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Christian Direction for Natural Science

Al Mennega

Dordt College

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EDITORIAL

A Christian Direction for Natural Science

Is science detrimental to our faith? Can a scientist be a Christian? These are questions with which some people have real difficulty. I am glad to be able to say that in the Natural Science Division at Dordt College we do not have much difficulty answering these questions in a satisfactory way. The answers are not always easy to give, and they are not always as complete as we would like them to be. But the basic answers are there. And we are working at the task of spelling out just what it means for a Christian to be active in science.

People have been busy in science for many years, of course, and we all recognize that the result of the work of scientists has greatly changed the face of our society. It is also a well-established fact that most scientists are not Christians, and we should, therefore, expect much of the work done by scientists to be strongly colored by non-Christian beliefs and convictions. This we do in-

deed find. And it is probably for that reason that many people show concern about Christians going into science. Although this concern is legitimate, there really should be no more concern about going into science than about going into any other type of profession or occupation. Dangers and temptations are everywhere, but a Christian is going to have to face these dangers and challenges, and meet them in the confidence that the Lord God will guide and give wisdom for every situation of life, as He has promised.

It is important to remember that there are two kinds of people who engage in science: unbelievers and Christians. The unbelieving natural scientist goes about his work in a way that is consistent with his presuppositions, and he will accept only those results which will fit into his way of thinking. Although the Christian scientist readily accepts all data from natural science studies, it is his explicit task as a Christian scientist to put these

data together, to interpret them, and to give them meaning, in a way which is consistent with his Christian principles.

In many instances this will mean that the data can be incorporated into an existing model which is already operative in science and which is acceptable to both the Christian and the unbeliever. For example, there would be no difficulty for a Christian to incorporate into his science the fact that certain stomach cells produce hydrochloric acid, and the consequences this has in the digestive process. On the other hand, there will be many instances where the interpretation of certain data by most of today's scientists will be unacceptable to the Christian, and therefore will need

confessions. Consequently, the real meaning of natural science will be different for the Christian. An entirely new system must be developed.

If this is done with honesty and integrity, there is no doubt that the unbelieving world will rise in protest and forcefully reject any such attempt at re-interpretation. Those who are willing to engage in this kind of basic Christian scientific work will also have to be willing to be rejected by the scientific community at large, and to be branded as unscientific, ignorant, obsolete, fanatic, etc. This will, of course, in many cases mean "professional suicide," and a separation from the main body of people in one's field.

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to be reinterpreted. When, for example, some biochemists interpret their findings of the laboratory to mean that life could have started simply through the operations of "natural laws," and exclude even the possibility of a Creator, the Christian has to reinterpret the data. He must put them in their proper perspective and state clearly for himself, for the Christian community, and for the unbelieving scientists, just where the issues of the origin of life lie.

It becomes necessary, therefore, for the Christian to spell out exactly what his presuppositions are in science, and which things are acceptable and unacceptable to him, even before he engages in any science. One must start out from the confession that Jehovah is God, that He has revealed Himself in Scripture, and that only from Scripture can we know who man is, what his place in the universe is, what his task is, and what the real meaning of human life is. It then becomes obvious that those generally accepted presuppositions which are of a religious nature in secular natural science have to be discarded and be replaced with Christian presuppositions and

If the unbeliever, however, accepts only those interpretations which are consistent with his basic beliefs, it is only reasonable for the Christian scientist to insist on his right to interpret all data on the basis of his Christian beliefs. The Christian scientist is first of all a Christian, and only secondarily a scientist. (This does not mean, of course, that therefore a Christian is a second-rate scientist. Not at all. History shows that many Christians have indeed been excellent scientists.)

We confess that every part of life belongs to Christ. This means that the scientist must also subject his science life to Christ. There is not an inch in all the universe which does not belong to Christ. It is therefore impossible to ignore the person of Christ in any part of science, or to leave Him behind when entering the laboratory. If we live with and for Christ, it is also possible for us to engage in science in a distinctly Christian way, and thus in our science proclaim the Christ to the whole world.

Although he may not always be conscious of it, an unbeliever starts out with certain beliefs and confessions, and only after that

does he decide what is logical and what is acceptable to him. Many are the instances where, in many textbooks and articles, authors make it clear that by their standards it is unacceptable and unscientific even to consider any supernatural being or revelation in explaining natural phenomena. This is, of course, the prerogative of the author, and helps the reader to understand why certain phenomena are interpreted the way they are. But this is no more scientific than it is for the Christian to state his belief in God and his reliance on the faithfulness of God in maintaining the universe. And, conversely, the Christian is not being unscientific when he states his basic commitments and makes his choices and interpretations on that basis.

Because the majority of today's scientists are not Christians, it may be surmised that much of today's science would not be acceptable to the Christian when it comes to the interpretation of the facts and their integration into the total meaning of the subject material. Of the relatively few scientists who are Christians, some are unable or unwilling to reinterpret except for the most blatant denials of Christian doctrine, as, for example, the claim that there is no God. In fact, it is not at all unusual to find Christians who confess that they believe in God, and in Christ as their Savior, who at the same time hold to a strictly mechanistic interpretation of the universe, in which God is not even considered, or only incidentally so.

We find still another category of scientists, a small minority, consisting of Christians who not only confess Jehovah to be their God, and know Christ as their Savior, but who are also willing to listen to God's Word speak first to give them a true perspective on all of the created order, and then to integrate all data and phenomena of natural science into this view of reality. For them it is essential to start with the fact that God created all things, by the power of His Word, and that He faithfully upholds all things constantly. There is no room, therefore, for chance happenings, or for the spontaneous origin of organisms, or for absolutization of "natural law." Creation by God accounts for the origin of all things, and His Providence accounts for the fact that all things are upheld from moment to moment.

There is room for miracles in a Christian's view of reality, but not the kind of miracle which we often find in textbooks. Not infrequently an author will demonstrate that the probability of a certain phase of evolution, such as the evolution of the horse, is so small that it approaches zero, and indicates that therefore we would normally reject this explanation of the data. Since, however, the horse is here, the statistically impossible is said to have happened. This is a sort of miracle which takes place in the minds of many scientists today. But these "miracles" are accepted only because of logical necessity, because these people have to come up with a particular end result. This kind of miracle is basically different from the miracles in which Christians believe, in that the latter are based on a sure knowledge derived from God's Word. We know that God created the world because He Himself tells us in Scripture. We know that Christ changed water into real wine because Scripture says so.

Where can one find the scientific views of these Christian scientists spelled out today? Because of the enormity of the task, there is no complete work available anywhere dealing with all the aspects of science from that viewpoint, and neither is it feasible for any one scientist to attempt that task. But we are finding more and more people who see the implications of their Christian commitments and who are trying to work them out faithfully. And I believe that this is one of the basic concerns we have in the Natural Science Division at Dordt College, and toward which our work must always be directed. We must not expect complete unanimity among all instructors, but with a mutual exchange of ideas, on the basis of our basic unity in Christ, there can be progress toward the goal of doing all natural science to God's glory, and pro rege. We must stand united, and put together the best which the Christian academic community can produce. And, certainly, we must do that which we know to be what God demands of us. We may plant and water, but still it is God alone Who can give the increase.

A.M.