

Article

Twenty-Five ASA Fellows and Editors Tell of PSCF Articles That Changed Their Lives

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1971

BERNARD RAMM, "Evangelical Theology and Technological Shock," *JASA* 23, no. 2 (1971): 52-56.

As a young Christian in the early 1960s, the framework for my thinking on the relationship between science and faith was molded by Bernard Ramm's book, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (1954). Consequently, when several years later I encountered his article "Evangelical Theology and Technological Shock" in the ASA journal (*JASA* 23, no. 2 (1971): 52-56), I was eager to see how he coped with the burgeoning new technologies.

I was immediately struck by his comment that, in the past, the evangelical response to any new scientific idea had gone through the same pattern: following its announcement, it was denounced, but was eventually absorbed into evangelical theology. For Ramm this was tragic. Evangelicals should seek to anticipate what is coming and formulate theological responses in advance of new scientific developments.

In undertaking this task, Ramm admits he is a theologian and has to rely on scientists for the requisite information and prognostications. This takes him into a plethora of areas, many of which have been assessed, and in some cases dismissed, over the intervening fifty years. Ones that caught my attention included cloning, sperm and ovum banks, organ transplantation and brain (mental) death, genetic engineering, chemical and surgical alteration of behavior, and biologically generated increases in life expectancy.

Looking at this 1971 article today, I was struck by the state of the science and the manner in which science popularizers expected them to influence society. Ramm's dependence upon them meant he had to place too much store by their interpretations. And so, helpful as Ramm was, his lack of scientific nous proved a disadvantage. If only more Christian scientists had been available to dialogue with him. Nevertheless, Ramm was a sterling example of a theologian who takes scientific activity and thinking seriously. He paid it respect and regarded it as a legitimate contributor to Christian thinking in the contemporary world.

Ramm, very perceptively, wanted the church to be prepared for forthcoming developments and their implications. Inevitably, though, there is danger in this type of forward thinking since it is associated with speculation and on occasion with grandiose claims. This is where dialogue between theologians, and scientists seeking to be informed by Christian values, comes to the fore.

It is fascinating to reflect on the optimism of those commenting on the scientific developments, and how ill-founded some turned out to be. We are told that people will shop for the kind of child they want; during reproduction, they will be able to eliminate all unwanted genetic traits; and they will have at their disposal chemical bullets to control love, hate, and morality. While it is easy to dismiss these claims as extravagant, each of them contains a grain of truth and we live with their heirs. Ramm was correct in taking them seriously, but a critical eye informed by scientific reality and biblical directives is essential.

At certain points Ramm pushed the theological implications too far. For instance, he argues for the need for a new theology of the Holy Spirit, based on developments in the behavioral sciences and psychiatry. This is because he sees no ceiling to the control, shaping, and modulation of human behavior in a future technologically dominated world. His aim is to understand the continuity of the work of the Holy Spirit with human technological control over nature. While his intentions are good, he may have been giving too much to optimistic interpretations of technological innovations.

And yet Ramm is far from smitten by technology, since he is concerned that it will lead to excessive degrees of automation that, in turn, will usher in a society where people retire at 50. Technology will, he argues, plunge us into a pandemic of apathy and a loss of meaning of life. The answer for Ramm is the Christian Church with its message of life's meaning in Christ.

While there is much in Ramm's analysis that suffers from the passage of time and his undue reliance upon science writers with their unalloyed pleasure at the marvels of the technological bliss to come, he is prepared to engage with this world. Some of the future possibilities will not come to pass, and some may seriously lead us astray. But it is important to keep in contact with the claims and counterclaims.

Otherwise, Christians will be on a path of blissful ignorance, ignoring the trends and challenges around them, and failing to cast a Christ-centered eye over them. Ramm is to be congratulated for showing the relevance of theology and that some theologians are open to ongoing debate over science and its implications.

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1973

CARL E. ARMERDING, "Biblical Perspectives on the Ecology Crisis," *JASA* 25, no. 1 (1973): 4–9.

I first ran into the journal in a college library. I have long been something of a library hound, enjoying a fine collection and walking the shelves to see what might look interesting. I was a transfer to a Christian college from two secular colleges, and had not even heard of any such thing as "Christian scholarship" or "faith and learning," being a recent convert to Christianity from a background in math and physical sciences. The *JASA/PSCF* ("the journal" herein) was displayed in the new issues rack near the entrance. Imagine how wonderful it was for a young Christian with my background to run into an entire *journal*, a whole *association*, devoted to this new idea that robust Christian faith and serious, academic and scientific research and inquiry can and should belong together! While I could not afford to go to any conferences, I did read each new issue with great interest, and perused the back issues in the serials collection. The library had the entire print set, I was happy to discover.

I used the journal as a kind of introduction to the field of science and Christian theology. Often I would find an author introduced, or a footnote to a standard work, in its pages. That would send me to the card catalog (!) (soon to be the computer terminal), to seek other works by the same author. Sometimes I would find the book itself in the good old Southern California College library (now Vanguard University). The librarians were friendly and helpful, offering to order books from other libraries if they did not have it. Looking back, I am sure they found it odd to find a student who would come across a journal, and start to read it right away. I did that a lot with the journal, new issues and old volumes alike.

It was in the pages of the journal that I was introduced to important topics. Serious and learned debate about origins and evolution was there, to be sure, but also discussion about a range of scientific issues I simply had never thought of from a faith perspective. Looking back at those issues in the 1970s and 1980s, I see some old friends and much respected scholars and authors I first discovered there. Bernard Ramm, Ron Numbers, Richard Bube, Al Plantinga, J. W. Haas, George Murphy, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen were scholars I would learn from for a long time, in articles and in important books. New areas of science and theology were also found in its pages, or at least, new to me! Grounded in the physical sciences, I first learned about the Bible and our ecological crisis in an article from 1973 by Carl Armerding (a fine OT scholar as I later discovered). Then of course I had to go back and read the articles he was responding to (by Kenneth Hare and Richard Wright).

In the journal I also discovered that the social sciences, too, can and should be integrated or in dialogue with Christian theology and sacred scripture. In short, reading the pages of the journal was an access point for theology and the sciences. Thinking back to those days, I am grateful to God, and to these early Christian authors, scholars, editors and others, who created in the journal a forum for scholarly, thoughtful, engaging, and respectful dialogue in an area of research and learning I would spend many decades enjoying. Thank you!

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1979

DAVIS A. YOUNG, "Flood Geology Is Uniformitarian!" *JASA* 31, no. 3 (1979): 146–52.

A coworker at the major oil company where I worked handed me a dog-eared and underlined copy of an article from the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*. It was not my introduction to the author, Davis Young, whose book *Creation and the Flood* (Baker, 1977), I had recently read. But "Flood Geology Is Uniformitarian!" was my introduction to the ASA and its journal. Now, uniformitarianism presumes that Earth history can be interpreted from the study of rocks having formed by presently