
The Rise of Theistic Evolution in Christian Higher Education: A Report from the Trenches

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As the evidence supporting evolution continues to crumble under the weight of each new scientific discovery, what can atheistic evolutionists do to affirm their belief in evolution? They can enlist the help of the Christian who also believes in evolution—the theistic evolutionist. Many Christians who promote theistic evolution (TE), or evolutionary creationism, believe that this theory makes the Gospel more appealing to an atheist. They are quite unaware that TE supports the foundation upon which atheism is based, and as such, has become an effective weapon to counter the truth of the Gospel and to deny the scientific evidence for creationism.

Young-earth creationism (YEC) has often been questioned by Christian academics, but never to the extent that it is today. The belief in TE has become so strong in Christian higher education that YEC is dismissed as nonsense in practically every Christian college or university, and is even discouraged in many churches. TE has become a juggernaut, a mercilessly relentless unstoppable force. How did this come about?

I have taught biology in a Christian university since 1990, and have witnessed, first hand, the recent growth of TE among Christian academics. TE may be traced to Victorian England when Darwin first published *The Origins*, but its recent rise to the level of an intellectual obligation can be attributed to the efforts of a powerful and wealthy philanthropic organisation, the John Templeton Foundation. The Templeton Foundation awards the Templeton Prize which “honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life’s spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works.” Worth over \$2 million US, this prize has been received by notable Christians such as Billy Graham (1982), Chuck Colson (1993), Bill Bright (1996) and Desmond Tutu (2013). Although the Templeton Foundation is known mainly for this prize, its most effective strategy for promoting TE has been The Science and Religion Course Program that it funded from 1995 to 2002.

The Science and Religion Course Program promoted TE by offering awards of \$10,000 US each to professors or clergy to teach a faith and science course. Award contenders needed to submit a course syllabus, and if chosen for the award, half the funds went to the university to allow the instructor to teach the course, and the remainder went to the instructor. At first glance, this effort seemed commendable. Science and Christianity should not be at odds with one another, and science and faith courses should become a regular part of higher education. But there was a consequence to taking a bite out of this “apple.”

Of all the courses selected to receive this award, only those courses which promoted evolution and an ancient earth were successful. Courses proposed by a known young-earth creationist, or courses which questioned evolution in any way, were excluded. As a result, whole cohorts of students have been taught by Christian faculty in Christian institutions that Genesis contains truth but is not historically true (it is a fable or metaphor), that over a period of millions of years species arose by God-directed natural selection (a contradiction in terms), that Adam and Eve represent tribes or nations of people (Adam and Eve did not really exist), and that Moses compiled the Genesis creation account from origin legends prevalent in the cultures of his day.

Nearly 800 awards were presented during this 7 year period, and the effects of this indoctrination can still be felt today. In the early 1990's, some of my Christian colleagues were willing to discuss origins, but today, accepting YEC has become akin to committing academic suicide, even within the Christian community. I personally know five professors who received these awards, and none will approach me on the topic of Genesis nor the science of evolution. The validity of evolution is no longer a question for them. Their only concern is to convince students that Genesis can be massaged to fit evolution, and thereby remove the conflict between evolution and Christianity. These professors are authoritative figures in their institutions and respected Christians. Is there any wonder why the Science and Religion Course Program has been so effective?

The Templeton Foundation spent close to \$10 million US promoting the Science and Religion Course Program to ensure that TE became the norm within our classrooms, and having been successful, they are now spending vast sums of money to promote their New Age philosophy on spiritualism, a philosophy that reduces Christianity and the Cross to a fabrication that arose during the evolutionary history of human culture. The top ten grants from the Templeton Foundation can be found on their web site, and these grants add up to over \$70 million US.

One grant totalling over \$2 million US was given to Francis Collins, Head of the Human Genome Project and a born-again Christian, to start BioLogos, which describes itself as “a community of evangelical Christians committed to exploring and celebrating the compatibility of evolutionary creation and biblical faith.” Unlike the Templeton Foundation, BioLogos is distinctly Christian, but like the Templeton Foundation, it fully endorses evolution and completely dismisses YEC and the straight forward interpretation of Genesis. As Francis Collins claims, “The evidence supporting the idea that all living things are descended from a common ancestor is truly overwhelming... It does not serve faith well to try to deny that.” BioLogos is only one of the several offshoots of the

Science and Religion Course Program that are currently supporting TE through well-funded academic conferences and research centres.

As a biologist working at a Christian university I find myself in the trenches where TE is being heavily promoted, and I have witnessed how effective this indoctrination can be. Students confessing to be Ken-Ham-style creationists in high school graduate from a Christian college as full fledged believers in TE. One such individual confessed to me that he has begun to question his understanding of the Cross. The next step is to question the Cross altogether. This account is only the tip of the TE iceberg. Yet in spite of this cancer running deep and spreading rapidly, I believe this disease can be prevented if we inoculate ourselves, and our youth, with three simple rules.

Rule 1: Know the Bible

Ensure that we know what the Bible clearly states about our origins and the necessity of the Old Testament sacrifices. At Redeemer University College, many of our first year biology students come from Christian homes and have been highly involved in church work, but many also lack a detailed knowledge of basic biblical facts. For instance, when given a test on the six (not seven!) Days of Creation, most fail to place the created acts on the right days. And since Christ became the ultimate sacrifice, the Old Testament rituals and ordinances are glossed over as being irrelevant for the Christian era. However, not knowing why the Israelites sacrificed removes the link between a real Adam and Eve and Jesus dying on the cross.

Rule 2: Know about evolution

Know as much as you can about evolution. I do not teach creationism in my biology classes since I have found that, in higher education, knowing evolution is the best defence against believing in evolution. Due to necessity, TE accepts evolution as a scientific fact, and completely avoids any critical or systematic examination of these facts. As a consequence, very few Christians who believe in TE actually know what evolution is. They have been taught to accept the scientific consensus and to ignore the truth in the scientific evidence. Creationists need to fill in that information gap to make Christians fully aware of what they are accepting when they accept TE.

Rule 3: Know the Gospel

Make connections between the Genesis creation account and the Cross. TE makes a mistake by assuming that the only important thing is to believe God created, not how he created. As Billy Graham, the 1982 winner of the Templeton Prize, has written:

“I think that we have misinterpreted the Scriptures many times and we've tried to make the Scriptures say things they weren't meant to say [...] The Bible is not a book of science [...] God created man, and whether it came by an evolutionary process [...]” it “does not change the fact that God did create man.”

But regardless of Dr. Graham's opinions, the Bible IS a book of facts, and how God created is extremely important. Adam had to be created from the dust of the earth, and Eve had to come from Adam before the Cross could redeem all those who were born of Adam. Also, the physical body of Christ had to be exactly like the body of Adam before Adam sinned in order for the Cross to be sufficient. Salvation would not have been possible had God ordained the creation of Adam and Eve through an evolutionary process. Understanding the importance of these connections makes TE untenable for the Christian.

Given these three directives, I believe Christians will gain the confidence needed to ward off the cancer of TE. By inoculating ourselves, especially our youth, against TE, creation ministries will be free to do what the Lord intends them to do—preach the Gospel to the lost—rather than consuming valuable time and efforts to reach out to Christians who have been lured into the TE trap with its promise of wealth and wisdom.

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