

From the Pastor's Desk (1989 - 1993)

Science and Galileo

The Bible is neither a science textbook nor is it in conflict with science. Can scientific truth be found in the Bible? Since the Bible is inerrant, all facts contained in it are correct. But many claim that the Bible is not relevant in matters of science because it was written by men who didn't know science as we know it today. To prove the point they suggest that the Bible teaches a three story universe. Heaven is in the skies and hell is below the surface of the earth. Paul in Philippians 2: 10 is said to have referred to this view of the universe: "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth." What did Paul really teach? Dr. Russell W. Maatman rightly says that he taught that no part of creation is beyond Christ's authority. "No man, whether he is a scientist or any other kind of explorer, will ever be able to maintain that he has found a place where Christ does not rule" (p.27 *The Bible Natural Science, And Evolution*). Others ask: "How can you believe in Jesus' ascension in this space age? Doesn't the Bible teach that Jesus went UP to heaven?" The disciples, who witnessed the ascension didn't have a specific scientific statement in mind when they recorded what they had seen. What the Bible says about the ascension is that Jesus led the disciples to a place over against Bethany and that as they looked on, He was taken up, and a cloud received him out of sight. It ought to be clear that the "UP" clearly refers to the every day experience of the disciples who were standing on earth. They spoke the language of experience. Many say how can anyone claim that the Bible is factually correct when it speaks of sunrise and sunset? But the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) does the same thing when it informs its audience about the times of the rising and setting of the sun. Nobody claims that the CBC is out of date. What happens in observatories, those sanctuaries of science? The habitual language of the astronomers is still quite like that of Scripture.

Science

There is no physical error in the Word of God. Scientism, modern man's worship of science and scientific knowledge, has intimidated the church and has read its own apostate religious view back into the Bible. Christians have become almost afraid to speak about a beautiful sunset lest they get ridiculed for believing a primitive cosmology (the study of the universe). The Bible does not present us with some sort of scientific system. Its human authors guided by the Holy Spirit spoke about sunset and sunrise because they used the language of everyday appearance to describe what they saw.

Christians tend to be on the defensive when it comes to Science. Unbelievers speak disparagingly about the conflict between faith and science. They charge that the church has stifled science: They ask: "How can a scientist believe the Bible with its primitive concept of the world?" Over and over again they have cited the dispute between the Roman Catholic Church and Galileo as one of history's great emblems of conflict between reason and dogma, science and faith.

Galileo

Galileo (1564-1642), Italian astronomer, philosopher and lecturer in mathematics fell foul of the Inquisition, a church court established in the 13th century by Pope Gregory IX. It had as threefold aim: to investigate the spread of heresy; to summon before it all Roman Catholics suspected of heresy; and to show them their errors, punish them and call them to repentance. Galileo was forbidden to teach the theory of Copernicus (1473-1543) who had criticized the Ptolemaic view of the universe, which held that the earth was a stationary body about which the Sun, planets and stars revolved daily. He was forced to recant his view that the earth revolves around the sun and to declare:

I, Galileo, in the seventieth year of my age, on my knees before you Eminences, having before my eyes, and touching with my own hands, the Holy Scripture, abjure, curse, and detest, the error of the earth's movement." Years later the church changed its position. In 1757, Galileo's *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* was removed from the Index list of publications banned by the Church. In 1979 Pope John Paul II, addressing a meeting of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, said that he would support an effort to reverse the condemnation issued by the Inquisition. On October 31, 1992, the Pope closed the investigation. The Vatican formally acknowledged its error. The secular media hailed this admittance of error as a victory of science over faith, of enlightenment over obscurantism, of reason over the Bible. Not only the Roman Catholic Church came under attack but the Christian church in general.

The tragedy is that the blame for the conflict between faith and science did not fall on the Medieval Christians who read Greek scientific meaning back into the Bible but on the Bible itself. Dr. Zimmerman observed, "Scientists later reached that point where they were ready to throw the baby out with the bath water. They wrongly concluded that Scripture in all its aspects must be discarded completely before science could progress."

Galileo's ambition was to free science from the authority of Greek philosophy. In lectures and pamphlets he attacked the, Ptolemaic view of the universe held by most scientists of his day and the Church. When Galileo appeared before the Inquisition, he was told that he could hold the Copernican view if he could admit that it was just another theory. He had to recant His belief that Copernicus was right. In his defense he made two major points: scientific theories should never have creedal status; the new cosmology of Copernicus was in harmony with the Bible. And he declared, "The Bible tells how one goes to heaven, not how the heavens go." Yet Galileo himself was guilty of reading scientific views back into the Bible. His own reading of the Bible was conditioned by his eagerness to prove that the new science was right. And the church asked him to admit that he had erred in using the Bible to prove that his scientific view was right. Dr. Hooijkaas (*Religion and the Rise of modern Science*) observes that Galileo pretended to expect that the Church authorities would never proclaim any verdict on matters of science and Bible, without following the advice of the scientists. In Galileo's opinion, astronomical truth (that is the Copernican system) is in fact contained in the Bible. In his interpretation of Psalm 19: 5-7 (the sun like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion) he says this psalm teaches the initiation how the sun emits its rays. "The law of the Lord is perfect reviving the soul" means that God's spotless law is as much more perfect than the sun, which is marked with stains (sunspots), as the power to guide souls is

higher than the sun's power of moving the celestial bodies." Hooykaas comments, "Here even a poetic passage received from Galileo, a literalist inter-relation, which, moreover projected into the Bible not a generally received or an ancient world picture, but early seventeenth century discoveries and hypotheses." The very Scripture the church used to condemn the Copernican view; Galileo employed for its verification. He fell into the same error as his opponents. His philosophy affected the way he read the Bible.

Not much has changed since Galileo. Feminists, creation -scientists, liberation theologians, just to name a few, also read their philosophies back into Scripture. To submit ourselves to Scripture is always difficult. "We must allow the Spirit to correct or even overthrow an unbiblical world view. The Scriptures are sharper than a two-edged sword and can shatter our preconceptions. The Holy Spirit, working through God's Word, can lead us in new vision and new obedience (p,105 *The Transforming Vision. Shaping a Christian World View*) by Walsh Middleton

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