

# Review of “Can a Smart Person Believe in God” by Michael Guillen

**Reviewer: Dalton Porter**

10/30/2006

## **Executive summary:**

Dr. Guillen is attempting to show that you can believe in both science and the Bible, but if the two disagree, you have to modify your interpretation of the Bible. While not making this statement directly, it is implied by the summary points as shown below. This is somewhat alarming considering that Dr. Guillen notes on more than one occasion that science is not all knowing and, in fact, fallible. There are nuggets of “A-men” material here, but the overall message is one of Biblical compromise.

## **About the reviewer:**

We all bring to the table preconceived notions and ideas. There is no such thing as an unbiased opinion when it comes to discussing philosophy. And make no mistake, this book is all about philosophy.

Given that, I feel obligated to state my biases relating to this subject. I would fall back on these principles:

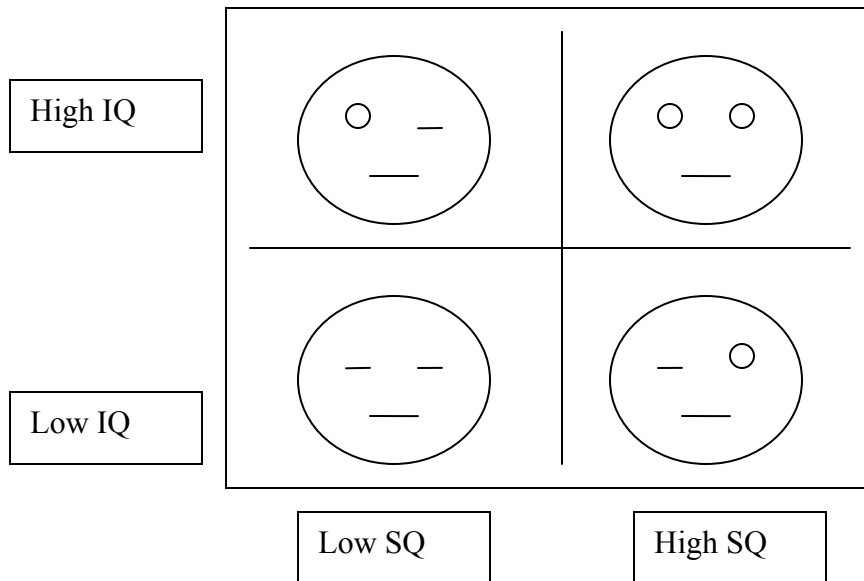
- 1) The Bible is the inspired Word of God. Inspired by the Holy Spirit and committed to paper by chosen men.
- 2) The Bible must be taken seriously. It means what it says and says what it means.
- 3) The idea of an ancient earth is counter to the exegesis of Genesis chapters 1-11, and leads to other non-scriptural ideas such as theistic evolution (e.g. the idea that God used evolution (molecules to man) as part of his creative process)

Dr. Guillen does not lead off his book with a section like this. You have to get to page 122 to discover what he really believes about the reliability of Genesis.

## **Spiritual Quotient**

In this book Dr. Guillen attempts to define what he calls the Spiritual Quotient (SQ).  
*“[SQ] that ineffable, instinctive aptitude I believe we’re all born with. I claim SQ is a measure of our ability to perceive the subtler, nonphysical aspects of reality; to solve problems and acquire conviction spiritually.”*

Dr. Guillen simplifies this in the form of a two dimensional grid similar to this illustration.



Much of the book focuses on trying to define these IQ states and giving examples - some hypothetical, some actual people. Dr. Guillen proceeds to tell us that it is best to be in the upper right quadrant of this diagram (Hi IQ/Hi SQ). It's made clear that our goal in life should be to have both eyes open. If you have an eye closed, you will have issues.

To a Christian, having a high SQ would seem desirable. However, it is clear that SQ does not imply Christ or even a Supreme Being. A good example is the Carl Sagan reference. Carl Sagan was (by all accounts that I know of) a very nice man, but he was a valiant advocate of naturalistic evolution.

CASPBIG, p. 29

I came to know (and respect) Carl well enough to discover that he had a deep, SQ-type reverence for the beautiful way in which our universe operates.

... but nevertheless he [Carl Sagan] was, in his own way, a devoutly religious man.

I certainly agree with the statement that Dr. Sagan was devoutly religious. His religion was humanism. I personally find it difficult to place Dr. Sagan's SQ higher than zero. Of course, my idea of SQ is biased towards a relationship with Christ, not spirituality in general.

Dr. Guillen goes on to mention Ann Druyann's spirituality. Again, I find it difficult to give her a SQ higher than zero.

CASPBIG, p. 29

The same kind of religiosity is even more evident in Carl Sagan's widow, Ann Druyann. Like him, she doesn't believe in God, yet is spiritually passionate about the scientific process that elucidates the natural world. Listen to her in a speech describing an astronomy show she cocreated for the Hayden Planetarium in New York. She sounds positively evangelistic:

"This is what got me thinking about how we might offer something that would be at least as compelling as whatever anyone else in the religion business is offering." ...

"Every kid who goes to a city public school get taken to these shows"

She sounds evangelistic, perhaps giddy, at the prospect of proselytizing public school children.

In the following case, this hypothetical woman is to be considered "inferior" in some respect because she allows her faith to veto her IQ.

CASPBIG pp. 14-15

A woman with a PhD degree and an Einsteinlike IQ, for example, might come to believe, as many Amish do, that intellectualism is actually a stumbling block in anyone's attempted approach to God; that it's best to seek Him purely with faith. For that reason, such a woman, despite her enormous smarts, would fall into the low-IQ/high-SQ category of my grid. She'd qualify as a Spiritual Cyclops.

Note the jab at the Amish. Just because the Amish believe something, does that make it unacceptable?

### **The Bible**

I would like to revisit some remarks about Dr. Guillen's faith in the Bible and God.

CASPBIG p. 46

Evil behavior appears to be a cursed and universal feature of the Homo sapiens experience. Science doesn't have any satisfactory explanation of why this is so, its endless nature-nurture debate notwithstanding.

Fortunately, God does.

CASPBIG p. 77

God is fast becoming the much-sought-after simplest explanation of all!

For now, the point is: whilst billions of people on Planet Earth warmly embrace God, Mr. Occam doesn't. For him, God is too SQ, too complex, too far-out, and perforce must be dismissed without any consideration. That's why God will never be a part of science's so-called theory of everything.

CASPBIG p. 108

I believe that Utopia will come at the hands of God, not of humankind. Why do I believe that? Because it's written in the Bible ...

CASPBIG p.128

Our underlying faith in God doesn't need science, and never will, to remain alive and well.

CASPBIG p. 134

I trust God. I have faith in Him ... and in Saint Paul's promise that one day we will know the answers.

The statements above, I would agree with. Dr. Guillen is building a case for the authority of God and His book, the Bible.

### **The Limitations of Science**

Now, I would like to revisit some of Dr. Guillen's comments about science.

CASPBIG p. 65

I doubt seriously it's [science's] ability to lead us unescorted to ultimate truth.

CASPBIG p. 91

Scientific Explanations Come and Go Unpredictably

CASPBIG pp. 95-96

But wait! declares the optimist, maybe science has experienced its last Thomas Young-like upheaval. From now on, maybe it's all about simply spit-polishing the chrome of existing theories.

Yes, maybe. Problem is, anyone who's ever thought that has ended up having to eat crow: for example ...

CASPBIG p. 97

The take-home lesson of all of this: worshipping the scientific process is like building your house on constantly shifting sands. As we've seen, all the evidence indicates that science is not converging smoothly and consensually

upon one firm, reliable understanding of the way our world began or how it operates, really. It's not even converging upon such an understanding in fits and starts.

All the evidence indicates it's not converging at all, but rather changing its mind constantly in wildly unpredictable ways, always in concert with the latest, equally unpredictable outcomes of ever more clever and sophisticated experiments ...

CASPBIG p. 102

For that reason, our efforts to understand the world solely with our IQ will always be doomed to permanent indecision and debate.

These statements lend credence to a very valid idea – scientific knowledge changes over time. For about 200 years, Newton's ideas reigned supreme. However, by the year 1915, it was becoming obvious that Newton's Laws could not explain all of the scientific data. In time, Einstein's General Theory of relativity displaced Newton's Universal Gravitation as the equation that governs the universe. Today, modern physics is moving beyond Einstein's ideas into areas such as Superstring Theory. In fact, it seems the only constant in science is "change".

It is also possible for the scientific community to be intentionally misled. You don't have to look any further than the year 1913 and the Piltdown Man hoax. This "missing link" stood until 1953 when it was discovered to be a fraud.

In summary, Dr. Guillen is correct. Science is done by humans – fallible humans.

### **Contradictions**

Dr. Guillen has established that he believes the Bible. He also believes in science, and understands that science is not perfect and in fact guaranteed to change its mind over time.

Given those two statements, we must now call in to question Dr. Guillen's Cyclopes analogy. Let's start with his description of how a 3D image is formed.

CASPBIG p. 129

... they pool their flat, one-dimensional images to create a single, coherent, three- dimensional picture. That's how stereo vision works.

Well, I suppose he meant to say 'two-dimensional images', but that is beside the point. Stereo vision only works if the left and right images are of the same quality. If one of the images contains imperfections, the resulting stereo image will not be coherent and may contain artifacts.

Let us assume that the spiritual eye is guided by the Bible and the intelligence eye is guided by science. Let us further assume that the Bible is the written record of God's Word and that is it complete. We arrive at the conclusion that one of the eyes has an unchanging image, but the image in the other eye is guaranteed to change. The question we must now ask is "How should we handle the situation where modern science appears to refute something in the Bible?" Obviously one of the images must be adjusted somehow – but which?

One common way is to "re-interpret" the sixty-six books in light of the sixty-seventh book where the sixty-seventh book is nature. Of course, the most popular example of this is in Genesis 1 where the word "day" is used. Simple exegesis of these passages indicates that a "day" in this context is a twenty-four hour day. The same is true for Exodus 20:11. You really have to work to build a Biblical case for making a "creation day" into a long period of time. If you have modern science making the statement that the earth is ancient, then you may feel obligated to make such a compromise of Scripture – perhaps to avoid ridicule. In reality, there is really no need for that. Once you understand how "absolute dating" is done, you will see what a flimsy foundation those interpretations are built on. In addition, 14C dating actually indicates that the earth can not be ancient. The point here is not to debate the age of the earth, just to point out that science has not "proven" it to be ancient.

Dr. Guillen has already pointed out that we must not assume we are at the pinnacle of scientific knowledge – it could all be changed tomorrow with a single experiment. Why then would you choose to compromise a perfectly good Bible that has never been proven wrong with a scientific model that can not be proven right? That's right, I said "can not be proven". Science does not "prove" anything.

### **Is there a better model than the Cyclopes?**

In fact there is, its called "using spiritual glasses" to view the world. If we believe the Bible to be true and understand that science by definition is going to change, then we must use a "truth detector". In fact, Dr. Guillen admits such in this passage:

CASPBIG p. 71

In 1 Thessalonians 5:21, Saint Paul exhorts us: "Test everything. Hold on to the good." Again this is clearly not an invitation for us to become Spiritual Cyclopes, to turn a blind eye to the natural world. Just the opposite.

I believe the Bible here is urging us to observe every little thing that goes on around us - every claim, every phenomenon, every impulse - and to judge each one critically, sorting out the trustworthy ones from the bogus ones. In other words, the Bible is commanding us to behave like scientists!

What Dr. Guillen fails to mention is the standard by which things should be tested! That standard is God's Word. It is not a standard of men. It is not a changing standard.

Thus saith the Lord!

It is written ...

Have ye not read ...

I am not advocating that the Bible be used as a science text book. Hardly, since the Word is unchanging. I am advocating that the Word be used as a filter to reject wrong ideas. This would of course be laughable to the atheistic naturalist but that is not unexpected. (see Acts 17)

If we imagine being present at the time of the "Scopes Monkey Trial", one of the pieces of evidence used there was the discovery of the Piltdown skull. How difficult it must have been at that time to be a Christian advocating the Bible as a truth detector! Here they have the evidence literally in their hands – the missing link. You can go see it in a glass case. You must amend your reading of Scripture – you are wrong! However, there were some who did not falter – even though they did not have the correct answer at the time. The facts of the Piltdown hoax were not discovered until 40 years after its presentation. What a mighty test of faith.

Instead of interpreting Scripture in light of the best that science can offer, we should be using the Bible as a filter.

### **A Fallen World**

A mistake often made these days is that we can discern truth for ourselves independent of the Bible. We must not forget that we live in a fallen world and we have fallen brains. Could it be that this is why there appear to be contradictions between what our brains tell us and what the Word says?

### **What does Dr. Guillen believe?**

There is not a section in the book that deals specifically with this, so I will have to guess based on statements in the book.

I suggest that he is either a theistic evolutionist or a progressive creationist. He believes the earth to be about 4.6 billion years old. He believes that God created the universe out of nothing (which I agree with). He is willing to bend the plain exegesis of Genesis 1-11 because if not, the stereo image formed is completely unintelligible. He is aware that he is "interpreting" the Bible based on the best science can offer today. Below are statements from the book which lead me to these conclusions.

CASPBIG p. 85

The Bible was never on trial, nor was God. Instead, as James Carvil might say: It's the interpretation, stupid!

Does changing the interpretation not change the meaning? How is this different than editing the text?

CASPBIG p. 101

Where is option 4? Noah's flood.

CASPBIG p. 105

Who knew, for example, that our constant use of modern antibiotics would stimulate the rise of deadly, Terminator-like microbes that positively resist treatment?

Microbes that predate the use of penicillin have been found and there are antibiotic resistant strains among them. The microbes did not get "smart" and evolve a new ability. This is not a proof of evolution.

CASPBIG p. 121

... that scientific view has changed by 180 degrees, and in the process, come into greater agreement with the essence of Genesis 1:1 in two profound ways. First, it now appears that the cosmos did indeed have a definite beginning: starting with a "big bang", it sprang into existence out of nothing (what scientists call a quantum vacuum)

Equating Genesis 1:1 with the big bang? If he really means "created out of nothing" he should be more careful. The unsuspecting might get the idea that the "big bang" is compatible with Genesis 1. Just as a reminder, among other issues relating to cosmic evolution, the sun and other celestial objects were created on day 4, not day 1.

CASPBIG p. 122

Put another way: he [Hoyle] calculated Randomness would need about three hundred times the age of the earth to create a single protein molecule by accident. That amounts to about 1.3 trillion years! Considering that scientists currently estimate the entire universe to be only 13 billion years old, that doesn't leave nearly enough time for Randomness to have pieced life together from scratch, by accident.

While Randomness is scourged, the idea that the universe is 13 billion years old doesn't even raise an eyebrow.

CASPBIG p. 123

John Eccles famous Nobel Prize-winning neurophysiologist, concurs: "There is a divine Providence over and above the materialistic happenings of biological evolution"

There is no scourging of "evolution" - in fact, it seems to be a tool of God.

CASPBIG p. 125

According to the latest evidence alleged by paleoanthropologists, humans as we know them appeared suddenly and mysteriously only a very, very short while ago. ... By most scientific estimates, our appearance happened less than 80,000 years ago, a mere blink of an eye in geological terms.

The straightforward (Occam's razor) reading of the Bible puts the appearance of humans at about 6,000 years ago. The use of "geologic terms" indicates a belief in extreme age.

CASPBIG p. 126

Never mind your personal views on evolution, the all important point here is this: ...

This is meant to deflect criticism of his belief in evolution (tool of God or not) because he knows this is a hot button. A wise move considering this book will probably be read by Christians – some of whom may not be aware that it was sin that caused death. Death was not part of God's creative process. Death only came on the scene AFTER the initial creation.

CASPBIG p. 127

As we've already discussed, my personal interpretation of the Bible, if it is to remain credible, must avoid running afoul of some irrefutable scientific achievement or discovery (see chapter 6).

This pretty much gives away the farm. Dr. Guillen has already said he won't give up the Bible, but when push comes to shove, he is willing to "reinterpret" it. Do I have to mention that Piltdown Man was considered "irrefutable" in its time?

### **The Ultimate Collaboration**

Dr. Guillen is encouraged by a collaboration that he sees forming between the science organizations of the world and the theologians. Indeed such collaboration would be grand except for the detail that both sides have to give a little. As Christians, we have to stand for something. If we think that non-believers can't understand what's going on, we

are deluding ourselves. When Christians begin to reinterpret the Bible to fit world views, we are seen not to be standing firm, but giving an “uncertain sound”. (1 Cor 14:8) In fact, we now **invite** the whole of the Scripture to be attacked. If we are not certain about Genesis, how can we be sure about Matthew? (or anything else for that matter)

Jesus references Genesis in Mark 10:6, specifically noting that man and woman were created at the beginning. In John 5:45-47, Jesus indicates if we don’t believe what Moses wrote (which includes Exodus 20:11 and Genesis), how could we believe his words?

CASPBIG p. 113

Sir John Marks Templeton

... ninety-one year-old John Templeton is doing more than any single individual alive today to promote and finance the Ultimate Collaboration.

CASPBIG p. 117

The American Association for the Advancement of Science

It created a new division called Dialog on Science, Ethics, and Religion (DoSER).

I say gutsy because DoSER’s existence flies in the face of strongly voiced demands by leading scientists who oppose anything having to do with religion, which in their opinion is science’s inferior.

A closer examination of what these individuals and organizations stand for may be in order. I suggest the reader research them a bit to see how closely they are willing to embrace Christians. (see Attachment A)

### **So, What’s the Problem?**

I have had a few positive things to say about Dr. Guillen’s book. I agree with several of his points, but it is his conclusion that I disagree with. However, don’t get me wrong, I’m not condemning him. Quite to the contrary, I expect to meet him in heaven – based on his personal testimony in this book. It is our relationship with Christ that determines our future.

So why did I feel it so important to go through this exercise if the salvation of both Dr. Guillen and myself is assured? It’s all about the next generation of Christians. If we don’t stand firm and “speak with the enemies in the gate” (Psm 127 4-5), the next generation is going to have even bigger problems than we do. Genesis chapters 1-11 are foundational to our doctrine especially concerning original sin, the nature of man, and our NEED for a savior. If we relegate these to myth, what is to stop the next generation from doing the same thing to other parts of the Bible?

There is a precedent set in the Bible about preaching creation.

*1 Cor 1:22-23 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;*

The reader is invited to study this passage more carefully, but I believe it is saying that preaching Christ is foolishness to those who do not have the background of divine creation and original sin. Follow this with Acts chapter 17:16-34 to see how Paul preached to the people of Athens – those with no concept of the one creator God. Paul realized that these people had no foundation, so he started with creation. He knew that unless they were made aware of their problem, they would not realize their need for a savior.

The book has a statement that might be considered contrary to the doctrine of original sin.

CASPBIG pp. 58-59

... the scientific method has enriched our lives in countless ways.

In religion: the scientific method has helped to clarify our understanding of God and His creation. For instance, most of us now realize ... That congenital diseases are caused not by the sins of our fathers, but by their faulty genes.

A casual reader of this may conclude that God created man with faulty genes! In reality, these diseases ARE caused by the sin of at least one of our fathers – Adam. If I am misreading this, I apologize, but the reader who is not familiar with the doctrines of “the fall” and “original sin” might interpret Dr. Guillen’s statement improperly. Authorities like Dr. Guillen need to be very careful with statements like this.

In case you do not think that some Christians are pushing for Genesis 1-11 to be declared as only “spiritual truths”, I suggest that you use the Internet and research “The Clergy Letter” developed at Butler University. I was very upset to see Christian clergy signing up to this – and even worse, clergy in my own area! I have included the clergy letter as Attachment B.

Dr. Guillen remarks about Spiritual Cyclopes:

CASPBIG p. 118

They [spiritual cyclopes] worry science might end up demystifying and defiling some of our most sacred spiritual mysteries.

I understand where each camp is coming from. But that’s also why I’m certain the John Templeton Foundation, NIH, and AAAS, and others like them, are leading us in the direction of Ultimate Collaboration: they’re getting hammered equally from both sides!

In case it's not obvious by now, I am (according to Dr. Guillen) a Spiritual Cyclops – although I would prefer to be described as someone that uses the Bible as a truth detector. Being labeled such, I feel the need to defend myself from his statement. I do not worry that science might demystify, defile, or otherwise destroy anything I hold to be true - even if the “proof” is on display at the Smithsonian. God willing, I will remain faithful that God's Word will prove to be true no matter how enticing the evidence to contrary might be.

If you think getting hammered from every side is an indicator that you are on the right track, the young earth creationists are leading the pack.

CASPBIG p. 146

how can a smart person not believe in God?

I agree 100%.

## **Attachement A**

### Information about John Templeton

John M. Templeton was born Nov. 29, 1912, in the small town of Winchester, Tennessee — a biographical item bearing some irony. A dozen years later in nearby Dayton, TN, the famous Scopes "Monkey Trial" would unfold in a battle of evolution theory vs. fundamentalist views of Creation. Templeton and his foundation work on the premise that scientific principles of evolution and the idea of God as Creator are compatible.

Typical of Templeton's wide-lens view of spirituality and ethics, the dedicated Presbyterian admits to additional influence from the New Thought movements of Christian Science, Unity and Religious Science. Those metaphysical churches espouse a non-literal view of heaven and hell, and suggest a shared divinity between God and humanity. "We realize that our own divinity arises from something more than merely being 'God's children' or being 'made in his image,'" Templeton wrote. Sir John does not claim credentials as a theologian as much as someone with enough money to stir new research pursuing further "knowledge and love of God."

The multi-faith framework of the prize calls for "a clearer acceptance of the diversity of gifts within the major religions of the world," Templeton said in 1972 while inaugurating plans for the awards. "We are indebted to our forefathers who recorded in books their spiritual discoveries and revelations," he said, "Alive today are other persons to whom God is revealing further holy truths." One of Templeton's most recent books, *Wisdom from World Religions*, assembles spiritual principles from sacred writings and from the teachings of Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism, Zen and Zoroastrianism. Examples of the wisdom found in this rich resource reflect what Templeton says: "An attitude of gratitude creates blessings, Help yourself by helping others; You have the most powerful weapons on earth — love and prayer."

[http://www.templeton.org/sir\\_john\\_templeton/index.asp](http://www.templeton.org/sir_john_templeton/index.asp)

## SJT Quotes

"Suppose you went to your priest and asked for help — he would refer you to the Bible, but if you went the next day to your medical doctor, and he referred you to the book of Hippocrates, which was written at about the same time as the Bible, you would think that was old-fashioned."

"I have no quarrel with what I learned in the Presbyterian Church — I am still an enthusiastic Christian. But why shouldn't I try to learn more? Why shouldn't I go to Hindu services? Why shouldn't I go to Muslim services? If you are not egotistical, you will welcome the opportunity to learn more."

"The objective of our Religious Foundations is to teach people that they are hurting themselves when they say they believe something. What we should realize is we know almost nothing about God and therefore we should be eager to search and to learn."

"A flower is a miracle, but it does not have the sight or speech to describe us. And our own ability is no greater than that flower when we try to describe God. His infinity covers not only one planet, but the entire solar system and 100 billion suns. That doesn't mean He is limited in his ability to be part of you. "

"I believe all religions are becoming obsolete, clinging to ancient concepts."

"The question is not is there a God, but is there anything else except God? God is everyone and each of us is a little bit."

[http://www.templeton.org/sir\\_john\\_templeton/quotes.asp](http://www.templeton.org/sir_john_templeton/quotes.asp)

**Attachment B**  
The Text of the Clergy Letter

[http://www.butler.edu/clergyproject/religion\\_science\\_collaboration.htm](http://www.butler.edu/clergyproject/religion_science_collaboration.htm)

Within the community of Christian believers there are areas of dispute and disagreement, including the proper way to interpret Holy Scripture. While virtually all Christians take the Bible seriously and hold it to be authoritative in matters of faith and practice, the overwhelming majority do not read the Bible literally, as they would a science textbook. Many of the beloved stories found in the Bible – the Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the ark – convey timeless truths about God, human beings, and the proper relationship between Creator and creation expressed in the only form capable of transmitting these truths from generation to generation. Religious truth is of a different order from scientific truth. Its purpose is not to convey scientific information but to transform hearts.

We the undersigned, Christian clergy from many different traditions, believe that the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist. We believe that the theory of evolution is a foundational scientific truth, one that has stood up to rigorous scrutiny and upon which much of human knowledge and achievement rests. To reject this truth or to treat it as “one theory among others” is to deliberately embrace scientific ignorance and transmit such ignorance to our children. We believe that among God’s good gifts are human minds capable of critical thought and that the failure to fully employ this gift is a rejection of the will of our Creator. To argue that God’s loving plan of salvation for humanity precludes the full employment of the God-given faculty of reason is to attempt to limit God, an act of hubris. We urge school board members to preserve the integrity of the science curriculum by affirming the teaching of the theory of evolution as a core component of human knowledge. We ask that science remain science and that religion remain religion, two very different, but complementary, forms of truth.