

Got Questions? Can I Believe in Creation and Evolution?

Genesis 1:1; Genesis 11:1-9; Romans 1:19-20

September 26, 2010

Before beginning an answer as to whether one can believe in Creation and Evolution, I want to say one thing. Last week's message and this week's do not fall neatly into what I would normally think of as preaching. Instead, I would categorize these two more accurately as best stabs by a thinking Christian at answering difficult questions. My approach to these two questions has been to give you issues to think about related to the questions at hand. I have my own opinions on the issues, but preaching is not about forcing my personal opinions on you. Know that I have prayed a great deal about the content of these messages, and they contain what I believe to be helpful information for us as the Body of Christ. However, do not take them as the official doctrine of the church...but merely as me sharing my best understanding on the issue with you.

So, with that said, let us pray.

Father in Heaven, we ask your guidance as we study your Word and your Creation. Give us wisdom, insight, and humility in this task. Bless us as we seek your truth. Help us to speak in love with those around us. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Can one believe in Creation and Evolution and be faithful to both?

The first place I looked for information on the issue, as a United Methodist minister, was the Bible and our denomination's Book of Discipline.

In the Bible I found, *In the beginning, God created....*

In the Discipline I found the following in the Preamble to the Social Principles and in ¶160.F *Science and Technology*:

- We, the people called United Methodists, affirm our faith in God our Creator....
- We recognize science as a legitimate interpretation of God's natural world.... We find that science's descriptions of cosmological, geological, and biological evolution are not in conflict with theology.

Basically, the thrust of the paragraph in The Book of Discipline is that science is important, but it must be coupled with theology in order to have a full and complete picture of humanity.

Now, I will tell you that I do not always agree with everything that is said in our Discipline, and this is one case where I *may* disagree. However, my disagreement, if it exists, is one based in semantics and definition. When we speak of *evolution*, I believe we must understand whether we are speaking merely of the concept of natural selection, whereby a species adapts over time to

a changing environment; or, are we carrying evolution to its natural conclusion, that all life evolved from non-life.

In preparation for this message, I went back and read most of Darwin's On the Origin of Species and the part of his autobiography that dealt with his religious life. The following is a quote from his autobiography:

Whilst on board the *Beagle* I was quite orthodox, and I remember being heartily laughed at by several of the officers (though themselves orthodox) for quoting the Bible as an unanswerable authority on some point of morality....

After much observation, writing, thinking, etc., all around the idea of evolution, Darwin wrote the following about his belief in God.

I found it more and more difficult, with free scope given to my imagination, to invent evidence which would suffice to convince me. Thus disbelief crept over me at very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress, and have never since doubted even for a single second that my conclusion was correct.

Basically, Charles Darwin began his work as a believer. Yet as he lived with his work on evolution, over time he moved away from a belief in God as Creator. It was not a decision made in an instant, but was more akin to the old image of boiling a frog – beginning the frog in a pot of tepid water and slowly turning up the heat until it reaches boiling. The slow change will not distress the frog, yet it ends up dead without ever knowing what killed it.

I, like you, am a believer. So what do I believe?

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

I believe that Jesus is the only way by which our right relationship to God can be restored.

I believe he was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem, in fulfillment of prophecy.

I believe he was crucified and rose from the dead in the flesh.

His death for our sins and His resurrection pay the price for our sins.

I believe we have salvation and eternal life in heaven if we believe in Jesus Christ and trust in His grace.

I believe that through the power of the Holy Spirit we can have new life, and that we are called to share the Good News of redemption through Jesus with all the world.

I appreciate the insight of Carl Drew in an essay he wrote about Theistic Evolution in which he said:

Next to these great beliefs, a biological theory seems pretty unimportant. That impression is correct. Do I believe in Evolution like I believe in the Resurrection of

Jesus Christ? Absolutely not! I accept the Theory of Evolution like I use the Quadratic Formula; they are both useful for a certain class of problems that I sometimes have to solve. I certainly do not place my eternal life and soul in the care of a scientific theory or a mathematical formula. I place my entire being in the hands of God Almighty through his Son, Jesus Christ.

As People of the Book, we need to begin with, “In the beginning, God...” The Bible assures us that all of Creation originated in the mind of the Father, took form through the Son and was given life by the Holy Spirit. The Creation stories in Genesis are there for a reason. I’m not sure that they are meant to give us a moment-by-moment, blow-by-blow account of every aspect of how Creation came to be. My understanding is that those stories are there to tell us Who initiated the creative power, that there was no matter pre-existent with which God had to work, and that mankind was intended to be in a special relationship with God. There is something excitingly mysterious and grandly miraculous about Creation as it came from God! This needs to be the basis of our understanding, and all other truth needs to match up with our theology. If evolution is ever proven to be true beyond any shadow of doubt, then it will not conflict with theology. Truth does not conflict with Truth.

Basically, problems crop up when the theory of evolution is turned into a philosophy of life instead of what it is presently...a theory, based on observation, with human intellect, inference, and speculation applied to it. Again, we must go back to the challenge presented when we rely primarily on reasoning that comes from a fallen mind.

If the theory of evolution is taken to its extreme, and if understood as Darwin would have us to understand it, it has the possibility of removing God from any role in Creation. If taken in that sense, then the biblical understanding of all of creation originating from God is not compatible with evolution.

In my own mind I limit the theory of evolution to the process of natural selection. When I do that, I don’t encounter a slippery slope between that theory *and* a creation that originates from God.

The difference is instead of believing that all life came from a chance meeting of abiotic material resulting in abiogenesis (or life from non-life), I believe that God created all kinds of animals and other life, and over time those life forms used their God-given ability to adapt to their changing environments so that the most successful forms might flourish.

It is the difference in understanding the diversity of creation as we know it as a tree with only one trunk, versus a grove of trees with each tree representing a different kind of animal, plant, etc.

Finally, I want to encourage all of us to cultivate a healthy sense of humility within ourselves as we face these great mysteries of life. We don’t want the theory of evolution to become a modern

Tower of Babel. The tower was created by mankind following the Flood as a manifestation of their pride in themselves. We don't want to set ourselves up as being more knowledgeable than God. We cannot make God, and any other part of the universe we don't fully perceive, fit into the finite box of our understanding. God is greater than we, and he has built great mystery into his Creation.

Romans 1:19-20 reminds us as we are confronted with Creation:

Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.

Long story short...if evolution is true, it will point to God; if it is false, it will point away from God. I would encourage you to pray and seek wisdom so that you may understand for yourself what is true.