From the Dust: Conversations in Creation

directed by Ryan Pettey
Mountain View (CA): Highway Media, 2012. 66 minutes

reviewed by Keith B Miller

This 2012 documentary film by Highway Media and the BioLogos Foundation was produced by filmmaker Ryan Pettey of Satellite Pictures. Highway Media is a non-profit founded for the purpose of creating visual media to promote conversations about the “big questions” that face the Christian community. BioLogos was established in 2007 by Francis Collins (past director of the Human Genome Project), who served as its president until 2009 when he became the director of the National Institutes of Health. Collins was disturbed by the prevalence of the warfare view of science and religious faith held by many both inside and outside of the Christian community. The mission of BioLogos is to foster a dialogue among evangelical Christians on the harmony of science and faith. The BioLogos website (http://biologos.org) has rapidly become a major web presence, and is now one of the most viewed websites dedicated to science/faith issues.

This 66-minute film is directed at a specifically Christian audience, and seeks to address the major concerns voiced by those Christians who reject evolution. It emphasizes theological issues, rather than questions of scientific evidence or interpretation. This is entirely appropriate for the target audience, whose rejection of evolution is not based on scientific argument but on deeply held religious views. There is a strong focus on questions of biblical interpretation. This is critical for reaching out to a part of the Christian community that has come to see evolution as in conflict with the Bible, largely because of a literalistic reading of these ancient records. Other important theological and philosophical issues addressed by the film include: the role of randomness in natural processes, the false perception of conflict between natural processes and divine action, the role of death, and the meaning of human uniqueness in an evolutionary context. In addition, the film touches on some common misconceptions of the nature of science. It is made clear that science, by itself, is incapable of assigning meaning or purpose to the natural processes it describes. The important role of uncertainty in science is also discussed, as a source of tension for those who demand certainty. The desire for unquestioning certainty is shown to be an obstacle to the pursuit of truth.

From the Dust is presented as a conversation over the meaning of creation in light of the conclusions of science about the history and processes of the natural world. It opens with interviews of individuals representing the Creation Museum in Kentucky, Answers in Genesis, and Canopy Ministries. The claims of these young-earth creationists serve to set up the questions to be discussed in the film. The voices of a large group of British and American scholars are used to develop the theological and philosophical responses to the young Earth advocates. The names of many of these theologians and scientists will be fa-
familiar to those who have followed the scholarly discussion of evolution and the Christian faith. These include John Polkinghorne, Nancey Murphy, NT Wright, Alister McGrath, David Wenham, Peter Enns, and John Walton, among others. Having such a large number of voices (over fifteen) from a wide range of institutions and Christian denominations serves the purpose of showing that evolutionary science is accepted and embraced by theologians and scientists from a large segment of the evangelical Christian community. However, drawing on so many individuals doesn’t allow enough time for developing a coherent explanation or perspective. The film jumps rapidly from one individual to another, never resting long on a single point or topic. In my view, the benefit of showing many individuals is outweighed by the loss of coherence.

Although the film has a very worthy objective and includes some very excellent content, it suffers from trying to do too much. It not only includes too many voices, but also revisits arguments from the young-earth creationists at intervals throughout the film. This becomes a distraction to the central points that are being made. Furthermore, there are several story lines that are interlaced throughout the film. These include stories of Christian college students working through the theological issues and of science faculty struggling to find a voice in the polarized public atmosphere. Stories of how to communicate evolutionary science to a skeptical Christian public are important, but would be better dealt with on their own. Last, the quality of the videography of the film is very uneven. Some of it is very good, but at other points it more resembles a family video. This unevenness adds to the distraction.

In summary, despite some weaknesses, this film is a valuable resource for initiating discussion of the place of evolutionary theory within an entirely orthodox Christian theology. It would serve well for church discussion groups and parachurch groups, as well as for individuals who are struggling with reconciling their faith and the claims of science. This film represents one more tool in a growing list of books, on-line videos, websites, and blogs that seek to break down the false dichotomy of science and religious faith. This can only be good news for increasing the public acceptance of science at a time when our society is facing increasingly pressing scientific and technological challenges.

**About the Author**

Keith B Miller is Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Geology at Kansas State University and a member of NCSE’s Advisory Council. He edited *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation* (Grand Rapids [MI]: Eerdmans, 2003).

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