

## By What Means God Is Made Known Unto Us (1)

*Text: Belgic Confession 2; Romans 1:18-32*

*Belgic Confession*, article 2, addresses general revelation in the first paragraph and special written revelation in the Bible in the second. General and special revelation are both “books” by which God reveals Himself. The first book is the universe: “creation, preservation and government of all things.” The question posed is what does the universe indicate about divine things? There are various wrong answers to this, representing several philosophical and theological systems.

Some people look at the world and conclude that the universe reveals nothing, that there is no God. They interpret everything as time, matter and chance. These are atheists. Others believe in two gods, attributing material and evil things to a bad god and invisible virtues to a good one. This is dualism. Some see many gods, like the ancients or Native Americans, assigning deities to rivers, mountains, the wind etc. The Romans had Neptune for the sea, Bacchus for wine, Mars for war, Venus for love and so on. This is polytheism. Then there are those who claim *everything* is God – pantheism. The oceans, sunsets, love... everything is divine. Pantheism is the belief that everything is God and that God is impersonal. Others profess agnosticism, asserting that divine things are unknowable because the universe is too complicated. And then there are those who are entirely irreligious and apathetic, people who do not even ask such questions, content to work, pay bills and watch television, avoiding the thought of divine realities altogether.

### What Creation Reveals

All these views are incorrect. The universe reveals something definite: it declares the glory of the one true God. Article 2 says, “By the creation, preservation and government of the universe... a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, His power and divinity.” Paul teaches the same in Romans 1. The God revealed in creation is the one described in article 1: “simple... spiritual... eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good and the overflowing fountain of all good.”

Book 1, then, consists of the created universe – what God made, preserves and governs. Consider a pagan who has never heard the gospel. What does this first book tell him about God? Romans 1:18–32 is the key passage. Verse 20 declares that the “eternal power” and “Godhead” of God are clearly seen through the creation. The pagan learns that God is eternal, powerful, divine, glorious, incorruptible, truthful, blessed, righteous and just. These divine attributes are evident to all who live in God’s creation. Furthermore, the *works* of God are also known: He is Creator, Sustainer and Judge. Verse 32 says they know the judgment of God—they understand they are worthy of death. Verses 18–20 emphasize that this knowledge is not optional or speculative: it is *clearly seen, understood* and *revealed* to everyone. The creation makes divine truth *manifest*. Verse 18 even teaches that men “suppress” this truth in unrighteousness. They know the truth about God but choose to deny it. This is not ignorance; it is *rebellion*.

What should have been the response to this revelation? Verse 21: They ought to have glorified God and been thankful. Instead, they suppressed the truth and substituted idols! They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped the creature rather than the Creator! Atheists do this too, though in more sophisticated ways. Idolatry is the inevitable result of suppressing God’s revelation. Instead of attributing glory to the true God, they made images like unto man, birds, four-footed beasts or creeping things. Even the most modern deniers of God engage in idolatry: serving money, pleasure, power or human intellect as replacements for the divine.

### **The Purpose and Limits of General Revelation**

God judges this suppression by giving them over to their sin. Romans 1 emphasizes sexual sins, including fornication, lesbianism and sodomy. These are not only sins but also *divine judgments*. God gives people over to a reprobate mind. Verses 29–32 list a catalogue of sins resulting from this judgment: unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, deceit, malignity and more. Yet knowing they are worthy of death, they continue in their sin and even take pleasure in others who sin. This is seen, for example, in the entertainment world – people delighting in watching others sin on television and on the internet (pornography).

Why does God reveal Himself in the creation to pagans at all? It is not to save them. Roman Catholic theology claims otherwise, suggesting that unconverted man can construct a natural theology and, by following his conscience, attain salvation. But Scripture and the Reformed confessions reject this. The *Canons of Dordt*, Heads III and IV, Rejection of Errors 5, specifically refute the error that

man can use the light of nature and common grace to gain salvation. They argue against the idea that God gives everyone sufficient grace through nature and conscience to find their way to Christ without the gospel. Psalm 147:19–20 and Acts 14:16 teach that God has not revealed His statutes to the nations as He has to Israel. Romans 1:20 confirms the true purpose of general revelation: to *leave men without excuse*. On the day of judgment, no one can say, “I didn’t know.” They knew, but they held down the truth and worshipped idols. This is the divine purpose of general revelation: not to save but to *convict*; to silence the mouth of every sinner.

This is why the church must preach the gospel. If people could be saved through general revelation, why bother evangelizing? But they are perishing. Only the Word of God brings salvation. Believing that people can be saved without the gospel leads to spiritual apathy and the destruction of souls. It undermines the missionary task of the church and obscures the urgency of the Great Commission.

### **Upholding Scripture and Rejecting Misuse**

There is a further abuse of general revelation—using it to overthrow special revelation. This is seen in theistic evolution. Departing churches deny the first article of the *Apostles Creed* (“I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth”) by embracing evolutionary theories. They interpret the fossil record and geological formations as proof of an old earth. They claim the book of creation contradicts the book of Scripture. But they ignore the flood described in Genesis 6–8, which explains much of the fossil record. They reinterpret the creation account, not by Scripture, but by scientific speculation, and thus place fallible human reasoning over the infallible Word of God. They say man evolved from animals; but Scripture teaches that Adam was made from the dust and Eve from Adam’s rib. Similarities in bone structure are not proof of evolution but of a common Creator. The so-called “missing links” have been discredited, and some were even forgeries. Evolutionists were often driven by a desire to disprove God.

Theistic evolutionists seek to accommodate secular science, but in doing so, they deny fundamental truths of the faith. They claim the universe began with the Big Bang, but Hebrews 11:3 says, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God.” The Bible says God created the heavens and the earth. Theistic evolution rejects this and replaces it with unbelieving science. Saving faith believes in God’s creative act, not an explosion from an infinitely dense speck of matter. This false theology has crept into major denominations. Leaders in the Presbyterian Church, Church of Ireland and

Methodists promote theistic evolution. The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in North America embraced it too. To defend their professors, they appealed to article 2 of the *Belgic Confession*, twisting it to say that creation teaches an old earth and evolution. They relied on the false notion of “common grace,” claiming that unbelieving scientists, aided by God, could discover truth in nature.

But Scripture says unconverted man suppresses the truth. He is not partially good; he is totally depraved. Without the gospel, he cannot find the true God in nature. The CRC produced a massive document defending its heresy, filled with pseudo-scientific jargon to confuse and silence opposition. It included a 47-page report and a 19-page scientific appendix to impress and mislead. The implications go beyond Genesis. If the creation account is false, then why believe what it says about marriage or gender? The Bible teaches that God “made them male and female.” Evolution erodes this foundation. If man came from animals, then human dignity, the image of God and the divine institution of marriage are undermined. The gospel itself is compromised if sin did not originate from one historical Adam.

Providence, the second aspect of general revelation, can also be misused. The most shocking example is Nazi Germany. The Nazis used providence to justify a new theology. Hitler was presented as the providential leader. The German nation, race, land and history became theological themes. The instituted church was to support the state, and “Positive Christianity” was born. It discarded sin, promoted nationalistic virtues and eliminated the Old Testament and parts of the New. The Nazis even produced a new version of the Bible stripped of Jewish elements. Hitler was portrayed as a Christ-like figure. This abuse of providence mirrored the abuse of creation by evolutionists. The result was a grotesque ideology baptized in Christian terms, with providence hijacked to affirm tyranny.

The confessing church opposed this. Karl Barth, its most prominent theologian, rejected general revelation altogether in response, denying any revelation in nature or history. This was an overreaction. Barth’s neo-orthodoxy was itself heretical, but he rightly saw the danger in Nazi theology. Another theologian, Emil Brunner, debated him, trying to salvage a proper view of general revelation. Thus, the abuse of creation and providence to contradict Scripture must be rejected. Article 2 of the *Belgic Confession* must be understood properly. God reveals Himself in creation and providence, but that revelation is sufficient only to condemn. It leaves man without excuse, not with saving knowledge. The Bible alone reveals the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. The church must uphold the primacy of special revelation and preach the Word to all nations, for without the Word, men perish.