

Science and theology since Copernicus - the search for understanding

University of South Africa - The Faith Behind the Famous: Isaac Newton



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The Faith Behind the Famous: Isaac Newton

In 1703 Newton was elected president of the Royal Society, which for two decades he ruled with an iron hand, taking offense at all who opposed his views. Yet this vast legacy lay hidden from public view for two centuries until the auction of his nonscientific writings in 1936.

The Faith Behind the Famous: Isaac Newton

Submerged in the torrent of adulation were criticisms of internal contradictions in his writings, his atomistic theory of matter, and his mechanistic world-view. A vast industry grew up dedicated to his memory—medals, poems, statues. Studies at Cambridge In June 1661 Newton entered Trinity College, Cambridge, a community of four hundred scholars and students that was his home for most of the next thirty-five years.

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It is likely that decades of overwork were taking their toll, possibly augmented by mercury poisoning from years of alchemy experiments.

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Alchemists had long pursued a method to transmute base metals into gold, and during thirty years in Cambridge Newton labored for thousands of hours with his furnace as he pored over alchemical books.

The Faith Behind the Famous: Isaac Newton

Newton did not consider one to be sacred and the other secular, nor did Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, or Pascal—all practicing Christians.

The Faith Behind the Famous: Isaac Newton

He communicated virtually nothing about his private passion to others.

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