

Faith Community Church, Roslyn, PA, 1968

## **Science and the Scriptures**

**Robert C. Newman**

### **What is Science?**

Various Definitions:

- Systematic knowledge of natural or physical phenomena
- Truth ascertained by observation, experiment and induction
- An ordered arrangement of facts known under classes or heads
- Theoretical knowledge as distinguished from practical
- Knowledge of principles and rules of invention, construction and mechanism, as distinguished from art

A General Definition: the systematic study of and knowledge about the real world

Science as method: the empirical method (actually, systematized common sense)

1. Examine data.
2. Construct a hypothesis:
  - a. Fitting the known data;
  - b. As simple as possible consistent with a.
3. Apply deductive logic to the hypothesis to obtain testable consequences.
4. Re-examine data to check these consequences.

Comments

Science involves both art and scholarship; often considerable brilliance is required to construct a theory; if enough data are available, it is usually easier to test a theory than to construct one.

The general definition (above) and the scientific method are not just confined to the so-called exact sciences; one should study the Bible in this way, too.

### **Should we expect scientific statements in the Bible?**

Yes, certainly if the general definition (above) is used.

What about science in the more restricted sense, such as the first of the various definitions above?

- The Bible is not a science textbook.
- Yet it claims to be written by inspiration of God, who is the creator and sustainer of the world.
- Thus we should expect mistakes to be avoided, just as we would for a good scientist writing simple material in the field of his competence.

## **To what extent is science a scriptural activity?**

It is commanded and approved.

- Man commissioned to subdue the earth (Gen 1:28).
- Example of Daniel, Solomon, etc.

The problem of sin: applies to Christians as well as to non-Christians; affects one's outlook (cp. Prov 9:10, 14:12).

Still, careful investigation is enjoined (Prov 14:15, 12:15, 25:2).

## **The occurrence of science in the Scriptures**

Inspiration and consequent lack of error; how this material becomes revelation.

Examples of pre-science, to give assurance (Prov 22:19-21)

- Jacob's sheep (Gen 30:37-39, 31:10-12)
- Pleiades and Orion (Job 38:31-32)
- See examples in McMillen, *None of These Diseases*; Stoner, *Science Speaks*.

## **Problems of Interpretation**

Have such problems both in nature and the Bible

- Copernicus: response of Luther, Calvin and Roman Catholics
- Fixity of species: Agassiz and "kinds"

Great care is necessary to avoid pitfalls here.

- Reading things into Scripture (or nature)
- Overstating the case
  - Too much certainty on an unclear point
  - Going beyond what is stated – Calvin's point
- The importance of context
  - Who is speaking? (e.g., the fool; Jacob, above)
  - What is he talking about? (19<sup>th</sup> cen teetotaler quote of "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!")
  - Is the statement intended to be literal? (Jesus: "I am the door")

## **Conclusion**

Adherence to God's word as thoroughly reliable has proven to be the safest policy (Albright, Thiele; Prov 21:30).