

October 2004

## REPORT FROM THE INTELLIGENT DESIGN CONFERENCE HIGHLANDS, NORTH CAROLINA, JUNE 24-26, 2004

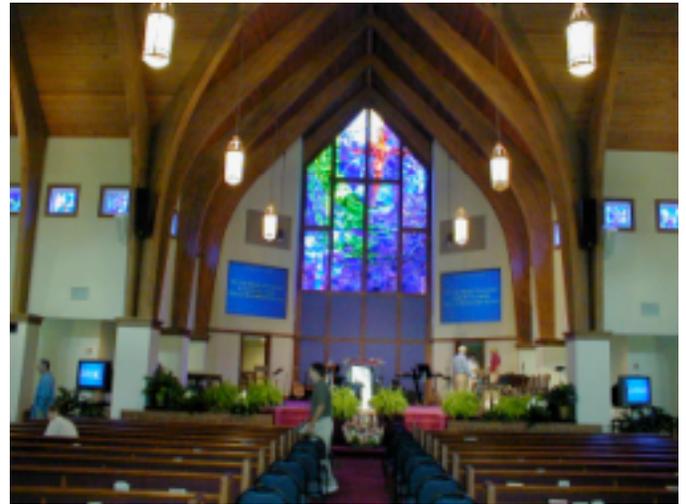
by Dan Reynolds, PhD ([dwr51055@aol.com](mailto:dwr51055@aol.com))

### Setting and Overview

The conference was held at the Community Bible Church in Highlands North Carolina situated in the beautiful Smokey Mountain area surrounded by clouds, forest, and waterfalls (website: <http://www.idconference.org/>). My daughter, Holly, and I attended. I took a digital camera and made a few pictures some of which are included below.



Folks at the church did an excellent job planning and orchestrating the conference of 550 attendees from around the US and several foreign countries. Their work



was truly a labor of love which was two years in the making. The beautiful main sanctuary of the church was used for the presentations.

Attendees enjoyed two meals a day catered by a local family who on Friday night served smoked beef and chicken. The Annie Moses Band provided entertainment /lead worship on three occasions; they simply must be seen and heard to be believed. If you ever have a chance to see them, don't pass it up! If you can imagine a fusion of jazz, rock, hillbilly, and classical music, with beautiful vocal harmonies, you have an idea what they are like. There was also a youth conference held in parallel to the main conference; my daughter, Holly, 14, attended. Over 18 hours of presentations and Q&A sessions were recorded by the technical staff at the church and will be available in CD and DVD formats. I ordered a complete set. There was also a well stocked bookstore.

There was a painting made in honor of the conference by Hayes Meyer, a local, who was commissioned by the church for her work. The painting, entitled "Seven Days," was hung in the foyer of the church just before the main sanctuary. Unfortunately, I was unable to get permission to post an image of the painting as its creator is currently negotiating with a potential buyer. The

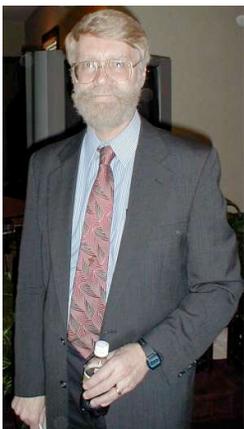
painting faithfully depicts the seven days of creation as described in Genesis 1. Of particular note were the inclusion of sea mammals on day five and dinosaurs on day six. Hayes Meyers is a mural painter and has painted in homes, businesses and museums. She can be contacted at 828-743-7339 or hayesart@dnet.net.

Thomas Woodward, author of *Doubts about Darwin*, introduced most of the speakers and moderated the half-hour question and answer sessions held at the end of each day. All the speakers presented in PowerPoint or an equivalent. The speakers included D. Russell Humphreys, Larry Vardiman, Hugh Ross, Michael Behe, Charles Thaxton, Chuck Colson, Finn Laursen, Thomas Woodward, and Mark Eckel. Each talk was about an hour long. Some speakers presented twice. Most of the speakers were available for questions after their talks, at meals, and during free time.

## Presentations

The following reviews are based on notes, handouts, recollection, and an occasional book reference. I accidentally missed most of one of Michael Behe's talks while talking to other presenters. I did not take notes during Mark Eckel's talk, but I do have his nice handout. If anyone wants it, I will seek his permission to make e-copies and will distribute accordingly. This review is not comprehensive or exhaustively detailed and I take responsibility for any errors in reporting I may have made. At some point, I may be able to revise this report when I have had a chance to review the DVDs.

Physicist Russell Humphreys of ICR and author of *Starlight and Time* gave two talks. The first was entitled "The Intelligent Designer is the God Who Created Recently."



Russell Humphreys

The evidences cited for a recent creation included the scriptures, rate of winding of spiral galaxies, number and lifetimes of comets, seafloor mud accumulation, rate of salt deposition in the oceans, decay of the earth's magnetic field, length of written history, lack of stone age graves, rapid rate of decay of DNA coupled with recent finds of intact *T. Rex* DNA, ubiquity of residual radiocarbon throughout the fossil record, and evidences for accelerated nuclear decay in

the past. God used relativity to allow us to see the cosmos even though the earth is young. Dr. Humphreys' second talk was entitled "Carbon 14 is Now the Friend of Young-Earth Creationists." Dr. Humphreys described recent findings by the RATE group ([www.icr.org/research](http://www.icr.org/research)) with regards to the presence of

residual radiocarbon throughout the fossil records and in diamond samples. The presence of residual radiocarbon in coals allegedly hundreds of millions of years old coupled with radiocarbon's short 6000 year half-life indicate the fossils must have formed in the recent past, consistent with the Genesis account. In a separate conversation, Dr. Humphreys said he has shown by calculation that the residual C14 in diamonds could not have been derived from the reaction of neutrons (from U fission) with C12, C13, or N14. The retention of excess helium in zircons "dated" at 1.5 billion years old coupled with the now firmly established rapid diffusion of helium through zircons (RATE) was presented as evidence for rapid nuclear decay in the past. The most recent results extending the helium diffusion rates through zircon down to about 100° C (June 2004 CRSQ, [http://www.creationresearch.org/crsq/articles/41/41\\_1/Helium.htm](http://www.creationresearch.org/crsq/articles/41/41_1/Helium.htm)) were discussed. Dr. Humphreys found a piece of granite containing mica while at the conference and passed it around during one of his talks.

Larry Vardiman of ICR also discussed the RATE project and the Ice Age. He first gave evidences for an Ice Age such as striations, kettle lakes, glaciers, drumlins, moraines, and erratics. Dr. Vardiman explained that the oceans warmed up during the Flood due to the release of magma from the breaking up of the earth's crust. The warmer oceans coupled with the cooler temperature at the ground due to volcanic dust in the atmosphere in the aftermath of the Flood lead to a



Larry Vardiman

higher evaporation rate and hence precipitation rates. The greater snowfall at the higher latitudes lead to greater land coverage by snow. This lead to greater cooling of the earth due to more sunlight being reflected by the snow. The process was self-perpetuating and eventually lead to the Ice Age. The higher evaporation rates may have also lead to the formation of hypercanes, super hurricanes which would have dropped more precipitation and left the land barren. The barren land would have reflected light causing additional cooling. Evidence for rapid snowfall was presented: WW2 fighters have been found buried under hundreds of feet of snow.

On a completely different subject, Dr. Vardiman said that there was now evidence that the "polar wind" may be able to remove helium from the atmosphere fast enough to explain the low levels of helium in the earth's atmosphere. Hence, even if the earth were billions of years old, the helium content of the atmosphere would be small. Although disappointing, the helium retention in and diffusion through zircon results and their impli-

cations for accelerated nuclear decay and a young earth stand on their own.

Michael Behe spoke on irreducible complexity and responded to some of his critics. He discussed Darwin's theory of natural selection operating on variations to



Michael Behe

facilitate "survival of the fittest." Darwin speculated that a light sensitive spot may have evolved into human eye by his mechanism. However, Darwin conceded that his theory would breakdown if it could ever be shown that there was a complex organ that could not be explained by numerous, slight, successive changes. Behe introduced his concept of irreducible complexity, the idea that all of the parts of system are necessary for its function; if any part is removed or modified, the system ceases to work. He then illustrated this concept by describing the required parts of a mouse trap and how removal of any part would cause the trap to stop working. He then discussed the bacterial flagellum as an example of irreducible complexity in biology. The flagellum is made of some 40 proteins, some of which are used in other parts of the cell. Some critics have said that these preexisting pieces could have been co-opted for use in the flagellum without the need for making them from scratch. Behe responded that only a few of the proteins are preexisting and that the machinery and instructions for assembly would still be required (must have evolved); the formation of the flagellum is tightly orchestrated. Indeed, the machinery required to assemble the flagellum is itself irreducibly complex. Critics say that intelligent design (ID) is just religious. Behe argued that it is an empirical deduction based on physical evidence. Behe said that Franklin Harold, author of "The Way of the Cell" rejects ID but admits current Darwinian explanations for complex biochemical structures are "just-so" stories. Behe said science should follow the evidence wherever it leads. Behe mentioned that some believe they have met the challenge of irreducible complexity in the mouse trap example. Some have cleverly devised mouse traps which have fewer parts and claim this proves the 5 part mouse trap is not irreducibly complex after all. Behe said what they must demonstrate is how their mouse traps with fewer parts could have become the 5 part trap through small, successive, numerous changes with each intermediate trap being fully functional. Behe said some of his responses to his critics could be found at [www.crsc.org](http://www.crsc.org). An interesting personal note about Dr. Behe—he has nine children.

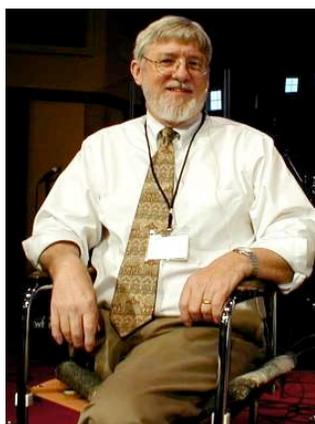
Astronomer and progressive creationist Hugh Ross, president of Reasons to Believe ([www.reasons.org](http://www.reasons.org)), said

we must identify the intelligent designer. Ross said that only biblically based biblical faith is consistent with the well established theory of General Relativity. God did not have a beginning or need to be created because He is beyond time. The universe is fine tuned for life; this is evidence for ID. Ross said that if several predictions he has made at the end of his recent book, *A Matter of Days*, are not fulfilled, he will change his position concerning the age of the earth. Some of these predictions are listed below:

1. More theologians will embrace the old earth (OE) view.
2. More theologians will consider the OE position as best supporting inerrancy.
3. Research will confirm that there were various hominid species living prior to Adam and Eve. The species will prove to be morphologically and genetically distinct from modern humans.
4. Evidence for the Big Bang will increase.
5. Astronomers' measurement of the age of the universe will become more precise and confirm billions of years.
6. The number of scientists who conclude that the age of the earth and universe is thousands of years based on physical evidence alone will remain essentially zero.
7. The reliability of radiometric dating will increase.
8. Distant galaxies will prove closer together and at earlier developmental stages than galaxies in our neighborhood.
9. Evidence that globular clusters are old will increase.
10. Evidence for comet clouds, the Oort Cloud, and Kuiper Belt will increase.
11. Evidence for old supernova remnants will increase.
12. Evidence for the fixity of the laws and constants of physics over the last several billion years will increase.

Ross also spoke on the origin of life. He said it would take a miracle for life to have formed on earth through natural processes alone. (Comment: It seems that Dr. Ross has stacked the deck in his favor in his predictions. He is basically saying that scientists who for the most part do not take scripture seriously will continue to see the world as they always have and will integrate new data into the existing paradigm. In my humble opinion, the prediction which has the greatest potential help for his cause is number 12, but the RATE group's recent findings and the apparent change in the fine structure constant seem to be refuting it. The rest of the predictions seem explicable by sociology, philosophical bias, and Dr. Humphreys White Hole Cosmology.)

Charles Thaxton, chemist and coauthor of *The Mystery of Life's Origin*, gave a talk on the origin of life.



Charles Thaxton

Thaxton distinguished between order and complexity: order is redundant and periodic whereas complexity is aperiodic and random. Information is complex and specified—it contains a message. Life's molecules exhibit specified complexity. He said origin of life experiments have generated 19 of the 20 essential amino acids, all five nucleic acid bases, sugars, glucose, ribose,

deoxyribose, and fatty acids. Nevertheless, there are still major problems:

1. If the early earth had a reducing atmosphere and contained methane, ultraviolet light would have polymerized methane to form high molecular weight hydrocarbons, but no petroleum layer has been found in the fossil record.
2. There is no evidence the early earth's atmosphere contained ammonia.
3. Oxygen forms from the ultraviolet photolysis of water. This process generates oxygen at the same rate as photosynthesis. Oxygen stops reactions needed to make life's building blocks in origin of life experiments.
4. Oxygen converts to ozone and ozone blocks ultraviolet light. Prebiotic chemistry required ultraviolet light to drive reactions.
5. There is no geochemical evidence of a prebiotic soup.
6. There is no explanation for the homochirality of amino acids and sugars.
7. Interfering cross reactions would have made many molecules which are not relevant to abiogenesis.
8. Fatty acids and phosphates precipitate from water in the presence of magnesium and calcium.
9. Sugars cross react with other compounds to give complex mixtures.
10. Prebiotic soup would have been too dilute for polymerization to occur.
11. The processes which make the required chemicals also destroy them.

Many have concluded that abiogenesis on the earth was not possible and say that the required organic chemicals must have been brought to earth by comets. The timeframe in which life must have evolved has shrunk to 100-150 million years. Unchannelled energy flow can-

not do the configurational entropy work required to make biopolymers with the correct sequences. Where do the instructions to make the correct chemicals come from? An explanation for life requires natural and intelligent causes. Dr. Thaxton lost his leg to cancer a few years ago and has just recovered from a long illness. His wife's love for him was obvious.

Chuck Colson, author of several books and founder of Prison Fellowship and the Wilberforce Forum (they sponsored the conference), spoke on how Christians should engage our culture. He said origins is a critical issue and our message must get into the schools. We live in the age of post modernism which holds that truth is unknowable. We must defend the truth and engage our culture at every turn. Societies are changed from the bottom up, one individual at a time. He cited 1 Chronicles 12:32, Acts 17:11, and Romans 12:1,2. We must understand our times and learn what to do, must use the scriptures as our guide, and must commit to obey God.



Charles Colson

Truth is relative in our culture; our culture has embraced pragmatism and subjectivism. As a consequence, we have lost our sense of meaning in life. The heart cannot rejoice in what the mind rejects; if there is no real truth, then there is no real meaning. Should we worship the god we want or the God that is? The secularization of culture neutralizes religious ideas in all spheres of life: media, entertainment, education. Today's heroes are celebrities. Not many people are thinking today. Today's culture says the private life is where freedom should be. Pluralism provides a smorgasbord mentality which encourages the individual to design his own religion. We live in a credulous age; people will believe anything. Christians should be elitist on ideas and egalitarian about people. Our age has embraced naturalism and secular humanism. Theists believe that reality is personal. There must be an I/thou relationship, a plurality of persons (trinity), for there to be love; the implication of naturalism is despair. Monism is the god of "the force" (Star Wars), an impersonal entity in which all things are moving towards unity. Reality is ultimately personal. Colson recommended a few websites: <http://reflections.gospelcom.net/>, [www.arn.org](http://www.arn.org), [www.apologetics.org](http://www.apologetics.org), and [www.reasons.org](http://www.reasons.org).

Finn Laursen (finn@ceai.org) of Christian Educators Association International presented a talk on legal rights in

the classroom. According to the Supreme Court, Creation Science cannot be taught in public schools because it violates the Establishment Clause. However, ID may not have this problem since it does not specify the designer. Several court cases were presented.

Thomas Woodward, author of *Doubts about Darwin, A History of Intelligent Design*, gave talks entitled "'Power Stories' in the Evolution Controversy" and "The Radical Edge of Intelligent Design." He said ID is radical like the



Thomas Woodward

counter culture of the 1960s; the prevailing "establishment" needs to be uprooted and overturned, a true revolution is called for. Michael Denton's book *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* awakened Michael Behe and Phil Johnson to the inadequacies of Darwinism. Johnson has concluded that the evidence for Darwinism is somewhere between weak and non-existent. Evolutionist David Raup has said that Johnson understands 99% of evolutionary biology. There are four dimensions to the radicalism of ID; they are like an engine, a tree, a foundation and a filter. There is no engine for evolution: random mutations acted upon by natural selection is an insufficient mechanism for macroevolution, there is no evidence for self-organization, symbiotic evolution does not create new information, and punctuated equilibrium is too improbable. There is no tree of common ancestry. The fossil record is a record of sudden appearance, stasis, and extinction. The Eocene bat (allegedly lived 50 million years ago) is a living fossil discovered in 1965. The Cambrian Explosion and the inverted cone of diversity seen in the fossil record contradict Darwinism. No gradualism has been observed in the fossil record as expected if decent with modification is true. The fossil evidence fits well with the idea of separate created kinds. The foundation of Darwinism is naturalistic philosophy and not empirical evidence. Intelligent causes can be detected by use of William Dembski's Explanatory Filter. Objects which exhibit complex specified information (CSI) were created by intelligent causes. Irreducibly complex biochemical machines such as the bacterial flagellum exhibit CSI and were therefore designed. The root of the problem is the deification of nature (Romans 1). Darwinism is a true modern superstition which Christians should expose. We need to insist that the data be allowed to speak for itself. Modern science has betrayed its core value of truth telling.

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Mark Eckel of the Moody Bible Institute gave a talk entitled "Originality." He said God is transcendent and immanent. God's transcendence means He is separate and apart from his creation; we will never be God. God's immanence means He is close to and cares for His creation. Origin ideas derived from naturalism are futile for living: materialism, determinism, perfectionism, utopianism, and skepticism. Materialism says that the physical universe is all there is. Determinism says we are merely complex chemical reactions which can be explained by environmental and genetic factors alone. Perfectionism says man can be perfected by science. Utopianism says we can create a perfect world through the proper governmental structures. Skepticism says we can never really know the truth. Correctly understanding our origins gives a basis for law, freedom, rights, responsibility, respect, community, dignity, proper relationships, hope, and redemption. We must confess creation and communicate with our culture.

### Sneak Preview of the Video Privileged Planet

Conference attendees were treated to a viewing of a new video by Illustra Media entitled *The Privileged Planet* which is now available. The video is similar in format to the video *Unlocking the Mysteries of Life*, also available from Illustra. Several astronomers (not Hugh Ross) discuss the fine tuning of the laws of nature and various aspects of the earth and our solar system that just happen to be what they must be for us to be here.

### Question and Answer Sessions

My recollection and notes on these sessions are fragmentary and mostly consist of responses from Russell Humphreys and Hugh Ross. Both men behaved in a professional and respectful way. Thomas Woodward was a good moderator and only let discussions go so far before addressing a new topic. Woodward was respectful to all. Charles Thaxton commented that he thought the ID camp should be a "big tent" with room for both YEC and OE creationists. Ross was asked if he thought the salt deposition in the sea was a convincing argument for a young earth. He said no and that there was probably some mechanism which removed salt from the sea. He also said that old supernova remnants have been seen in other galaxies but not in our own because there is too much dust locally and the remnants are faint. He claimed that accelerated nuclear decay can be disproved by observing the elemental composition of stars which are millions of light years away; no matter what age of star you observe, the elemental composition is what is expected if decay rates have always been the same. Ross also said that helium diffusion should not be used as a chronometer because helium is small and slippery and may have come from sources other than radioactive decay. Dr. Humphreys responded that the amount of helium found in the zircons was greater than in the surrounding rock, proving its source was the zircons and

not some external source. Moreover, the sum of the helium found in the zircons and the surrounding biotite was close to the theoretical amount based on the amount of radioactive decay indicated by the uranium/lead content of the zircons. The rapid helium diffusion rates plus high helium retention in zircons leave no other option than to infer a past episode of accelerated nuclear decay. The way the sessions were handled did not permit every comment made by one speaker to be addressed by another who might have held a different position. At one point Woodward thanked Humphreys and Ross calling them scholars and lead in a round of applause. ☺

## ERRATA

In the September article entitled, Deglaciation or The Meltdown, the values 100° C and 40° C in the last paragraph on page one and in the first paragraph on page two should have read as 10° C and 4° C, respectively.

## COMING EVENTS

**Thursday, October 14, 7:30 P.M., Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh.**

Dr. David Plaisted will present "The Complexity of Life": pictorial survey of the structure of life from the level of the cell down to the level of molecular biology. Dr. Plaisted will show us the marvelous complexity of life in a mostly non-technical presentation.

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