


# The Creation Controversy and Florida College

*Ferrell Jenkins*

It shall be my purpose in this article to provide an event-by-event chronology of the current controversy about the Florida College Biblical Studies faculty concerning creation and evolution.

Attendance at the annual lectures has been growing steadily over the past decade. In order to alleviate crowding in Hutchinson Auditorium, where we can seat more about 600 persons, we began to have classes, taught primarily by our own faculty members, in Puckett Auditorium. This facility seats 220 but we often have more than 300 with standing room only.

In the fall of 1998,  a wonderful new facility, equipped for multi-media presentations, became available at Florida College. The McCarty Multimedia Auditorium seats about 100. The Biblical Studies faculty thought it would be good to provide some additional classes in this facility for the 1999 lectures, especially those that would take advantage of the equipment there.

We scheduled some men to speak on the development of web pages, using PowerPoint in preaching, etc. I had heard many good things about the *Lord I Believe* seminars conducted by Hill Roberts and others across the country. We decided to ask brother Roberts, a physicist who has also had practical experience discussing apologetics with unbelievers in Russia and other places, to present four classes in the McCarty Multimedia Auditorium. His topics were “Reaching Out to the Skeptics,” “Using Advanced Technology to Reach a Skeptical World,” and “Apologetics for the Skeptic: Using God's Natural Revelation.”

I had *no knowledge* that there had been any controversy or discussion among brethren about the teaching of brother Roberts. The lecture schedule was published in early January, 1999, first on the College web page and then in *The FC Magazine*. About *three weeks* prior to the lectures (Feb. 1-4, 1999), President C. G. Caldwell and I began to receive a few inquiries and criticisms about our choice of four speakers, including brother Roberts. The first E-mail I received was on Jan. 8, the next one on Jan. 14, and two on Jan. 20. We saw no problem with having brother Roberts and the others speak on the *assigned* topics.

## **We Don't Always Agree With Our Speakers**

Several times since I have been editing the lecture book I have stated in print that one might not always agree with what a speaker had to say, but that one should use it as an opportunity to study. In fact, in *Christ and the Church*, the 1998 annual lectures, I wrote:

We expect each speaker to study his topic carefully and to present his conclusions clearly and with love. Like me, you may find occasionally that you differ with one of the points made by a speaker. We trust that this will provide the impetus for additional study “until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). (x)

One reason I wrote as I did was because two speakers had taken views contrary to published materials which I have written. One of these was brother Harry Osborne who spoke on “The Holy Spirit in Ephesians and Colossians.” Harry took several positions which differ with what I have written in *The Finger of God* and which I have taught for years in my class on The Scheme of Redemption (now called Epistles: Ephesians and Colossians) and published in *The Theme of the Bible*. I was rather certain Harry would take a different view and personally suggested to the Biblical Studies faculty that he be our choice

of speaker for the topic. Should I have written an open letter about his views after the lectures? We both may be wrong but we both can not be right on this issue.

In 1964, brother H. E. Phillips commented on a similar situation regarding one who edits a religious journal.

This same attitude prevails in the publication of a paper such as **Searching The Scriptures**. If a certain person writes an article on a given subject that does not agree with the views of another, immediately the editor is classified as holding that view. I want to make it clear that I may not endorse every position taken by every writer, but he has the right to state his position. That is the way we learn where the truth is. A journal that permits only one side of a question to be presented is not worth reading so far as learning the whole truth is concerned. I am ready to state my convictions on any subject I know anything about, and I am open minded enough to hear the other fellow state his convictions. That does not mean that we must permit error to be taught without exposing it as error. Truth and error can be separated by examining all the evidence and comparing it with the word of God. (“Condemned by Association.” *Searching the Scriptures*. July, 1964: 89)

In Puckett Auditorium, with an audience three times the size of that in McCarty Auditorium, we invited Dr. Harry E. Payne, Dean of Florida College, to present three lectures on Evolution and Creation.

### **Rumors About Hill Robert's Classes**

After the lectures, E-mail began to be circulated and articles began to be written about brother Roberts. One of these was published by brother Thomas G. O'Neal in *Walking in Truth*, July-Dec., 1999. Under the heading “**(4) Creation**,” he said,

Brother Roberts presented his material this year in a special class during the Florida College lectures. Four hours were used in this class, more time than I have ever known being given a speaker upon the lecture program. A few years ago when brethren Frank Puckett spoke on “*The Holy Spirit*” and Roy Cogdill spoke on “*The Nature and Structure of the Church*” in which he reviewed both brethren Homer Hailey's and Charles A. Holt's view of elders, the two brethren were given only three hours each. After brother Roberts presented his material, great concern was evidenced by knowledgeable brethren over what he said. (6)

In my class during the 2000 lectures I responded to this accusation. Brother Roberts did not speak on **Creation**. While up to 900 brethren were listening to lectures in Hutchinson Auditorium and Puckett Auditorium, barely more than 100 were listening to brother Roberts. To compare this to the “old days” when the entire program consisted of one lecture in Hutchinson auditorium is mis-informed, to say the least. Hill Roberts did not discuss the days of creation at all. In his discussion about origins he pointed out that any time the unbeliever fills in the blank regarding the age of the earth it means that the universe had a beginning. The believer can direct the discussion to the subject of the Creator.

The concern that a few brethren showed after brother Robert's speech was primarily over what he had written previously, and by this time was widely distributed over the Internet. Brother Roberts and several other brethren entered a discussion over some of these issues which are published on the Internet at *re:thinking* (<http://www.allanturner.com>).

I am not here dealing with the views of brother Roberts, but with what happened at the Florida College

lectures which I direct.

### Florida College Responds

In the October, 1999, issue of *The FC Magazine* the president of Florida College stated firmly and plainly the belief of the administration and faculty concerning the divine creation of the universe and all that is in it. He stated rejection of both *macro-evolution* and *theistic evolution*. Dr. Douglas HC Northcutt published a lengthy article on “Evolution, Science and the Bible.” These are available on the Florida College web page (<http://www.flcoll.edu/pdfs/colly.pdf> and <http://www.flcoll.edu/pdfs/dnorth.pdf>)

### The 2000 Lectures

The Biblical Studies faculty, after much discussion, prevailed upon me to talk about the days of creation in a class during the 2000 lectures. We also decided to invite Dr. Steve Wolfgang to present some of his research on how science and religion issues have been handled in the Restoration Movement. Steve presented two lectures which are available on audio tape from the Florida College bookstore (US: 1 800-423-1648; FL: 1 800-922-2390). My speech has been transcribed and is available on the Internet at <http://bibleworld.com>. The material presented in that lecture regarding how to deal with the “days” of creation represents my thinking and teaching in the churches for at least 45 years. I have never before had any brethren try to make an issue of it.

### After the 2000 Lectures: The Open Letter

About the middle of June I received an envelope containing “An Open Letter: The Creation Account & Florida College.” There were no signatures on it, but the names of 61 brethren were printed at the end. I don't know when this conference was held but I must assume that each of them gives his total approval to the things written above his name. Within a few weeks this letter was being discussed on the Internet and the list of “official” signatories had grown to 67.

Much of the Open Letter is about Hill Roberts and the “Lord I Believe” Seminars. After one of his lectures in 1999 brother Roberts gave those in attendance a free copy of a CD which contained material he uses in his seminars. I recall that he asked me if he could distribute the CD so those who wished could have the photos, art, etc. that he used in his presentations on the use of technology in reaching skeptics.

Now, I and others at Florida College are accused of tolerating the Big Bang theory and other views which allow a naturalistic origin of the “inanimate” creation. ***Nothing could be further from the truth.*** In my speech I said,

I want you to know also that I reject *macro-evolution* — terminology that most of you will know. I also reject *theistic evolution*.... I want you to know too that I know of no teacher at Florida College, no teacher in any field, science, Bible, or anywhere else who holds either one of these views. Nobody here holds these views. I want you to know that. That is my confidence in the people who are here.

When I received the Open Letter with these charges of (1) aiding and giving comfort to a theory which calls for a naturalistic origin of the inanimate universe, and (2) that we had failed to reject this teaching, I must say that I was more than mildly surprised. If I had known that the distribution of the CD was an issue, or that anyone thought that some of us at Florida College did not believe the divine origin of the universe, I would have dealt with it in my speech. Some of these brethren are not content with anything we say. They bring up one issue and we respond to it, then they bring up another that we had not even imagined to believe.

Many of the men who signed the Open Letter are unknown to me by face. There are even a few names I have never heard. I am rather sure that several of these men have not attended the lectures for several years. Of the 61, only two had made any effort to discuss these matters with me in any detail. A third spoke in chapel in April, ate lunch with me and others, but did not bring up any details about this matter. I certainly had no idea he would see fit to write an open letter after sitting at my right hand for nearly an hour. Another two or three had written E-mail to me about some aspect of the issue or prior to the 1999 lectures.

Some of these men have cited brother Wolfgang's statement that brethren need to listen to Dan King and Harry Osborne. None of them have dealt with the major material presented by brother Wolfgang. Who do they think selected Steve Wolfgang to speak? Who do they think selected Buddy Payne to speak on Creation and Evolution for three days (in Puckett Auditorium), giving him access to more than 300 brethren per session, while brother Roberts only had access to about 100 per session while *not* speaking on this subject.

### **The True Picture of the FC Lectures and Evolution**

For the past several years we have had several sessions responding to evolution, or dealing with related issues, on our lecture programs. As a reminder I will list some of them:

#### **2000 Lectures**

Ferrell Jenkins. "Making Sense of the Days of Creation."

Steve Wolfgang. "Science and Religion in the Restoration" (2 lectures)

#### **1999 Lectures**

Buddy Payne. "Evolution/Creation" (3 lectures)

The 1999 program was *A Place to Stand: Apologetics in an Uncertain Age*. The purpose of the program was to help Christians to learn how to deal with unbelief in modern thought. Numerous points were made in the speeches regarding evolution and creation as we had planned there would be.

#### **1997 Lectures**

Doug Northcutt. "Of course Origins Matter." Dr. Northcutt is a biology professor at Florida College.

#### **1995 Lectures**

There were several lectures in the book, *In His Image: The Implication of Creation*, which deal with the subject of origins and Bible/Science concerns.

Tom Kinzel. "Challenges From Evolution."

Larry Dickens. "The Role of Science." Dr. Dickens teaches chemistry at FC.

This entire lecture program, *planned by the Biblical Studies faculty*, was based on the conviction that the inanimate universe is of divine origin and that man, and all animate beings, were created by God as taught in Genesis.

#### **1994 Lectures**

Lawson Winton. "Origin of Man: Evolved or Created." Dr. Winton taught biology at Florida College at the time.

Must we go back further? ***I doubt that any subject has been so thoroughly addressed!*** Tapes of all lectures are available. Those lectures which were part of the main program are published in the various

books. Contact the Florida College Bookstore (1 800 423-1648; (FL) 1 800 922-2390).

If we have been sending signals, it is that we are against the theory of evolution in all its forms. And don't forget that our sophomore students take a course, Introduction to Christian Evidences, in which there is a *response* to evolutionary thought.

### Propositions for Debate

The 61 men who signed the Open Letter have presented some ridiculous propositions which they know fully that none of us can sign. I am willing to affirm the following proposition:

***The Bible teaches that in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.***

**Affirmed:** *Ferrell Jenkins* (I think I will be able to get several helpers from among the Biblical Studies faculty as well as from the Science faculty.)

**Denied:** *The signers of the Open Letter.*

I propose this be a public, oral discussion, conducted at the various congregations where these men preach. It may take a while to get around to nearly 60 locations, but it should be a worthwhile effort. This will give brethren who are not able to attend the lectures but who have heard so much about these Florida College teachers to see and hear them in person. I suggest we begin at a point most distant from Florida College (Washington state?) and move toward Temple Terrace like a great drag net. One night should be adequate in each location. The man in that location who has signed the Open Letter will deny what we affirm. We will agree to follow the rules of controversy advanced by Levi Hedge. These are commonly followed in debates. Brother Franklin Puckett used to read these rules to us, even in open forums at Florida College. Rule 6 says,

*The consequences of any doctrine are not to be charged on him, who maintains it, unless he expressly avows them. If an absurd consequence be fairly deducible from any doctrine, it is rightly concluded that the doctrine itself is false; but it is not rightly concluded, that he, who advances it, supports the absurd consequence. The charitable presumption, in such case, would be, that he had never made the deduction; and that, if he had made it, he would have abandoned the original doctrine.*

### Other Charges

Several men whose name is printed below the Open Letter have recently written serious charges against Florida College, its administration and faculty, and the lecture speakers.

To illustrate the quality of speakers we have on the main program (published in the book) I will list those for the past three years.

**The Present Truth — 2000:** Robert Harkrider; Robert Jackson; Wilson Adams; Jim McDonald; Kieran Murphy; Frank Jamerson; Ricky Shanks; Thomas Nelson; Harold Turner; Thomas Hamilton; Jon Quinn; Micky Galloway; Ira Lynn; Joseph Olson; Dennis Allan.

**A Place to Stand — 1999:** C. G. Caldwell; Dee Bowman; Tom Moody; Mark Roberts; Curtis Pope; Doug Roush; David McClister; David West; Mike Wilson; Melvin Curry; Doy Moyer; Thaxter Dickey; Shane Scott; Ray Madrigal; Don Bassett.

**Christ and the Church — 1998:** Ferrell Jenkins; David Posey; Patrick Farish; Stan Caldwell; Huey Hartsell; John Kilgore; Gary Kerr; Harry Osborne; Jeff Smelser; Ken Weliever; Gary Ogden; Reuben Amador; Leslie Maydell; Jim Deason; Robert Gabhart.

These 45 men come from all across the nation (and a few from around the world) and represent a diversity of preaching styles. What they said is available to everyone who wishes to know in the books and tapes from the Florida College Bookstore.

### The “Electronic Mail Chair”

“Sending good brethren to the electronic mail chair” is a statement for which I am pleased to take credit. To my knowledge it is one of the truly original things I have ever said. The Open Letter says,

Brother Jenkins also belittled much of the discussion about the issues arising over brother Roberts' teaching as “E-gossip” in which some brethren were sentenced to the “electronic mail chair.” It was material good for a laugh, but was not befitting a serious attempt to openly discuss issues which affect our souls. (4)

What I said was,

In the last year, there have been articles dealing with it [what was or was not discussed during the 1999 lectures]. There has been “e-gossip” dealing with it; you understand what I mean [audience laughter]. And some brethren have been sent to the “**electronic mail chair**” [more laughter]. I would suggest to you that we probably did brethren a great service last year. It has prompted a discussion that brethren evidently thought needed to be discussed. There have been some good articles, I want to say. And so, maybe we've done a good service. That's what education is about; making people think and allowing us to come to conclusions based on our study of the Word of God.

In April I ate with and talked with brother Daniel King, Sr. about this expression. He took exception to it saying that he thought I had reference to his material which had been published by Harry Osborne in an Internet magazine. I explained that I *did not have in mind any discussion of the issues*. Then I gave him an example of the kind of thing I was talking about. I had seen an email message which said, in essence, “I don't know if this is true, but I wanted to pass it along to you [a list].” Since that time I received a message from a signer of the Open Letter which contained a letter from someone whose name he did not know about a third party conversation.

This, my dear brethren, does affect our souls. This is a doctrinal matter about which the Bible has much to say. See Micky D. Galloway's good lecture, “Taming the Tongue.” *The Present Truth* (91-100).

I am not able to take credit for this one, but I would like to share another good anonymous comment about the improper use of e-mail:

The e-mail of the species is more deadly than the mail.  
[In my head I can hear laughter :-)]

One of the signers of the Open Letter has even written an article about it as if my comment was only aimed at one segment of brethren. I agree with him that error should be exposed and that gossiping is sin. Brother Reeves had a bit of fun himself with the “e-pistles” (I hope Tom and Harry don't see his article) (*Truth Magazine*, June 1, 2000: 4). This brings me back to a theme which I stressed in my FC speech — the need for *e-vangelism*.

### Regarding Hill Roberts

Please permit me a brief summary regarding brother Hill Roberts.

- When I invited Hill Roberts to speak I did not know he was a controversial character. In fact, I did not hear anything about this until Jan. 8, 1999, about three weeks prior to the lectures. Why had the 61+ been so silent? Why had they not warned the churches about this man? I had heard only good of his seminars.
- He did *not* speak at Florida College on the creation or the “days” of creation, but we did have Buddy Payne, Dean of Florida College, speak on Creation and Evolution for three days
- Our record of lectures against the theory of evolution *in all its forms* indicates the consistent stand Florida College has taken on this subject. [See above, p. 5]
- Whatever brother Roberts teaches in his seminars, on his CD and web page, you may take up with him. If there is anything there that indicates anything other than a divine origin of the *inanimate* or *animate* creation, I reject it.
- ***Brethren, drop it!*** Or, take it up somewhere that it is relevant.

### Regarding Shane Scott

Little has been said by me about brother Scott because both he and Colly Caldwell, president of Florida College, had written responses to a published criticism by Connie W. Adams which was published in *Truth Magazine*, July 6, 2000. Their response to this article was sent to Mike Willis, editor of *Truth Magazine*, on June 9, 2000, with the request that they be published in the same issue with Connie's article. This was not done. You may now read their responses at <http://bibleworld.com>.

Some things about brother Scott's views which have been called in question are summarized here.

- The views advocated by brother Scott in his *Sentry* magazine debate about five years ago and otherwise are based on what he sees in the ***text of the Bible***. They are *not based on science or evolution*.
- The views he advanced are no different than those held by numerous brethren over the years. Dr. Wolfgang pointed this out in his two classes during the 2000 lectures. I understand that these men of the past are not our standard of authority. That is not the point in mentioning them. It shows that brethren *did not make this an issue of fellowship* until after February, 1999.
- The views he set forth are no different than those published in a book compiled and edited by James R. Cope, president of Florida Christian College, containing outlines of the 1962 annual lectures. This material may be found in “A Lesson on 'Evolution and Creation' at the 1962 Florida Christian College Lectures” at <http://bibleworld.com>. Connie W. Adams, Dudley Ross Spears, James P. Needham and Leslie E. Sloan were on the program that year.
- The view presented by Shane Scott has been held continuously by one or more teachers at Florida College since at least before I enrolled as a student in 1953. Some of these teachers openly taught the view as their preferred understanding of the biblical text. Several of the signers of the Open Letter were students during that time and some had these teachers. Do they know of anyone whose faith

was shattered as a result of this? Was yours? None of the men mentioned here were naturalistic or theistic evolutionists. Neither is Shane Scott.

- Shane Scott believes in the divine creation of the universe and of man. He is a strong anti-evolutionist.
- Shane Scott does not believe in *theistic* evolution.
- The view Scott held is probably not so bold as that held by the late W. W. Otey. Below is a further discussion of this matter.

### **W. W. Otey, Contender for the Faith**

In 1930 a book by W. W. Otey was published by the Firm Foundation under the title *Creation or Evolution*. In it brother Otey said,

Then there is not the semblance of a contradiction between the Bible account of creation recorded in Genesis, and the fossils found in the racks [sic]. The Bible account begins with the present order of plant and animal life now on earth. **Were it proved that the earth was peopled with plant and animal life millions of years before the appearance of the present order, it would in no way conflict with the record in Genesis.** (58-59)

And if it be argued that the progenitors of the present order of plant and animal life now on earth **were created a long period before men**, I would not waste time controverting the contention. That man has no ancestors such as fishes, reptiles and apes, is the vital question at issue. (104)

In 1938 a revision of Otey's book was published by the William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company under the title *The Origin and Destiny of Man*. Listen again to the comments made by Otey:

The mode or process employed in forming the plants and bodies of animals is not stated. It matters not whether it was by a simple word of command or otherwise. The fact that the progenitors were fundamentally like their offspring to the present day, is the idea involved. **And if it be argued that the progenitors of the present order of plants and animal life now on earth were created a long period before man, the author would not waste time controverting the contention.** That man has no ancestors such as fish, reptiles and apes, is the vital question at issue. (123)

The biography, *W. W. Otey: Contender for the Faith*, was written by Cecil Willis, long-time editor of *Truth Magazine*. The introduction to the book was written by James P. Needham. Brother Needham said the following of Otey and the book:

It records the history of the life of a great and godly man, which within itself is sufficient justification for its publication.

He was truly a “contender for the faith”. First and foremost in his mind was his obligation to do God's commandments, one of which is "to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). In his discharge of this duty, W. W. Otey asked no quarter and gave none. He lived through great controversies in the Lord's church, and suffered without complaint all the consequences.



Of the biography by Willis brother Needham said,

I believe it will be invaluable from that standpoint alone, to say nothing of its being a demonstration of how W. W. Otey loved and stood for his convictions regardless of the consequences.

As recent as the June, 2000, issue of *Gospel Truths*, brother Needham said,

I've been privileged personally to know some of the great preachers of the generation that preceded my own; men who **blazed the trail and held the line against the false doctrines that tried to invade the kingdom of God**. Men like N. B. Hardeman, C. R. Nichol, Foy E. Wallace, jr., Roy E. Cogdill, **W. W. Otey**, Luther Blackmon, and many more. We owe a great debt of gratitude to these brave men. (12) [Emphasis mine, FJ]

If brother Otey were able to read those pages cited above just one time at Florida College today would there be an Open Letter written about him? I think I know the answer but I will leave it for others to answer. Someone has changed!

**Finally**  
**“They shall come out against you one way**  
**and shall flee before you seven ways” (Dt. 28:7)**

More than 60 men joined together to fight a perceived enemy as one, but now they write as individuals. They have sought to create a heretic through a misunderstanding. I am now getting a few personal letters from good men who should have made their inquiry before they joined to send the Open Letter. Brethren, you know we don't have the time to engage each of you in a personal correspondence. Don't expect it.

Our school year will begin soon and we have work to do. Personally, I think the men and women here are doing a fabulous job of educating young people in a variety of academic areas. They, to the person, are doing so with the firm conviction that God is the creator of the universe and all that is in it. I am pleased to be a part of this good work. We would like your goodwill and support. That is a decision only you can make.

“May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure” (1 Pet. 1:2).