

## TIM WEATHERSTONE

# Concordism

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A recent article in this journal<sup>1</sup> sought to remind us of the dangers of concordism in its various historical manifestations. In its conclusion the article also rightly emphasises that concordism still finds its apologists today, making the material of more immediate interest.

I submit that the broader point is not whether there is truth in Scripture but how one might go about accessing that knowledge. All manner of views have taken and continue to appropriate, the Bible as their foundational or base text. One thinks of various extreme political movements today and in the recent past, and in the times of the Church Fathers – some commentators wanting to point to various natural phenomena as proof texts of the doctrine of the Trinity, for example.

Concordism might therefore be seen not solely as an affectation of the science/theology debate. Indeed, to regard it as such is to do disservice to the wider issue of how we make use of Scripture. I have made that remark in a particular way, as in ‘how we make use of Scripture’, for we can recall the debates of John 6 and notice that our Lord went out of his way on that occasion to make remarks calculated to upset those who took a concordist view of Scripture. This again, to refer to the definition used in the earlier article, amounts to making the Bible fit *our* world-view whether we choose to call that a ‘scientific’ world-view or something else.

The John 6 debates are an instructive read in this context for Jesus makes plain elsewhere that indeed all truth is to be found there but is not accessible to those who take an instrumentalist view of the text. It is not that it is ‘open to interpretation’, in that oft-used phrase, since that takes one back once again to making the Bible fit a human world-view. The key is said to be to view the text in a ‘spiritual’ manner, a mode of instruction that is apparently open only to those who are follows of Christ.

Thus in utter humility one is made to confront the (perhaps unpleasant) truth that a particular way of life, a life that is dedicated to Christ, is by grace attuned to perceive truth of all kinds, whether these be termed ‘scientific’ or not, from Scripture.

To deny that any knowledge other than the soteriological is hidden in Scripture is, I submit, to fall into the Barthian approach to Natural Theology. Since God is God of all truth and ‘your Word is truth’ it is not unreasonable to ex-

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1 De Felipe, P. ‘Curiosity in the early Christian era – Philoponus’s defence of ancient astronomy against Christian critics’, *Science & Christian Belief* (2018) 30 1, 38-56.

pect truth of all kinds in Scripture. Barth, as is well known, objected to Natural Theology largely on political grounds, at a time when to allow it would have left him open to the accusation of accommodating national socialism. There is surely something deeply ironic in a ridiculing of the hope of finding 'scientific' truth in Scripture on the basis of a heroic eighty year old objection to the most abhorrent regime in human history.

In conclusion I submit that we should continue to hold out the hope that humans can come to acknowledge that all truth has its basis in Scripture. If this were not to be the case it is challenging to understand how Christ is to be understood as the fount of all wisdom and knowledge. Such attempts will not always end in failure. Perhaps we might be more imaginative in our seeking.

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***PABLO DE FELIPE***

## **A response to Tim Weatherstone**

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I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the comments on my recent article.

I readily agree that concordism belongs to 'the wider issue of how we make use of Scripture', one that it is not reduced to the science/theology relationship. However, my criticism of the concordist approach in science/theology relationships is not based on Barth's theology. Rather, I write from the point of view of the results of a detailed study of the history of this relationship. It is a very long history which I traced back from the early church. I also write as someone who has become tired of seeing my fellow Christians falling into the same traps again and again.

Of course, we agree, that 'Christ is to be understood as the fount of all wisdom and knowledge'. But, how are we supposed to 'understand' that statement? In my case, I understand it in the sense that Christ is the Creator and Sustainer of all creation, a very old Christian conviction with which I have no issue.

However, it is a very different thing to affirm that 'we should continue to hold out the hope that humans can come to acknowledge that all truth has its basis in Scripture'. And even more worrying for me is to affirm that 'Since God is God of all truth and 'your Word' is truth it is not unreasonable to expect truth of all kinds in Scripture.' This very old 'concordist' syllogism starts well ('God is God of all truth') and ends in an incredible all-encompassing leap ('it is not unreasonable to expect truth of all kinds in Scripture'). To accept that Scripture is truth, does not give us the right to affirm that we can 'perceive truth of all kinds, whether these be termed 'scientific' or not, from Scripture'. To go down that road is in danger of abusing Scripture.

The Bible itself has never made such strong claims (see the famous 2 Tim 3:16: ‘ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful *for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*’, my emphasis), Christians have never lived this way (even the staunchist concordists do not make use of Scripture for many areas of daily life that are not even mentioned in the Bible – I guess Paul did not learn how to make tents reading Scripture), and the history of science has shown us how this ‘syllogism’ has been the cause of all sorts of misfortunes for Christianity.

I wonder if we should find the truth of theoretical physics, genomics or the periodic table somewhere hidden in Scripture. Such claims have no sense and, more importantly, no basis in Scripture.

**PS:** I would like to point readers to a small mistake (a missing word, ‘mystery’) in a key quotation from Rothmann in my original article.<sup>1</sup> I copy here the correct translation:

... the Holy Spirit did not want to reveal them [the prophets] the wisdom that God set in nature, except for the wisdom of that wonderful and supernatural mystery of the Redemption of the human race.... Therefore, the authority of Sacred Scripture, even though adduced in a plausible manner, it could not be an objection in this question, since we will know only as much as we achieve to discover through mathematical demonstrations.

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1 De Felipe, P. ‘Curiosity in the early Christian era – Philoponus’s defence of ancient astronomy against Christian critics’, *Science & Christian Belief* (2018) 30 1, 38-56.