

THE WORD OF GOD AND SCIENCE

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1. The problem of the relation of the Bible to science is of fundamental importance for any group of Christians who engage in theoretical work. At the same time this customary formulation of the question, the relation of the Bible to science, is inadequate and requires expansion. The real issue at stake is the relation of the Word of God to science, and not merely, as is often intimated, the relation of the Written Word to science.

Only when it is clear as to how we are to conceive of the Word of God, including the Scriptures, is it possible to go on and consider the relation of the Bible and science. For that reason, and since it is becoming increasingly clear that there is no consensus in regard to the nature of the Word, not to say that in general most Christians hold to view of the Word which itself minimizes the Word, this paper will deal largely with this cardinal matter. In conclusion the significance of what is said about the Word for science will be summarized.

2. Confessing that the Scriptures are profitable for instruction, we turn to them to be instructed as to the nature of the Word of God. At this beginning point we can only appeal to the Scriptures. We cannot appeal to Reason in a rationalistic or neo-rationalistic way, nor to religious consciousness a la Schleiermacher, nor to the results of the historical-critical method in its nineteenth or twentieth century forms.

Our appeal to the Scriptures takes the form of confession. We confess that it is in the Scriptures that we come to know Christ. We believe in Christ according to the Scriptures. In faith we bow before the Scriptures as the Word of God. That we cannot go behind or beyond the Scriptures to test their authority as the Word of God is not a problem to be acknowledged. If there was some higher authority by which to corroborate the Scriptures, the Scriptures would not be the Word or Canon for the new creation. At the outset of human action, including scientific endeavors, a man must confess in what he puts his first and final trust, he must choose whether he will live by the Word or some pseudo-word.

3. Studying the Scriptures with a view to receiving the first beginnings from which one can formulate a doctrine of the Word it becomes shockingly clear that the Christian community has been and still is plagued by a tragic reduction of the Word of God. Today 'liberals' are concerned to maintain

that only Christ is the Word--if they are even willing to grant that--and 'conservatives' fight to defend the fact that the Scriptures as well as Christ are the Word.

Meanwhile the Scriptures are emphatic over against both liberal and conservative that "by the Word of Yahweh the heavens were made, their whole array by the breath of his mouth. ... He spoke, and it was created, he commanded and there it stood" (Ps. 33:6-9). The Psalmist further testifies that "He gives an order; his word flashes to earth: to spread snow like a blanket, to strew hoarfrost like ashes, to drop ice like breadcrumbs, and when the cold is unbearable, he sends his word to bring the thaw and warm wind to melt the snow. He reveals his word to Jacob, his statutes and rulings to Israel" (Ps. 147:17-19). "Fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy winds fulfilling his word" (Ps. 148:8).

And the words of Peter are to the point: "They are choosing to forget that there were the heavens at the beginning, and that the earth was formed by the word of God out of water and between waters But by the same word, the present sky and earth are destined for fire" (Peter 3:5-7; cf. Hebrews 11:3; Ps. 119:89-96).

The Scriptures demand that in our reflection we take account of the fact that the world was created by the Word of God. "And God said, let there be ... and there was." Any discussion of the Word may not be limited to the Scriptures or even to Christ. God spoke and the world was formed. Nothing exists in itself or by itself. All things were created by God through the Word, and all things are reconciled by God through the Word. All things are upheld by the "word of his power" (Hebrews 1:1). God put his Word to the world and called creation into existence and the same Word holds it to this day in place in Jesus Christ in whom all things cohere (cf. Gen. 1, Job 38, John 1, Ephesians 1, Colossians 1). The only continuity between God and his creation is the Word. Without this Word, the world would simply pass away. And the Spirit of the Lord leads and moves the creation according to the direction of the Word to the eschaton in which God will be all-in-all.

4. When liberals and conservatives alike, including men of science, ignore this plain testimony of the Scriptures, they emasculate their confession that Christ and the Scriptures are the Word. For without the Biblical view that the Word of God structures and directs creation, it is impossible to understand the meaning and purpose of the Written Word as the means by which, after the Fall, mankind could again see his place and task in the world. Further, without the Biblical view of the Word as the Law-Word for creation, it is impossible to do justice to the Word Incarnate as He in whom all things exist and cohere (cf. Eph. 1 and Col. 1). Isolating Christ from that Law-Word cannot begin to understand properly the confession of John 1 that all things were made through the Word and that without Him nothing was made. One cannot grasp the meaning of Hebrews 1 that the Son of God sustains the universe by His Word of power.

The Christian Church must recover the fullness and unity of the Word of God. The Word of God is one. But since man's fall, that Word also comes to us

in Inscripturated and Incarnate forms. When mankind fell in Adam, it no longer heard and understood the Word. To make it possible again for man to hear and do the Word, and thus live, God gave the Scriptures to enlighten man as to his place, his nature and his task. Finally, in the "last days He has spoken to us in His Son" (Hebrews 1:1). The Word in its unity and in its forms is the Power of God to life. That Word is "alive and active. It cuts more deeply than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12).

Since the Word is one, it is as illegitimate to play off its forms against each other (e.g., 'Do you go by the Law-Word or the Scriptures?') as it is to deny that all the forms are the Word of God. In order to obey the Word of God Written it is necessary to confess that the Word is not exhausted in the Scriptures. The Word of God is every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And since the Lord is faithful and His words trustworthy, the words of God are the one Word.

5. The mystery of the Scriptures and of Christ and at the same time our joy and salvation is the fact that in the Scriptures and Christ the Word of God takes on the form of creaturely reality which is subject to the Word. In this way the Scriptures and Christ are completely human (creaturely) and at the same time completely the Word (divine). In this way the Scriptures and Christ are "handles" by which a fallen creation can again see and obey the Word. The Word became flesh; it was Inscripturated and Incarnate for our salvation.

The Scriptures republish the Word in the creaturely way of confession. As a book of confession the Scriptures reveal the Word as Norm for confession. To say it in other words: the Scriptures urge us to surrender our lives to the Lord and place before us the Direction of obedience. They unfold for mankind the vision of Christ's Kingdom and the necessity of confessing his name to live in that Kingdom. The Scriptures lay the mainlines of a confessional vision which is to guide our day-to-day activities. They tell us who we are (God's servants), where we are (in a creation in the grip of His Word), where we are going (in Christ to the final perfection of the already-dawning Kingdom) and what our task is (obedient gardeners, agents of the reconciliation). In this way the Scriptures through Christ put us back in place so that we can again rightly hear, see and know the Word of God holding for creation. Gipped by this vision of the Kingdom and our task in it, mankind ought to begin to work out the meaning of this salvation in all of his activities with fear and trembling, also in science.

6. The Word of God or Law-Word is in its unity a coherent diversity. Many words of the Lord, many "let there be's" make up the one Word. And man is to live by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God, not only by the word for bread. The Word in its diversity as law-order structures, directs and upholds creation. The law-order is the structure-for the structures-of creation.

It is important to note this dual use of structure. Usually when one speaks of structures, he refers to the make-up of concrete totalities. Such

structures belonging to reality and thus subject to the law I will refer to as structures-of. They are structures of meaning. At the same time it is the structures-for which delimit and make possible the structures-of. It is these structures-for meaning which are usually overlooked or are confused or identified with the structures-of. But it is just the structure-for which is the Word of God. The structure-for is the fundamental conditioning law which first makes possible the existence of things, events, societal structures, etc. It is the structuring framework outside of which nothing exists or can exist.

7.

The preceding makes it clear that reality is never just "out there," to be rationally apprehended. Reality is always the on-going revelation of the Word of God or, since the Fall, the revelation of the Lie of the Devil. As revelation of the Word it is meaningful, as revelation of the Lie it is meaningless.

Consequently science is not the rational investigation and domination of a rationally qualified reality, nor is it the setting up of models with a view to introducing some order into the chaos of reality. Much rather scientific work is basically a response to the Word of God in which efforts are made to trace out the structures-for the various areas of creation.

Theorizing or science is the type of concrete human activity which is characterized by logical abstraction. Theory involves abstraction from the wholeness of reality to an aspect(s) or segment(s) of it, from the particular to the general. Theory has as its purpose the tracing out of the law-structures for the areas of concern. A botanist, as botanist, for example, is concerned with the organic aspect of trees rather than with trees as objects of worship, as economically valuable or aesthetically pleasing. He is not concerned with this tree or that tree in particular, but with trees in general. He is intent on discovering the organic law structures which hold for trees.

8. One only discovers the structures-for (law) in his theorizing via, through and in the structures-of (facticity subject to the law). One acquires insight into the structures-for through observation of regularities and law-conformities given in the experiencing of structures-of. The structural laws hold for creation; they are never at hand capable of being grasped. Much rather they are the very conditions of that which is at hand and which can be grasped. All this means that one in his concern for the structure-for is not leaving reality (metaphysically) as is often implied for the ethereal regions beyond. At the same time one is not empiricist-ically locked in facticity. Rather, one goes to work empirically investigating experience in order through observed regularities to gain clearer insight into the order holding for reality.

It is not, it is well to note, that man can trace out surely the apriori structures-for from out his experience of the factual structures-of. However, even though our scientific descriptions of the structures-for are fallible and always open to correction, this does not affect in the

least the obtaining-force of these laws. The structures-for are not dependent for their constitution on human knowledge. Our descriptions may never be identified with or equated with the structures-for. At the same time it is the task of science to work ever harder to increase our insight into these for-structures.

Scientific knowledge once gathered can, once it is translated and integrated into life situations, help mankind the more effectively and obediently to order its life before the face of the Lord.

9. How one responds to the diverse words of the Lord in his theorizing depends in the final analysis on his heart response to the Word in its unity. Only when one surrenders wholeheartedly to the Word is he able (in principle) to see the various words in their proper perspective, interrelation and unity. Outside of Christ one elevates one dimension and distorts by pretending as if it is the Word in its unity. (This is not to deny that much valuable work can be done and is done by non-Christian scientists. After all, they too are working within the creation formed and bounded by the Word. But having rejected the key of knowledge they will never understand the meaning of reality even though they discover many things. Modern scientists outside of Christ are like the Pharisees who knew everything and yet nothing about the Scriptures.)

One can only know the Word since the Fall in surrender to Jesus Christ. And since Christ is known via the Scriptures, and since the Word for creation is known in this central heart sense via the spectacles of the Scriptures, the Bible is indispensable for science.

At the same time, since the Scriptures are a republication in confessional form of the Word and not a republication in a theoretic form, the Scriptures are in no sense scientific textbooks. Scientists, driven by the Scriptural motives, are mandated to investigate creation realities and thus trace out the structures-for those realities.

10. It may be well for a moment to compare this approach to the more customary one. If we simply ask about the relation of the Bible and science, the impression is created that scientific activity is an activity in itself and then later, because we are Christians, the question arises as to the relation of our scientific work and the Scriptures. It is difficult in this set-up, if not impossible, to escape from conceiving of the relation as a question of the relation of nature (science) and grace (Scriptures). Even talk of finding the intrinsic connection can be misunderstood. It leaves open the possibility that science as science can be engaged in without concern for the Word.

It has been the theme of this brief paper that scientific activity itself, whether conducted in subjection or in rejection of Christ, is only a possibility because of the Word of God.

11. Every science is intimately, integrally and inextricably bound up with the Word of God. All theorizing is a response to the Word. Every science is a science of a dimension or side of the Word. Theology in this sense has no special status; at the same time, we could call every science sacred.

Having believed in Christ according to the Scriptures, our eyes are once again open to see and know the Word as it grips and directs creation. For men of science this is of paramount importance as they attempt to bring every thought captive to Jesus Christ.