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# Misterio y transparencia: el acceso a la información en los dominios de la religión y la ciencia

*Mystery and transparency: access to information in the domains of religion and science*

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## Resumen

Aunque la ciencia y la religión pueden considerarse compatibles como dos métodos para buscar la verdad, en la práctica divergen en sus efectos. Este hecho tiene serias implicaciones para la teoría y la práctica profesional de la información y la documentación. A partir del principio del derecho humano a la libertad de expresión —que contiene el derecho a la libertad de acceso a la información—, es posible comparar religión y ciencia y su tendencia al misterio o a la transparencia. El método científico es inherentemente escéptico, orientado a la comprobación de hipótesis mediante métodos y resultados expuestos abiertamente. Aunque la pureza de la ciencia resulta en ocasiones comprometida por sus financiadores —gobiernos, corporaciones y fundaciones— y por los poderes científicos, ofrece un modelo de transparencia. La religión se basa en la fe en alguna forma de revelación, frecuentemente encapsulada en un libro o libros, frente a la cual el conocimiento es contrastado. En la práctica esta preferencia por la autoridad y el misterio favorece el rechazo violento de ideas y promueve el secretismo tanto intelectual como organizacional. Se sugiere que las bibliotecas son instituciones que exponen ideas para su uso público y que, por tanto, son parte del proyecto científico. La censura y la supresión de ideas asociada con la religión debe ser resistida por los profesionales de la información y la documentación en cualquiera de las formas en que esta tendencia se manifieste, como, por ejemplo, en el resurgimiento del énfasis en la protección de la religión mediante leyes sobre la blasfemia.

**Palabras clave:** Acceso a la información. Libertad de expresión. Método científico. Transparencia. Censura. Blasfemia.

## 1. Introduction

'Many women who dress inappropriately  
cause youths to go astray, taint their chastity  
and incite extramarital sex in society,  
which increases earthquakes'  
Ayatollah Kazem Sedighi

## Abstract

Whilst science and religion are arguably compatible as two methods to identify truth, in practice they are divergent in their effects. This has serious implications for the theory and practice of library and information work. By starting with the human right of freedom of expression (which contains the right of freedom of access to information), it is possible to compare religion and science and their tendency towards mystery or transparency. The scientific method is inherently sceptical, testing hypotheses with openly exposed methods and results. Although the purity of science is sometimes reduced by its paymasters (governments, corporations and foundations) and by the scientific establishment itself, it offers a model of transparency. Religion is based on faith in some form of revelation, often encapsulated in a book or books, against which knowledge is tested. In practice this preference for authority and mystery encourages the forceful rejection of ideas and fosters secrecy both intellectual and organisational. It is suggested here that libraries are institutions that expose ideas for public use and that they are therefore part of the scientific project. The censorship and suppression of ideas associated with religion needs to be resisted by library and information professionals in whatever form, such as a resurgent emphasis on protection of religion through blasphemy laws, that this tendency manifests itself.

**Keywords:** Access to information. Freedom of expression. Scientific method. Transparency. Censorship. Blasphemy.

Scientists who are religious and religious people who accept the importance of science tell us that they can reconcile the two in their own minds, some of them with little difficulty, but others only after much painful reflection. These believers seem able to take the essence of their faith and match its revelations with those obtained from structured observation and experimentation. When they have taken their thought to this level

of abstraction the polarities represented by scientific method and religious belief seem to them quite illusory, merely representing two valid approaches to the essential truths of existence. In defence of this position, it is true, for example, that the first chapter of Genesis can be read as a poetic prefiguring of an evolutionary approach and that Muslims claim that the Koran has encoded within it the whole of scientific knowledge. Whilst respecting the sincere and far from simplistic view of the world that this approach can represent, for others of us the contradictions between science and religion loom large. Ayatollah Sedighi's marvellously colourful equation of female sexual display with the incidence of earthquakes (which forms the epigraph for this article) shows just how ridiculous and dangerous this approach can be. What will be argued here is that for library and information science (LIS), in particular, the contrasting effects of religious belief and scientific thinking have significant theoretical and practical implications.

To discuss this further we must begin with the human right of freedom of expression, which is arguably the very basis of LIS. This is the position broadly promoted by IFLA's Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) of which the writer was chair 2003-9. At this point it is necessary to explain the reference to 'freedom of expression', rather than the more obvious 'freedom of access to information'. The explanation is that Article Nineteen of the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1947) is set out as a right to freedom of expression. To some extent this is unfortunate because it diverts attention from the underlying and, arguably, more fundamental rights of freedom of access to information and freedom of opinion. There is a line of argument that says freedom of expression is a human right because we can demonstrate that freedom of access to information is essential for the healthy development and functioning of the human brain (Sturges, 2009). By this reasoning the need for freedom of access to information is inherent to the human being and to deprive anyone of access to information (however we may define 'information') assaults their essential humanity.

Therefore, whilst it might be possible to assert that there is no fundamental contradiction between science and religion, if it can be shown that in practice the two are divergent in their implications for access to information, significant conclusions can be drawn for ordinary human beings. In the context of LIS, a divergence between science and religion would mean that information and library services could differ according to the degree of respect those providing the

services paid to either science or religion. It will be argued here that this is a real danger in that concealment is natural to one: openness is the natural mode of the other. To be more precise, religion points towards mystery: science towards transparency. One chooses to regard the world and all that is in it as beyond human comprehension, a matter for a god or gods, with maybe a priesthood that can comprehend what is not intended for ordinary minds: the other strives to reveal and explain every detail down to the tiniest atomic particle. What follows will seek to expand on this and identify what it means in an information context.

## 2. Science

Science's claim to be true is not absolute, in contrast with the claims of religion. What science does is seek to provide the best explanation of phenomena available at the time. This is of course in the context of a search for absolute truth, but the characterisation of science as a rival religion, as opposed to a rival to religion, is not valid. Science works through the agency of scientific method: the rigorous testing and re-testing of hypotheses and their identification as false if the evidence shows that to be the case. Science uses observation, measurement and experimentation to obtain evidence for theorising. Both the evidence of science and the processes of reasoning applied to the evidence are intended to be open to all who wish to know. The effectiveness of this process of scientific investigation and the conclusions that scientists reach are subject to peer review, in which panels of experts from the field assess research proposals, findings offered for publication, and the qualifications of individual scientists and scientific institutions. The scientific literature is open to all and provides the evidence that either supports a theory or allows the development of a hostile critique.

In principle the method and the process sift out inadequate theories, bad research and unconvincing reporting, leaving us with the best explanation of any phenomenon or group of phenomena that is available at any given time. Responsibility for any idea or set of ideas is spread across a wide spectrum of the scientific community, from humble laboratory or field workers, teams of highly qualified and experienced thinkers and writers, juries of scientific peers, not forgetting the writers of popular science whose books and articles introduce and explain science to a wider public. Even when a theory has a scientist's name attached to it (such as Einstein's special and general theories of relativity) no one actually owns scientific ideas, even

though the literature is rigorously searched to establish precedents, anticipations and contributory ideas. The ideas and the evidence for them are a public good. When functioning effectively this is a magnificent system, but there is a problem in that it doesn't always function perfectly.

For instance, the governments that finance science through universities, research institutes and laboratories, are not always neutral guarantors of a sphere of freedom in which science can operate. Another key financial source, business corporations, want new science that helps their search for profit and protects their existing activities from interference on grounds such as public health and safety, or protection of the natural environment. There are other vested interests, the environmental movement for instance, which engage with science and dispute the validity of some of its findings. But more than this, science itself can be flawed in practice. The existence of a scientific establishment, including university professors and faculty members, presidents and committees of scientific societies, and members of official and corporate scientific advisory boards, is the source of the problem. The reputations, livelihoods, and indeed the belief systems, of members of the establishment are so closely associated with accepted findings and theories that they tend to suspect and, sometimes, marginalise science that challenges the orthodoxy. In these cases, the whole peer review system can look like a conspiracy to suppress challenges, rather than a means of guaranteeing scientific quality. The important thing to remember is that these are distortions and corruptions of an essentially strong and effective method to establish truths. For an example of the process in operation we can turn to the question of the origin of humanity's close companion and helper, the dog.

Despite the amazing variety of dogs, the evidence is that all the breeds were developed by selective breeding from wolves, on the part of humans who wanted to obtain a smaller, more easily tameable working animal. The generally accepted version of this has been that the process began in East Asia approximately 10,000 years ago. More recently, genetics researchers have collected sufficient dog and wolf DNA samples from different parts of the world to suggest an origin in the Middle East about 15,000 years ago. Dog remains found in dateable Middle Eastern archaeological sites seem to support this. This suggests that the dog was either first domesticated there rather than in East Asia, or that East Asian dogs might have been domesticated at the same time, but remained more like wolves because of subsequent cross breeding. Fairly

naturally the scientists who had developed the original East Asian theory were uncomfortable with this potential replacement of their version. The interesting thing is that their defence of the East Asian theory is based on criticism of the data used for the Middle Eastern theory (suggesting that it failed to include dog DNA from significant regions in South China). The details of this are chiefly of interest to the scientific experts, but the debate depends on openly available data and fully published theorising based on this data. An accepted consensus may emerge, or one theory may defeat another, but in either case a transparent process is underway. Through this process the scientific method should eventually give us the best available understanding of an interesting and significant question. The purity of the process is less apparent with some more controversial topics such as climate change.

Climate change and, more specifically, the idea that there is a process of global warming well advanced, features frequently in broadcast and published news. Images, such as those of polar bears trapped on ice floes drifting away from the safety of land, make this an issue that is not merely a concern of scientists, but something that disturbs the public mind. At its heart the issue is a matter of the enormous bodies of current and historical meteorological data available, the computer systems that can be used to organise them, and the interpretations that emerge from informed examination of the data. There is, however, the personal observation of the ordinary person to take into account. It is not only that, for instance, in the UK meteorologists note that the 10 warmest years on record have occurred during the last 12 years. It is also observable fact that there has been little or no snow in lowland England during the lifetimes of the younger part of the population. And, of course, people from other countries have noted equally disturbing changes.

Scientifically measurable patterns, personal observation and the suggestion that there is a broad, long-term trend in process fit together persuasively. Add to that the suggestion that this all is caused by damage to the ozone layer resulting from the high levels of carbon emissions produced by modern industrial society and you have a potent mix of scientific concern and public anxiety. For the non-scientific observer this is difficult issue to think through. In a lifetime one becomes aware of short term climatic fluctuations, groups of colder and warmer years, dry seasons and wet ones. That such patterns stretch back further in time is obvious. In what we might call the medium term, anyone with some historical knowledge will be aware that

Britain was much, much colder during parts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: fairs with oxen roasted on the frozen Thames are well recorded. These sharp variations in 'normal' weather patterns initially raise questions about the idea that there is a man-made pattern of global warming in process. At the very least, the issue of global warming is open to scientific and general debate.

If one looks at the content of scientific communication on the issue, it is overwhelmingly in favour of the argument that global warming, driven by carbon emissions is in process. This is the authoritative view put forward by the [UK] Royal Society (2005) in a lengthy essay based on the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). It states that 'This document examines twelve misleading arguments put forward by the opponents of urgent action on climate change and highlights the scientific evidence that exposes their flaws.' Many, many similarly powerful statements from the scientific establishment could be cited. Governments have, albeit tentatively and usually ineffectively, signed up to international agreements to reduce emissions. Some major corporations have pledged to reduce their 'carbon footprint'. It is not actually very fashionable to go against this trend of opinion, yet a few scientists, journalists and many corporations, noticeably those with interests in the manufacturing and energy industries, do argue against the global warming orthodoxy. Probably because the debate potentially affects the budgets of corporations and governments, it tends to become sharply polarised and hostile in tone.

This very difficult area actually becomes a real problem when the principles of scientific transparency are violated, as was the case recently at the University of East Anglia's Climate Research Unit (CRU). The CRU was exposed as having resisted attempts using the UK Freedom of Information Act to obtain disclosure of data sets held on behalf of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Leaked email showed a culture of possessiveness, contempt for critics and an unwillingness to cooperate with the law. Amongst other allegations, it was said that the head of the CRU, Professor Philip Jones, was trying to cover up bad data in a paper he wrote in 1990. In March 2010 a British parliamentary enquiry dismissed some of these accusations but criticised Jones for being 'too possessive and secretive about the raw scientific data and computer codes they use to establish the link between global warming and human activities. They also criticised the University for fostering a culture of non-disclosure of

scientific information from climate sceptics. (Connor, 2010).

This unsavoury and harmful episode did, however, have the virtue of reasserting scientific transparency. This principle remains the origin of the scientific literature that is the greatest resource of the world's libraries and the source of human material progress for centuries.

### 3. Religion

What is the basis of religion's claim to provide answers to broadly the same set of problems that are addressed by science? This varies from religion to religion, but most commonly it stems from some form of prior authority. The nature of this authority can be the word of a god or gods. This word is usually conveyed through the agency of a prophet or prophets, whose rendering of the word is taken as accurate, authoritative and exempt from criticism. The revelation is generally set out in a book or books, which themselves may have become the object of a respect amounting to worship (The Holy Bible, or the Holy Koran). Subsidiary revelation can come from saints and miraculous events of one kind or another. Interpretation of the word is usually placed in the hands of some priestly and scholarly group who are granted (indirectly, by the original god) special insight into the texts of the word and any supporting revelations. Quite often their interpretations are openly or implicitly declared to be infallible and thus having something of the force of the original word. Believers often claim that their position of belief was reached by logical examination of the evidence for and against, but more commonly they themselves experience some sort of moment when the truth of the word becomes apparent to them, without the intervention of their intellectual powers. At this point it is common for them to submit their will to the god, the prophets, leaders and priests, or whatever combination of these is the norm in their particular religion. Thereafter they are expected to study, meditate and immerse themselves in their particular faith to the exclusion of others. Of course, the believers in a particular faith will almost certainly claim that this is a travesty of their belief and church structures, but if we take religion as a phenomenon with many specific manifestations, the characterisation is not unfair.

In the brief account of science that preceded this it was argued that, despite the imperfections that could be identified in the practice of science, it was essentially a very good method of discovering the truth. The counter claim is that religion, despite its often beneficial role in society, is a very bad method of discovering the truth. Essen-

tially it relies on the assertion that something is true because some authority says it is. The source of certainty may be some book compiled from oral tradition, translated from an imperfectly understood ancient language and stemming from a culture quite alien to that in which is supposed to retain complete validity. It may be the oral statements and interpretations of someone who has hardly every exposed their intelligence to sources beyond a narrow compass of religious texts and discussions. In any case, it is authority that matters, rather than evidence or the quality of argument that supports it. What makes this worse is that dissenting or questioning voices may be directly suppressed by the systems erected by the religion and the community of believers. This seems to happen all the time within religious communities, but sometimes the dispute takes the form of a clash between supporters of a religion and outside critics. In such cases the religious groups frequently seek to suppress comment, criticism and satire, rather than to engage in debate on the merits of the case. What is more, they tend to expand the protection they claim for their specifically religious beliefs to a whole range of matters concerned with their religious organisations and the role of these organisations in society.

A significant instance of this flared up in September 2005 when a Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten published a group of cartoons containing satirical depictions of the Prophet Mahommed. (Sturges, 2006).

As Islamic communities throughout the world gradually became aware of the publication of the cartoons there were many passionate expressions of distress and anger, largely on two grounds: first that Muslim belief does not accept pictorial representations of the Prophet and second that the cartoons associated the Prophet and Muslims generally with terrorism. Public demonstrations, some of them violent and resulting in loss of life, and protests directed mainly at the newspaper and the Danish government followed, whilst the cartoons were reprinted by a number of newspapers in other countries in solidarity with the original publishers. The essence of the confrontation can be seen as based on opposed views of freedom of expression. One, put forward by Jyllands Posten and its supporters, is that what occurred was simply an exercise of a right of freedom of expression that is central to the effective working of democratic society. The other, as expressed by the Muslim opponents of the publication of the cartoons, is that there are limits to freedom of expression, and that one of these is the denigration of religion.

In case it should seem that this is only about secular views of Islam, it should be pointed out that there has been an increase of cases in which members of religious groups have protes-

ted vehemently against representations of their religion. Two examples from Britain illustrate the point that this is certainly not confined to the Muslim community. There was a comparatively enormous volume of Christian protests at the TV transmission of Jerry Springer: The Opera, in which there was a comic and disrespectful portrayal of Christ. The protests included death threats to the executives who approved the transmission. Street protests by members of the Sikh community in Birmingham at the performance of the play Behzti (which had scenes portraying criminal behaviour taking place in a gurdwara) reached such levels that further performances were cancelled because of the risk of harm to people and property.

Public meetings, street protests, petitions and formal complaints may be a common method used by believers to express protest against comment on religion, but some religious organisations use other methods to counter or suppress comment. For instance, the Church of Scientology has been accused by a French state prosecutor of operating a 'universe of secret rules' to protect its relations with members. There is clearly a need that transparency should be applied to the organisation's practices when Scientology is accused of pressuring vulnerable members into spending very large sums of money on books, courses and treatments. However, one of its responses has been legal action against books that criticise Scientology. This is a not-untypical response of beleaguered religious groups which have explored copyright, confidentiality, defamation and blasphemy laws for means to suppress criticisms and disclosures about their workings.

The most prominent example by far is the Roman Catholic Church. Accusations of persistent paedophilia on the part of priests in many parts of the world (nearly 12,000 such accusations in the USA alone) were resisted with determination by the hierarchy until court judgements began to affirm that the accusations were true. What is more, it is clear that the Church moved reliably accused priests from the area where they had offended to new parishes where their offences were sometimes repeated. A pattern of avoidance of the issue arguably amounting to criminal complicity seems to have been the normal response. Documentation showing that accusers were privately compensated and sworn to silence exists. Apologies, or at least partial apologies, have followed, but none of this regret was expressed when the Church was still felt itself in a position to suppress the accusations. This is so extensively documented in the press that a large bibliography would be needed to do it jus-

tice, but a newspaper article on the Pulitzer Prize winning investigation by the Boston Globe give a flavour of the whole story (Henley, 2010). Now it is clear that the trail of responsibility passes upwards through the hierarchy as far as the head of the organisation, the current Pope, whose signature can be seen on documents revealing that he was party to a conscious cover-up in some cases. The Church has taken elaborate measure to conceal this concealment, including trying to prevent the transmission of a BBC TV programme 'Sex Crimes and the Vatican' on RAI TV. In an unsuccessful attempt to extend this process to secular Britain, complainers tried to censure the comedian Jimmy Carr, who referred in a Channel 4 broadcast to the Pope as 'King of the Paedophiles'. Church spokesmen dismiss this as 'idle gossip', but the sexual violation of thousands of children, systemic public lying, and a more general contempt for the truth is more like cause for urgent public concern than idle gossip.

To some extent this is much the response that might be expected from an organisation of any type that finds its credibility undermined by some scandal. The difference is that the Church claims a special position in relation to all aspects of human life, in particular to the truth. If the Church has a unique and unquestionable hold on the truth and its truth includes the need for celibacy on the part of its priests, it is faced with a real dilemma when the behaviour of those priests reveals to what lengths celibacy can drive its practitioners. As the English novelist Philip Pullman puts it (Pullman, 2010):

When you get that sort of authority, in any setup, the potential for corruption is wide open. And when it comes to looking after children or people who are incapable or helpless, well, human beings are tempted. And of course part of the reason it happens is priestly celibacy. They'll deny it and say it's nothing to do with that, but of course it is.

The assumption of authority, a claim to ownership of the truth, the rule of priestly celibacy and the practice of paedophilia are locked together in a sorry chain of causation. This is bad, but it is what it reveals about the Church and the truth that is particularly interesting. The Church focuses on its rituals and ceremonies, its saint-making and other bizarre revelations, its biblical and moral teaching, its 'saving of souls' and it seems to have come to regard these as more important than everyday human decency and honesty. Another way to put this is that the Church rates its mysteries higher than transparency and everyone else suffers the effects. The consequence is that it has had to be dragged into openness and, indeed, self knowledge, by outsiders not afflicted with the centuries of emotional and intellectual baggage that constitute Catholicism.

#### 4. The opposition between religion and science

Why should this matter? Aren't the spiritual and the worldly realms distinct and don't they constitute the separate concerns and responsibilities of science and religion? This is certainly what many people, notably those of a religious disposition, claim. The problem comes because there are enormous areas over which both religion and science claim dominion. Thus religion might well claim dominion over all human knowledge, though sometimes being prepared to cede to science the area of observation, measurement and experimentation, whilst claiming to retain rights over the areas of interpretation and theory derived from these investigations. Most usually science would seek to subject all the phenomena of nature to its own interpretation, only perhaps ceding the matter of first causes and human spirituality to religion. This wide-reaching opposition of claims forces the individual to choose a position somewhere on the spectrum between the two approaches and it can be suggested it also has implications for the practice of the information and communication industries and services.

Since the eighteenth century age of enlightenment, religion has arguably been mainly on the defensive as the scope, capacity and confidence of science has grown. This makes the survival of the concept of blasphemy in various traditional and more modern guises that much more important. Essentially blasphemy is the expression of disbelief or disrespect for a religion. The purpose of blasphemy laws seems to the outsider as essentially a tool by which different cults and religions could assert themselves against others by making dissent from their own orthodoxy a punishable offence. Throughout history people have been shunned and tortured (mentally and physically), and also stoned, burned, crucified or otherwise put to death in considerable numbers for their opposition to the whole, or even some inconsequential looking aspect of a religion.

Science may at times have subjected the scientifically uninformed and religious believers to ridicule, but the author is not aware of any ill-treatment of non-scientists that remotely compares with the cruelty of religions. Science may be intolerant, but it does not express that intolerance in savagery towards non-believers. This assumption by the devotees of religion of a right to protect the faith by force matters, in the first place, because blasphemy is still a strong legal presence in countries like Saudi Arabia or Iran, enforced by religious police or revolutionary guards. Secondly, though less worryingly, it may

be an offence that still lurks on the statute books of the enlightened democracies, though it is virtually never invoked. In March 2008 the British House of Lords (the upper house of parliament) voted by a large majority to abolish the offence, which only applied to the Anglican Church, but debating time seems unlikely to be found in the House of Commons so as to confirm the abolition. In a reasonable world blasphemy or its surrogates would not be an offence in any jurisdiction. Everything would be subject to debate (whether rational or impassioned) and either resolved, or left unresolved for further discussion on another day. Put differently, in this ideal situation, the human right of freedom of expression would be universally respected.

This makes the promotion of the concept of defamation of religion (or religions in the plural) an extremely worrying development. For many years this has lurked in the structures of the United Nations, frequently supported by non-binding resolutions, but never being formally adopted. The idea seems to have been introduced by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and mainly supported by Muslim states, ostensibly as a means to combat the victimisation of Muslims, and others, on grounds of their religion. The problem is that this has either accidentally, or more likely deliberately, been rolled up with the idea of protecting religion itself. Protection of the religious individual or community is one thing, but protection of the articles of their faith is another. This, however, is what the defamation of religions movement seeks to do: restricting freedom of expression to ensure respect for religions and convictions. So far votes in favour of resolutions on this have not affected the core commitment of the United Nations to freedom of expression, but the threat remains.

The idea itself is certainly not confined to Muslims. For instance at the same time as The British House of Lords was voting to abolish blasphemy laws, the Catholic Bishop of Lancaster told the House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee that books critical of the Catholic faith should be banned from school libraries. Here we have the dilemma of protecting religion in stark relation to the library profession. Works criticising particular scientific theories are effectively welcomed by libraries in that every scientific theory is established on the refutation of previous theory. Works that explain religions in sympathetic and favourable terms are normal in libraries, but in both the interest of freedom of expression and of scientific progress works critical of religion and specific religions need to be present too. The great ethical mission of the library is to open up knowledge and

the opportunity to explore ideas to all. The conclusion drawn here is that at the core of formal religion there is a resistance to key aspects of this mission.

## 5. Conclusions

Is what has been set out above a rejection of religion and an encouragement to exclude religious materials from libraries? In response it must be admitted that the author's approach is not in the least bit sympathetic to religion's claims and practices. However, in the interests of freedom of expression, it is necessary to defend the freedom of expression of religious people along with that of their non-religious fellow human beings. What is not acceptable is the attempt to preserve the supremacy of mystery over transparency that informs most of formal religious discourse. The consequences of a secretive, possessive religious leadership are plain to be seen in the twenty-first century turmoil in the Catholic Church. The argument put forward here is that this is inescapably linked to the preference for authority in ideas, which is a defining characteristic of the religious mindset.

Because libraries have a major role in exposing the results of transparency and introducing transparency where it does not exist, the librarian will inevitably have to enter the struggle alongside writers, broadcasters, artists, publishers and media managers for open access to ideas on all topics, including religion. The library needs balanced collections and unrestricted access facilities so that users can use freedom of access to information to develop their free opinions and enjoy the benefits of free expression. The need for balanced collections and access is inherent in the scientific approach, but challenged in religion (which tends to say that that criticism is blasphemy or some other offence against religion's control of information). Treating religion as equal to science (in collections and services) is possible: treating it as special is extremely dangerous. Librarianship should recognise that it is fundamentally a scientific enterprise, even though this means acquiring, preserving and making available the heritage of religious thought. If we look at the welfare of the individual human being and society as a whole, librarians face two alternatives: do they trust people to explore and examine information, both scientific and religious, so as to form their own opinions, or do they join the ranks of those who prefer to control and conceal. The author suggests that, for the reasons set out here, librarianship must always reject mystery and offer transparency.

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