

## QUESTIONING FUNDAMENTAL TEACHINGS

From the earliest times men have tried to bring their own ideas into what we call the Truth. It started with Cain, who thought God ought to be pleased with his vegetables instead of lambs. 1000 years later by the time of Noah men had 'corrupted' God's way so seriously that only Noah was left as a true believer. Jeroboam son of Nebat wanted Israel to be like the nations round about and introduced the worship of the golden calves. Ahab's wife Jezebel brought in the Canaanite Baals. Then the apostles in the New Testament are constantly fighting the invasion of new teachings that contradicted the Truth taught by Jesus. For example, Paul in Colossians 2:18-23 rejects the idea that righteousness means having a perfect body; John in his epistles has to insist that Jesus came in the flesh (1 John 4:1-4) and Peter in his second epistle condemns those who were saying there would not be a second coming of Jesus (2 Peter 3:1-4). We can also trace in church history the introduction of ideas from Greek philosophy in the second and third centuries after Christ, as the church adopted the concept of an immortal soul and eventually the Trinity.

The apostles divided the true believers from 'the world', They insisted we must separate ourselves from the ways and the teachings of those who surround us, even though they often seem more palatable than what we have been taught (James 4:4). It is particularly appropriate to remember that Jesus himself warns us that at the time of the end false ideas would flourish, and many of the believers would be deceived (see Matthew 24:24). So, it is not surprising that today we have those within our community who try to bring in ideas from outside. It has always been so, and I can remember the earlier controversy over theistic evolution in the 1950's, led by such brethren as Ralph Lovelock, who eventually resigned from our community. Rob Hyndman is a similar case in our own time – a professor at Monash University, who now does not even believe in God. Again, this is nothing new. The apostle Paul bewailed Demas who had once been his close companion and fellow worker, but afterwards departed from the Truth (see Philemon 1:24 and 2 Timothy 4:10).

It is good to remind ourselves that the Truth is essentially very simple, and it does not appeal to those who consider themselves intellectual giants. The apostle makes it clear that the Truth is considered foolish by this world, and few who are counted by this world as wise will accept it (1 Corinthians 1:20-27). It is very difficult for those who work in the field of science to break away from the views of the establishment. 'Unorthodox' ideas are shunned, and driven out. There is tremendous 'peer pressure' to conform. However, many 'new' ideas eventually become accepted as valid, such as Lavoisier's oxygen theory of combustion which replaced the phlogiston theory. That is how science moves on. This is especially true in the field of evolution, where views have changed drastically in the last two decades. The teachings of the 1990's are now regarded as hopelessly out of date as advances in the analysis of the genomes of man and other animals has changed the accepted links between species from a tree-like structure with branches to one resembling a bush with many sprouts. Science represents the present state of knowledge, and many theories which seemed logical in the past have been abandoned.

## THEISTIC EVOLUTION

Biology today teaches that all life evolved from simple to complex forms over millions of years. All living creatures are said to have come from a common ancestor, 4 billion years ago. Study of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid, the multi-based string of molecules used to encode the appearance and characteristics of all living things) is said to reveal the links between groups of living things as they branched out from the common ancestor (the evolutionary bush). There is variation within groups with a similar genotype (species) that allows for change. The mechanism for change is held to be Natural Selection (the pressure of environment and

competition between species) which is said to create and preserve traits that are useful and eliminate useless developments. Mutation (random changes in the DNA), genetic drift (movement of DNA within a population as some individuals beget more offspring than others), and gene migration between species, may also contribute to change. Mitochondrial changes (changes in DNA held outside the nucleus of the cell, and therefore passed on without the normal process of sexual reproduction where male and female each contribute half of the genes to their offspring), are also said to allow for inheritable modifications. Claimed evidence for evolution includes the fossil record, and the existence of the same mutation (genetic alteration) at the same point in the DNA sequence for different species. For example, both monkeys and man lack a gene for making Vitamin C, which is found in other animals and birds. However, the earth is the only planet with life in the form we know it. It alone has just the mix of temperature, light, water and minerals essential to our kind of life. Repeated and expensive searches have failed to find another planet where life has evolved.

Evolution is taught, by law, in English schools. But it is not defined precisely. For example, there is argument over how life began. In view of the minute probability that life could arise spontaneously from inert materials, some scientists now assume that the earth was 'seeded' from outer space with the molecules needed for life to begin. Some would argue that life began in the seas, and that mammals emerged from water-based ancestors. Others would disagree. Most would say that birds developed from dinosaurs, which have now become extinct. All would agree that the earth went through phases during which plants, animals, birds and insects competed with each other for food and space, and during which many earlier forms died out because they lost this race, or the climate changed, and they could not adapt to it. It is considered that 99% of all the species that once existed are now extinct.

## CREATION

Bible students traditionally accepted that there is a God, a supreme being outside the earth, who is eternal and all powerful, and who created life on the earth a few thousand years ago. The record of the creation of life is contained in the first two chapters of the Bible, but its attribution to God continues all through the book. There is argument about how long it took – whether six literal days or a longer period of time, and about the fossil record of species which are now extinct and with an apparent age much further back than a few thousand years. Some ('young earth' believers) insist that the globe itself, along with the other planets, came into being at the same time as Creation. Others assume the first verse of Genesis allows for a globe already in existence, but inert, covered with water and in darkness. For them, clearing the globe and clothing it with life then takes the seven-day period described in Genesis one. Both groups can be labelled 'Creationists', and traditionally, Christadelphians were always Creationists.

All Creationists find it incredible that life could arise spontaneously, and more logical to believe in a Creator. Also, the complexity of living creatures, which often requires a number of independent units to be present simultaneously before an organ can be effective, they find hard to explain by random events such as mutation or natural selection. Creationists allow that there can be change within a species to allow it to adapt to changing conditions. For example, men can survive in the desert and in the Arctic. But they find it hard to accept proof of an *upward* change in complexity from simple life forms to the bewildering variety of life on earth today.

## THEISTIC EVOLUTION IN THE BROTHERHOOD

Classical evolution assumes life began spontaneously, and that all the subsequent development from simple to complex species took place through natural selection. It has no need for an external force (a Creator).

In recent years, and even within the brotherhood, there has been a move to accept the broad teaching of evolution, but to assume that the introduction of life and the origin of species came about under the direction of an external God. This compromise, labelled Theistic Evolution, is more acceptable to modern thinking. For a definition, here is Wikipedia:

<Francis Collins describes theistic evolution as the position that "evolution is real, but that it was set in motion by God",<sup>[3]</sup> and characterizes it as accepting "that evolution occurred as biologists describe it, but under the direction of God".<sup>[4]</sup> The executive director of the National Center for Science Education in the United States of America, Eugenie Scott, has used the term to refer to the part of the overall spectrum of beliefs about creation and evolution holding the theological view that God creates through evolution. It covers a wide range of beliefs about the extent of any intervention by God ...>

How are we to view theistic evolution? From the traditional Christadelphian point of view, it challenges a number of important doctrines. For example

#### **a) OUR VIEW OF GENESIS 1 to 4**

Theistic evolutionists must explain the account of creation in the Bible. Most will say chapter one is not a literal account of the work of seven actual days, but a simplified version of what actually happened for people who would not understand the complexities of evolution. Bro David Brown in 'Genesis – don't take it literally' suggests the Genesis account could be a re-hash of earlier Babylonian creation legends. Similarly, the more detailed account of the creation of Adam and Eve in chapter two is usually reduced to a parable or myth. Many theistic evolutionists doubt there was an actual man called Adam. Others will say God added a special creation of a man called Adam into a world where there were already thousands of 'hominids' (ape-like men). David Brown suggests that Adam could just be a representation of the first group of evolving hominids allowed to come into a covenant relationship with God. One common argument for the existence of hominids alongside Adam's descendants is the statement that Cain left his parents and married someone. He also feared reprisals from other people. However, there was no prohibition in those early times against a brother-sister marriage, and Adam had other sons and daughters as well as Cain, Abel and Seth during a long life (see Genesis 5:4), so really this objection is unfounded.

There are two challenges in this approach, and both affect our view of the whole Bible. Firstly, the creation of life on the earth in seven days, the special creation of Eve and her temptation, and the murder of a good man called Abel, are stated many times in the rest of the Bible, not just in Genesis. For example: Exodus 31:17, Deuteronomy 4:32, Psalm 148:5, Isaiah 42:5, 45:18, Matthew 19:4 and 23:25, 1 Corinthians 11:9 and 15:1, 1 Timothy 2:14, Hebrews 11:4, 1 John 3:12, and Revelation 10:6. So if we reject the literality of the early chapters of Genesis, we take away from the rest of scripture. We end up unable to trust the Bible as the inspired word of God.

Secondly, the account of the fall of man – the eating of the forbidden fruit and the introduction of death into the world as the result of Adam's sin - is a fundamental doctrine. The literality of Adam's fall is an essential part of scripture. For example: Romans 5:12, 17, 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22. The core of Christianity is that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. This assumes human death is a punishment for sin, and that Jesus' obedience to God made it possible for sins to be forgiven and sinners set free from the grave. If we accept theistic evolution, with the gradual development of hominids into men, death must already have been in the world before the time of Adam, and unrelated to sin (breaking God's laws). Even the

alternative theory, the special creation of a man called Adam who then fails and must die, makes no sense if hominids had already been dying for thousands of years.

Facing up to the challenge of evolution, how can we reconcile the existence of fossils of huge land, air and sea animals, and the coal measures, and the white cliffs of Dover containing massive deposits of the shells of marine creatures, and the huge distortion of the strata of the rocks in places, with the account in Genesis 1? The answer is that Genesis 1:1 should be taken as a heading, a newspaper headline, which is followed by the details of creation in the rest of the chapter and the first three verses of the next. On this basis there was already an earth present, but it was in a state of chaos and devoid of life. The work of the six days was to drain the waters away, leaving a gap between the earth and the clouds, and then to add life on the earth. This proceeded logically – light, dry land, a breathable atmosphere, plants, sea and air creatures, and finally land creatures. The whole process is presented from the point of view of a hypothetical observer standing on the earth – hypothetical, because man was not created until day six. So, the earth was revolving on its axis and receiving dim light from the sun from day one, because night and day ('evening and morning') were present from day one. The sun was already there. By day four the atmosphere was clear enough for the sun, moon and stars to become visible from the surface of the earth. As for the fossils, white cliffs and coal measures, we may assume they belong to an earlier period, before the Adamic creation, necessary to prepare minerals and fuel ready for the world of man. We have no details in the Bible about that previous world, which was brought to an end.

If the 'evening and mornings' of Genesis one are not literal days but very long periods, the theistic evolutionist has to explain how recurring light and darkness occurred six times during the process of evolution. And if the days are not literal he has to fit in the interdependence of plants, formed first, and insects, formed millions of years later.

As for the power and forethought necessary to bring about this great work, firstly, the Bible labels God's Holy Spirit as the source of the energy needed. It is referred to in Genesis 1:2. Secondly, the Bible insists God is not bound by time, as we are (see 2 Peter 3:8), so that he had ages to design the features of the new world he was creating for his own pleasure (Revelation 4:11). And it is clear he had innumerable helpers in the form of the immortal angels (Revelation 5:11). Thirdly, if we were to query the ability of God to create life on earth in six days, we have only to consider a very fundamental Christian doctrine, that is, the resurrection of the dead. We have to believe as Christians that in one day God will raise from the dust and recreate the bodies and souls of thousands of people, and for the faithful, transform them from mortal to immortal in the time it takes to wink an eye. If we can accept this mighty work of God, why should we doubt his power to create life in the first place?

## **b) OUR VIEW OF GENESIS 5**

Another problem if we adopt theistic evolution, is what to do with Genesis 5. Here we have a genealogy of Adam, with his age at child bearing and death. We have a list of his descendants, with their ages at child bearing and death. Are these imaginary? If so, what are they doing on the book of God, when they are not true? Then there is the case of Enoch, seventh in line from Adam. He was obviously an especially good man (Genesis 5:21-24). He is referred to in the New Testament as a real person (Hebrews 11:5). Jude quotes from a book written by Enoch (Jude 14). How can this be if there was no such person? And Jesus' own genealogy includes people from Genesis five (Luke 3:36-38). How can this be, if these people were not real? If they were real, then surely, we must accept the early chapters of Genesis are not myth or parable but a true account of what happened in those formative days.

## SUMMARY

- 1) It takes faith to believe in a God who created life on earth when we cannot see him. But Hebrews 11:3 and 6 insist this is essential for the Christian. It could be argued that it takes even more faith to believe in evolution.
- 2) Theistic evolution attempts to combine acceptance of the theory of evolution of life on earth with the existence of God, claiming that he originated life and controlled the process of evolution over millions of years.
- 3) Theistic evolution explains the early chapters of Genesis as a summary of what really happened, in terms that could be understood by simple minds.
- 4) Most theistic evolutionists query the existence of a real man Adam with a wife called Eve and insist there were primitive men (hominids) on the earth from which Homo Sapiens developed. Others see Adam as a special creation alongside existing hominids, and have Cain intermarrying with them.
- 5) However, the Bible consistently states God created life on earth in six days.
- 6) It also treats Adam and Eve as literal beings, and attributes human death to their breaking of God's law.
- 7) Genesis five has names and personal details for Adam's descendants, some of whom are referred to and even quoted from in the New Testament.
- 8) Finally, it is difficult to reconcile the picture of God initiating life and then allowing it to develop over millions of years with only occasional 'tweaks', with the God revealed in the Bible. Our God is intimately concerned with the people he has made, interacting with them from day to day both as individuals and groups, during a comparatively brief period of only a few thousands of years. For him to wait millions of years before this could begin, makes no sense.

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