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Faith and Science, Falsely So-Called

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:20–21

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The apostle Paul closed his first epistle to Timothy by urging the young pastor to guard the deposit of truth that had been entrusted to him, “avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge” (1 Timothy 6:20-21). In the King James Version, the text famously speaks of “*science* falsely so called.”

Over the course of human history, all kinds of speculative ideas have been falsely labeled “science” and mistakenly accepted as true and reliable knowledge by otherwise brilliant people. The now-discredited dogmas of older scientific theories are numerous—and in some cases laughable. They include *alchemy* (the medieval belief that other base metals could be transmuted into gold); *phrenology* (the Victorian belief that the shape of one’s skull reflects character traits and mental capacity); *astrology* (the pagan belief that human destiny is determined by the motions of celestial bodies); and *abiogenesis* (the long-standing belief that living organisms are spontaneously generated by decaying organic substances). All those false beliefs were deemed credible as “science” by the leading minds of their times.

Consider just one of those—abiogenesis. Popularly known as “spontaneous generation,” this idea has long been, and continues to be, one of the archetypal expressions of “science falsely so called.” It is also one of the most persistent of all demonstrably pseudoscientific fictions. The notion that aphids arise naturally from dew on plant leaves, mold is generated automatically by aging bread, and maggots are spontaneously begotten by rotting meat was more or less deemed self-evident by most of humanity’s brightest intellects (such as Alexander Ross; see below) from the time of Aristotle until 1861, when Louis Pasteur conclusively proved that non-living matter cannot spawn life on its own.

[**Note:** Alexander Ross, an early seventeenth-century Scottish writer and intellectual, harshly criticized Sir Thomas Browne for questioning the dogma of spontaneous generation. Under the heading “Mice and other vermin bred of putrefaction, even in mens bodies,” he wrote: “He doubts whether mice can be procreated of putrefaction. So he may doubt whether in cheese and timber worms are generated; Or if Betels and wasps in coves dung; Or if butterflies, locusts, grasshoppers, shel-fish, snails, eeles, and such like, be procreated of putrefied matter, which is apt to receive the form of that creature to which it is by the formative power disposed. *To question this, is to question Reason, Sense, and Experience*: If he doubts of this, let him go to *Egypt*, and there he will finde the fields swarming with mice begot of the mud of [the Nile].” *Arcana Microcosmi*, (London: Newcomb, 1652), book 2, chapter 10, 156.]

It is one of the great ironies of scientific history that the first edition of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* was published exactly two years before Pasteur’s famous experiments proved that life cannot arise spontaneously from non-living matter. The publication of Darwin’s book marked the apotheosis of evolutionary theory, and it was rooted in the basic presupposition that under the right circumstances, life can spring on its own from non-living matter. In other words, two years before abiogenesis was scientifically debunked, it was in effect canonized as the central dogma of modern

secular belief about the origins of life. The discovery that fleas don't magically form out of decomposing dander on the backs of dirty dogs did not dissuade most in the scientific world from embracing the theory that all life in the universe arose by itself out of nothing. The belief that life spontaneously came from non-life remains to this day the great unexplained (albeit easily disprovable) assumption underlying the dogma of evolution.

The irony of that is utterly lost on many in the scientific community today, where evolution has become an article of faith—*unshakable* faith, it turns out.

Evolutionists have conveniently “solved” the problem of abiogenesis by repeatedly moving their estimates of the earth's age backward toward infinity. Given enough time, it seems, *anything* is possible. Trying desperately to keep the biblical concept of eternity at bay, evolutionists have thus devised an alternative kind of infinitude. Every time a challenge to current evolutionary theory arises, geologists and astronomers dutifully tack billions and billions of eons onto their theories about the earth's age, adding however many ancient epochs are deemed necessary for some new impossibility to be explained.

In the introduction to my 2001 book, *The Battle for the Beginning*, I suggested naturalism had become the dominant religion of contemporary secular society. “*Religion* is exactly the right word to describe naturalism,” I wrote. “The entire philosophy is built on a faith-based premise. Its basic presupposition—a rejection of everything supernatural—requires a giant leap of faith. And nearly all its supporting theories must be taken by faith as well” (*The Battle for the Beginning*, Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2001, p. 11).

Here, then, is a classic example of what I was talking about: the typical evolutionist's starting point is this notion that life arose spontaneously from inanimate matter sometime in eternity past. That requires not merely the willful suspension of what we know for certain about the origins of life and the impossibility of abiogenesis—but also enough deliberate gullibility to believe that moving-target estimates of the earth's antiquity can sufficiently answer all the problems and contradictions sheer naturalism poses.

Meanwhile, in the popular media, evolutionary doctrine and ever-expanding notions of prehistory are being promoted with all the pious zeal of the latest religious sect. Watch the Internet forums, programs on the Discovery Channel, interviews and articles published in the mass media, school textbooks, and books aimed at lay readers—and what you will usually see is raw assertions, demagoguery, intimidation, and ridicule (especially when the subjects of biblical theism and the Genesis account of creation are raised).

But question the dogma that all life evolved from a single spontaneously-generated cell, point out that the universe is full of evidence for intelligent design, or demand the kind of proof for evolutionary origins that would ordinarily pass scientific muster, and the ardent evolutionist will simply dismiss you as a heretic or a bigot of the worst stripe. What they are tacitly acknowledging is that as far as they are concerned, evolution is a doctrine that must be received with implicit faith, not something that can be scientifically demonstrated. After all, the claims of true *science* can always be investigated, observed, reproduced, tested, and proved in the laboratory. So to insist that evolution and so-called “deep time” doctrines must be accepted without question is really just a tacit admission that these are not scientific ideas at all.

Consider these quotations from typical evolutionist writers:

- No biologist today would think of submitting a paper entitled “New evidence for evolution;” it simply has not been an issue for a century. (Douglas J. Futuyma, *Evolutionary Biology*, 2nd ed., Boston: Sinauer Associates, 1986, p. 15)
- It is time for students of the evolutionary process, especially those who have been misquoted and used by the creationists, to state clearly that evolution is a fact, not theory. . . . All present forms of life arose from ancestral forms that were different. Birds arose from nonbirds and humans from nonhumans. No person who pretends to any understanding of the natural world can deny these facts. (R. C. Lewontin, “Evolution/creation debate: A time for truth,” *Bioscience* (1981), 31:559)
- Here is what separates real scientists from the pseudoscientists of the school of intelligent design. . . . One thing all real scientists agree upon is the fact of evolution itself. It is a fact that we are cousins of gorillas, kangaroos, starfish, and bacteria. Evolution is as much a fact as the heat of the sun. It is not a theory, and for pity’s sake, let’s stop confusing the philosophically naive by calling it so. Evolution is a fact. (Richard Dawkins, “The Illusion of Design,” *Natural History* (November 2005), 53)

But as those statements themselves show, evolution is a dogma, not a demonstrable “fact.” I stand by the position I took in *The Battle for the Beginning*: “Belief in evolutionary theory is a matter of sheer faith. [It is] as much a religion as any theistic world-view” (*The Battle for the Beginning*, p. 12).

I’ll go even further: *science* cannot speak with any authority about when the universe began, how it came into being, or how life originated on earth. Science by definition deals with what can be observed, tested, measured, and investigated by empirical means. Scientific data by definition are facts that can be demonstrated by controlled, repeatable experiments that always yield consistent results. The beginning of the universe by its very nature falls outside the realm of scientific investigation.

To state the case plainly: there is no scientific way to explain creation. *No one* but God actually observed creation. It did not happen by any uniform, predictable, observable, repeatable, fixed, or natural laws. It was not a natural event or a series of natural events. The initial creation of matter was an instantaneous, monumental, inexplicable miracle—the exact opposite of a “natural” phenomenon. And the formation of the universe was a brief series of supernatural events that simply cannot be studied or explained by science. There are no natural processes involved in creation; the act of creation cannot be repeated; it cannot be tested; and therefore naturalistic theories purporting to explain the origin and age of the universe are unverifiable.

In other words, creation is a theological issue, not a scientific one. Scripture is our only credible source of information about creation, because God Himself was the only eyewitness to the event. We can either believe what He says or reject it. But no Christian should ever imagine that what we believe about the origin of the universe is merely a secondary, nonessential, or incidental matter. It is, after all, the very starting point of God’s self-revelation.

In fact, in its profound brevity, Genesis 1:1 is a very simple, clear, and unequivocal account of how the universe, the earth, and everything on the earth came to be: “In the beginning God created the

heavens and the earth.” That is not an ambiguous statement. Until Darwinian evolution undertook a campaign to co-opt the story of creation and bring it into the realm of naturalistic “science”—and especially before modernist skepticism began to seep into the church—no one who claimed to be a Christian was the least bit confused by the Genesis account.

Christians should not be intimidated by dogmatic naturalism. We do not need to invent a new interpretation of Genesis every time some geologist or astronomer declares that the universe must be older than he previously thought. Nor should we imagine that legitimate science poses any threat to the truth of Scripture. Above all, we must not seek ways to circumvent the clear meaning of God’s Word, compromise our trust in the Creator, or continually yield ground to every new theory of falsely-so-called science. That is precisely what Paul was warning Timothy about.

Sadly, it seems evolutionary thinking and qualms about the Genesis account of creation have reached epidemic levels among professing Christians in recent decades. Too many Christian leaders, evangelical schools, and Bible commentators have been willing to set aside the biblical account of a relatively young earth in order to accommodate the ever-changing estimates of naturalistic geologists and astronomers. They have thrown away sound hermeneutical principles—at least in the early chapters of Genesis—to accommodate the latest theories of evolution.

When I encounter people who think evolutionary doctrine trumps the biblical account of creation, I like to ask them where their belief in the Bible kicks in. Is it in chapter 3, where the fall of Adam and original sin are accounted for? In chapters 4-5, where early human history is chronicled? In chapters 6-8, with the record of the flood? In chapter 11, with the Tower of Babel? Because if you bring naturalism and its presuppositions to the early chapters of Genesis, it is just a short step to denying *all* the miracles of Scripture—including the resurrection of Christ. If we want to make science the test of biblical truth rather than vice versa, why would it not make just as much sense to question the biblical record of the resurrection as it does to reject the Genesis account? But “if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! . . . If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (1 Corinthians 15:17-19).

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