

The Rev. Dr. David Leininger, Pastor
The First Presbyterian Church
Warren, PA

Genesis 1:1-2:3 (antiphon - see end); John 1:1-4 Warren
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"INTELLIGENT DESIGN:" THE CONTROVERSY

Little Julie came home from first grade one day soon after the school year had begun. "Hi, Mommy, I'm home. Mommy, where did I come from?"

Mother was taken a bit off guard with the question. She quickly thought back to her first grade experience and realized that biological science was not part of the curriculum back then, but she put that aside and forged ahead figuring that kids are just more advanced these days. She began by talking about how two people fall in love, decide to marry, and so on. There was some detail about reproductive anatomy and physiology, but only as much as a six-year-old might comprehend. Finally, after almost a half-hour of discourse, she asked, "Does that answer your question, sweetheart?"

Little Julie responded, "Well, I guess so. Jimmy, who sits in front of me in class, came from Chicago."

Questions about our origins are not limited to six-year-olds, of course, and certainly not to the location of a hometown. The opening chapters of the first book in our Bible, Genesis, deal with it. There are actually two creation accounts found there. There is the one about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the narrative account that would have been used by ancient Hebrew parents and grandparents when the question was raised by some long-ago Julie or Jacob. That is preceded by the one we read together a moment ago, which, as I hope you could tell by the way we read it, was never intended to be a scientific treatise on the way the world came to be, but rather an instrument for use in worship - an antiphon affirming our faith in the God who is the source of all we have and all

we are.

So saying, as you probably know, some folks disagree with that interpretation. In generations past, that might have been understandable. It has only been in relatively recent times that we have had the tools of biblical scholarship, archeology, textual analysis, etc., available to us to enable a more accurate reading.

But that more accurate reading has caused some problems. As little Julie's question reminds us, we DO want to know something about our origins, and up until about a century and a half ago, we thought we knew. But then along came Charles Darwin and The Origin of the Species in 1859. Evolution. Natural selection. That neat little package in Genesis One of six days of creation came into question. People of faith took great umbrage at Darwin's theories. Some were so offended that they convinced their state legislatures to pass laws making the teaching of Evolution illegal. Religion, science, and politics, all blended together - a more toxic mix has rarely been brewed. And it all came to a head 80 years ago in Dayton, Tennessee, as a young high school biology teacher named John Scopes was convicted of teaching the forbidden subject and fined \$100, an amount never collected, by the way, since the case was eventually thrown out on a technicality.¹

Most of us are familiar with the Scopes Monkey Trial because of the immensely entertaining Broadway play and eventually movie, "Inherit the Wind." The show was based on fact but played fast and loose with details, as might be expected. The result was that people left theatres celebrating the triumph of science over superstition and, at the same time, thinking that religious folks are slightly loony. More about that in a bit.

Of course, as recent headlines attest, the Scopes Monkey Trial was not the end of the controversy. Most mainline religious bodies quickly reoriented their thinking about the origins of life in light of both Darwin and Genesis. Because there was still little understanding of the use of the text as something other than a scientific document, scholars resorted to referring to the six "days" of creation as something other than 24-hour days - each day was an epoch of an indeterminate length of time. That explanation would allow for the huge amounts of time necessary for the evolutionary process to occur while still

retaining faith in the accuracy of the biblical account. As we have seen, it turns out that even that bit of ecclesiastical gymnastics was not necessary since we now know that the text was never intended to give a scientific explanation for creation anyway. We use the majestic cadence of wonderful poetry to affirm our faith.

Look carefully at the verses again. Day One: "Let there be light." OK. Where does light come from? The sun. But you will notice that sun is not created in this passage until Day Four. And the flora and fauna that we know so depend upon the sun arrive on Day Three. Hmm. No need to press this further. Simply note there is a beautiful poetic parallel:

Day 1: Light Day 4: Sun/Moon/Stars

Day 2: Waters/Sky Day 5: Fish/Birds

Day 3: Dry land/Vegetation . .Day 6: Land animals/People

Was this science? Of course not. It was faith. It was the ancient theologian's way of saying what we ourselves say in our creed: "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

Back to the issue at hand. During the past generation, we have seen the rise of an extremely conservative social and theological wing of evangelical Christianity in this country. The growth began after 1960 when the Federal Communications Commission stopped requiring that radio and television stations give a certain amount of air time to non-profit entities like churches. Mainline denominations had been the beneficiary of the former policy; those on the fringes, if they wanted air time, had to pay for it like any other commercial advertiser. Once the policy changed, the mainliners opted out of paying for the time (one of the worst mistakes ever made by the church, in my estimation) while those on the fringes happily jumped into the void. The results are history.

Courtesy of television, the most public personalities have become well-known - Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Dobson, for example. Their priorities are plain for all to see - no abortion, no same-sex marriage, prayer in public schools, appointment of conservative judges, etc.

In an effort to further its agenda, the Christian right aligned itself with the Republican party and has shown its clout by making a difference in both local and national elections. Right next door to us, we find the Ohio Restoration Project, an emergent network of nearly 1,000 "Patriot Pastors" from conservative churches across the state. Each has pledged to register 300 "values voters," adding hundreds of thousands of like-minded citizens to the electorate. There is the Texas Restoration Project in President Bush's home state. The fledgling Pennsylvania Pastors' Network has signed up 81 conservative clergy so far² (not including yours truly, in case you were wondering).

One of the places these folks are targeting is the school board. For example, earlier this year a federal district court judge ordered a board of education in Georgia to remove stickers from biology textbooks that stated "Evolution is just a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things." The interesting thing is that no one disputes that evolution is a theory - in fact, the chapter on evolution is titled, "The Theory of Evolution." So why the fuss?

The author of the science book in questions says, "The most misleading part of the sticker was its concluding sentence: "This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered." Wait a minute. Just one subject in a science textbook is to be approached with an open mind and critically considered? That means we are certain of everything in biology except evolution? Nonsense. What that sticker should have said is what the textbooks make clear: "Everything in science should be approached with critical thinking and an open mind."³

The judge ordered the stickers removed because they served no scientific or educational purpose. The purpose they did serve was to confuse students about the difference between theories and facts. Theories in science do not become facts - rather, they explain facts. Please remember that. Theories in science do not become facts - rather, they explain facts.

At the local High School in Dover, Pennsylvania, south of Harrisburg, administrators recently appeared before ninth-grade biology classes and read a statement. "Evolution is

no more than a theory," it read, "and as a way to explain the origin of humans on earth, 'intelligent design' theory is just as valid."

In response, Alan Leshner, who heads the American Association for the Advancement of Science wrote, "The statement, approved by the Dover school board was brief, but the intent is revolutionary. It seeks to discredit the science of evolution, backed by nearly 150 years of research and accepted by an overwhelming majority of scientists worldwide, and to encourage the acceptance of intelligent design, a theory with strong appeal to many religious people, but no backing in actual evidence or in science."

What exactly IS "Intelligent Design?" This simply asserts that the natural world is so complex that it could not possibly have developed on its own through a process of evolution. Somebody must have been behind the design. We who are people of faith can easily say AMEN to that...with one major limit: I would be very uncomfortable with that affirmation if it includes scientific details. For example, an "Oh, by the way, and the designer did it in six days."

Listen to Steven Pinker, a professor of Psychology at Harvard who was interviewed for TIME magazine's cover story last week on this very issue:

It's natural to think that living things must be the handiwork of a designer. But it was also natural to think that the sun went around the earth. Overcoming naive impressions to figure out how things really work is one of humanity's highest callings. Our own bodies are riddled with quirks that no competent engineer would have planned but that disclose a history of trial-and-error tinkering: a retina installed backward, a seminal duct that hooks over the ureter like a garden hose snagged on a tree, goose bumps that uselessly try to warm us by fluffing up long-gone fur. The moral design of nature is as bungled as its engineering design. What twisted sadist would have invented a parasite that blinds millions of people or a gene that covers babies with excruciating blisters? To adapt a Yiddish expression about God: If an intelligent designer lived on Earth, people would break his windows. The theory of natural selection explains life as

we find it, with all its quirks and tragedies. We can prove mathematically that it is capable of producing adaptive life forms and track it in computer simulations, lab experiments and real ecosystems. It doesn't pretend to solve one mystery (the origin of complex life) by slipping in another (the origin of a complex designer).⁴

The debate is not over, of course. Earlier this month, when President Bush was asked about intelligent design, he answered, "Both sides ought to be properly taught...so people can understand what the debate is about." This sounds reasonable until you realize that, as the president's own science adviser, John Marburger, admits, there is no real debate. "Intelligent design is not a scientific concept," Marburger admitted, committing a bit of candor that will probably earn him a trip to the White House woodshed.⁵

Part of the problem, as I see it, is that this issue makes Christians sound like Luddites. I mentioned "Inherit the Wind" earlier and the disquieting sense it left that Christians are kooks. Well, this week, the satirical internet journal, The Onion, published a piece datelined Kansas City, Kansas, where a week and a half ago, the school board passed new guidelines that encourage public school teachers to teach a variety of theories about the origins of life, downgrading the centrality of the theory of evolution. It reads,

"As the debate over the teaching of evolution in public schools continues, a new controversy over the science curriculum arose Monday in this embattled Midwestern state. Scientists from the Evangelical Center For Faith-Based Reasoning are now asserting that the long-held 'theory of gravity' is flawed, and they have responded to it with a new theory of Intelligent Falling. 'Things fall not because they are acted upon by some gravitational force, but because a higher intelligence, 'God' if you will, is pushing them down,' said Gabriel Burdett, who holds degrees in education, applied Scripture, and physics from Oral Roberts University. Burdett added, "Gravity – which is taught to our children as a law – is founded on great gaps in understanding,'" and they are calling on public schools to give equal time to the Intelligent Falling theory.⁶

Silly, of course, but again it raises the image of Christians as kooks. That helps no one.

Intelligent design: the controversy. Actually, there IS no controversy, at least among the vast majority of the scientific community. The November Issue of the National Geographic last year asked on its cover in large print: "Was Darwin Wrong?" Inside in equally large type the answer is announced: "NO. The evidence for evolution is overwhelming." The controversy is not scientific, it is political.

"Mommy, where did I come from?" That question will be asked forever, and we will continue to learn more and more. The Webb Telescope, set to launch in 2011, will help astronomers peer back in time to when the universe was a toddler, a mere 200 million years after its birth in the "Big Bang" that took place 13.7 billion years ago. Who knows what we will learn?

Can we believe in both God and science? Absolutely. One does not rule out the other. Never has, never will. Just remember,

This is my Father's world,

And to my listening ears

All nature sings and round me rings

The music of the spheres.

This is my Father's world:

Oh, let me ne'er forget

That though the wrong seems oft so strong,

God is the ruler yet.⁷

Amen!

THE CREATION

Leader: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was

hovering over the waters.

Right: And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night."

ALL: And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day.

Left: And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse "sky."

ALL: And there was evening, and there was morning--the second day.

R: And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas."

ALL: And God saw that it was good.

L: Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds.

ALL: And God saw that it was good.

And there was evening, and there was morning--the third day.

R: And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. God made two great lights--the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness.

ALL: And God saw that it was good.

And there was evening, and there was morning--the fourth day.

L: And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.

ALL: And God saw that it was good.

R God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth."

ALL: And there was evening, and there was morning--the fifth day.

L: And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds.

ALL: And God saw that it was good.

R: Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

L: Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground--everything that has the breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food."

ALL: And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day.

Leader: Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.

ALL: And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy,

because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

David Leininger
First Presbyterian Church, Warren, PA
www.presbyterianwarren.com