

32 How do Christians square the theory of evolution with what the bible says?

How do Christians square the theory of evolution with what the bible says? We square the two by getting to grips with the heart both of what the bible and evolutionary theory really say. I say 'the heart' because if the biblical accounts of creation in Genesis need interpretation so does evolution theory. We don't have to choose between God bringing everything we know into being in hours or days and billions of years of a process run by chance.

Most churches accept we need care in interpreting the bible lest we end up doing the impossible – defending God! Very many scientists are unhappy with the idea of evolution disproving God because many see in it this theory homage to his glorious purpose in the creation of the world.

The bible starts by describing the way the world was made in a great hymn with the repeated chorus *God saw that it was good*. There are six verses for six days of creation covering aspects from light through to human beings. Turn over a page and you get another shorter version more focussed on the creation of man and woman.

An internet definition of *evolution* runs that it *is the process of change in all forms of life over generations so that organisms inherit features from their parents through genes. Changes or so-called mutations in these genes can produce a new trait in the offspring of an organism. If a new trait makes these offspring better suited to their environment, they will be more successful at surviving and reproducing. This process is called natural selection, and it causes useful traits to become more common. Over many generations, a population can acquire so many new traits that it becomes a new species.*

The understanding of evolutionary biology began with the 1859 publication of Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species. In addition, Gregor Mendel's work with plants helped to explain the hereditary patterns of genetics. This led to an understanding of the mechanisms of inheritance.

At first sight the *bible* and *evolution* contradict. The bible talks of six days of creation whilst evolution theory talks of five billion years. Yet the bible talks in poetry here and science talks in prose. The bible talks not of the mechanical laws of the universe but of who's behind the universe and what his plan is for us all. By contrast evolutionary theory shows a purpose and direction to human history that should puzzle any atheist. So much so people are talking about atheism in the gaps, or the need for atheists to tackle the consensus of today's science that there is an order and direction and by implication a purpose to life on earth.

How do Christians square the theory of evolution with what the bible says? There are broadly two approaches. One that denies evolutionary theory and one that accepts it with qualifications. Some extremely cautious Christians go as far as to suggest God has allowed fossils to test our faith rather than to point us to his genius in making an evolving world. They can't

accept any challenge to the literal interpretation of scripture because any other interpretation would seem to give Christian tradition some authority over the Bible.

The other approach widely adopted is to see scriptural truth as of a different kind to scientific truth. Science deals with how things are made whilst the bible deals with why things were made. The bible and its God given supplement *nature* are to be taken together and not allowed to be rival interpreters of reality. On this view creation is often presented as something *continuing* rather than as simply an event in the past.

The French priest scientist and mystic Teilhard de Chardin taught from the first chapters of John's Gospel, Colossians and Hebrews how Christ *holds all things in being* and is *bringing all things together in himself*.

He saw the whole cosmos as like a cone with the movements within it converging upon Jesus as the apex or omega point. Our individual futures, the future development of the church and the whole creation rests in Jesus and is to end in Jesus. The evolution and connecting up of conscious beings into the sort of collective consciousness that we call the World Wide Web was actually prophesied in his writings though he lived long before the internet.

To hold Christian faith requires no surrender of intellectual integrity in the face of evolutionary theory. The truth of Christ is an anchor that holds us but it is also the greatest clue to the forward movement and fulfilment of the universe.