In Defense of
Dr. Bruce K. Waltke

*Introduction*

Dr. Waltke’s views of science and the scripture seem to have triggered somewhat of a kerfuffle, a scandal in the reformed world: a scandal which Dr. Waltke himself clearly sought to avoid.[[1]](#endnote-1)

“In April 2010, news reports emerged alleging that Waltke was asked to resign his professorship at the Reformed Theological Seminary because he advocated that evolution and Christianity were compatible in a video on the Biologos Foundation’s website.[[2]](#endnote-2) [[3]](#endnote-3) However, the RTS chancellor, Ric Cannada, later stated that this was not the case and that Waltke had submitted his resignation without solicitation.[[4]](#endnote-4) Waltke himself clarified things: ‘Ric’s acceptance of my resignation has only added to the emotional turmoil; I have received letters from many quarters condemning RTS for his action. In fact, I was asked to be interviewed about my resignation on ABC News with Diane Sawyer! Of course, I refused because I am certain it would have been spun to reflect negatively on RTS and the church. I find no fault with the RTS administration; in fact, I think they did the right thing.’ ”[[5]](#endnote-5) [[6]](#endnote-6) [[7]](#endnote-7)

We certainly hope that our discussion does not add to Dr. Waltke’s discomfort in any way. We hasten to point out that this is a Reformed discussion, not an evangelical discussion:[[8]](#endnote-8) the Reformed community[[9]](#endnote-9) simply has scruples that just don’t bother other folks for the most part. So, unless we have some experience with the Reformed community, we are unlikely to understand what’s going on here.

*God’s Perspective*

At what is, perhaps, its most basic level, it is impossible that the God of Creation and the God of the Bible are in any disagreement: they are One and the same Persons. Moreover, just as God gave His Word without error; so, He also made Creation without flaw: it is ludicrous to suppose any inerrancy of scripture, while at the same time claiming a flaw filled nature. In their original forms, both are flawless, inerrant, perfect, and pristine. However, we often get this originality factor mixed up.

“Asked if this limits academic freedom, Milton said: ‘We are a confessional seminary. I’m a professor myself, but I do not have a freedom that would go past the boundaries of the confession. Nor do I have a freedom that would allow me to express my views in such a way to hurt or impugn someone who holds another view.’ Indeed he added that the problem with what Waltke said was as much his suggestion that religion will lose support over these issues as his statements about evolution itself. (The statement of faith at the seminary states: ‘Since the Bible is absolutely and finally authoritative as the inerrant Word of God, it is the basis for the total curriculum.’)”[[10]](#endnote-10)

This particular statement is wrong in that it fails to specify autographa or originality. As far as we know, the only autographs surviving today are specified in Revelation 5 and 10.

*Man’s Perspective*

Aye, and herein lies the rub, as soon as man gets his grimy mitts on either Creation or Bible, they are defiled. As soon as Adam and Eve are cast out of Paradise, it becomes impossible for them to any longer have a flawless conversation with God, or to give themselves to their life commission of naming and understanding Creation, filling it, and making it peaceful. Studies of either the Bible or science, on the part of man are consequently and inevitably stained by flaws. This does not relieve mankind of the responsibility to understand and reconcile both: for both come flawlessly from the hand of God; so that, it is our common human duty to struggle to see the Universe as God sees it. Fail, we will; yet, not for want of trying.

“But the fact that his seminary did dismiss him is viewed as a sign of just how difficult it may be for scholars at some institutions to raise issues involving science that are not 100 percent consistent with a literal interpretation of the Bible.”[[11]](#endnote-11)

This statement is also wrong. What does “a literal interpretation” even mean? For far too many, this means a literal interpretation of the KJV, not even a literal interpretation of the Greek or Hebrew text, let alone any of the possible potential Akkadian documents. Those who insist on the literal usually don’t know what they are talking about: for the most part they have never attempted to struggle with the complexities of Greek or Hebrew. This adherence to literalism mostly speaks to some sort of boneheaded obstinacy. As the saying goes, “For every complex problem, there is one solution, which is also terribly wrong.” If man is involved, the potential for error becomes infinite.

*Polarization*

Central to the problem is the fact that both science and theology are highly specialized fields, each of which has its own specialized language: these languages do not interact very readily. So, the potential for scientists to misunderstand theologians, for theologians to misunderstand scientists, and for the rest of us to be left completely in the dark, is enormous. Sometimes scientists don’t even understand themselves; which can also be said of theologians.

The topic of evolution was on the table; yet, very few people have a clear understanding of what is meant. Evolution is very easily demonstrated in modern laboratories; yet, when we look more closely, all of the evolution that is being observed is within species boundaries.[[12]](#endnote-12) On the other hand, no evidence has ever been found of evolution crossing species boundaries, at least in higher order beings:[[13]](#endnote-13) this becomes murkier in the microbial world. Very few people maintain any distinction between these two, very-different ideas; evolution is an emotionally loaded “hot” word; so, bitter wrangling self-perpetuates based on ignorance, and an historic battle that no longer exists.

Theology has the same problem. This discussion is not really about science and the Bible, it is about an institutional “statement of faith”.

*Conclusion*

Dr. Waltke is right. We must continue to strive, no matter how difficult a task this is; we must continue to seek the same reconciliation between science and the Bible that God sees between Creation and His Word. Failure at this task is just more blockheaded stubbornness.[[14]](#endnote-14)

Dr. Waltke may not have specified the minutia between micro- and macro- evolution; but, that was not his point, was it? Dr. Waltke is not a scientist by practice, so we can forgive any minor oversight; if, indeed, any was made.

Dr. Waltke is not a scientist; he is not even a theologian in the broadest sense of the word; he is a linguistic specialist in Hebrew; he’s also superior at Greek. He’s the sort of fellow that is so honest that it is impossible for him to hide what he is thinking; he is an Israelite in whom there is no guile (John 1:47). May his tribe increase. This is the sort of person to which the Reformed community, and every Christian community needs to be listening. This person is the one who can’t help but tell us, whenever we have made a mistake. He is also the sort of person who will forgive our debts: for he is kind.

Dr. Waltke’s loss to RTS is their loss, not his. Those who appreciate his work in Psalms, Proverbs, and many other places will continue to benefit from his works in years to come. That is only as it should be.

God bless you, Dr. Waltke.

[[15]](#endnote-15)

1. This writer knows from painful personal experience that attempting to step down in order to avoid division and strife in the Church is a sure way to attract a lynch mob: a court will convene; judgment will almost certainly take place; even if it is only the court of popular opinion, entirely devoid of due process. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Jaschik, Scott (2010-04-09). [“Evangelical Scholar Forced Out After Endorsing Evolution”](https://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2010-04-09-IHE-evangelical-endorsing-evolution-forced-out09_ST_N.htm). *USA Today*. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Harris, Dan; Murray, Michael (2010-04-16), [Evangelist Spurned for Supporting Evolution](http://abcnews.go.com/WN/evangelical-bible-scholar-spurned-supporting-inclusion-evolutionary-theory/story?id=10395181), ABC World News, A Prominent Evangelical Bible Scholar Has Been Attacked for Proposing That Evolution May Be True”. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. [“Statement from Chancellor Ric Cannada to the RTS community and beyond”](http://www.rts.edu/newsevents/newsdetails.aspx?news_id=1371). 2010-04-11. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. “Professor Bruce Waltke Posts An ‘Open Letter to the RTS Community’ on Facebook”. 2010-04-13. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. [Bruce Waltke’s entire letter](http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2010/april/bruce-waltke-headed-to-knox-theological-seminary-updated.html) 2010-04-12 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Waltke>. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Many of the articles flying around use the terms evangelical or evangelist. The Reformed community has taken great pains to distinguish itself from evangelicalism. In my wildest dreams, I could never associate the Evangelical community with the Reformed community. If you think I’m splitting hairs, please feel free to consult any copy of *Handbook of Denominations* printed in the last two score years. Yes, there are Reformed individuals who are more evangelical than others: pressing this to mean that Reformed ≡ Evangelical is a little like saying that apples and apricots are both fruit, it’s true in a way, but it’s very misleading.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handbook_of_Denominations>

<https://www.harvesthousepublishers.com/data/files/excerpts/9780736952910_exc.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. The Reformed community comprises roughly twenty denominations, possibly a few more or less, in its more conservative representations; Reformed Theological Seminary is only a minute particle in that community. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/04/09/video> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/04/09/video> [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. I would prefer that we always call this micro-evolution: it is an unavoidable scientific fact, it’s beyond all dispute. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. I could wish that we always call this macro-evolution: it has no evidence in higher order plants and animals; the distinction might possible become blurred in single-celled organisms. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. I was fried over this issue in my ordination exams; I don’t know how I even passed. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. If you have been blessed or helped by any of these meditations, please repost, share, or use any of them as you wish. No rights are reserved. They are designed and intended for your free participation. They were freely received, and are freely given. No other permission is required for their use. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)