



Science and apologetics

What does science have to do with apologetics? Some Christians say that science can assist us in defending the Christian faith. After all, the triune God who reveals Himself in Scripture is the God who also created the heavens and the earth and everything in them. Therefore we would expect that science will support the truth of Scripture.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if Noah's Ark were really found on a high mountain in the Near East and dated to the 3rd or 4th Millennium BC? Wouldn't that silence the unbelieving critics of the reliability of Scripture? And wouldn't it be fantastic if scientists discovered incontrovertible evidence that the earth is young? And what if geneticists realised that macro-evolution of life really is impossible due to the nature of the information encoded in the DNA molecule of every living cell? And what if scientists finally admitted that it is impossible to account for all of reality on a purely materialistic basis?

Such things would be interesting and even serve to confirm the faith of those who already believe the Word of God. But none of these things would change the thinking of a person who had no inclination to believe the truth of Scripture. Why not? Because every fact of science is interpreted by the scientist in order to fit into his well established belief-system. There are no brute facts; all facts are interpreted.

If the Ark of Noah were discovered, it may be interpreted as a great monument constructed to the god of the receding evolutionary sea. If the earth were found to be young, earth's history may be interpreted as evidence that earth is the cultivated garden of an advanced race from the stars (as indeed scientists have suggested in some of their writings). A finding that the evolution of life is impossible would be proof indeed that there is a caretaker race out there!

The fundamental nature of one's belief-system

I am not trying to poke fun at science or at scientists. The far-fetched ideas I have suggested above are not out of line with the theories proposed by scientists on other matters. One only has to consider the web recently spun around a rock found in Antarctica *supposedly* from Mars with *possible* evidence of life to see what wild claims receive serious consideration by scientists. The proposed theories of a scientist tell us more about his belief-system than they do about the object of his theorizing.

A belief-system is fundamental. All facts are understood through one's belief-system. All conclusions are drawn from evidence that accords with one's belief-system. It is only philosophically naive scientists who think that their conclusions are unaffected by their beliefs about the world they study. A scientist who rejects Scripture can accept a theory which postulates an alien race from the stars, but he cannot accept a theory that depends upon the creative activity of an Almighty God who created all things including the scientist himself. Why? Because of his belief-system.

So the apologetic value of science is very limited. Scientific theories, no matter how well established, will convince no one of ultimate truth. Rather one's view of ultimate truth will shape the interpretation of the data one considers. In fact, one's view of ultimate truth actually provides the criteria of selection for the data one considers and which data will be discarded as irrelevant.

Furthermore, anyone who does seek to use the theories of science to support the truth of Scripture will find himself disappointed after a few decades when the support he once found in those theories begins to erode and finally disappear altogether. The "assured results of science" tend to become unsure and are eventually discarded after a few decades. It doesn't take much study of the history of any of the major fields of science to discover this fact. This is true of even the 'hard sciences', physics and chemistry. Not too many decades ago the atom was indivisible. Later electrons, protons, and neutrons were the building blocks of the universe. Now the six fundamental particles have been discovered from which everything is made.

Less than seven decades ago physicists had no room for chance; until then scientists believed everything had a cause. Then in 1927 Heisenberg changed everything. His 'uncertainty principle' threw doubt upon the principle of cause and effect and caused statistical formulae to be used to describe the 'random motion' (i.e. without apparent cause) of electrons. But the recent development of 'chaos theory' raises the prospect for another change of perspective. It suggests that there may be an order behind all this 'random motion' but an order which will not enable us to predict, let alone determine, the exact course of events.

Yes, even the 'hard sciences' aren't so hard. They are rather soft and spongy when viewed in the long term. They are certainly not something upon which to base a defense of the Christian faith.

All this, however, does not mean there is no relation between science and apologetics. Science and apologetics must be related to one another by the Christian in three ways. First, in our apologetics we must point out the religious nature of many of the claims and theories of modern science so that the supposed conflict between science and Christianity will be recognised as a conflict of beliefs. Second, we must show that, despite claims to the contrary, science hasn't disproved the Bible, though it may cause us to rethink our interpretation of Scripture. And third, Christians must indirectly defend Christian truth by doing good science on the basis of their Christian beliefs.

The religious nature of many claims of science

When scientists declare that the miracles of Scripture are unscientific, or deny the universal flood of Noah because there is no evidence for such a recent, world-wide catastrophe, or assert that the resurrection of Christ is impossible, they have left off doing science and have begun to meddle in religion. These are religious or philosophic claims arising from one's beliefs.

Scientific claims are deduced from careful analysis of evidence and supported by repeated testing. But the above are assertions made by those whose religious belief-system is contrary to that of Scripture. One only has to compare other theories proposed and often tested by scientists to see this.

Are the miracles of Scripture any less scientific than the theory that there is intelligent life somewhere 'out there'? That this theory is considered reasonable is evidenced by the many millions, perhaps billions of dollars which have been spent trying to test this theory and the continued pursuit of this theory with no evidence at all. Neither belief has anything to do with science; these are matters of faith.

Is there any more evidence for the theory that millions of years ago the dinosaurs were destroyed by a large meteorite crashing into the earth than for a recent universal flood? It depends on how one interprets the data and that in turn depends upon what theories are considered reasonable.

Is the resurrection of Christ any less possible than matter being in two places at once? This is what scientists say happens when an electron passes through two slits at the same time (of course in such a case they call it a wave, but it's still an electron). One's view of what is possible depends on one's fundamental assumptions.

Thus the first aspect of our Christian apologetic will be to urge scientists, the popularizers of science and those who listen to them to examine the nature of their claims and acknowledge that many of these claims are religious claims, nonscientific in nature. We may further point out that religious beliefs are not to be rejected on the grounds that they are 'unscientific'. Of course not! Religious beliefs are held for reasons other than scientific evidence. Because of their nature they cannot be either affirmed or denied by science. This is true for both the Christian and the non-Christian.

As Christians we believe the teaching of Scripture because it is God's Word whereas the non-Christian believes something other than Scripture because he is not willing to submit to God's Word. He would rather believe anything else. This is what the Christian apologist will try to point out to the unbeliever.

Science hasn't disproved the Bible

Second, science hasn't disproved the Bible. We do not need to worry about such a thing happening. Truly, the God who spoke His Word through the inspired prophets and apostles made the universe and everything in it. Any 'discovery' of science that seems to contradict the Bible needs to be examined very carefully. It needs to be examined scientifically to see if it passes the test of good science. The belief-system underlying the claim also needs to be examined so that everyone can see just what assumptions are being made. (Every claim of science has underlying assumptions. Scientists, like other humans, are not infinite and therefore have to start with certain assumptions.) Finally, the Scripture needs to be examined in light of scientific claims. It may be that a scientific discovery will help us rethink our interpretation of Scripture so that we interpret Scripture with Scripture more accurately.

The example of Galileo has often been used (even by scientists in the Reformed tradition who should know better) as a warning that theologians must not set dogmatic limits for scientists. Scientists warn that any interference in science by theologians will lead to religious persecution and bad science just as it did in the days of Galileo. In this way they argue that academic freedom, unrestrained by dogmatics, must be maintained for scientists in their search for truth. Precisely this kind of argument has been used in the Christian Reformed Church of North America to permit professors to teach and maintain the theory that man descended from animals.

But the example of Galileo is very different from this recent example. Galileo had a great deal of observable data and repeatable evidence to support his theory. The Roman Church was relying on the views of Aristotle whose philosophy had been granted virtual canonical status. In that case Galileo's theory should have caused the Church to examine its interpretation of Scripture so that the Aristotelian philosophy which shaped its interpretation of Scripture could be rooted out.

Today the theory of the animal ancestry of man is proposed and maintained by observable data that only very indirectly supports the theory and with no repeat able evidence at all. Furthermore, on this matter we have clear and explicit statements of Scripture to the contrary which no one has shown are being interpreted in a way foreign to the rest of Scripture despite repeated examination.

Good science must be based on Christian truth

Finally, science done with the belief-system of Christian truth undergirding it will have an apologetic value of its own. It is science done in this way which is most productive in the long run and which therefore indirectly supports the truths of Scripture which it assumes. Historically, this is the reason that western science has been so productive. It is not that all great western scientists have been Christians. Certainly not! But because the belief-system underlying western science has been fundamentally Christian rather than monistic or polytheistic. Western science has operated out of a Christian world-view which acknowledges

1. that God is the infinite creator and providential ruler of all things, and

2. that man is finite but made in God's image and so is able to understand (to some finite degree) the mind of God and the works of God.

For this reason apparent paradoxes have not put western scientists off. Rather they have, until recently, been accepted as evidence of an infinite creator whose works are very complex, perhaps of unlimited complexity. Yet God's complex works have not been regarded as totally incomprehensible because man was created in the image of God in order to understand these works.

Christians have a golden opportunity in many fields of science today because of the breakdown of the underlying Christian belief-system. This breakdown has caused much recent scientific investigation to waste vast amounts of time and money on unproductive ventures. Witness again the search for intelligent life in the universe. The only redeeming feature of this search is that there are many profitable by-products which benefit us in daily life. (The micro-computer sitting on your desk is in large degree a result of space research, the heat-resistant glass in the door of your log burner is also a result of space research.)

As scientists search for intelligent life in the universe, they will find it. And they will have found darkness. They will have found the demons and the Devil himself! Science done apart from the undergirding belief-system of Scripture leads to darkness, not light, for God is light and His Word is truth. A good read describing this descent into darkness via unbelieving science is C.S. Lewis' book *That Hideous Strength*.

I would encourage our youth to consider a career in science. Equipped with the knowledge of Scripture and sustained by a true faith in the Author of Scripture, you have the opportunity to do productive work in science. In doing so you may, through God's blessing, exercise a restraint upon the headlong course toward darkness which science is currently taking. You may also, through the blessing of God upon your labours, show that productive science is a result of a humble and obedient acceptance of God's Word and thus indirectly defend the faith we confess. This is precisely what apologetics is all about.

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