

Faith, Science and Technology
by Orville Boyd Jenkins

This address was first given on 27 August 1969, the week after the first human walked on the moon

*I*n the past week, we've seen the greatest feat ever performed by man, accomplished to the utmost precision, beautiful in design and execution. To see man actually walk on the moon, we are privileged among generations, because this is something which ten years ago was only a dream and fifty years ago had hardly been taught about.

In seventy years, we've seen man go from wagons and buggies to satellites and manned space stations. Within that past twenty-five years, we've been given television and all of the marvelous developments of advanced computers and electronics.

Science and technology have literally changed the world we live in, conceptually, economically, educationally and even mathematically. Much of the math which we have has been developed only in the past few decades. The advanced calculus based on an atomic philosophy of the universe conceived by Bertrand Russell, has been the basis for the computerization of the world today.

We may not realize the full impact of a world of science on our thoughts and beliefs about life, about ourselves, about the world we live in and about religion and faith.

We live now in a scientific world. We think in scientific terms. This is something we can't help, because we ultimately are **products of the culture** into which we are born. The structure of our language is scientific: the terms in which we think of the world are scientific.

For some people this poses a religious threat. It poses a threat to the religious faith some people have inherited or adopted along the way, because their religion has no room for science. Yet being born into a society in which the language structure and thought patterns are scientific in nature, we cannot help thinking of our religious stance in scientific terms.

Our closed and scientized approach to our own faith sometimes obscures the actual meaning of our own religion. We begin to think of Christ and his ministry in terms of the actuality of his existence and the literalness of every miracle we have record of. And this is not to deny either of these – but this **approach** to the Christian message keeps

us from the real essence of Christianity; from the application of that real meaning of Christ's life and resurrection to our lives.

We forget sometimes that the record we have of Christ's ministry and that of the early church was written in pre-scientific terms. The whole development of Christianity came before there ever was such a thing as we know as science. And when we read the Bible, we miss so much of the glory and beauty of it and we fail to really fail to find the experience with Christ which opens our hearts and eyes and our minds and our lives in order to make us worth something to God – because we interpret the Bible message in scientific terms when it was not written in scientific terms to Christians here.

For instance, I've read the account of a battle in Joshua 10:12-14. As background to this story, Joshua was leading the children of Israel people into their promised land and they had to take the land away from the natives of Canaan. In this particular battle, it is reported that the sun stood still and lengthened the day until the Israelites could win the battle. The main question that would come up about this is "Did the sun literally stop?"

Non-believing scientists in the 19th century tried to prove the Bible was unreliable by proving that this and several other examples could not happen scientifically, because for the sun to stop its motion across the sky the earth actually would stop rotating and that, of course, would cancel gravity and all creation would immediately be in havoc and destruction.

Some Christians argued back that God can do impossible – stop sun and keep everything going as usual.

God Ruler of Nature

Some said it is just a figure of speech to express the way the battle seemed to go for Joshua. They killed so many, it is so hard to see how they killed so many in that length of time. This is a metaphor or a hyperbole – it was **as though** the sun stood still.

Now some would be dissatisfied with this last statement because they feel that you are doubting the truth of God's word. But there is a language question involved. We all use expressions which do not mean literally what they sound like. But both the scientific and the Christian reactionary have been missed the point of this passage.

But I think the best way to look at it is try to see it as the one who wrote the book did. He was a Hebrew – in a time when everyone believed the world was flat and they didn't understand the universe in terms of the laws of nature. He believed the sun went around the earth and that the earth was a flat piece of land that stood on four pillars. He was a man of a religious point of view, *ie*, he looked at the world from a religious frame of reference, rather than from an objective point of view.

We declare that the Bible can't have contradictions and inconsistencies and with this rule we approach the Bible. When we read, seeming contradictions come up and must be explained away **only** because we have taken the writer's terms in scientific sense. In reality, the word, phrase or account may not even have had the same meaning to the writer.

A problem is created that isn't there. The contradictions or seeming contradictions are actually in our approach or interpretation, rather than actually in the text or normally wouldn't come up.

We talked last week about the difference between science or philosophy on the one hand and theology or religion on the other. Science looks at the world from a non-involved stand point. A doctor cannot be emotionally involved with his patients, a geologist must carefully weigh evidence and examine a specimen thoroughly before he makes a pronouncement on it.

Whereas theology **interprets** the world from an involved standpoint, theology asks **why** or what is the meaning while science asks how, in many cases. So the scientist and the twentieth century Christian looks at this writing as dealing with a scientific fact of whether or not the sun actually stood still.

But the fellow God was using to write this down probably years after it happened was looking at the event as he felt God was working with Israel. He may very well **have actually meant** the sun did stop for a day. But is **that** the point **he** was trying to get across to us? Certainly **not**. The point was **the Lord** was fighting for Israel. This other about the sun was merely the instrument of showing God's power was with Joshua and Israel.

He was not trying to write a scientifically historical account of a battle, he was writing a chapter in a religious drama that seemed the ages and eternity. He was not a scientific man. And they didn't even have what we call history. He was a man from a religious understanding of the universe.

We have a scientific understanding of the universe into which we have to fit our religious viewpoint – we may not notice or realize this, but in our modern world, because of Thomas Aquinas and his successors, man's mind is divided into categories and we can't help it. A man's thought patterns are basically the product of the society in which he lives. But we see over and over again this religious mind of the Hebrews, in the way they wrote their accounts.

We must not forget that God uses human means to give us his revelation – and he is working with human beings – so he will speak to them in a way they can understand. So the writings of the Old Testament, and the New Testament as well, could not have been written in a scientific background or understanding, because the people were not scientific people.

Problem of the Gospel in a Scientific Time

But someone says, "The gospel is the same anyway – no matter what people it is given to." This is true and for this reason we must read the gospel writing in the way they were written rather than in our way of thinking from 2000 years later.

The gospel message may actually be changed **by** expressing it the way it once was to a people who are not like the people who once were. The **words you use** do not necessarily make it the gospel. If the words you use don't mean the same thing to some people as they did to other people, you are not saying the same thing.

This gives us who are Christians, a great responsibility to know how to express the spirit and meaning of the gospel in terms that will result in the **action and change** which the gospel produces. (Paul attempted to adapt to the cultural situation he was in – he became all things to all men.)

As far as it goes with the passage we read, it does not make any difference whether the sun actually did stop or not. That isn't even the point. The point is that God was with Israel and Joshua.

Since this writer is not making a scientific statement, but a religious statement, for me it is not susceptible to scientific proof or disproof. Proven or disproven, it says the same thing. And it is true in a deeper sense than the scientific factualness of the matter. It is true in a spiritual sense. In a sense that touches our hearts, not our minds.

The truth and reliability of the Bible is just as great even if there may be statements which are not correct scientifically, because they are not talking on the same level that science is. Even when the same statement is made religiously, it does not have the same meaning as were it is made scientifically.

Scientific Defense Belittles the Bible

We try to prove that the Bible is scientifically correct and claim that what is actually scientifically proven is in no way contradictory to the Bible. Well, I would agree that scientific statements are not in opposition to the truths of the Bible. Biblical or any theological truth is not in opposition to scientific truth. But I would not say it for the same reason.

Many Christians feel obliged to **prove** the authenticity of the Bible or defend its inerrancy. I don't think this is necessary. In fact, I think this belittles the Bible as a revelation from God to man and belittles the purpose and message of the Bible. The Bible is not a textbook of science – it is a book of Religion. It is a religious revelation, not a scientific account of a fact.

What is in the Bible message cannot be proven or disproven. It must be experienced. And it **becomes** true to **you** only when you experience it.

To state scientifically, "God created the world" is to state a fact. So say religiously "God created the world" is to confess faith in God, not to make any factual statement, or go with or against any scientific theory.

"God created the world" cannot actually be said scientifically, because it cannot be proven by demonstration. It can only be a statement of faith in God, and this after all is how the Christian is to live. Rom. 1:17

Science in the 20th century has stopped trying to **prove** its claims as over against some other scientist's claim. Science is merely exploratory – seeking to find new truth and examine the evidence it has to find truth rather than try to **prove** a statement or theory in the traditional sense.

But religion is still caught in the grip of 19th century thought of having to **prove** its beliefs. And so each religious group claims its beliefs are the truths of God. We are getting away from that a little and we are now realizing that there is more to truth than one man can know and that what one man believes.

But we still have many who take a scientific approach to a non-scientifically-oriented religion, such as Christ's, and **create** clashed **with** the **pure** sciences over questions which are not even scientific in the first place. We must be sure not to put a scientific mold on our religious experience.

So we must first see that our faith or expression of the gospel and science are not opposed because they don't deal with the same things. We must learn to accept truth wherever it is and realize that we are to live by faith.

The problem of the conflict between science and religion can best be worked on by being tolerant of the other person's point of view, scientific or religious and respect other people. In being dogmatic or refusing to examine our own faiths, we are actually refusing to recognize our own limits to knowledge, as humans.

Basically, this **may**, in many cases be simply a matter of pride, but this is our whole problem of finding God. Letting our pride go and realizing our limits as humans. So we cannot have an attitude of desolation.

Meaning of Faith

Fear – if we are truly trusting in Christ we don't need to fear the claims of others. We don't need to feel endangered because whatever is true or false is not affecting our **trust** in God.

Christians do not need to be defensive. We should be offensive and that is as much faith as trust is different from the use of the term "faith" as our system of religion or our religious beliefs. We don't need to go around telling what we **don't** believe and

condemning other people's ideas. Or more in our way of life than in the "facts" we believe. The **way** we think rather than **what** we believe is to be true.

Religious truths are not the same kind of truth as science and when we speak **religious** truths up against scientific truths and we say choose the claims of religion or the claims of science we are trying to turn religion into science and are thus learning the meaning of truth or religion.

You shall know the truth
Resurrection now
Living water
A matter of faith not fact

Too many times we tend to judge religion by scientific standards and we don't really realize our approach to religion is actually a 19th century scientific approach of absolutism and we try to **prove** certain things that we believe, rather than really dealing with the meaning of **faith in life**.

But even the point of science is not to **prove** things, but to explain things. They are merely investigating certain points. But many people still feel the essence of their religious faith is to **prove** what they believe to be true as a fact.

This is not to say that there are no evidences to indicate what we believe. But merely that this is not the same thing as faith in Christ.

Conscience and Spirit

There will be individual differences of opinion concerning personal conscience in a particular situation. There is not a rule for each situation. We are to be led by the Spirit, not by a rule. (See Romans 8.)

It will be up to each individual to make his own choice as he feels the Holy Spirit would find him, and there is no higher authority for a believer except Christ. (1 Corinthians 8:5-9)

Responsibility is great 1 Corinthians 8:8-9 everything should be positive. Now these will be contradictions in our own experience because some people will have opposite reactions to our one decision. But we need to make our choice in a particular situation on the basis of what choice will enable us to help the most people, or will affect the most people in a positive way.

Most of all, we need to remember that the Bible is a guide for **us** to examine and guide **our** lives rather than decide what is right and wrong for others.

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