

# Are **Science** and *Religion* *Compatible?*

Should God be divorced from science? or is God the author of science?

by Ariel A. Roth

During a meeting of the Geological Society of America, I heard a number of scientists express concern about the impact of creationism. At one of the larger sessions a speaker warned that those attending "should not let science fall to the fraud of creationists." Another characterized biblical catastrophism - which makes the Genesis Flood an important part of earth history - as "dishonest" and "nasty." And someone else called creation science an "erroneous pseudoscience."(1)

What had stimulated these reactions was a recent Gallup Poll of adults in the United States. This poll indicated that most people don't believe what science proclaims about human origins. Only 9 percent believe the scientific model that human beings evolved over millions of years without the involvement of any God. Conversely, 44 percent believe that God created human beings within the past ten thousand years, and 38 percent believe that God guided in the development of man over millions of years. These results are essentially the same as those of five previous polls asking the same questions(2). Most people find it difficult to believe that we're here by accident and that life has no meaning or purpose.

## **Many scientists believe**

Just what do scientists believe about God? Two studies published in the prestigious journal *Nature* appear to be reliable(3). One thousand scientists, randomly selected from the long listing in *American Men and Women of Science*, were queried about their belief in God. The questionnaire defined God very narrowly; to be considered believers in God the respondents had to agree to the

statement: "I believe in a God in intellectual and affective communication with humankind; i.e., a God to whom one may pray in expectation of receiving an answer. By 'answer' I mean more than the subjective psychological effect of prayer."

About 40 percent of those surveyed said they believed in the kind of God described above; 45 percent did not, and 15 percent said they didn't know. Interestingly, this 1996 survey was a repeat of an identical one taken 80 years earlier with just about the same results.

Can a scientist believe that God created the world in six days, as described in the Bible? Yes. A recent publication entitled *In Six Days: Why 50 Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation* (4), compiles the comments of 50 scientists, all with degrees at the doctoral level, as to why they believe the biblical account of Creation. So, many more scientists believe in God than one would suspect from what one reads in science textbooks, articles, and the public media.

And there is an abundance of data that support their beliefs, that suggest there is a God who designed the natural world we see about us. It all seems way too precise and way too complicated to have arisen on its own. Recent discoveries make the case even more compelling. Examples include: (1) The precise value of many physical constants necessary for the existence of our universe(5). (2) The very complicated nature of even the simplest microbe(6). (3) The interdependence of the numerous complexities found in advanced organisms such as the elaborate relationship of the eye to the brain (7). Science that excludes the concept of a designer God stands mute when trying to explain adequately the origin of these marvelous things.

## Science's founders

Chemistry students very soon learn about Boyle's Law, which delineates the inverse relationship between the volume and pressure of a gas. That law and

other important principles were discovered centuries ago by Robert Boyle, who has often been called the "father of chemistry." This pioneer of modern science wrote extensively about both science and the Bible. He saw an "absolute harmony" between the two(8). He believed that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the world.

Boyle is typical of the pioneers of science who, by emphasizing observation and experimentation, helped extricate this discipline from the confusion of the Middle Ages. Kepler, Galileo, Newton, Pascal, and Linnaeus are well-known examples. Few denied God's existence. Most were deeply committed religious thinkers who believed the Bible and saw no conflict whatsoever between their religion and their scientific discoveries. They felt they were discovering the principles and laws that God had created.

In fact, an impressive number of leading scholars support the concept that modern science developed in the Western world *because of its Judeo-Christian background*. (9) In other words, instead of science and the Bible being worlds apart, science owes its very origin to the philosophy of the Bible.

The argument is that the Bible speaks of a God who is consistent and reasonable and who created the cause-and-effect relationships that scientists observe in nature. Although both India and China existed long enough to allow for the development of scientific thought and understanding, science did not develop in those countries because they believed in gods who were capricious and unpredictable. Consequently, their worldview precluded them from discovering the law and order that lies at the foundation of modern science.

While it is difficult to unequivocally affirm this broadly accepted concept, the very fact that it exists suggests a close relationship between the God of the Bible and science.

Some exclude God

Many scientists want to deal only with what they can observe in nature. This is understandable since the study of nature is their specialty. In doing this, however, they often exclude God even though there is compelling evidence for God in the precision and complexities science has discovered.

Some scientists even define science as excluding God. In so doing, they compromise science's claim to find truth. Science cannot find God as long as it pretends there is no God. It would seem preferable for science to return to the broader view of the pioneers of modern science - the view that included God. Science made its greatest philosophical error when it rejected God and tried to explain everything within a limited, naturalistic (mechanistic) perspective.

Can a Bible-believing person be a scientist? Some scientists suggest that religious people cannot interpret nature correctly because of their bias. Let's recognize that it is possible to evaluate truth in nature in spite of our biases. One can legitimately ask, though, if scientists who reject belief in God could find the truth about Him if He truly does exist.

Finally, if you say that a religious person cannot be a scientist, you are going to have to eliminate the 40 percent of scientists who believe God answers their prayers, as well as most of the pioneers of modern science. Isaac Newton, who very much believed the Bible and whom many consider to be the greatest scientist of all time, would not qualify as a scientist! A Bible believer can be a scientist searching for explanations about nature.

So, let the data of nature speak openly for itself - including the evidence that there is a God. In my opinion, this would be a more truly scientific approach.

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- (1) For more details see Ariel A. Roth, "Where Has the Science Gone?" *Origins* 10 (1983): 48,49.
- (2) <http://www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr01305.asp>>.
- (3) E.J. Larson, L. Witham, "Scientists Are Still Keeping the Faith," *Nature* 386 (1977): 435,436.
- (4) J. F. Ashton, ed. *In Six Days: Why 50 Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation* (Sydney, London: New Holland Publishers [Australia] Pty. Ltd., 1999).
- (5) For a good review see D. L. Overman, *A Case Against Accident and Self-Organization* (Lanham, Md.; Boulder, Colo.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1997), 103-175.
- (6) See Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1998), 63-79.
- (7) See *ibid.*, 94-129.
- (8) D. L. Woodall, "The Relationship Between Science and Scripture in the Thought of Robert Boyle," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 49 (1997): 32-39.
- (9) These include A. N. Whitehead, R. G. Collingwood, R. Hookas, S. L. Jacki, etc. For 12 references see Roth, , *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture*, p. 58, note 4.