

DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS

A COMPARATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE CONCEPT OF NATURE IN THE WRITINGS OF HENRY M. MORRIS AND BERNARD L. RAMM

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The study examines two major contrasting theological accounts of nature within the contemporary North American evangelical community, as articulated by Henry Morris and Bernard Ramm. In doing so, the dissertation analyzes nature considered diachronically in three epochs: *Natura Originalis* (the origin of nature), *Natura Continuo* (the contemporary status of nature), and *Natura Nova* (the future of nature).

The purpose of this research is to discover, describe, analyze, and compare the shape of the two contrasting concepts of nature articulated respectively by Morris, a strict concordist and special creationist, and Ramm, a broad concordist and a progressive creationist, as a first step in a systematic, theological, and comparative study of the contemporary North American evangelical understanding of nature.

The core of the dissertation is a critical comparison and evaluation of the three epochs of nature, according to Morris and Ramm. Their different views on nature and hermeneutics are analyzed and evaluated, and their respective strengths and weaknesses are highlighted.

The evangelical discussion of nature as represented by Morris and Ramm is framed synchronically and diachronically. In doing so, the study reaches four critical conclusions: (1) Whereas Ramm requires reinterpretation of Scripture when Scripture appears to make statements that counter current scientific beliefs regarding nature, the dissertation concludes, such a methodology may, however, result in giving unintended meaning to scriptural statements about nature. (2) The synchronic and diachronic framing by the dissertation of the evangelical discussion of nature by Morris and Ramm is a useful way of illuminating their views of nature. For example, the close diachronic framing reveals that Morris's claim that future nature mirrors original nature is not fully consistent due to the presence of hell in future nature. (3) The strict and broad concordists' approaches to nature, as articulated by Morris and Ramm, are inadequate and insufficient for the task of developing a fully coherent evangelical concept of nature. (4) While Morris's emphasis on a literal interpretation of Scripture is a positive development, Ramm's call to evangelicals to be open to science and to develop a healthy attitude toward science is also commendable. However, both thinkers tend to appeal to the extremes of the evangelical spectrum. The dissertation suggests that there is a need for a more centrist approach to nature in evangelical discussions. The dissertation ends by making recommendations for further study.