

# Christ Presbyterian Church

Edina, Minnesota

June 23 & 27, 2010

John Crosby

## Glad You Asked - Evolution and Creation: How Do We Choose?

### Genesis 1:1

Let me give you two quotes here at the beginning. One we use every Christmas, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God from the beginning. Through Him all things were made; nothing was made without Him.... The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen the glory of the One and only Son, who came from the Father full of grace and truth, Who made the world." But then the other is from Richard Dawkins, one of the chief voices of what we would call the new atheist movement in our country, "The more you understand the significance of evolution, the more you are pushed away from the agnostic position and toward atheism. Complex, statistically improbable things are by their nature more difficult to explain than simple, statistically probable things." In the beginning the more you understand, the more you lean toward evolution away from God. Is that true?

Gallup poll: "Human beings did not evolve, but were created," 46 percent. "Evolution is a fact guided by God," 40 percent. "Evolution occurred by itself; no God," 10 percent. We're all over the map. As I said to you, I received a comment this week from a friend at the University who said, "One of the problems that I have is people who try to box God in, put Him into seven 24-hour days to make the world." And I got another email from someone who said, "Please note our work at the Creation Museum in Kentucky." Both right here to say nothing about there. So what I thought I would do today is talk about faith and science, creation and evolution, and then have us discuss what God might want to say to us.



There are probably five phases of this. The first is the traditional view represented up here not only put on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel but secure in the idea that God did this, that that is the only thing that really matters. God did this. That view held pretty tightly together through the Jewish time, through the Christian experience, all the way until, say, the 17<sup>th</sup> century when we come to the second chapter.

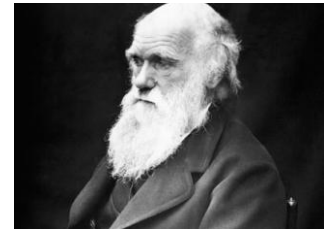
The Renaissance has now spawned the Enlightenment and the Industrial Age, but as a result of the Enlightenment, we come across figures like René Descartes, you remember from that philosophy course you were forced to take. René Descartes: "I think, therefore I am." Descartes insisted that only what is provable be accepted as valid, that he did not want to take things on faith, that he would trust only his senses, and that while for him as a devout Catholic,



there was a place for personal faith, that was in the area of mysticism, a separate gift from God. To trust only our senses is the beginning of rationalism, not rational thought but rationalism. Not science, but scientism. "I believe only what I can prove."

It comes to fruition probably in the life of Carl Sagan. Many of you remember Sagan from the science series and his work with NASA and with SETI Institute to discover other civilizations. Sagan was a nonbeliever, a firm nonbeliever, not because he didn't want to believe in God but because it could not be proven. Somebody said after his death, "If Carl could only have believed..." But his wife said, "Carl never wanted to believe. Carl wanted proof." So there comes to be a tension between proof of a certain sort and faith because faith is what we have grown up with in the Christian tradition. The writer of Hebrews: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."

We have a tension developing between these two views of how to understand our world. Both sets of people usually sit together in the pews, but Descartes leads to the scientific explosion, and the foremost feature of that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was this white-bearded gentleman, Charles Darwin. Darwin begins to see patterns in biological life, and over the course of a 30-year or so study, proposes the theory that life can be explained by change over time, change over time that accommodates the survival of the fittest by natural selection. At the end of his book called *The Origin of Species*, Darwin, in the second edition, not the first, in the second edition, says, "And so we believe that all things were started by their Creator, and then nature does the rest." He put that in there because of the outpouring of criticism that God had been squeezed from Darwin's work and Darwin's world, and it was true. Frankly, he never had much of a faith, he said. Growing up in a religious household and married to a very devout woman, what was left of his faith was shattered at the death of his daughter. Darwin stands as an emblem of evolution.



No doubt about it, in contrast to Darwin come the people who say, "The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it." Some of them band together and are called the fundamentalists because they believe in the fundamentals, the five fundamentals of the faith. These are not stupid people. These are Princeton University, Princeton Seminary folk. Interestingly, the head of them, Machen, is surprisingly not anti-evolution. He is a theistic evolutionist himself, and they are most famously known for this. You may remember what this is about, the Scopes Monkey Trial from which we get the play, *Inherit the Wind*. That's right. And the clash is not only a clash of ideologies and world views and a particular brand of science and a particular brand of faith, it is a clash between people, and heartbreak ensues in *Inherit the Wind*.

**Why is all this so important? Why would you talk about this in church? Because it is about how faith and science interact.** It is about if what you believe and what you come here for each week is a myth, then stay home. **If it is true, then it needs to be defended in the midst of an increasingly skeptical society.** There are huge implications here for how we view God, how we view sin and natural selection, survival of the fittest, how we view eternal life, what we even believe about humanity and truth. So I think it's important, but for me it's also important because we need to learn how dialog in a very contentious society instead of being either marginalized, Christians are the ones who don't think, or being one of the bomb-throwers. My sense is that in this discussion as in many others in our society, the middle is muddled, and the middle is muddled,

that is, they don't know what to think, because the two ends are so extreme. Both ends are not only extreme, but they demonize everybody to their left or their right calling them ignorant or superstitious or sinful or demonic. So we are, for better or worse, Presbyterians, the folks who read and study and think and contribute.

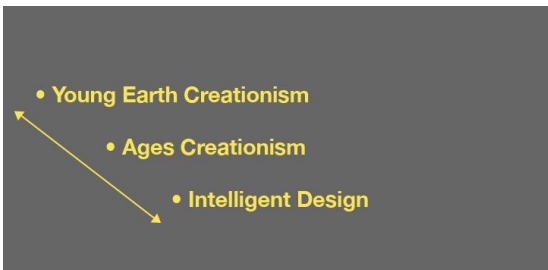
Let me give you an overview today of what the creation-evolution thing looks like. In six quick slides I think I can do that.



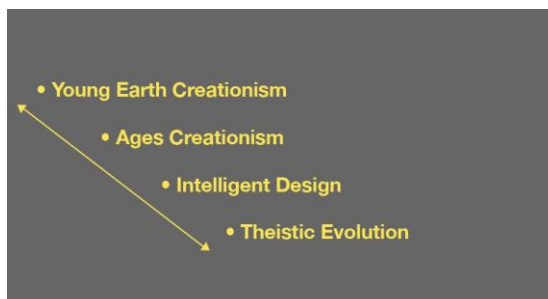
First, is the group at one end called the *Young Earth Creationists*. They are the ones who propose the Biblical account of Genesis 1 of six 24-hour days, a fairly young earth. They get the age of the earth by adding up all the generations listed in the genealogies of the Bible and come out between six and 20,000 years of age.



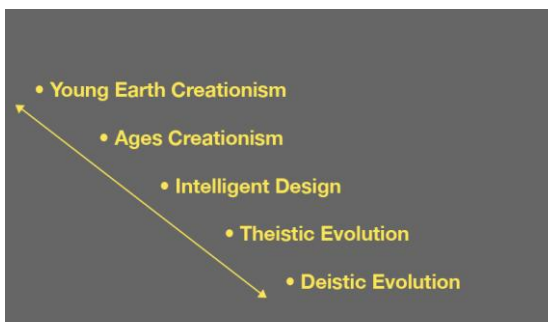
Next to them is *Ages Creationism*, the folks who understand that the earth was created in ages but still created by God. When He talks about a day, "On the second day God created..." That could refer to an entire age at which point God intervenes, still creationism, and that could accommodate an old earth in the same process.



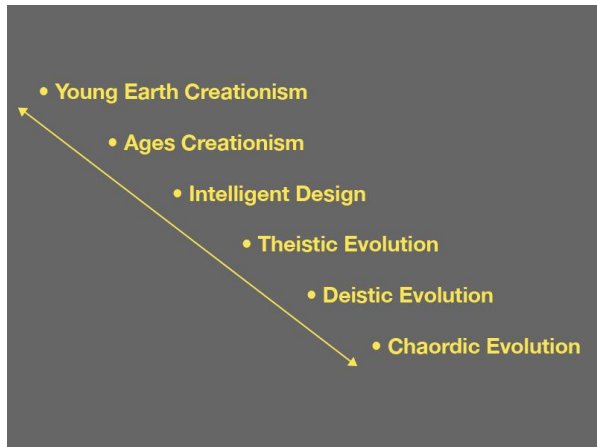
The third group would still be creationists, and they are an increasingly vocal group called the *Intelligent Design* folks, who say it takes a lot more faith to believe that this thumb or this eyeball came about by blind chance and random chaos than it does to believe in the intelligent design of a Creator who is guiding this process, however you understand it. That would probably be the creationist side.



On the other side or continuing, really, on the same spectrum would be a group, who believes in what is called *Theistic Evolution*. They would say, "I affirm radically that God created the heavens and the earth. It may have been that the tool that God used was evolution, as we understand it."



Next to them are folks who are called the *Deists*. Remember there were a lot of Deists at the founding of our country? Many of the founders, Jefferson and Washington and Franklin were Deists. Basically they believed that God created the world like a big machine. He set it spinning, pushed it off into space, and sat back watching it go, removed from the process, but there still is a God.



And at the other end from the young earth people are those whom I would call *Chaordic*. This is a technical term that means out of chaos, order. They would be secular evolutionists, believing that there is no need to have a Supreme Being in the evolutionary understanding of our existence, and that in some ways, actually, that belief in a God gets in the way. All these folks sitting on the same school board, most going to the same churches. **How do you go forward?** Let me take ten minutes and suggest just two parts of this that we should consider today.

**The first is that this is about the Bible.** How do you understand what the Bible says? **And the second is that this is about evolution.** What really is evolution? I guess, first, you need to understand that I see the Bible as authoritative and inspired when properly understood. There was a professor, though, whom Laura had at seminary who said, “I believe God’s Word is inspired and infallible. I believe I am not *either*. That’s me.” And then Versiput turned to these young students and said, “I believe God’s Word is inspired and infallible, and I am not, and *neither are you*.” We are doing our best to interpret words that we only partly understand, but these words are important.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good.... And God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our own image’.... So God created....them, male and female. In the image of God He created them.... And God saw all he had made, and it was very good.”

Is that how the world was formed? Or put more technically is Genesis 1, the first chapter of the Bible, is it history, is it science, or is it something else? Let me suggest that **there are two principles in reading the Bible I’d like you to learn. The first is, what is the intent of the author?** The Bible cannot mean what the author did not intend it to mean. Now it could mean *more* than the author knew. The author may be talking about something that later in the history we see as prophecy, but it can never mean something less or something different from what the author said. So when the author is saying poetry, we need to say, that’s a poem. When he is saying history, we need to say that’s history. When he is writing down the law, we need to see that as legal. Intent!

**The second piece of this is genre analysis.** In other words, how do you know whether you are looking at the comic page or the front page, the finance page or the sports column? You become familiar with the voice that each has. As I look at the voice of Genesis 1, I see over and over things that look much more like an epic poem or prose narrative than history. I see the repetition ten times of the phrase, “And it was good.” I see nine times, “And God said.” Most important, I see the repetition of the same story: Genesis 1, the creation; Genesis 2 tells it again. The same way that in the Book of Exodus, chapter 14 tells the story of how they escaped from Egypt, and chapter 15 tells the exact same thing in a poem, the Song of Moses. The same way that when the Jews conquered the Syrians in Judges 4, Judges 5 is the Song of Deborah. Same story in a poem, spoken two different ways.

I think Genesis 1 is the poem, and Genesis 2 is the history. I do not think that that means you have to believe in evolution because of that. I just think it means that you have to read it the way that the author intended it to be read. He is not concerned with how it happened but *why* it happened and is telling a story about who made it happen.

Now when we get to Genesis 2, I do believe that's history, ancient history told in ancient ways. And just the same way that I don't believe that Genesis 1 is history because I don't think the author believes it, I believe that Genesis 2 about the story of Adam *is* history because the apostle Paul treats it as history, talking about Jesus, the second Adam, saying that the Gospel is not good advice; it is good news. Something *happened* here.

I believe in miracles. I believe the creation of the world was miraculous, but by their nature I believe that miracles are an intervention in nature that is rare and very possible. So, my reading of the Scriptures allows for, but doesn't insist on the possibility of biological evolution as a tool that God would use.

The second part of this that I wanted to talk about is what I see as a confusion of science and philosophy. When I talk about evolution, I am talking about the evolutionary processes that allow for Mendel's work on genes, the breeding that we see, whether plants or animals, to be true. Science as seeing God's world makes sense. I believe that God made the world to make sense, and He loves it when we discover the way it ticks. That's Psalm 19, "The heavens declare the glory of God." As we explore that, it seems to me that we see that evolution as a biological process is fairly irrefutable. Things change over time.

But there is also a school of evolution that I don't think is biology, and I think that is philosophy. I think it says, if that biological process is true, then that should be the way we look at all of life. It should exclude the need for God. It should exclude the idea of truth or morality or outside meaning. This is what Dawkins is talking about, evolution as a philosophy that pushes God out of the way. I believe that that is totally wrong.

I know that when I move out of my field of Biblical studies and theology, my IQ goes way down. When I talk to anybody about math or when I talk to somebody about economics, I sound like an idiot, but I recognize that feeling when somebody who is a giant in another field comes into mine, and I feel like that is what Dawkins is doing. He is starting to make science which is good into philosophy which is terrible.

So, why is this important? Are you a child of God, or are you a cosmic accident? Do you have meaning and a place in the universe, or is everything you do hardwired, and you really don't have any choices? Can Bible-believing followers of Jesus affirm any kind of evolutionary process? I think so. And can evolutionists continue to believe in a personal God? I'd insist on the possibility. But I guess I'd also turn to some of you and say, are you still a theist? Do you believe that God is closer than your breath? Do you believe in the words of the hymn *His Eye Is on the Sparrow*? Or have you become a fairly functional deist, God set up the world and set it spinning, and now we are on our own, and as much as you cry out for God, God is far away? I would encourage you to discover a personal God, but in the midst of all of this discussion, I would encourage you to seek truth with humility because we all see through a glass darkly and only at the end will see face to face.



Remember, I started with *Inherit the Wind*, the play about the Scopes “Monkey Trial”? There is a great quote in there that, really, the whole play revolves around. The William Jennings Bryan character, the evangelist who believes in seventh day creation, is introduced by a preacher who is hell, fire, and brimstone radical, “Anybody who believes in evolution is going to hell. Anybody who believes in evolution is going to fry.” And his daughter, the preacher’s daughter, goes, “Oh, no, I’m in love with the teacher. Please, no. God’s grace....” “There is no place in God’s grace for those who believe in evolution.” And the

evangelist who hates the idea of evolution stands up and puts his arm on the preacher and says, “Brother, he that troubleth his own house...he shall inherit the wind.” He might win the argument, but his house will be empty. I believe that God is calling you and me to fight as hard as we can to love God with our heart, our soul, our strength, *and our mind* and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Let’s pray.

Lord Jesus, it is a good thing that after a talk like this that seems so academic to some and distant and so troubling to others, it is a good thing that we come to Your table because here we come like children, who don’t know what happens when You say, “This is My Body broken for You,” but we believe it; who don’t know how, this is “the cup of My Blood shed for you,” how that happens, but we believe that Your sacrifice brings us to Your love. So bless our time here at Your table. Bless us, Your children, *all* of Your children. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*