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**Dialogue Between A Scientist-Believer And A Theologian-Philosopher:  
Ecological Vs Theological Restoration**

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**ABSTRACT**

This Town-Hall dialogue comprises six key-questions posed by a scientist/believer to a theologian, followed by six key questions posed by the theologian to a scientist-believer and the responses by the two scholars expose some fundamental issues that deal with “Uniqueness of Man” and the human responsibility for prudent and sustainable stewardship of God’s Creation and Created order on Planet Earth. The questions from Theologian to Scientist are: (1) Is it possible to narrow the gap between Science and Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? (2) What is the fundamental difference between weather and climate and what are your thoughts on Climate Change? (3) We live in the world today, where GLOBALIZATION is a rapidly advancing process? Should we now focus on LOCAL Issues: e.g. Falls Lake Project (4) In Christian Perspectives is Second Coming of Jesus. Ecologists also use the word RESTORATION but is it not RECOVERY? (5) Roman 8: 16 – 17, Suffering, Hope, Patience (SHP). Theologians are contemplating the Second Coming. Do scientists/believers predict a Catastrophe? And (6) CHRISTIAN CREATION: CARE: How can Church help?

The six questions from Scientist-Believer to Theologian are: (1) Has there been tension between Christianity and Science? (2) Today we see a considerable tension. Why do you think this is so? (3) How would Theologians and Christian Ecologists help narrow the tension between Science and Christianity (4) How did Theologian Francis Schaeffer attempt to encourage Christians in creation care? (5) Often one hears the accusation that because Christians believe that Jesus will come

again to restore creation to its original state that Christians should not be concerned with creation care or conservation? (6) How can we involve the Christian community (churches and seminaries) in Creation Care in general and Falls Lake in particular? The questions are posed one by one.

Little's Q-1: Is it at all possible to narrow the gap between Science and Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

George's Answer: *Albert Einstein, in all his wisdom said: "Science without religion is blind and religion without science is lame". Albert is my hero. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we saw Europe profoundly influenced by science, including Darwinism, and younger generation widened the gap between science and Christianity. I do not want this disaster to happen in the United States of America. This is why I founded the 'Theoecology Journal' to bring about a genuine focus to reduce the tension between believers and scientists in our academia and society at large. This symposium to restore Falls Lake, with dedicated theologians and scientists working together, is "One big step in the right direction."*

George's Q- 1. Has there been always a tension between Christianity and Science?

Little's Answer: *No. Up until more recent times, science and Christianity were very much in harmony. In fact there are a number of historians who believe that it was Christianity that gave the foundation for modern science. For example, theist Francis Bacon has been hailed by many historians for giving the methodology and spirit of modern science. In fact, Edward O. Wilson makes that point. This is not merely opinion, one can make a strong case that in fact it was the Christian view that we lived in a rationally structured universe that gave rise to modern science. One can look at the ontological and epistemological commitments of those such as Kepler (1571 – 1630), Boyle (1627 – 1727), Newton (1642 – 1727), Faraday (1791 – 1867), Mendel (1822 – 1884), Pasteur (1822 – 95, to name a few who were theists. In no way did their belief in God hinder their work as scientists, and in fact, many claimed that science confirmed their faith. Melvin Calvin, Nobel-Prize winner in biochemistry, claims that the orderly function of this universe is essential for science. He notes that the Hebrew Christian view of the universe "seems to be the historical foundation of modern science. The adversarial relationship did not develop until the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of Darwinian thought. So, it is historically incorrect to pit Christianity against science. Where the problem has arisen between Christianity and modern science is in the area of interpretation. Those*

*in the field of science often claim that their conclusions are objective, that is, they are just looking at the facts. But facts are not self-interpreting. Someone needs to interpret the facts which means that conclusions are not merely objective—there is always a subjective element to our conclusions. That is true of the theologian as much as it is true of the scientist. Given that reality, we must see that conflict arises not over the facts, but the interpretation of the facts. At that level, we must work together to find conclusions that fit the facts of science as well as the facts of Scripture.*

Little's Q-2: What is the fundamental difference between weather and climate change?

*George's Answer: This is a tough nut to crack. In simple language, weather is defined in short term (daily, monthly, seasonal) but climate change is a phenomenon in long-term cycles (in thousands or million of years). Politically, climate change or global warming has become bad words in the Capital Hill, Washington DC. There are skeptics like our mutual pal and Theologian Dr. Cal Beisner and alarmists like former VP Al Gore. The fact of the matter is this; There is a trend in recent decades for more frequent hurricanes such as 2011 Irene in North Carolina; there is evidence of increasing sea level and increasing ocean acidification. Is it due to anthropogenic impact of excessive production of CO2? This question is now an ongoing debate. As a scientist, I believe that El Nino cycle (5-7 years) is real. Let us go to the Bible and see the interpretation of Joseph on Pharaoh's dream of fat cows and lean cows. Joseph interpreted the fertile years vs. drought and he advised that in fertile years we must not consume all that is produced but save the harvests for the imminent drought season. We need to do the same today. I also want to say that we cannot predict the future and develop accurate models based on the past. Albert Einstein said: "The distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion, however persistent."*

George's Q-2: Today, we see considerable tension between science and Christianity. Why do you think this is so?

*Little's Answer: Well, there was a split in the way the west began to consider the true value of knowledge about the world. This began, quite unintentionally I might add, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes. What happened was the idea that religious claims required no justification. That is, we just believe them because they are there as religion teaches. Science claims,*

*however, were reportedly founded on the scientific epistemological system of empiricism and thought to have justification as demonstrated by the facts of the case.*

*In time, religious claims were understood as only about personal beliefs regarding the spiritual world and it did not matter if they were true or not because they did not deal with reality in which we lived. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century science was seen as the true and only arbiter of truth. Of course one can see why science gained so much traction in the thinking of the people. Religious men could pray for the sick, but scientists found cures; religious men could promise a heaven when one dies, but the scientist promised the longer life. This is the great heritage of Francis Bacon who was certain that if his method were properly applied man's condition on this earth would be measurably improved. And so it was. One can see why religious truths continually lost ontological weight in the minds of people. It seemed that science would bring to man sure and steady improvement thus reducing the need for any belief in God. It would seem natural that if truths of religion were only religious truths of psychological value and truths of science the truths of the real world, then it did seem likely that in time God would become implausible and unnecessary. In a world dominated by science as the final arbitrator of truth it is understandable that soon tension between Christianity and science. Science was seen as objective and Christianity as purely subjective personal beliefs. So in the end it was the way that both science and Christianity would be viewed that created the tension. When Christianity insisted on making claims about the reality of our world then conflict broke out between science and Christianity in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, it is interesting that Bacon, possibly the father of modern science, said that he was certain that things would go right if science would be properly guided by reason and proper religion. Yet in our days, it is difficult to convince people that Bacon had a very important point.*

Little's Q-3: Do you have any brief comments on Globalization Vs Glocalization?

*George's Answer: Glocalization is a term recently coined by the theologian Prof. Craig Bartholomew in his book "PLACE". He describes the first city Ur where Abraham lived in the Babylonian days. Today we have mega-cities that increased since the Industrial Revolution. I believe that the mega-multinational corporations, in this electronic information age, accelerated globalization (Bartholomew, 2011). In the same token, we need to accelerate "Glocalization". Our Falls Lake project and the Chesapeake Bay Project on 'The Heaven meets the Earth' by scientist-believer Dr. Susan Emmerich are perfect examples*

*glocalization. Here in the Triangle area, Falls Lake is located in the vicinity of Raleigh with North Carolina State University, Durham with Duke University, Chapel Hill with University of North Carolina and Wake Forest with Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Falls Lake is the umbilical cord providing drinking water for 600,000 citizens of North Carolina. Pollution is threatening the lake today and the lake can only be saved by prudent decisions and management by local collaborative actions that also include church-based initiatives. In a recent book entitled “Song of A Scientist”, Prof. Cal DeWitt has elegantly defined how Christianity is part of the formula in the overall environmental stewardship (DeWitt, 2012).*

George’s Q-3: How would Theologians and Christian ecologists help narrow the tension between Science and Christianity?

Little’s Answer:

*(A) I think, there are probably several ways, but one way is to see that Christianity and science are looking at the same reality, but from different perspectives. It is like looking at maps of a particular state, let us say North Carolina. There are topographical maps, road maps, and so forth, but they are maps of the same reality—the state of North Carolina. We see that the maps complement one another. In fact, if you look at a road map and a topographical map one will see the real harmony even though they speak to different aspects. Second, facts are not self-interpreting so we must be humble with our claims where several possible interpretations are legitimate. This is true of the scientist as well as for the theologian.*

*Third, we must be clear that science is not a replacement for God, nor science is hostile to belief in God. Furthermore, God must not be thought of a replacement for science nor should believers in God be against science. True science is about understanding particulars and how they work. Religious knowledge is about the nature of things and why things are way they are. Christianity speaks to the nature of reality, its structure and why it is structured the way it is. Christianity teaches us that the first question to be answered (here it agrees with Aristotle) is not what something can do, but what is its nature or essence. The nature of the thing (Aristotle would have called this the formal cause) is the first question and Christianity answers that question in the doctrine of creation. So first we must show that Christianity answers a different question than science and the answers must not be held in mutual exclusivity*

***(B) I think you have raised an interesting possibility. As you know, it was your good friend Edward O. Wilson who wrote a book titled Creation. In that book he acknowledges that even though Christians would have a different worldview than he, he thought that we could work together for a common good. I think the term that has been used for this is the idea of cobelligerents. Scientists and Christians can work together at least in a limited sense even if they hold to worldviews that differ in some way. For example, scientists can help understand the way the universe works, and what would be damaging and what could be done to minimize the damage to the planet. Christians then can use this information to live wisely in this place we call creation. In addition, Christianity can explain the importance of creation stewardship by explaining the true nature of creation itself, namely, it is good because it is the creation of the all-good God.***

Little's Q-4: In the light of 'Second Coming of Jesus' for 'Restoration', how do you interpret the use of this term "restoration" by government policy makers?

***George's Answer: We are looking at apples and oranges. Quite frankly, the Biblical word 'Restoration' is very distinct from Ecological Restoration. For example, in Falls Lake the ecosystem will never go back to what it was before the dam was built when eels, sturgeons and many migratory fishes were abundant. But we can reduce storm water flow, septic tank failures and ecologically restore the Falls Lake as a clean water ecosystem so that half a million citizens can continue getting drinking water from Falls Lake.***

George's Q- 4. How did theologian Francis Schaeffer attempt to encourage Christians in Creation Care?

***Little's Answer: Schaeffer began with the idea that if our place is the creation of God then it has some worth. Not in the sense that pantheism would suggest, but as the work of an all-good God. For Schaeffer (and I should say Christianity in general) creation is not to be worshipped as it is not part of God. The Christian doctrine of creation is what is called ex nihilo (out of nothing). Creation is contingent in that it depends on God for its existence, but it is not to be worshipped. Furthermore, creation is such that it is what provides us with everything that sustains us physically. Therefore, we should care about creation on two counts, (1) it is God's handiwork and (2) it is necessary to our existence.***

*In addition, Schaeffer understood the realities of the God-given responsibility to man to have dominion or leadership over creation. We can exercise our dominion over creation either in a good way or a bad way. This means there is a logical extension of a Christian view of creation, which requires dominion in the right way. So for Schaeffer, this was not something Christians do because of some ecological crisis, but because it is a matter of obedience to their Faith-commitments as those who live in God's creation. We could say it in another way. Christians should exercise creation stewardship as part of their loving God and their neighbor.*

Little's Q-5: In Roman 8: 16-25 St. Paul talks about sufferings, HOPE and Patience? As a believer-scientist, how would you interpret "PATIENCE"?

George's Answer: *Honestly I am not into predicting ARMAGADON. When will Jesus come again? I will say it is not going to be tomorrow or in a century from now. I just finished reading the book "Next Hundred Years (2010), by George Friedman. I do not take his word seriously. What I recommend is that we humans must recognize that we are unique and become really responsible citizens and care for God's Creation that includes Falls Lake and all Lakes, Rivers and Ocean and the land ecosystems.*

George's Q-5: Often one hears accusations that because Christians believe that Jesus will come again to restore creation to its original state that Christian should not be concerned with Creation care or conservation. What are your thoughts on this presumptive assumption?

Little's Answer: *Unfortunately, this is true in some quarters of the evangelical Christian community even today. Some Christians are suspicious of anything that has the smell of environmentalism to it as they are sure this is part of some liberal agenda. They are focused on only one thing, telling people about Jesus because he is coming again and the time must be short. Of course I believe we should do that, but not because the time is necessarily short, but because our Risen Lord has commanded us. However, there is no logical entailment in Christ coming again that encourages an abandonment of the mandate to creation stewardship found in the early chapters of Genesis. I think this position is not as strong as it once was, but one can still find it alive and well in certain places. It is interesting that Francis Schaeffer who was very clear and strong in his theology that Christ's would bodily return to this earth was one of the leaders in the evangelical world on the matter of creation stewardship. So, looking at*

***Schaeffer one can see that belief in Christ's return is not theological grounds for belittling creation stewardship.***

Little's Q-6: Bob, tell me how churches and pastors can help in Falls Lake Restoration?

***George's Answer: Well that is the very purpose of this symposium. I thank Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation for giving GIBS a grant as seed money to initiate this project with a goal of involving Church community to promote 'CREATION CARE'. This effort, I hope, will take four or more years. Ten local Pastors (interviewed in this project) of conservative churches of three denominations (Southern Baptists, Lutheran and Presbyterian) have already recommended the following actions: (1) To involve church leaders in city advisory councils with reference to ecological restoration of Falls Lake, (2) To develop Creation Care curriculum for both children and adults in Sunday schools, (3) To adopt streams and creeks for cleaning up, (4) To organize church picnics in Falls Lake and (5) To develop a Falls Lake Observation Initiative (FLOI) in areas where 'Baptism' takes place.***

George's Q-6: How can we involve the Christian community (Churches and Seminaries) in Creation care in general and Falls Lake in particular?

***Little's Answer: I am happy to say that the Center for Faith and Culture (CFC) which is part of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS) organized one of the first creation care events in this area from which this event today is birthed. There are pastors like Dwayne Milioni who are leading local churches to see the importance of Christian stewardship as it relates to the environment. I think creation care or creation stewardship, which ever term you want to use, in the Christian community must begin with pastors who teach their people regarding the logical extensions of the doctrine of creation. We must remember that the power of this is that as Christians we do not need to be convinced of a crisis to act responsibly towards this planet. Of course, we should not be a 'Chicken Little' who thinks the sky is falling in, nor should we be the 'proverbial ostrich' with our heads in the sand and think that there is no problem. There is a balance of course, but what I am saying is that Christians should be involve in creation stewardship on the point of being faith to God's commands. Furthermore, it does not require a lot of money or major organization to make a difference in this area. It is being responsible in our life style by responsible recycling or carrying our own shopping bags to the markets. Of course there is***



*much more that can be done, but I only mention these two to illustrate that everybody can be a part of creation stewardship. Pastors can encourage their congregations to be involved in projects that clean up polluted lakes and streams, but mostly by being good examples of creation care in their everyday lives. I think many people doing little things will make a big difference. Sometimes we look at the big picture and think it is too much for us as little people to do anything meaningful. It almost paralyzes us. But there are many things we can and should do. One does not need to take on the world. Maybe the most difficult task within the Christian community is to change attitudes towards creation care or stewardship.*

#### CLOSING STATEMENT ON NEW CREATION (RESTORATION)

Amongst the four evangelists, who are the authors of the four Gospels, Mathew and John were the two of the twelve disciples and John was the youngest one in the twelve. John's prologue as seen in John 1: 1-18 looks at "In the beginning" and therefore, reflects upon creation as narrated in Genesis and the journey to the new nation Israel as narrated in Exodus. "The Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1: 14). This means that Jesus was God and man in one person as states the Nicene Creed (325 AD). He came into the world to provide a way of redemption and the forgiveness of sins for man. It is also true that this work of redemption for mankind had cosmic implications as the St Paul tells us that all of creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). This makes the very clear connection between man and nature as we see in Genesis 1:26-31).

Jesus declared on the cross his final word "*tetelestai*" that means "It is all done." The work of redemption is announced to be brought to its end. Now, salvation is open to humanity and the eventual redemption and restoration of all creation. Hence, we are now looking forward to the 'new creation' (Restoration, so to say, the focus of our dialogue today). The grounds for the new creation began with the resurrection of Jesus and will be consummated upon His second coming with power and glory. Until then, we as the early disciples of Christ are sent into the world in obedience to the "Great Commission" (Matthew 28:19-20). Part of the disciple-making mandate of Christians is to teach man's proper relationship and responsibility to creation. Part of the responsibility to creation is to use it reasonably and wisely that it might be a sufficiently productive and comfortably inhabitable place for us and our posterity until Jesus comes and makes all things new.

And Add following References

WT Wright

C Dewitt

C Bartholomew

G Friedman

R George

B Little

EO Wilson