

# The Religion of Science: The Largest Remaining Frontier A Missionary Speaks Out on Science/Faith Conflicts

by *Al Hammond*

**I**n 1954 Bernard Ramm spoke of the noble and the ignoble tradition with regard to the manner in which science and faith issues were debated. In the preface of his book are the words:

Unfortunately the noble tradition which was in the ascendancy in the closing years of the nineteenth century has not been the major tradition in evangelicalism in the twentieth century. A narrow bibliolatry, the product not of faith but of fear, buried the noble tradition.<sup>1</sup>

Ramm's purpose was to call evangelicalism back to the noble tradition. He only partially succeeded. Today overstatements from both the science community and fundamentalist Christians continue to reinforce the polarized extremes on science/faith issues.

The late Stephen J. Gould, a much published popularizer of evolution, asserted confidently that "evolution has occurred."<sup>2</sup> *Science* editor Allen Hammond stresses that "evolution has been observed."<sup>3</sup> Both refer to well established examples of micro-evolution to shore up the non-demonstrable assumptions of Darwinian theory. Their assertions that macro-evolution (amoeba to anthropos) is proven beyond doubt is the unwarranted conclusion that provokes many creationists.<sup>4</sup>

The following statement by John D. Morris of the Institute of Creation Research is the kind of rhetoric which reflects the shared convictions of many conservative Christians; yet it angers those who believe in the scientific credibility of evolution, a number of whom are theistic evolutionists.

First, evolution is bad science...the evidence does not support evolution. Evolution is a non-testable concept, non-falsifiable, and therefore not even a proper scientific theory. It violates the basic laws of science and probability. There is no hint in the fossil record that any basic category of plant or animal has ever changed into any other. It ascribes incredible complex life forms to pure chance. Furthermore, evolution has evil fruits. The failed concepts of racism, fascism, Marxism, imperialism...are all founded on evolutionary principles, as are the extant concepts of Freudianism, promiscuity, abortion, homosexuality, drug use, etc.<sup>5</sup>

## *Mutual Stereotypes*

Mutual stereotypes have been formed by the protagonists in the modern science and religion debates and have become fixed in the popular mind. For many conservative creationists, scientists are not to be trusted, for they teach theory as fact and argue in a circle by dating the rocks by the fossils and the fossils by the rocks.

This is Chapter Six, the first chapter of Part II, "Applications of Missionary Principles" of Hammond's about-to-be-published book, *The Missionary Approach to Science/Faith Conflicts*.

*Al Hammond served 16 years as a missionary to Japan, planting churches and editing an open forum quarterly. Since leaving Tokyo he serves as chair of Intercultural Studies at San Jose Christian College. For many years he has taught a course on Issues in Science to better prepare future missionaries for the science/faith issues encountered in the world's urban centers.*

They are part of a conspiracy to instill scientific humanism in our school systems. Their evolutionary philosophy is the primary cause for the moral breakdown in present day society.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, to many science practitioners, creationists are portrayed as those who twist scientific facts to match a biblical literalism. Their views of a young earth attack the credibility of not only geology, but paleontology, physics, and astronomy. They are deceptive and use quotations out of context to support their own biases. They are to be feared for they number some 30 million in the U.S. and are politically active. If they succeed in establishing their anti-science views they will undermine science education for the future.<sup>7</sup>

### Diverse Profiles

There is both truth and error in stereotypes. The fallacy of either/or thinking perpetuates the polarized extremes. An accurate picture of the modern debate would include not two typical adversarial positions but a number of participants, who hold to diverse viewpoints. Profiles of each position might be described as follows:

1) Closed creationists define a “creationist” as one who believes in a literal view of Genesis describing God creating the universe and all forms of life in six literal days. In their thinking, the genealogy of Scripture indicates that the earth is only 6,000 to 10,000 years old. The catastrophic universal flood explains most of the major configurations of the earth. They discredit views that depict fossils from simple to complex found in uniform stratified layers. They uphold the fixity of species and are antagonistic to both biological and cosmic evolution. This position attracts large numbers who equate a strictly literal interpretation of the Bible with truth. Representative of this position are Henry Morris, author of *The Genesis Flood*<sup>8</sup> and founder of the Institute of Creation Research, and Duane Gish, a coworker and an outspoken debater who wrote the popular *Evolution: The Fossils Say No*.<sup>9</sup>

2) Open creationists hold to the inerrancy of Scripture but allow for figurative interpretations of Genesis, chapter

one, which would accommodate the findings of science on the age of the earth. The “gap theory” would permit vast amounts of time between Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” and the following verses, which prepared the earth for life. (Some put the old earth before 1:1). The popular “age day theory” would suggest that the Hebrew word, *yom*, used for day, could be understood to be an aeon or age which could match with the geological column. They would still hold to separate progressive acts of creation for each kind of life form and would not accept macroevolution. This position is popular because it appears to establish concord between science and Scripture. Hugh Ross, author of *Creation and Time*,<sup>10</sup> and L. Duane Thurman, who wrote, *How to Think About Evolution*,<sup>11</sup> give clear rationales for this point of view.

3) Theologically defined creationism is an interpretive preference of those who affirm that Genesis should be understood from a literary viewpoint. They believe that Moses is using the framework of the Jewish week to describe God’s unique creation, which contrasts dramatically with the pagan myths that existed in the polytheistic nations that surrounded Israel. The main point of the Genesis narrative is that the one, true God is the benevolent creator of all. Nature nor the life forms in it are to be feared or worshipped. After each act of creation “God saw that it was good.”<sup>12</sup>

The general order of life forms can be matched with that of modern geology, but this would not have been Moses’ understanding. The language is not scientific but well arranged religious prose, nearly poetic in form, that depicts symbolic meaning much deeper than the literalism of fruit trees, a talking snake, and an angel with a flaming sword. The symbolic language is inspired by God, but it is an expression of the cultural thought forms of Moses’ day. Its message of the creation and the fall of man would be understood as necessary precedents to the redemption plan.<sup>13</sup>

This interpretive viewpoint has been growing in favor with conservative Christians as they come to recognize the different styles of biblical literature. French theologian Henri Blocher’s *In The Beginning*<sup>14</sup> gives able

defense of this view, as does Clark Pinnock’s article “Climbing Out Of A Swamp: The Evangelical Struggle to Understand the Creation Texts.”<sup>15</sup> Bernard Ramm, who held a form of concordism in his 1954 text, gravitated toward the theological interpretation of Genesis in later years.<sup>16</sup>

4) Theistic evolutionists are impressed by the circumstantial case for organic evolution, but they are candid about the inadequacies of the present theories to explain it. While they feel that the evidence for an old earth is overwhelming, they also believe that the exposed stratum in various parts of the earth consistently reveal a fossil pattern from simple to complex.

They recognize the intricate design in all life forms, from the simplest cell to the most complex organism, and find it difficult to believe that this could be accidental. Their conclusion is that an intelligent creator must be behind the unfolding evolutionary process.<sup>17</sup> There are both Christians and non-Christians that hold to some form of theistic evolution. Ian G. Barbour’s text, *Issues in Science and Religion*,<sup>18</sup> expresses this position in a compelling way. Pope John Paul II came to accept this view. He deplored the tragic mistake of the Catholic Church that put Galileo on trial for his scientific views and commended the example of Albertus Magnus, who worked out a synthesis between matters of science and faith.<sup>19</sup> Yet, the Pope’s recent statements accepting evolution only produced skepticism among many conservative Protestants.<sup>20</sup>

5) Evolutionary naturalists of today are committed to the materialist view that a reductionist approach in science will continue to give us the only verifiable knowledge that we can attain. They assume that the universe and life forms, themselves, began by chance and, in time, can be understood mechanistically. Evolution is perceived to be the grand framework that gives a coherent understanding of the life sciences. Although the spontaneous origin of life has not yet been adequately demonstrated, naturalists have faith that it can ultimately be explained.<sup>21</sup> Isaac Asimov, popular science-fiction author, and the late Carl Sagan, Harvard professor and originator of *Cosmos*, the popular televised series

on astronomy, would fit this profile.<sup>22</sup> However, there are others, who accept the methodological rules of the game assumed in evolutionary naturalism in their research, who acknowledge that there may be ultimate answers beyond the limitations of science.<sup>23</sup>

### *Subcultures of Distrust*

The five categories mentioned above can be perceived as subcultures of religious and science communities that, to a considerable degree, operate in isolation one from another. Although the members of the Institute of Creation Research Society are credentialed scientists, their written contributions are not usually welcomed in the secular science journals. Their language and worldview simply do not fit in with what is expected in a naturalistic science context.

The converse would also be true. Conservative religious publications primarily print only select excerpts from secular sources, either because the passages seem to be concessions that agree with the creation tradition or because the evolutionary bias is so blatant that it counts against the secular scientists.<sup>24</sup>

Those who occupy middle ground positions often find themselves shut out by both those on the left and right. The American Scientific Affiliation (ASA) represents Christians in the field of science, who offer an open forum in their journal, *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*.<sup>25</sup> Articles representing fiat creationism and theistic evolutionary points of view may appear in the same issues of the journal. It was for this reason that a number of those now representing anti-evolutionary "creation science" withdrew their membership from the ASA.<sup>26</sup>

Those who try to put the best construction on opposing viewpoints seem to be fewer in number. In spite of the many positive contributions of modern science in the fields of agriculture, communications, ecology, genetic engineering, human health, and space exploration (to mention only a few), negative images of science are often projected. Respect for the integrity of the rank and file of men and women in today's science community is lacking among many on the religious right. Because of this distrust, communication breaks down. Yet, we need to

remind ourselves that these are people who are objects of God's love.<sup>27</sup>

We recognize that similar expressions of intolerance appear in the secular science community. ICR's public debaters on university campuses have frequently encountered noisy hecklers from the audience and rude personal attacks from arrogant opponents.<sup>28</sup> When the astronomer, Robert Jastrow, broke ranks with the secular science status quo and declared that there had to be an intelligence behind the incredible design in the universe, his printed remarks were met with derision. Edwin A. Olson quotes the strong reactionary sarcasm of Isaac Asimov against Jastrow:

If I can continue to read the English language, Jastrow is implying that since the Bible has all the answers...it has been a waste of time, money and effort for astronomers to have been peering through their little spyglasses all this time. Perhaps Jastrow, abandoning his "faith in the power of reason" (assuming he ever had it) will now abandon his science and pore over the Bible until he finds out what a quasar is... Why should he waste his time in observatories?<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps the worst kind of communication blocker is the malpractice of "poisoning the well," that is, the sowing of innuendo against those of differing views. Such was the approach of a young earth creationist, who suggested to his readers that those Christian colleges that teach an old earth view are unfaithful to the Scriptures and are deceitful and not to be trusted by sending them students. Here we have an example of making an interpretive view on biblical chronology a test of fellowship among Christian conservative believers!<sup>30</sup>

To differ with others in matters of conviction is certainly appropriate. But how we as Christians communicate is crucial. The present climate is neither conducive to persuading other believers to agree with our point of view, nor is it a testimony to the non-committed. God's purpose is the reconciliation of the world to himself through Christ. In the process He does not count men's sins against them (II Cor 5:18-20). Should we not also exercise this kind of love and grace as we endeavor to reconcile those with conflicting views about how God made the world? Creationists

that exercise an irenic spirit have a much better chance of convincing agnostics that a loving God exists. □□□□

### *Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, Reprint), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> James Gorman, "Scientist of the Year: Stephen J. Gould," *Discover*, (January 1982), p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Allen Hammond and Lynn Margulis, "Farewell to Newton, Einstein, Darwin..." *Science*, (December 1981), p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> John D. Morris, "Why Should A Christian Believe in Creation," ICR pamphlet, *Back to Genesis*, No. 31 (July 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Hammond, *Science* 81, pp. 55-60; Gorman, *Discover*, pp. 58-62.

<sup>8</sup> John C. Whitcomb, Jr. and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood*, (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961).

<sup>9</sup> Duane Gish, *Evolution: The Fossils Say No!*, (San Diego: Creation Life Publishers, 3rd Print, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> L. Duane Thurman, *How to Think About Evolution*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2nd Ed., 1978).

<sup>12</sup> Karl Giberson, gives a description of the literary view in Chapter 8, "How Should We Then Read," *Worlds Apart: The Unholy War Between Science and Religion*, (Kansas City: Bacon Hill Press, 1993), pp. 155-170.

<sup>13</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer interprets Genesis in a literary manner but holds to the historicity of Adam and Eve, *Genesis in Space and Time*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1972), pp. 41-45

<sup>14</sup> Henri Blocher, *In The Beginning*, translated by David Preston, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, "Climbing Out of a Swamp: The Evangelical Struggle to Understand the Creation Texts," *Theology* Vol IV, ed. J. I. Packer (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 1990), pp. 39-50.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph L. Spradley, "Changing Views of Science and Scripture: Bernard Ramm and the ASA," *Perspectives on Science and the Christian Faith* (Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation), Vol 44, No 1, March, 1992), pp. 7, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Asa Gray, famed professor of Natural History at Harvard, was an advocate of biological evolution but had a vital Christian faith. His essay, "Natural Science and Religion," makes up Chapter 7 in *Is God A*

*Creationist?* Roland Mushrat Frye, ed., (New York: Charles Scribners: 1983), pp. 107-118.

<sup>18</sup> Ian G. Barbour, *Issues In Science and Religion*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 365-408.

<sup>19</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Science and Christianity," in Chapter 9, *Is God A Creationist?*, op.cit., pp. 141-154.

<sup>20</sup> In my own circle of conservative friends in college and in homes I heard skeptical remarks about this late announcement of the Pope endorsing evolution. Hugh Ross understood his statement in a positive light. See: Randy Frame, "Pope Says Evolution 'More than a Hypothesis,'" *Christianity Today* (December 9, 1996), pp. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Recent efforts to explore Mars are motivated to find evidence of life's chance beginning from inorganic matter. "Earth Invades Mars," *Time* cover story (July 4, 1997), pp. 26-36.

<sup>22</sup> In the flyleaf of his book, *A Choice of Catastrophes*, Isaac Asimov is endorsed by Carl Sagan as, "...a natural resource, a Renaissance man born out of his time—

thank God." Sagan's evolutionary naturalism is discussed by Mark G. McKim, "The Cosmos According to Carl Sagan: Review and Critique," in *Perspectives on Science and the Christian Faith* (Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation), Vol 45, No 1, (March, 1993), pp. 18-25.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher Kaiser puts Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr in the category of those who have been influenced by evolutionary naturalism but acknowledge meaning beyond rational science, *Creation and The History of Science*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 301-308.

<sup>24</sup> Edwin A. Olson accuses young earth creationists of searching secular scientific literature to cull out statements that reinforce their prejudices. "Hidden Agenda Behind the Evolutionist/Creationist Debate," *Christianity Today*, (April 23, 1982), p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> For a better understanding of the history of the American Scientific Affiliation read, "The Fundamentalist Origins of the American Scientific Affiliation," by

D.G. Hart, in *Perspectives on Science and the Christian Faith* (Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation), Vol 43, No 4 (December, 1991), pp. 238-248.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Giberson, *Worlds Apart*, op.cit., pp. 38-59.

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Duane Gish of the Institute of Creation Research was frequently interrupted by rude hecklers at U.C. Berkeley, "A Mob Scene on Campus," *Acts and Facts*, Vol 11, No 7 (July 1982). Richard Dawkins used ridicule and intimidation when debating Vincent Sarich and Duane Gish at Stanford University, *Acts and Facts*, (San Diego: ICR), Vol 15, No 5, (May 1986).

<sup>29</sup> Olsen, "Hidden Agenda", op.cit., quotes scientist-writer Isaac Asimov, who made unrestrained criticisms against astronomer Jastrow for his shift in position, *Christianity Today*, (April 23, 1982), p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> Ken Ham, "Choosing A Christian College," *Back to Genesis* No 32, ICR (August, 1991).

### The Thinker's Guide to Evil

By Peter Vardy and Julie Arliss  
Alresford, Hants SO24 9AU, UK:  
John Hunt Publishing, Ltd.  
2003, 191 pp., ISBN 1903816335

—Reviewed by Ralph D. Winter

**P**eter Vardy is Vice Principal of Heythrop College, University of London. Julie Arliss is a lecturer in Religious Education at Richard Huish College, Taunton, UK

This joint effort makes a very complex picture as simple as it could be. Although it is a slim book of only 191 pages and is full of colored pictures all the way through. No heavy text, it is by design popular and yet is technically quite comprehensive, ranging from Zoroastrian dualism, Augustine, Aquinas, Jung and many others to Darth Vader and Harry Potter. Even pictures of the 9/11 tragedy are involved in the complete picture this book portrays.

All the way through this book, the authors present ideas for the reader to decide. Yet at the end we find a very fine emphasis on the importance of taking the Hebrew and Christian scriptures seriously into account. The whole book is designed to force the reader to take evil seriously and do something about it.

At the end the authors begin their final chapter (on page 178) with the statement, "Three points have become clear." The statements are as follows:

1. The freedom of human beings to choose to be selfish, self-centered and to ignore the demands and interests of others is central to any understanding of evil.
2. The human psyche is a dark and complex place, and the source of many individual acts lie outside of conscious control in the psyche—these are often caused by events in childhood, repressed sexuality or a failure to come to terms with the difficulties and failure of relationships or of death itself.
3. Institutional evil probably represents the most pervasive, difficult-to-identify and hard-to-remedy evil. It dwells in nation states, in companies, in schools, in police forces, in churches and religious groupings, in family and racial groups and can be masked by apparently good people ignoring its reality.

Here I bump on the very first statement, which makes human choice of evil "central." This is anthropocentric, since the Bible traces the fallen nature of humans to the serpent, an external force. By contrast the authors go on to say, "Many other factors, such as whether there is an independent source of evil, may be debated." It is as if something that is debated cannot logically be a candidate for the central

source of evil. Furthermore, only if we believe there is "an independent source of evil" will we ever scour all of reality for evidences of a continuing creation of evil to be intelligently fought. We will be unable to "resist the devil" as Scripture commands us.

As a very major example, without taking that independent force seriously, we will be unaware or confused by the evidence of distortion in nature—the pervasive suffering and violence. We may even conclude that God, being sovereign, is the author of all evil (for good purposes of course) instead of being the intentional creator of angels and men with freedom of the will and thus the freedom to choose to love Him or oppose him. In effect we will be poor soldiers, mere survivors seeking our own salvation instead of being willing to lose our lives for His sake and the gospel.

In my view, both man and the institutions of man can and should be held responsible for evil acts, but this does not explain all evil, such as the violence in nature. The existence of "an independent source of evil" enables a much clearer picture of what we can actually see happening—be it the kind of temptations Satan posed to Jesus in the wilderness or the alarming and constant rapid upgrading of incredibly intelligent and virulent germs and parasites such as the malarial plasmodium.