

## Education and religion vs. learning and faith

By Kevin Craig

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For engineers working on real-world engineering systems, it is always about response. Society's problems are multidisciplinary, complex and ever-changing. To help solve these human-centered problems, engineers create machines, processes and systems, augmented with actuators, sensors, computers and controls, to produce a desired response to some stimulus - a desired input, a disturbance or a system change - with the goals of performance, reliability, low cost, robustness, energy efficiency and sustainability. The focus is always on the response.

Education and religion must also focus on response. Education must lead to learning, and religion must lead to faith. Learning and faith are the essential responses to education and religion. If this is not so, then education and religion fail human beings around the world.

I am not an education expert, although I have been an engineering professor for 30 years and have practiced engineering with industry colleagues all that time. I am not a theologian, although I have lived and studied the Catholic faith all my life. My views on education and religion, learning and faith have evolved over the years as I have read, listened, studied and lived.

Throughout the years of formal education - middle school, high school and college - educators use assignments, exams and grades to help students understand and internalize the material being studied. They are not an end in themselves and are used to promote critical thinking in students and foster the attitude that lifelong learning is not only necessary, it is joyful.

A human being's response to formal education is learning for the sake of learning and embracing the knowledge in a field one has a passion for in order to grow as a person each and every day. Each of us must never stop learning, and all our learning makes the world better through the solution of the problems humankind faces.

Unfortunately, in today's society, so much emphasis is placed on these performance metrics that the reason for their existence is forgotten; they become an end in themselves. Education then becomes a test, and once passed, learning stops, because it was never embraced, and innovation ceases.

The same applies to religion and faith. A choice each of us must make is whether to believe in a God or not. In a sense, we are all believers with doubt; some of us believe in a God, others believe that a God does not exist, while others believe that we cannot know the answer and don't make a commitment.

For those who choose to believe in a God, the choice then is what kind of God one believes in. Is God a benefactor, a judge or a lover? In the words and life of Jesus Christ, God is a father of unconditional love and forgiveness and our challenge is to accept that love and live a life in response to that love. Our life and behavior are a consequence of being loved by God, not a condition for being loved by God.

And this applies to each and every human being in the world. That is the faith of a Christian. Each one is loved by God as we are right now, not as we will be. Our life is a journey and a relentless pursuit to infuse God's love into the world. Religion offers guidelines and practices to help us in our quest.

Religion, like education, should nurture us, but when it becomes the focus of all our attention, we cease to grow and become with all our being what God desires for each of us. Religion then becomes a distraction, leading us away from God, away from the person each of us needs to become. Obeying rules and satisfying requirements are easy; it is a part-time job. God wants our whole being, and becoming a person who lives a life of response to God's love is a full-time job, 24/7, never ending, with always more to be done. That is the challenge.

Focusing only on education and religion results in a view that life is a test, to be passed with some acceptable grade and then rewarded for a job well done. Do just enough to get by, stay out of trouble and all will be fine in the end. This is certainly not a prescription for world-changing action.

Focusing on learning and faith results in a view that we are all works in progress, each of us on a quest for knowledge and understanding to better become every day a person responding to God's gift of unconditional love, as we are right now, not as we will be.

The fire this view fosters in each of us cannot help but change the world for the better, the way God intends.

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