

This weekend across North America, over 750 congregations are addressing, discussing, and defending Evolution. The purpose behind “Evolution Weekend” is to demonstrate that religious people from many faiths understand that evolution is sound science and poses no theological problems, and that it’s a false dichotomy to claim that people must choose between religion and science.

Twenty years ago the great debate was between Evolution and “Creation Science”, but the buzz-words have changed. “Creation Science” has gone underground for the most part, but their websites are alive and well. One website (<http://emporium.turnpike.net/C/cs/creatdef.htm>) self-proclaims:

"Creation scientists" ... have a "world-view", or "model" for their science which is based on the belief that an intelligent designer ("God") created our universe and the natural things in it. A large subset of creation scientists could be called "Biblical creationists", who take the first eleven chapters of the Bible to be real history, including the creation of all things in six 24-hour days, the existence of Adam and Eve as the first man and woman, the unnatural introduction of "death" into the perfect creation because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and the occurrence of a world-wide flood which destroyed most life and greatly affected the processes operating on the earth. Most creation scientists believe that the earth is "young" (on the order of ten thousand years), but this is a secondary issue. Biblical creationists believe that the Bible and true science are in full harmony with each other - there is no need to "check your brain at the door" when entering a church.

Because it’s clear that “Creation Science” starts out affirming the Biblical Creation narrative in Genesis—it’s generally agreed that “Creation Science” is an inappropriate intrusion of Church into the educational affairs of State. “Creation Science,” it’s been decided, doesn’t belong in the public-school classroom because it’s religion and not science. Instead, these folks now are promoting “Intelligent Design”-- an objective, evidence-based and scientific approach to creation.

Proponents of “Intelligent Design” declare that it merits inclusion in school curricula because it’s a bonafide scientific explanation of how Life on earth came to be. “Intelligent Design” theorizes that evolution, or any other explanation for life on earth, could not have happened without the guidance of a higher intelligent Presence. But note, I didn’t say “Creator **God**”!

In pockets of America, school boards are debating whether “Intelligent Design” ought to have a place in the public school science curriculum. That was the issue in the Dover, Pennsylvania case a few years ago that drew national attention and became a documentary. Of course, the truth is that “Intelligent Design” is a re-packaged version of “Creation Science”.

Rabbi Brad Hirschfield once noted on NPR: “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 tradition insists that we possess both!” And so it is, in good Jewish tradition, that we say to scientists supporting Darwinian Evolution: ‘yes, we think you could very well be right’; and to the proponents of “Intelligent Design” we say: ‘yes, we believe that you are in all likelihood right!’ And to the voice which then asks, “Wait, they both can’t be right!” our answer is “Well, yes, you’re right too!”

If the “evolution-ists” and the “design-ists” can both be right, that doesn’t mean that the values and virtues of both arguments belong in the same discussion! And that is the bottom line—it makes no sense to debate them in the same forum! And not because it’s like arguing “apples and oranges”, it’s more like “apples and umbrellas” – each argument is functionally and structurally foreign to the other.

Evolution does not require the necessity of a **theological construct** in order for it to be studied or promoted as science. And “Intelligent Design” is not interested in **scientific evidence** in order for it to be studied or promoted as 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 tradition teaches that God is the ground of all being and the ultimate source of all life. That is a foundational, a priori truth. But that statement is not in any way a challenge to the scientific theory of Evolution. The basis for our saying “God is Creator” is chapters one and two of Genesis. But those chapters are only preaching *that* God is Creator, not teaching *how* God created! These narratives were written only to convey a religious truth, and were never meant to define an accurate, scientific 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. 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”. 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 us (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, and inter-connected Creation-construct, bespeaks a coordinated and pre-planned creation-process. Chapter One has everything to do with the Organizer behind the structure of this six-part, interlocking Creation-- its transcendent, omnipotent and omniscient Creator. It’s not about how God did it! And to make sure that we don’t 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, and format, and formation.

In Chapter Two nothing has been yet created, there is only a bare surface of land, into which God reaches 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 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, who is personally concerned about his well-being, and decides one piece at a time, what next to make.

And we, the perplexed readers, ask: ‘what’s the purpose of these two contradictory narratives?’ Genesis is telling us to not so quickly assume we know how Creation came to be. Genesis is teaching that on the one hand we can think of ourselves and God in a distant relationship—God is “up there” in charge of running the world according to a Divine Plan. And yet, don’t we want God 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, 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 being both transcendent and immanent belongs in the Sunday School classroom, and scientific inquiry has no place in that discussion.

And in another school 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 “Design-ists” are convinced going in, that what they will find will prove their theory right. The “Evolution-ists,” 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 Jewish tradition has always had 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 in the other one that is challenged by the origin and direction and development of Life. But because 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, there is an intelligent design that 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-community affirms that Presence through our 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, and 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 living in the presence of, and in covenant with, God is a Jewish Truth. And yes, I believe that the theory of Evolution best explains why we are what we are, and that too is True for me.

And there’s something very re-assuring that we can have it both ways!

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