



Jesus is alive! Charles Darwin —not so much

by Andrew Craig

Responding to the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth

Picture an empty tomb in a garden. Usually emptiness means bad things, but in this case it signifies the best news ever. Where once only death prevailed, life finds a way; God finds a way. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and saved every one of us from an eternity of separation from Him.

This supernatural act breaking into our natural world has a profound effect on those who believe. It means eternal life, the promise of forgiveness of sins, the constant presence of God in our lives.

However, a great many people simply feel that the “natural” is all there is, and the world we live in—everything we see, everything we are, our very existence, happened by accident. You and I are just the latest in a long chain of species. Where there was once a tree of life, there is now a tree of evolved life.

I’m not saying the advance of science is something Christians should shun or be afraid of—unless the theories threaten the message and hope of our salvation. That is especially true if those theories are far from conclusive, despite what many of their proponents may say.

We could easily argue that Charles Darwin has done more to shape our current scientific landscape than anyone else in the past 200 years. Science has made advances and accomplished things Darwin and his contemporaries would consider pure magic. But if you ask students in junior high how life began, most will tell you naturalistic evolution plays a big part.

Many historical figures have gained such renown that we observe their birthdays as a way of honouring them. From Bach to Mozart, Luther to Lincoln, we make note of those who helped shape who we have become. Darwin is no exception. I used the online search engine *Google* on his birthday. How do I know it was his birthday? Because *Google* uses special banners on significant days, and when I was baffled by all the pretty birds and idyllic scenery on a particular banner, I held my computer mouse over it and discovered it was Charles Darwin’s 200th birthday.

Darwin’s thoughts have evolved into one of the most volatile argument-starters you can possibly toss into a conversation. If you don’t believe me, try posting on your blog something about evolution or creation

and wait for a day or so. It won’t take long for your opinions to come under fire.

However, despite his books, well-known theory and the observance of his 200th birthday—Charles Darwin is—and will remain—dead for the foreseeable future. The hope of evolving past this life eluded him (and us), which is essentially the real problem.

I am interested in the philosophical and, more importantly, theological ramifications of naturalistic evolutionary theory more than anything else. I also know that this theory has itself evolved way past Darwin’s original ideas laid out in *The Origin of Species*. I have always been curious about the scientific aspect of Creation.

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How do we make the supernatural understandable? Using physics, biology or chemistry, can we ever comprehend that *something* supernatural happened at some point?

Media messages

My own curiosity led me to two documentaries in the past few months, and they are great bookends to one another. One, *Expelled*, comes from a religious perspective and focuses on Intelligent Design (ID) as credible science. The other, an episode of *Nova* entitled (rather ominously) *Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial* tells the story of a U.S. trial in which parents sued a school board for attempting to bring Intelligent Design into the classroom.

In Canada, by comparison, that battle was over before it really began, with no fight in the classroom or courtroom. Teachers are not allowed to teach Intelligent Design, while evolution holds the floor with impunity. A recent issue of the British Columbia Teacher's Federation magazine ran a political cartoon about the stupidity of those who believe in creation, much to the chagrin of my wife and other teachers in my congregation who live their vocation in B.C.

We may not hear about it much in our news, or see it on the surface here in Canada, but that simply means we have moved into a battle of suppression rather than a more overt war. It also means we need to know what we're talking about when our children come home from school with questions, and acknowledge the challenges Christian teachers and students are facing in the classroom.

Both documentaries had some interesting points, but both showed me a bigger, more intrinsic problem: in terms of science—and whether ID is or isn't science—this topic is too adversarial to promote good discussion any longer. In both programs the discussion moved more in the direction of proving the opposition is simply stupid or, worse, downright evil, as opposed to letting the science speak for itself.

This does a disservice to theorists who bear the burden of establishing that Intelligent Design is a field of science. It also does a disservice to evolutionary scientists who have devolved into a frustrated, angry mob convinced Christians are not only "religious" but stupid.

Open your mind

On a recent trip to *Chapters* I saw a book titled boldly *Why Evolution Is True* by Jerry Coyne. My interest piqued, I picked up the book. The final sentence on the dust jacket read, "With this book the author proves that anyone with an open mind can see that evolution is true."

Think about that. If we are to have an open mind we *must* believe evolution is true. It's clear to see from this how "open minded" the opposition is when they say we are flawed if we don't believe them.

Nothing good can come of this. Until each side exercises a bit of contrition and looks at the logs in their own eyes, no new ground can be covered.

Intelligent Design needs to be better established as a field of science. Proponents of evolutionary science need

Evolution and evolution

In a document published in 1970 by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations (and adopted by Lutheran Church—Canada in 1988) affirms God's creative activity as recorded in the Bible. However, the writers note "[t]he Biblical teaching concerning creation does not rule out ongoing changes within the world of creatures. In fact, man's fall into sin produced great changes in creation, some of them sudden and others gradual. The efforts of individual men are constantly modifying the world of creatures including man himself. Such changes, however, do not represent any alteration in what the Lutheran Confessions would call the essential nature of the creatures in question. Moreover, the grace of God, which calls men to put their trust in Jesus Christ, through the activity of the Holy Spirit makes men new beings, changes their individual outlook and their life, and so works as a creative force for the renewal of men's relationships toward each other, toward society, and toward creation as a whole."

Author B.A. Robinson, writing on www.religioustolerance.org, explains that "Naturalistic evolution (a.k.a. "atheistic evolution" "naturalistic evolution," "the theory of evolution," or simply "evolution") is a belief in the development of the species from the first living cell to the present diversity of plant and animal species. It proceeded in response to natural processes, without intervention from God or other deities."

to realize that in terms of life's origin they are "religious." They believe something miraculous happened and have no explanation how—which is faith! Until both sides can see that each has its own dark corners to deal with, nothing fruitful can come from discussion at the scientific level, which then leaves us with the religious side of things.

Down the road to disaster

From a Christian viewpoint, where does the Darwinist road lead? As scientists say rather insistently, evolution is not religious, nor is it meant to be. While this may be true, its ideas threaten those who believe God created the world. And Creation is one of our core beliefs. The first article of the Apostles' Creed is "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." The scriptures begin with God creating the heavens and earth in six days. Scripture even goes so far as to say, "there was evening, and there was morning..." (Genesis 1:31).

As Christian people who confess the Scriptures to be the inerrant Word of God, and who also hold to the creeds, this is a big deal. Some have tried to reconcile both systems, saying that elsewhere in Scripture it says "with the Lord a day is like a thousand years" (2 Peter 3:8). They then lean toward the idea that evolution possibly played a role during those "days." The problem remains that "there was evening, and there was morning..."

But more important is the fact that in Creation, God,

for our sakes, is creating time itself and marking the passage of time in a way *we* can understand and not in a way only *He* could understand. This is another example of God's grace and love for us.

Still, this is not the make-or-break issue with naturalistic evolution. The make-or-break issue is the matter of spirituality altogether. If God did not create the world, what else didn't He do? If the first article of the Apostles' Creed is wrong, what else may be wrong? If God's Word is fictional at the beginning, what if it is fictional all the way through? If we believe evolution—from amoeba to man—is true, we forfeit an awful lot to be hip and with it.

In the end, for those who follow Darwinist ideologies, life is bleak. At its core, naturalistic evolution claims we arrived where we are by accident. There was nothing intentional about it; therefore, the purpose of our existence eludes us. The philosophy behind this naturalistic view of evolution is nihilistic. It says, "I have been blessed

through random selection with the ability to think deep thoughts, to ponder the incredible nature of the universe, and yet I have been denied the opportunity for it to mean anything." Darwin's legacy: "I may leave my mark on the world, but ultimately my memory can be summed up in a banner on Google."

Answers to big questions?

In terms of the ultimate question, "What is the meaning of life?" naturalistic evolution can only offer "There isn't one" as its ultimate response. It does not allow for a soul, nor does it allow for the existence of God; therefore, all we see, touch, taste, smell and feel in this life is all there is. If evolution is correct, that's all its proponents receive in the end: they get to be right. They lie in their graves returning to dust, and there they will always stay, as will we—if they are right.

As a man of faith, this is the biggest problem I have with the whole debate. Even if scientists proved naturalistic evolution true to the ninety-ninth percentile, it only offers me hopelessness. Am I supposed to trade my faith in Jesus, the promise of eternal life, the hope of the resurrection for simply being *right* with no hope of anything beyond this existence?

When despair creeps in, the only thing that can remove it is the forgiveness of sins and the means of grace. If I cannot remind a person of the gift of eternal life won for us on the cross, or remind them to consider their baptism whenever they come into contact with water, or offer the strengthening of faith and opportunity to 'taste and see that God is good' in communion—then I cannot offer hope. What's more, I lose my own. How can we be expected to trade that hope for what is essentially faith packaged as science?

I did not check my brain at the door. I am not irrational or closed-minded simply because someone tells me I am, and neither are you. At the end of the day, no amount of arguing on our part is going to change anyone's mind. We are called to confess the hope that is in us and let God do the rest.

The message of Christ's resurrection is a threat to the way humans have come to understand the natural world. The question must be asked, though, what makes humanity the best judge of what is and what isn't "natural"?

Are we objective enough to take it all in and put it all together without assistance? Is the resurrection as supernatural as we make it out to be, or is it a restoration to what is meant to be the natural state? We were created to be eternal, and to live in God's presence.

Our world is what it is because of sin; therefore, all our assumptions about the world and the way it works are also tainted by sin, by a lack of knowledge of what it was like before

the Fall. It makes sense that Darwin's theories (or rather the extensions of them) can lead only to death, because that is what sin brings into the world. We may not be able to comprehend God entering into this world to save it—but that doesn't mean He didn't do it.

Where as Christians we have an empty tomb to celebrate, evolution promises graves as far as the eye can see, full of people who will never know what it is to receive life and have it abundantly. Christ's tomb is empty—so is yours.

Rev. Andrew Craig is associate pastor at Zion Lutheran Church, Surrey, B.C.

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