

Book Review

Research News, Feb. 2002 (p. 17)

Research News is published
by The Templeton Foundation

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The Seamless Migration from Religion to Science

Let There Be Life: A Scientific and Poetic Retelling of the Genesis Creation Story. Robert Fripp (Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2001) 196 pages. \$18.00 hardback.

By Ruth A. Cameron

Let *There Be Life* is a difficult book to classify. In his foreword, the novelist John Fowles (best known for *The French Lieutenant's Woman*) calls it "a literary curiosity." Is it a new translation with commentary, like Everett Fox's treatment of Genesis in *The Five Books of Moses*? Robert Fripp's commentary differs from usual biblical exegesis; instead, he offers a series of essays that give a chronology of the evolution of the universe. Moreover, Fripp's "Verses" are not a "translation" of Genesis 1 and 2; they use the style of the King James Version of the Bible (sometimes using phraseology from other books of the Old Testament, as in his "Verse 25") to rephrase the Creation story in the light of recent scientific knowledge:

"And God spake, saying: Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low. So God brake the land with

once more within the deep. Then God caused hills to come forth from the waters and great mountains to come up also out of the seas, that the testimony of his might was graven on dry land, even as the shells that are fossil within the rocks thereof."

Readers of Isaiah and listeners to Handel's *Messiah* will recognize the language of "Every valley shall be exalted." Fripp is an author who has the poetic imagery and rhythms of the KJV in his soul.

The subtitle purports to describe the book: *A Scientific and Poetic Retelling of the Genesis Creation Story*. Fripp's stated purpose in the introduction disavows "an attempt to reach a compromise between the literal interpretation of Genesis' creation on the one hand, and evolutionary theory on the other." It is, he says, "an attempt, in allegorical form, to combine the spirit and the sense of Genesis with the conventional wisdom of current scientific thought." A literary critic will question his rather free use of

Who would be the "ideal reader" of such a work? The word "scientific," which comes first in the subtitle, presupposes that scientists, particularly those interested in theories of creation and evolution, would be engaged by Fripp's endeavor. The word "poetic" suggests that people like me in literary disciplines would be interested in this "Poetic Retelling," perhaps in the manner of Robert March's *Physics for Poets*. Or is this a book for the general reading public? Fripp's genial and poetic style and relative lack of scholarly apparatus would appear to point in that direction.

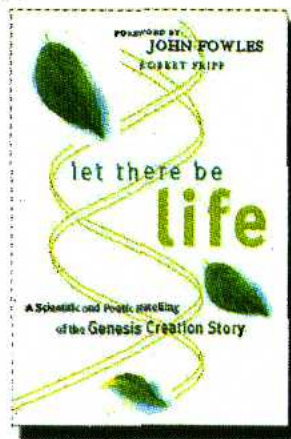
However, there are problems for the general lay reader and for poetic/literary types like me. First, the author assumes that his readers have a working knowledge of scientific terms and personalities in the history of science. His ideal reader would need to have a wide range of background in the sciences — astrophysics, geophysics, molecular chemistry, zoology, microbiology and paleontology. Thus, it would seem that his immediate audience would be scientists

material well-known to them — details of the creation/evolution of the universe? Is there anything new for them?

Given Fripp's apparent purpose to reconcile evolutionary theory and the Genesis account of creation, especially as he writes his final essay, I would say that the ideal reader of *Let There Be Light* might be the readers of a publication like *Research News*. They will be enlightened and inspired by the author's words in the final essay:

"The concept of the Big Bang is at least as implausible as any tenet of religious faith. The intellectual migration from religion to science is in some ways seamless. And the notion that God is everywhere but occupies no single point translates well to the cosmological principle, which states that, the universe is the same everywhere and has no center." ❖

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