

RESEARCHING CREATION

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For a biologist who believes that God has created the world, the question of evolution is a matter of radical Christian scholarship. Scholarship is done by finite, fallen humans with shaping principles that are products of their time (culture) and training. Yet, scholarship is done in a world that God has freely created. To believe that the cosmos is the creation of God means that one must deal with all the data available, for the roots of reality were ordained by Him and the shape of the world reflects His sovereign choices. The creation of God trumps the ideas of humans – in any field, including both science and theology.

Our disciplinary conclusions, our paradigms, theories and predictions are formed in the tension between our assumptions and His reality: creature versus Creator. How do we do faithful scholarship which is radically Christian? We must cut to our disciplinary roots (their radix).

Radical scholarship in God's cosmos includes a full working knowledge of the data, theories, and paradigms of the field in question. It must cut to a discipline's theoretical root and evaluate its assumptions in the light of Scripture. Radical scholarship must then build its way back out from the root, formulating new foundations (or validating old foundations) as needed. On those bases a discipline can be reformed.

How should a Christian evaluate biology's evolutionary paradigm? First, we should evaluate the mechanisms biology holds to have produced biological change in light of what the Scripture says of God's role of natural causation. There are four such questions:

1. Natural Selection - survival and reproduction, life and death - are these matters governed by God, or is nature autonomous?
2. Mutation and Drift - do such unpredictable events happen by the choice of God, or are they random and directionless?
3. Improbable events - do we mean improbable events that are not God's usual custom or events that are simply impossible for God to do?
4. Limits to change - Is the amount of change which might happen to biological species due to God's choices or are there intrinsic limits set by nature?

I think it is clear that a biblical understanding of God as Creator/King rather than divine "doemaker" views all of these processes as under His providential control - thus, all evolutionary mechanisms simply show God at work. There is no rational way that such an evolutionary narrative can exclude Him. So God could create that way.

The second question is one of history. Are all (or most) creatures actually related to each other through a process descendent with modification, descent from common ancestors? Did they evolve? This is very controversial. As radical Christian scholars considering the shape of the creation event, we need to let the testimony (data) of God's works (the creation itself) test our theories. We test theories by predicting the physical data that we expect to see. The most powerful sort of test is one which differentiates between two or more alternative theories with different predictions/expectations.

There are two basic theories of biological creation. The first is Special Creation - that the world of life was created as a series of genetically separate 'kinds' (baramin) with no physical relationship between them (one kind was not reworked to make another). The data of science will therefore give evidence of the barriers that exist between these primordial biological entities. The second is Continuous Creation/Theistic Evolution - that the world of life was created by God through the providential governance of natural mechanisms, producing an evolutionary process. The data of science will give evidence of a continuity of relationships between living species, as well as indications of the history and mechanisms by which God created. There may also be evidence of God's creative intent.

An adequate test of these theories would predict patterns - patterns of how animals are distributed across the world, in the fossil record, in the relationships of existing species, and in comparisons of many genomes. I will give one example to illustrate the predictive process.

If special creation is correct, all similarities in genetic sequences (DNA forensics) shared between 'baramin' will reflect common plans in the Creator's mind. If continuous creation is correct, in addition to God's common plans, there may also be shared copies of genetic 'accidents' which happened to a common ancestor - such as

the insertion at a particular spot in the DNA of a deactivated retrovirus. 'Share'd' (homologous) retroviruses should not be found in different 'baramin'.

The human race shares a wide variety of such DNA insertions with many other species. This is consistent with continuous creation - and 'falsifies' special creation. If such predictions continue to accumulate, it would be perverse of a faithful scholar to ignore the testimony of God's creation in favor of established (human) ideas about how the creation took place - even if those human ideas reflect what we have traditionally understood the Scriptures to mean.

But that does not mean that the Scriptures are irrelevant or not God's word - only that we have misunderstood what they were telling us. They tell us how God relates to the world and to us. He is not a 'momentary creator' who sets the world in motion, but the shepherd of Israel, the ruling Lord of creation. Remember that a doctrine of God's occasional presence is a doctrine of His usual absence. Material autonomy means Divine absenteeism. God is free to act in the natural order as He chooses - suddenly or gradually, intrusively or immediately - but never occasionally. And now, we have to follow Him out into His creation, looking to see what He has done.

NOTE: Dr. Dave Wilcox recently published the book God and Evolution, a Faith Based Understanding (ISBN 081-701-474-8), named a finalist in the Religion category of the "Best Books 2005 Awards." USABookNews.com. He is currently working on a book proposal for a Christian examination of the scientific evidence concerning the origin of the human race. The theological issues involved are of critical importance. There are a wealth of new physical data which have changed the nature of the field. An intense attack on the Christian understanding of humanity is being made by certain writers, using the data and theories of paleo-anthropology. Contact Dr. Wilcox at dwilcox@eastern.edu