

The value of Genesis

Many statements about God's actions are metaphorical (God 'sent out his arrows and scattered them', Psalm 18:14), and virtually everyone accepts that. So it is not hard to accept that the creation accounts are largely metaphorical.

What is important about the Genesis creation stories (both of them – Genesis 1 and Genesis 2) is the claim that God is the sole creator of everything, and that humans have a duty to care for the earth, precisely because it really belongs to God and is valued by God.

Concern for ecology is not new; it is embedded in the Bible from the first. That is the true value of Genesis as a religious insight, not a treatise on physics.

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Modern Church

Evolution

**what it is and
how it is
consistent with
a creator God**

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Evolution and God

Evolution, in its post-Darwinian sense, is the belief that all present living beings on earth, including humans, have descended from one or a few much simpler organisms.

The belief is now well-established in biology and genetics, and does not pose any special problems for belief in a creator God. If that is how God made humans come into existence, so be it!

Does evolution undermine faith in God?

Some writers argue that evolution is too random, unintelligent, and cruel to be created by God. But the problems of chance and suffering exist, whether or not you accept evolution.

Evolution arguably helps to answer some of those problems. Chance (or indeterminacy) may be a condition for moral freedom and creative self-development. Pain may be a necessary by-product of the evolutionary struggle, without which we could not exist. And that struggle helps to explain why we have tendencies to lust and aggression as well as tendencies to sympathy and altruism, and so how real moral freedom developed.

If humans have evolved by a long process of struggle and learning, our evolutionary past may be essential to what we now are.

Evolution and humanity

Evolution may point to a future in which intelligence and love may evolve further, and that may be God's will for us. In that case, evolution is the friend, not the enemy, of faith.

Evolution and human uniqueness

Some have argued that evolution undermines the unique position of humans on earth.

But if humans have distinctive capacities of abstract thought and morally responsible action, they have them whether they evolved from simpler forms or not. Indeed, insofar as evolutionary theory makes us more aware of our kinship with other animals, it supports the Biblical view that all living things (not just humans) are given the 'breath of life' by God (Genesis 7:15).



Evolution and the Bible

Genesis adds that humans are created 'in the image and likeness of God' (Genesis 1:26). That is widely taken to mean that humans have intellectual understanding and freedom of action and are capable of conscious relationship with God. We have a responsibility for all life on earth. Nothing in evolutionary theory denies that.

How to interpret Genesis

Of course evolution conflicts with a very literal account of Genesis, though it supports the general view that species came into being in stages, with humans being last.

Hardly any early Christian theologians interpreted the Genesis creation accounts literally. Augustine, for example, said the six 'days' of creation were not about times at all, but were metaphors for logical distinctions between sorts of beings.

Very literal accounts seem to have originated only after the sixteenth century, and revived again in twentieth century American fundamentalism. Such accounts are rarely really literal anyway (on a literal reading, the stars are 'sanctuary lamps' hung on a semicircular dome, above which is a lot of water. Does anyone take that literally?)