
Pro Rege

Volume 3 | Number 2

Article 3

December 1974

Antithesis in Physical Science

Russell W. Maatman

Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Physics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Maatman, Russell W. (1974) "Antithesis in Physical Science," *Pro Rege*:

Vol. 3: No. 2, 6 - 9.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol3/iss2/3

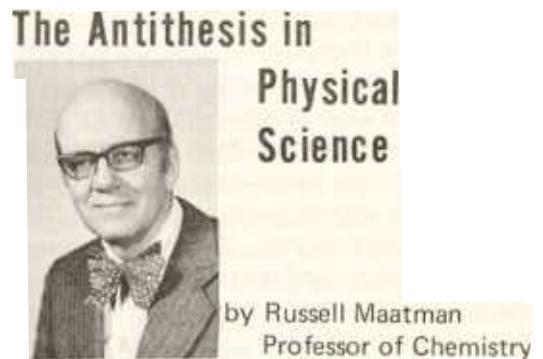
This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Dordt Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Dordt Digital Collections. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.

little in strictly technical matters, but as you extrapolate and deduce, and as you interpret and draw conclusions, inevitably these two groups must diverge. In 1899 he gave a thorough treatment of 19th century Evolutionism in his "Evolutie" address to the faculty of the Free University of Amsterdam. In it he not only showed the incompatibility of atheistic evolution with the Christian faith, but also very clearly denounced any compromise between the two camps, using very strong language in his warnings not to have anything to do with any form of evolution.

Kuyper's positive emphasis was clearly that there must be a sharp difference between what the Christian scientist does and what his unbelieving colleague does. By his criteria, 20th century science, as far as the Christian community is concerned, has not done a commendable job.

Where do we find evidence of the antithesis today? Although we may find some remnants in the works of some people, here and there, generally speaking there is little positive, progressive Christian analysis and interpretation of the data and of the theories of modern-day natural science. Most attempts in this direction are made by individuals or groups to get around some of the most irksome problems in their field which cause continual difficulty and uneasiness, and regarding which they are most often questioned by the Christian layman. But to do this is not enough. We need a well-worked-out position, with explicit reasons for taking specific stands on specific issues and questions. It is not enough to keep peace with the scientific elite and with the lay people. Instead, we ought to be at odds with the secular scientific elite, and we should be drawing fire from them because of our distinctively Christian analysis in our areas of specialization. Our stand for Christ and our reliance on Scripture must be evident in our contact with the scientific world.

It is within this context that we hope that we may be goaded into more action and guided in the right direction during this academic year. May we more consciously and conscientiously apply ourselves to this goal, and be richer Christians because of it. And may particular parts of Scripture have a more special meaning for us, as Christians and as scientists, that we may truly praise our Maker.



Dr. Russell Maatman received his Ph.D. in Chemistry from Michigan State University. Prior to joining the Dordt faculty in 1963, Dr. Maatman taught at the University of Mississippi. He also taught at De Pauw University and has been a research chemist for the Mobil Oil Company. He is the author of a book and several technical and non-technical articles.

Man was created in the image of God. Why? I assume that we shall not be able to give an exhaustive answer to that question in this life. But one reason we were created in the image of God is implied when the idea is first mentioned in the Bible. In Genesis 1:26 it says, "Let us make man in

our image...and let them have dominion..." Thus, one reason man was created in the image of God was so he could have dominion in creation.

What does "dominion" mean? It means many things, but surely today it includes the idea that man must explore creation. Exploring creation includes activity in the physical sciences—sciences such as astronomy, chemistry, and physics. I conclude that man is man, created in the image of God, and is not an animal, partly because he has the ability to engage in physical scientific work.

What I have said does not mean that all men do engage in or ought to engage in physical scientific work. (I have some students who are certain that not all men should engage in physical scientific work!) But it does mean that there is something inherent in all men which makes work in physical science possible. What is this "something" which all men have which makes physical science possible? Paul says in Romans 1, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead...." Notice that Paul says the power of God is understood by all.

Thus, in a most fundamental way all men, believers and unbelievers, know that God causes all things. In physical science, all men know that God brought into existence every fact and every law, although with many this knowledge is not conscious knowledge. Because there is only one God, and God does not contradict Himself, those facts and laws do not contradict each other. Precisely because these facts and laws do not contradict each other, physical science is possible.

Let me explain this point. Suppose that there were truly contradictions in Creation. In such a world, how would physical science be possible? If physical science is anything, it is surely correlation of facts and deduction; and whenever we correlate facts and deduce, we assume that things do indeed fit together. We cannot work in physical science without assuming that

there are no contradictions in Creation. The physical scientist is a living testimony to Paul's statement that men—all men—understand "his eternal power and Godhead." All these things teach us that both unbelieving and believing physical scientists build their science on a true principle, the principle that God created, ordered, and ordained.

But there is an antithesis in physical science. The Christian is consciously aware that God created, ordered, and ordained. The people of God are not at all surprised when the physical scientists report that the physical aspects of Creation "hang together," are ordered, have a structure. The people of God are the people who can make a positive statement about reality, about all of Creation. Their positive statement, their thesis, is this: God created and upholds. What is the anti-thesis, the "antithesis"? The antithesis is a denial that God created and upholds. Unbelievers are the people of the antithesis.

An unbelieving scientist builds his science by unwittingly assuming that there is an "eternal power and Godhead" — "clearly seen," says Paul—but such a scientist says that there is no eternal power and no Godhead. He denies his own human-ness, the image of God in him. The people of the antithesis are inconsistent. To the extent that our lives acknowledge God's ultimate power, we, the people of the thesis, are consistent.

It is an honor to be able to discuss this subject at a convocation of this college. It seems to me that this is a college in which God's Creation is taken seriously. When the Christian physical scientist explores the physical aspects of Creation, he sees that which the unbeliever should acknowledge, but does not acknowledge. The Christian physical scientist knows that God created, sustains, and holds all things together. The unbeliever sees many things, but he simply cannot, precisely because of his unbelief, see how all things hang together.

Unfortunately, many Christians give too much ground to the unbeliever when they describe the antithesis. They make

the mistake of thinking that the antithesis is merely a word which acknowledges that there is a sharp line between believer and unbeliever. If they are right, the antithesis has nothing to do with that part of Creation outside of man. With their kind of an antithesis, one in which man and not the rest of Creation is involved, they assume that the Creation we investigate is "neutral," that it means the same thing to believer and unbeliever.

What I want to maintain is that the people of God are at home in Creation; they consciously obey the command to have dominion, to discover what God created and upholds. The individual members of the human race die, however, and their children take over. Therefore, the people of God, through their schools, tell their children what they have learned about Creation. They explain what they have seen of God's creating acts and His upholding of what He has made. As time passes, there is more and more to tell. In the physical sciences, there is a mountain of information about discoveries which have been made. In our schools, we must always see this mountain of information for what it is: it is information about Creation which we are to transmit to the new generation. What we give to the new generation is not a set of so-called bare facts, but, rather, we give the new generation an account of what God created and upholds, using the best current knowledge we have. In Christian education, the student receives the whole picture. Everything is related to the hand of God, which has created and which upholds. The people of the antithesis pretend that God does not exist, and so non-Christian education is distorted.

Paul recognized that the people of the antithesis are distorters. In their understanding of Creation, he says, they ultimately worship the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). What he says is a good description of non-Christian education: take God out, and talk to the students only about "nature." An attempt to treat Creation as if it were neutral, as if it were not involved in the antithesis, can-

not be correct. Creation is not neutral.

It is not surprising that developments in modern physical science make more sense to the Christian than to the non-Christian. The non-Christian will not admit it, but he has been trying to fit square pegs into round holes. Let me tell you of a few modern developments in physical science which illustrate that the Christian is at home in his study of Creation and that the non-Christian is not.

First, it has been discovered that the smallest known particles act in a way that will always seem random to man. It is a long and involved story, but it amounts to this: these small particles behave in a way inherently unpredictable by man. It would seem at this point that one could hardly escape the conclusion that there is some kind of "force" which is outside of Creation, which causes these particles to do whatever they do. The Christian says that God causes them to do what they do. But the non-Christian is frustrated in analyzing this situation; he postulates blind, irrational chance. He is forced to prefer no cause at all to admitting that God, the Creator and Sustainer, is the cause. With him, that which is irrational wins the day.

Another place unbelieving physical scientists run into a frustrating dead end has to do with the origin of the universe. The Christian says that the uncreated God tells him in the Scriptures of Creation by God. But the unbelieving physical scientist looks to Creation to decide whether the universe was ever created. The unbelieving physical scientist examines nature, so he says, to find out if there was a beginning point. It is no surprise, however, that he concludes that he cannot accept the idea of Creation. The unbelieving physical scientist looks to "nature" for proof that there never was a beginning. Scientists who have otherwise done respectable work have seriously presented evidence which, they say, indicated that there never was a beginning.

Perhaps holding to no beginning or no act of Creation, is the ultimate in unbelieving physical science. The people of the thesis believe that God created and sustains

The consistent people of the antithesis believe that no one created. Thus, the consistent unbeliever says that what we see before our eyes never began and is basically random, resting on chance—and so, is meaningless.

I would like to mention one more development in physical science which helps the Christian appreciate what God has done. What I am going to describe is not something which necessarily refutes the position of the unbeliever. But you will see that this basic development fits very well into the Christian's idea of how things are.

First, we must accept the idea (although I am sure that we cannot explain it) that God exists outside of time; God is transcendent as well as immanent. That is what we mean when we say that God is timeless, and that He does not change. He has no age. But time is something which does exist; and since God created all things, He created time. Here is an interesting development in physical science concerning time: the concepts of matter, radiation, etc.—everything which is physical—have been shown in twentieth-century scientific developments to have no meaning unless we assume that time exists. In a very fundamental way, we cannot properly say that an atom and time exist. We cannot speak of the co-existence of atoms and time. Physical scientists have shown that as soon as we talk of an atom, or anything else that is physical, we must presuppose the existence of time. I cannot, of course, prove this complicated idea here; but you may safely assume that it is provable in a physics class.

How does this idea help the Christian physical scientist? Understanding that time is inherent in Creation, we can see that the act of Creation implies the existence of Providence, since, after all Providence is God's action in time. We cannot say, as some deists have held, that God created and then Creation unwinds, operating on its own like a machine. If the act of Creation of necessity implies the creation of time, then the upholding Providence, God's

action in time which Christians speak about, is a part of Creation itself.

The consequences of this idea cannot be worked out here. But perhaps a more faithful examination of God's relation to time will keep us from teasing ourselves with illegitimate questions, such as the question of free will vs. predestination. Also, if we truly believe that God created time, perhaps we will not be improperly mystified by the possibility of Biblical prophecy. After all, if God did truly create time, why should anyone be surprised when God reveals what is going to happen in the future?

These things I have been speaking of lead to an amazing conclusion. Modern developments in physical science have shown that the position of the unbeliever is impossible. Further, assuming that we know the Triune God by faith and therefore know that He is the Creator and Sustainer, some developments, such as the one concerning time which I mentioned, enrich our faith and even help us forget about illegitimate questions. More and more, we can see what the Scriptures mean when they tell us that the heavens—all of Creation—declare the glory of God.

Can we prove from physical science that God created and sustains? Of course not; we know of God and His work only by the faith which He gives us through His Word and Spirit. But when He has given us faith, we can work in Creation with the assumption that God created and sustains. If we assume, as we do at this college, that Creation is not to be downgraded, we can build on that assumption. That is why it is a privilege to talk about these things, such as work in physical science, here. We assume here that the Christian way of understanding Creation is the only way which can possibly be correct and internally inconsistent; not one of them "hangs together."

May the Lord bless us so that we can consciously build on the thesis, the faith principle, that God created and sustains.