

## The Organism of Revelation

Michael Goheen

[p.313]

This paper seeks to explicate the role of the Bible in relation to the natural sciences as understood in the Reformational or neo-Calvinist tradition. I will argue that the Scripture is unique in the organism of revelation, in that it unfolds God's work of redemption which culminates in Jesus Christ. Scripture narrates the universal redemptive history within which the scientist does his or her work, and through a worldview shapes foundational questions at the root of the scientific enterprise. I will caution against domesticating Scripture into the worldview of modern science dominated by various dualisms. Complementarism and biblicism in creation science are symptoms of this dualism. In contrast, the scientist is called to dwell in the biblical story and seek the light of Scripture for his or her scientific conceptualizing.

Any discussion of the authority and nature of Scripture must begin with Scripture itself. We confess that the Old and New Testament are the Word of God. As we read Scripture we find that it testifies to revelation other than itself. It points to a powerful activity of the Word of God in creation that reveals God and his will to us.<sup>1</sup> In the unfolding of God's redemptive plan we see that God reveals himself and his will in verbal communications, dreams, visions, theophanies and mighty acts. Finally, we are told that in these last days God has spoken to us in the fullness of his Son, Jesus Christ. Any formulation of Scripture's nature and authority, then, must understand that nature and authority in the context of the fullness of God's revelation. [p.314>]

I use the metaphor of an organism employed by others in the Reformed tradition<sup>2</sup> to stress the unity in diversity of God's revelation. There are many parts to one organism, but they work together for the same purpose. There is no competition among the different aspects of God's revelation. All cohere to reveal God and his will for humankind. If we wanted to understand the unique role of the eye, say, in the body, we would not seek to separate that organ from the rest of the body. Rather, we would seek to understand its unique role in the total functioning of the organism. Likewise, if we are to understand the unique role of Scripture in the organism of revelation, we would not separate Scripture from the rest of the organism of revelation. Scripture's unique nature and authority must be understood in the context of the fullness of God's revelation.

### THE UNIQUENESS OF SCRIPTURE

The key to understanding the nature of Scripture's authority is to say that the Bible is the Spirit's witness through human authors to God's work of salvation that centers in Jesus Christ. In this phrase we find that the uniqueness of Scripture can be found in three

things: the Spirit's witness through human authors, the redemptive function and the theocentric and christological focus. Scripture is unique in its origin, purpose and content.

Scripture is unique in the first place because it is the Spirit's witness to God's work of redemption. The Spirit was given to the human authors of Scripture to enable them to witness faithfully and reliably to God's work of salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Scripture is the inscripturated witness of the Spirit to God's work of renewal. That same Spirit continues to testify to Christ as Scripture is proclaimed making them powerful unto salvation. Thus at all three stages—the process of inspiration, the product of the God-breathed Scripture and the testimony of the Holy Spirit today—the witness of the Spirit is decisive for scriptural authority.

The witness of the Spirit is through human witnesses—those who have experienced God's redemptive revelation firsthand in faith and are called, authorized and equipped to communicate that revelation to others. They are witnesses from faith to faith. The witness of the Holy Spirit is embodied in the servant form of the witness of human authors.

Scripture is unique in its authority because it is the Spirit's witness to God's work of redemption that centers in Jesus Christ. Scripture has as its content and subject matter God's work of redemption. Scripture is a record and tool of God's redeeming work. The Bible narrates the unified and progressive unfolding drama of God's redemptive work.

[p.315>]

The focus is always on God and what he is doing to bring about the renewal and restoration of the creation.

Finally, Scripture is unique in its authority because it bears witness to God's work of redemption as it finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Scripture has a christological center and focus. Jesus Christ is the key that unlocks the meaning of God's redemptive work and the light that illumines the past and the future. The Bible contains revelation that is given over a long period of time. There is a single plan of redemption that unifies God's work. The single plan of redemption is directed toward Jesus Christ and moves from him. Jesus Christ is the unifying theme that enables us to understand and interpret the tremendous variety of revelation in the Bible.

It is these three things—the Spirit's witness, the redemptive function and the theological and christological focus—that define the unique authority of Scripture. I will now briefly elaborate on each of these.

### **THE SPIRIT'S WITNESS: THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF SCRIPTURE**

The translation of *theopneustos* in 2 Timothy 3:16 as inspiration has led to confusion between the God-breathed nature of Scripture and the inspiration of the authors. There is no "in" in the word.<sup>3</sup> Inspiration refers to the work of the Spirit *in the authors* in their recording of the Scripture. *Theopneustos* refers to the divinely authoritative message concerning salvation that has come from God and is recorded in the Scriptures. Inspiration refers to the *process* by which that Scripture has come into being while *theopneustos* qualifies the Scripture as a finished product. *Theopneustos* is concerned

with the divinely authoritative message *in the Scripture* while inspiration is concerned with how the Spirit brought that message into being *in the human authors*.

While the inspiration of the authors and the God-breathed nature of the Scripture should not be confused, they are very closely interrelated. It is precisely because God's Spirit has been given to the scriptural authors to enable them to bear witness to God's redemptive work that Scripture itself embodies the Spirit's witness to God's mighty deeds. However, it would be a mistake to appeal to the *fact* of inspiration or a general theory of inspiration to explicate Scripture's unique authority.

Berkouwer has complained rightly that much theological reflection on inspiration has focused on the "anthropological possibility"<sup>4</sup> of an inspirational work of the Spirit—*how* the Spirit of God *could* work in humanity—rather than on the unique witness of the Scriptural testimony. In discussing inspiration, theologians have addressed the ontological issue of how human words could also be God's words and [p.316>] the instrumental question of how the human authorship relates to divine authorship in the reception and recording of Scripture.<sup>5</sup> Mechanical theories have emphasized the divine and blurred the human. Dynamic theories have accentuated the human and obscured the divine. The theory of organic inspiration has carefully balanced the two factors. However, all these theories have maintained a dualism between a primary and a secondary author. This has deflected our understanding of the unique authority of Scripture itself.

It would be better to establish a close connection between the God-breathed nature of Scripture and the revelation to which it bears witness. Inspiration is part of the process of revelation. The Holy Spirit in the prophets and apostles bore witness to God's revelation in Christ.<sup>6</sup> Under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit, the authors were human witnesses to God's work of redemption in Christ. That witness is a human witness. "It is a product of a perception that was not infinite. It is subject to human limitations, its record does not exceed the limits of human memory."<sup>7</sup> Bavinck speaks of the "truth in the thought of Schleiermacher" regarding the holy circle [of revelation] in which the writers lived.<sup>8</sup> That is, the uniqueness of the scriptural witness is not established by a general theory of the Spirit's work in the authors but by the witness of the Holy Spirit through human beings to God's revelation.

Two implications of this formulation need to be emphasized. First, the scriptural testimony is "from God" and therefore bears divine *authority*.<sup>9</sup> When we listen to the human witness to God's work of redemption we hear God speaking to us. The relationship between the human witness and God speaking can be described "without exaggeration as *identity*."<sup>10</sup> This identity is as close as the words of Jesus in Luke: "He who hears you hears me."<sup>11</sup> What Scripture says is synonymous with what God says. The Scriptures are the very breath of God.<sup>12</sup>

It is the divine origin of Scripture that gives it divine authority. Two analogies can make more clear what I mean here. In Matthew 21:23f., the authority of Jesus is questioned by the chief priests and the elders of the people. They ask Jesus, "By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?" Jesus answers them with a question of his own. He asks them of the origin of John's baptism—was it from heaven or from men? Here authority is tied very closely to origin. If the origin of John's baptism

was divine (from heaven) then it should have been received as such. If the origin of John's baptism was from men then it could be dismissed as not carrying divine authority.

Another helpful analogy comes from Jeremiah 23:16. Here the Lord Almighty admonishes Israel not to listen to false prophets who are [p.317>] filling them with false hopes. Their prophecies have their origin "from their own minds" rather than "from the mouth of the Lord." Again we see that the origin of a message is decisive for its authority. When we speak of the inspiration of Scripture, we mean that the message of Scripture finds its origin in God and therefore bears divine authority.

The second implication of this formulation of the God-breathed nature of Scripture is that in Scripture we have a thoroughly human witness to God's work of redemption that centers in Christ. God's word is not substituted for human words but the authors were authorized by God and equipped by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to God's work of redemption. The work of the human author was carried out in a normal way along the channels cut at creation. For example, the author of the book of Kings sifts through written sources, selects, arranges and interprets the material to meet a certain need in the covenant community in which he lived. His focus is on the unfolding of the covenant relationship between God and Israel led by its covenant mediator kings. The author has a story to tell to meet a certain need. His work is the researching and writing work of any historian of that time. However, when we say that he was inspired we mean that he was equipped and guided by the Spirit to carry out this task in such a way as to give a reliable and divinely authoritative interpretation of covenant history. Similarly, God equips the biblical wise man with the Spirit to search out and discern God's will in the creation through experience, in the fear of the Lord. Again, there is no circumvention of creation. The wisdom of Scripture has come "from God" but this does not bypass the normal workings of creation. Similar things could be said about the biblical poet, prophet, gospel writer and apostle.

Therefore, Scripture consists of thoroughly human documents that bear divine authority. It is a false dilemma to pit the humanness of Scripture against the divine authority of Scripture. Scripture must be read in the light of its original historical and cultural setting. The Bible is not addressed, in the first place, to us, our needs, our questions and our particular context of understanding shaped as they are by a modern scientific worldview. Rather, it is addressed to the needs of people long ago and must be read in the light of their original cultural and historical circumstances.

Scripture employs (though it does not teach) cosmological concepts of times passed. Bavinck recognized "without hesitation, that the Bible writers' world-views were no different from those which were generally held at the time"—for example the way heavenly bodies moved in the sky. However, he could also say that "they in no way bind us in a normative sense."<sup>13</sup> The early chapters of Genesis seem to reflect an ancient Near Eastern cosmology. The earth is flat and stands on pillars. There is water under the earth and the sky is a dome which [p.318>] holds back the waters over the earth. The windows of this firmament are opened to allow for rain. Ramm points to other so-called scientific concepts in Scripture in the realm of time, psychology, medicine, mathematics and geography.<sup>14</sup> While the author may have employed these thought forms and categories when he formulated his message, his *intention* was not to teach these concepts.

How does this fit in with the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture? Bastiaan Van Elderen answers:

Under the concept of organic inspiration we imply that the Bible was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by men who used the language, culture, cosmology, thought forms, categories, understanding of nature and reality—all of these of their environment and times. After all, this revelation had to be intelligible to the contemporaries of the authors. Thus Paul wrote in the framework of a first century cosmology—not our twentieth century perspective.<sup>15</sup>

This highlights the importance of clarifying the universe of discourse that is operative in the Scriptures. In the heyday of positivism, the discourse of Scripture was often judged by the supposed precision and technicality of scientific discourse. However, it has become clear that language has many forms, operates in many different life contexts and serves various functions. Poetry is qualified poetically, business contracts are qualified economically, courtroom discourse is qualified juridically, scientific discourse is qualified analytically. Different kinds of discourse manifest the uniqueness of the distinct spheres in which they are operative. Scriptural and scientific discourse function in different aspects of experience and are aimed at different ends.

The discourse of Scripture is concerned with faith and ultimate beliefs.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the history of created reality is conveyed in a confessionally focused manner from the standpoint of God's redemptive purposes. Scripture is only interested in things and events from the unique standpoint of redemption because it seeks to redirect our faith to God and therein restore our understanding of created reality. For example, Omri was so famous internationally that the Assyrians referred to the northern kingdom of Israel as the "House of Omri" for years after Omri's death. However, rather than focusing on what Omri accomplished militarily, economically, or politically, the book of Kings unfolds the history of the covenant during the divided kingdom. The covenant mediator kings are leading Israel into covenant breaking and thus to punishment. Therefore, the author disposes of Omri in eight verses as just one more king in the line of Israel's kings who is leading Israel further into covenant rebellion.<sup>17</sup> The narrative of Omri was [p.319>] written to call Israel back to faith, and its content becomes intelligible within that context.

When the difference between the discourse of science and of Scripture is recognized one will not expect Scripture to provide data for science. The language of Scripture is seen to function in a confessional way and to express the truth of a situation in a way that is different from but not inferior to scientific discourse. Evan Runner rightly notes:

To speak of the sun's going down is not *unscientific*; it is not a failure to be up to scientific standard, not a *primitive* statement... The *pre-scientific* is not *unscientific* but *non-scientific*; it is of *another kind than* scientific.<sup>18</sup>

### **REDEMPTIVE FUNCTION OF SCRIPTURE**

Paul tells us that Scripture is "able to make you wise to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" and "for training and equipping the man of God for every good work." If we are to be "thoroughly equipped for every good work"<sup>19</sup> and avoid a pietistic or existentialist

form of religion we must know about mankind, history, culture, the future and much more. This includes our scholarly endeavors.

Sometimes those outside of the church have seen this more clearly than those inside. Lesslie Newbigin relates a comment made to him by a learned Hindu friend. This Hindu remarked that the Bible was not simply another book of religion. It was a unique interpretation of universal, cosmic history and a unique understanding of the human as a responsible actor in history. This Hindu believed that Christian missionaries had not spoken of the Bible in this sense. They had spoken of it as another book of religion. In that case, the Hindu believed that India did not need another religious book to add to their already rich supply. However, the Bible is not another religious book narrowly defined. Rather, it is a unique and authoritative interpretation of universal and cosmic history *and*<sup>20</sup> a unique understanding of the human person as a responsible actor in history. It tells us about a good creation that has been ravaged by sin and that is being reclaimed by God to again be his obedient kingdom. Scripture is a record of this activity in history. And since God's redemptive and reconciling work extends to the whole creation Scripture speaks to all of life. The question is how Scripture speaks to the scientific enterprise. It is not given to provide us with data or theories for science, but to make us responsive to salvation by leading us to Jesus Christ. The answer lies in the recognition that the purpose of Scripture qualifies the nature of its authority. Biblical authority cannot be defined apart from this purpose and intent. Herman Ridderbos sums this up nicely.

[p.320>]

The New Testament, therefore is totalitarian in its scope, touching every area of human life and knowledge because the salvation of which it speaks is totalitarian. It has that scope, however, in its own way, that is, it illuminates man and the world, history and the future, church and nation, the state and society, science and art from one standpoint, the standpoint of the coming, death, resurrection and return of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

Herman Ridderbos goes on to define more precisely the unique way in which the New Testament speaks using three categories from redemptive history. While these categories are taken from New Testament scholarship, they are helpful in understanding the authority of the Old Testament as well. Ridderbos defines the authority of the Bible in terms of *kerygma*, *marturia* and *didache*. One hundred years ago the so-called historical books of the Old Testament were seen as the history of Israel, the Gospels were seen as biographies of Jesus and Acts as a history of the early church. It was against this background that scholars, first in the area of the New Testament, and later in the Old Testament began to stress the idea of *kerygma*. This word comes from the realm of the herald who broadcasts and proclaims good news. The Gospels were not so much historical books designed simply and merely to give us historical facts, as they were a proclamation that God's kingdom had arrived. This announcement was directed to mankind as covenant breaker and it demanded faith.

These books are also *marturia*. While *kerygma* comes from the realm of a herald's proclamation, *marturia* refers to a judicial witness in court who bears witness to an original experience. In the case of the biblical witnesses, they are called on to communicate God's revelation to others. The apostles, for example, were called by God,

authorized by Christ and equipped by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the redemptive significance of the coming, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Again this witness is a call to faith. This character of the so-called historical books has been increasingly seen in the last few decades.

While the historical books were seen as mere history, the Epistles were seen as theological documents. The Epistles, however, must be seen as *didache*. *Didache* refers to religious instruction. The Epistles represent a more advanced stage of revelation flowing from and building on witness and proclamation. Since the believers already knew the message, it was not necessary to proclaim it as new and startling news. Rather, it was necessary to work out the implications of this gospel for the daily situations in which the believers found themselves. The announcement of good news demanded that the meaning and consequences of that revelation be unfolded in particular contexts, that it be connected with Old Testament revelation, and that it be defended [p.321>] from heresy and error. All of this is instruction for the edification of the church. This is *didache*.

These three categories illumine the nature of scriptural authority. The authors of Scripture were given the Holy Spirit—inspired—to proclaim and to witness to the unfolding of God's plan of redemption. Further, they were equipped by the Holy Spirit to spell out the implications for the life of the covenant community in their particular setting, with their particular needs and problems. Inspiration must be understood in terms of this purpose and function of Scripture. While God did not equip the authors to reveal all kinds of information about the world that would relieve the scholars of the task he gives them to explore, understand and conceptualize the creation, he shines his light by which scholars may carry out the work.

### THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CENTER OF SCRIPTURE

Scripture reveals God in terms of his covenant relationship with the creation and of powerful acts of redemption in reestablishing his kingdom. This redemptive work of God culminates in the person and work of Jesus Christ and unifies the diversity of authors, styles, genres and emphases through which the story of redemption is revealed both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. This christological focus also qualifies the authority of Scripture. When Scripture is levelled out and each proposition is seen as a rational, verbal statement of meaning that can stand alone and is true in and of itself,<sup>22</sup> we have missed the christological focus of Scripture. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the key that unlocks the meaning of Scripture.<sup>23</sup>

The Jews of Jesus' day stand as a warning against missing the christological focus of Scripture. Jesus says to the religious leaders who knew every jot and tittle of the Scriptures, "nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent."<sup>24</sup> He continues: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me yet you refuse to come to me to have life."<sup>25</sup>

## SCRIPTURE AND SCIENCE

### *Dwelling in the Scriptural Story*

“The place of the Bible in our task of studying the creation is not to give answers, but to guide us in our search for answers, to be the light by whose illumination we will find the answers in the creation itself.”<sup>26</sup>

[p.322>]

Scripture functions as the light by which we gain knowledge of the world.<sup>27</sup> A worldview emerges from Scripture through which we view the creation. It is this insight that gives us a clue to the relationship between the Bible and the work of science. Scriptural themes are formulated into a worldview which shapes foundational questions that lie at the root of the scientific enterprise.

By its narration of redemptive, universal history and our place in it, the Bible provides a storied vision of and for life.<sup>28</sup> It is an interpretation of universal history and our place in it. Stories create a world of meaning. As such, Scripture evokes its own domain of meaning by narrating a redemptive historical story.<sup>29</sup> It draws us into the unfolding drama and situates and orients<sup>30</sup> us in that story. It shapes our imagination and perception of the world, interprets and orients us in the world, as the story of the Bible becomes our story. It provides the story within which we live our lives and understand reality. The scriptural story is to be the most real world in which we live our lives. We are called to dwell in the scriptural story.<sup>31</sup>

Central to this story is the unfolding of the mighty acts of God. God is revealed as Scripture renders<sup>32</sup> his character and purposes in his work of creation and redemption. As his work of redemption is revealed in the covenant we are called to serve him in faith as covenant partners. Thus, the Scripture is not simply a record of redemption, it is also a tool of redemption.<sup>33</sup> Scripture is powerful as God's word to renew our lives by calling forth and nurturing faith. And as Gordon Spykman has said,

Faith is not merely a hidden assumption, buried in the background, which seldom rises to the surface. Faith works to shape and mold the entire scientific enterprise. Such radical position-taking is always there and always real. Therefore, any science worth it [sic] salt must be willing to explicate its often implicit assumptions. For science, like all other human activities, is an exercise of the heart, out of which are all the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). Science is one way in which men express their religious identity. It is one way in which we put our faith to work (James 2: 14, 17, 18).<sup>34</sup>

It is the narrative of the Bible that provides true insight into the reality in which all scientists live and work and have their being. Thus, the believing scientist is called to inhabit and carry out his scientific work in the story of the Bible.

Finally, dwelling in a story is always *communal*. Worldviews are not disembodied narratives but are always embodied in a community. Nor are worldviews held in individual isolation from the community. Rather, God has created us to live in community. We share our lives—including our understanding, interpretation and orientation to life—in [p.323>] common with those in our community. Further, each community has a history and, therefore, there are different traditions in the Christian

community. Since each tradition is partial, selective, historically and culturally situated, there is a need for dialogue for a deeper understanding into Scripture. So it is not a matter of the individual scientist and his or her Bible. Rather, the scientist is part of a confessional tradition that in turn is part of the broader Christian community that seeks to understand the Scripture and share it as its common way of viewing life.

Since the believing scientist belongs to a scientific and a confessional community, there is the possibility of conflict. The scientific community shares the modern scientific worldview that stands in opposition to Scripture. Since the dominant worldview in a society will strive to become the exclusive way of seeing the world, a conflict will develop. The believing scientist cannot escape this problem by withdrawing into a Christian ghetto but rather he or she must

learn to live so fully within both traditions that the debate between them is internalized. As a Christian I seek so to live within the Biblical tradition, using its language as my language, its models as the models through which I make sense of experience, its story as the clue to my story, that I help to strengthen and carry forward this tradition of rationality.... Within my own mind there is a continuing dialogue between the two. Insofar as my own participation in the Christian tradition is healthy and vigorous, both in thought and in practice, I shall be equipped for the external dialogue with the other tradition.<sup>35</sup>

### *To Dwell in the Modern Scientific Worldview*

There is always the danger that the Bible will be domesticated and co-opted in the dominant worldview and plausibility structure of the culture. Lesslie Newbigin has lucidly articulated the plausibility structure of the modern scientific worldview that has dominated the West for the past 300 years.<sup>36</sup> Finding its roots in Descartes's commitment to judge all truth claims by human reason, the modern scientific worldview has erected the scientific method as a grid which all truth claims must pass. Truth claims that can be validated by human reason become public fact while other truth claims remain private. Science falls under the realm of public fact while religious or theological claims are considered as private beliefs. Thus such dualisms as between fact and value, public and private, knowledge and belief, truth and opinion are at the heart of our culture's plausibility structure.

This has affected the way the church has approached the Scriptures. Liberal scholarship has reduced the Bible to a record of human [p.324<] religious experience. The Bible cannot claim uniqueness or divine authority but must be put alongside other sacred literature that testify to similar religious experience. In this case, the Bible has been co-opted into the reigning plausibility structure by incorporating it into the private realm of values. This kind of dualism does not allow the Bible any authority in the area of science.<sup>37</sup> It gives the Bible free reign in one area of life and science free reign in another, but Scripture is declared irrelevant to all scientific investigation. When no meaningful connection can be seen between Scripture and science there is little possibility of specifically Christian scientific work.

The opposite approach has been taken in fundamentalism and creation science. Here the Bible is considered from the standpoint of scientific data and the positivistic ideal.

Scripture is made up of timeless statements having the law-like character of Newtonian cosmology. These statements are neutral propositions disinfected of all confessional subjectivity. Thus, while the more careful fundamentalists may agree that Scripture's intent is not to provide data for science, the failure to distinguish the confessional nature of Scripture from the positivistic understanding of scientific discourse opens up the possibility of finding much data for science. In the biblicism of H. Rimmer "it is possible for the careful student of science and Scripture to discover literally scores of such anticipations [of modern science]."<sup>38</sup> But this process dehistoricizes the text. The Bible is to be interpreted in terms of its historical and cultural setting and what the original readers would have understood. Further, biblicism misunderstands the nature and function of the Bible. The Bible will guide us in our search for answers by its light but it will not give the answers or provide the data.

### *Dwelling in the Scriptural Story and the Work of Science*

As the believing scientist dwells in the story of Scripture and participates in the believing community, he or she will discern themes and norms that will give direction to the scientific endeavour.<sup>39</sup>

The discovery of norms and themes in Scripture relevant to the task of science is primarily (though not exclusively) the work of the natural scientist. The scientist is part of the believing community that functions as a body wherein each part does its work. Therefore, the theologian and biblical exegete can provide assistance. However, the main work must be carried out by natural scientists in living contact with the Scripture and robust participation in the Christian tradition. The believing scientist, by virtue of his or her situation, will be able to discern themes in Scripture that shed light in his or her work.

[p.325>]

Understanding comes from interpretive anticipations of meaning that are rooted in the situation of the interpreter.<sup>40</sup> A person's life situation and context will take certain attitudes toward an object and thus "see" things another will not. The scientist, in his or her context of scientific work will be absorbed in the issues and problems of his or her field and may as a result see themes in Scripture that others will not.

Secondly, it seems to me that there will be fewer themes and norms in Scripture that are *immediately* applicable to scientific theorizing in the natural sciences than in the human sciences. This is because the natural sciences seek to explain the nonhuman world while the human sciences seek to discern societal and cultural norms.<sup>41</sup> In sociology, the biblical themes of norms for marriage and family would provide specific direction. In political science, the God-given authority of government and biblical theme of justice would provide specific direction. In history, the biblical theme that God acts in history according to his covenant to establish his kingdom will give more specific direction. In economics, the biblical themes of stewardship, justice and work would provide more precise direction for the economist. However, it seems to me that the themes applicable to the natural sciences would be fewer and less precise and immediate since Scripture addresses *humanity* calling it to covenant obedience and service. Nevertheless, in his scientific endeavors, in communal solidarity with fellow believing scientists, the natural scientist needs to search for the light of Scripture in relevant themes that will be foundational for his or her work.

The scientist is engaged in a spiritual battle for ultimate allegiance—the Christ of Scripture or an idol. In terms of the ultimate context of our scientific work, *sola Scriptura* must keep its inspiring and central meaning against any power that would challenge that authority. Therefore, this question—how does Scripture relate to our scientific endeavors?—must remain a continuing item on the agenda of faith and science.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See my "Scriptural Revelation, Creational Revelation and Natural Science: The Issue," in *Facets of Faith and Science. Volume 4: Interpreting God's Action in the World*, edited by J.M. van der Meer (Lanham: The Pascal Centre for Advanced Studies in Faith and Science/University Press of America, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> For example, A. Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, translated by H. De Vries (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 260; J. Frame, "Rationality and Scripture," in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, edited by H. Hart, J. Vander Hoeven and N. Wolterstorff (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 293f; S. Fowler, *The Word of God* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom Press, 1985), 6-10.

<sup>3</sup> "[T]he simple rendering 'God-breathed' would commend itself powerfully to us... since the preposition 'in' is wholly lacking in the term and is not demanded for the sense in any of its implications." B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (n.p., 1948), 284.

<sup>4</sup> G.C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 161.

<sup>5</sup> [H.G. Geertsema, "Faith and Science in Biblical Perspective: Human Responsibility Before God," in *Facets of Faith and Science. Volume 4: Interpreting God's Action in Nature*, edited by J. M. van der Meer (Lanham: The Pascal Centre for Advanced Studies in Faith and Science/University Press of America, 1996). Edilor.]

<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 1:11, John 14:26, John 16:13f.

<sup>7</sup> Herman Ridderbos, quoted in Berkouwer, 162, note 75.

<sup>8</sup> H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmaliek*, vols. 1 and 2 (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1906), 1:396.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Peter 1:21.

<sup>10</sup> Berkouwer, 145.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 10:16.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16.

<sup>13</sup> Bavinck, *Kennis en Leven*, 1922, 196. Quoted in G.C. Berkouwer, *A Half Century of Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 140. Similarly, Greidanus writes:

Does the non-scientific language of the Bible make use, here and there, of ancient "scientific" concepts? The answer would appear to be affirmative since language, culture, and thought forms are all intertwined. And indeed, when we check Scripture we find that the biblical authors make use of the worldview and thought forms of that time and thus also of ancient "scientific" concepts.... At the same time, we must note that the Bible does not necessarily teach the concepts, thought forms, and categories which it uses in formulating its message. (S. Greidanus, "The Use of the Bible in Christian Scholarship," Paper originally distributed by the Institute for Christian Studies, n.d. Also published in *Christian Scholar's Review* 11, no. 2, (1982): 141f.)

<sup>14</sup> B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 50f.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Greidanus.

<sup>16</sup> For a more extended and detailed treatment of the confessional nature of Scriptural discourse see D. Sinnema, "The Uniqueness of the Language of Faith," a paper distributed by the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ontario, 1975. See also G. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 128-133; and G. Spykman, "A Confessional Hermeneutic: Alternative to the Historical-Critical Method," *Reformed Ecumenical Synod Theological Bulletin* 1, no. 3 (December 1973): 1-13.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Kings 16:21-28.

<sup>18</sup> E. Runner, *The Relation of Bible to Learning* (Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1982), 118.

<sup>19</sup> 2 Timothy 3:15f.

<sup>20</sup> It is important to stress this “and.” The Bible does not just give us a redemptive historical story that has little relevance for us. We are not spectators watching the divine drama. Rather, God creates mankind to be his covenant partner. In God’s work of redemption he calls people back to their covenant task. In the context of Scripture there is much instruction concerning our covenant task that is important for the believer. Lesslie Newbigin summarizes the words of his learned Hindu friend. “As I read the Bible I find in it a quite unique interpretation of universal history and, therefore, a unique understanding of the human person as a responsible actor in history.” *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 89.

<sup>21</sup> H. Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*, translated by R. B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988), 58.

<sup>22</sup> [For more detail, see Geertsema. Editor.]

<sup>23</sup> While Christ is the key to the meaning of Scripture, the scriptural story is the context for understanding Christ. Brunner expresses this idea by speaking of the prospective context (Old Testament) and the retrospective context (New Testament). I would reject, however, Brunner’s reduction of revelation to Jesus Christ. Scripture is more than simply context for Jesus Christ who is revelation. It is revelational. To interpret Jesus Christ—his person and work correctly—we need to see him in the context of Scripture. There is something similar to a hermeneutical circle—Christ in the context of Scripture, Scripture in the context of Christ. Therefore, the Christ that unlocks the meaning of Scripture is not the ontological or metaphysical Jesus Christ of scholasticism and some forms of evangelicalism, nor the Christ of faith that has been severed from history, nor the reconstructed Jesus of history discovered by historical- critical methods. Rather it is the historical Jesus Christ rendered in the gospel narratives.

<sup>24</sup> John 5:38.

<sup>25</sup> John 5:39f.

<sup>26</sup> S. Fowler, *The Place of the Bible in the School* (New Zealand: Foundations for Christian Studies, 1975), 11.

<sup>27</sup> A Liberation theologian has said that the important thing in the use of the Bible is not to understand the text but to understand the world through the text. Such a statement, it seems to me, pushes the metaphor too far. We must examine the text, indeed soak in the text if it is to become the world in which we live. Thus, what I am drawing from this metaphor is the fact that the Bible is the means through which we gain knowledge of the world not that it is always tacit.

<sup>28</sup> See Brian Walsh’s definition of a worldview in “Who Turned Out the Lights: The Light of the Gospel in a Post-Enlightenment Culture,” Inaugural Address of the Institute of Christian Studies, 1988. He says:

A worldview is a vision of life. It provides its adherents with a vision *of* the world, a perspective through which to make sense out of life. A worldview always has a story because a worldview is a vision of life in history, in time. It provides us with a story that tells us who we are in history and why we are here. It provides us with insight to determine good from evil in history and gives us a sense of where we are going. Therefore worldviews are descriptive, they tell us the way things are. In this sense they are like a light, they illumine our experience. A vision of the world is also always a vision *for* the world. Such visions are always normative.

<sup>29</sup> When I speak of Scripture as a story creating its own domain of meaning I am not implying that it is fictional or that it creates a subjectively constructed domain of meaning that is then imposed on a neutral, meaningless world. Over against many in the cultural-linguistic camp I stress that the story of Scripture is a historically true story and further, that Scripture opens our eyes to the meaning of the world given in creation. I do not think that this implies that I am operating in the shadow of the Enlightenment and

importing extraneous, extrascriptural categories into Scripture. (Cf. G. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* [Westminster Press, 1984], 119f.) Rather, it is a matter of correctly identifying the literary genre of the narrative. Is it historical or realistic narrative? To some in the cultural-linguistic camp that want to stress the literary against the historical I want to say that Scripture is a *true* story. It is not simply realistic narrative. Over against a doctrinalist, scholastic, metaphysical, existential or moralistic reading of Scripture I want to stress that Scripture is a true *story*.

<sup>30</sup> That is, Scripture does not only interpret the world for us but is normative in that it provides direction for us. In this regard, a cartographic metaphor comes to mind. Scripture is like a map or a compass that gives us direction in the world.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Polanyi's purpose with the metaphor of indwelling is not to seek to define the nature of the authority of Scripture. Rather, he is speaking of how worldviews and concepts influence the scientific enterprise. However, the suitability of this metaphor for Scripture will be shown below.

<sup>32</sup> This is the language of Hans Frei, George Lindbeck and David Kelsey; H. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975); Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*. David Kelsey says the function of canonical narrative is to "render a character....offer an identity description of an agent." *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 48.

<sup>33</sup> A particularly succinct and helpful confession of Scripture's authority is found in the *Contemporary Testimony: Our World Belongs to God* of the Christian Reformed Church (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publications, 1986). This is where I find the language of "record" and "tool." "The Bible is the Word of God, record and tool of his redeeming work. It is the Word of Truth, fully reliable in leading us to know God and have life in Jesus Christ" (paragraph 35).

<sup>34</sup> G. Spykman, "Scripture, Faith and Science" (An unpublished paper delivered at the Reformed Ecumenical Synod Conference on Scripture, August, 1972), 5. Later published as G. Spykman, "Scripture, Faith, and Science," *International Reformed Bulletin* (Summer 1974): 54.

<sup>35</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 65.

<sup>36</sup> See Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. See also L. Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986); L. Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984* (New York: World Council of Churches, 1983); Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*.

<sup>37</sup> Liberalism is not the only form of dualism that limits scriptural authority to the internal or "spiritual" aspect of man's life. Complementarist approaches that are dualistic abound in many confessional traditions. E.g., D.M. MacKay, *Christianity in a Mechanistic Universe* (London: Intervarsity Press, 1965); W. Dyrness, *Christian Apologetics in a World Community* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1983); A. Ford, *Universe: God, Man and Science* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986). Whether Scripture is limited to the interior, individual or spiritual life of man in the liberal or the evangelical tradition, it is a manifestation of the private religious opinion/public scientific knowledge dualism prevalent in the West

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Ramm, 88.

<sup>39</sup> A good example of an articulation of themes from Scripture that guide and direct scientific work is found in Dordt College's philosophy of education statement (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 1979). It covers such themes as creation as unified and yet diverse cosmos, man as religious being, idolatry, creation-fall-redemption storyline, office, covenant and other.

<sup>40</sup> I am thinking here of the observations from the hermeneutics tradition of philosophy—Heidegger's forestructure of understanding, Dilthey's life relations, Gadamer's rehabilitation of prejudice. Gadamer says, "Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute *initial directedness* of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are *biases of our openness* to the world" (H. G. Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," in H.G. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 9). I would, however, want to avoid the subjectivism found here, that is, the interpretive projection of meaning on to the object. But I do think that a life-situation, circumstances and expectations

will enable one to “see” what others have not seen. C.S. Lewis has written in *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1960), 79:

The application of Christian trade principles, say, to trade unionism or education, must come from Christian trade unionists and Christian schoolmasters: just as Christian literature comes from Christian novelists and dramatists—not from the bench of theologians getting together and trying to write plays and novels in their spare time.

<sup>41</sup> In “The Use of the Bible in Christian Scholarship,” Greidanus suggests three ways of relating Scripture to science. First, the Bible calls us to faith which shapes and molds the scientific enterprise. Secondly, the Bible provides a biblical framework of reality (worldview) which provides parameters and direction for scholarly work. Finally, the Bible provides scholars in various disciplines with norms and themes which provide more specific direction. However, after pointing out that the theme of creation provides direction for the natural scientist, the rest of his examples are from the human sciences (ethics, political science, sociology, psychology, history and economics).