

CREATION AND EVOLUTION: SORTING PERSPECTIVES IN FOUR RECENT PUBLICATIONS

By Amy F. Galen*

Charles E. Hummel

The Galileo Connection — Resolving Conflicts between Science and the Bible

Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press

293 pp., 1986

Norman L. Geisler and J. Kerby Anderson

Origin Science — A Proposal for the Creation - Evolution Controversy

Grand Rapids: Baker Book House

198 pp., 1987

Howard J. Van Till, Davis A. Young and Clarence Menninga

Science Held Hostage — What's Wrong with Creation Science and Evolutionism

Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press

189 pp., 1988

Vernon Blackmore and Andrew Page

Evolution — The Great Debate

Oxford: Lion Publishing

192pp., 1989

There has been a struggle among evangelicals for well over a century concerning the nature of life and the relationship between theology and science. Was life created or did it evolve? Is a literal reading of Genesis a criterion of faithfulness, or is it a sign of scientific ignorance? The books reviewed in this article attempt to delve into these questions by examining a particular facet of the purported conflict between scientific endeavor and Christian belief. The perspectives are wide-ranging and the authors are thorough in presenting their carefully delineated areas of investigation. The scientific and philosophical issues that lie beneath the controversy are competently, even scathingly, handled. In my opinion, however, the theological issues are glossed over in an attempt to mitigate the polemics. None of the authors even begins to build a creative anthropology — an effort that is sorely needed if the depths of the controversy are truly to be plumbed.

Charles Hummel approaches the conflict historically. In a well-researched series of portraits he illustrates how, in Galileo's terms, "the Bible tells us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go." He gives a thorough account of scientific perspectives from Aristotle to Newton, emphasizing that the Christian worldview has encouraged, rather than discouraged, an empirical investiga-

*Mrs. Galen holds a Master's degree in anthropology from Columbia and is currently pursuing graduate studies in theology.

tion of the laws of nature based upon a deeply rooted faith that such an investigation was a "sacred duty and privilege."

In discussing Kepler, Hummel highlights the compatibility of his faith in both sustaining and encouraging his drive to interpret the physical world. In Hummel's view, the "scientific" reliability of the Bible is an inappropriate assumption, and he candidly admits to his own failures at reconciling Genesis with science when challenged at Yale by a "non-Christian friend" who asked him, "Why are you so desperately concerned to make the Bible scientifically respectable? Isn't Christianity essentially a matter of commitment to Jesus Christ?"¹ Hummel is jarred into surmising that since science is a multi-faceted and ever-changing investigation of the natural world, "a Bible whose credibility depends on its agreement with modern science, . . . will eventually find its place alongside obsolete scientific theories on a shelf of historical relics."²

Nevertheless, Hummel pursues a number of questions relevant to the creation/evolution debate with lucidity, taking care to define terms and to delineate presuppositions concerning their respective domains of inquiry. He is to be commended for his competent overview including a thoughtful discussion of miracles and scientific laws. He lacks depth, however, in his discussion of human origins which, for most readers, is the crux of the issue. Hummel's approach is to accept the fossil evidence on its own merits and to separate the metaphysical issues (i.e. the concept of human creation in the image and likeness of God) for theological consideration. He adds somewhat wistfully that it should suffice to say, "I accept the biblical accounts of creation and the scientific theory of evolution."³ Nevertheless he acknowledges, parenthetically, that this position draws fire from both extremes and is argued to be "impossible." Sometimes, Hummel adds, "that seems to be the one point on which . . . [the protagonists] . . . can agree."⁴

Geisler and Anderson take a more didactic and philosophical route. The purpose of their writing is to define the arguments, presuppositions and avenues of inquiry in both science and theology. They are thorough, at times to the point of tedium, as they hammer persistently at the premises undergirding naturalism and supernaturalism. They propose a carefully drawn model for understanding the difference between origin science and operation science, suggesting that origin or forensic science should be carefully separated from operational or secondary cause investigation.

After segregating the different categories of scientific inquiry they lauch into "new possibilities"⁵ consisting of a general outline of a creationist view of origins. Geisler and Anderson are not young-earth creationists but they are antagonists of evolutionary theory. On this point, they propose to extend their stance on the origin of life to embody a creationist perspective which they term "Pre-Darwinian." Their case rests on two major premises. First, that the design universally observed in the natural world provides conclusive evidence of an intelligent Creator. Secondly, they argue that recent assessments of the fossil record have highlighted the rather sudden appearance of various life forms. Termed "punctuated equilibrium," this revised perspective on the pace of

evolution is viewed by the authors as authenticating the creationist perspective. For them, punctationalism lacks "a satisfactory mechanism to make plausible their view of sudden evolution."⁶ "After all," they suggest, even "Darwin took suddenness as a sign of creation."⁷

Are they convincing? Unfortunately they may be to those readers possessing a minimal knowledge of the fossil record. Their arguments are clever and they press upon the reader highly polemical statements backed by a subtle manipulation of the data. Enter Van Till, Young and Menninga who aggressively present themselves as defenders of the scientific method. In my opinion, they are positively swashbuckling as they set about refuting "creation science" while they take pains to distinguish the domain of "natural science" from religious and philosophical inquiry. Because these authors are, respectively, a physicist and two geologists, they have a firm grasp of their disciplines as they approach such topics as the size of the sun, the thickness of moon dust and the salinity of the oceans.

But, as their title declares, they are equally critical (though not for scientific reasons) of a philosophical orientation called evolutionism which draws upon Darwin's theory to support an atheistic world view. This approach, popularized by Carl Sagan and Isaac Asimov, is called "naturalistic scientism" in which "science is treated as if it were applicable to everything"⁸ and a "victor over religion" in the search for truth. Both scientific creationism and evolutionism are defined by these authors as "folk sciences" which are creedal in their orientation but seek to use scientific fact (dubiously so in the case of creation science) to support a worldview. With bold arguments they seek to set the cosmological record straight while supporting biological evolution as a satisfactory mechanism for understanding the history of life on earth. Their overriding concern is to separate questions like "the duration of cosmic history, the interpretation of the geological record, the temporal succession of life forms, the physical mechanisms required for evolutionary development"⁹ from religious questions which they contend lie at the heart of the "folk science debate and generate most of its emotional energy."¹⁰

Up to this point, the three books reviewed concentrate on separating issues in the creation/evolution controversy. They make a cogent appeal for vigilance in distinguishing theological inquiry from that of empirical science. In this they are logical and thoughtful, but they leave the reader with a hunger for more than semantics and refutation. After all, the controversy sinks deeply to the roots of evangelicalism both in Britain and in America and is manifest currently in the widespread publication and broadcasting of creation science propaganda. Over the last decade both educational policies and political agendas have been revised under pressure from creationists. Where does the inquirer turn for a balanced presentation of all these issues?

Fortunately, Blackmore and Page have come upon the scene with a book that is both comprehensive and a pleasure to read. Laid out like a biology text with colorful photographs and intriguing "thought-boxed" (highlighted sections where controversial issues are explored in depth), its appeal is broad, handling historical, sociological and biological perspectives deftly, but not

superficially. The authors juxtapose scientific discovery with social theory, theological speculation with genetic maps and the result is both enlightening and satisfying. False dichotomies are carefully dissected and ideological prejudice is quietly exposed without resorting to polemics. The authors are masterful at handling sacred cows (both scientific and theological) and successful at presenting alternative points of view with tolerance and clarity.

Where Van Till *et al.* tend to slash, Blackmore and Page provoke thoughtful reflection. As confessing Christians they see God working in and through His creation which has taken myriad forms over time. The random behavior of molecules, or that of complex living beings, is not seen as contradicting the immanence of God, but rather, as demonstrating the current limits of human understanding. How refreshing! Indeed, I readily admit to my delight in Blackmore and Page because I, too, come from a tradition which holds both theological and scientific truths in compatible tension. I sense, however, that the evangelical community will require further explication. There is a need for creative minds to articulate some kind of synthesis; Blackmore and Page are not theologians. Pragmatically speaking, the average church goer should not have to choose between science and theology, yet regrettably many feel compelled to cast one aside in an effort to embrace the other.

It is the theologians who will have to speak up if the church is to clarify not obfuscate the creation/evolution controversy. Over half of the American public, laments ethologist Richard Dawkins, does not "believe in evolution. Not just any people . . . but powerful people with influence over educational policy."¹¹ Is this a victory for creation science? Hardly. It is a statistic which speaks of ignorance and confusion. Caution is in order; no theological or scientific manipulation has been spared in this on-going debate. Strong voices must continue to present the issues boldly and thoughtfully, lest faith be assaulted by misappropriated biology or falsely delimited by an aggressive theology masquerading as a comprehensive science.

END NOTES

¹Hummel, *The Galileo Connection*, p. 18.

²Ibid., p.18.

³Ibid., p. 250.

⁴Ibid., p. 250.

⁵Geisler and Anderson, *Origin Science*, p. 19.

⁶Ibid., p. 151.

⁷Ibid., p. 151.

⁸Van Till, Young, Menninga, *Science Held Hostage*, p. 167.

⁹Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 171.

¹¹Richard Dawkins, "Put Your Money on Evolution," *New York Book Review*, March 1989.

