

# Science and the Authority of Scripture (Part 1)

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## Introduction

One of the great challenges for all students of the Bible is how to integrate general revelation and the conclusions of modern science into our understanding of scripture and, in particular, our doctrine of creation. At present, the understanding of most Christian and non-Christian scientists stands in stark contrast to what the language of scripture appears to be communicating. In response, many evangelical theologians, wishing to maintain the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, have felt compelled to modify their interpretation of what the Bible teaches about creation to bring it in line with the current scientific consensus. But is this the correct approach to the problem?

## Two Books of Revelation?

Many evangelical scientists and theologians attempt to resolve this question by holding to the notion that God has revealed Himself in two “books”—general revelation and special revelation. Special revelation (the Bible) is authoritative in all matters relating to spiritual truth, salvation, ethics, morality and Christian living, whereas general revelation is authoritative in all matters relating to the natural world. Furthermore, the tasks of the theologian and the scientist are seen to be the interpretation of scripture, and the interpretation of nature, respectively, and each have their own specific methodology and procedures for determining the true meaning of the particular book they are studying.<sup>1</sup>

The basic tenet of the dual revelation theory is summarized by Bernard Ramm: “God cannot contradict His speech in Nature by His speech in Scripture. If the Author of Nature and Scripture are the same God, then the two books of God must eventually recite the same story.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, Hugh Ross considers nature to be just as inspired as scripture—a sixty-seventh book of the Bible.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the basic maxim for those who accept the dual revelation theory is “all truth is God’s truth.” Yet as C. L. Deinhardt comments, “The prevalence of this maxim among Christian writers could make one think it is a quotation from Scripture, with very likely a long history of theological treatises about it

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<sup>1</sup> John C. Whitcomb, “Biblical Inerrancy and the Double Revelation Theory” *GJ* 4 (Winter 1963), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Ramm, *Christian View of Science and Scripture* (London: Paternoster, 1955) 25.

<sup>3</sup> Hugh N. Ross, *Creation and Time* (Colorado Springs, NavPress, 1994), 56–57.

and biblical exegeses supporting its use in justifying ‘truth’ being drawn from science, nature, psychology, etc. But I have yet to find the text in the Bible.”<sup>4</sup>

Even on the face of it, the idea of two non-contradictory “books” of revelation seems flawed. The fact is that these two “books” do appear to contradict each other at numerous points. Such conflicts are nearly always resolved by simply reinterpreting the special revelation in scripture. In other words, general revelation takes priority over special revelation, implying—at least in the minds of many interpreters—that the two are not equal! This has been demonstrated time after time in the publications of the American Scientific Affiliation (ASA). In his review article on the ASA and the Creation Research Society, William Lane Craig notes that “[t]he whole point of the double revelation theory was supposed to prove that ‘these two revelations must agree; if they do not appear to do so, it must be because we are misinterpreting either one or both.’ But the Bible always seems to come out on the short end.”<sup>5</sup>

David Diehi highlights the central interpretive implication of the dual revelation theory when he asserts that “general and special revelation are equally authoritative and infallible *for the respective truths that they in fact reveal*.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, general revelation, through scientific study, is the final and infallible authority on matters pertaining to the natural world, whereas *the special revelation of scripture may contain errors of fact when speaking about the structure, form, operation and dating of the universe*.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the dual revelation approach implies that whenever there is an apparent conflict between the conclusions of the scientist and the interpretations of the theologian, then the theologian must re-evaluate his interpretation of the scriptures on these points in order to bring the Bible back into harmony with science. Since the Bible is not a scientific textbook, it is not thought to speak authoritatively on issues relating to the actual form and operation of the physical world. Proponents of the dual revelation theory believe that only careful scientific study can give us detailed and authoritative answers in these areas. This is especially true for those questions relating to the origin and nature of the universe, the effects of the Edenic curse, and the reality, significance and effect of the Genesis flood in the time of Noah. Therefore, it is not difficult to determine which “revelation” gains the supremacy in any dual revelation theory. Science conquers all.<sup>8</sup>

In any case, the dual-revelation theory is based on flawed understandings of both general and special revelation.

### *General Revelation*

The classical definition of general revelation is given by Bruce Demarest and Gordon Lewis: “[T]he disclosure of God in nature, in providential history, and in the moral law within the heart, whereby

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<sup>4</sup> C. L. Deinhardt, “General Revelation as an Important Theological Consideration for Christian Counselling and Therapy” *διδασκαλία* (Fall 1995), 50.

<sup>5</sup> William Lane Craig, “Evangelicals And Evolution: An Analysis Of The Debate Between The Creation Research Society And The American Scientific Affiliation” *JETS* 17/3 (Summer 1974), 141.

<sup>6</sup> David W. Diehi, “Evangelicalism and General Revelation: An Unfinished Agenda” *JETS* 30 (December 1987), 448. My emphasis.

<sup>7</sup> Examples of this belief can be found in Paul H. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above. Part I: The meaning of *raqiya*’ in Gen. 1:6–8” *WTJ* 53/2 (1991), 227–240; Paul H. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above. Part II: The meaning of ‘the water above the firmament’ in Gen. 1:6–8” *WTJ* 54/1 (1992), 31–46; Paul H. Seely, “The Geographical Meaning of ‘Earth’ and ‘Seas’ in Genesis 1:10” *WTJ* 59/2 (1997), 231–256.

<sup>8</sup> Marvin L. Goodman, “Non-literal Interpretations of Genesis Creation” *GJ* 14/1 (Winter 1973), 29.

all persons at all times and places gain a rudimentary understanding of the Creator and his moral demands.”<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, Demarest adds: “General revelation, mediated through nature, conscience, and the providential ordering of history, traditionally has been understood as a universal witness to God’s existence and character.”<sup>10</sup>

Millard Erickson offers a similar definition but, as Robert Thomas points out, he slips in an additional connotation for the meaning of “general.”<sup>11</sup> Erickson understands general revelation as “general” not only in the sense that it is universally available to everyone, but also in the sense that its *content* is general.<sup>12</sup> This definition represents a significant departure from the definition of general revelation traditionally used by theologians. How, then, should general revelation be defined and what is the biblical basis for such a definition?

Firstly, in what sense is general revelation “general”? While Erickson believes the content of the revelation is general, David Diehi argues that the content of the revelation “about creation” is quite specific, including what God has made (e.g. the heavens, firmament, rains and fruitful seasons, and similar).<sup>13</sup> Yet it is difficult to see what he actually means by this. The heavens, the firmament, the rains and the like are indeed quite specific things, but this only indicates that God has created many specific things that are distinct from each other. While this may provide some insight into the character and nature of the Creator, it says very little about the creation itself. Nevertheless, Diehi argues that if general revelation “includes both knowledge of God and knowledge of creation, and if it is an objective and infallible revelation, then not only does theology have a reliable and divinely authoritative source but so does science.”<sup>14</sup> However, he also acknowledges that such a conclusion is conditional upon showing that general revelation does indeed include “knowledge of creation” and if so, to what extent.

Secondly, in what way is science related to general revelation? It is quite common for theologians and scientists to view science and general revelation as one and the same thing,<sup>15</sup> although most understand science as the study of God’s general revelation in the same way that theology is the study of God’s special revelation. For example, Norman Geisler declares: “Systematic theology is as meaningful as science is, for theology is to the Bible (God’s special revelation) what science is to nature (God’s general revelation). Both are a systematic approach to the truths God has revealed in a nonsystematic way. In each case God has given the truths and left it for man to organize them in an orderly way.”<sup>16</sup>

Robert C. Newman claims that knowledge from general revelation is based on a much larger body of data than that of special revelation, and therefore provides far more detail than scripture.<sup>17</sup> But Newman fails to see that data is just that—data. It is not communication and it does not speak for

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce A. Demarest and Gordon R. Lewis, *Integrative Theology: Knowing Ultimate Reality, the Living God*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1987), 1:61.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1982), 14.

<sup>11</sup> Robert L. Thomas, “General Revelation and Biblical Hermeneutics” *TMSJ* 9 (Spring 1998), 6.

<sup>12</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker, 1998), 154.

<sup>13</sup> Diehi, “Evangelicalism and General Revelation,” 449.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* Indeed, Diehi believes the Bible is not the only infallible source of truth (448).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Ramm, *Christian View of Science and Scripture*, 23; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2001), 77.

<sup>16</sup> Norman L. Geisler, “The Relation of Purpose and Meaning in Interpreting Scripture” *GTJ* 5 (Fall 1984), fn 6.

<sup>17</sup> Robert C. Newman, “Progressive Creationism” in J. P. Moreland and J. M. Reynolds (editors), *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1999), 131.

itself, since there are often different interpretations for the same data set. Therefore, raw uninterpreted data cannot be revelation.

Diehi, on the other hand, considers general revelation to be “progressive throughout the whole of human history...As we investigate more deeply and fully the creation of God, he progressively unveils to us its true nature and structure...Thus to progress in a knowledge of general revelation is to be able to better understand the significance and application of the teachings of scripture. It is to be able to know more precisely what scripture does and does not teach.”<sup>18</sup>

Diehi’s application of the term “progressive” to general revelation is curious. He appears to be drawing a parallel with the progressive nature of biblical (special) revelation which is progressive in the sense that it was revealed over an extended but *limited* period of time. Describing general revelation as progressive, however, means something quite different, since, according to Diehi, general revelation continues *indefinitely*. Diehi also assumes that the knowledge gained from general revelation through scientific study is cumulative in the same way that our picture of God becomes clearer and more detailed He progressively reveals Himself in salvation history. But Diehi’s understanding of the history of the scientific enterprise is very naïve. Scientific knowledge was not gleaned in an accumulative manner, but rather, through “revolutions,” where many of the currently held paradigms and theories were completely overturned and replaced by new paradigms and theories.<sup>19</sup> In fact, if Diehi’s conception of general revelation is accepted, then we are forced to view it as a dynamic, constantly changing source of “knowledge.” The problem is that at many points in history, scientific ‘knowledge’ has turned out to be quite wrong. But if general revelation (as Diehi conceives of it) has been wrong many times, then how can it be viewed as authoritative, let alone infallible?

Is there any warrant, then, for broadening the scope of general revelation to include scientific study? Robert Thomas answers in the negative for several reasons: (1) Knowledge of general revelation should be common to all people: “It is not something they must seek to discover. It is not hidden truth such as the mysteries of special revelation revealed to the apostles. It is information that is common knowledge to all...and impossible for mankind to avoid.”<sup>20</sup> (2) Modern science is not general revelation since most scientific knowledge is of recent origin, and only comprehensible to those with advanced training in the various scientific disciplines. (3) The subject of general revelation is God Himself (cf. Ps. 19:6; Rom. 1:19–21; Acts 14:15–17; Acts 17:24–8; Rom. 2:14–15, etc.), not the physical world.<sup>21</sup> (4) Humanity’s invariable response to general revelation is *negative* (cf. Rom. 1:18–21). As Thomas notes: “For human discoveries to be categorized under the heading of general revelation, those discoveries must be objects of rejection by the non-Christian world, not revelations of truth...to suggest that discoveries of the secular Western mind are direct results of positive responses to general revelation is to contradict what Scripture says about unregenerate mankind’s response to that revelation.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the notion that general revelation includes scientific data, reasoning and conclusions cannot be maintained.

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<sup>18</sup> Diehi, “Evangelicalism and General Revelation,” 453–4.

<sup>19</sup> See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996). The history of science will be further discussed in chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas, “General Revelation and Biblical Hermeneutics,” 10.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 7–9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 9–10. Of course, unbelievers *do* reject or suppress the *teleological implications* of the natural world, which is what Romans 1:18–21 teaches.

Thirdly, Diehi argues that all biblical statements are “dependent on general revelation for rational, empirical and personal meaning” and therefore, general revelation has an “epistemological priority” over special revelation: “It is in the logical, empirical and personal structure of creation as general revelation that we have a basis for the meaning of any proposition, Biblical or otherwise.” Indeed, the laws of logic are “grounded in general revelation,” and without logic, no statement of Scripture is intelligible.<sup>23</sup> But on this point Diehi is quite mistaken. The capacity to reason is an inherent part of human nature. We are created in the image of God, and since God is a rational being, we too are rational beings. When God told Adam and Eve not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they understood what He meant and that death would result.<sup>24</sup> They did not have to turn to the scientific study of the garden to determine God’s intent! Diehi goes on to argue that in order to understand Psalm 23, for example, one has to have at least a basic knowledge about sheep and the role of the shepherd.<sup>25</sup> Again, Diehi is mistaken. Such knowledge is gained by studying the relevant culture not by studying general revelation.

Finally, what do the scriptures themselves teach about the nature and function of general revelation? Psalm 19:1–4 is often cited as supporting the concept of the ‘two books’ of revelation and that scientific study can reveal specific information about God and His creation:

The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they display knowledge.  
There is no speech or language  
where their voice is not heard.  
Their voice goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world.<sup>26</sup>

Regarding verse 1, Diehi points to the phrases “glory of God” and “the work of his hands,” and argues that general revelation reveals not only knowledge of God Himself, but also knowledge of the things He has made.<sup>27</sup> Yet, Diehi fails to note the synonymous parallelism between the two halves of this verse. While each half is distinct, it also serves to reinforce the other half. The “heavens” reveal the majesty and greatness of God, while the “skies” (synonymous to “heavens”) reveal His incredible creative activity. Both halves focus wholly on God, not on the actual creation. The skies do not proclaim themselves; they proclaim the work of God.

In addition, the translation of verses 3–4 is not straightforward. Verse 3 simply emphasizes the fact that the heavens do not have any actual audible voice. Note that the word “where” in verse 3 in the NIV is not in the Hebrew. The two clauses are semantically parallel: in declaring God’s glory, the heavens do not employ speech or language, and they have no audible voice. Yet, verse 4 explains that, despite the lack of verbal communication, God’s message in creation is broadcast throughout the earth and reaches everyone.

The Hebrew Masoretic Text of verse 4 has *qawam* (“their measuring cord”), rather than *qolam* (“their voice”). The LXX and all modern translations, however, prefer *qolam*, since it appears that a scribe erred by dropping the lamed (*l*) when copying *qolam*, which resulted in *qawam*, and “their measuring cord” does not appear to make much sense. Yet “voice” does not seem to fit the context

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<sup>23</sup> Diehi, “General Revelation and Biblical Hermeneutics,” 450.

<sup>24</sup> This is clearly indicated by Eve’s response to the serpent in Gen. 3:3.

<sup>25</sup> Diehi, “General Revelation and Biblical Hermeneutics,” 450.

<sup>26</sup> NIV.

<sup>27</sup> Diehi, “General Revelation and Biblical Hermeneutics,” 448.

any better, given that the preceding verse states that the heavens do not have any actual voice. Secondly, the principles of textual criticism suggest that the “more difficult” reading is preferable.

How, then, should verse 4 be translated? The semantic range of *qaw* is not completely settled. In Isaiah 28:10, *qaw* is synonymously parallel with *tsaw* (“precept”) suggesting a similar meaning. In Psalm 19:4, the Syriac Peshitta renders it as “their message”<sup>28</sup> and this appears to be the rendering that makes the most sense of the text. Thus, Psalm 19:1–4 is best rendered as:

The heavens declare God's glory;  
the sky displays his handiwork.  
Day after day it speaks out;  
night after night it reveals his greatness.  
There is no actual speech or words,  
their voice is not literally heard.  
Yet their message goes out to the whole earth;  
their words reach the ends of the earth.

Whether we accept *qaw* from the Hebrew Masoretic Text or *qolam* derived from the LXX, the point of this text is that although the creation does not audibly speak or communicate in human language, it nevertheless testifies to God’s existence and His power and glory, and that this testimony is universal. Language and physical location present no barriers to “hearing” and seeing God in creation. This is consistent with Paul’s point in Romans 1:20—no one has any excuse for not acknowledging God because creation has made His existence and power obvious to everyone.

Yet Romans 1:20 is commonly cited by advocates of the dual revelation theory as proof that general revelation includes science and reveals truth about the physical creation. Romans 1:19–20 states: “since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” Again, note that what has been revealed is knowledge *about God*—specifically “God’s invisible qualities”—not scientific facts or knowledge about the physical creation. Note also the purpose for this revelation: so that mankind cannot claim ignorance as a reason for not accepting God.

Richard Young argues that if the expressions in Romans 1:20 are interpreted in light of “the central Creator/creation/idolatry motif that runs throughout the passage,” it is apparent that “God’s eternal power would then pertain to God’s creative energy, and God’s deity would pertain to the idea that the Creator, not creation, is sovereign and deserving of worship. Thus what is manifest throughout creation is simply that God is the Creator who should be worshiped.”<sup>29</sup> Young also notes that if *to gnoston* (v. 19) is rendered as “what is known” it would create a tautology: what is known has been made known. Therefore it would be better to take it as a reference to a subset of knowledge about Himself that God has chosen to reveal to humanity.<sup>30</sup>

It should be clear, then, that neither Psalm 19:1–4 nor Romans 1:19–20 offers any support for the view that general revelation encompasses specific knowledge about the physical world, including modern scientific conclusions and theories. What, then, is the purpose of general revelation? Romans 1:19–20 clearly teaches that general revelation reveals to *all* humanity, past and present, that God exists, that He created the universe and everything in it, and that He is great and powerful.

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<sup>28</sup> See entry for *qaw* (I) in *HALOT*.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Alan Young, “The Knowledge of God in Romans 1:18–23” *JETS* 43 (December 2000), 704.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 704, n 38. Cf. NIV—“what may be known about God.”

Thus, *the physical world is not a second book of revelation from God, but a signpost pointing to God the almighty Creator.*

In the final analysis, the dual revelation theory fails to acknowledge the inherent limitations of scientific knowledge and method, especially in relation to the study of origins. John Whitcomb adds:

The scientific method assumes without proof the universal validity of uniformity as a law of nature, by extrapolating present processes forever into the past and future; and it ignores the possible anti-theistic bias of the scientist himself as he handles the “facts” of nature in arriving at a cosmology (a theory concerning the basic structure and character of the universe) and a cosmogony (a theory concerning the origin of the universe and its parts).<sup>31</sup>

### *The Primacy of Special Revelation*

Mark Noll writes:

The height of foolishness is to confuse the tasks of creator and creature (Rom. 1). Humans are creatures, not the creator. As such we will always be limited by our finitude from seeing the whole picture. We will always be predisposed by our fallenness to misconstrue the results of historical inquiry for our own idolatrous satisfaction. We will always be trading the advantages that come from living in the God ordained particularities of our own cultures for the blindness that comes from being unable to see what is so obvious to those who gaze upon the past from other frames of reference.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, it is impossible to discover the truth about creation by relying on our own knowledge, ideas and methods, simply because we are finite and fallen human beings. Not only does our humanity prohibit us from having exhaustive knowledge, but our fallen nature also inhibits our ability to perceive, to reason, and to assess. Moreover, the object of scientific study—the natural world—is also fallen. While it still reveals the glory and greatness of God, it is, nevertheless, in “bondage to decay” (Rom 8:20–22). The image it presents is to some extent distorted.

Nevertheless, Diehi objects to using sin or sin’s curse on creation or a supposed deficiency in general revelation as an excuse for reducing general revelation to a second-rate position such that, in theology and science disputes, scripture is taken as the only trustworthy source of truth.<sup>33</sup> However, not only does Diehi fail to understand the nature and purpose of general revelation, he also appears to place far too much confidence in the ability of scientists—who are fallen human beings with biases and agendas—to produce an accurate assessment and come to unbiased conclusions.

A much clearer picture of creation can be gleaned from the special revelation of scripture. The scriptures tell the story of our creation, of our sin in Adam, and of God’s gift of salvation in Christ. The message of general revelation in the natural world, on the other hand, is more modest. It is limited to proclaiming that God exists, that He is the almighty and all-powerful Creator, and that in the past, He has judged the world for their sin and rebellion.<sup>34</sup> Regarding salvation, however, Wolters posits that general revelation is “useless,” and the two revelations are not even comparable.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Whitcomb, “Biblical Inerrancy and the Double Revelation Theory,” 4.

<sup>32</sup> Mark A. Noll, “Traditional Christianity and the Possibility of Historical Knowledge” *CSR* 19/4 (June 1990), 402.

<sup>33</sup> Diehi, “General Revelation and biblical Hermeneutics” 448.

<sup>34</sup> The Noahic flood is an example of God’s judgment in the past of human sin and rebellion. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 10.

<sup>35</sup> A. M. Wolters, *Creation Regained* (Carlisle, Paternoster, 1996), 31.

The scriptures, unlike general revelation, are presented in the words of ordinary human language. As Wolters points out, “[t]hey are plain in a way that general revelation never is, have a ‘perspicuity’ that is not found in the book of nature. In a way, therefore, the Scriptures are like a verbal commentary on the dimly perceived sign language of creation.”<sup>36</sup> For this reason, the special revelation of scripture should always take priority over both general revelation in the natural world and the conclusions of modern science. The revelation of scripture is the filter through which all else should be interpreted. Indeed, Calvin, long ago, suggested that the scriptures are the spectacles with which to read the book of nature and that the illumination of the Spirit is needed to give us proper eyesight for the reading.<sup>37</sup> As Graeme Goldsworthy points out, “all reality depends upon the creative word of God.” Thus, “the word of God must judge the ideas of men about truth and error, not the other way round.”<sup>38</sup>

In addition, special revelation occurs in history and concerns historical events, and thus reinforces the link between Christianity and factual history:

Is not God’s revelation first event, and only then knowledge? Does not revelation occur in history, and not first of all in ideation? Is not revelation the history of God’s acts in time and space, and not merely as information[?] Information is data, facts, measures, statistics, knowledge? [*sic*] While revelation yields information, it is not constituted by information as such but by God’s disclosure of himself through historical events.<sup>39</sup>

Yet the most important and significant attribute of special revelation is that it is the testimony of the Creator Himself regarding truth that is inherently inaccessible to human perception and inquiry. Allan MacRae summarized this point well:

The greatest importance of revelation lies in fields in which the facts are inaccessible to the observer. No human being was present when the earth was made. No one could see the various processes that occurred, or tell from his own observation what is their purpose and ultimate destiny. The earth as it exists today can be studied, and inferences made as to its past history. Processes now going on can be observed and measured, and estimates made as to their occurrence in past times. After all this is done, much remains to be learned. How much easier it would be, if a revelation about these matters could be secured from the One who made the earth.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, it is precisely for this reason that, when studying origins, more attention needs to be paid to the scriptures—the special revelation of “the God who is there” and who “is not silent.”

Allowing the conclusions of modern science to determine our doctrine of creation is essentially a denial of the historic, evangelical doctrine of *sola scriptura*.<sup>41</sup> No longer does scripture alone determine what the Christian church should believe. Instead, the scientific priesthood is now telling

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>37</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.6.1.

<sup>38</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Carlisle, Paternoster, 1981). 49.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas C. Oden, “Response to Hugh Ross on General Revelation” *PhC* 21/1 (Summer 1998).

<sup>40</sup> Allan A. MacRae, “The Scientific Approach to the Old Testament Part 1” *BSac* 110 (January–March 1953), 22–23.

<sup>41</sup> It is often stated that *sola scriptura* applies only to matters of “faith and life.” Indeed, this has become the basis for allowing science the authority in matters concerning origins (see for example chapter 7, “Hardening of the Categories: Why Theologians Have opposed ‘New Knowledge’” in M. James Sawyer, *The Survivor’s Guide to Theology* [Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2002]). However, this is another instance of revisionist historiography. As Don Carson points out (“Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture” in D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge [eds], *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* [Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker, 1995] 14), “Precisely because the Reformers’ theological formulations were shaped by the controversies of their age, it is clear that the “faith and life” formula was meant to be an all-embracing rubric, not a limiting one. They claimed that the deposit of truth lies in the Bible, not in the church or in the magisterium of the church. Their concern, in other words, was to spell out the locus of authority in order to rebut their Roman Catholic opponents, not to restrict the range of the Bible’s authority to religious life and thought, away from history and the natural world. The modern disjunction would have seemed strange to them.”



the church what to believe about creation and how the scriptures should be interpreted to fit in with those beliefs. For many, the Bible “is to teach us how one goes to heaven, not how the heavens go.”<sup>42</sup> But the central issue is not so much about the scientific accuracy of scripture, but rather its *historical* accuracy. Does it accurately describe past events in propositional form? While all agree scripture is not a textbook on science, those who have a high view of scripture believe that when it does touch on areas such as science and history, it does speak truthfully and authoritatively.

## Summary

General Revelation is not science nor does it include science. Rather, it is revelation that is available to all people in all places at all times, not just to those living in developed societies during the scientific age. General Revelation functions only as a signpost for God’s existence and awesome power. It does not contradict Special Revelation or ‘trump’ it in any way.

Special Revelation, on the other hand, is God’s particular revelation of Himself in human language, and communicates to us the true nature and character of God, the true nature of human beings, and what God requires of us. It is this revelation that not only reveals our need for a Saviour, what God has done for us, and the future glory of those who follow Him, but also reveals how the universe came into being and was corrupted by the fall of mankind.

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<sup>42</sup> This saying is generally attributed to Galileo, although some attribute it to Jerome or Cardinal Baronius.