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Science in Faith, A Christian Perspective on Teaching Science (Book Review)

John Zwart
Dordt College

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—even the Resurrection—out of Christianity.

During his university years Rendle-Short learned that his father had struggled with the creation-evolution question all his life. His own turning point on that question was meeting A. E. Wilder-Smith in 1974 and reading his book, *Man's Origin, Man's Destiny* (1968). Wilder-Smith maintained that the earth was created in six 24-hour days. Rendle-Short also had discussions with Francis Schaeffer and read some of his books. He liked many of Schaeffer's ideas, but questions his views on creation.

In the last part of the book, Rendle-Short repeats his reasons for rejecting evolutionary theory and adds new ones: (1) It fails to account for intelligence. (2) It is not consistent with the second law of thermodynamics. (3) Evolutionary humanism has failed. He accepts a young earth and a universal flood because: (1) Animals with blood could not have died before the Fall. (2) A universal flood accounts for the fossils. (3) These conclusions are consistent with biblical teaching.

Rendle-Short is absolutely correct in insisting on the necessity of accepting the entire written Word, on Christ's sacrifice, on free grace, on the insufficiency of human works, and on our complete dependence on God. I do not agree with all of his conclusions on evolution and creation, but even if his conclusions on this question were the same as mine, I would still have a fundamental disagreement on how one arrives at such conclusions. My problem is that Rendle-Short and many other Christians assume that we can know a priori how God must have acted. This assumption may be the reason for all four faith struggles

he describes. Two examples—the first from the author and the second from Christians who accept evolution, theistic evolutionists—illustrate how this assumption is used.

First, if in God's plan animals die before, and not because of, man's sin, then it is not for us to reason that "animals could not have died in a good creation." Rendle-Short seems to base his belief that animals did not die before the Fall more on the unreasonableness of such death than on his rather weak biblical argument. We limit God when we decide that pre-Fall death would be unreasonable.

Second, theistic evolutionists also use an a priori assumption about how God must have acted. They claim some ancient fossils are either pre-human or human because these fossils were like human beings: some were buried with flowers, some were cared for by their fellows, some were associated with religious ritual, and so forth. The mistake is not in the claim that the fossils are actually very old, or that artifacts found with the fossils are not what they seem to be. The mistake is assuming that human-like activities and characteristics prove human-ness. The Bible provides only one criterion: to be human is to bear the image of God. We cannot presume to know how God must have acted. We limit God when we claim God would not have created beings with human-like characteristics.

I enjoyed this book and I recommend it because in a non-polemical account the author shows how views on evolution are shaped—to a certain extent—by personal experiences. Its British manner of dealing gently with controversial issues is refreshing.

Science in Faith, A Christian Perspective on Teaching Science, by A. Jones, et al. (Romford: The Christian Schools' Trust, 1998). 142 pp. Reviewed by John Zwart, Professor of Physics, Dordt College.

In a *Time* magazine essay last summer, Stephen Jay Gould wrote that "No scientific theory, including evolution, can pose any threat to religion – for these two great tools of human understanding operate in complementary (not contrary) fashion in their totally separate realms: science as an inquiry about the factual state of the natural world, religion as a search for spiritual meaning and ethical values." This view of science as somehow being religiously neutral is common in the scientific community. Another less common (but still frequently encountered) view claims that science has done away with the need for religion. *Science in Faith* exposes the misconceptions on which these views are based. This book, written in the UK, addresses Christians who teach science to students aged 11-18. Editor and main author Arthur Jones explains that the book was written for the "new independent Christian schools" that have been founded in the UK in response to "perceived secularism in the state system." The book is the "first publication from within this movement to provide a wide ranging defense of Christian

approaches to education."

The main thrust of the book is that science is not a neutral subject but is heavily shaped by worldview. Commonly accepted understandings of the neutrality of science shape not only the practice of science, but also the way textbooks are written for the secular market. Such science is characterized by reductionism, and texts tend to promote a "faith in the idols of *science, technology and economic growth*" (p. 95, emphasis in original). *Science in Faith* seeks to clarify the role of worldview in science, to promote a Christian worldview, and to provide examples for teaching science from a Christian worldview using the themes of creation, fall, and redemption. Chapter one provides an overview of worldview and a Christian approach to science. The second chapter discusses the evolution/creation debate. Chapter three considers a few of the stories of science. The fourth gives three examples that illustrate the teaching of science from a Christian perspective, and chapter five provides an annotated bibliography. Overall, the topics of biology and

chemistry get the most attention.

Science in Faith is a thoroughly researched, well-referenced book. Although written for a UK audience, the themes, critique of government schools, and discussion of what it means to practise science from a Christian perspective are applicable to a broader audience. Items that are peculiar to the UK are few. References include a mix of British, Canadian, and American authors, including many in the Reformed tradition as well as other Christian traditions and members of the scientific establishment.

The first chapter provides a sound overview of the role of worldview in the sciences, particularly in biology and chemistry. It could stand alone as an introductory essay for any student of the natural sciences, not simply for those intending to teach. The references in the annotated bibliography (chapter 5) and in the end-of-chapter notes (over 150 entries in this chapter alone) provide an excellent reading list for those wishing to dig deeper into the subject.

Chapter two, on creation and evolution, has a much narrower focus than Chapter one. As the author puts it, "Christians and churches tend to give no serious attention to the biblical teaching on creation – *and that really does matter*" (p. 57, emphasis in original). The discussion in this chapter promotes one particular point of view on this important debate, and focuses on biological evolution. The author's starting point is that many churches "contain Christians who believe in evolution and others who believe in acts of creation. The former generally accept the objectivity of modern science, and are so convinced that we must accept these theories – such as evolution – that most scientists regard as well established. The latter generally assume that science is not neutral, but is crucially influenced by the secular beliefs and values held by the majority of scientists" (p. 57).

I believe that the book oversimplifies in painting this as an either/or situation. The range of understanding within the Christian community is far more nuanced. Teachers would be better served by a broader discussion of how Christians enter into this debate, but other understandings held by Christian scientists receive scant attention. For example, theistic evolution is mentioned in just a few paragraphs with the critique that "theistic evolutionists usually do not question the secular scientific enterprise" (p. 63). The author's bias is reflected in the annotated bibliography. Both books listed that discuss theistic evolution reject this viewpoint. The discussion in this chapter would have been clearer if the author had provided his working definitions for both evolution and creation at the beginning of the chapter rather than halfway through. He defines a creationist as one who "conclude[s] that, in all

essentials, the created kinds have always been as they are now" (p. 67). I believe this definition is too narrow. Though the author explains why the label "creationist" is not used to include theistic evolutionists ("to avoid confusion," p. 68), the definition also will not allow those who believe in changes within kinds to consider themselves as creationists. This chapter does provide some fine critiques of the way evolution is typically presented, and states that "both [creation and evolution] can and have been enshrined in scientific theories" (p. 68), but it does not present a strong scientific theory of creationism.

Chapter three points out that the "stories of science," such as biographies of scientists, tend to be simplified in a way that makes them appear to be neutral, and so the stories are "taught in an impersonal and seemingly value-free way" (p. 88). The chapter gives two examples, pointing out that science is done both obediently and disobediently and is not separated out from the rest of life. Chapter four, entitled "The Data of Science," puts the scientific enterprise in the context of creation, fall, and redemption. In the context of creation, it emphasizes that we must act as stewards of God's creation, that the creation is part of God's loving provision for us, and that the creation serves to sustain us and enable us to fulfil our cultural mandate. In terms of the fall, misuse and abuse of the creation is discussed, and under redemption, appropriate use of the creation is emphasized. For example, in a discussion of the element calcium, not only is a chemical description given, but calcium's role in our bodies and world is discussed. One mineral form, limestone, is not just considered in terms of industrial use, but also in terms of its role in the environment. Misuse, such as quarrying too much limestone and causing the disruption of an aquifer, is described. I appreciate the modeling of teaching science Christianly. Many books criticize the status quo but do not provide an alternative.

I find this book to be a valuable resource, not only for teachers, but for anyone wanting to see how worldview influences the scientific enterprise and to develop an understanding of science from a Christian worldview. Its examples are drawn mainly from biology and chemistry, so a person interested in physics may want to augment it with a book such as Charles Hummel's *The Galileo Connection* (InterVarsity Press, 1986). Likewise, one interested in gaining a broad over-view of how the Christian scientific community enters the creation/evolution debate will need to go beyond this book. These caveats aside, this is a good book. I am gratified that the Christian Schools' Trust saw fit to make *Science in Faith* its first publication.

ERRATUM: Brian Walsh's article "Regimes of Truth and the Rhetoric of Deceit: Colossians 2 in Postmodern Context," in *Pro Rege*, XXVIII/3 (March 2000) should have included an acknowledgment that the article has also been published in the Australian journal *Interface: A Forum for Theology in the World*, 2.1 (May 1999):23-37.