

## **Doubting Thomas: a Patron Saint for Scientists- our Modern Prophets** (Vicar's Voice Earth Day & Easter 2017)

Thomas Dixon, writing in his OUP blog, recently reflected upon the story of [Doubting Thomas](#), ironically “the patron saint of the blind” (thus named, as he “would not see the Lord in faith”) as a wonderful philosophical parable about seeing and believing, but what exactly is the intended moral? And what light does it shed on the relationship between science and religion?

An emerging view portrays Doubting Thomas as a scientific hero demanding evidence and refusing to succumb to blind faith. [Richard Dawkins](#) has popularised this version since the publication of [The Selfish Gene](#) in 1976. Last September he [tweeted](#), “If there’s evidence, it isn’t faith. Doubting Thomas should be the patron saint of scientists who wanted evidence. Other disciples were praised for not doing so.”

In [John’s gospel](#), written at the end of the first century, the other disciples tell Thomas: “We have seen the Lord.” Thomas is not convinced: “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.” A week later Jesus appears to all the disciples, and addresses Thomas: “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.” Thomas now believes, and Jesus comments: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

Traditionally, remember that the story is told so that we should admire not Thomas, but the other disciples, “Whose faith was so strong that they did not need evidence.” The traditional church reacts to this in that faith is held up above evidence. What is wrong with that? Well, first of all, the women and the other disciples believed in the Resurrection not through blind faith, but because they had seen the risen Jesus with their own eyes. When they told Thomas, he wanted proof! This desire was seen as faithless and a challenge to first century church authority! The scientific method was seen as a threat to evangelism.

Dawkins is right that we are not supposed to admire Thomas’s refusal to believe, and he is right about the reason. Thomas’s behaviour really is rational. Dixon asks “What better basis for belief could he have had than the testimony of his most trusted friends? We all have to rely on testimony rather than first-hand experience for the vast majority of our knowledge.” Agreed! However, knowledge can be proven, blind faith cannot. Scientists are becoming the modern prophets speaking truth to power standing up to authority.

Sadly, naming Thomas “Doubting Thomas” slurs his quest for knowledge based in evidence, a foundation of science. The church has had a long history of dishonouring and non-acceptance of scientific discoveries. Galileo, Newton, Einstein and Darwin all had difficulty in having their observations and conclusions accepted by the church. Some of their findings are still controversial today in some Christian quarters. There is a fear among many people of faith –mostly Biblical literalist Christians that scientific discoveries concerning Climate Change will diminish the majesty of God and the power of church leaders. They also hold a belief that God will save people from their own stupidity. They believe that we can burn all the coal we want, pollute the water, suffocate the oceans, devastate the land and raise the temperature of the planet with no impact upon “God’s elect” a Christian group who literally believes, interprets and follows the Bible. God will elevate them and save them from destruction and return them to the earth-a new Garden of Eden. This naïve thinking process is shaping some cultural and political decisions in North America.

This non-scientific conclusion is not based upon rational thinking but upon irrational belief that is supported by greed and unscrupulous manipulation. It is perpetrated by those who benefit from selling their coal, oil and polluting industrialized products aided by vested interested politicians who benefit from donations and church leaders who are so “Heavenly minded that they are no earthly good” to faithfully blind people. To save our planet we do not need blind faith in politicians and religious leaders but heed to a call to action by scientists for all us to listen to their warnings to change our ways. Scientists are the

modern prophets of God, of our age! We have one planet, one God and one people. We must all join together to save our Island home, the Planet Earth for ourselves and for the generations yet unborn.