

# The Apostle Paul's Assessment of the Testimony of Nature

A critique of, *In Christ All Things Hold Together: The Intersection of Science & Christian Theology*. (The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), Feb. 2015).

Individual page numbers referenced below pertain to the document under review. Biblical references are from the Revised Standard Version.

In every arena of life where matters of fact are pursued, it is expected that truth-claims will be substantiated against the facts of the case. It is precisely when requests for evidence are denied that suspicions are raised against the claim in *question*. When for example a defendant's reputation is challenged in court, a dismissal of charges based solely on technicalities will leave his reputation in doubt. Only when the *entire* body of evidence is brought to bear on the matter is moral exoneration established. Unless that is accomplished, the defendant's name will remain under a cloud of suspicion; which for the purposes of this critique sheds light onto why it is that the biblical assertion that the God of the Bible is Creator is so roundly dismissed as superstition by so many secularists today. The irony in this situation is that while the scientific facts are consistent with the biblical declaration, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1), the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) has distanced itself from that very body of scientific evidence which vindicates this claim.

I judge it to be a major crisis that the CTCR document,<sup>1</sup> *In Christ All Things Hold Together (All Things)*, refuses every appeal to evidence (that are external to Scripture) as a means for establishing the truth of Scripture. Indeed, *All Things* urges that the Bible be exempted from the principle stated above for the reason of its opinion that the submission of Scripture to the standard of external evidence is an affront to the majesty of God. I completely disagree. It is my judgment that the thesis this document propounds is utterly ill-considered on four counts: 1) It contradicts St. Paul's stricture in Romans 1:18-20 against suppressing the testimony of nature, specifically as it pertains to God's existence. 2) With its appropriation of the ministerial/magisterial paradigm (p. 19) it illogically undermines the rationally-required concept of the unity of truth.<sup>2</sup> 3) It overlooks the numerous instances in Scripture where appeals are made to both facts and reason (labelled "*autonomous* reason" on p. 9.) precisely for the reason of their independent confirmation of the existence and power of God.<sup>3</sup> 4) It effectively hinders our calling evangelize unbelievers on the basis of the truth of the Gospel.<sup>4</sup> Although all four of the above points are vital, I will limit my argument to the first point.

## A Measured Word of Praise

The *All Things* study is not altogether without merit. Indeed, there are three aspects of the document that are praiseworthy. It firstly offers a valuable historical analysis of key

---

<sup>1</sup> Angus Menuge has been acknowledge by the CTCR president to be the author of this anonymous booklet. (<http://thedaystarjournal.com/a-lifelong-lcms-member-and-the-ctcr/August 20, 2015>).

<sup>2</sup> I am emphatically not denying the inerrancy of Scripture. To the contrary I affirm it. I am instead denying that that doctrine can be legitimately maintained by appealing to the paradigm at hand.

<sup>3</sup> Consider my paper, *The Pervasive Employment of Apologetics in the Bible*, At my website, [www.christianityontheoffense.com](http://www.christianityontheoffense.com).

<sup>4</sup> Consider my paper, "*The 'Elephant' Standing Between Secularists and their Receptivity to the Truth of the Gospel*," at my website (Ibid).

philosophical insights from Western intellectual history and their bearing on the analytical investigation of the natural world that we today define as “scientific inquiry” (p. 59f). This analysis also highlights those peculiar insights that a *biblical* worldview has contributed toward the birth of science as a disciplined empirical investigation of the physical world (p. 48f).<sup>5</sup> Writing as a student in the *Science and Religion* M.A. degree program through Biola University for example,<sup>6</sup> I am delighted to identify a convergence between insights I gained from our survey of scientific inquiry class (“Historical Perspectives on Science and Religion”) and the corresponding analysis provided in *All Things*.

Secondly, the authors of the *All Things* document accurately elucidate the wide range of scientific opinions concerning such fields of study as anthropology, biological intelligent design, and cosmology. However, it does strike me as odd that, beyond their solitary bare assertion that science provides “*over-whelming evidence that the universe came into existence a finite time ago*” (p. 119, n. 302), they neglect to identify, let alone substantiate, the actual body of observational data which affirms the facticity of that momentous beginning of creation in a manner consistent with Genesis 1:1.<sup>7</sup> I consider that three of my enumerated objections to the CTCR position referenced above provide clear insight into just why it is that that evidence is neglected in this document.

Thirdly, I do applaud *All Things* (ch. V) for encouraging Christians to confront secularists with the same faulty logic (including the law of non-contradiction) that skeptics commonly employ in an attempt to maintain their secular world-views.<sup>8</sup> I further welcome the document’s call to repent of our timidity and embrace a posture of intellectual courage. After all, why should we expect to be believed if we fail to appreciate that the central role of the Holy

---

<sup>5</sup> Langdon Gilkey. Ch. 5, “*Creation and the Intelligibility of our World.*” Maker of Heaven and Earth. (Doubleday, 1959).

<sup>6</sup> biola.edu.

<sup>7</sup> The authors correctly state that the “steady state theory” came to be roundly rejected for the reason “*of the overwhelming evidence that the universe came into existence a finite time ago*” (p.119, note 302). My question is, why then do they neglect to identify the very data by which scientists concede the scientific grounds for that beginning? My reply is, because that same roster of facts unambiguously dates the beginning of the universe at approximately 13.7 billion years ago. Once that data is specified, then it becomes impossible to reconcile belief in that beginning with the commitment of the LCMS to the tenets of young-earth creationism (YEC). The standard age of the cosmos just stated is measured by the vast distances out to the farthest galaxies measured with respect to light-travel time in terms of the speed of light. Consequently, to peer out across the universe back to that beginning moment is to look backward in time virtually all the way back to the beginning of time. Adherence to this timeframe does not entail commitment to a given theological position, but instead to a thoroughly tested scientific procedure. Even Luther acknowledged the *prima facie* legitimacy of natural philosophers (as opposed to theologians) making their judgments about the natural order by stating, “*the astronomers are the experts [concerning the sun and moon] from whom it is most convenient to get what may be discussed about these subjects.*” (Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. Luther’s Works: Genesis. v.1. (Concordia, 1958), p.41, boldface mine). \*\* Luther also writes, “*But it is not an evil thing to investigate the nature and quantities of things. Besides, the causes of the objects of this world are the most evident of all, far from difficult to know.*” (Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. Luther’s Works: Notes on Ecclesiastes. v.15. (Concordia, 1972), p.18).

<sup>8</sup> Jesus said, “*Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*” (Matthew 10:16). He also exercised that same method in His own engagement with his opponents in the final days before His crucifixion. \*\* Nancy Pearcey employs these methods as a fundamental aspect of her strategy in her book, Finding Truth. (David Cook, 2015).

Spirit is to *convince*<sup>9</sup> sinners that the Gospel is in actual fact true?<sup>10</sup> Indeed both the breadth and the depth<sup>11</sup> of the *factual* basis<sup>12</sup> of the biblical claim is overwhelmingly adequate for our task of proclaiming the rational soundness of Christianity. It is on this count, however, that the particularly dreadful aspect of the CTCR document I have already raised becomes increasingly apparent. Tragically, the promise of fruit that should reasonably be expected to follow upon the application of this aspect of the CTCR strategy, is utterly undermined by the study's own well-intentioned, yet biblically false, epistemic<sup>13</sup> position.

### **The Core Argument Revisited**

It is the fundamental assertion<sup>14</sup> of *All Things* that the authorial status of both *human* reason (rationality) and *factual* data (empirical knowledge)<sup>15</sup> attained from scientific research, must yield to the authority of the Bible (p. 24), that is, must be relegated to a “ministerial” instead of “magisterial” role in relation to dogmatic biblical proclamation. Therefore, conclusions that are derived from *scientific* discovery must be rejected out-of-hand as criteria against which to judge biblical interpretation. In sum, *All Things* denies legitimacy of every scientific fact-claim which is perceived to conflict with the text of the Bible on the following grounds: Since Scripture is the *revelational* Word of the Creator (2 Timothy 3:16), no other standard of judgment *can* exist which possesses a level of competence against which God's Word is obligated to submit in order to legitimize its own truth-claims (pp. 19, 103).

### **Why this Argument Matters**

The logical ramifications of this position are not trivial, but highly consequential with respect to the question of our denominational participation in the current debate over the existence of the God of the Bible. The *cosmological* history of the universe (in contrast to the dubious nature of Darwinian claims that pertain to *biological* history)<sup>16</sup> has now been substantially measured<sup>17</sup> and documented.<sup>18</sup> The results highly favor the biblical worldview. Two observational facts from cosmology in particular point conclusively<sup>19</sup> to the existence of

---

<sup>9</sup> *Elegchei* (“convince”) in John 16:8.

<sup>10</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:5.

<sup>11</sup> See my paper, *The Prints are Everywhere*, Op.cit. (3).

<sup>12</sup> John Warwick Montgomery. *Faith Founded on Fact*. (Thomas Nelson, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> “Epistemology” is the study into the question of what kinds of evidence justifies our knowledge of the world.

<sup>14</sup> I deliberately avoid the words “thesis” or “premise” for the reason that *All Things* is actually discouraging the kind of conversation that would lead readers reconsider their interpretation of Genesis ch. 1. See my paper, *The Biblical Demand to Take Another Look: Ten “Compelling” Exegetical Reasons the Creation Days of Genesis are Non-24-Hour*. Op.cit. (3).

<sup>15</sup> It is a weakness of this study that no clear distinction is made between these two concepts.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Behe. *Darwin's Black Box*. (Free Press, 1996), \*\* Michael Denton. *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*. (Adler and Adler, 1986), John Lennox, *God's Undertaker*. (Lion, 2009), \*\* and Stephen Meyer. *Darwin's Doubt*. (Harper-One, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Hugh. Ross. *More than a Theory*. (Baker, 2009), chs. 6-9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* ch. 17.

<sup>19</sup> I am not ignorant of the roster of contemporary scientists of note who, laying claim to their authority as scientists, deny that the big bang represents a true singularity-creation out of nothing. Yet I reply that their agenda is driven not by scientific facts, but by their materialistic philosophical commitments. They betray an anti-scientific shift away from full-bodied empirical analysis into abstract mathematical speculation of a kind most

the God of the Holy Bible. Firstly, empirical data<sup>20</sup> from mainstream scientific investigation over the last hundred years<sup>21</sup> has yielded clear evidence that the universe came into existence out of nothing in the “*finite past*”<sup>22</sup> in what is identified as the Big Bang. Secondly, both the four fundamental physical forces (both the strong and the weak nuclear forces, electromagnetism, and gravity) and the initial conditions at the creation moment (including both the total amount of mass at the beginning, and the expansion rate of space, to name just a few factors) were fine-tuned by a measure of extreme precision that would be absolutely required in order for our universe to be habitable for any possible living creatures.<sup>23</sup> Never in the history of scientific discovery has the body of scientific evidence so fully affirmed the biblical declarations of Genesis 1:1, Psalm 19:1, and John 1:1-3, as it does now. Let there be no misunderstanding as to the relative weight of this shift, however. It is not as though scientists prior to the discovery of the Big Bang had evidence favoring an eternal universe. No such knowledge existed at that time which explicitly favored either position. Prior beliefs in an eternal universe were adhered to by faith alone. All that time it was the Bible alone which declared the universe to have begun out of nothing. In light of the data which favors the Big Bang, it is those who dismiss God’s reality who must now scramble to explain a beginning of the universe out of nothing.<sup>24</sup>

Yet astonishingly it is the practice of the LCMS to suppress such scientific data as affirms the existence of a Creator and Designer to the universe.<sup>25</sup> Why? It is apparent that the sole reason for the denial of such evidence is that it also indicates (contrary to the “young-earth” position), that the cosmos is 13.7 billion years old.<sup>26</sup> However, this dismissive posture with respect to science is neither logically valid (as I will soon explain), nor is it appropriate with respect to faithful biblical interpretation. As an LCMS pastor who embraces the Bible as God’s inerrant propositional revelation, my heavily documented paper *The Biblical Demand*<sup>27</sup> establishes that, despite *All Things’* assertions to the contrary (pp. 117-18, 123), the Hebrew text of Genesis 1 gives no clear indication either that the universe is “young,” or that the

---

blatantly represented in Stephen Hawking and Leonid Mlodinow’s *The Grand Design*. (Bantam, 2010), p.131, 4. \*\* See John Lennox’s rebuttal, *God and Stephen Hawking*. (Lion, 2011). \*\* Consider also my parallel rebuttal paper, “*Was the Big Bang the Big Beginning?*” \*\* Note also my four-part blog posting (Aug. 20-Oct. 18, 2014) on a debate entailing the same challenge between theoretical physicist Sean Carroll and Christian philosopher Wm. Lane Craig, “*Sean Carroll’s Sleight-of-Hand Evasion of the Creator,*” (<http://www.offensivechristianity.blogspot.com>).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Fred Heeren. *Show Me God*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition. (Daystar, 2004), Chapter 6.

<sup>22</sup> The previous CTCR document, *The Natural Knowledge of God in Christian Confession and Christian Witness*. (LCMS, 2013) provided a fuller accounting of the supporting scientific evidence than does *All Things*. In contrast to the latter, it declares, “*Advances in astronomy during the twentieth century...led to the discovery that the universe is not static but is expanding. [Such] discoveries thus suggested (by projecting backwards) the now generally accepted conclusion that the universe of space and time had a beginning in a finite past*” (p. 59).

<sup>23</sup> Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards. *The Privileged Planet*. (Regnery, 2010), ch.10.

<sup>24</sup> Antony Flew. *There is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*. (Harper One, 2007). He writes, “*When I first met the big-bang theory as an atheist, it seemed to me the theory made a big difference because it suggested that the universe had a beginning,*” about which, he further states, it “*...is physically impossible to discover what, if anything, caused that big bang* (boldface mine--p. 134).

<sup>25</sup> Op.cit. (4).

<sup>26</sup> Consider my challenge to the LCMS President Matthew Harrison, *When Tradition Trumps Scripture*, at my website, <http://www.christianityontheoffense.com>.

<sup>27</sup> Op.cit. (11).

creation days of Genesis must have been 24-hour. For these reasons I judge the persistent distrust by the LCMS of the scientific evidence laid out above to be unwarranted. Yet the consequences of our Synod's defensive posture are more grievous still, for the following reasons:

1. The LCMS coerces members to choose between either of two ways of knowing truth (unhindered scientific investigation or revelation) even though they need not conflict with each other.<sup>28</sup>
2. Despite protestations to the contrary, *All Things* logically implies both that Christian faith and scientific inquiry are enemies, and that knowledge acquired by the latter is *ultimately* unsound.
3. Consequently, as a condition for entry *in good standing* into the kingdom of Christ, the LCMS obligates prospective candidates to deny a broad range of thoroughly established facts about the natural world<sup>29</sup> (I exclude Darwinian evolution from this list of "established facts" for reason of the lack of empirical evidence to substantiate its central claims).<sup>30</sup>
4. In a manner consonant with Mormon missionary methods of appealing to a "*burning within the bosom*" of their candidates, LCMS leaders impose on both lay people and leaders such interpretations of Scripture as cannot square with knowable facts pertaining to the "real" world.
5. In the face of our evangelistic challenge, the LCMS de-legitimizes the very best arguments that are at our disposal which favor the existence of the God of the Bible, thereby allowing the most intellectually weak challenges that are employed by anti-Christian skeptics to prevail unanswered.<sup>31</sup>

I am emphatically not calling for compromise on the authority and truthfulness of Holy Scripture. To the contrary! The instinct from the Holy Spirit dwelling within Christian believers to defend<sup>32</sup> the Bible as true is descriptive of the same commitment that I as a fellow Bible believer also embrace. Indeed, it is this agenda which is motivating me to critique the *All Things* document. Yet it is at the same time also required that our strategy for defending Scripture embrace the interpretational principles which the Bible itself specifies pertain to that goal. Does the inerrant Word of God affirm the principles laid out in the first full paragraph of page 3, above? I argue it does not. Although I grant that if viewed superficially, the strategy specified there might appear to be biblically-grounded and God-honoring, that posture is in reality grounded on serious errors, the first of which contradicts an explicit directive of Scripture.

---

<sup>28</sup> Richard Carlson, ed. *Science and Christianity: Four Views*. Stephen Meyer. "*Qualified Agreement*." ch. (Intervarsity, 2000), pp. 127-174.

<sup>29</sup> See my paper, *The Elephant Standing Between Secularists and their Receptivity to the Gospel*. Op.cit. (9).

<sup>30</sup> Op.cit. (13).

<sup>31</sup> *All Things* is failing to acknowledge its own culpability concerning C.S. Lewis's warning, in spite of its citing him on p. 13: "*To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen*" (*Learning in War-Time. The Weight of Glory*. (Macmillan, 1965), p.27-28)).

<sup>32</sup> Jude 3. The Greek word typically translated "contend" is the root for our word "agonize."

## 1) A Critical Challenge from the Apostle Paul

*All Things'* wholesale dismissal of scientifically-acquired knowledge relative to a specific interpretation of Genesis 1 (the text of which Luther conceded was "*difficult to understand*"<sup>33</sup>) pits the CTCR document squarely against the clear teaching of the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:18-20. While I do not question the sincerity of the intentions of the proponents of the *All Things* position to defend the integrity of the Holy Bible, I argue that their methods are at actually at cross-purposes with that goal. Indeed, they are in violation of The Apostle Paul's stricture in Romans 1:18-20, which states:

18. *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. 19. For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. 20. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and deity, have been clearly perceived since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse."*

No other passage in the entire Bible is more relevant to the question of the "intersection between science and Christian theology"<sup>34</sup> than this text. Although Rev. Phil Johnson, in his sermon based on Psalm 19, "*The Superiority of Scripture*," claimed on the basis of Psalm 19:7 that the Bible is the stole standard against which to judge every conceivable truth-claim under the sun,<sup>35</sup> the verse's context fails to support his assertion. This is not a slight on Psalm 19! Yet since it is Rom. 1:18-20 and not Psalm 19:7 that has the testimony of nature as its direct concern, it is to Paul's letter that we must turn for insight on evaluating the legitimacy of *All Things* thesis. Why, again, Romans and not the Psalms? I reply that the task of correctly discerning which of the two to choose cannot be a matter of personal preferences as to outcomes, but an acknowledgment of which of the two speaks more directly to the point under consideration. When David stated that the "*law of the LORD is perfect*," he completed that thought by identifying the goal of the law as specifically the revival of the soul (v.7). By contrast the Romans passage addresses *directly* the altogether different question of what people do with the facts of nature relative to the truth of God as He reveals Himself. How did Johnson miss Paul's conclusion? My reply is that while he cited Rom. 1:18 and 19 in his sermon, he entirely omitted v. 20. What is problematic about this neglect is that v. 20 is absolutely required for a valid assessment of the Johnson's thesis (which is consistent with *All Things*) under the light of Scripture. Consequently, it is vital to understand that all three verses (18-20) must be taken together as a unit in order to appreciate the light St. Paul's brings to bear on the authority of nature's testimony.

Notice then the following ten points as they are drawn from these three verses:

1. God deems truth to be a matter of paramount importance. He obligates human beings to pursue truth (v. 18).

---

<sup>33</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. *Luther's Works: Genesis*. v.1. (Concordia, 1958), p.3.

<sup>34</sup> The subtitle of *All Things*.

<sup>35</sup> The "sun" terminology is mine. Although I am very critical of this one point in particular, I liked the sermon until he urged that conclusion. (<http://www.thegracelifepulpit.com/Player.aspx?code=2015-01-11-PJ>).

2. Consequently, the sinful human tendency to instead deny and suppress truth is itself a sinful act that is subject to God's "*wrath*" (v. 18).
3. The human apprehension of God's nature and character, namely "*His eternal power and deity,*" entails both the pursuit of truth and the rejection of falsehood (1 John 1:7-9). God is known both through His verbal revelation and, secondarily, though surely, through nature. He does not bypass these mediums by instead conveying His presence through irrational experiences (v. 18, 20).
4. St. Paul *unites* the concept of truth into a unified whole as opposed to compartmentalizing and assigning disparate hierarchical status to each (e.g. "magisterial" vs. "ministerial"). God's truth (v. 19) harmonizes with "scientific" truth (v. 20) as dual aspects of the same category, namely Truth. Indeed, "*all truth is God's truth.*"
5. It is in part through the vehicle of nature ("*the things that have been made*") that God has revealed aspects of both His deity and His character to every person, whether with Bible in hand, or not (vs. 18-20).
6. St. Paul judges that the testimony of nature (v.20), though incomplete, is clear enough to convey *truth* concerning His existence and power (v. 18).
7. The testimony of nature is a reliable indicator not only of the reality of God, but also of the structure and nature of nature itself ("*the things that have been made*") for the reason that truth cannot be compartmentalized.<sup>36</sup>
8. Indications within nature that the cosmos was made by an intelligent being are one standard against which all people will be judged to be "without excuse" for their denial of God's rightful lordship (vs. 18, 21).
9. St. Paul's summary warning in Romans 3:19-20 makes clear that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of chapter Romans 1 (18-32) he is employing the testimony of creation as a law by which to confront sinners with the irrational consequences which logically follow from denying the rightful lordship of God.
10. Consequently, the pursuit of truth is not merely an epistemological challenge that is limited to academic specialists, but a moral and spiritual obligation that applies to all people.

As a summary conclusion from the insights drawn from Romans 1:18-20, I identify three major points:

- Taken as a whole, these three verses forbid the suppression of the testimony of nature for the reason that it is a vehicle of God's whereby He makes His power and presence known to all people. In other words, to suppress the testimony of nature is tantamount to denying one vehicle of God's revelation.
- Because Paul employs these verses as a manifestation of a law (Romans 3:19-20), the purpose of which is to convict people of their sin so that they might repent and believe in the Gospel, it is counterproductive to the task of proclaiming that message whenever

---

<sup>36</sup> Francis Schaeffer. Escape from Reason. (Intervarsity, 1982).

that law is blunted in any manner. Each time the law is blunted, one of the essential means by which sinners are convicted is either undermined or removed.

In the entire section (Romans 1:18-18) which leads to his summary conclusion (3:19-20) the Apostle Paul lists four separate aspects of God's convicting law (*nomos*) by which all people will be judged:

1. The suppression of the revelation of God manifest in nature, together with the destructive consequences which logically follow from that transgression (1:18-32).
  2. The convicting light of the universal application of the double standard by all people: *"Therefore you have no excuse, O one, whoever you are when you judge another; for in passing judgment on him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things"* (2:1 (1-11)).
  3. The convicting presence of God's law written onto people consciences, known as "natural law:" *"They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them"* (2:15 (12-16)).
  4. The convicting light of God's revealed word in canonical Scripture: *"But if you call yourself a Jew and rely upon the law and boast of your relationship with God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed in the law... You who teach others, will you not teach yourselves?"* (2:18, 20 (2:17-3:18)).
- Notice that three of the above four aspects of God's law function *independently* from the written Scriptures. By their very nature they each have the capacity (under the power of the Holy Spirit—John 16:8) to confront all people everywhere with their sinfulness, irrespective of whether or not they are in contact with God's verbal revelation. Therefore as a matter of consequence, when the LCMS casts doubt on the trustworthiness of scientific knowledge in particular (*"the things that have been made"*), it undermines an essential means by which God has chosen to convict humans of their sinfulness (Romans 3:20-21; 7:7b). Indeed, when our Synod dismisses the testimony of nature in order to maintain a YEC interpretation, it stands in contradiction to the biblical stricture that St. Paul specified in Rom. 1:18.

For the above reasons it is not hard to guess why it is the *All Things* study has in fact neglected reference to Romans 1:18-20 almost entirely. I am aware of only a single instance in the entire 139-page document where even a portion, 1: 19-20, is cited (p. 80). Notice that v. 18 (which forbids suppressing the truth) is missing. The thrust of Paul's argument requires the inclusion of all three verses to be integrated together as a whole. This omission then is *especially* glaring for the reason that the subtitle of the *All Things* document is *"The Intersection of Science & Christian Theology."* How, in a study of this nature, can such a fundamental passage be overlooked? I judge that the LCMS is simply not prepared to deal with the weight of St. Paul's stricture regarding the denigration of the authority of natural revelation with respect to the case for God's existence.

## 2) The Faulty Logic of the Ministerial/Magisterial Distinction on Matters of Truth

The *All Things* document does not advocate “giv[ing] up on using reason or doing science” (p. 19). Yet is founded on a *fallacious* conclusion following from the following propositions of which only some (but not all) can from the Bible be unequivocally affirmed to be true:

- A. The Bible is the revealed Word of the infinite and wise God.
- B. As God’s Word, the Bible is God’s infallible, inerrant, and complete revelation (p.23).
- C. Human beings are limited in their capacity to correctly understand the world. Not only are they *creatures* who are consequently *finite* (Isaiah 55:8-9), they are also, from the time of the Fall of Adam (Romans 5:12), all *sinners* (Ephesians 2:1). For this reason, humans are utterly inferior in knowledge and wisdom when contrasted with the Maker of all things (p.10, 23).
- D. For this reason, the Bible forbids the employment of human knowledge<sup>37</sup> that is derived from outside its pages, as a standard against which to judge the interpretation of Scripture (p.24).<sup>38</sup>
- E. Additionally, it is to be judged both foolish and sinful for humans to presume upon their own “autonomous” discoveries about the nature, most especially the “*beginning*” of creation through means that are independent of the revelation of the Bible.

In deductive logic, distinctions are made between arguments that are logically *valid* and arguments that are logically *sound*. An argument is deemed *valid* if the minor premise merely harmonizes with the major premise. But an argument can only be regarded as *sound* if the premise on which it rests is *actually* true. Therefore, with respect to the *All Things* document, if a foundation on which it rests is actually true, then in that respect its central thesis is indeed sound. For example,

*If the Bible is God’s revealed Word, then it is reasonable to assume that His word is superior to the perceptions of humans. The Bible is supernatural revelation from God. Hence, the Bible must indeed be deemed to carry an authority superior to the opinions of human beings.*

Yet in the case of the document before us, its central assertion rests on five interrelated foundations. Therefore, order to determine whether or not the thesis of *All Things* is sound, it is imperative to examine every one of the minor premises with attention focused on their respective correspondence to truth.

---

<sup>37</sup> The challenge of defining (scientific) knowledge provides the first hint of my challenge to the thesis identified in this paragraph. In Steven Hein’s article, “Reason and the Two Kingdoms: An Essay in Luther’s Thought” (<http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/heinreasontwokingdoms.pdf>), he states that Luther’s use of the word *ratio* refers **not specifically to facts**, but “to the thought processes, the means by which man organizes and makes inferences from what is given” (p.143). Indeed, he concludes the same article with the statement, “Far from being a Kantian dualist [as sometimes charged] Luther maintained that Christ’s divinity was fully evidenced in his miracles which were **open to friend and enemy alike**” (p.145, boldface mine), by providing the example from Jesus’ *public* demonstration of His authority to forgive sins on earth when he healed the paralyzed man (Mark 2:1-12), etc.

<sup>38</sup> Notice, on the other hand, p.119 of the same text. The doctrine of biblical inerrancy does not guarantee the legitimacy of a given interpretation, particularly a passage of Scripture that Luther himself called “difficult.”

I agree with the entirety of premise *A* that the Bible is the Word of God. Yet that being said, I do contest the means by which the Missouri Synod *claims* to have arrived at that position. By the very definition of the word “truth” it is logically not possible to distinguish between the truth of the Bible and the errors of the sacred texts of non-biblical religions except on the basis of the criteria that is denied by premise *D*. For the same reason it is also impossible for Christians to commend, in a credible way, the truthfulness of the Bible to a skeptical world.

No other passage of Scripture even remotely equals Romans 1:18-20 in authority<sup>39</sup> with respect to the Christian assessment of “The Intersection of Science and Christian Theology.”<sup>40</sup> In that passage, the Apostle Paul, speaking through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, not only declares that the testimony of nature presents an accurate portrayal of the material world,<sup>41</sup> but also that human beings are accountable for drawing an affirmative conclusion about the power and existence of God directly from that correct testimony. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul deems it “wickedness” for human beings to “suppress” that same testimony with respect to its bearing on the existence of God. Indeed, the testimony of nature (and the consequences of disobeying it) is the first of four revelational (v.18) manifestations of the law (*nomos*) of God against which people will ultimately be judged as lawbreakers (Romans 3:19,20). The four aspects of God’s convicting law include 1) nature’s testimony in 1:18-32, 2) the fact of the universal practice by humans imposing a standard of expectations onto others which we in turn break ourselves (the “double-standard) in Romans 2:1 (1-11), 3) the inner testimony to the reality of right and wrong in our conscience, called “natural law,” in 2:12-16, and 4) the verbal, written, God-breathed law of God (most specifically in 2:17-24).

When people of the Bible speak about the law of God, we properly emphasize that God’s moral law is neither arbitrary nor capricious. Rather, the Ten Commandments (together with God’s Word as a whole) are expressive both of the His holy character, and what is required in order for people to live harmoniously within the realm of nature which He has made. Unless we are able to reconcile these two realms properly, we will live out of sync with His purposes. And indeed, this is just how God graciously blesses His people who walk in the light of His Word (Psalm 1).

Rev. Gary Jensen  
Zion Lutheran Church (LCMS), Snohomish, Washington  
© June 4, 2015

---

<sup>39</sup> Both the context and the scope of Psalm 19:7 (7-12), contrary to the assertion of Phil Johnson in his sermon titled, “The Superiority of Scripture,” preclude it from usurping the authority of Romans 1:18-20 on this matter.

<sup>40</sup> The subtitle of the newly-published *All Things*. Op.cit. (1).

<sup>41</sup> Luther agrees in “The Bondage of the Will.”