

# Scriptural Revelation, Creational Revelation and Natural Science: The Issue

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When the findings of natural science conflict with an interpretation of Scripture, how are we to deal with it? As Christians we want to be faithful to God's revelation in Scripture. Yet we also recognize that "those facts [brought to light by science] are just as much the words of God as the content of Holy Writ and are therefore to be accepted in faith by everyone."<sup>1</sup> The Reformed tradition has dealt with this question in terms of a distinction between general and special revelation. Further, the Reformed tradition has recognized that today God reveals himself and his will in creation and in Scripture, and that the scientific investigation of creation has some connection with creational revelation.

It will be my purpose to address the relationship between creational revelation, scriptural revelation and science. I will argue that creational revelation is a powerful disclosure not only of God, but also of the creation itself. While this does not give science divine authority—for science is a human formulation of creation revelation—it does pose a problem when science conflicts with an established interpretation of Scripture, for both are human responses to divine revelation. I will argue that a resolution can only be found by way of a communal struggle in the light of the overall teaching of Scripture.

[p.332>]

## THE NATURE AND AUTHORITY OF CREATIONAL REVELATION

### Creational Revelation and Theological Reflection

Much theological reflection on the teaching of Scripture concerning creational revelation has been done before the rise of modern science. As a result, there has been an underdevelopment of the scriptural doctrine of creational revelation. The primary concern in the formulation of the doctrine of creational revelation has been with the knowledge of God—that is, God's virtues, perfections and being—that can be gained from the creation. John Calvin reflects Scripture's teaching when he says:

[God has] revealed himself and daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe. As a consequence, men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him.... Wherever you cast your eyes there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory. I confess, of course, that it can be said reverently, provided that it proceeds from a reverent mind, that nature is God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, vol. 1 and 2 (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1906), 2: 464. All quotations from Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* have been translated by Albert Wolters.

<sup>2</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, bk. 1, edited by J.T. McNeill, translated by F.L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), bk. I, vol. V, sect. 1 and 5

Similarly, Herman Bavinck sees the world as a mirror that reflects God's glory.<sup>3</sup> Confessional and theological positions were staked out over the relationship of creational revelation to Scripture but concerned only the degree to which God could be known.

The discussion of creational revelation has been narrowed in two ways. First, the doctrine has been narrowed from God's character and will to primarily God's character. Secondly, when God's will is discussed, it is narrowed from God's will in all of creation to God's will in the ethical and moral dimension of life. It is no wonder that David Diehl has complained that "Evangelicals tend to emphasize the knowledge of God given in general revelation but not the fact that it also gives a knowledge of the creation." It is because of "an under-development in their doctrine of general revelation" that evangelicals have trouble relating theology and science.<sup>4</sup>

### The Word of God in Creation and Providence

To formulate the doctrine of creational revelation in such a way that a profitable relationship is opened up between theology and science, it will be important to pay attention to Scripture's teaching on the nature of the Word of God. [p.333>]

According to Scripture there is a powerful activity of the Word of God in the creation. In the opening chapter of the Bible it is the creative Word of God that gives shape and order to the creation. We cannot say, however, that this Word was *only* a Word of origination. It is by that same Word that the creation continues to be structured and ordered. God's word is like the decree of a king which is law for the subject in the kingdom and cannot be repealed. The Word that initially gave structure and order to the creation continues to structure and order the creation.<sup>5</sup>

The rest of Scripture corroborates this observation that God in the beginning issued a decree that is enduring in its effect. The Psalmist called all creation to worship God for his work of creation and redemption that had been accomplished by the one Word of God. "Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place forever and ever. He gave a decree which will never

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<sup>3</sup> "It is God's good pleasure to bring the excellences of his triune being into manifestation in His creatures, so to prepare glory and honour for Himself in those creatures.. the whole world in its length and breadth is for Him a mirror in which He sees His excellences at play." H. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, translated by H. Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 169

<sup>4</sup> D. Diehl, "Evangelicalism and General Revelation: An Unfinished Agenda," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. 4 (December 1987): 441-55. In a footnote, Diehl thankfully acknowledges that "one of the few sources that explicitly elaborates on how general revelation is the basis for the different fields of knowledge is [Cornelius] Van Til."

<sup>5</sup> As Old Testament scholar John Stek comments:

God's "Let there be..." in Genesis 1 is too narrowly conceived if it be supposed that it stands only as a power word to effect origination, the [p.344>] means by which God brought into being creatures that had then to be maintained by a new divine act, another decree from the mouth of God, such as, "Let the created be preserved." There is no additional word—and that is not because the narrator omitted it but because God's "Let there be..." was a sovereign establishing and sustaining word. His creation decree was and is the fundamental preserving word.

J. Stek, "What Says the Scriptures?," *Portraits of Creation*, edited by H. Van Til (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 246

pass away.”<sup>6</sup> Peter said of the scoffers that “they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.” He goes on to say that “*by the same word* the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement...”<sup>7</sup>

This is not to confuse creation with providence. Creation is the word of God as it effects origination while providence is God’s word as it continues to order, structure and rule the creation. It is precisely the unity of the word of God that preserves the unity between creation and providence. It is by the powerful activity of God’s word that creation continues to be ordered.

### God’s Word and Revelation

This Word of God that structures and orders the world is revealed to humankind through the creation order. God’s revelation in creation does not only reveal himself but also his will. There is a biblical text that Bavinck refers to in his discussion of creation revelation that makes this clear:<sup>8</sup>

Listen and hear my voice; pay attention to what I say.  
When a farmer ploughs for planting, does he plough continually?  
Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing soil?  
When he has levelled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cummin?  
Does he not plant wheat in its place barley in its plot and spelt in its field?  
*His God instructs him and teaches him the right way.*  
Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cummin;  
[p.334>]  
caraway is beaten out with a rod, and cummin with a stick.  
Grain must be ground to make bread; so one does not go on threshing it forever.  
Though he drives the wheels of his threshing cart over it his horses do not grind it.  
*All this also comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful and magnificent in wisdom.*<sup>9</sup>

This text reveals that there are numerous regularities in the creation resulting from the ordering Word of God that are observed and understood by the farmer so that he may carry out his calling. He must understand the peculiar nature of the creatures he is dealing with. He learns to adapt his way of sowing and threshing according to the unique nature of each kind of seed and crop. Isaiah does not consider the option that the farmer has discovered an impersonal law built into the cosmos. Rather, his God instructs him and teaches him the right way. All of it comes from the Lord Almighty who is wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom. This is precisely the Old Testament understanding of wisdom. Von Rad represented wisdom in Old Testament thought as “the practical knowledge of the laws of life and of the world based on experience.”<sup>10</sup> Scriptural wisdom which comes from the Lord is a discernment of the creation order with the corresponding activity in conformity with it. A brief perusal of

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<sup>6</sup> Psalm 148:5, 6

<sup>7</sup> 2 Peter 3:5, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 1: 313f.

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 28:23-28.

<sup>10</sup> G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 418. See also von Rad’s *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon. 1972).

the proverbs of the Old Testament shows that the “laws of life” cover a wide range of God’s creation.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Power of God’s Revelation**

The reason that there can be knowledge of God’s creation, even by the unbeliever whose mind is darkened, is because of the impinging nature of God’s revelation. This revelation in creation is a powerful and forceful activity. God’s creation is not a passive, inert and static state of affairs, but a compelling act of God.<sup>12</sup>

The power of God’s creational revelation has often been employed in the Reformational tradition to explain why unbelievers are capable of scientific knowledge. Hendrik Stoker says:

This plan [God’s eternal plan as seen in the creation and revealed by God to humanity] confronts us everywhere in and around ourselves; *it forces itself upon us*; we cannot avoid or escape it; all our knowing and doings presuppose it; without the actual and virtual presence of this plan, man could not know and act... This plan confronts them [unbelievers] and *forces itself upon them* too, nor can they escape it.<sup>13</sup>

[p.335>]

Likewise, Leegwater argues that the commonness and agreement of detail between unbelieving and believing scientists come not from our excellent insight into reality but are an indication of “the overpowering nature of God’s revelation.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Revelation of God and Revelation of the Creation**

I believe that the term creational revelation can be used to cover not only a knowledge of God as formulated in traditional theology, but also the knowledge of creation itself. What must be made clear is the relationship between the knowledge of God and the

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<sup>11</sup> With respect to the connection between the Biblical understanding of wisdom and knowledge of the non-human creation see 1 Kings 4:29ff:

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.. He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom....

<sup>12</sup> “The revelation of God in nature and history is never a mere passive pouring forth of God’s virtues but is always a positive act on the part of God. The Father of Jesus works always (John 5:17). His providence is a divine, eternal, omnipresent power.” H. Bavinck, “Herman Bavinck’s Common Grace: A Translation,” translated by R.C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* (1990): 41. Emphasis is Bavinck’s. F.W.A. Korff cautions against referring God’s revelation in creation and history as general revelation in all cases. The term general revelation “unconsciously suggests something at rest, something static.” Korff is also concerned that general revelation not only suggests something static and passive instead of powerful and active but also suggests something impersonal rather than personal. He wants to maintain general revelation as an active, forceful, powerful and personal act of God. F.W.A. Korff, *Het Christelijk geloof en de niet-Christelijke Godsdiensten*, 73, quoted in Berkouwer, *General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), 293. Berkouwer noted a similar point: “As a matter of fact, this danger is not at all imaginary, and in discussions on general revelation in ‘nature’ men sometimes lose sight of the living and personal God who reveals himself sovereignly and mightily...” Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, 293.

<sup>13</sup> H. Stoker, “Reconnoitering the Theory of Knowledge of Prof. Dr. Cornelius Van Til,” *Jerusalem and Athens*, edited by E.R. Geehan (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1971), 61

<sup>14</sup> A. Leegwater, “Creation: Does It Matter?” in *Life is Religion* (St. Catherines: Paideia Press, 1981), 261.

knowledge of creation in creational revelation. So far, in theology the doctrine of creational revelation has had primary reference to the personal revelation of God himself in the world. If creational revelation is a revelation of God, how does that revelation relate to the knowledge of creation? Can we say, for example, that the scientist investigates creational revelation?

Berkouwer does not think that science reflects on the general revelation of God. He is interacting with W.J.A. Schouten and R. Hooykaas who have made nature and Scripture two coexistent and independent sources of revelation, both possessing absolute authority. They hold that our scientific knowledge of nature is automatically a knowledge of God's revelation. Schouten tells us that our study of general revelation in nature has led to important discoveries like the age of the earth, for example. Berkouwer disagrees:

This view ignores the fact that it will not do simply to equate the knowledge of nature with the knowledge of God's general revelation, for this revelation deals with the knowledge of God Himself. In our opinion, therefore, it is wrong to say, as is sometimes done, that the natural sciences "investigate" God's general revelation; and surely it is just as wrong to state that we owe our knowledge of God's revelation in nature primarily to the natural sciences.<sup>15</sup>

Science does not investigate God's creation revelation, Berkouwer says, because creational revelation is concerned with a knowledge of God himself and not a knowledge of God's creation. The revelation of God in creation is first of all apprehended by faith, not by scientific investigation. Science deals with the knowledge of nature *an sich* but general revelation is concerned with the knowledge of God's glory, eternal power and divinity that comes through nature.

Berkouwer makes some very important points, though his understanding of the relation between nature and revelation seems to me to [p.336>] be problematic. In the course of his discussion, Berkouwer agrees with J. Bohatec on the relation between history and revelation: "Revelation and history are not of equal value and significance. History as such is not revelation, it is only the *place* and *means* of revelation."<sup>16</sup> This distinction gives rise to the question: "Does Berkouwer's position too easily separate general revelation from the created reality through which it occurs, and thus separate faith from science?"<sup>17</sup> Berkouwer's view suggests a separation between revelation—understood as a perpendicular, personal encounter or injection into a self-sufficient nature—and creation which is simply the *place* and *means* of that revelation.<sup>18</sup>

Stoker attempts a much more satisfactory formulation of the relation between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of creation in God's creational revelation. Following Bavinck,<sup>19</sup> Stoker distinguishes between the revelation of God himself

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<sup>15</sup> Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, 288.

<sup>16</sup> J. Bohatec, "Gott und die Geschichte nach Calvin," *Philosophia Reformata* 1, 149. Quoted in Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, 289, footnote 12

<sup>17</sup> "Report of the Committee on Creation and Science," in *Agenda for Synod 1991* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Church of North America, 1991), 9.

<sup>18</sup> This position is similar to Paul Tillich's, who says succinctly: "In all these cases it is not the thing or the event as such which has revelatory character; they reveal that which uses them as a medium and bearer of revelation." *Systematic Theology: Volume One* (Digswell Place: Nisbet, 1953), 132.

<sup>19</sup> "In a certain sense it can be said that also all knowledge of nature and history as it is acquired and applied in professions and trades, in commerce and industry, in science and art, is due to divine

including his relation to all things, to humanity in his word and in creation, on the one hand, and the revelation of the created universe to humanity on the other. Here the doctrine of creation revelation has two subsections. The first subsection takes up the concerns of Berkouwer by dealing with God's self-revelation in creation from the standpoint of faith. The second subsection asserts that God reveals his created universe to humanity and opens up an area for science under creation revelation.

This distinction within the concept of creation revelation raises the question as to whether we have disguised two related but essentially distinct topics with mere terminology. Do we have here a knowledge of God, on the one hand, and a knowledge of creation, on the other, left side by side but subsumed under the category "creational revelation"? Stoker's attempt to relate the two is very illuminating:

Every fact...thus (i.) has an *ultimate* meaning moment....revelational of God's majesty, wisdom, power and glory and *at the same time* (ii.) a creaturely *specific* meaning moment; for instance, a rose being revelational of God *and at the same time* being a rose and not a lily or a butterfly. These meaning moments, though distinguishable, are not separable.<sup>20</sup>

Stoker says there is one revelation of God. Its ultimate purpose is to reveal himself so that he might be known, loved and served. By faith one apprehends this "ultimate meaning moment." God himself is revealed. In that same revelation of God, a creaturely, specific meaning moment can be distinguished. One can know the creature itself. These moments of meaning are to be distinguished but not separated.

This formulation goes a long way to capturing the unity of creational revelation. Instead of two unrelated revelations side by side, it seems [p.337>] better to speak of one revelation of God. The ultimate purpose of this revelation is to reveal the glory and majesty of God. Every fact and creature, in each part and in the whole, reveals the splendor of God. This is the ultimate meaning of God's revelation in creation. By faith in Christ and through the spectacles of Scripture we can discern this ultimate meaning in creation. It is possible, however, to examine the structural side of the creature that reveals God. We can examine the creaturely specific moment in more than one way—as to its mathematical side, its chemical side, its biological side and so forth.

### THE RELATION BETWEEN CREATIONAL REVELATION AND SCIENCE

It has been objected that making this kind of connection between creational revelation and science somehow gives divine authority to scientific work. If science merely formulates God's creational revelation, then we must accord divine authority to those scientific formulations. However, to do this is to misunderstand the relationship between science and creational revelation.

We must make a distinction between God's word that gives order to the creation and his revelation of that word, on the one hand, and scientific law, which is a human endeavor to theoretically formulate a description of that revelation, on the other. Western philosophical thought has sought to locate the organizing principle in

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revelation. For all these elements of culture exist only because God puts thoughts and powers in his creation, which man gradually comes to understand under his guidance. Scripture itself testifies to this, when it says that it is God who instructs and teaches the farmer concerning the way in which he should work the soil (Is[aiah] 28:23-29)." Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 313f.

<sup>20</sup> H. Stoker, "Reconnoitering the Theory of Knowledge," 56.

“reality” and to incorporate that into various epistemological systems. The organizing principle that gives order, however, is not a principle at all. It is the word of the Creator God. The word of God itself is not available empirically and cannot be assimilated or defined. We can only know the Word of God as it is revealed in our experience of its ordering effect in the world. The scientist experiences this order in creation, and seeks to construct a theoretical formulation of it.

These scientific formulations can never be identified with the law-word of God, however. They are human approximations of the order that results from the faithfulness of God in ruling the creation by his word. Because human theoretical formulation is a creative and constructive exercise, the scientist is affected by his or her worldview and the scientific paradigm within which he or she works. The scientist is a historical being and therefore his or her reception of God’s revelation will be partial. All models and metaphors, paradigms and worldviews are human constructions that approximate and partially describe a side of the creation, giving shape and structure to theoretical formulations. In this sense, the reception and scientific formulation of the order resulting from God’s word is contrived. All human [p.338>] formulations can never attain more than a creaturely status. They are always historically situated and culturally conditioned. All human theoretical formulations are open to modification, expansion or abandonment.

This would preclude any idea of attributing divine authority to science. All scientific formulations are partial, historical, human endeavors and therefore fallible. God’s word in creation is divinely authoritative, but our human reception and articulation of it is not.

## **THE RELATION BETWEEN CREATIONAL REVELATION SCRIPTURAL REVELATION**

### **Equal Authority But Different Roles**

Creational revelation and scriptural revelation are equally authoritative and equally true. Both are revelations from God. Since both are divine revelation, they both bear divine authority, and there can be no conflict between creational revelation and scriptural revelation.

Yet scriptural and creational revelation function in different roles in the organism of revelation. I speak here of an *organism* of revelation to highlight unity in diversity. In a body there are many parts and all the parts play their own unique role. So with revelation. There is a harmony in God’s revelation that can be seen by contrasting a Reformational understanding of the fundamental unity in creational revelation and scriptural revelation to a Barthian approach on the one hand, and natural theology, on the other.

For the natural theologian, creational revelation can be known apart from scriptural revelation. There are two different sources of revelation—one from creation and the other from Scripture. Creational revelation is a second source of true knowledge that exists along side of scriptural revelation. Thus creational revelation is seen as another *independent* source of revelation that does not need Scripture.

Karl Barth has mounted a frontal assault on natural theology, however. For Barth the attempt to know God from the creation was “an attempt to unite Yahweh with Baal”

and “an invention of the Antichrist.”<sup>21</sup> Barth was concerned to protect the uniqueness and exclusivity of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. He noted that in church history we always find a fatal “and” when it comes to revelation: Scripture and tradition (Roman Catholicism), Scripture and reason (rationalism, scholasticism), and Scripture and emotion (subjectivism, pietism). Whenever special revelation in Christ is joined to any other source, the secondary source, however, soon becomes a “more equal” [p.339>] partner and the uniqueness and significance of special revelation in Christ is diminished. In effect, Barth accepted the formulation of natural theology which holds to two sources of independent revelation. Natural theology united general and special revelation in a nature/grace scheme while Barth has rejected general revelation and reduced revelation to an encounter between Christ and human beings.

The problem with both is the presupposition of two sources of revelation. In contrast, I believe that revelation is an organic whole in which each part functions and contributes in its own unique way to the sum of God’s revelation.

There are two striking analogies used in the Reformed tradition to illustrate the harmony between Scripture and creational revelation. The most famous, of course, is Calvin’s analogy of the spectacles and a written volume:

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.<sup>22</sup>

Scripture holds a redemptive priority in the organism of revelation. By the work of the Spirit as he leads us to Christ in the Scriptures, we are brought to faith in Jesus Christ. It is then that our eyes are opened to see the glorious revelation of God in creation. As Bavinck has said:

But standing on this solid foundation he looks round about through the spectacles of Holy Writ, and sees in the entire realm of nature a revelation of the same God whom he knows and confesses in Christ as his father in heaven.<sup>23</sup>

Scripture does not only open our eyes in the initial work of conversion, but continues to function as spectacles enabling “bleary-eyed old men” to be able to see the volume in front of them. First, we are given sight as we are regenerated. Then the Scriptures continue to enable us to see God’s revelation in creation.

The second striking analogy that has been used numerous times to point out the relationship between Scripture and creational revelation is that of light and the objects which it illuminates. Scripture leads us to think in this way when it says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”<sup>24</sup> Wolters, drawing on an analogy from Vollenhoven, explains this analogy.

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<sup>21</sup> K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1960), Pt. 1, 273

<sup>22</sup> Calvin, bk. I, chap. VI, sect. 1, page 70.

<sup>23</sup> H. Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, translated by W. Hendriksen (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1951), 62

<sup>24</sup> Psalm 119:105.

Scripture is like a miner's lamp, which lights up the world wherever we turn to look at it. Miners working in an unlighted underground mine shaft cannot do their work without the lamp fitted to their helmets; they are helpless without it and therefore must take great care to see that it functions properly. Yet their attention while they work is turned to the rockface, not to the lamp. The lamp serves to illuminate the environment in which they are called to work, to enable them to discern the nature of what lies before them: earth and rock, ore and gangue. The Scriptures are like that.<sup>25</sup>

What is clear from both images is that scriptural and creational revelation function on entirely different levels. We do not have two sources of revelation that lie next to or beside one another. These analogies make it absolutely clear that the one without the other is useless. They presuppose and complete each other. They function and contribute in unique and complementary ways. Creational revelation leads to scriptural revelation and scriptural revelation points back to creational revelation.

It is absolutely necessary to understand the unique nature and authority of scriptural and creational revelation. Problems often arise, not simply because there are misinterpretations of Scripture, but because the unique nature of scriptural authority and its role in God's organism of revelation is misunderstood and too much is asked of it.

Scripture is not everything God wanted to reveal to us. It has a unique function and focus, witnessing to God's work of redemption that culminates in Jesus Christ. Scripture with its redemptive focus will unfold the way of salvation that cannot be found in creation. It narrates God's renewing work as he restores man to his unique place in the creation of covenant partnership and is in no way meant to provide scientific data. Scripture, however, does function in shaping a worldview that affects the foundations of the natural sciences, narrating the ultimate story in which our lives must be placed—including our scientific endeavors. Since Scripture addresses us in the fullness of our lives and addresses much of our covenantal responsibility, some overlap is to be expected with the revelation that is given in creation. For instance, humanity, created in the image of God, should be able to discern God's norm of honesty and integrity in communication. However, in the context of the renewal of the covenant at Sinai, God gives the command: "You shall not bear false witness." God's creational norm for truthfulness is republished in Scripture calling people as covenant breakers back to covenant faithfulness in his communication. In this case, creational revelation and scriptural revelation will always agree. Scripture simply restates God's creational norms. [p.341>]

In summary, competition or separation between scriptural and creational revelation is excluded because they have one source that binds the unique authority and nature of Scripture and creational revelation together in a harmonious and organic relationship.

### **Mutually Corrective Interaction**

If there can be no conflict between scriptural and creational revelation, any conflict that arises must result from a clash between interpretations. As Bavinck has said:

Scripture and theology have nothing to fear from the facts which have been written by the Almighty hand of God. Conflict arises only because the text of

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<sup>25</sup> A. Wolters, *Creation Regained* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 14

both the book of Scripture and that of nature is often read and understood so badly.<sup>26</sup>

The opposition is between an interpretation of Scripture in a confessional and theological tradition and an interpretation of creational revelation within a scientific tradition. Neither our science nor our exegesis of Scripture bear divine authority. Interpretation is always a human endeavour and can be mistaken. All human interpretation may be revised, adjusted, modified or abandoned. It is facile to assume, as is sometimes done, that the voice of God is miraculously direct in Scripture and clouded in creational revelation. This position undermines the complex questions surrounding the nature, authority, purpose and interpretation of Scripture.

Conflict must always lead to a reassessment of interpretations. There is no *a priori* way of knowing which is correct. There is no method, technique or perfected hermeneutic in either the scientific or the scriptural exegetical endeavour that can provide a key to the secret of resolution. Since all techniques and methods are themselves the product of a historical tradition embodied in a community, reliance on some hermeneutical method for resolution will be fruitless.

### **Communal Struggle**

If there is no perfected method, technique or hermeneutic that will resolve the issues, are we not left with an unresolvable conflict? There may be an extended period of struggle as the Christian community seeks to define and resolve the issues, but each member of the community has a part to play in this struggle. While there will be relative degrees of certainty regarding Scripture's teaching on various issues, there should be modesty in recognizing that all positions are [p.342>] human interpretations. The reassessment involved in this communal struggle will require not only an examination of the exegetical interpretation of Scripture and the scientific interpretation of creational revelation, but also a deeper examination as to the very nature of Scripture and of creational revelation, of science and of the hermeneutical principles that govern interpretation. It will lead also to a deeper understanding of the worldview that underlies all this. In theology, the clash with science has sharpened our understanding of the nature and authority of Scripture, the hermeneutical principles applied in exegetical work and the worldview that underlies certain views of the authority, nature and interpretation of Scripture. God has and will lead his church into a deeper understanding of the Scriptures that he has entrusted to us.

### **Fundamental Stance:**

#### **Modern Scientific Worldview or Scriptural Worldview**

This reassessment of the interpretation of certain details of Scripture in its encounter with science does not mean that Scripture is being absorbed, accommodated and domesticated into the plausibility structure and worldview of modern science. Science may indeed provide an *occasion* for the reexamination of a traditional interpretation of Scripture. The term "new light" of science has been used here—that is, Scripture is examined in the new light of science. Does this mean that ultimately science is the light for Scripture or that we have two competing sources of light after all? How can we say with seriousness that Scripture must be the light for all our lives, including science, when the "light" of science challenges and moves us to reexamine Scripture? How can we seriously say that our task is to interpret science in the light of Scripture

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<sup>26</sup> Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 459.

and not the other way around? Is there a way to give Scripture the priority in our covenant task?<sup>27</sup>

Two things can be said in response. First, science legitimately gives occasion for reevaluation of our hermeneutical conclusions when science is seen not as a light for the interpretation of Scripture *but serves to focus our attention on Scripture*. The question is, does science divert our attention *from* Scripture or does it serve to direct our attention *to* Scripture that we might understand it more deeply?

Secondly, this occasion for another look at Scripture has to do with *details*. That is, it may challenge and correct an interpretation here or there. However, the fundamental stance of the Christian is that the Scripture is the ultimate narrative in which he or she carries out his or her scientific work. I believe there are many examples of scholars working in the area of faith or theology and science who have [p.343>] domesticated the Scriptures into the modern scientific worldview. The story of science in the West has become the ultimate story in which the Scriptures must find a place. However, if we take seriously the covenant Word of the Lord, it will be the narrative of Scripture that will provide our light. There will be occasions for the reexamination of certain individual interpretations, but the overall scriptural story must still remain our final authority—even in the reexaminations of our hermeneutical conclusions.

I am convinced that the most important conflict taking place today between Scripture and science is not a battle over various details of exegesis but the battle for supremacy of two different worldviews that provide the ultimate narrative for our lives. Perhaps this can explain the passion with which some will maintain a fierce loyalty to certain traditional exegetical conclusions. They sense that the issue is deeper than, say, the days in Genesis 1. The question is whether the scriptural worldview will be domesticated into the modern scientific worldview, or whether science will take its rightful place within the ultimate narrative of Scripture. It is here that the believer must take a fundamental stance for Scripture in keeping with its unique role in the organic whole of revelation.

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<sup>27</sup> In his helpful article, “Rationality and Scripture,” in *Rationality and the Calvinian Tradition* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 293-317, John Frame seeks to resolve this dilemma by suggesting that Scripture be given priority when there is a “settled interpretation.” The weakness of this solution is seen when we consider the Copernican revolution and realize that the “settled interpretation” of the church was precisely the problem! A settled interpretation is no guarantee against error.