

Revelation and Science Education

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Article 2 of the Belgic Confession states that God reveals himself to us by two means. “First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe” and second, “by his holy and divine Word.”¹ The truths laid out in Article 2 must permeate the entirety of Christian education. A truly Christian education does not concern itself with trying to prove that God exists; rather, it is more concerned with knowledge of *who* God is and the application of that knowledge. This knowledge of God comes only from his self-revelation, apart from which we can know nothing about God.² When we understand what God reveals to us and how he accomplishes that, we are better enabled to understand “what man is. And what children are. And what college students are. And what education should be.”³ Thus, God’s revelation as explained by Article 2 has everything to do with the aim of Christian education, namely, the development of the covenant child as “the perfect man of God.”⁴

Christian education starts with the premise that God *is* and that all true knowledge flows from his revelation in scripture and in creation. This is what the child of God studies. This is what Article 2 teaches. But how is the Christian teacher to integrate the truth of Article 2 into instruction day after day? Bringing God into the curriculum certainly consists of more than mere “tacked on references to God’s greatness, the insertion of one or two Bible passages...[or] the

¹ Belgic Confession, Article 2, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 24.

² Peter Y. De Jong, *The Church’s Witness to the World* (Pella IA: Pella Publishing Inc., 1960), 79.

³ Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian Philosophy of Education* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1988), 43.

⁴ Herman Hoeksema, “Christian Education,” *Standard Bearer* 3 (September 1, 1927), 536.

discussion of a religious or moral application at the unit's conclusion."⁵ Rather, God's revelation of himself in Scripture and the creation must be as a golden thread that is woven through the entire fabric of the instruction. This must be true for every subject area taught in the Christian school, including the sciences, an area where man has increasingly tried to push God out. The cry today in academia is to keep religion out of science at all costs.⁶ But **since God is the source of all knowledge, science and religion cannot be separated.** "The man who devotes himself to science [and teaching it] cannot split himself into halves and separate his faith from his knowledge."⁷ The Christian teacher then must use his knowledge of science (the investigation of God's revelation in creation) only in conjunction with the lens of scripture (special revelation).

The first section of Article 2 describes general revelation, God's revelation of himself in the creation, preservation, and government of the universe. Interestingly, Article 2 describes this revelation of God as "a most elegant book." What do we do with a book? We read it, we understand it, we learn from it, we remember it, and sometimes, if it is good and profitable, we read it again. In the case of the elegant book of God's revelation in the creation, we read it over and over in the Christian science classroom. We stand in awe of the works of God in creation. With David we confess, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou has ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him" (Ps. 8:3-4).

Like any other, this book has chapters. By studying biology we read the chapter on the great design of the Creator in creating and providing for the many different kinds of organisms

⁵ Harro W. Van Brummelen, *Telling the Next Generation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1986), 225.

⁶ Jerry A. Coyne, "Science, religion, and society: the problem of evolution in America," *Evolution* 66 (August 2012):2654-2663. Also: Eugenie C. Scott and Glenn Branch, "Evolution: what's wrong with 'teaching the controversy,'" *TRENDS in Ecology and Evolution* 18 (October 2003):499-502.

⁷ Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (1908), 50. Accessed online, Christian Classics Ethereal Library (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bavinck/revelation.html>).

that inhabit the earth. Studying ecology reveals the many relationships between organisms that the Creator has established, which contribute to the great order seen in the creation. When we study astronomy we are reading the chapter on the vastness of the universe; so immense and seemingly infinite, yet God transcends the finite universe. Geology gives the teacher opportunity to explain the mighty power of God behind the flood when he destroyed the world that then was and provided deliverance for his church. The Christian school teacher explains these chapters to the students continually, pointing to the glory and sovereignty of God. In doing so, the aim of Christian education—the formation of the perfect man of God—is furthered.

This elegant book also has characters; characters that lead us “to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, His eternal power and divinity.”⁸ These characters are described as creatures, both great and small. When we see the word “creature,” we often think of things with life: fish, birds, mammals, insects, reptiles, bacteria, and plants. But if we consider the etymology of the word “creature,” it includes much more than just living things. The word “creature” comes from the Latin *creātūra*, which means “a created thing.” Living things were not the only things created by God. We confess that *all* things were created by God; “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible...” (Col. 1:16). Therefore, in addition to plants and animals, the things we normally consider as creatures, we add water, rocks, mountains, planets, and stars. In light of this, if science education in the Christian school is anything, it is a character study—characters that lead students to contemplate the invisible things of God. It is the great responsibility of the Christian science teacher to show these characters to the students, furthering their understanding of God’s eternal power and divinity and also their formation as a perfect man of God.

⁸ Article 2.

Article 2's treatment of general revelation ends with its application to the unbeliever. God reveals himself to unbelieving man in the creation to leave him without excuse in the day of judgment (Rom. 1:20). The teacher points out the judgment that awaits the unbelievers to whom God has shown himself in the creation. Romans 1:18–19 leaves no doubt about this: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them." How much greater judgment lies in store for the one who has heard the faithful preaching of the gospel and has received a Christian education, who then turns his back on the truths he has been shown? Here the opportunity arises for the teacher to encourage the students toward a life of child-like faith and trust in God as the Creator. This is part of the aim of covenant education, the formation of the perfect man of God.

Article 2 next states that God "makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word."⁹ Why is this included? Peter De Jong clarifies this statement in his commentary on confession:

Man cannot know God as Creator and Sovereign of the world by means of a strictly scientific investigation of nature, history and human experience... Therefore, special revelation, embodied in Holy Scripture, not merely supplements general revelation... It republishes, corrects and interprets the truths of God revealed in nature. Only by the illumination which Christ's Spirit bestows can man again know God, the world and himself as he should... Only the Christian, because he has the key of Holy Scripture, can unlock and understand the revelation of God in nature and history.¹⁰

Calvin speaks to the importance of scripture alone as the way to an understanding of general revelation.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ De Jong, *The Church's Witness to the World*, 81.

For as the aged, or those whose sight is defective, when any book, however fair, is set before them, though they perceive that here is something written are scarcely able to make out two consecutive words, but, when aided by glasses, begin to read distinctly, so Scripture, gathering together the impressions of Deity, which, till then, lay confused in our minds, dissipates the darkness, and shows us the true God clearly.¹¹

The Christian school teacher equips the student with the spectacles of scripture to teach the students how and why God reveals himself in the creation. The Christian school teacher leads the students through the general revelation of God and uses the spectacles of scripture to say, “*This* God is the one who has revealed himself in creation and *this* God is the one you must serve.” In this way the Christian school teacher leads the students to Christ day after day, aiming at the goal of covenant education, the formation of the perfect man of God.

Science education in the Christian school draws from both aspects of God’s revelation. This education must not be limited simply to the passing on of a body of knowledge about the natural world to the students. The students can know the creation only in light of the scriptures, and then they will “arrive at the sciences, not ‘Christian sciences,’ but science in its own right.”¹² The students must be diligent in their study of the body of scientific knowledge the way that God intended, with the Creator at the forefront. “To be so occupied in the investigation of the secrets of nature, as never to turn the eyes to its Author, is a most perverted study; and to enjoy everything in nature without acknowledging the Author of the benefit, is the basest ingratitude.”¹³ Christian education concerns itself with the formation of the perfect man of God, which is furthered when the golden thread of God’s revelation in scripture and creation is woven

¹¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2008), 26.

¹² Jan Waterink, *Basic Concepts in Christian Pedagogy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), 111.

¹³ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 60.

into the fabric of every lesson. Equipped through that way, the covenant students cannot refrain from leaving the science classroom each day in awe of who God is.

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