

THE “ANTAGONISM” OF BIBLE AND SCIENCE

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“The Bible is not a textbook on science” screamed the man from his seat in the audience, “and should not be used or discussed in any scientific matters!” Not surprisingly, I suppose, this attitude seems quite prevalent in our “scientific” society. Many, not knowing a great deal about either science or the Bible, have come to the false conclusion that there always has been, is currently, and always shall be an “antagonism” between the Bible and science. Somehow, the two are alleged to be mutually exclusive and diametrically opposed. How sad that such an erroneous concept should be so widespread.

The Bible and science are not antagonistic. Nor are they mutually exclusive. There is little doubt that there is, in the minds of some, a certain amount of tension between the two. But that can easily be explained by an investigation of the way scientists view science. Science, you see, operates within its own inherent set of assumptions. This framework of assumptions was perhaps best expressed by M. K. Hubbert of Stanford University when he stated at a symposium some years ago on the principle of uniformity that science has certain procedural assumptions. He expressed those assumptions as follows: “Fundamentally they are two: (1) We assume that natural laws are invariant with time; (2) We exclude hypotheses of the violation of natural laws by Divine Providence or other forms of supernaturalism.”¹ It will be obvious, of course, that the Bible does not operate within that framework of assumptions. The Bible does not assert that all events are repeatable; it does not state that all events are the product of merely natural forces; nor does it state that all events are intelligible to man’s intellect solely in terms of natural law. Consequently, it is inevitable that some tension will result from an attempt to view both the Bible and science in the same light.

However, simply because this “tension” is present, does not mean—by any stretch of the imagination—that the Bible and science are mutually exclusive or antagonistic to each other. It is essential

that these scientific assumptions be recognized as exactly that—assumptions. They are pragmatic or operational expedients man uses to work with his realm of experience. They do not deal with ultimate metaphysical truth. And the Bible believer accepts the value of these assumptions upon which science is based—used in their proper perspective. The Bible, in fact, commends the regularity of some aspects of nature to us. We could list numerous examples, such as Jesus’ statement about rain, sunshine and seasons coming on just and unjust alike (Matthew 5:45), the promise made by God to Noah concerning the rainbow (Genesis 9:12-17), or God’s statements that “while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22). The Bible believer has no problem in accepting the assumptions of science—when they are recognized as being of value within certain limits.

Science, in all of its operations—whether physics, chemistry, biology, etc.—operates within a naturalistic framework. Science restricts itself, by definition of its method, to phenomena that are totally natural. As Lachman has pointed out: “...science deals only with the finite, not the infinite....[S]cience deals only with phenomena which occur within the three attributes of space, and in time, insofar as these four dimensions can be described, and, preferably, measured.”² Viewed in this light, men and women who are philosophically atheist, Christian, or agnostic can work in science. The problem comes, however, when the fallacy of reductionism is committed. In committing this fallacy, scientists “reduce” everything to science, implying that nothing else of importance exists. This, of course, is terribly wrong, and perpetrates an impossible-to-accept viewpoint of reality. Everyone recognizes, for example, that there are certain things with which science is not equipped to deal: morality, aesthetics, love, hate, greed, etc. Science, as science, simply cannot supply all the answers. Science cannot explain, for example, rational thought or altruistic love.

And so, for those people who seek only a naturalistic explanation to the totality of life's phenomena, there will be a tension (an "antagonism" if you please) between science and the Bible. But the antagonism is not real; it is imagined. Since science cannot, by definition of its own method, deal with **all** things, answers for certain areas of life must be provided elsewhere. The Bible provides such answers.

Quite frankly, however, science is not always viewed in this proper perspective, especially in the 20th century when scientific technology continues to amaze us and create so many "miracles" of the human mind. The god-like view of science (which Anthony Standen effectively lampooned a few years ago in his book, *Science Is A Sacred Cow*) is very popular in our day and time. Despite cogent rebuttals from reputable sources, people in America today are becoming increasingly convinced that science and science alone can provide a basis for the total philosophy of life. Even some Bible believers, thinking science has "proven Scripture wrong (or at best antiquated)," have begun to accept, at least in part, this kind of thinking. And so we have current attempts to "demythologize" the Scriptures to make them "relevant" to the latest scientific "facts." Methods of interpretation are "discovered" that allow the end result of somehow harmonizing Scripture and science, thereby making the Scripture more "relevant" because it now speaks with "scientific accuracy and acumen." Then, when the "science" forced into harmony with biblical interpretation suddenly turns up in error (or when biblical interpretation is faulty), foes yell with magnum force that "the Bible is not a textbook on science" or worse, "the Bible is pre-scientific, antiquated, ready-for-the-trash-pile type of literature." Little wonder some see the "antagonism" between science and the Bible spoken of by so many in our culture today.

Whenever science is viewed as the sole guide to truth, or as the only dependable source of true knowledge, then science and the Bible will be mutually exclusive. But this mutually exclusive state is not created by a faulty Bible; rather the fundamental issue at stake here is naturalism (scientism) as a philosophy of life. Supernaturalism, as found in the Bible (along with other items, such as the explanation of altruistic love, origin and purpose of rational thought, etc.), becomes totally irrelevant in a cultural framework of naturalism (scientism). And not only does it become irrelevant, it becomes something which must be opposed, for if it is correct, then naturalism is not. If the Bible is correct, then scientism crum-

bles before the very eyes of its advocates, in which case they find themselves with nothing of any consequence. They are left with no cosmogony (world view), no explanation for current processes, in short, no explanation for anything!

The task of those of us who are Christians becomes one which calls for boldness and intellectual rigor. We must explain, in sensible, correct terms the true relationship between the Bible and Science. We must explain that science, in its own sphere, is right and proper. It is God's looking glass into His creation, given by direct command of God (Genesis 1:28—"...replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."). It is a tool given to man by God, meant for man's usefulness. Christians must point out, lovingly but firmly, that the tool is being prostituted for something it never was meant to accomplish, i.e.: explaining the whole of reality. We must remind those who believe in this "antagonism" between the Bible and science that the antagonism need not exist. The Bible and science are not mutually exclusive, as long as neither is misused or abused.

Together, they make a grand pair. In the words of Lord Kelvin (1824-1907), the famous thermodynamicist of Great Britain: "You will find science not antagonistic but helpful to religion."³ Conversely, we need to press the point that science will, in fact, find religion helpful to itself. Science can make good use of the guiding light of divine revelation. That is the way it was intended from the very beginning. Let us work to return that kind of spirit and atmosphere to the halls of science.

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- ³ Kelvin, Lord, (1903), *Nineteenth Century and After*, 53: 1068-1069, June.

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