TEACHING AND UNTEACHING EVOLUTION: The Fossils Say Nothing

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Evolution, a major accepted thought in all the sciences, claims all forms of matter and particularly all forms of life, continually change of necessity by themselves without intended design or purpose, but rather by chance from simple forms to complex forms generally improving in a world without end.

The Christian teacher knows the one and only true God, the Triune God, created all things from nothing to please His good will. Our Lord created all things with design and purpose. Nothing was left to chance. It was Adam and Eve who sinned bringing to this broken creation its travail and in our own sin we watch it wear out like a garment. If it were not for the redeeming work of Jesus Christ and the hope faith in Him gives, our life on such a "garment" would indeed be analogous to a life of a cloth eating worm. By our hope for a life everlasting with our Savior we also know by that same faith that the world now is not that of chance, without design. We know these evolutionary teachings in science are wrong. They are satanic when they lead some in this scientific age to reject the Holy Scriptures and turn from their need for their Savior by thinking all things improve of themselves and without an accountability to God.

What is the Christian teacher to do with science? We believe that all subjects need to be taught in the light of God's Word. When science is taught, it should be emphasized that God has created all things in a given order as He told us from the first day to the sixth day, resting on the seventh. The entire dome of the sky as far as can be detected and beyond shows the handiwork of our Lord, detailed in structure and purposeful in design, requiring much work by the Godhead. But when the underpinning structure of the science of today so coolly dismisses such teachings, when many church bodies have allowed liberal interpretations of the Scriptures in order to harmonize science with their own teachings of the Bible to the extent of losing the Scriptures themselves, then the task of the loyal Christian teacher becomes difficult and lonely.

Some people rightly point out failures in Lamark's laws of evolution upon which Darwin built his system of thought, the survival of the fittest. Don't cheer too loudly. Evolution is not going to go away. Some teachers have turned to "Christian" textbooks teaching science in a special way which many times ignores evolution altogether. The claim is made that "true science" is what we need to give our students. But is this separatist method the way to go? Shall our children, those that our Lord sent to us through His church, sent to us by their parents, be given lessons in science so separate from the main stream of worldly science that they do not know evolution or the commonly accepted systems of scientific thought when they get to the university? Or worse, should they be fed a lie that their brand of science is better?

Teachers, hold fast to your high calling "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." That calling is not to save this world from its false science by finding a true science. Look what must be added to find a hopeful harmony between our Bible and science. If we teach our students that there were no dinosaurs, and their university professor takes them on an exciting dig to piece together their own dinosaur bones, what has become of such added teachings? If we eloquently argue against ice ages using

what we believe to be good laws of physics, what becomes of our teaching when our students study the ice caps of this world that still exist? How certain can we be of a universal climate before the Flood? Any such teachings are additions to the record Moses wrote for us.

Need we make the second law of thermodynamics a Lutheran doctrine? It seems to have crept into many junior high school courses in our midst in an effort to overcome evolution. If it is taught that sin brought on this second law, that all things always move to greater disorder with time, what will happen when our students at a more mature age read *Order out of Chaos* by Ilya Prigogine? He is the 1977 Nobel Prize winner who showed that the old laws of thermodynamics are limited only to equilibrium conditions and the reverse, an increase of order and structure, is possible in the many more nonequilibrium occurrences of nature. We dare not equip our children with outdated scientific interpretations, especially not in subject areas where we lack expertise and training. We are all Christian teachers, not scientists!

It is imperative all teachers see that science has always been a work of human thought forged in the market place. As such a product of human thought, as all products of sinful man, science has never had a claim to certain truth. Nor can science claim for itself an ascendance to truth. Our children must see that science is an ever changing body of knowledge based on attempts by men and women to explain the natural world our Lord has created and maintains. Our children must see the human side of science and its changeable character, not the phony image of unchanging laws as displayed in a textbook, but yet are altered with each new edition. Scientific laws as written by men and women are not synonymous with God's work of nature. With such a proper introduction to the study of science, I believe the best way for a Christian teacher to deal with evolution is to teach it right out front, plainly, to the youngest child that can understand the difference between man's word and God's Word.

Many fine Christian teachers have expressed to me a rightful fear of giving an offense to a child's faith by teaching evolution. This is indeed a rightful fear and should prick each and everyone of our consciences. But also consider that if you teach about atoms, you have already done more for the evolutionist than you can imagine. Atomic theory and the related laws are the embodiment and chief mechanism of evolution. Kinetic motions without prior planned design, by chance, without beginning or end, provide an explanation of all motions without a spiritual mover.

If you teach a biological classification system that is in the least way fashioned after the Linnean scheme separating one species from another by an ascending order, a university professor of evolution can easily supply a few hundred million years between the main groupings. An infinite number of methods for the classification of plants and animals is possible. Recognize and teach the human invention of classification systems.

We should teach evolution with its strengths. I believe species change. Also, extinction of some species has occurred in the past. Mankind has much to gain searching for organic mechanisms that improve species.

We should teach evolution with its weaknesses. I believe gaps between species exist, making the idea of all life evolving from a single cell as most doubtful from a scientific point of view. Great catastrophes have occurred geologically raising many scientific questions about extremely long periods of time.

We should teach evolution with its out-and-out false doctrines bringing the child of God face-to-face with the world that does not desire, much less love their Savior Jesus.

In this way we as teachers may use any textbook the world might produce. Knowing such a book contains much that is false, we as teachers will develop fresh testimony straight from our hearts, write extra lessons showing God's Word in authority over man's wisdom, and leave the child to ponder in amazement even as Christ's disciples, "Even the wind and the sea obey Him." When a teacher must explain some aspect of science as error before the Word, science will be taught as it is, as human attempts to explain. Nature will be taught as the creative work of God, subtle and beyond certain explanation. That human side of science is the stuff of real science.

When scientific explanation leads to successful results, the pride of man will not be emphasized, but instead praise of a gracious God showering more of His abundant material blessings on the just and the unjust as He sends the rain to the just and the unjust. Man's uncertainty will remain even in success.

I've mentioned uncertainty a lot. Uncertainty exists in all science. Scientific knowledge of one age becomes the nonsense of the next. Who of us cares about epicycles of planets, phlogiston or caloric fluid? These ideas should give the teacher of science a cautious attitude toward teaching the laws. But the history of science, I believe, gives comfort to the Christian teacher with the knowledge that evolution is not new. Nor are we the first Christian teachers to mistrust science. Only when Christians dominated the western world did science take on that lovely aspect of desiring to see God's works in nature. And today, the last days, do not expect the scientific world to harmoniously embrace Christian thought. The farther unbelief takes science in its explanations of nature, the less likely the Christian will be able to support it, no matter how valiantly some may try. And I personally have no quarrel with those in that struggle. But for us as teachers, we must hold fast to the priority of our call. A study of history over the past three thousand documented years of written human thought is also an aid. The fulfillment of God's promise and His story of His church are of paramount importance. Yet the secondary thought, what men have thought and dreamed throughout history is one of personal pride, honor and human will against God. Embedded in these thoughts are scientific thoughts. These are what teachers of science should also strive to learn in order to comprehend the science of our age. Permit a lightning flash of such a history of science that I hope will reveal faintly the whirlwind of destruction hidden in the dark.

Science of the western civilization was invented with animosity toward all gods. The Greeks had a mythical God for every natural phenomena imaginable. Zeus was the cloud compeller and the lord of the lightning flash. Poseidon was the earth shaker, Xanthus the god of the river, and Hermes the bringer of luck. Rejecting these and many more gods, Greek science explained natural happenings as occurrences of necessity without spiritual direction, without deliberate design and only by chance. Democritus' atomic theory explained existence and motion without beginning or end. According to his theory, atoms simply always existed and always were moving. Life and development are mere interaction and arrangement of atoms. Anaxagoras argued from a law of contradiction that claimed a proposition and its negation cannot be simultaneously valid. Thus if something is real, such as a real substance, it cannot come from nothing. This is fundamental to science from its inception. Matter cannot be created or destroyed. In the structure of Greek thought Anaxagoras had developed the most acceptable law of science through all the ages. It is in everyone of our science text books. Modern chemistry and our present periodic chart cannot exist without this law of conservation of matter.

Many of these early Greek scientists were persecuted and some were tried for piety. The statesman Pericles got Anaxagoras acquitted, but saw Socrates, his more famous client, given the cup of hemlock. Socrates was executed for the same offense of piety, a rejection of the gods. From this Greek setting of science where knowledge is rejection of

the gods, I do not find it strange that the early Christian church fathers did little to promote the advanced scholarship of the natural world . Though St. Clement of Alexandria made fun of the Christian's fear of the pagan's natural philosophy, and his pupil Origen saw all knowledge as good and found the study of natural science compatible with Christian understanding, the divinity of Jesus and the facing of the limits of reason in comprehending the Holy Trinity dominated church intellect. Christian daily life and the love of God were of primary importance to teach. St. Augustine wrote negatively,

> Men seek out the hidden powers of nature, which to know profit not and wherein men desire nothing but knowledge. With the same perverted aim they seek after magic arts. . . . As for me, I care not to know the courses of the stars, while all sacrilegious mysteries I hate.[1]

It wasn't until the early Renaissance that a new view of science for the Christian was sought. New found translations of ancient works were merged together with empirical mathematical modeling. Controlled laboratory experiments were relied upon for the settlement of conflicts brought about from inductive reasoning. Showing a new trust, Roger Bacon wrote in his *Opus Maius*,

> All the wise men of antiquity worked in mathematics so that they might know all things . . . by the power of mathe^ matics, to unfold the causes of all things and to give a sufficient explanation of human and divine phenomena.[2]

A God of design provided order in nature which was knowable. Through induction, first promoted extensively by Robert Grosseteste, the chancellor of Oxford University, scholars at his university provided adequate explanations that still are diagramed in our modern science text books as the correct explanations. God was given the credit for the purpose and design of refraction and reflection of colors in the rainbow through raindrops when it was explained four centuries before Newton deciphered the dispersion of colors.

With this merging of natural philosophy with Christian doctrine, even though overdone by Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274), science generally enjoyed political, intellectual and theological support culminating in the two great works *Principia* (1686) and *Opticks* (1704) by Isaac Newton. At times contradictions were identified between God's Word and the scientific explanations of the day. Even then, order seen by science, its laws, was looked upon as the created order of God. Luther, for example, could critically praise natural philosophy attributing order to God's creation and variation from that order to God's providence or maintenance.

> Men were induced to assign to fire the uppermost place, the next to air, the third to water, and the lowest position to the earth, because it weighs the most. . . . even if by His Word God has established and created all these things, nevertheless He is not bound to those rules in such a way that He cannot alter them according to His will. Therefore even if we know from experience that those four elements are arranged in that order and have been assigned their positions, nevertheless God can go contrary to this arrangement and can have fire even in the midst of the sea and maintain it there, just as we see it hidden in the flint.[3]

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[1] St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, Book X, Chapter 35.
[2] Roger Bacon, *Opus Maius*, part IV.
[3] Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis”, *Luther's Works*, Volume 1, p. 27.

Men made great strides in science acknowledging that the observable order was of God. This is a high principle to teach and get across to the children of every age. But remember that science is an endeavor of human beings and note how Luther trusted God's Word more than man's science. Order in nature may be of God, but order explained by men is still by men only. Each century the laws of science had to be altered and many times abandoned altogether for new interpretations in the continual struggle to explain the subtle ways our Lord maintains the natural world. By the time of Charles Darwin, God's order was no longer looked for in nature. Science again was like that of the Greeks, very independent of, even antagonistic to, God's Word.

In those golden years from Roger Bacon to Isaac Newton, a biological classification system in vogue taught that the species were immutable and unalterable. Such a system fit well into the Genesis "kinds." But such a humanly devised system also failed under the overwhelming quantities of new species brought back to England by Captain James Cook (expedition dates: 1768-1779) and other scientific exploring expeditions. The Frenchman Jean Baptiste Lamark in the early 1800's gave up trying to classify animals and plants into such a rigid system of thought. Darwin likewise was overwhelmed on his similar exploring voyage of the H.M.S. Beagle (expedition dates: 1831-1836). To Darwin, reasoning from the success of farmers altering breeds of cattle, fowl and plants, species changed by a "creative force" [4] identified in uncontrolled nature and later called natural selection. Teach that. It is a very real and exciting story of mankind struggling with the size of their new world and the awesome number of kinds of life found on it. Where you see sinful pride leaving out the Creator, teach that, for sure, since it is a necessary part of the struggle to understand nature. Where you see human failure, teach that too. Looking back on my own exciting scientific career, it was in failure to understand things too wonderful for me that humility could permit a growth in faith.[5]

It is not a threat to the faith, nor is it scripturally wrong to claim as Darwin that different species of finches on the Galapagos Islands may have evolved with different beaks in pursuing different food stuffs which God directed them to for their existence, a "creative force." The kinds still reproduce according to their kind. Wide beaked finches, narrow beaked finches, sharp beaked finches are still all finches. If they evolved, so has the corn now grown in the Midwest when it is compared to the corn discovered at Plymouth Colony. Our tomatoes are not the same as grandma's tomatoes, and in fact, if you were to preserve them the same way she did, not taking into account the evolution that has occurred, your home preserved tomatoes could give your family botulism. God must provide for some altering of species. Many creation research people wisely permit changes within the kinds, but they avoid a rigorous defining of the "kinds." The Hebrew likewise identifies only a limiting outline for kinds[6] and cannot imply unalterable forms of life as Karl Linnaeus' definition of species.

The church should not have censored Galileo's heliocentric theory of planetary motion. They wrongly clung to Aristotelian science which insisted that no changes existed and no changes could occur in the celestial world above the earth. When eroded mountains could be seen on the moon and when star nova were identified as exploding stars, the church suffered foolishly. Had the ridicule been for the sake of teaching Scripture, that would be to the glory of God, but the tragedy was that the ridicule came over changing of human ideas.

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[4] Charles Darwin, The phrase "creative force" was used in his original journals written while on board the H.M.S. Beagle from 1831-1836.

[5] Martin P. Sponholz, *Among the Magi*, On the world wide web maintained by the *New South Polar Times* <http://www.205.174.118.254/nspt/home.htm>

[6] H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, Vol. I, pp. 66-69.

Likewise when Darwin witnessed earthquakes that left some of the Andes Mountains higher above sea level, confirmed by detailed surveying, he claimed sea fossils on the mountain tops got there by this earthquake lifting method over long periods of time. Some church scholars, confirmed in the conservative scientific explanation of the day, insisted that the immovable mountains were covered by flood waters simply rising and then descending again at the time of Noah. Perhaps a correct Noachic Flood association could be made, but the church again was left with defending a wrong law of science, demanding allegiance to the concept of immovable mountains, which in fact moved. Today most scholars on either side of the creation-evolution debate accept the possibility of rapidly rising and sinking of both the sea level and the land masses.

We must likewise be careful not to dogmatize science, use too much of the science from the Calvinist camp, or add our own uncertain ideas to the pure Word. With this Lutheran sensitivity, *Sola Scriptura*, in the science class we should teach that microevolutionary changes are plausible within the confines of Genesis kinds. A new classification system, recognizing change confined to some limits as established by God and witnessed in the order of nature, is long overdue. And when it comes, I believe much of the evolution as we know it today will fade away just as caloric fluid and phlogiston did. But of primary importance to us is that we must not lose sight of our divine call to teach the children of Christ. Let the scientist discover, classify and change his laws. We are called to teach.

Time helps science a lot. In the one hundred and twenty years since *The Origin of Species*, the missing links between the major kinds have not been found. Now Stephen Gould has introduced punctuated equilibrium, the possibility of sudden changes in species such as a bird hatching from a reptilian egg due to massive genetic changes brought on by catastrophic events (some what overstated). This we should also teach that the changing laws are seen in the history of science along with “O Thou who changest not, abide with me.”

History of science helps us teach evolution and unteach evolution. It shows all of science as it truly is: a human effort, a changing human effort. It shows science making great strides and providing great achievements, but also not always improving, not always getting closer to the truth, many times raising more confusion than before. Many have been proud of what they learned from the fossils. A book exists titled *Evolution--The Fossils Say No*. A rebuttal exists called *Evolution--The Fossils Say Yes*. The real truth is that the fossils say nothing.[7] Only humans can do the observing and interpreting. We cannot use Christian education to censor ideas of human reason. We can teach our children to scrutinize ideas of human reason in the brilliant light of God's Word.

If as a teacher you cannot solve each and every contradiction you see or your student raises about science over against our faithful understanding of God's Word, good. I failed as a scientist. I fail as a teacher. Then God's Word must stand sufficient. In our failure the Word cannot be supported by your or my wild scientific ideas. Then the children will learn the power of the Word as it is alone, and that we must live by faith, faith alone, even in a scientific age.

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[7] I would be remiss if I did not disclose that in a wide ranging discussion session between Dr. Paul R. Boehlke, Dr. James H. Wandersee and myself over the two books *Evolution—The Fossils say No* by Gish and *Evolution—The Fossils say Yes* by (I think) Gould that Jim in his quiet laughter said, “really the fossils don’t say anything at all.” Now stolen as my title.

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