

A Missionary Speaks Out on Science/Faith CONFLICTS

Al Hammond

This excerpt is taken from Chapter Six, the first chapter of Part II, "Applications of Missionary Principles" of a soon-to-be-published book, *The Missionary Approach to Science/Faith Conflicts*. The full chapter can be found in issue 20:4 (Winter 2003) of the *International Journal of Frontier Missions*.

In 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.

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." Science editor Allen Hammond stresses that "evolution has been observed." 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.

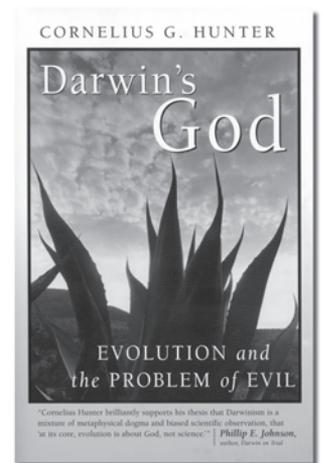
The following statement by John D. Morris of the Institute of Creation Research is the kind of rhetoric which reflects the shared convictions of many conservative Christians; yet it angers those who believe in the scientific credibility of evolution, a number of whom are theistic evolutionists.

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.

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. 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.

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

Subcultures of Distrust

The five categories mentioned above [but not elaborated in this excerpt: closed creationists, open creationists, theologically-defined creationists, theistic evolutionists, and evolutionary naturalists] 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.

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*). 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.

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

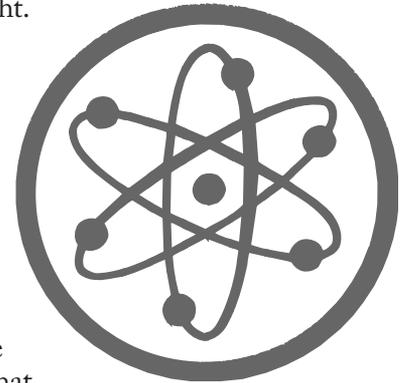
rank and file of men and women in today's science community is lacking among many on the religious right.

Because of this distrust, communication breaks down. Yet, we need to remind ourselves that these are people who are objects of God's love

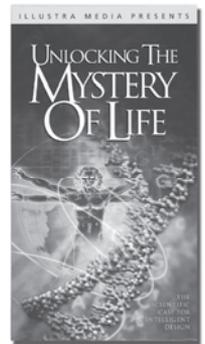
Perhaps the worst kind of communication blocker is the malpractice of "poisoning the well," that is, the sowing of innuendo against those of differing views. Such was the approach of a young earth creationist who suggested to his readers that those Christian colleges that teach an old-earth view are 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!

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. 🌐



Science



Al Hammond served 16 years as a missionary to Japan, planting churches and editing an open forum quarterly. Since leaving Tokyo he has served 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.