

Concordia Theological Monthly



S E P T E M B E R • 1 9 5 0

Reflections of a Lover of the Scriptures and Nature*

BY AUGUST C. REHWALDT

ONE of the theses which Ayres¹ would nail to the laboratory door is: "That we can keep science and belief separate by relegating our religion to the Sabbath day." The implication of this seems to be that a man cannot at one and the same time be religious and scientific any more than he can be a child of the world and a child of God at one and the same time. Religion and science are incompatible, some think. But are they?

We have but one word to say to anyone who with his science, or because of his science, would relegate the Lord out of the universe: such a view is not scientific. Science can begin only after there are things, forces, energies, and a thinking mind to occupy itself with these things, forces, and energies. Science cannot begin before this. Religion can. Religion even goes on where science leaves off.

SUPERNATURAL NATURALISM

The religion of the Bible is meant, "supernatural naturalism,"² as Lewis calls it. This is not that sheer naturalism which admits nothing divine, but regards nature as an eternal self-development, which, if it has a God at all, has one who is not supramundane, but extramundane, and holds himself aloof from nature and the universe. Nor is theistic naturalism meant, which postulates a first cause to start the machinery of the universe. The God of the Bible not only gave us the first great beginning, but has since given other beginnings which could not have come without Him, and has

*) The author does not propose to offer the final solution of the problem arising from the Biblical view of natural phenomena and the view held by various scientific theories. Nevertheless his analysis should prove stimulating and suggest further investigation by the student of the Bible and the student of nature. — ED. COM.

¹ Ayres, C. E., *Science the False Messiah*, Bobbs-Merrill, 1927.

² Lewis, Taylor, "Special Introduction to the First Chapter of Genesis," Part IV. Schaff-Lange, *Genesis*, N. Y., 1871, 143—147.

made changes which could not otherwise have taken place. In the religion of the Bible the supernatural and the natural is ever present.

It is equally true that nature has meaning only then when we see the supernatural standing back of it. Without that, the study of nature "reveals more mysteries than it solves." Unless a man sees God standing back of all nature, he may look at the blue sky, and however blue and bright it may be, to him it will be sad and awful, and he will cry out with Carlyle: "A sad sight!" The unscientific Psalmist David stands under that same blue sky, which is without speech and words and audible voice, and exclaims: "The heavens declare the glory of God." An autonomous nature is terrible. There chance and probability reign supreme. There this might happen as well as that, or some other thing. On that scene, man appears for no reason whatever, is victimized for a few moments and disappears again, all for no reason or purpose. In such a world the blue heavens are indeed frightening. David, with his little science, knows and understands nature and is right at the heart and core of things, for he has read not only from the book of nature, but from the book of the Law, and so knows what many with all their science do not know, the God of love, who stands back of nature.

HARMONY OF SCRIPTURE AND NATURE

The God of love is the author of both the Book of Nature and the Bible. Contradictions between these two books are impossible, and since there is no strife and antagonism, we cannot speak of a reconciliation between them. There may be a conflict between the Bible and science, as when the term *science* is used to connote philosophical explanations. If a conflict seems to exist, its source is to be found in man. Sometimes willfully, at times with pious intentions, modern notions have been foisted on O. T. language; interpretations have been rendered which are out of harmony with the rest of the Bible; interpretations are based on ancient and obsolete science or on modern science; the representation of a fact is mistaken for the fact; and finally the Bible has been committed to some scientific theory—to mention in a general way the sources of trouble. We find most frequently that some philosoph-

ical science has been read into the Bible. If this science, in consequence of later and fuller investigations, was revised, science suffered but little thereby, but faith in the Bible was shaken, if not lost, particularly among young people.

The material given here *will offer little that has not been said before*, but it is hoped that it will in some manner be of aid to those who are called upon to guide and direct and assure particularly young men and women who are disturbed by doubts and misgivings arising from a misunderstanding of, or a failure to see, the harmony between the Bible and nature.

What is offered herewith is not intended for the conversion of the unbeliever. The treatment he needs is the plain Law applied, and without argumentation, followed by the Gospel, also applied without any argumentation. Argument will never convert a man. Law and Gospel will turn him face about. And again, what is offered here is not meant to be an outward prop of the Bible. The Bible requires no outward support, and habitual reliance on such outward props, even when sound and resting on truth, only weakens faith. True faith in the Scriptures must have its strength in the Scriptures themselves.

THE INFINITE THROUGH THE FINITE

If we let our thoughts sweep across nature and across the universe, looking for the most wonderful and awe-inspiring thing we can find, they must come to rest on the Bible before us. Nature indeed does tell us something of the Almighty, the All-wise, the Creator-God, but that knowledge, standing by itself, helps us men not at all. It only makes God the more remote and unapproachable for us, and fearsome. How different is the aspect of nature when we know and believe: "God is Love." Now all that before was so terrifying, so fearsome, so crushing to us, makes us feel secure and safe and sheltered. To reveal to us poor, lost men His eternal, rescuing, saving, keeping love, God has given us the Bible. Its message is comprehended in three words: "God is Love." Whatever else may be said of God, of His holiness, His justice, His righteousness, and all His other attributes, below it all, around it all, above it all, the periphery of it all, is Love. "God *is* Love." His very nature compels Him to reveal Himself to all men of all

ages, for He "will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." Using human agents, God has through His Holy Spirit produced the sacred Scriptures, in which through the medium of human speech, human experiences and pictures, and human emotions, even trite truths and sayings, He does reveal Himself to man who otherwise could know nothing of Him, or no more than the little which nature reveals of Him. As long as there are human mothers in this world with little babes in their arms, men can know of God's redeeming love, for laying hold of a common fundamental instinct, God says: "Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me." These sacred writings address themselves, in the first instance, to the most separate and peculiar people in the world, and yet, by drawing on elementary and fundamental human experiences, etc., common to all men, these writings have a most unique appeal to all peoples, all ages, and all individual men. The many translations bear this out.

Nature is one grand parable. Jesus saw it thus. The natural and the supernatural cannot be separated. They are inseparably intertwined and run through all the Scriptures from the genesis of the first earth to the appearing of the new. The natural and the supernatural cannot be separated when the great question of the unity of the race in its connection with the doctrines of the *fall*, of the *incarnation*, and of *redemption* is considered. The supernatural is made known through the natural. The Infinite reveals Himself to the finite through the finite. And yet, the primary object of divine revelation is not to extend our profane knowledge, i. e., the Bible nowhere is intended to give us strictly scientific knowledge. It draws in the natural as much as is needed to achieve its great purpose, no more. When a reference is made to nature, it is not merely casual, but the reference is needed to bring before the reader, or the hearer, some spiritual truth. Where such reference is made, Scripture deals with nature and natural phenomena in its own Scriptural way and uses a language that is universally understood, the phenomenal, or as some prefer, the phenomenational language.

PHENOMENATIONAL LANGUAGE

If I go to a photographer and have him make a portrait of me, what he hands me, some time later, is not I as a matter of fact, but a representation of me. We see facts, taste them, hear them, feel them, smell them, and as we do, a conception is formed of them, or a mind's image, which in distinction from the fact is a mere representation of the fact. If we perceive some fact, etc., and, as the conception, or mind's image, is formed, keep it stripped of all emotion we may experience, and allow no explanation of the fact to become a part of the mind's image, then the conception in our mind will be the same as will appear in any other. The mind's image of the fact will be universal. If we put such a universal conception, stripped of all emotion and explanation, in words, we have phenomenational language. The fact then is one thing, the representation of the fact is another. For example, we think of the act or process in nature which we all know as sunrise—but we dare not call it that, for then we have already passed from the observation of the fact to its interpretation. When this process mentioned before occurs in nature, the observer perceives through his sense of sight, and the image, or concept, is formed in the mind. The image formed in one mind will be the same as that formed in another, regardless of the observer's intellectual endowments. The sun rises in the morning. The sun sets in the evening. It would appear no different to Einstein than to an Egyptologist. Language, especially early language or primitive language, seeks to express this conception, or mental image of the fact, etc., in distinction from the fact and as a representation of it. *To use such phenomenational language in saying "the sun rises" does not commit the speaker, and we may add, the Bible, to any astronomical system, nor to any scientific explanation of the fact,* but it is merely the representation of the fact by the universal image formed in the mind. If a poet should observe a sunrise, he might desire to let the emotion which he experiences modify his representation of the fact, but since not all would have the same experience, he would no longer be devising language which is universally understood, i. e., it would not be phenomenational language. A scientist observing the same phenomenon has a scientific explanation of it which may affect the manner in which he represents the fact verbally. He would be

devising specialized language which would not be universally understood. Of course, both of the latter two may find it convenient to let the matter rest in the phenomenational representation of the fact, reserving for themselves the right to make any mental elaboration or correction of this representation.

All language begins with such imaging. After long use and wear a language loses more and more this richness and freshness which goes with such imaging, and, finally, what was once an image representation comes to stand for thoughts or facts, or physical agencies without such conceptual representation. Thus, much of a language gradually becomes lifeless like the x and y of the mathematician. Thus, much of a live language may be dead, and a dead language may be much alive, as is the case with the original languages of Scripture. With respect to nature the Bible uses the phenomenational language, without committing itself to any scientific explanation or theory, which may at times need revision and readjustment.

SCIENTIFIC LANGUAGE

Scientific language always strives to be descriptive rather than philosophic. A process once initiated may involve a long chain of steps, each one of which may be started by a cause or a secondary cause which issued from a previous step which has just reached its completion or has progressed sufficiently far for the succeeding step to begin. The chain reaction of the atomic pile might be mentioned as an example, or the particles of powder in a fuse may furnish a more simple example. Here in the fuse particle "a" is first ignited and starts off "b," etc., until the cap is reached. The process which develops in the cap or in the final explosion may again involve many steps and secondary causes. Scientific language seeks to describe cause and effect, secondary as well as primary, and, strange to say, cannot always cut itself loose from phenomenational language. Thus sunrise, in scientific language, would involve the earth's orbit, revolution, rotation, planetary motion, gravitational attraction, etc. The object is to explain the relation of phenomena to each other and to trace their connection all the way up to the ultimate truth or agency. If such a scientific explanation stays within its sphere of operation, which is confined to things, energies, forces, it must stop short of the ultimate.

Stopping short of that, the human mind by its very nature is restless, impatient with its own shortcomings, is anxious for more, and may attempt to supply by speculation what is outside its reach. Not infrequently, scientific explanation merely chops a larger mystery into any number of smaller ones, each one of which may be left unsolved or unexplained. Knowledge may be somewhat extended by this latter process, but the ultimate truth and agency always remains unattainable.

Lest such statements give the impression that we seek to disparage scientific thinking, we would add that we are merely being honest. We respect true science and logical thinking too much to indulge in slighting them, but we do regret misuse and abuse of them. The mind and intelligent thinking are a gift of God, which, like the daily bread and sunlight, are bestowed alike on the good and on the evil. If some abuse these gifts of God, this does not oblige the Christian man to starve himself physically and intellectually. A Christian can be a Christian man and an intelligent man at one and the same time. Moreover, unless we completely misunderstand Christ's word Matt. 22:37, and Cremer's comment on the word "mind," then intellectual processes are challenged by spiritual things. Rom. 12:2 Paul speaks of the "renewing of your mind," which implies that also intellectual faculties are elevated and ennobled and are put to use in the King's service. Abuse of intellectual gifts we regret, but we do not disparage or slight them because they are intellectual. Nor would we summarily condemn the "scientific method," for there is a sphere in which it operates legitimately, but if it is applied to religion, to morality, to ethics, or to spiritual things, as is so frequently done not only by the sciences, but also by the social sciences, called "science" for the sake of prestige, then it is misapplied and has lost its usefulness.

SCIENTIFIC LANGUAGE IS NOT EMPLOYED BY THE BIBLE

The Bible does not employ "scientific" language, for the use of such language would constitute the Scripture's endorsement of the theory and philosophy back of such language, would underwrite the correctness of such theory and philosophy. Science cannot claim such endorsement because phenomenational language is used in the Scriptures. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word

shall not pass away." No matter how much scientific explanation may change, be revised, or discarded wholly, as new discoveries are taken into account, new hypotheses are devised, the phenomenon as it is perceived by the mind will not change. The appearance of a fact stands, however much the scientific explanation of the fact may change. No scientific explanation, no philosophy can impeach the authority of the Scriptures in things physical.

In our translations and in our exegesis the phenomenational language of the Scriptures is sometimes weakened or dimmed or obscured. We cannot rid ourselves of the feeling that it had been better not to translate at all such words as *raqia*, *yom*, *min*, *olam*. We dare not use *species* when we mean *min*. Luther's "*Art*" may serve, but even the "*kind*" of the Authorized Version is hardly adequate.

By way of comparison we shall let Genesis 1 furnish a word or two from the phenomenational language of Scripture. We shall then supply equivalents from the scientific terminology, and finally we shall draw from other parts of the Bible words used for the poetical version. *Firmament*, *sky*, *water* "above and below the firmament" mean the same in simple phenomenational language that *atmosphere*, *rarefaction*, *condensation*, *reflection*, *refraction* would represent in the scientific. In poetical language the Bible renders the same remote facts as: *treasures*, *storehouses*, of rain, snow, hail; *molten-looking glass*, *curtain*, *tent* are used for sky. All speak of the same fact, each in its own way, and the poetical language touches upon our emotions besides.

IN SOME INSTANCES SCIENCE IS FORCED TO USE PHENOMENATIONAL LANGUAGE

Even an exact science such as physics cannot dispense with phenomenational language, nor can the even greater astronomy. On visiting the Adler Planetarium at Chicago one hears such phenomenational language as *sunrise*, *sunset*, *the stars set*, *eclipse*, etc. The great Newton in the attempt to define such a fundamental thing as *force* could do no better than to say, "force is a push or pull." He set out to describe force, but force, whatever it is, is ineffable. So the best that Newton can do is to tell what force does or may do to matter. It may push or pull it. That is the mind's

image of force, something else in motion because of it. Our language, also our scientific language, cannot shake itself loose from the representation by appearances, that is, the phenomenational language. Some scientific terms are so far from being "scientific" that they are amusing, e. g., *phrenology*. We might also add such terms as *cell*, and *vacuole*, and for still more we might turn to Gray's *Manual*.³ The scientific names of the members of the botanical world abound with the language of appearance. If, then, science cautions us not to mistake the mind's image-representation of the fact for the fact, we shall gladly accept this cautionary word, it is well spoken; and we on our part shall turn to science and to all who are critical of the Scriptures, as well as any who would interpret the Sacred Writings, and caution them all not to mistake the mind's image-representation of a fact for the fact, which is ineffable, nor to put modern notions nor modern science where it has no place.

JOSHUA 10:11-14

We take the passage Joshua 10:11-14 just as it stands without entering into any discussion not along the line of phenomenational language. The question which this passage often raises is whether it teaches an astronomical system. Some think it does.

We begin with verse 14, "For the Lord fought for Israel," and we shall also draw upon verse 8, "There shall not a man stand before thee." With these words the Amorites were doomed. That was the will of God, and we need say no more on this point. The Amorites were to be destroyed by the instrumentality of the men of Israel. The Israelites were to be God's executioners. He might have used angels or Satan, as He did on other occasions, but He chose instead the men of Israel. Nor need we inquire why the one agent is preferred to the other. Very pertinent to our discussion is the fact, as the events of the day demonstrated later, that this particular assignment was more than Israel could accomplish in the remaining hours of light on that particular day, had there been no divine interference. This feature may have been God's subtle way of keeping Israel mindful of the fact that they were

³ Gray's *New Manual of Botany*, American Book Company, the best-known taxonomic key to the flowering plants and ferns of the central and northeastern United States and adjacent Canada.

merely instruments and that "the battle is the Lord's." Joshua saw that daylight was running short of Israel's need for it, and so he asked for more. There followed a strange and inexplicable lengthening of that particular day.

If God purposed to preserve a record of this day with its pertinent incidents for posterity, He would have to address Himself to human minds, through human agents and processes, that is, He would have to come down to human level. He might take us up as He took up Paul to the third heaven, but we could not understand the language spoken there, and what we there heard would be unutterable here below. He comes down to our level and uses the simple language of appearance to describe the phenomenon connected with the physical agent or the supernatural divine act, whichever was back of the lengthening of that particular day. The sun appeared to stand immovable in the sky, so Scriptures say, "The sun stood still." No one can fail to understand that this day was lengthened in some inexplicable manner, and such understanding is independent of any astronomical or planetary system. If today we were to make a similar experience and were to report it, we would, no doubt, use the same words. To designate it simply as a lengthening of the day would fail to bring out the preternatural, for we speak of a lengthening of the day each spring. We would say, "The sun stood still." The whole incident is recorded so that we may know that the Lord will keep His promises. Is. 38:8; 2 Kings 20:11; Ps. 19:5-6 employ the same language by implication.

PSALM 29

Throughout this twenty-ninth Psalm we find such phenomenational representation. We at first hear the thunder, "the voice of the Lord," muttering in the north as the storm gathers, then crashing overhead, as the storm center passes, and finally we hear it growling in the south, where the storm expends itself. All is presented as a demonstration of the power and the majesty of God, who took His place as King and Judge uncompromisingly against sin and evil at the time of the Deluge. All similar minor acts, such as storm and tempests, solemnly remind us that "the Lord sitteth King forever," unchanged in His attitude toward sin and transgression, which gives each thundercrash an awful significance. After the storm has rolled away, the sun breaks forth and the

bow appears on the clouds, as it were, for we hear the congregation singing: "The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace." Through Christ this strength and peace are imparted to the people of God. That is a brief summary of the Psalm.

Seven times we hear "the voice of the Lord," that is, the thunder. That is the universal conception of thunder, that some higher being is speaking. Primitive man will strike his breast when the thunder rolls across the plain and cry out: "The gods are angry; a god has spoken." Our primitive ancestors sensed this too and had their Thor. We have our Thursday. Some of the cruelest and most inhuman of the Roman despots hid under the bed when the thunder snarled overhead, we are told. No matter how much science you may have in you, it cannot obliterate this primitive conception of thunder, and no amount of bravado and philosophical boasting can do away with the impression that God is indeed near to us in the thunderstorm, however distant He may seem in other operations in nature.

Thunder is a noise that any little child of today can explain, perhaps in scientific terms. To call thunder "the voice of the Lord" is unscientific. That is correct. But the Psalmist is not interested in the scientific. He has higher ideas to occupy him. He is speaking of the First Cause, God, and its final effect as we perceive it with our senses, thunder, and he makes no attempt to explain what goes on between first cause and effect. It is the sphere of science to explain that. Thunder is "the voice of the Lord," however many secondary causes may operate before it reaches our ear.

We know all about electricity and lightning and thunder. We may generate all the electricity we please and use it to drag our freight across the mountains and power our industry and send inane programs across the air; but that is no reason why we cannot reverently and devoutly repeat the words of this Psalm with David. We shall let the physicists discover all they can about electricity and thunder and lightning and rarefactions and condensations, and let them tell us all about it. We shall make it our own and put it to use, and, then passing from nature to a higher plane, we shall hear Jehovah speaking in the thunder and in the storm. This Psalm, like the whole Bible, begins where science leaves off.

Milwaukee, Wis.