

CONFRONTING CULTURAL CONTROVERSIES 7

“Creation and Evolution”

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters...Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves...So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them...Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!...On the Seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work.” Genesis 1: 1-2, 26-27, 31, 2:2

This morning I want to begin this message by looking at the Four Primary Approaches to understanding the Genesis Account of Creation. Credit must again be expressed to Adam Hamilton for much of this information and inspiration. I don't have time to waste, so let's begin.

1. Young-Earth Biblical Literalist Approach

According to proponents of this theory, Genesis 1 accurately represents the basic facts surrounding creation. Creation took place in six twenty-four-hour days, in the order in which it is represented in Genesis. Later a Universal flood – described in the story of Noah and the ark – took place, and water covered the entire planet. The flood is the likely explanation for the demise of the dinosaurs, and the pressure created by the weight of the flood waters was the primary force in creating fossils. A sum of the years calculated using the genealogies of the Old Testament, the period between the Old and New Testaments, and the 2000 years since Christ was born; are added together to deduce that the actual age of the planet is less than 10,000 years old, according to this approach. These views generally represent what is usually meant by the term ‘creation science’.

2. Old-Earth Biblical Literalist Approach

According to this group the Genesis account must be taken literally and that when the Bible speaks about scientific matters it is always correct, but they leave a bit of wiggle room. They note that the Scriptures teach: *“with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.”* (1 Peter 3:8).

They believe each day described in Genesis 1 could be a period or an era spanning millions and millions of years. They tend to accept the dating of scientists who say that the earth could be as old as 4.6 billion years.

An example of their thinking would point to Genesis 1:1-2 and see between these two verses the possibility of a vast period of time during which, perhaps, cataclysmic events took place. First God creates the heavens and the earth, and then, in this gap, there is room for God’s creative work with dinosaurs and all kinds of creatures. But notice, in verse 2, the earth is now covered in darkness and water, perhaps the result of an asteroid hitting the earth as has been proposed, under this theory, as a reason for the demise of the dinosaurs. Verse three is then the re-creation of the planet. Proponents of this idea call this the ‘gap theory’.

3. The Naturalistic and Mythological Approach

This approach is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the Creation Science approach. These thinkers believe that the Genesis story of creation is just that – a story with little credibility for the modern scientific era. They see it as a myth for prescientific people who needed the concept of God to explain what they could not understand. Those who hold this position believe that evolutionary theory alone is sufficient to explain all that exists. The dismissing of the Genesis account of creation in this way is not acceptable to most Christians.

4. The Biblical – Scientific Synthesis Approach

This is the approach held by many scientists and biblical scholars and the one that most main line Protestant denominations, as well as the Roman Catholic Church and even many evangelical churches hold. This view begins by recognizing what Genesis 1-3 is meant to teach and what it is not meant to teach. These verses are clearly meant to lay claim to the fact that God is the creator of everything.

Nothing exists apart from God's creative word, will, and power. The Genesis account teaches us God is the rightful ruler of all things, owner of all things, and that all things are a reflection of the Creator. The Genesis creation account, which is primarily written in poetry form; was intended to make clear to the ancient Israelites, living in the midst of peoples who worshiped the sun, moon, stars, animals, and inanimate objects; that none of those things are gods. Israel's God, in fact, created them all!

But listen carefully: These verses were not meant to teach us the *how* and the *when* of creation, only the *Who* and the *why*, of creation! This section of Genesis is set in poetic language, maybe not in our English translations, but it is in the Hebrew. Poetry is the language of faith, not science. This does not mean, however, that the poetry of Genesis stands counter to scientific discoveries, but that it serves a higher purpose, leading us to the truth about God our creator and our relationship to God. The creation account of Genesis is meant to communicate the purposes of life. It is meant to describe in epic fashion the most marvelous theological truth of all: that Israel's God was not merely another regional god like the other nations served but is, in fact, the Lord God who, by God's very words, called forth light from darkness and life from nothing at all!

This approach is most able to help us reconcile some of the difficulties with trying to accept Genesis 1-3 as pure science. The order of creation is not completely logical as presented in Genesis 1. And Genesis 2 has a different order; creating man before creating the gardens and plants, for instance.

In Genesis one, male and female humans are created out of the mere Word of God, God spoke them into being. In Genesis two; man is created out of the dust, and woman is created from the rib of man. Now, I understand that Genesis 2 may indeed be by a more personalized interpretation of Genesis 1, but this approach to understanding Genesis is more able to reconcile some of the seeming inconsistencies found in the 'literal' reading of this passage.

It also amazes me that this approach to understanding Genesis, written at least 5000 years before the Big Bang theory was invented, might reconcile that scientific theory with the Biblical account. Both the Bible and science agree that the universe had a beginning point. They agree that first there was nothing, (though we believe there was always God) and then there was light, and from this beginning, all the galaxies of the universe were formed.

5000 years before scientists told us that the earth would have been formless and void before life began, that's exactly what Genesis says. 5000 years before Darwin proposed that life began in the seas, (the primordial soup) the author of Genesis told us that the first creatures God brought forth were in the seas, when God said, "*let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures*". (Genesis 1:20) And 5000 years before chemists helped us understand that even human beings come from the same carbon compounds found in the earth, the writer of Genesis told us that God took the dust of the earth and shaped it into a human being and breathed into it the breath of life. Genesis is a poetic, powerful and majestic way of revealing not the processes of creation, but the fact that God did these things!

Those who hold this view are not threatened by science exploring the "how" of creation. At every stage they step back and evaluate the scientists' theories and discoveries, and they note these discoveries only serve to heighten the sense of awe at a God who designed all creation!

So what's all fuss about evolution then? Let me tell a few of the problems people have with Evolution.

1. It has become the Accepted Scientific Theory

I don't have a problem with evolution as a scientific means of explaining some of the origins of life, but it is not the only or even the final word. Evolutionary Science...is evolving!

I do have a problem with any system that tries to explain the unexplainable complexity of human existence without at least some acknowledgement that there might be an intelligent designer behind and before the beginning! In my opinion, that is as much a statement of science, as it is faith! But, I have to be honest, that statement grows out of my personal presupposition that there is a God, whereas many evolutionary scientists begin with a presupposition that there is not.

Just because many scientists and most secularists have agreed that Evolution is the best theory we have to explain life (without God) doesn't mean that they are entirely and completely correct!

2. Some followers of Darwin have misused the theory of evolution as a means of, for example, reinforcing racist ideas, always believing that the most evolved human beings were those who looked most like themselves. Hitler's philosophy was largely shaped by these views, and he claimed that the theory of evolution offered justification for his plans to exterminate what he considered to be inferior races. I don't think Darwin, even on his worst days, had that implication in mind.

3. For some other of Darwin's followers, the theory of evolution was liberating, setting them free from what they believed were outmoded concepts of divine law. Evolution could grant them permission to pursue their own lifestyles without guilt, because now there was no ultimate right or wrong; conscience was merely fashioned by one's family and culture.

If there is no meaning to life, and there is also no ultimate judgment day, then it matters not how we live, nor how we treat other people. If our ultimate heritage springs from the womb of a gorilla or the bottom of the primordial soup bowl, then life is cheap, and we really are worthless. I don't see that as liberating, but I suppose some people do.

The misuse of Darwin's views does not point to the inaccuracy of evolutionary concepts, per se, only to the critical reason why evolution, divorced from any concept of God, is a woefully inadequate foundation for a philosophy of life, and leads to all manner of abhorrent (we would say WRONG) behavior; and I have a problem with that.

4. Evolution is taught in public schools as the only generally accepted pure scientific theory for explaining the origin of life.

I believe the evolutionary theory has some scientific merit, but it does not answer all life's complex questions. I think I understand the constitutional prohibitions regarding the separation of Church and State, but I think it is academically dishonest not to acknowledge some of the limitations with the evolutionary theory, and it is equally dishonest not to acknowledge even the possibility of the work of a Supreme Being at the beginning of creation and throughout the evolutionary process. I further believe that intelligent people could find acceptable wordings that neither endorse nor ridicule one particular religion; that might at least recognize that a vast majority of people believe that evolution alone cannot explain all the marvels and wonders of life. And that such a statement or two in a Public School science text book would do no harm to the scientific process, and would go a long way in honoring the beliefs of a vast majority of people, including many scientists. Might be too much to ask...I don't think so!

So in conclusion; evolution is not the enemy of Christian faith; it is merely a way of talking about one possible process God may have used to develop the wonders of life on our planet. But evolution alone, without God, seems ill equipped to explain the origin of life or the meaning of life, or the magnificence of the human spirit. Science can and will help teach us how things work. The creation accounts can and will teach us WHO did and WHO continues to do the work.

One last thing. I don't claim to be a scientist, nor certainly not an evolution expert. I'm satisfied living in the great uncertainty and in the middle of the mystery that life and its origins are beyond my ability to understand them all. But this much I do know. God is an intelligent designer, and with whatever means and methods he choose to create all this...and me too; I'm glad to be a God inspired, God breathed - spirit filled, human being. Because God created us, we are filled with meaning, maybe not all the intelligence necessary to make it all make sense, but enough sense to figure out that because God made us, and did so because he loves us...our lives are meaningful, our lives have purpose, our lives are distinguished from the animals and plants and other created things, because God breathed His spirit only into us, and that makes us special!

Like the caption under the picture of a tiny boy standing next to a huge garbage dump...God made me...and God don't make no junk! Not good English, but great Theology...and not bad 'science' if you think about it! AMEN

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Four Primary Approaches to understanding the Genesis Account of Creation:

1. _____ **Biblical Literalist Approach**
2. _____ **Biblical Literalist Approach**
3. The _____ and _____ **Approach**
4. The _____ – _____ **Synthesis Approach**

Four Representative Problems People have with the Theory of Evolution:

1. It has become the _____ **Scientific Theory**
2. Some followers of Darwin have _____ **the theory of evolution**
3. For some other of Darwin’s followers, the theory of evolution was _____
4. Evolution is taught in public schools as the only generally accepted _____ **scientific theory for explaining the origin of life.**