

New Atheism Is Making Science the Enemy of Religion—But It's Not

At the second Faith and Science Conference, themed “Genesis and Genetics,” held June 23-25 at Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri, pastors, educators, scientists, students and laypeople came away equipped with information that kept the conference buzzing with excitement.

“New atheism is making science the enemy of religion, but it’s not,” states Dr. James Bradford, Assemblies of God general secretary. “The goal of the conference was to equip spiritual leaders to be able to interact with congregations who are scientifically literate and to answer the hard questions people are asking. The men and women who presented at this conference are born again Christians who are also considered leaders in their scientific fields—including areas such as genetics, mathematics, astrophysics, neuroscience, chemistry, biology and theology.”

Bradford says that it was important for the conference not to deify science, like the secular world does, but also not to demonize it either. He believes the conference achieved its objectives.

The featured guest speaker for the Faith and Science Conference was Dr. John Lennox. Lennox, a world renowned Christian apologist and professor of mathematics at Oxford University, England, kicked off the conference with a Sunday morning service at Central Assembly of God in Springfield (which can be heard at [here](#) under the headline “In The Word”). He has debated the leading atheists in the world, and during the conference, Lennox pointed out lethal weaknesses in atheists’ arguments.

“‘One of the key quotes from Dr. Lennox that really struck me was, ‘The universe is not neutral in its testimony about God (Romans 1). The evidence of the created universe points to God,’” Bradford says.

“Another quote from a plenary leader also struck me when he said, ‘To non-scientist believers—we are not reeling in a defensive posture. There has been a remarkable consonance within the last 100 years between Scripture and nature.’”

Daniel Guy, social media strategist for the AG, attended the conference, tweeting out key points along the way. “To me, one of the key points made was not to forget about the minds doing the science,” Guy says. “How are we even able to do science in the first place, if our consciousness is developed by chance, how can we trust ourselves to do anything accurately?”

After most presentations, breakout Q&A sessions were offered in order for attendees to ask follow-up questions and provide greater clarity to the presentations.

“People were enthusiastic about what was presented during the conference,” Guy observes. “There were a lot of questions during the Q&A times—lots of discussions. People were really engaging with the information presented.”

Pastors and laity weren’t the only ones engaging in the conference.

Dr. Mike Tenneson, a biology professor at Evangel and chair of planning for both the 2011 and 2014 Faith and Science conferences, found the revelation that 4 percent of human DNA is unique (not found in any other life) very significant.

“Further,” he says, “there’s no known natural mechanism of mutation that could explain the sudden appearance of such a large quantity of DNA, which points to the unique and special creation of Eve.”

Bradford adds, "There is a lot of evidence that we are not here by mistake. We looked at DNA evidence for the human race coming from one couple and how life could not evolve spontaneously by accident."

The conference itself was also a model for leaders in how to have a discussion without a threatening atmosphere. "You have to understand, that even among Christians there is debate about, for example, young earth and old earth," Bradford says, "but we were able to model and place tools in leaders' hands on how to handle things occurring in a congregation relating to faith and science."

Tenneson agrees. "Not every Christian agrees on the solution to scientific or theological problems, but we were able to discuss those areas in an open forum without it turning into a painful or unpleasant interaction."

Bradford, Tenneson and Guy also report overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees.

"All the feedback I received has been really positive, with several indicating a desire for every AG pastor to receive this kind of training," Tenneson says. "I believe attendees came away knowing that science is not the enemy of faith and faith is not the enemy of science."

Guy says that the interest in the conference wasn't just limited to the Evangel campus. "We had more than 1,100 tweets and retweets using the hashtag #faithandscience," Guy says. "That resulted in those tweets being seen more than 1.8 million times, which far exceeded our expectations."

The conference also presented Guy with something unexpected, outside of the educational.

"One thing I wasn't expecting, but probably should have, were the times of worship we had before each plenary session, and the presence of God we experienced during those times," Guy

says.

“Seeing a group of more than 350 academically wired individuals respond to God’s presence ... the worship was so powerful. People were encountering God during those times. The Holy Spirit was there. It was really beautiful.”

Although the conference has concluded, a book featuring the peer-reviewed papers from the conference has been produced. Titled *Genesis & Genetics: Proceedings of the 2014 Faith & Science Conference*, the collection of papers is available through My Healthy Church.

In addition, videos of most of the conference’s plenary sessions and all of the breakout sessions will be made available to view on the conference website at conference website in the upcoming weeks.

Currently, the conference, which was co-sponsored by the AG General Secretary’s Office, Evangel University, and the Pensmore Foundation, is being planned to be held every two years, with the next conference slated for 2015 at Evangel.

“Just the fact that we’re having a conference like this within the AG is huge,” Bradford says. “Now people don’t have to go outside of the AG to have these conversations or find answers to their questions.”