



TRUE HORIZON

EMPOWERING THINKING CHRISTIANS TO ENGAGE THE WORLD

Dual Revelation

Thinking About The Relationship Between Science and Religion

truehorizon.org

An Eye-Opening Observation

One of the events that forever changed my thought life happened in a church Sunday School class back in the early 1990s. The teacher, a PhD chemist named Doug Klendworth, asked the class to think about a simple fact that all of us learned in grade school about magnetism. "Opposite charges attract. Like charges repel. So, did you ever wonder what keeps all those positively charged protons in the nucleus of an atom so tightly packed together?"

I was kind of surprised that such an obvious conundrum had never entered my mind.

Doug went on: "Well it's something called the 'Strong Nuclear Force' and it's thousands of times stronger than the forces of gravity or electromagnetism. The weird thing is that no one really understands what causes it."

I had never heard of the Strong Nuclear Force and, because I love science, I was pleased to learn a new scientific fact. But my friend Doug wasn't finished. He opened his Bible to the Book of Colossians and started reading in chapter one, verse 16: *"For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. **He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.**"*

As he finished reading the passage, the hair on the back of my neck stood up and a chill went over my body. I had always loved science and had considered myself a Christian for as long as I could remember. But for me, those two subjects were as unrelated as night and day and there had never been any reason to think of them otherwise. For the first time in my life, I was shocked into considering that



there was actually a connection between the two. I will never forget the feeling I experienced when that bombshell went off in my mind.

Many years later, I have come to understand that we have no reason to believe Paul was actually referring to the Strong Nuclear Force when he wrote his letter to the Colossians. My friend, Doug, wasn't suggesting such a thing. But what he pointed out to me in his illustration was that if I claim to believe in the God of the Bible, I should expect to see the effects of His handiwork everywhere I look. The science I love and the faith I practice are both reflections of the God who made them possible.

The Conundrum of Conflict

Everyone knows that science is about objective facts, religion is about personal feelings, and that these things don't mix. For that reason, science and religion are "at war."

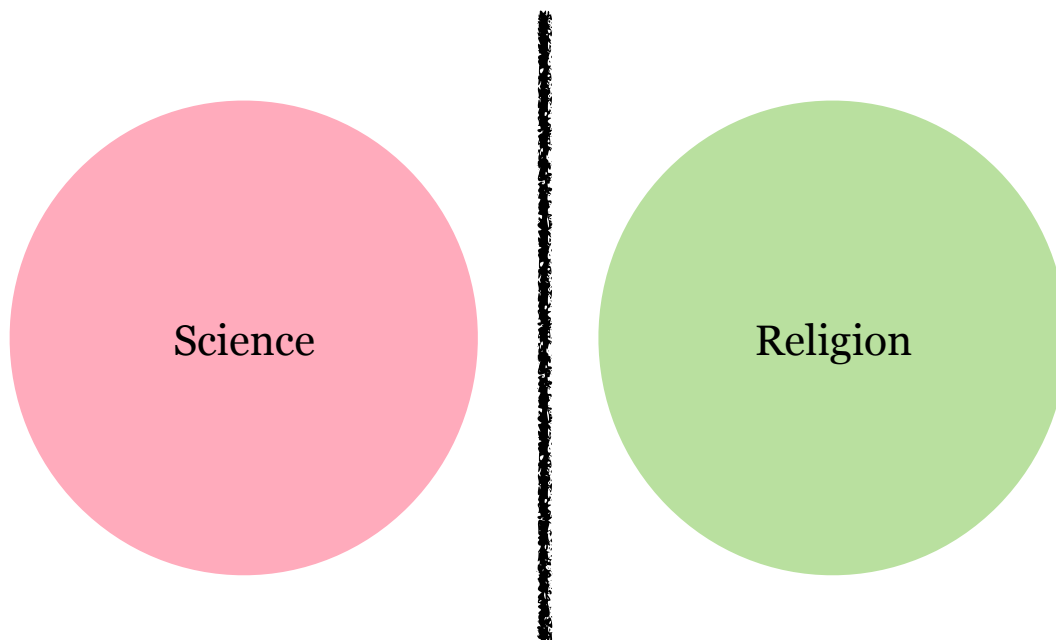
At least, that's what we've been told by those who influence our culture.

There is no denying that we live in a scientific world. Because science, medicine, and technology have brought us so many tangible advancements and improved so many aspects of our lives, we tend to trust what scientists say. We are enamored with the idea that science is the best way to understand and assess our world and that it will provide objective answers to our most important questions. We see scientists as impartial observers who don't rely on wishful thinking when they seek solutions to our problems. They work with facts — with things we can see, taste, touch, feel, hear, taste, and measure. For that reason, we can trust science.

Religion? Not so much.



We have been conditioned to believe that religion is an area that requires us to take a “leap of faith” and jump to conclusions without (or in spite of) evidence. We have accepted the idea that faith is a private affair that we are free to practice if we are so-inclined but that we should never try to introduce our personal religious opinions into the arena of objective scientific fact. In other words, science and religion are completely different realms between which there is a dividing wall that may *never* be crossed.



This view of a *conflict* between science and religion is built on some faulty assumptions and misunderstood history. It relies on a deliberate rejection of divine revelation that occurred during the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries. Those are topics for discussion elsewhere. For now, I want to point out the consequences of this way of thinking for believers who accept this commonly held view. They are forced to do one of two things:

- 1) They can accept the schism between science and religion as the price to be paid for being “religious.”
- 2) They can reject science altogether.

Unfortunately, many “fundamentalist” denominations have opted for the latter. The results of that decision have been disastrous, not just for the relevance of their churches in the larger culture, but also for the credibility of young adults who leave the protection of such churches and have to function in the science-infused world that surrounds them. Even those who believe they can live with the schism find themselves in a constant state of tension between what seem to be the clear findings of science and the clear teachings of the Bible. What’s a believer to do?

My goal here is to show that we don’t have to pick a side in this pseudo-fight — that we can approach the relationship between science and religion in a way that respects both the science and a biblical view of the world. Christian believers have been doing so for centuries.

Dual Revelation

Within the faith community, those of us who love and respect science are often told that accepting science “undermines the authority of Scripture” by elevating it above the words of Scripture. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is a way to properly evaluate both science and Scripture.

This idea that God reveals His truth to us in complementary ways is as old as human history but it was formalized in the [Belgic Confession](#) in 1561 AD:

Article 2: The Means by Which We Know God

We know him by two means:



First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: his eternal power and his divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All these things are enough to convict men and to leave them without excuse.

Second, he makes himself known to us more openly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for his glory and for the salvation of his own.

These two forms of divine revelation are referred to as “general” and “special” revelation. Special Revelation is the “Word of God,” which has been given to us not just in the Bible, but in its ultimate form in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. That’s what makes it special.

Let me stop right here and be very clear about something. Special Revelation is God’s instruction book about His moral authority, His dominion over mankind, and His plan of salvation — it’s about how to understand the ultimate reason for our existence. None of that is in question. The point here is to help those of us *who share a high view of Special Revelation* to think about how to approach the so-called “war” between science and religion.

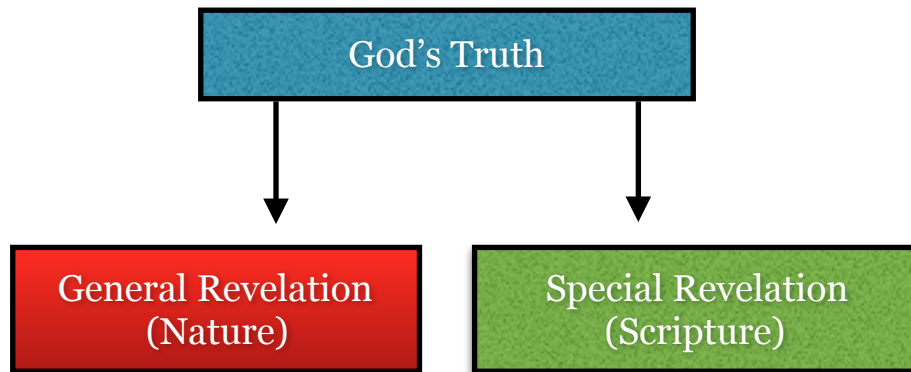
Within special revelation, we are also specifically told that God also reveals Himself to us through His creation:

Psalm 19:1-4 — “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 end of the world.”



Romans 1:20 — “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen through what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

You can think of it like this:



In other words, *by Scripture's own testimony*, God has written us two books — the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature. Notice that, so far, *science isn't even involved in the discussion*. All we are saying is that God reveals Himself to us in two different ways. Now it's up to us to *interpret* the two books.

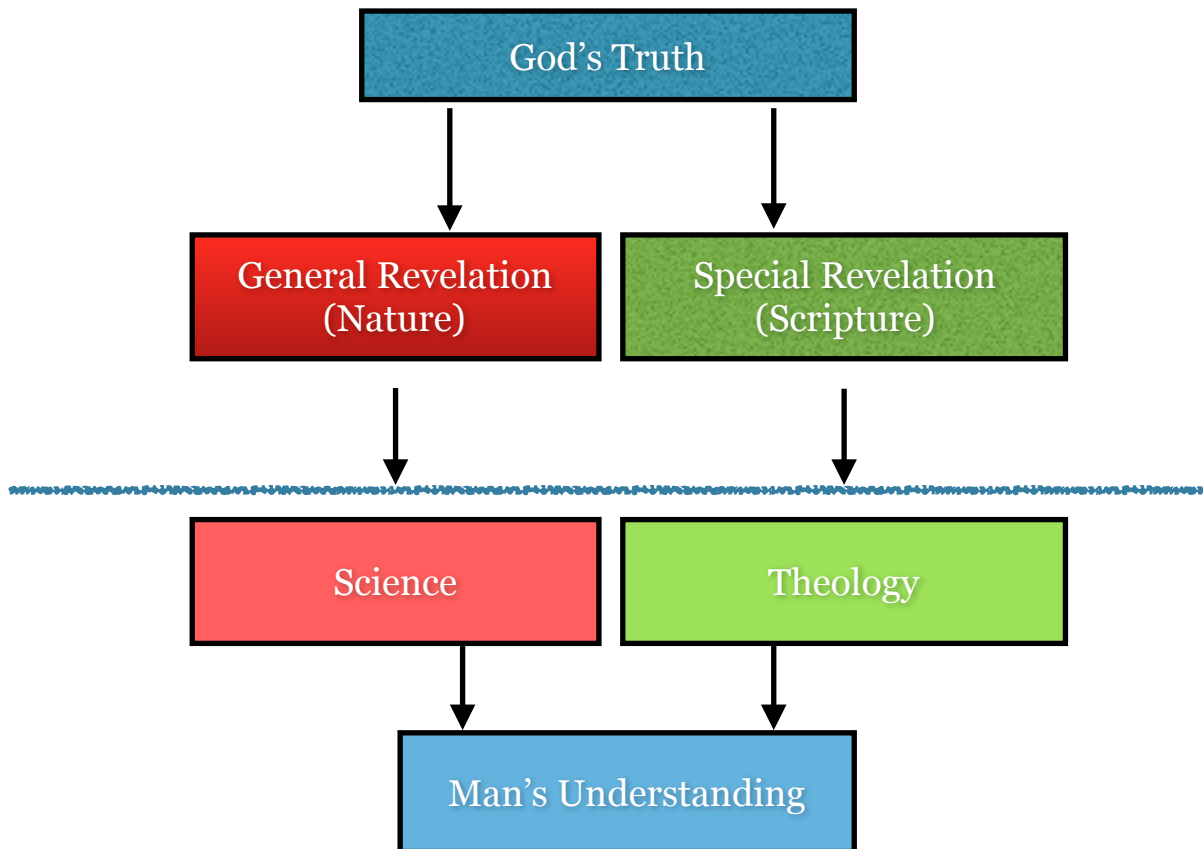
The study of what God reveals about Himself in Scripture, and the discipline of interpreting that revelation from God, is called *theology*. Theology is our *interpretation* of Special Revelation.

In a parallel way, the study of what God reveals about Himself through the world around us — through nature — is called *science*. Science is our *interpretation* of General Revelation.

In other words, when we talk about Dual Revelation, *we are not comparing science to Scripture*. *We are comparing science to theology*. This is a vitally important point because it directly addresses the fear many Christians have of



elevating science above Scripture. Dual Revelation implies no such thing. All we have done is add another layer to our diagram:



Note that everything above the blue line is direct revelation from God. It is of divine origin. It is exactly what God wants to reveal to us about Himself. It does not have “errors.”

At the same time, everything below the blue line is human interpretation. Therefore, it is subject to error. We *do* get it wrong — all the time!

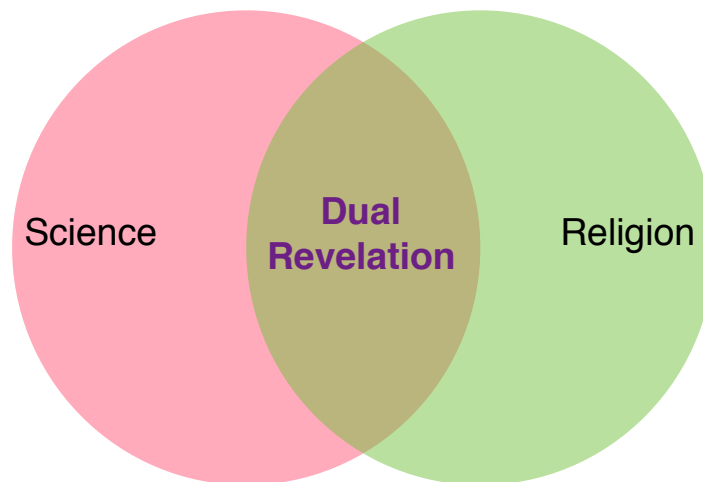
We humans make improper interpretations. We get our science and our theology wrong and we are obligated to do our best to correct those errors. But — and here's the really important point — General Revelation and Special Revelation



never contradict one another. If they appear to, the problem is not with God's revelation (that's above the line). *If we see apparent contradictions between our science and our theology, the problem is with us.*

So, back to the “war.”

Once we understand the differences between revelation and interpretation, our view of the relationship between science and religion (theology) changes dramatically. They are not in conflict. Science and religion actually *complement* one another. Instead of being isolated into non-overlapping realms, the real relationship looks more like this:



There are topics our study of nature uncovers that you will never find in the Bible — things like the laws of physics, the content of the electromagnetic spectrum, or the speed of light. There are also topics like the plan of salvation or the attributes of God about which science has absolutely nothing to say. But between these two extremes there are places where the two forms of revelation overlap.

For instance, the Bible has something to say about the origin of the universe, the origin and nature of life, the design of our world, and the nature and development of human beings. But it is also true that science weighs in on these very same topics in disciplines like: cosmology, astronomy, biology, physics, paleontology, anthropology, history, and archaeology. In these areas, we can compare what science and theology tell us to see if they are at least consistent with one another.

Please notice that this is a modest claim. No one is saying that our interpretation of the Bible will give us the same level of detail about some natural phenomenon that science will. The concept of Dual Revelation simply says that there should not be *contradictions* between the two. If there are apparent contradictions, we need to reconsider *both* of our interpretations.

The devil, of course, is in the details. There are plenty of scientific issues that are up for debate. So let's debate them. Let's follow the evidence wherever it leads. But let's not be intimidated into ignoring or minimizing the serious work of scientists. Yes, many of them hold a biased view of reality that does not include God, but we know that going in — and so do they. Let's evaluate the data with intellectual integrity and appeal honestly to those who are genuinely seeking the truth.

That is the ultimate purpose of Dual Revelation — to seek the truth. We need not be afraid of one of the ways God uses to reveal His truth to us. Science is not the enemy. If we really believe that “all truth is God's truth,” a Bible-honoring approach to science can become our greatest ally in the effort to help others take the Christian worldview seriously.

~ Bob Perry



SUGGESTED RESOURCES

J. Warner Wallace, *[God's Crime Scene: A Cold-Case Detective Examines The Evidence For A Divinely Created Universe](#)* (David C. Cook: Colorado Springs, Colorado, 2015)

Lee Strobel, *[The Case For A Creator: A Journalist Investigates Scientific Evidence That Points Toward God](#)* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2004)

Hugh Ross Interview of June 20, 2014, “Does Science Support The Book of Genesis?” on Fox News (8 mins, 2 secs) at: <http://video.foxnews.com/v/3633724402001/?#sp=show-clips>

