

Questions

1. Are we embracing naturalism, excluding God from nature totally, even in His very existence and thus in creation?
2. Are we theistic evolutionists, denying the fiat power of the Creator God?
3. Are we deists, excluding God from nature after He created it?
4. Are we free lovers, excluding a God of love from defining for us what love looks like, insisting that He must accept whatever is, as right, declaring He does not condemn nor does He exercise retributive justice?

Could we be missing the vital lessons of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, embodied in these verses?

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Romans 8:3, 4)

Tracing the Danger

Consider the following historical statements about placing nature, even the created things blighted by sin, above God. (All emphases are supplied.)

1876:

"The Days of Noah"

Men began to feel secure and to talk of the fixed laws of nature. **They reasoned then as men reason now, as though nature was above the God of nature**, that her ways were so fixed that God Himself would not or could not change them, thus making God's messages of warning of none effect because, should His word be fulfilled, the course of nature would be disturbed. The men before the Flood sought to quiet their consciences, which the Spirit of God had aroused, by arguing how impossible it was for the message of Noah to be true and a flood to deluge the world, which would turn nature out of her course.

Manuscript 5, 1876, pp. 1-4. ("The Days of Noah," cir. 1876.) {10MR 373.1}

Revised in 1877:

"Noah's Time and Ours"

The world before the flood reasoned that for centuries the laws of nature had been fixed. The recurring seasons had come in their order. The rivers and brooks had never yet passed their boundaries, but had borne their waters safely to the proud sea. Fixed decrees had kept the waters from overflowing their banks. But these reasons did not recognize the Hand that had stayed the waters, saying, thus far shalt thou go and no farther. As time passed on without any apparent change in nature men began to be reassured whose hearts

had trembled at times with fear. They felt secure in their unbelief. **They reasoned then as men reason now, as though nature was above the God of nature**, and her ways were so fixed that God himself could not change them, thus making in the minds of the world God's messages of warning a delusion, a grand deception, reasoning that if the message of Noah was correct nature would be turned out of her course of order. {ST, December 20, 1877 par. 7}

Revised in 1890:

"The Flood"

As time passed on, with no apparent change in nature, men whose hearts had at times trembled with fear, began to be reassured. **They reasoned, as many reason now, that nature is above the God of nature**, and that her laws are so firmly established that God Himself could not change them. Reasoning that if the message of Noah were correct, nature would be turned out of her course, they made that message, in the minds of the world, a delusion--a grand deception. They manifested their contempt for the warning of God by doing just as they had done before the warning was given. {PP 97.1}

1884:

"Science and the Bible in Education"

Many teach that matter possesses vital power. They hold that certain properties are imparted to matter, and it is then left to act through its own inherent power; and that the operations of nature are carried on in harmony with fixed laws, that God himself cannot interfere with. This is false science, and is sustained by nothing in the word of God. Nature is not self-acting; she is the servant of her Creator. God does not annul his laws nor work contrary to them; but he is continually using them as his instruments. **Nature testifies of an intelligence, a presence, an active agency, that works in, and through, and above her laws.** There is in nature the continual working of the Father and the Son. Said Christ, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." {ST March 20, 1884 par. 5}; repeated in {HL 290.1} and {BLJ 241.3}

"God's Dealing with Apostasy"

The priests of Baal have worshiped nature, and have **exalted the created above the Creator.** All the blessings they enjoy have been ascribed to nature and to their gods. Now they have an opportunity to prove the power of their gods, and of showing that Elijah's words are false. They have altars and priests, and expensive sacrifices are provided to be offered to their idol gods. **If nature, governed by her infallible laws, continues her course in defiance of Jehovah's threatenings, then let nature be exalted above the God of nature.** If Baal can bring showers of rain; if he can clothe the fields with verdure, and cause vegetation to flourish; if he can bring forth the harvest in its season, and thus provide food for man and beast, then let the gods of wood and stone be worshiped. Who shall fear the God of Elijah, or tremble at the words of the prophet? {ST, December 18, 1884 par. 6}

1888:

"Marrying and Giving in Marriage"

The testimony of Noah, in regard to the judgments that were to fall upon the antediluvian world, was not received by the people as the message of God. The servant of God gave to the transgressors of the law of Jehovah, a warning which announced that in one hundred and twenty

years the world would be destroyed by a flood. His warning was scoffed at, ridiculed, and rejected. The preacher of righteousness was proclaimed to be an ignorant fanatic, who had no knowledge of the laws of nature. The wise men of that time argued that it was an impossibility for water to rise high enough to deluge the world. They reasoned from scientific principles, that the world could not be destroyed, and that no attention should be paid to the predictions of Noah. **This philosophy, or science falsely so called, exalted the law above the Lawgiver, and things created above the Creator.** {RH, September 25, 1888 par. 1}

1895:

"The Basis of True Education"

Learned men have given lectures in which have been mingled truth and error; but they have unbalanced the minds of those who leaned toward error instead of toward truth. The nicely-woven sophistries of the so-called wise men have a charm for a certain class of students; but the impression that these lectures leave upon the mind is that the God of nature is restricted by his own laws. The immutability of nature has been largely dwelt upon, and skeptical theories have been readily adopted by those whose minds chose the atmosphere of doubt, because they were not in harmony with God's holy law, the foundation of his government in heaven and earth. Their natural tendency to evil made it easy for them to choose false paths, and to doubt the reliability of both the Old and the New Testament's records and history. Poisoned with error themselves, they have watched every opportunity to sow the seeds of doubt in other minds. **Nature is exalted above the God of nature, and the simplicity of faith is destroyed;** for the foundation of faith is made to appear uncertain. Befogged in skepticism, the minds of those who doubt are left to beat on the rocks of infidelity.

{YI, January 31, 1895 par. 3}; repeated in {FE 329.1}

1898:

"Notes of the Week of Prayer, No. 5"

The most difficult and humiliating lesson which man has to learn, if he is kept by the power of God, is his own inefficiency in depending upon human wisdom, and the sure failure of his own efforts to read nature correctly. Sin has obscured his vision, and he **cannot interpret nature without placing it above God.** He cannot discern in it God, or Jesus Christ, whom He has sent. He is in the same position as the Athenians who erected their altars for the worship of nature, upon which they might well inscribe, "To the unknown god." Paul, standing in the midst of Mars Hill said to them, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. {Ms86-1898}

"God that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needeth anything, seeing he giveth to all life and breath and all things: and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation. That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being: as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art or man's device." {Ms86-1898}

Nature is not God nor ever was God. God is in nature; the voice of nature testifies of God; but nature is not God. It but bears a testimony of God's power, as His created works. There is a personal God, the Father; there is a personal Christ, the Son. "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Here the Son of God is referred to, "who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power." John declares, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory (glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth." {Ms86-1898}

Nature declares the glory of God. The psalmist says: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard." {Ms86-1898}

Some may suppose that these grand things in the natural world are God. But they are not God. They but show forth His glory. The ancient philosophers prided themselves upon their superior knowledge. But let us read the inspired apostles understanding of the matter. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things; who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever more." {Ms86-1898}

Will we consider this? In its human wisdom, the world knows not God. **Its wise men gather an imperfect knowledge of God in His created works, and then in their foolishness exalt nature and the laws of nature above nature's God.** Nature is an open book which reveals God. All who are attracted to nature may behold in it the God that created nature. But those who have a knowledge of God in their acceptance of the revelation God has made of himself in Christ, will obtain only an imperfect knowledge of God in nature. This knowledge, so far from giving elevated conceptions of God, so far from elevating the mind, the soul, the heart, and bringing the whole being into conformity to the will of God, will make men idolaters. Professing to be wise men, they become fools. {Ms86-1898}

Those who think they can obtain a knowledge of God aside from the Representative whom the Word declares is "the express image of his person," will need to become fools in their own estimation before they can be wise. Christ came as a personal Saviour to the world. He represented a personal God. He ascended on high as a personal Saviour, and will come again as he ascended to heaven—a personal Saviour. It is impossible to gain a perfect knowledge of God from nature, for nature itself is imperfect. A curse and blight is upon it. Yet the things of nature, marred as they are by the blight of sin, inculcate truths regarding the skilful Master Artist. {Ms86-1898}

One omnipotent in power, great in goodness, in mercy, and love has created the earth, and even in its blighted state much that is beautiful remains. Nature's voice speaks, saying that there is a God back of nature, but it does not in its imperfections represent God. Nature cannot reveal the nature and character of God in His moral perfection. {Ms86-1898} [July 3, 1898]; repeated with some editing in {3MR 247.4 to 348.3}

Revised in:

"God in Nature"

Some may suppose that these grand things in the natural world are God, but they are not God; they but show forth his glory. The ancient philosophers prided themselves upon their superior knowledge. But let us read the inspired apostle's understanding of the matter: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. . . . Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever." {HL 293.2}

In its human wisdom the world knows not God. **Its wise men gather an imperfect knowledge of God through his created works, and then in their foolishness exalt nature and the laws of nature above nature's God.** Nature is an open book which reveals God. All who are attracted to nature may behold in it the God that created them. But those who have not a knowledge of God, in their acceptance of the revelation God has made of himself in Christ, will obtain only an imperfect knowledge of God in nature. This knowledge, so far from giving elevated conceptions of God, so far from elevating the mind, the soul, the heart, and bringing the whole being into conformity to the will of God, will make men idolaters. Professing to be wise, they become as fools. {HL 293.3}

Revised in:

"The Revelation of God"

The ancient philosophers prided themselves on their superior knowledge. Let us read the inspired apostle's understanding of the matter. "Professing themselves to be wise," he says, "they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. . . . Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator." In its human wisdom the world can not know God. **Its wise men gather an imperfect knowledge of God from his created works, and then in their foolishness they exalt nature and the laws of nature above nature's God.** Those who have not a knowledge of God through an acceptance of the revelation he has made of himself in Christ, will obtain only an imperfect knowledge of him in nature; and this knowledge, so far from giving elevated conceptions of God, and bringing the whole being into conformity to his will, will make men idolaters. Professing themselves to be wise, they will become fools. {RH, November 8, 1898 par. 14}; repeated in {1SM 295.1}, {6BC 1068.5}, {RH, March 17, 1904 par. 14}

Revised in 1904:

"Man's Failure to Interpret Nature"

Apart from Christ we are still incapable of interpreting rightly the language of nature. The most difficult and humiliating lesson that man has to learn is his own inefficiency in depending upon human wisdom, and the sure failure of his efforts to read nature correctly. **Of himself he cannot interpret nature without placing it above God.** He is in a condition similar to that of the Athenians, who, amidst their altars dedicated to the worship of nature, had one inscribed: "To the unknown God." God was indeed unknown to them. He is unknown to all who, without the guidance of the divine Teacher, take up the study of nature. They will assuredly come to wrong conclusions. {8T 257.1}

In its human wisdom the world knows not God. Its wise men gather an imperfect knowledge of Him from His created works; but this knowledge, so far from giving them exalted conceptions of God, so far from elevating the mind and the soul, and bringing the whole being into conformity with His will, tends to make men idolaters. **In their blindness they exalt nature and the laws of nature above nature's God.**

{8T 257.2} [In Section "The Essential Knowledge" which later addresses pantheism (291.2) and spiritualism (291.1&3; 292.1&3&4; 293.1)]

1905:

"The Knowledge Received Through God's Word"

He who has gained a knowledge of God and His word through personal experience is prepared to engage in the study of natural science. Of Christ it is written, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." John 1:4. Before the entrance of sin, Adam and Eve in Eden were surrounded with a clear and beautiful light, the light of God. This light illuminated everything which they approached. There was nothing to obscure their perception of the character or the works of God. But when they yielded to the tempter, the light departed from them. In losing the garments of holiness, they lost the light that had illuminated nature. No longer could they read it aright. They could not discern the character of God in His works. So today man cannot of himself read aright the teaching of nature. **Unless guided by divine wisdom, he exalts nature and the laws of nature above nature's God.** This is why mere human ideas in regard to science so often contradict the teaching of God's word. But for those who receive the light of the life of Christ, nature is again illuminated. In the light shining from the cross, we can rightly interpret nature's teaching. {MH 461.6}; extracted in {SD 241.2}

Conclusion

Our condition through sin has become preternatural, and the power that restores us must be supernatural, else it has no value. There is but one power that can break the hold of evil from the hearts of men, and that is the power of God in Jesus Christ. Only through the blood of the Crucified One is there cleansing from sin. His grace alone can enable us to resist and subdue the tendencies of our fallen nature. This power the spiritualistic theories concerning God make of no effect. If God is an essence pervading all nature, then He dwells in all men; and in order to attain holiness, man has only to develop the power that is within him. {8T 291.3}

These theories, followed to their logical conclusion, sweep away the whole Christian economy. They do away with the necessity for the atonement and make man his own savior. These theories regarding God make His word of no effect, and those who accept them are in great danger of being led finally to look upon the whole Bible as a fiction. They may regard virtue as better than vice; but God being removed from His position of sovereignty, they place their dependence upon human power, which, without God, is worthless. The unaided human will has no real power to resist and overcome evil. The defenses of the soul are broken down. Man has no barrier against sin. When once the restraints of God's word and His Spirit are rejected, we know not to what depths one may sink. {8T 291.4}

Those who continue to hold these spiritualistic theories will surely spoil their Christian experience, sever their connection with God, and lose eternal life. {8T 292.1}

The sophistries regarding God and nature that are flooding the world with skepticism are the

inspiration of the fallen foe, who is himself a Bible student, who knows the truth that it is essential for the people to receive, and whose study it is to divert minds from the great truths given to prepare them for what is coming upon the world. {8T 292.2}

I have seen the results of these fanciful views of God, in apostasy, spiritualism, and free-lovism. The free love tendency of these teachings was so concealed that at first it was difficult to make plain its real character. Until the Lord presented it to me, I knew not what to call it, but I was instructed to call it unholy spiritual love. {8T 292.3}