticker on their car or wears the little WWJD bracelet is, as soon as you do that you have to be really careful about how you handle yourself, because...if you behave in an unethical manner or treat people like dirt, and don't treat people respectfully or whatever, and you're wearing that shirt or you have that bumper sticker on your car, you perpetuate the negative stereotypes. And so, I think, as soon as you advertise in that way, you do become accountable to a degree.

I don't think there's a problem with wearing [Christian] things, but if you're going to, you have to be extra...conscious in how you act, because in wearing that whatever paraphernalia you're wearing, you're kind of making a statement...I know lots of people, a big type is that people are like, 'oh, Christians are such hypocrites,' or they're upset by people who are... 'holier than thou' but then they really just behave like anyone else...you have to be careful because you don't want to further that type

that we say one thing and act a different way.

I've found all too often that people will advertise and not live up to expectations, and it's a lot better to, I guess, live the right way and stuff, than to advertise and not do it.

While students are proud of their Christian faith and happy to share it with others, they are understandably not happy about the associations others might make between Christianity and hypocrisy, based either on people who “falsely advertise” Christianity and then “treat people like dirt,” or the historical usage of “Christianity” to justify decidedly un-Christian events (several of the students complained about the inclusion of the term “Crusade” in CCC’s name, because of its, “bad connotations, especially for the Muslim population of MIT”). Fully aware that, “how others perceive and define one has an effect upon one’s construction of identity” (Ali 2005:516), these students do not want others to perceive Christians, and therefore themselves, as hypocrites. For them, “the idea of bringing a bad name on Christianity is a big deal,” because doing so has the potential to taint the Christian message they wish to share with others, and, as a result, what it means for them to identify themselves as Christians. So while students may not feel a need to hide their Christian identities, they often do feel a need to manage how they present themselves as Christians, and how others interpret what it means to be Christian.

Students have two main “techniques of information control” (Goffman, 1963) for accomplishing these goals. As previously discussed, the first is to be mindful of how they present themselves as Christians by being “accountable” for their behavior when wearing Christian paraphernalia, which simultaneously shows others that they as an individual are a Christian and not a hypocrite, and therefore, by extension, that there do exist non-hypocritical Christians. The second is to challenge the association between Christianity and hypocrisy through conversations with others when the topic becomes relevant:

Student: ...[There are] Christians that stand on the street corner and preach hellfire and say, ‘You’re all going to Hell in a handbasket!’ ...How much does that negatively portray Christians...like, ‘Oh, well, that person is preaching Christianity, how do I know that you, my friend who’s a Christian, aren’t the same as that person, you’re just not as loud?’ So, I think that definitely does affect it. Extreme views in any group of people, unfortunately, taints the view of the entire group of people.

Me: How do you react in those situations?

Student: Most of the time I’m like, ‘Well, not all Christians are like that, you know that, right? Do you think I’m like that? Why do you think I’m different? Do you think

I believe the same thing as him?’ Well, I mean, I do believe the same thing as him, but I say it differently.

Another student emphasized the, “distinction between Christianity, and having that relationship with Christ, and the institutions, because the institutions are not necessarily infallible” when the topic of Christians or Christian organizations behaving in non-Christian ways arose. It is important to note, however, that not all of the students saw other Christians behaving inappropriately as problematic, trusting instead that other people can understand the difference between extremist Christians portrayed in the media “just to get ratings” and the “real” Christians they know personally:

You get some people who are way out there, and whose beliefs don’t line up with the Bible at all, but I think, I feel like people realize that, and they don’t associate those people with the Christians that they know...I guess that’s why it hasn’t really bothered me in the past, because I just assume that people can, people see the difference between the Christians that they know in everyday life and these people that they’re showing on TV.

However students choose to identify themselves as Christians and manage what Christianity looks like to other people, they agree that their faith is not something to “try to hide,” but rather something it is important to share with others, both because of the Biblical injunction to spread the word of God (which I discuss in further detail below) and the centrality of Christianity to their sense of who they are as people in the world. As one student explained, “I’m glad that [my friends] know [I’m a Christian], I wouldn’t like it if they didn’t know...I feel like it’s part of who I am, it’s how I identify myself, so if they didn’t know, they wouldn’t know a big part of me.”

Living in a Secular Institute

Just as “colorblindness” does not equate to racial neutrality for non-White Americans (Lazarre 1997), “secular” does not always equate to religious neutrality for Christian students. Attempts to remove religious debates from the classroom may actually have the opposite effect:

[Religion] came up once as a point of tension in my AP literature class because my teacher wanted us to refer to the Bible just as a book of stories. Except for, for those of us who were Christians in the class, we found that very difficult for him to just dismiss it as nothing more than a book of stories. He just said, ‘let’s set all the religious things aside,’ but if you believe that the Bible is the word of God, that’s not a separable thing, you can’t pull that out.

And statements made under the assumption that they are uncontroversial may also unwittingly place Christian students in an awkward situation:

Student: I don't think I've ever been in a situation when I wasn't comfortable, well, actually, that's not true. When it's been a person in a position of authority, like a professor. If it's a professor badmouthing Christianity, especially a professor who I work for, or a professor who has authority over me in some way, it seems difficult to disagree.

Me: Has that happened?

Student: In, very indirectly. I think one thing that happens here on the East coast is sometimes people will espouse a liberal political view or a liberal religious view, and just assume that the other person agrees with them. And so that kind of thing has happened, and I kind of want to say, 'I don't agree with that,' but then I'm like, 'oh, I don't know.'

Some students even reported Professorial comments that assume not just liberalism, but actual anti-Christian sentiment on behalf of their students:

In my genetics class...[the professor] was basically saying how his relatives were Christians who didn't really, who weren't very intelligent, implying that that's basically why they were Christians. So, I guess in a way it was offensive. I try not to take those kinds of things personally.

Or that classroom "discussions" were not friendly to their views:

I think a lot of times in classrooms, you're not really allowed to disagree with professors ...They pretty much are the authorities. Or even if you could, only certain dissenting voices are allowed, and not others. I had a [class] where there was one other guy in the class who was semi-conservative, not as conservative as me, and then everybody else was liberal...And our teacher came in with a Kerry pin on her shirt every day, John Kerry election pin. And, all we ever did was talk about politics. And that teacher would let students interrupt and go back and forth on different issues, but if the one guy in my class, Rob was his name...if Rob started to talk, other people would cut him off, and the teacher wouldn't let him finish, or the teacher would cut him off. And one time he just threw up his hands and said, 'I'm done, I'm not participating in class anymore.' And she was like, 'well, I'm sorry to hear that,' and he was like, 'you guys don't let me participate, everybody cuts me off.' And she's like, 'well then you and I can talk about that after class.' And he got scolded for saying he wasn't going to participate after he tried for so long and never was allowed to...I was really frustrated by that teacher, because I felt that was really unfair, to not let, I mean, if somebody has an opinion or is trying to participate, you as the teacher should be the moderator, you should let everybody voice their opinion. And so for her to not only...not reprimand the students who were cutting him off, but to cut him off herself, I felt was really, that wasn't very cool.

Others described how the assumption that serious Christian students are a nonentity can result in non-

Christian students accidentally hurting their Christian peers with an offhand comment. One (non-CCC) Christian student described her dismay at hearing another student respond to Easter candy distributed by CCC with “Does this mean I have to do something for Jesus now?,” apparently oblivious to the significance of the cross she was wearing. The same student also felt “sad” when her dorm-mates jokingly dubbed a human trebuchet they built, “Jesus: The Ride,” because of the cross position it required its riders to assume, since she, understandably, did not find the crucifixion of Christ a very humorous subject. She was not the only student to note the tendency of non-Christian students to make fun of Christianity without necessarily intending to be hurtful:

I understand that people sometimes view Christian symbolism or Jesus as a point of humor...I know that they're not targeting me as an individual...but I do feel that it could be seen as offensive.

Another student commenting upon this same tendency pointed out that it's not religion in general that is often seen as laughable, but Christianity in particular: “I mean, you don't hear people saying ‘Ha ha, a star of David!’”

While not all the students agreed on what merited taking offense to, there was unanimous agreement about what to do when they did find something offensive. If the offending party is a stranger or someone not open to actual discussion, the consensus is not to bother to start an argument impossible to win:

[I was] just walking down somewhere, some people were talking and said something that, I guess most Christians would find grievously offensive...I did not stop and say anything, because...first, it's hard to tell what someone actually believes and what they're just saying around a group of friends, type of thing, and then also, I didn't know them, and they weren't asking me to do anything...I'm not entirely comfortable just interjecting myself into some entirely separate conversation with people I don't know, you know, wasn't invited into the conversation, and stuff. That also seems, I guess it would be the equivalent of two people talking about their sex lives, and interjecting ‘you should wear a condom!’ It's not, it doesn't seem appropriate.

I've talked to my friends about issues about science and faith, never in the context where they've insulted me, and then I've tried to respond. I feel like for situations like that, if they're so against faith, getting in an argument's not going to help. It's only if they're open to actually talking about it, then I would want to talk about it, because otherwise I feel like we'd just keep arguing back and forth forever and never get anywhere.

So people that would [say offensive things] would be people that I don't know that well, or I just happen to be in hearing range, and I don't feel the need to really say

anything about it, because I feel like if I don't have that basis with them...we have no connection in the sense that what I say wouldn't impact them particularly...I feel like if you're not a close friend of somebody, it's hard to share with them some of these things. It's harder to connect with people on this point if you don't have the mutual friendship, because then they would respect you and respect what you want to say, and they would have more impact if you were already acquainted, but if you just didn't know each other at all, there's no point in getting into a debate because...I don't think that would get either of us anywhere.

If, however, the person questioning Christianity is a friend or is just someone willing to have an intellectual discussion, then it is appropriate, and quite desirable, to engage them in one, similar to the previously discussed importance of challenging the association between Christianity and hypocrisy in relevant situations. Here the goal is not just to ensure that Christianity does not get a "bad name," but also to share one's faith and bring the interlocutor one step closer to conversion:

My goal, in trying to talk to someone, would be to, if someone has intellectual barriers to Christianity, to try to address those, and say, 'you know, I don't think that should be something that is a barrier between you and believing that this might be true'... But I don't want to do it in a coercive way, or manipulative way, or disrespectful way.

I end up just getting in conversations with people about what religious beliefs they grew up with and why they continue those beliefs or have walked away from those beliefs, whether they be Christian or not Christian, and it's just, at the very least, then somebody has talked to them about Christianity, and hopefully somebody, like, they would be thinking about it and somebody else would come along and be able to talk to them about it again. Like in the Bible it talks about sowing and reaping the harvest, per se, as far as converting people...a lot of times you're just planting seeds, and somebody else may come and reap the harvest...it's not the point of like, 'I'm not gonna stop this conversation until you believe what I do.'

Like the Baptists studied by Harding, the biggest criterion for starting a conversation about Christianity with someone is that they be willing to listen (1987). While none of the Christian students I spoke with explicitly tried to convert me, as Harding's informants did for her, many of them did ask about my religious background (and most met my reply of "Jewish" with an anthropological query of their own: "Culturally or religiously?"). Several also asked if I had any questions about Christianity they could answer for me, likely with the dual intentions of helping me with my paper and of planting the seed of Christianity in me. As with Harding's Baptists, to these Christian students, it is "an act of love to try to change someone else's mind," because:

I've seen how much my faith has changed my life, and how much God has blessed me through believing in Him and following Him, and I know that I would be much worse

off without him. And because I love my friends, and I love my family, I want them to be able to experience the same thing, and to know God in the same way, and just to have life with Him because I know it's so much better than without Him.

However, unlike Harding's Baptists, the students I spoke with do not approach conversion as a feat to be accomplished primarily through emotional rhetoric designed to "appropriate the listener's dialogic imagination" (1987:169), because "usually people who become Christians in those kinds of ways, a lot of times it doesn't last." Instead, perhaps because their audience is primarily other stereotypically science-minded MIT students, conversion is seen as something that must begin with a long period of rational discussions and "breaking down intellectual barriers" before it can proceed to a more emotional, "irrational" leap of faith. This tradeoff between rationality and faith is a central theme that emerged time after time in my conversations with Christian students, especially when the question of reconciling their identities as Christians and as scientists or engineers arose.

Strengthening Faith through Science

None of the students I interviewed felt that their faith and their scientific prowess conflicted in any way. In fact, the majority of them felt that what they learned as scientists and engineers served to strengthen their belief in God, and several used examples from science to explain why they believed in God in the first place:

I've seen enough stuff [since coming to MIT] that makes me think that I'm even more right...or even more, I guess, deeper into my faith. Like, in 8.012 [Physics 1]...[the professor] said that basically you have conservation of energy from the Big Bang...[and that] as far as we know right now it can happen, you can take the Big Bang, and you don't need anything at all to start it, except like a gram or two of mass, which we just kind of neglect. But, you know, where did that come from? It's a perfect explanation for energy and gravity, for everything else, but you still have to have something, some spark, and so, you know, no one really knows what the spark for the Big Bang was, and so it makes just as much sense that it was some supernatural deity as some other supernatural act.

I think when you get into the research...learning all the different laws of nature and things like that, that really just, it really amazes me how God brought all these things together, and made the world work...it's so amazing how God could create things to work in such an amazing way....I think in biology especially, like looking at the human body or the cell, how intricate and detailed it is...I really see God through the study of nature.

These students' descriptions of their awe at the complexity of nature revealed by science then

translating into awe and admiration for God resonates with the nineteenth century Protestant understanding of science, which held that:

God had revealed himself to us twice, in scripture and in nature, so that curiosity about nature was a good Christian virtue...Although the methods for studying nature were different from those for scripture, the end result was expected to be the same: a person was morally enriched by seeing the evidence of God's character in his creation (Toumey 1994: 14).

Students were not unaware of this historical precedent for their easy reconciliation of science and Christianity:

Many of the pioneers in science were Christian, and I don't think that was an accident. Typically, the reason that they connected their Christianity with their science was because they thought 'God made the world, God made our minds, God made our minds in such a way that we can go out and understand the world, and we can use things like mathematics to describe it.' So, they said, 'therefore, philosophically, I have a good reason to go out and be a scientist, as a Christian...the world is going to be understandable, it's going to follow certain laws, and it's going to be elegant and beautiful, and we can use our minds to search these things out.'

Students were also not unaware, however, that the current popular attitude towards science is no longer one which links it with attempting to understand God and His creation. Instead, due to the increasing specialization of higher education and the popularization of scientific knowledge among the non-educated public, the contemporary popular ideal of science is of a secular model "explicitly grounded in rationalism and naturalism" (Toumey 1994:19). As a result, current popular opinion holds that science cannot successfully mix with religion. So while none of the students described personal difficulties reconciling their belief in God with their interest in science, many did describe frustration with the fact that other people expect that reconciliation to be difficult:

I do have a lot of times where I'm really frustrated, particularly in a community that's so science-based, and thinking that science and Christianity can't mix, because I think they're actually a lot more compatible than people say they are.

Some students also described how the general perceptions that "science and Christianity don't mix" and "science requires rationality and intelligence" can lead to the deduction that "Christianity requires a lack of rationality and intelligence," like the student whose genetics professor insinuated that his relatives were Christians because they were not intelligent. Another complained that, "they say that an intellectual, academic person can't be a Christian," and another that, "some people say that becoming a Christian would be committing intellectual suicide." So while students do not have

difficulty reconciling their own understandings of science and Christianity, they do have difficulty reconciling the outside expectation that “Christianity is antithetical to science, and therefore to intellectualism” with their internal understanding of themselves as simultaneously devout Christians and skilled scientists or engineers. It is here, at the intersection of external and internal understandings of science and Christianity, where the students have to navigate the relationship between rationality and faith in their religion, their chosen field, and their lives.

While non-Christians may perceive science and Christianity as characterized by “such fundamental conflicts of worldview” as to be incommensurable (Boellstorff 2005:575), the Christian students I spoke with had several strategies for bridging the “unbridgeable” gap between science’s basis in rationality and Christianity’s in faith. Some students do so by challenging the belief that science is based purely in rationality:

I think that people put a lot of faith in science itself...And I think that, in general, there’s too much faith put in the capabilities of science, especially with evolutionary theory. I mean, sure, it might have happened, but there are so many holes in it, and having evolution in and of itself doesn’t disprove that there was or was not God. I think if you actually do research into it, you, I realize that it is just a theory right now. Like the fossil records are completely, they’re very incomplete, things like the Cambrian explosion where there’s a huge, all these species started appearing, plants, animals, all at the same time, so it’s like, ‘well, how did it evolve from a multi-celled organism to that?’ Evolution still doesn’t explain where the first cell came from or how life got started, and things like that. So I think that in general people should be more rigorous about how much stock they put into science.

Or that Christianity is based solely in faith:

It’s very generally said [among Christians] that we find a basis in reason, and then we have to make a few leaps of faith. But...people who are not Christians generally make the claim that in order to be a Christian you have to disregard all evidence, and all logic, in order to believe in something, whereas ...most Christians I have met and talked to will say that they have thought about things and have, you know, read the Bible, looked at the history...outside the Bible, and that the reason they believe, at least in part, is because that the Bible meshes with history outside the Bible, and that things in the Bible mesh with things outside, whether historical or just common sense idea. And that many of the ideas in the Bible are implemented even if you’re not a Christian. Like, I’ve heard of some atheists taking their kids to Church, not so that they’ll become religious, but so that the morals that Christianity teaches will be instilled in their children...And beyond that there are, you know, there are a few things I guess that have to be taken on faith, but they make sense, even with modern science.

One student felt that while Christianity and rationality are not antithetical to each other, non-

Christians emphasize the conflict between the two because doing so masks their own emotional (and therefore irrational) problems with Christianity:

And there are some people that, so when we're [CCC] going and asking people questions about what they believe and stuff, sometimes people definitely backfire questions at you, and sometimes it's out of true intellectual curiosity, but a lot of times people's intellectual questions aren't as big of a barrier as they make them out to be, because they're like, they'd be willing to believe it, except they had a Christian friend who was really awful to them in high school, or something like that. People have a lot of emotional issues with Christianity, but that's not the first questions that they ask, you have to dig deeper...to get them to actually ask the questions they really want answered..intellectual questions are very valid, and I know people have them, but there are a lot of people who ask the intellectual question just so that they can skirt the real questions that they have, because they don't want you to answer their real question.

Many students felt that rationality and faith are not so much incommensurable as they are complimentary, and that rational thought can actually serve as a first step towards faith. Like the students' descriptions of conversion as a process that starts with "breaking down intellectual barriers," Christianity was often described as something that people arrive at after asking intellectual questions, and then rationally working out their answers:

There are definitely people who come to believe in Christianity through asking intellectual questions. So it's definitely not something that you have to ignore the questions that you have to be able to believe in it...I have friends who have become Christians in college...and the people who become Christians later in life, like, you know, after being a kid, it's because they asked questions and they found answers they were looking for, or answers that were satisfactory. So, to me, that just more solidifies that you can be in a college or an intellectual environment and still have Christian beliefs.

If you take mathematics, because that's my field, we have, as a very basic thing, a few basic axioms...and then from that we construct everything else. And, for me, I said, when I was reasoning myself and just trying to figure out why I believed...I essentially made...the proposition or the axiom that there's a god, and I guess I went ahead and made the next one, that there's only one god. Because having, you know, multiple ones brings up a whole load of issues like, well then, why are you believing in something that's not omnipotent is worth worshiping or anything?...So, I guess, I made the proposition that there is a god, which to me is not that big of a leap, and two that there's only one god, and that he's...omnipotent, and all-knowing, and that type of thing, which, you know, if you're making a god and starting with axioms, seems valid. And then from there, you know, that narrows it down to, I guess, monotheistic religions, and looking at basic ideas from each one...And the one that I found, I guess, matched with what I believed already, like pre-existing things, was

most assuredly Christianity...

However, there is an asymmetry in how students allow rationality and faith to interact: rationality and science are only allowed to support faith (although it is not necessary that they do so for faith to exist), they are not allowed to detract from it (because by definition they can never disprove faith):

If I believe that God created the world, he isn't limited by science, and science can only tell you a limited amount of things...Science will never be able to prove or disprove faith, or prove or disprove that there is a God. Because science is limited in what it can tell you, it can tell you about the natural world and explain things that happen in this world, but God is, he transcends this world, because He created it. I think that no matter how hard people try, they're never going to be able to prove that God exists or disprove it through scientific research...So I think that in general people should...[realize] that God can't be captured through things like the scientific method.

There is one further restriction on the interaction between rationality and faith: while rationality and science can *support* faith, they can not *prove* it (just as they can not disprove it). You can be led to Christianity by asking intellectual questions and answering them rationally, but you cannot truly "come to know Jesus Christ as your personal lord and savior" based solely on empirical evidence:

I think that the only way that we would know there was a God is if God chose to reveal himself, which I think He does in a lot of ways, through nature, through the different laws he set up, or the different ways things work in the world, the intricacy and things like that. I think that God shows us in small ways, but He doesn't want to show us definitively, 'yes, I exist, I'm here,' because otherwise believing in Him and loving Him wouldn't be a choice so much as, 'oh, I better do this because I'm scared,' or something like that. He wants us to...love Him based on faith, because if He forced us to love Him it wouldn't really be love.

Conclusion

MIT students simultaneously inhabit two seemingly incommensurable worlds: one based in faith in the unknowable, and one based in the desire to empirically understand the world. Further investigation into this apparent paradox, however, shows that science can be based in faith as much as Christianity can be based in rationality, and rational, intellectual thought can be the first step towards an eventual "leap of faith" into embracing the tenets of Christianity. While the existence of committed Christians at as secular an institution as MIT may seem confusing to those who think it is a contradiction to be both a Christian and a scientist or engineer, Christian MIT students know that Christianity and science are only irreconcilable if you have a limited understanding of both.

References

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