

"Great are the works of the Lord; They are studied by all who delight in them."
—Psalm 111:2

Reasons To Believe Rochester, N.Y. Network



Middle Falls, Letchworth State Park, N.Y.

June-July 2009 Newsletter



REASONS TO BELIEVE

The mission of Reasons To Believe is to show that science and faith are, and always will be, allies, not enemies. Our goal is to bring that life-changing truth to everybody who needs to know, both believers and nonbelievers.

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“They Will Know We Are Christians...”

by Jim Reverts

John 17:23, from the **Bible in Basic English**:

"I in them, and you in me, so that they may be made completely one, and so that it may become clear to all men that you have sent me and that they are loved by you as I am loved by you."

Creationists are not looked upon by the scientific community as a substantial threat, often dismissed much like a used napkin at a hotdog stand. On a good day, animosity is at a minimum, and rational, dispassionate conversation will focus upon the data and the strength of the various interpretations. On a lousy day, shouting goes online and undercuts all rational discussion.

Unfortunately, the same critique can be leveled at creationists of differing perspectives. It seems we can't get away from our humanness. Even though we are "in the Christian camp," there are plenty of examples where we take each other's positions and names "in vain."

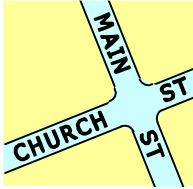
I propose that, even where Old Earth Creationists disagree with Young Earth Creationists, and where these part company with Theistic Evolutionists and those who hold to the Framework Hypothesis, there is a deeper reality we must continually be cognizant of for Christ's sake: our collective witness to the world. While "polemics" will always be with us, it seems that Jesus' commands and desires for his body go beyond getting it right and

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Lessons from Galileo

by David Peterson

INTERSECTIONS



Last time, we looked at the fact that Bible “stories” are really history, and can hold their own when put side by side with our secular studies of history. Sometimes there will be apparent conflicts, like that of Darius the Mede, that can’t be resolved with the current state of knowledge; but we can rest on our faith that there *is* a resolution, even if it is never found. In apologetics, we would like to be able to answer every challenge with a conclusive response, but that is not how truth works! No historical source (secular or scriptural) is complete, so there is always room for some missing fact that would resolve the problem. In addition, some apparent contradictions come from misinterpretation either of scripture or of other data. We need to be ready to change our interpretations when we find a contradiction with *clear* facts (not just theories) from other sources. Often we must recognize several possible ways to take a passage, and hold to one tentatively rather than dogmatically until there is more evidence.

The same thing can happen with science: Since our knowledge is incomplete, we must be humble in our insistence on what we “know” about the world. Even the Bible makes no claim to tell us everything we’d like to know, and it is easy to misinterpret it based on what we think we “know”. For a case study in how an apparent contradiction with scientific truth can arise and be dissipated, let’s look at the story of Galileo.

Before Copernicus, most of the world believed “scientifically” that the sun goes around the earth. Why? It was obvious – you can see the sun go around, and you can’t feel

the earth moving (except in California). From this common-sense idea, early scientists built astronomical theories with which they could predict eclipses, the movement of planets, etc., giving further credence to it. (They had to make their model of the solar system more and more complicated, with circles around circles around circles, in order to accurately predict where a planet would be seen – but it *did* work.)

Living in that culture, readers of the Bible would naturally interpret passages about a moving sun and a stable earth in the obvious way, taking it to mean just what they already believed anyway:

He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved. Psalm 104:5

It [the sun] rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat. Psalm 19:6

The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. Ecclesiastes 1:5

In reading passages like these, Christians of the time would never have reason to consider that there could be alternative interpretations! As we now know, theirs was not the only, or the best, interpretation; but it took new scientific evidence to force a re-thinking. At first (in the 1500’s, the time of Luther and Calvin) the evidence for the new Copernican theory was slight; in fact, until Kepler’s discovery in 1605 of elliptical orbits, the new theory made *less* accurate predictions than the old theory! But things changed in 1609 when Galileo’s telescope revealed the similarity

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Galileo *(Continued from page 3)*

of other planets to the earth, the phases of Venus (showing that it went behind the sun), and the moons of Jupiter (showing that orbits around planets were possible). A few scientists became convinced by such arguments that the sun must be at the center. And in response to them, theologians turned verses like those above into proof-texts, declaring that the Bible *teaches* that the sun moves.

Thus the “church” (Catholic, and to some extent Protestant) unwittingly took the side of “old science” against “new science”, putting itself in the midst of a controversy where it didn’t belong, and creating a conflict between scripture and science that never had to exist. Within a century after Galileo, the scientific evidence became so strong that Christians found themselves in the position of insisting the Bible taught something that was *clearly* false. They eventually recognized that the passages supposed to teach geocentrism are not intended to do so, and can be properly interpreted in ways that agree with modern science. Were they compromising with science, letting science win against scripture and tell us what to believe? No; they were just doing (belatedly) what we always have to do in interpreting scripture: identify the possible meanings of a passage, compare these with other scriptures and external data, and choose the best interpretation to fit everything we know.

We now recognize that saying the sun rises does not mean that it actually moves; even a modern astronomer can say that, when it is appropriate to use everyday language. And the Bible is not written in modern technical English! If only Christians had realized that sooner.

How can we avoid becoming a source of “anti-apologetics”, providing ammunition for unbelievers to use *against* scripture, instead of supporting our faith?

First, we must be careful to distinguish

between scripture itself and our interpretation of it, and be aware of our biases. Like scientists, as humans we tend to interpret according to what we believe, rather than the other way around. This should keep us from making absolute statements about scientific issues, pro or con, that might tie us to an idea that may later be proved worthless, and which the Bible doesn’t really teach in the first place.

Second, we can take both scripture and other data seriously, looking carefully for valid ways to fit it all together, yet being careful not to jump at answers that mishandle one or the other. Then we can offer *possible* explanations of apparent discrepancies, or point out ways in which scientific facts (*if* they turn out to be true) will support faith, always remaining humble as we do so. The *correct* interpretation of scripture will never conflict with the *truth* about nature, but we may not know either as well as we think!

Thus the same principles we saw for handling historical conflicts apply also to science:

- **Recognize** the limitations of the data, and be willing to say “we don’t know enough yet”.
- **Be humble** about our interpretations of both scripture and science, recognizing possible alternatives.
- **Propose** harmonizations tentatively, as a *support* (not *proof*) for faith.
- **Be open** to correction by new data, which may disprove our most cherished assumptions, or suggest ideas we’d never imagined.

Dave teaches math at Monroe Community College in Rochester and is an elder and teacher in his church. This article was originally written for the church newsletter.

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For more information about Galileo:

Dava Sobel, *Galileo’s Daughter*, Penguin Books, 1999.

*Galileo’s Battle for the Heavens*

Resources from the NOVA program on PBS:

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/galileo/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/galileo/)





## “Can’t We All Just Get Along?”

by Virginia Peterson

[This article was originally written for my church newsletter. It has been revised and expanded here in order to talk more explicitly about disagreements involving creation issues.]

Conflicts between Christians are sometimes common and unfortunate occurrences, and can be counterproductive to the cause of Christ. Here are a couple of essays from the internet that give some good food for thought for how to act when we disagree with one another.

Dr. Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, has on his website a paper entitled **A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity**.<sup>1</sup> This essay talks about how theological issues can be divided into three categories, and thus helps us decide which are worth spending our time on, either promoting or disputing.


The first category of theological issues is the “essentials” or non-negotiables of our beliefs, which are those doctrines such as the virgin birth and incarnation of Christ, his atoning death, resurrection and return, and the inerrancy and authority of the Bible – what separates us from other religions. The second tier of doctrines is those that typically separate denominations: for example, the meaning and mode of baptism and communion, church government and the role of women. In the third category are beliefs that could be disputed among Christians in the same church, such as eschatology, social action, schooling choices, science, or music and worship styles.

As an example of how these categories could be wrongly used, liberal churches could denigrate the importance of first category beliefs in favor of stressing social justice activities. Or on the other hand, a church group could spend too much time on a third category issue such as music, to the detriment of evangelism or other outreach.

I first heard about this paper on a Creation Update broadcast<sup>2</sup> in 2005. The interviewee was Dr. Ted Cabal, Professor of Christian Philosophy at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Cabal, Dr. Hugh Ross, Dr. Fuz Rana, and Krista Bontrager spent some time talking about the age of the earth controversy, and how this hierarchy of issues applies to it.

Many times, particularly by those of the young earth persuasion, creation issues are taken as fundamental and crucial to the doctrinal orthodoxy of a church or organization. For example, a church or college may choose to make membership or a teaching position dependent on a person holding to a young-earth interpretation of Genesis. Obviously, to them this issue falls into the second or even first category of issues. Is that where it belongs? Or are creation issues in the third category, with other similar topics that can be discussed

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## Get Along *(Continued from page 5)*

together in a loving manner for mutual edification, challenge, and growth?

To help us in such a discussion, a second, related paper of interest is called **Polemic Theology: How to Deal with Those Who Differ from Us**,<sup>3</sup> by Dr. Roger R. Nicole, Emeritus Professor of Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. Although the word “polemics” can be defined as “the branch of Christian theology devoted to the refutation of errors”, the author points out that the principles he advocates can equally be applied to many areas of our lives where we find ourselves in disagreement with another, such as politics, business, or the family.

Dr. Nicole lists and develops three questions to consider:

- 1) What do I **owe** to the person who differs from me?
- 2) What can I **learn** from those who differ from me?
- 3) How can I **cope** with those who differ from me?

What we **owe** the person who differs with us is simply “love”. We should treat that person as we want to be treated. That includes striving to thoroughly understand that person’s position, and learning what it is possible to know of why they’re reacting to us the way they are.

**Learning** from those who differ starts with our own demeanor of being gracious and courteous to them, and moves to the inner attitudes we should have while listening. We should consider “Could I be wrong?”, “Have I considered all the facts?”, and “Am I communicating clearly what I mean?”.

Lastly, **coping** with those who differ requires that we be sure we are handling Scripture correctly, both in what we assert boldly, and in where we realize the limits of our arguments. We must also use correct reasoning and argumentation, as well as considering the merits of the objections to our view. As well, we may appeal to history and tradition when it is clearly biblical.

In the end, the basic point is, are we disputing an issue with someone for our own satisfaction and glory, or from a sincere desire to learn and to help them? :

“A Christian who carries on discussions with those who differ should not be subject to the psychology of the boxing ring where the contestants are bent upon demolishing one another. Rather ‘The Lord’s servant must not quarrel: instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses . . . ‘ (2 Tim. 2:24-26). “

Both of these papers give us ideas and tools to help in our interactions with people who may disagree with us. It can be hard to keep a humble attitude when faced with attacks or misunderstandings, but we need to, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in order to learn about our opponents’ views and to properly respond in a way that leads to lessening of the conflict

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## Upcoming Local Meetings

Join us at 7 p.m. on the following dates:

**Sunday, June 28**, New Hope Free Methodist Church, 62 N. Union St., Rochester, 14617  
 “Noah’s Flood: Global or Local?”

**Sunday, July 26**, New Hope Free Methodist Church, 62 N. Union St., Rochester, 14617  
 "Origins Science discovers Biblical Truth"

**Sunday, August 23**, tentative location New Hope Free Methodist Church  
 "Dual Revelation" DVD — major evangelical views on creation side-by-side



### **Love** *(Continued from page 2)*

move to the level where forbearance (Eph 4:1-6), honoring one another (Rom 12:3,10) and mutual submission (Eph 5:21) are fundamental to all relationships.

Yes, there will always be disagreements and differing perspectives; after all — what have the Calvinist and Arminian polemics taught us but we see the same things differently? So, because of this, our focus should remain OUTWARD — that is, on demonstrating that which draws people to Jesus in every sector of society: love. Since knowledge puffs up, and love edifies (1 Cor. 8:1), love should be our primary mode of operation. We must seek ways to love our brothers such that it testifies to the world that Jesus is in fact the One sent by God.

Jesus, I believe, would have us move in to our neighborhoods and live out the love He has put in our hearts. And since Jesus commanded us to “Love the Lord God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength...” (Matt. 22:37) as he did to love our neighbors, let us take up the gospel truth that Jesus is "Creator, Redeemer, and Friend" in the spirit of conciliatory brotherhood — remembering that the nonverbal witness of respect and unity in the midst of our differences is far more moving to a fractured world.



### **Get Along** *(Continued from page 6)*

#### **Notes:**

1. <[www.albertmohler.com/commentary\\_read.php?cdate=2004-05-20](http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2004-05-20)>

2. broadcast of June 2, 2005, “Age of the Earth: Core Christian Doctrine?”  
 <[www.reasons.org/resources/multimedia/rtbradio/archives\\_creation\\_update/200501-06archives.shtm](http://www.reasons.org/resources/multimedia/rtbradio/archives_creation_update/200501-06archives.shtm)> (not currently available—see related paper at <[tinyurl.com/nlhnac](http://tinyurl.com/nlhnac)>)

3. <[wwwFOUNDERS.org/FJ33/article3.html](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/FJ33/article3.html)>



## RTB Resource News

### Good Science, Good Faith

by Krista Bontrager,  
2009.

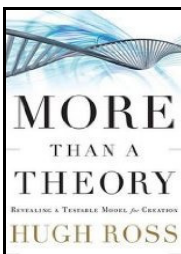
<[www.reasons.org/  
learning/reasons-  
academy](http://www.reasons.org/learning/reasons-academy)>



This online Reasons Academy course for high schoolers is now available in print form as curriculum. The year-long program is designed to prepare high school students to confront key questions related to the interface between science and Scripture that they will encounter in their university studies and beyond.

### More than a Theory: Revealing a Testable Model for Creation

by Dr. Hugh Ross, Baker Books,  
2009.

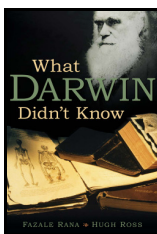


With this year marking the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of Charles Darwin, and the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of **On the Origin of Species**, there will be many Darwin celebrations throughout the year, as well as continuing attacks on Christians from the "New Atheists". In this book, Dr. Ross offers a testable creation model, discusses what is good science, responds to the atheists' challenges, and offers Christians the knowledge they need to defend the God of the Bible as Creator.

### What Darwin Didn't Know

by Dr. Fazale Rana and  
Dr. Hugh Ross, 2009.

This booklet appears on the occasion of Darwin's 200th birthday and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Origin of Species*. The focus is on the scientific discoveries since Darwin's time that throw doubt on the theory of evolution.



### Who's Afraid of the Multiverse?

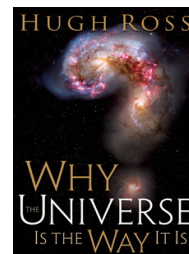
by Dr. Jeff Zweerink, 2008.



Do other worlds exist beyond the observable universe? If we do live in what scientists call a multiverse, doesn't this rule out the necessity of a Creator? In this booklet, astrophysicist Jeff Zweerink tackles these questions and many more as he explains this increasingly popular view of the universe. This booklet seeks to demystify the multiverse so that Christians can address skeptics' concerns with gentleness and respect, and without fear.

### Why the Universe is the Way it is

by Dr. Hugh Ross, Baker Books,  
2008.



With the Bible in one hand and the latest scientific findings in the other, Dr. Ross tackles many of our most pressing cosmic "whys". Questions such as, If God made the universe, why:

- \* is it so vast?
- \* wait to bring humans onto the scene?
- \* allow decay and death to be part of it?
- \* let one man and one woman ruin it for every one?
- \* should I believe my life has any real meaning?
- \* should I get excited about anything beyond what I can see?

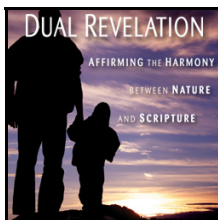
The same God who created the universe gave humans the intellect and curiosity to explore it. Dr. Ross leads the exploration by showing how cutting-edge research and key biblical principles agree. This book is not highly technical and is suitable for almost anyone.

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**RTB** (Continued from page 8)

**Dual Revelation: God's Word, God's World**

<[www.dualrevelation.com](http://www.dualrevelation.com)>



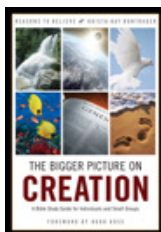
This 60 minute docudrama discusses the harmony between God's works in nature and His words in the Bible, using both provocative drama and input from knowledgeable scholars.

**News!** This film has just won an award.



**The Bigger Picture on Creation**

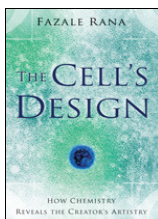
by Krista Bontrager, Reasons To Believe, 2008.  
<[www.readthebiggerpicture.com](http://www.readthebiggerpicture.com)>



This is a seven lesson study guide on Genesis One for individuals or groups. Available for download are flyers, posters, notes for the DVD videos, and a podcast. The eight episodes of the podcast feature interviews with the person appearing on the DVD segment for each lesson, and deal with questions that are likely to come up during the study.

**The Cell's Design: How Chemistry Reveals the Creator's Artistry**

by Dr. Fazale Rana, Baker Books, 2008.  
<[www.cellsdesign.com](http://www.cellsdesign.com)>



Explore the magnificent design of the "lowly" cell, and the startling molecular features that argue for a supernatural agent responsible for life..

**All these resources are available through the Reasons To Believe store at:**  
<[store.reasons.org](http://store.reasons.org)>

**Podcasts**

Listener contributions are invited for the question-and-answer podcast called "**I didn't know that**". Questions may be submitted at the email address: <[ask@reasons.org](mailto:ask@reasons.org)>.



**Science News Flash** covers headline-making science news, as well as significant discoveries that didn't make the news. Ken Samples' podcast is entitled **Straight Thinking**, dealing with philosophical and theological issues. A new podcast by Ken is now available on the book **Without a Doubt**.



These podcasts, as well as those for the books mentioned above, are all available on a single page on the new RTB website:

<[www.reasons.org/resources/radio-broadcasts-and-podcasts](http://www.reasons.org/resources/radio-broadcasts-and-podcasts)>



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