

Creation Versus Evolution: Two Belief Systems

Introduction

The interpretation of the first 11 chapters of Genesis was literal and historical throughout the history of the church until the mid nineteenth century. The Epicurean (Greek) belief of origins advocated a long age for the earth and spontaneous generation of life. The Early church and the Reformers vigorously opposed this. The Greek belief was given a pseudo scientific credibility with the emergence of gradualist (long age) geology and Darwinian evolution in the nineteenth century. The church progressively embraced this model of origins. This led to a new hermeneutic (method of interpretation) of the Christian scriptures when reference is made directly or indirectly to the chapters concerning origins in Genesis. The church generally has abandoned these chapters to metaphor or special religious language. We no longer speak with a confident voice on the origin and nature of humanity, sin and its consequences. Origin and its consequences are seen from a humanistic (Greek) viewpoint. As a result the gospel of Jesus Christ has become irrelevant to most people in our society. Our churches are emptying and our preaching does not affect the populace. We have supported a view of origins which undermines the source of our beliefs and makes the cross 'foolishness' [1].

Greek Epicurean ideas of Origins and their purpose [2]

"Lucretius (99-55 BC) the Epicurean poet stated in the 'The Nature of the Universe', *"Nothing can ever be created by divine power out of nothing"*. He said that if the origin of things could be explained without the need for gods, by natural means, people would cease to have fear of right and wrong, and would develop freely, doing and behaving as they desired. Lucretius went into detail on the formation of life from nonlife in a primordial *"soup"* He detailed the long evolutionary ascent of life from simple to complex. He discussed the influence of environmental factors like food supply on the evolutionary development of new adaptations. Finally, according to Lucretius, life evolved as far as the early ancestors of man, primitive creatures having a *"framework of bigger and solider bones fastened through their flesh to stout sinews."* These early men did not even know how to use fire, to communicate, or to clothe themselves. They lived only in bushes but, according to this first century B.C. writer, through long generations of physical change the present human race was born from these creatures!" [3]

The New Testament Reaction to these Evolutionary ideas

The Apostle Paul when he encountered the Epicureans at Athens thought carefully of his strategy and responded at Mars Hill (Acts 17) by asserting the nature of God's creative pattern and specific control over it. He spoke of one man (Adam) from whom God made all the races of the earth **before** moving onto sin, judgement, salvation and the resurrection. Paul in Acts 14v15 again speaking to Greeks begins by preaching God's creation to them. In the letter to the Romans 1:20,25 Paul identifies the nature of the Epicurean attitude to God's creation and its consequences.

The Church Fathers

In the writings of the Church Fathers it is clear that they were against the errors of evolutionary thinking. They were insistent on the literal interpretation of the six days of Creation (apart from Augustine who wanted it completely instantaneous) and on a period of approximately six thousand years from the Creation week. They do at times use the text in an allegorical or typological form but only from a basic position of its historicity. Below are a series of quotes from the early Christian documents. Much material is edited from the 'answersingenesis' website and links, but reading the original is important to get the context. [4]

Theophilus of Antioch (AD 177) *"There are not two myriads of myriads of years, even though Plato said such a period had elapsed between the deluge and his own time, . . . The world is not uncreated nor is there spontaneous production of everything, as Pythagoras and the others have babbled; instead the world is created and is providentially governed by the God who made everything. And the whole period of time and the years can be demonstrated to those who wish to learn the truth. . . The total number of years from the creation of the world is 5,695"* [5]

"On the fourth day the luminaries came into existence. Since God has foreknowledge, he understood the nonsense of the foolish philosophers who were going to say that the things produced on earth came from the stars, so that they might set God aside. In order therefore that the truth might be demonstrated, plants and seeds came into existence before the stars. For what comes into existence later cannot cause what is prior to it." [6]

Origen (b. 185), the great theologian of the Greek churches, defended, *"the Mosaic account of the creation, which teaches that the world is not yet ten thousand years old, but very much under that."* [7]

Augustine (b. 354), the great bishop of the Latin churches, wrote, *"the Scripture . . . has paramount authority, . . . to which we yield assent in all matters. But they say what they think, not what they know. They are deceived . . . by those highly mendacious documents which profess to give the history of many thousand years, though reckoning by the sacred writings, we find that not 6,000 years have yet passed"*. [8]

Basil, Bishop of Caesarea Mazaca, Cappadocia, (Greek Church) from AD 370–379. He argued strongly against various heresies of that day. In particular, he defended the vital biblical doctrine of the Trinity against the Arian Heresy which denied the deity of Christ, and later against the Sabellian (modalist) Heresy which denied the distinctness of the three Persons; Basil speaking of the creative method over the six days, *"Thus then, if it is said, "In the beginning God created", it is to teach us that at the will of God the world arose in less than an instant, and it is to convey this meaning more clearly than other interpreters have said: "God made summarily" that is to say all at once and in a moment."* [9] *"In the beginning God created". He did not make the thing itself the cause of its existence."* [10]

"And the evening and the morning were one day. Why does Scripture say "one day" not "the first day . . . if it therefore says "one day", it is from a wish to determine the measure of day and night, and to combine the time that they contain. . . It is as though it said: twenty-four hours measure the space of a day." [11] Basil wrote a commentary on every creation day, dealing with all the objections of evolutionary thinkers and pure allegorisers. (generally the church's present position on Gen 1-11). **Bishop Ambrose**, a Father of the Latin Church (340-397) borrowed Basil's sermons on this topic.

[1] "To the Jews a stumbling block to the Greeks foolishness." 1Co r1v23. see the non relationship between death and sin for Epicureans [20]

[2] http://classics.mit.edu/Carus/nature_things.html

[3] <http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/4067.asp> see also secular site:

<http://www.physics.hku.hk/~tboyce/sfseti/04lucretius.html>

[4] <http://www.earlychristianwriting.com>.

[5] Theophilus, 3.25,28.

[6] Theophilus, 2.15

[7] Origen, Against Celsus, 1.19, Ante-Nicene Fathers, 4:404.

[8] Augustine, The City of God, 11.3, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2:202. Ibid., 11.4, p. 202. Ibid., 12:10, p. 232.

[9] Basil Homily 1:6

[10] Homily 1:7

[11] Homily

Reformation and Post Reformation

Martin Luther was opposed to evolutionary thinking and ideas. With reference to the first chapters of Genesis: *"The earth is not more than 6000 years old"* [12] and *"if we cannot understand the meaning of the word "day" how can we possibly use days in the way God intended us to use them.. One may not use sophistries with reference to this text." and "This, I say, is historical... "Here we are taught about the beginning of man, that the first man did not come into existence by a process of generation as reason had deceived Aristotle and the philosophers into imagining.* [13]

John Calvin also believed literally in Genesis see <http://capo.org/holdfast4.html> for detailed technical discussion. *"They will not refrain from guffaws when they are informed that but little more than five thousand years have passed since the creation of the universe"* [14]

Isaac Newton on the days of creation, (sabbath) *"methinks one of the Ten Commandments given by God in Mount Sinai, pressed by divers of the prophets, observed by our Saviour, his Apostles, and first Christians for 300 years . . . should not be grounded on a fiction."* [15]

John Wesley, identified the 'modern' Epicurean of his day (Sermon 67) and responding, affirmed the literal days of creation and a six thousand year date for creation; specifically for the purpose of placing death as the result of sin and not prior to it. *"And unto dust thou shalt return." How admirably well has the wise Creator secured the execution of this sentence on all the offspring of Adam! It is true He was pleased to make one exception from this general rule, in a very early age of the world, in favour of an eminently righteous man. But setting these two or three instances aside, who has been able, in the course of near six thousand years, to evade the execution of this sentence, passed on Adam and all his posterity?* [16]

"No: God Almighty, whether you know it or not, did not make it as it is now. He himself made it better, unspeakably better, than it is at present. He made it without any blemish, yea, without any defect. He made no corruption, no destruction, in the inanimate creation. He made not death in the animal creation; neither its harbingers, -- sin and pain" [17]

See the following web address for a short list out of 120 dates held by scholars from antiquity to the date of publication for an age of the earth all less than 10000 years. http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/faq/docs/date_of_creation.asp and published in Young's Analytical Concordance of the Holy Bible, 1879 8th Edition, 1939 — entry under 'Creation'

A Question of Science?

The belief system of the Epicureans in its modern guise of Neo Darwinian evolution and associated disciplines is given the accolade of science and taught in our schools and universities as such. It is a false use of the term science. It may rightly be termed a form of scientific philosophy whose origins are ancient. The ideas cannot be tested in repeatable conditions and so they remain a philosophy. We cannot go back to the past beyond known history, and know the conditions prevailing, unless by God's revelation. Evolutionary philosophical science explanations need to **assume** constants throughout time to make the present inform what has happened in the past. That is **FAITH**. The method of **assuming** constants or constant conditions throughout time was exposed in 2Peter 3:3-6 as ungodly if denying God's self revelation and actions in history. The philosophy of the constancy of speed of light throughout the vacuum (and therefore time because of the distance involved) is an idolatrous construct if it denies the self revelation of God by imposing millions of years on history. [18]

The Effect of Evolutionary Philosophy on Christian Theology and Witness

Why should the church accept this now on **FAITH** to the detriment of its foundational documents? Historically it has not and for good reason. All of the major doctrines in the New Testament have their basis of understanding in Genesis.. Jesus affirms the document as of Mosaic authorship and historical; John 5v 46, 47, (belief in Jesus), Matt 19:3-6,(marriage) Luke 17v26,27 (Noah) It is essential to the theology of Paul with respect to sin and salvation. Every New Testament document uses it as its base of understanding.

We are allowing the foundations of our faith to be taken over by an ancient belief system whose **stated** intent is to destroy faith in God so that they can do what they want without reference to a Creator God. This is a description of our Post modern age "the living out of a rebellious, hyperindividualist, hedonist lifestyle". [19]

Personal Experience

I teach RE in secondary school. Very few children want to know. Most have been taught from an infant that we came by evolution. Christianity is wrong in this area and is thus a fairy story. Theistic evolution if taught merely postpones the moment when Christianity is rejected. "Millions of years between plants and the creation of the sun...No way!" The church says it is a special religious language. They agree and say it has nothing to teach them about real life, where they have come from, where they are going and how they will survive. Biology teaches them that. Most church children walk away at that point too.

"Now when a Christian believes that the death, bloodshed, disease, suffering and violence in the fossil record represents millions of years of history as God 'created', then what did sin do to the world? What did the Curse do? Why does death have anything to do with sin? Why does God describe this as very good? Does this mean that violence and disease are 'good' in God's eyes? Is it any wonder young people today have no sense of sin and the holiness of God?" [20]

[12] L.W., Vol. 1, page 3.

[13] J.P. Pelikan and H. Lehmann, ed., "Luther's Works" American Edition, 55 Volumes, Volume 1, "Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5" St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1955, p.1, hereafter abbreviated as L.W. see also

'answersingenesis' website

[14] Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion 2:925, ed. John T. McNeill, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, USA, 1960.

[15] H. S. Thayer, ed. Newton's Philosophy of Nature: Selections from his Writings (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1953), 64-65.

[16] On The Fall Of Man John Wesley Sermon 57 1782. see context for full weight of arguments <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/jwesley3.html>.

[17] God's Appropriation of His work. Sermon 56 1782 John Wesley .

[18] (<http://www.setterfield.org/>)

[19] In Search of the Postmodern.

Lyotard chpt1
[20] Why Won't they Listen? Ken Ham p84