

# CREATION and REVELATION

*- a guide to understanding science and theology*

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## INTRODUCTION

We live in an age dominated by science and technology. It is often important for Christians to think clearly about issues raised by scientific theories and their use. Unfortunately much of the discussion on the relationship between Christianity and science focuses on secondary issues such as individual scientific theories and interpretations of Scripture. Not surprisingly, such discussion often generates more heat than light.

We need to understand three things if we are to develop a Christian approach to science. These are the relationship between God and His world, the nature of God's revelation, especially through scripture, and exactly what is science.

## GOD AND HIS WORLD

The Bible reveals that God is sovereign over His universe. He is sovereign through creation and by sustaining it through to the end. There are no dark corners in God's universe and nothing that happens does so without His authority. Even events and forces that appear to be hostile or are in outright rebellion are still under His control. We must not think however that God is in some way "beyond" good and evil, or that He is responsible for evil, nor does this sovereignty diminish human accountability to God for our actions. God is of Himself unknowable, because He is completely separate from and different to His creation. God is constantly working in His universe through both natural law and divine miracle. God's sovereignty demonstrates his Lordship for He is truly Lord of all. It is His sovereignty that provides us with the security of our trust in Him and makes prayer worthwhile-why pray to a God who was not sovereign?

Other views of God and His world have been held. Some have seen God as sovereign only in the initial creation, since then the universe has operated according to its internal laws without involvement by God. Although contrary to scripture, this view was widespread in the 18th and 19th centuries. More prevalent today is the idea that God works by intervening in, interfering with, or stepping into a situation. Events such as the creation, the incarnation, miracles etc, are typical of God's activity to such people, who seek evidence of God's work in the miraculous but not in "normal" events. This view denies God's overall sovereignty, His freedom to work however He chooses, and His work through all things and confines His actions to the miraculous or inexplicable.

## **REVELATION**

Although intrinsically beyond human knowledge, God has chosen to reveal Himself. He does so in three ways, through the natural world, which shows God impersonal attributes, through the conscience, which reveals His moral character, and through scripture, which exposes His personality. Of these scripture is the most important, for it reveals the fallen nature of humanity, and God's grace towards us. God reveals through His word what we need for salvation-the nature of humanity, His law, the need for repentance, a history of God's personal revelation and people's response to it, and the work of Christ for our redemption.

The Bible was revealed to prescientific peoples, and any event that we would describe in scientific terms is of course described in non-scientific language. This does not diminish Scriptural authority in any way, but does constrain how we read it. If we interpret the Bible otherwise, we both misunderstand Scripture (Galileo is claimed to have said "The Scriptures teach us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go") and misuse it. It is not surprising then that historical attempts to use the Bible scientifically have always got Christians into trouble.

## **WHAT IS SCIENCE?**

Science is a human activity. Any discussion of "Christianity and science" is thus in the same boat as discussing "Christianity and accounting", or "Christianity and medical practice". Modern science is based on the assumption that the world, past and present, can be understood by reason. This can only be justified by the existence of a sovereign, reliable God whose sovereign power upholds the universe. It is no accident that modern science arose in Europe at a time when understanding of biblical theism was strong, as without such underpinning science is pointless.

The natural sciences are a rational way of understanding the natural world by the two-fold process of theory and observation. Observations give rise to explanations (scientific theories) of how the world works in a particular way, these theories are then tested by further observations and provisionally accepted, modified or rejected accordingly. There are three types of natural science, experimental sciences (physics, chemistry), involving relatively small simple systems which can be studied in the laboratory, observational sciences (ecology, astronomy, meteorology), observing systems too large or complex for the laboratory, and historical sciences (geology, archaeology), which interpret the past from its relics.

Modern science is a very powerful tool for understanding the natural world. Therefore different scientific theories have and are being continuously co-opted to justify different non-Christian philosophies. Thus Newtonian physics is used to support determinism, evolutionary biology in favour of social progressionism, Einsteinian physics to justify moral relativism, and quantum theory to reinforce eastern mysticism. All these philosophies are much older than, and parasitic upon, the scientific theories that allegedly support them. The same scientific theories could, with equal validity, be used to support Christian theology., although this has its risks.

## **A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO SCIENCE**

How is a Christian to approach the scientific edifice? I suggest in five ways. We must first always remember that God is sovereign, and that all that scientists can ever discover is how God is working and has worked in the universe. We need not be afraid therefore of any scientific discovery, but we can trust the God who is Lord over all and marvel, like the Old Testament believers, in the wonders, mysteries, and terrors of His creation.

Secondly, we must accept that while all Christians worship the same Lord of all, we may legitimately disagree on how our faith is related to our conduct. The Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking (although that may be a practical issue), but of righteousness. Nor is it a matter of arguing over the age of the earth and the method of creation.

Thirdly, Christians in general must not distress themselves too much about the implications of each new discovery. For Christian researchers of course, understanding and explaining the relationship between the faith and work is part of the responsibilities of their vocation to which God has called them. Above all we must avoid the temptation of linking our understanding of God's word to a particular scientific theory. The wine of God's eternal Word will always burst the wineskins of outworn scientific theories. This has happened many times in the past, with messy results for both Christian witness and the practice of science.

Fourthly, we must recognise that any attempt to link a scientific discovery or theory to a particular non-Christian philosophy is not based on science, but is an attempt by that philosophy to seek external justification and validation. Claims that quantum mechanics "prove" eastern mysticism must be dismissed appropriately, but without prejudice against the theory itself.

Finally, most scientific theories are used sooner or later as the basis of technology. How that technology is developed and used is a question of morality and ethics to which Christians should address themselves, but only if familiar with the issues involved. There have been too many cases of Christians getting publicly involved in debates without being fully aware of what is involved. The results of ill-informed comment by well-meaning Christians, in this as in other areas does not bring glory to God or promote right answers to problems.