

This coming Saturday and Sunday [February 14-15, 2015] will be the tenth annual Evolution Weekend in which clergy of over 600 congregations in America and 14 countries will preach or present programs on the relationship between religion and science, specifically as it regards the issue of Evolution. The organizers of this weekend post a list of over 13,000 ministers, priests, pastors and rabbis who have signed The Clergy Letter Project that “[urges] public school boards to affirm their commitment to the teaching of the science of evolution.”

It’s appropriate, I think, that today our Oakland University community acknowledges the challenge and promotes the discussion of religion and science. And there is no contact point between the two that has generated more heat and less light than the issue of Evolution.

On the current website of the *Institute for Creation Science* [<http://www.icr.org/tenets>] the following principles are affirmed:

- All things in the universe were created and made by God in the six literal days of the Creation Week described in Genesis 1 [1:1-2:3], and confirmed in Exodus 20 [20:8-11]. The creation record is factual [and] historical . . . thus all theories of origins or development that involve evolution in any form are false.
- The first human beings, Adam and Eve, were specially created by God, and all other men and women are their descendants. [They] did not evolve from an animal ancestry, but were specially created in fully human form from the start.
- The phenomenon of biological life did not develop by natural processes from inanimate systems but was specially and supernaturally created by the Creator. Each of the major kinds of plants and animals was created functionally complete from the beginning and did not evolve from some other kind of organism.
- The biblical record of primeval earth history in Genesis 1-11 is fully historical . . . including the creation and Fall of man . . . the worldwide cataclysmic deluge in the days of Noah . . . and the origin of nations and languages at the tower of Babel.

And so the sides line up against each other.

Rabbi Brad Hirschfield once said on NPR Radio: “most creationists relate to evolutionists as if they have no souls, and most evolutionists relate to the creationists as if they have no brains. And of course, Jewish [and Christian] tradition insists that we possess both!” The real problem of course is that scientists and religionists should not be in the same discussion. Science (and Evolution in particular) does not require the necessity of a *theological construct* in order for it to be studied or promoted. And Religion is not interested in *scientific evidence* in order to promote its theology. And since scientific inquiry requires tools outside the purview of theology, and theology cannot be measured using the tools of scientific inquiry—debated together, neither can speak in the “realm of truth” of the other. That’s why religion has no intrinsic interest in scientific inquiry, and science has no vested interest in the theology of religion. Science and Religion live and breath and grow in completely different worlds. And the reason the “Creation-ists” don’t understand this, is because they’ve not properly read chapters one and two of Genesis!

Jewish and Christian tradition alike teach that God is the ground of all being and the ultimate source of all life. That is a foundational, a priori truth within our faith communities. But that statement is not in any way a challenge to the scientific theory of Evolution. We do affirm that God is the Creator of the Universe based on chapters one and two of Genesis, but those chapters are only preaching *that* God is Creator, not at all teaching *how* God created! These Biblical narratives were written only to convey a religious truth, they are texts affirming faith not facts, and they were never meant to define an accurate, scientific, cosmological description of when and how Life came to be. These are stories whose one and only message is why and by whom Life came to be—they were never meant to be read as the “how”.

Does that mean that all those folks, fundamental Christians and Orthodox Jews who choose to read Genesis as an objective description of how the universe came to be are misguided and misled? Well, yes! And I sincerely suggest they go back and look at the Biblical text where they'll see that Genesis chapters one and two are separate and diametrically different Creation narratives. Chapter One tells us that in six distinct creation-units God arranged the universe. In the first three creation-units God opened 'passive space' in order for there to be a proper place for the second three creation-units of 'active life'.

What do I mean? God separated light from darkness (1st day), separated waters below from waters above (2nd day), and separated dry land from the seas (3rd day). Days 1, 2, and 3 are all separations that make "spaces" waiting to be filled. And into those spaces, God placed the lights of sun, moon and stars (4th day); the fish and the birds (5th day); and the animals of the land, including humanity (6th day). Days 4, 5, and 6 are all living insertions into Days 1, 2, and 3. Day 1 was life-filled in Day 4, Day 2 in Day 5, and Day 3 in Day 6. This complex, organized and inter-connected construct bespeaks a coordinated and pre-planned creation-process. Chapter One has everything to do with the Organizer behind this highly structured, six-part, interlocking Creation-- its transcendent, omnipotent and omniscient Creator. It's not about 'how' that God did it, it's about the 'Who'! And to make sure that we don't miss this point and think this six-set structured plan is a description of the 'how' of Creation, we no sooner conclude Chapter 1, than we read in Chapter Two of Genesis a *completely new story* of Creation, with a very different theme, intention, format, and process.

In Chapter Two nothing has been yet created, there is only a bare surface of land, into which God reaches, molds and forms from the clay of the earth, a human shape. God breathes into the clay the Breath of Life—and The Man comes alive. Then, for The Man's pleasure and nourishment, God plants a garden around him. And again, for The Man's sake, lest he be alone, God forms all the animals as companions who are brought to The Man to name. And because the animals are not adequate or sufficient companions, God finally fashions The Woman from the side of The Man.

Chapter Two has no interest in time, or sequence, or patterns of preparation. Chapter Two is only about God's single-minded intention to satisfy the needs of The Man. The God of Chapter One is distant and removed, creating only by speaking. Very different is the God of Chapter Two, who creates by shaping and forming, breathing and planting, intimately and personally concerned and involved with the ongoing happiness and well-being of The Man.

These are two so-opposite and so-completely contradictory side-by-side Creation narratives, that they intentionally challenge one another! Not only does each offer a strikingly different account of how Life came to be, but each presents a remarkably contrasting relationship of Humanity and God. In the first account, God is distant and removed from all of Creation (including humanity), a transcendent Architect and Planner who brings a complex, inter-connected plan into being in proper stages by verbal command. In the second account, God is just the opposite. God is immanent and intimate, a hands-on "parent" who molds the man from the clay, who breathes life into him, who speaks to The Man and is personally concerned about his well-being, and so decides to improve The Man's situation one attempt at a time.

And we, the perplexed readers, ask: 'what's the purpose of these two so contradictory narratives?' are we supposed to decide which one is "true"? Are we expected to twist them into a single explanation? No-- Genesis is telling us that it's not at all important 'how' Creation came to be. Genesis wants us to struggle with the 'who' of the Creator God! On the one hand we want to know and believe that God is "up there" in charge, running the world according to a Divine Plan. And on the other hand, we want to know and believe that God is right here with us, listening to me, taking care of me, protecting and guiding me. But if God is "up there", then God can't be "right here"—and if God listening to me, taking care of me, who's running the universe?! And this then is the fundamental challenge of religious theology: we want God "up there" in charge, but we also want God "down here" with me! That necessary contradiction is reflected in the two contradictory Creation stories of Genesis. The struggle to answer the challenge of God as both transcendent and immanent belongs in the Sunday School classroom, and scientific inquiry has no place in that discussion.

And in another schoolroom are those investigating fossil and genetic and astronomical evidence to account for Creation. They are interested in what can be measured and observed, predicted and replicated. And while those

toiling in one school can describe to those in the other, the process and progress of their respective endeavors—neither has anything that will particularly help or inform the other, for their investigations follow different rules, with different goals and expectations. This is not to say that one is more valid than the other, or even more accurate. It is to say that each is its own project.

And there is another significant difference between the inquiries in these separate schools—The Religionists are convinced going in, that what they will find will prove their theory right. The Scientists, on the other hand, would be just as happy to discover that they are wrong, that there is a better theory to be found.

And we, members of faith communities, ought to have a presence in both schools: in the one that is challenged by the purpose and meaning and certainty of what it means to be in covenant with our God, and also in the other school that is challenged by the origin and direction and development of Life. But we can't be in two places at the same time. At any given moment we can only engage in one of these very human endeavors.

What we cannot do is think it appropriate, or even reasonable, to assume that this is a single debate with Truth accorded to the winner. And so, our religious response and affirmation is: Yes, God brought Life into being. Yes, there is a Presence beyond us from which all Life flows, and continues to give and sustain Life. Our faith-communities affirm that Divine Presence through worship and the way we live our lives. And turning in the other direction, yes I do believe that the Darwinian theory of evolution makes scientific sense in explaining how the Natural World came to be. And no, one belief does not preclude the other.

Both scientific and religious inquiries require us to engage our hearts and minds in the search for truth and meaning. Both of these discussions have merit, both yield truth, and each is an endeavor that deserves our attention. But the methods of inquiry and the nature of the truth we seek in each are very different. And what is clear above all else is that these discussions do not belong in the same venue, or conflated as if there was a single monolithic Truth that bridges both worlds.

So yes, I believe that God is the well-spring from which Creation flows, that I live in the presence of, and in covenant with, God. And yes, I believe that the theory of Evolution best explains why we are what we are. And there's something very re-assuring that we can have it both ways!

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