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FROM THE RECTOR

Human beings did not come from apes. But humans and apes did come from one common ancestor. Millions of years ago one branch of life in its development split into two sub-branches. One of these sub-branches developed into apes, gorillas, orangutans and monkeys, and the other sub-branch developed into human beings. Human beings and apes are not sisters and brothers. They are cousins. Why am I getting into a topic like this? Lately we've been hearing about local boards of education and even State legislatures imposing restrictions on the teaching of evolution in schools. I thought, as we begin the school year, I should draw from my background and try to shed some light on this issue. I'm thinking especially about our young people.

First of all, as a Christian and an Episcopalian, and drawing from my background in science, philosophy and theology, I have to say flat out that evolution is a fact - that all things, including human beings, developed over millions of years. There are theories about what made things develop the way they did, and there are leaps and tangents in that development we can't explain. But that all things, living things in particular, developed - evolved - is a fact. How does this fact jive with our faith in God as maker of heaven and earth and all that is? How does this fact jive with the Bible? It jives very well. There can be no real contradiction between valid science and true faith. Faith tells us about the wherefores and the whys.

Science tells us about the hows and the whats.

We hear about something called "creationism", and there are brands of "creationism". It's the view that the story of creation we find in the Bible is scientifically valid, and that we should acknowledge the biblical story, or at least its implications, as "science" and this "science" should be taught in our schools. President Bush himself endorses this position. My friends, the account of creation in the Bible is a story, from which we take all kinds of lessons. But with all due respect to the President, it is not science, and it tells us nothing about how things came to be. There is no science in this story or anywhere else in the Bible, or at least we shouldn't go to the Bible and expect to find science. Remember it is from the Bible that for a very long time we had the idea that our Earth was the center of the whole universe and that the sun revolved around the Earth. Going to the Bible, expecting to find science in it, is like going to a book on architecture and expecting to find the recipe for eggplant parmigiana.

If human beings came from the same sources as animals, doesn't that degrade human nature? Not at all. On the contrary, it shows that the world is not just a stage where human beings play out a role, as Shakespeare said, but human beings are an integral part of the Earth - of all material creation, and as part, and indeed, if you will, the crown of material creation, it teaches us our responsibility for God's creation. In our Prayer Book in Eucharistic Prayer C we pray to the Father, "From the 'primal elements' you brought forth the human race, and blessed us with memory, reason and

skill. You made us the rulers of creation".

According to the latest scientific research and the conclusions from this research, human-like beings appeared and evolved over a few millions years, but human beings who had clearly evolved beyond animal life began to appear only around 100,000 years ago. Compared to other living things, human beings are a very young species. But this fact does raise critical issues for Christians, issues that are much more serious than the basic issue between those who accept evolution and those who do not.

Christians have believed and taught that there was a first man and woman, who lived in close personal relationship with God, and they lived a perfect kind of life in a perfect kind of world, a world that had come complete and finished from the hand of God. We have believed and taught that this first man and woman disobeyed God, and because of their sin, they lost their relationship with God, and lost their perfect life, and the world was no longer perfect. We go on to explain that all human beings who come into the world inherit their sin, and that we human beings could never on our own atone for this offense against God, and so the gates of heaven were closed to us. And so it was, we go on to say, that God himself became one of us and died and rose for us to atone for that first sin and for all the sin that entered the world because of that first sin - he redeemed us, that is, "bought us back from the power of Satan". And the fruits of his atonement and redemption continue to be applied to the human race, especially through the Church.

Evolution does not jive with all that. It tells us that the first humans appeared in a variety of places on the Earth and at different points in time. They were not perfect humans. They were brutish. What could they possibly know about God? There was no perfect life to be lost. There was no paradise to be lost. Humans and the world had not come complete and finished from God. Everything, including humans, evolved and continued to evolve. So how does this jive with doctrines about original sin, and the atonement and redemption of Jesus Christ? How does this jive with the mission of the Church and its ministries? How does this jive with what the Church has believed and taught for centuries about Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist and the other Sacramental Rites? What does all this tell us about who Jesus Christ was and what his mission was about? What does all this tell us about who we are, the so-called "rulers of creation"?

It tells us that we Christians have a lot of re-thinking to do, and that's THE understatement of all understatements! Again, there cannot be any contradiction between faith and science. So, where do we Christians go from here, challenged by science like that? What can we do to help prepare our children so that they will be so instructed, so insightful, so courageous, so wise that they will continue to do the re-thinking that has to be done. It has to be done, if we Christians are to carry out the "Commission" given to us by Christ-if the Christian message is to mean something to the world and to people everywhere. We Christians cannot and should not leave our brains at the doors of our churches.

Christians should stop arguing about evolution. We should stop arguing about whether evolution should be taught in our schools. It's a fact. Get over it. We have a lot of re-thinking to do. We should look forward to a Christianity up-ahead that will surely look and sound different, and probably very different from what Christians have been used to for a very long time. But the Christian way, like everything else, has to evolve. We Christians have to realize that we owe this re-thinking to our children, more than anything else. We have to inspire them to understand how essential this re-thinking is. Above all, we, and our children, have nothing to fear. As we accept the challenge of science, and as we boldly and honestly re-think our faith, Jesus' promises and assurances become so much more meaningful. His words should be echoing in our hearts every step of the way. "Do not be afraid...Remember, I am with you always."

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