

FROM EVOLUTION TO CREATION:

A Personal Testimony

Dr. Gary Parker

The following discussion was adapted from radio interviews.

Q. Dr. Parker, I understand that when you started teaching college-level biology you were an enthusiastic evolutionist.

A. Yes, indeed. The idea of evolution was very satisfying to me. It gave me a feeling of being one with the huge, evolving universe continually progressing toward grander things. Evolution was really my religion, a faith commitment and a complete world-and-life view that organized everything else for me, and I got quite emotional when evolution was challenged.

As a religion, evolution answered my questions about God, sin, and salvation. God was unnecessary, or at least did no more than make the particles and processes from which all else mechanistically followed. 'Sin' was only the result of animal instincts that had outlived their usefulness, and salvation involved only personal adjustment, enlightened self-interest, and perhaps one day the benefits of genetic engineering.

With no God to answer to, no God with a purpose for mankind, I saw our destiny in our own hands. Tied in with the idea of inevitable evolutionary progress, this was a truly thrilling idea and the part of evolution I liked best.

Q. Did your faith in evolution affect your classroom teaching?

A. It surely did. In my early years of teaching at both the high school and university levels, I worked hard to convince my students that evolution was true. I even had students crying in class. I thought I was teaching objective science, not religion, but I was very consciously trying to get students to bend their religious beliefs to evolution. In fact, a discussion with high school teachers in a graduate class I was assisting included just that goal: encouraging students to adapt their religious beliefs to the concept of evolution!

Q. I thought you weren't supposed to teach religion in the public school system.

A. Well, maybe you can't teach the Christian religion, but there is no trouble at all in teaching the evolutionary religion. I've done it myself, and I've watched the effects that accepting evolution has on a person's thought and life. Of course, I once thought that effect was good, 'liberating the mind from the shackles of revealed religion,' and making a person's own opinions supreme.

Q. Since you found evolution such a satisfying religion and enjoyed teaching it to others, what made you change your mind?

A. I've often marveled that God could change anyone as content as I was, especially with so many religious people (including two members of the Bible Department where I once taught!) actually supporting evolution over creation. But through a Bible study group my wife and I joined at first for purely social reasons, God slowly convinced me to lean not on my own opinions or those of other human authorities, but in all my ways to acknowledge Him and to let Him direct my paths. It is a blessed experience that gives me an absolute reference point and a truly mind-stretching eternal perspective.

Q. Did your conversion to Christianity then make you a creationist?

A. No, at least not at first. Like so many before and since, I simply combined my new-found Christian religion with the 'facts' of science and became a theistic evolutionist and then a progressive creationist. I thought the Bible told me who created and that evolution told me how.

But then I began to find scientific problems with the evolutionary part, and theological problems with the theistic part. I still have a good many friends who believe in theistic evolution or progressive creation, but I finally had to give it up.

Q. What theological problems did you find with evolution?

A. Perhaps the key point centered around the Bible's phrase, 'very good.' At the end of each creation period (except the second) God said that His creation was good. At the end of the sixth period He said that all His works of creation were very good.

Now all the theistic evolutionists and progressive creationists I know, including myself at one time, try to fit 'geologic time' and the fossil record into the creation periods. But regardless of how old they are, the fossils show the same things that we have on Earth today—famine, disease, disaster, extinction, floods, earthquakes, etc. So if fossils represent stages in God's creative activity, why should Christians oppose disease and famine or help preserve and endangered species? If the fossils were formed during the creation week, then all these things would be very good.

When I first believed in evolution, I had sort of a romantic idea about evolution as 'unending progress.' But in the closing paragraphs of the Origin of Species, Darwin explained that evolution, the 'production of higher animals,' was caused by 'the war of nature, from famine and death.' Does 'the war of nature, from famine and

death' sound like the means God would have used to create a world all very good?

In # Ge 3 Ro 8, and many other passages, we learn that such negative features were not part of the world that God created, but entered only *after* Adam's sin. By ignoring this point, either intentionally or unintentionally, theistic evolutionist and progressive creationists come into conflict with the whole pattern of Scripture: the great themes of Creation, the Fall, and Redemption, how God made the world perfect and beautiful; how man's sin brought a curse upon the world; and how Christ came to save us from our sins and to restore all things.

Q. With the Scriptures so plain, are there still many Christians who believe in theistic evolution or progressive creation?

A. Yes, there are. Of course, I can't speak for all of them, but I can tell you the problems I had to overcome before I could give up theistic evolution myself. First, I really hate to argue or take sides. When I was a theistic evolutionist I didn't have to argue with anybody. I just chimed in smiling at the end of an argument with something like, 'Well, the important thing is to remember that God did it.'

Then there is the matter of intellectual pride. Creationists are often looked down upon as ignorant throw-backs to the nineteenth century or worse, and I began to think of all the academic honors I had, and to tell you the truth, I didn't want to face that academic ridicule.

Finally, I, like many Christians, was honestly confused about the Biblical issues. I first became a creationist while teaching at a Christian college. Believe it or not, I got into big trouble with the Bible department. As soon as I started teaching creation instead of evolution, the Bible department people challenged me to a debate. The Bible department defended evolution, and two other scientists and I defended creation!

That debate pointed out how religious evolution really is, and the willingness of Christian leaders to speak out in favor of evolution makes it harder for the average Christian to take a strong stand on creation. To tell you the truth, I don't think I would have had the courage, especially as a professor of biology, to give up evolution or theistic evolution without finding out that the bulk of scientific data actually argues against evolution.

Q. In that sense, then, it was really the scientific data that completed your conversion from evolution, through theistic evolution, and progressive creation to Biblical, scientific creation.

A. Yes, it was. At first I was embarrassed to be both a creationist and a science professor, and I wasn't really sure what to do with the so-called 'mountains of evidence' for evolution.

A colleague in biology, Allen Davis, introduced me to Morris and Whitcomb's famous book, *The Genesis Flood*. At first I reacted strongly against the book, using all the evolutionist arguments I knew so well. But at that crucial time, the Lord provided me with a splendid Science Faculty Fellowship award from the National Science Foundation, so I resolved to pursue doctoral studies in biology, while also adding a cognate in geology to check out some of the creationist arguments first hand. To my surprise, and eventually to my delight, just about every course I took was full of more and more problems in evolution, and more and more support for the basic points of Biblical creation outlined in scientific creationist writings.

Q. Can you give us some examples?

A. Yes, indeed. One of the tensest moments for me came when we started discussing uranium-lead and other radiometric methods for estimating the age of the Earth. I just knew all the creationists' arguments would be shot down and crumbled, but just the opposite happened.

In one graduate class, the professor told us we didn't have to memorize the dates of the geologic systems since they were far too uncertain and conflicting. Then in geophysics we went over all of the assumptions that go into radiometric dating. Afterwards, the professor said something like this, 'If a fundamentalist ever got hold of this stuff, he would make havoc out of the radiometric dating system. So, keep the faith.' That's what he told us, 'keep the faith.' If it was a matter of keeping faith, I now had another faith I preferred to keep.

Q. Are there other examples like that?

A. Lots of them. One concerns the word paraconformity. In *The Genesis Flood*, I had heard that paraconformity was a word used by evolutionary geologists for fossil systems out of order, but with no evidence of erosion or overthrusting. My heart really started pounding when paraconformities and other unconformities came up in geology class. What did the professor say? Essentially the same thing as Morris and Whitcomb. He presented paraconformities as a real mystery and something very difficult to explain in evolutionary or uniformitarian terms. We even had a field trip to study paraconformities that emphasized the point.

So again, instead of challenging my creationist ideas, all the geology I was learning in graduate school was supporting it. I even discussed a creationist interpretation

of paraconformities with the professor, and I finally found myself discussing further evidence of creation with fellow graduate students and others.

Q. What do you mean by 'evidence of creation?'

A. All of us can recognize objects that man has created, whether paintings, sculptures, or just a Coke bottle. Because the pattern of relationships in those objects is contrary to relationships that time, chance, and natural physical processes would produce, we know an outside creative agent was involved. I began to see the same thing in a study of living things, especially in the area of my major interest, molecular biology.

All living things depend upon a working relationship between inheritable nucleic acid molecules, like DNA, and proteins, the chief structural and functional molecules. To make proteins, living creatures use a sequence of DNA bases to line up a sequence of amino acid R-groups. But the normal reactions between DNA and proteins are the 'wrong' ones, and act with time and chance to disrupt living systems. Just as phosphorus, glass, and copper will work together in a television set only if properly arranged by human engineers, so DNA and protein will work in productive harmony only if properly ordered by an outside creative agent.

I presented the biochemical details of this DNA-protein argument to a group of graduate students and professors, including my professor of molecular biology. At the end of the talk, my professor offered no criticism of the biology or biochemistry I had presented. She just said that she didn't believe it because she didn't believe there was anything out there to create life. But if your faith permits belief in a Creator, you can see the evidence of creation in the things that have been made (as the Apostle Paul implies in # Ro 1:18-20).

Q. Has creation influenced your work as a scientist and as a teacher?

A. Yes, in many positive ways. Science is based on the assumption of an understandable orderliness in the operation of nature, and the Scriptures guarantee both that order and man's ability to understand it, infusing science with enthusiastic hope and richer meaning. Furthermore, creationists are able to recognize both spontaneous and created (i.e., internally and externally determined) patterns of order, and this opened my eyes to a far greater range of theories and models to deal with the data from such diverse fields as physiology, systematics, and ecology.

Creation has certainly made the classroom a much more exciting place, both for me and my students. So much of biology touches on key ethical issues, such as

genetic engineering, the ecological crisis, reproduction, and development, and now I have so much more to offer than just my own opinions and the severely limited perspectives of other human authorities. And, of course, on the basic matter of origins, my students and I have the freedom to discuss both evolution and creation, a freedom tragically denied to most young people in our schools today.

Creationists have to pay the price of academic ridicule and occasional personal attacks, but these are nothing compared to the riches of knowledge and wisdom that are ours through Christ! I only wish that more scientists, science teachers, and science students could share the joy and challenge of looking at God's world through God's eyes.