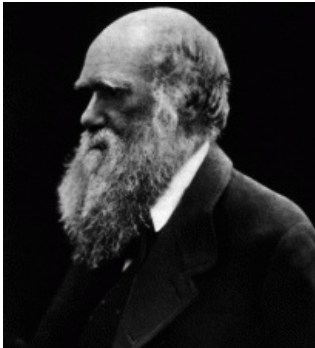


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Two Irreconcilable Worldviews

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Efforts to reconcile Christianity and evolutionary theory abound, even as evolutionists bemoan the fact that such a large percentage of Americans simply will not accept a naturalistic understanding of cosmic and human origins.

Writing in the *New Scientist*, Michael Zimmerman calls for a new public celebration of Darwinism. Zimmerman is one of the proponents of “Evolution Sunday,” an attempt to encourage liberal churches to support the compatibility of evolution and Christianity, scheduled annually for the Sunday closest to Darwin’s birthday.

In an interesting section of his article, Zimmerman cites me as an example of one who argues for the fundamental incompatibility of Darwinian evolution and biblical Christianity. Here is the section [available to *New Scientist* subscribers only]:

Fundamentalist religious leaders pushing a creationist agenda regularly assert that the faithful must choose between their religious beliefs and evolution. Evolution is regularly caricatured as being incompatible with belief in God; Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has stated that one can’t be a Christian and believe in evolution. This is particularly dangerous because I believe that most people, if forced to choose between religion and evolution, will select religion.

First, a clarification. I have not said that one can’t be a Christian and believe in evolution. It is entirely possible to be a confused Christian or a confused evolutionist . . . or both. Nevertheless, the dominant theory of evolution — the theory as taught and defended by the world’s leading evolutionary scientists — explicitly rules out any supernatural design or interference at any point in the evolutionary continuum. That fact alone makes the theory incompatible with any legitimate affirmation of divine creation or of biblical theism.

That point is also affirmed, though almost surely not intentionally, in the current issue of *The Christian Century*. In “[God in Evolution](#),” Amy Frykholm would seem to reassure Zimmerman.

As she writes:

While controversies over evolution continue to arise in some sectors of American Christianity, most mainline Christians have made their peace with Darwin. We may not grasp all the nuances of the scientific debate, but we have concluded that evolutionary theory is good science and therefore must be compatible with good theology. Darwin’s name doesn’t send chills up our spines. We are theistic evolutionists: we believe that natural selection is evidently part of God’s method of shaping the natural world.

According to Frykholm “most mainline Christians have made their peace with Darwin.” But, even as Frykholm makes this claim, she slips and admits that the “peace” is rather “combustible.” As she explains, “When theology faces off against the account of the world set forth by evolutionary biology, God’s goodness and power and God’s plans for the future seem to be called into question with new force.” Needless to say, those are rather significant issues.

Consider this section of her article:

Still, evolutionary biology makes it hard to discern purpose or direction in creation. For some theologians, facing a universe that includes randomness and chance may require a shift in thinking about how God works. John Haught, Catholic theologian and professor of theology at Georgetown University, suggests that we think in terms of a God who offers “a wide range of possibilities that the world can realize, a universe of innumerable possibilities.” Realization of any one possibility happens amid the play between God and creatures.

And then this passage:

The theological problem with going in this direction, of course, is that such a view leaves little sense of divine direction or action. Clayton [Philip Clayton, a theologian at Claremont School of Theology] argues that evolutionary biology severely limits what we can call divine action, though he believes that science does allow a small but significant space for interaction between creature and Creator. Nature can be “biologically constrained without being biologically determined,” he says. He calls the divine-creature interaction “the divine lure.” As evolution occurs, more complex

structures emerge. And the more complex forms that emerge are not reducible to a mere compilation of the kinds that come before them. In the space between what is and what is becoming, God might be said to act.

Theologies that emphasize God as deeply involved in natural, open-ended processes seem better able to make sense of evolution than do the classical accounts of an omnipotent God. On the other hand, if Jenson is right, perhaps what is needed is a richer notion of the God in whom these processes occur. At the very least, substantial interaction between Christian theology and evolutionary biology is prompting new metaphors and new ways of thinking about God.

In other words, the theology that has declared a truce with Darwin is a theology that is required, for example, to see God allowing any number of possible outcomes to history — a God who is “deeply involved” in creation, but not omnipotent. So I repeat my assertion: This is not biblical Christianity.

Tellingly, Michael Zimmerman sees the public status of evolutionary theory endangered by the fact that so many Christians resist the theory. As he admits, “I believe that most people, if forced to choose between religion and evolution, will select religion.” He is right, of course — and that is why there is such panic in the temple of Darwin.

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