

The Religion of Science: A Timely Excerpt on a Global Frontier

by Ralph D. Winter

Editor's Note: This an excerpt from part 2 of Ralph Winter's "Eleven Frontiers of Perspective (7-11)," printed in IJFM 20:4 Winter 2003.

The largest remaining frontier is, ironically, the result in part of the very intellectual vigor of the Christian faith. This frontier is the science community, *which is now as global as the Christian faith itself*. It is a faith. All effective scientific endeavors are dependent totally, not on a "method," but *a faith in the existence of order in nature*. This is a uniquely Biblical insight. It came with the Christian faith.

However, it is as though the Book of Creation and the Book of Scripture have each spawned a global faith community, and that to most of the adherents of either faith, the "other" is clearly—if not fearfully and harmfully—invalid. Millions of earnest souls around the world have been challenged and awed by each of the two books, and have been captured by profound belief in them. They are often so confident of the glory they have found that anyone from the "other" side who questions the glory they perceive is automatically assumed to be blind and or faithless.

This is not to say that a large minority of each of these two faith communities does not partake in various ways of the cultural tradition of the other. There are, for example, many scientists who are church goers. They may have nowhere near as profound a faith as they do in the truth and beauty of their scientific experience. There are also many Bible believing people who are happy with science and technology but who do not regard it as a holy experience comparable to what they find in the Word or at church.

More troublesome by far are those zealots on each side who actually seek to tear down faith on the other side. We think of people like Carl Sagan or Richard Dawkins, for whom confidence in the Bible is ridiculous, or some of the zealous believers in the Book of Scripture who actually twist scripture in their attempt to dethrone science. I refer to a quoting of Psalm 19:3 as saying (speaking of the handiwork of God in creation) that there is no speech or language where their voice is [not] heard. By leaving out the negative the Bible is on their side against science!

Obviously, the Book of Scripture extensively attributes a revelation of God's glory to what we call *general revelation*.

Paul, in Romans chapter one, seems to present the ultimate summary of the power of *general revelation*. He goes on to imply in chapter two that there are gentiles that "do by nature the things the law requires" without ever seeing or hearing from Scripture.

Whether or not we can readily make these statements congruent with our popular formulas for getting to heaven, these gropings of faith are extremely significant in missions in regard to foundations on which to build. Various religious faiths contain ambiguous mixtures of truth and nonsense. Yet we do not do well to ignore anything which is true, no matter where we find it.

In fact, perhaps the most classic of all missionary mistakes is the perspective with which Abraham dealt with Abimelech. Why, Abimelech asked, did Abraham tell a lie and try to deceive him? Because, Abraham said, "I said to myself there is no fear of God in this place." Instead of expecting to find that the Holy Spirit is in contact with all peoples, and building upon that foundation to the extent he might, Abraham presumed that all virtue was on his side and that Abimelech could not have possessed any spiritual foundation to build upon.

Thus, in crossing this frontier into the realm of science we must not ignore the presence of the Holy in the very world of science. If we can be people whose devotion to the living God is richly nourished by both books we can respect the genuine beginnings of belief in the lives of many if not most scientists, we can rejoice in the faith they have, which will give them reason to hear of another kind of faith.

But it is not as simple as that. Zealots on both sides have erected high walls to dichotomize and polarize the two Books. Simple, honest inquiry across this frontier is thus as uncommon as it is unusual.

On the other hand, it would seem to be, inherently, the easiest of all frontiers to cross, as well as having the greatest potential in terms of communicating with the entire world. Just think—no translation needed! We need ourselves to love His Word and His Works, and we need to share the manifest glory from both of those books if we wish to cross this huge, gargantuan frontier. **IJFM**

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