

Introduction

“Evangelicals and Science!” The very thought will make many today smile at the sheer incongruity of it. After all evangelicals were the cause of the Scopes trial and the whole round of “monkey” legislation in almost every state in the United States. Many readers, like me, will remember that scene in *Inherit the Wind* where the local Tennessee fundamentalists were singing “The Old Time Religion.” This has etched the perception that evangelicals are inherently hostile to science in the minds of many for the last half-century. Now there is some truth in this portrayal and I have been on the receiving end from latter day exemplars, who regard me as a heretic and compromiser, but the evangelicals have had a long and rich interaction with science, sometimes glorious and sometimes ignominious, and have produced some fine scientists. I prefer the tradition of Adam Sedgwick, in whose footsteps I have walked both literally and metaphorically (see Chapter 4).

The purpose of this volume is first to give an overview of the way evangelicals have interacted with science since the start of the Evangelical Revival in the 1730s and this accounts for Chapters 3 through to 6. Second, it aims to analyze how the evangelicals of today interact with science and to put the controversy of creationism into its proper context and to avoid simplistic dismissals. Third, it aims to understand how and why evangelicals interact with science because of their various theologies. Fourth, it takes the two ethical issues of the environment and bioethics to see how evangelicals interact with aspects of science in the political arena.

The whole aspect of evangelicals and science is frequently misunderstood as it is assumed that evangelicals are entirely literalist and thus this

book gives a wider perspective on that from both a historical and contemporary perspective. Of particular importance is that I demonstrate that with minor exceptions, and I mean minor, most evangelicals did not oppose science until the early twentieth century. It does, of course, explode the myth that there was virtual warfare between geology and Genesis in the early nineteenth century as I do over Sedgwick and others in Chapter 4. This continues my contribution to the *Geological Society of London Special Publication "Myth and Geology"* (Roberts, 2007), where I challenge the received account that the church was literalist over Genesis until 1800 and thus had serious problems over geological time. This myth renders many historical understandings of both evangelicals and science (and also Christianity in general and science) to be basically wrong, whether by evangelical creationists or secularists.

I also emphasize that the rise of creationism in the twentieth century is not a throwback to the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, but rather an innovation caused by the synergism between the early twentieth-century fundamentalism, which had a strong anti-intellectual component, and new ideas of "Flood Geology" coming from McCready Price and the Seventh Day Adventists. Despite Numbers' excellent work *The Creationists*, many still hold to this.

Consequently the historical section is almost teleological in that it does not discuss every aspect of evangelicals and science from 1730 until now, but rather focuses on that which is important today, that is creationism. I can hear criticisms that I have left out this or that and that I should have given more space to miracles and evangelical scientists working in physics, chemistry, or astronomy. Of course, they are important, but when faced with a limitation on space, an author has either to deal with everything in extreme brevity or some things in depth. I have chosen the latter course, and have sought to select those, which seem to be more relevant today than those which may be of interest historically. I have not attempted to give a catalogue and chronology of scientific evangelicals in the last quarter of a millennium.

My overriding purpose is to put evangelicals and science *today* into historical and contemporary context and it is written both for the student, who may be studying the history of science or contemporary science studies, for clergy of all stripes, for educationalists, for the scientific community at large as well as the general reader.

I thus start with the earliest evangelicals in the 1730s and gradually move forward to the present day and focus mostly on British and American evangelicals. The book reflects my life-long interest in both the history of science in relation to evangelicalism and creationism, which began when I visited the evangelical study center at L'Abri in Switzerland in 1971. This, along with a historical study on Darwin's geology, has been my main

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academic interest during my ministry in Anglican parishes. I have also been to many creationist meetings and also had the good fortune to attend the conference *Intelligent Design and its Critics* in Wisconsin in June 2000, when I met many leading Intelligent Designers and some of their critics.

Much of the book is not particularly original and has been said elsewhere, but my section in Chapter 4 on evangelicals and geology and “anti-geology” has come from my research into that period and presents evangelicals in a new light. An integral part of my research was deciphering the Welsh geological notebooks of Sedgwick, Buckland, and Sedgwick’s pupil Darwin and spending many days walking the Welsh hills in all weathers retracing their steps. On one particular day in 1999, it took me over ten hours to retrace Sedgwick’s route in the Carneddau, covering twenty miles of mountainous terrain. Above all, this book reflects nearly four decades of being personally involved in these issues and brings together my theological and scientific interests.

As this book deals with evangelicals both in history and today, the structure reflects this.

- Chapter 1 gives both a historical overview from the 1730s and contemporary snapshot of evangelicals in their sheer diversity from the most separatist fundamentalist to those who are nearly as liberal as Liberal Protestants.
- Chapter 2 considers the theological concerns of evangelicals and especially the nature and interpretation of the Bible and the iconic status of Inerrancy, along with the issue of the “Curse.”
- Chapters 3 through 6 trace out evangelical attitudes to science from the beginning of the Evangelical Revival in the 1730s, to the publication of *The Genesis Flood* in 1961.
- Chapter 3 begins with a study of the conflict thesis of science and religion and how this distorts our understanding of evangelicals and science. I then deal briefly with the early years from 1730 to 1790, when evangelicals were a small group, who simply reflected the science of their day.
- Chapter 4 takes one from 1790 to 1850, which is when the evangelicals blossomed in numbers and when geology became the most popular science. Evangelicals were both in the forefront of geological research, and in the opposition to geology because of its implications on Genesis.
- Chapter 5 takes us though the heyday of evangelicalism in the late nineteenth century and the time of Darwinian controversies. It shows how evangelicals first “made peace” with Darwin and then with the rise of Fundamentalism broke the truce and listened to voices coming from the Seventh Day Adventists.
- Chapter 6 records the decline of evangelicalism and the rise of fundamentalism with its break from intellectual Christianity and the adoption of anti-evolution culminating in the Scopes trial of 1925, putting evangelicals and science in the doldrums. Then after the war, scientific concerns of evangelicals revived with the

American Scientific Association in the United States and the Research Scientists Christian Fellowship in Britain, but “creationism” was also quietly growing.

- The next three chapters bring us to today, with its unique mix of “Creationism” in all its forms and also evangelicals in the mainstream of science.
- Chapter 7 discusses the origin and influence of “creationism” both Young Earth Creationism (YEC) and Intelligent Design (ID) and their critics.
- Chapter 8 brings out the sheer diversity of today’s evangelicals and science, and considers both evangelical scientists of all shades and how evangelicals at large, whether laity, clergy, or theologians understand science.
- Chapter 9 considers some of the ethical issues of science and how evangelicals deal with them. These are the environment (and global warming) and bioethics with attitudes to GM crops and stem cell research, over which evangelicals are sharply divided.
- Chapter 10 briefly sums up the book and attempts to crystal-gaze into the future, when evangelicals will be more prevalent in the Third World than they are today.

Evangelicals are split into three overlapping camps concerning science as described in Chapter 8. These are Young Earth Creationism, Intelligent Design and what is often called Theistic Evolution. Sometimes these co-exist, whether through desire or necessity, but at times this can lead to internecine warfare. The perception an individual will have of evangelicals and science will often depend on what type of attitude to science they have met among evangelicals, which varies from country to country, place to place and church to church.

I am very aware that my selectivity will not appeal to all informed readers, but I ask them to bear with me, particularly over my many omissions. I hope that through my recommended sources readers can read up for themselves what I have omitted. As McGrath wrote of himself in his writing of his massive three-volume work that he played to his strengths—biochemistry and historical theology—I have also done so and mine are geology and the history of science, and the former is often neglected. Geology and its history in relation to the Christian faith are essential to get a right perspective as so often it is glibly believed that in the early nineteenth century only liberal Christians accepted geology and when Darwin published *The Origin of Species* most Christians, whether educated or not, still accepted a six-day creation, whereas most educated Christians did not. To get this wrong, is to completely misunderstand the relationship of evangelicals and science and perpetuate the myth that good Bible-believers must accept Genesis literally.

I cannot claim to be a detached and disinterested outside observer on evangelicals, but then that creature does not exist. In one sense, the genesis of this book goes back thirty-six years when I first came across YEC at

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Francis Schaeffer's centre L'Abri in Switzerland, where I first had to consider the relationship of evangelicals with science. I was originally helped by the Rev. Bob Ferris, now a minister of the Southern Baptist Church, and his wife Sue, who had studied under Russell Mixter. I was later given a second impetus when Canon Eric Jenkins invited me to his Science and Religion group in Liverpool Diocese in the early 1980s, which in turn led me to involvement with groups like the *Science and Religion Forum*, *Society of Ordained Scientists* and *Christians in Science*. Were it not for Eric's encouragement and friendship, this book would never have been written, but as he died in November 2006 he will not see it.

It is difficult to give all acknowledgments but I would single out the historians of science Jim Moore, Jim Secord, and John Brooke. Among clerical scientists I have already mentioned Eric Jenkins and now mention Arthur Peacocke, who passed away the same month as Eric. For many years I have benefited from membership of *Christians in Science* and have had particular help from Oliver Barclay, Sam (R.J.) Berry, Paul Marston and Bennet McInnes. In 2000 Angus Menuge made me very welcome at Wisconsin. I have benefited from the help of members of the *American Scientific Association*, especially Ted Davies, and Jack Haas, who made me so welcome at the ASA conference at Boston in 2001. My membership of HOGG (the History Of Geology Group of the Geological Society of London) has helped to literally ground my historical study, especially the one who welcomed me as a "bloody clergyman" John McKeown of the John Ray Initiative gave me a copy of a paper he gave on the environment, which has been invaluable. Most of my research has been done on a shoestring but over the years I have received small grants from the dioceses of Liverpool, St Asaph and Blackburn. I also express my appreciation to Kevin Downing, who has tried to keep me to deadlines and Roger Olsen, the editor of this series.

And, finally, I give thanks to my wife, Andrea, who delights to refer to all I do as my "creationist rubbish" and now hopes that the study will regain some order and tidiness.

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