

The Impact of Evolution on Christian Belief and Doctrine

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A Christian's belief about the creation account in the Old Testament affects their understanding of foundational elements of their faith such as morality, sin, evil, suffering, and Christ's purpose in coming to earth. As the teaching of evolution in schools and media has become more dogmatic, more Christians are feeling pressure to accept the current secular theories of how the world and life began. This acceptance comes with a price, as the Bible accounts are very different from evolution, so faith must become almost schizophrenic in order to accommodate both views. Worse, faith not only is stretched, in the end, it is broken. As an atheist has bluntly observed:

And the creationists have also shown irrefutably that those liberal and neo-orthodox Christians who regard the creation stories as myths or allegories are undermining the rest of Scripture, for if there was no Adam, there was no fall; and if there was no fall there was no hell; and if there was no hell, there was no need of Jesus as Second Adam and Incarnate Savior, crucified and risen. As a result, the whole biblical system of salvation collapses. (Matill, 1982)

Two Ways of Viewing Facts

Holding mutually contradicting beliefs based on feelings is a growing trend in American society. In an article from the Barna Group (2008), the nation's leading pollster on American faith and culture, George Barna summarizes a survey he directed of the today's teenage generation:

The consistent deterioration of the Bible as the source of moral truth has led to a nation where people have become independent judges of right and wrong, basing their choices on feelings and circumstances. It is not likely that America will return to a more traditional moral code until the nation experiences significant pain from its moral choices. (para. 18)

Examples of feeling based beliefs in conflict abound in politics (handouts for everyone but don't raise taxes), education (don't fail anyone to help self esteem but identify top scholars for awards and hiring), and even parenting (protect children from the results of their bad

behavior but expect them to become responsible adults). Christians have not been immune to this trend, especially in the area of reconciling the Biblical account of creation with current scientific theories. Over the last 200 years, since scientists began developing theories of an old earth and naturalistic evolution of life, leaders in the church have tried to come up with interpretations of scripture to match the current theory of the day.

This warping or bending of the scriptures provided temporary intellectual relief to some believers, but as scientific theories continued to “evolve” further away from the Genesis account, Christians began to fall into one of two groups. One group chose to take the Biblical account on faith and ignore science altogether or to abandon scripture and follow whatever scientific theory was most popular. This group can be called the “either or” or Western thinking type of people who see truth as absolute and knowable. If one idea conflicts with another, one or both ideas may be wrong but both cannot be true. The second group falls into the “both and” or Eastern thought group that can accept multiple ideas or beliefs even if they are mutually exclusive (Burger, 2005). It is this second group that will be the focus of the rest of this paper, but first some brief definitions of the main views of creation will be given.

Three Basic Views of How the World Came to Be

A Literal Creation and the Flood According to Genesis

The view presented here is a rather literal reading of the creation account in Genesis which takes the texts as relating events that actually happened. This represents the historical view of the vast majority of Jews, Christians, and Muslims up until a few hundred years ago. It is also the view of a growing body of scientists in what is known as creation science movement. While the early creation scientists mostly focused on the errors of evolutionists or evidence for old earth creation theories, today they are presenting convincing evidence for the Genesis creation account in biology, physics, astronomy, genetics, molecular biology, and other “hard” sciences (Bergman 2003).

Genesis 1:1 begins sometime in the distant unknown past: God created the heavens and the earth. The date and method of this initial creation is not given, but the traditional view is that everything was supernaturally created from nothing and the earth is described as “formless and empty” (Genesis 1:1-2 NIV). Around six to ten thousand years ago, based both on genealogies in

Genesis and increasing scientific evidence, God began to form the earth and heavens as we know it today- including all life- over a period of six literal days (Genesis 1:1-31). The order of events in Genesis did not match evolution on several key points: plants were created before the sun, birds were created before animals, and the major disconnect was that man and every “kind” (genus or phyla) of animal was created at once and not evolved from a common ancestor.

After creation, the most controversial Genesis event that also relates to evolution was the global flood of Noah as related in Genesis chapters 6-9. This catastrophe caused mass drowning and burial of all human, animal, and plant life other than those in the ark. It also created dramatic changes in the geology, weather, and human lifespan. One of the greatest visual artifacts supporting evolution is the fossil record found in sedimentary layers around the globe. These layers are used to show that life must have progressed over millions of years adding biological complexity along the way. If these layers were shown to be the result of a global flood four to six thousand years ago, the popular view of evolution (at least as taught in classrooms and museums) would be dealt a serious blow.

Evolution According to Darwin and Modern Science

The most popular form of the evolution theory today has changed little from its original form as put forth by Darwin. Based on his observations of fossils and variation within species, Darwin extrapolated that life began as a simple organism and became increasingly complex over long periods of time through random mutations and natural selection. This idea of progressive development from simple forms to complex ones was taken up in the astronomy area later and drove the theory of stellar and planetary formation of stars and planets from gas and dust. The current form of the theory describing the progressive development of the universe is called the Big Bang theory.

Whether the theories are describing the origin of the universe or the first cell, science is silent as to “first causes” other than billions of years and chance. Here, evolution and creation have some common ground- neither can ever replicate their idea of origins in a controlled experiment (evolution needs billions of years and creation was a supernatural act of God) and therefore must accept it on faith alone. One might argue evolution can be proved by finding transitional forms (half one species and half another) and this was something Darwin was sure

would happen with further fossil study. So far, in over 150 years of scientists' best efforts studying thousands of fossils, no significant transitional forms have been found. Norman Newell, former Curator of Historical Geology at the American Museum of Natural History, correctly wrote "experience shows that the gaps which separate the highest categories may never be bridged in the fossil record. Many of the discontinuities tend to be more and more emphasized with increased collecting" (1970, pp. 644-645).

Efforts to Merge God and Evolution- A Middle Ground

This view, usually called theistic evolution, is held by many of the "both and" type of Christians. In an effort to blend in with dominant science theory, many have posed that evolution happened gradually over billions of years, but the "first cause" and driving creative force that science cannot speak to is the work of God. The Genesis scriptures (and other Biblical references to them) are modified to fit or taken as figurative language. Rather than deny scripture outright, theistic evolutionists edit problematic elements or accept contradictions without bothering to resolve them at all.

Because large sections of Genesis have to be taken as myth or parable, the later scriptures that reference these texts are also weakened. In addition to the impact to their faith that will be described in more detail below, scientists holding this view tend to receive more vehement rejection from the scientific establishment than creation scientists. Bergman (2006) aptly concludes, "The solution to the controversy is not to adopt a position that does justice to neither the science nor the Scriptures, but to advocate a position supported by the scientific data, and not science speculation based on naturalism" (p. iv).

Effects on Christian Doctrines from Belief in Evolution

Effect on Reading of Scripture- Inspired or Not

The most fundamental problem created by making scripture bend to fit evolution is the erosion of the meaning of scriptural inspiration. If passages in Genesis are incorrect or mythical, what other parts of the Bible are to be taken figuratively? While parts of the Bible certainly contain figurative speech, the Genesis passages in question are taken as fact all through the Old and New Testaments. A few examples of how Genesis chapters 1-10 form the basis of

foundational Christian doctrine are listed next, but a more thorough list may be found in an article by Bebbler & Taylor (1998).

Effect on Morals

In the arena of values, there are probably no more controversial issues today than the definition of marriage, capital punishment, and racism. Genesis speaks to all three of these issues in a direct way, but is essentially nullified by evolution claims. In Genesis 2, God creates Adam and Eve and establishes marriage between a man and a woman. This is re-enforced by Jesus himself in Matthew 19:4-6 where he quotes Genesis 2:24 in defining God's intent for marriage. If most of Genesis never really happened and marriage is a man-made concept, then Jesus was mistaken and it can be redefined by society if desired. In Genesis 9, after the flood, God tells Noah that if a life is taken then the one who took the life must also be put to death because mankind is created in God's image. Again, if the Noah account is a myth and mankind is not much different than animals, as evolution tells us, then the society again becomes the arbiter of all value.

While the previous two issues are under much debate today, racism has been a problem throughout history. With the advent of evolution theories and the concept of natural selection, racist ideas were finally given a "scientific" basis (Shipman, 1994). The proper view of race (that there is no such thing- only recently supported by science thanks to the evidence of genetics) is given in Genesis 5 and 10 through detailed genealogies that tell us all humans descended from a set of common ancestors (Adam and Eve followed by Noah and his children). The word or even concept of judging by race is not to be found in the Bible. God chose certain people and groups for reasons other than race, mostly due to character or actions. In fact, there is an example where God punished those who showed racial bias by striking Miriam with leprosy when she complained about her brother Moses having a black wife (Numbers 12:1-10).

Effect on Soteriology (Doctrine of Salvation).

As Christians are defined by their faith in Jesus Christ, it would seem that understanding why he came and what he accomplished would be fundamental truths requiring clarity. The New Testament lays out the details of universal sin, atonement, and forgiveness wrought by his death and resurrection, but what do these terms really mean and where did they come from? The

answers are found in Genesis. If there never was an original man who sinned and passed the sin nature to all people, how is it certain we have sinned individually? Paul writes in Acts 17:26 “from one man he made every nation of men” and:

by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:17 NIV)

These great foundational truths are almost stripped of meaning by evolution. The promises made to Eve in Genesis 3:15 and all through the Old Testament to send a savior to undo the results of sin lose their precious value if there really was no original sin and mankind is merely in need of enlightenment. Not only does the need for salvation of all mankind become vague, but the whole concept of evil and suffering is turned upside down from being a result of mankind's rebellion to God's fault for letting bad things happen to “good” people (as society define good).

Effect on Eschatology (Doctrine of End Times)

A proper understanding of life's beginnings may impact morality and the concept of sin and salvation, but what can it have to do with the Christian view of end times and judgment? Other than the already mentioned issue of not taking scripture literally, and therefore seeing Biblical descriptions of the future judgment and other events as allegorical, if the world has been going on for billions of years, then the logical conclusion is that it should continue to do so as long as mankind doesn't do something catastrophic. The New Testament writer Peter addresses this very point of view:

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (2 Peter 3:3-7 NIV)

Not only does the Christian lose any sense that Jesus' return could be eminent, but the picture of heaven is lost as well. There is not room here to go into detail, but the Biblical view of heaven is very much like the original Garden. In heaven there will be intimate fellowship, eternal life, a new heaven and earth (e.g. Revelation 20) - all will be restored as it was in the beginning of Genesis, just as God promised in Genesis 3. Undoing the curse of sin on mankind and the physical creation was the main reason for Jesus' first coming and this is lost, or at best greatly muted, by theistic evolution with its billions of years of death and chaos. When God said creation was "good" in Genesis 1, there was no death or sin- and one day the world will good again.

A Case in Point: Survey of Christians on Their Views of Creation, Doctrine, and Evolution

Description of the Survey Style, Distribution, and Results

A brief survey was devised to gather relevant data on what Christians think about Genesis, Jesus, and evolution. The format was 10 questions of various multiple choice or true and false formats. It was distributed to Christian friends and family and my local church. Most of the people sampled are Baptists, so the survey results can be considered to represent evangelical Christians. Paper copies as well as a web version (created by SurveyMonkey.com) were used and all inputs were given anonymously. The survey was active for one week and then closed after 70 responses were collected. Based on demographic data, the respondents were mostly female college graduates, but most of the other groups were significantly represented :

1. Gender: 63% female and 37% male.
2. Age: 14% <30, 37% 30-50, and 49% >50 years old.
3. Education: 3% in school, 33% high school only grads, and 67% college grads.

Analysis of Results- Making Connections

Two observations will be presented here from the survey results. The first is from the questions asking respondents to rank reasons for evolution that would most influence their views, whether they believed evolution or not (Table 1). Of the reasons listed the two most influential by far were "Evolution is taught in all schools" and "Never hear opposing views in the media" (even though the media was rated the least reliable source of information.) It is no accident that

these two areas, the classroom and the media, are the almost exclusive domain of evolution dogma. Whether it is a political candidate (Walters, 2008) or a curriculum (Wigoren, 2005) that in any way points to creation, alarms go off and academia and media frenzy ensues.

Next in line of most influential reasons was “Leading scientists- most all agree” which again is no coincidence, as any scientist who does not fall in line with evolution is blackballed from publications and even careers. This McCarthy style persecution was recently documented in the movie *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* (Ruloff, 2008). In addition, groups such as the National Academy of Science and the National Center for Science Education are activist bastions of evolutionists, and particularly atheists (Morris, 2003).

The second observation speaks to the heart of this paper which is the relation of belief about evolution and the Bible (Table 1 & 2). Of all respondents, 25-30% said textbooks and school teachers are usually or always correct, but 90% also believe in the creation account of Genesis, Adam and Eve, and Noah’s flood. Since only evolution is taught in schools, there are a significant number of Christians that hold both evolution and creation to be correct. This ambivalent view can also be seen in the way that 30-40% of people said it was not important to their faith nor would it affect the reason Jesus came to earth if Genesis were not true. The question as to how much of the Bible could be shown to be wrong or mythical without affecting these Christians’ faith certainly comes to mind.

Conclusion

It has been shown both in the literature and through a small survey that a significant number of Christians hold conflicting views of creation driven by the nearly unanimous bias towards evolution in academia and media. This merging of evolution and creation has been at the expense of the Biblical account which is the foundation of many key doctrines of the faith. This weakened view of scripture has affected Christian concepts on morality, sin, suffering, Jesus’ coming, and even the concept of heaven. The most active proponents of evolution are mostly atheists which should give most theistic evolutionists pause. The most logical conclusion from evolution is that the world did not need God’s involvement to arrive at the current state of things, and therefore God should be kept out of the future.

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Table 1.

Selected Questions from the Survey- Influences

2. Rate each of the reasons below on how much influence you think they have on the lack of belief in a literal creation as given in Genesis (even if you believe in the literal account).

	Very influential	Somewhat influential	Not very influential	Not important
Evolution is taught in all schools	48.6%	25.7%	11.4%	14.3%
Leading scientists- most all agree	27.1%	38.6%	17.1%	17.1%
Never hear opposing views in media	42.9%	27.1%	15.7%	14.3%
Evolution makes more logical sense	11.4%	35.7%	32.9%	20.0%
There is so much scientific data	20.0%	32.9%	30.0%	17.1%

4. Please rate your trust in the following sources of information.

	Reliable	Usually correct	Sometimes correct	Unreliable	Don't Know
Newspaper	1.4%	4.3%	47.1%	47.1%	0.0%
TV news (CNN,etc)	1.4%	8.6%	32.9%	57.1%	0.0%
Talk radio	1.4%	10.0%	50.0%	37.1%	1.4%
Textbooks	2.9%	27.1%	40.0%	28.6%	1.4%
School Teachers	2.9%	22.9%	54.3%	20.0%	0.0%
Christian Websites	11.4%	44.3%	40.0%	0.0%	4.3%

Table 2.

Selected Questions from the Survey- Biblical View

5. Choice the closest statement on how you think life on earth came into existence:

	Response
Evolution from single cells by random means	0.0%
Evolution from single cells guided by God	2.9%
Creation as told in Genesis	90.0%
All life evolved but man was specially created	4.3%
Other (please specify)	2.9%

9. If Genesis is not literally true, but was written to tell us about the world through stories, does it affect believing the rest of the Bible? (Can choose more than one answer)

	Response
No, each book of the Bible is to be taken separately	8.6%
Yes, because Genesis is referenced all thru the Bible	62.9%
No, the New Testament does not rely on the old testament	2.9%
Not really, faith in Jesus is all that matters	22.9%
Other (please specify)	11.4%
