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THE ANTITHESIS IN THE NATURAL SCIENCES

A series of Convocation Addresses delivered to Dordt students and faculty by members of the Dordt Natural Science Department.

Scripture Fundamentals, the Christian Scientist, and the Antithesis

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The Bible gives us a basic perspective of what this world is all about: that man was created good, as the crown of creation, in the image of God; but that he fell into sin and therefore lives in disharmony with God, with his fellow men, and with the created structure. It also reveals that some men remain in their condemnation, while others are redeemed through Christ and thus have new life, live in a new harmony with God, and have an in principle restored relation to their fellow men and the created structure. This view the Christian can have only through the power of the Holy Spirit, and through the reading of Scripture.

This basic way of seeing man must underlie and permeate all of the Christian's life, and of the Christian scientist's in particular. As a Christian, one can have varying views of where science with its data and interpretations fits in, but in this part of life, too, there are different degrees of sanctification. One can daily be renewed and filled, through renewed understanding of all of life in the light of Scripture.

Some Christian scientists agree with what Scripture says, in a broad sense, and let its teachings and stories have a sort of general, osmotic influence on them, and then enter into their scientific activity without ever checking back to see if the Scriptures speak at all on the topic with which they are concerned.

"The difference between a Christian and an unbelieving scientist must go beyond church attendance and believing in a God. It must show in his Christian world and life view, and must come to expression in his science as an explicit, integral part of his Christian view."

Other scientists look at the Bible and take a very literalistic approach, building scientific theories and models on the basis of certain isolated texts. This may easily lead to the problem of trying to prove from scientific data or their interpretations that the Bible is after all correct. But attempts to prove that God exists, or that He created all things, are completely unworthy of a Christian, and are probably as unconvincing as would be any attempted logical proof that I love my wife. That God exists and that He created all things we know from Scripture, and we confess this in faith.

Still other scientists profess to accept everything the Scriptures say about the origin and present condition of all created things, only to go on and say that the Scriptures are so incomplete and imprecise that we have to go to science to get the real answers to these questions. They adopt the current "scientific" view of the secular scientists, and put the biblical picture on the shelf, just in case they should, some day, find themselves too far down the broad, respectable road of secular humanistic science. But if we accept the current scientific view of what the world and life are all about, including the origin of the world and of living organisms, then we are hiding and hindering the antithesis. The difference between a Christian and an unbelieving scientist must go beyond church attendance and believing in a God. It must show in his Christian world and life view, and must come to expression in his science as an explicit, integral part of his Christian view. And if it does, it will conflict with the secular view of life and of the world, not in strictly technical details and theories, of course, but in the view of man, of where he is going, of the origin of the world, and all aspects of science that tie in directly with this view.

A better way for a Christian to start out would be to accept what Scripture says and teaches, in Genesis and elsewhere, in a very concrete way, and thus to know that the present world came into being in a miraculous way, and that it is more than just a mechanism unfolding according to its own, intrinsic laws. This approach I much prefer. We do know that God created all things. We do have the proper perspective of man in this universe, in the context of the explicit task to preach the whole Gospel of Christ to all people, and to have dominion over the whole earth as stewards and God's vice-gerents. Within this context we can ask very specific questions and look for specific answers in the Scriptures. In sociology, for example, we must not just look at how the family unit is unfolding itself presently, and thus derive our norms for Christian family life. And we may not condone divorce just because it is the most popular solution to today's marital problems. We find that Scripture speaks very specifically to the divorce problem, and that Christ Himself addressed Himself to it, speaking in no uncertain terms regarding the wrongness of divorce.

Or, regarding the origin of man, the secular scientist will tell you of his convic-

tion that man evolved from a primate ancestor a million or so years ago. But as Christians we know that Genesis tells about the origin of man, stating very specifically that God, in a very special way, called Adam into being, and that later he called Eve into being through another special act. This knowledge certainly is not what we call "scientific" knowledge. But, little as we understand exactly what happened when Adam and Eve were created, we may not ignore what the Scriptures say. We may, therefore, not maintain that on the basis of what I today know as a biologist, Adam and Eve could not have been created that way because I know that each human comes from equally human parents, always, ever, without exception. If we, uniformitarianly, hold strictly to the theory which we know to hold for all human procreation today, we not only come into sharp conflict with the Bible's teaching regarding man's origin, but also with the doctrine of Christ's divinity. For Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by Joseph the carpenter. You see how this does have a real bearing on how we see, study, and evaluate man and other creatures.

I do not think that it is trite to quote II Timothy 3:16-17, which says that

> All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living,
>
> So that the man who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good work. (TEV)

On the contrary, it is very much to the point in our consideration. How does Scripture, then, instruct us, as Christian natural scientists? It not only gives us the broad perspective on all of life, on the origin and main purpose of all creation, and of the direction in which we are going historically toward the end of time. It also gives us very definite guidelines for our daily life, telling us how to live before the Lord, and with his people. It tells us about rearing children, about loving our wives, about justice, and about employer/employee relations. It does, of course, not tell us all the particular details we might want to know about just when and how to discipline a child, or the amount of a fine for a traffic violation, or the optimum wage for each category of workers, or whether it is the specific duty of the husband or the wife to carry the garbage out to the street on collecting days.

And yet, Scripture speaks timelessly to each of these exact situations, indicating how an individual Christian should act. If a wife has a particular aversion to lugging the garbage can to the street, possibly because of childhood experiences, but the husband thinks that it is her task to do it anyway, the husband may come to see it as his duty to take care of this chore out of love and for the sake of peace and tranquility for wife and family. Likewise, there are directions for just wages for a fair day's work, even if it is not spelled out in shekels and mites. This can, of course, be understood properly only by those whose hearts have been renewed by the Spirit, and whose life-direction is toward God, in obedience.

While theology may not reign over the other sciences, it can lay the broad outlines of what Scripture teaches us regarding the world and man. But a natural scientist must develop his Christian view of his discipline independent from, although in cooperation with, the theologian. Each Christian natural scientist must bring to bear the entire message of the Scriptures on his field of investigation, and must bring particular problems of his field under the scrutiny of the Scriptures, while always seeing all his work in their light: "In Thy light shall we see light" (Psalm 36:9); or as John Calvin has it: only through the spectacles of Scripture can we see the world in its proper perspective.

Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare

the glory of God; and its firmament shows His handiwork." Now, do the heavens declare the glory of God? Indeed they do, to those who know Jehovah God in a personal way. But even the unbeliever can see enough of God's eternal power and divinity so that he is left without excuse in the judgment day. That he can know anything very specifically about God, comparable to a biblical doctrine, I doubt very much. And I doubt that any natural scientist can, through his study, come to a knowledge that Jehovah, the triune God, is Creator and Sustainer of all that is. Indeed, I doubt that, apart from the Scriptures, he can come to an understanding of the real place of the father in the family, or of true faithfulness between husband and wife, or of the right way to bring up children. From the created structure we cannot derive all the norms for those structures, but in many cases we can at best only approximate some of the corrolaries of these norms. This is much more true, of course, for the humanities than for the natural sciences. A scientist can also discover some of the consequences of improper behavior in different spheres. This is not because of his clear perception and understanding of the created structure, but only because of what the Belgic Confession calls "the glimmerings of natural light," i.e., the image of God, and in the context of which we sometimes use the term common grace. Had God left man entirely in darkness and had he given him completely over to his passions and sinful desires, it would be impossible for man to live, and human life would have been snuffed out long ago. It is for the sake of the elect that God restrains sin, and uses man for the furtherance of His Kingdom and to His glory.

Romans 7:22-23 says,

> My inner being delights in the law of God,
> But I see a different law at work in my body—a law that fights against the law that my mind approves of. It makes me a prisoner to the law of sin which is at work in my body. (TEV)

This testifies to the fact that there still is the conflict between the old man and the new man in the Christian's life, and between the power of sin and the fruits of salvation. Within this conflict, or dilemma, the Christian scientist today has to labor to do his work on the basis of Scriptural injunctions, out of gratitude to his God, and for the benefit of mankind. He must do his work in a way which is different from that of the unbeliever, not in the sense that his enzyme reactions or rat-behavior data will be different, but in the understanding that all of life, including that part which we live in the laboratory, must be lived to God's glory, and follow a direction dictated by a perspective which the unbeliever is unable to attain. And it is within these boundaries that we can and must develop a truly Christian natural science, based on the Scriptures, and carried out in obedience to His will, dealing with all the data available in a rigorous, honest way, and molding communally and individually the ever-expanding field of knowledge and understanding of the world around us.

It is well known that life in the church has not been what it ought to be, particularly in the last generation or so. Family life is not lived as it should be. We have not let our light shine in government, labor, and other areas, in a really significant way. Likewise, we have not been able to produce a generally satisfactory, worked-out, Christian natural science which can stand on its own feet, and which deals with all the natural phenomena, and which is strictly in accord with what Scripture seems to teach so clearly.

Abraham Kuyper, familiar to most of us, made it very clear that there is a basic division in the human race: of those who are regenerate and those who are apostate. The work of scientists, he says, will differ

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.

The Antithesis in Physical Science

by Russell Maatman
Professor of Chemistry

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 Paauw 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