The Rise of Theistic Evolutionism – The Salvation of Christianity?

By Dr. Arthur Chadwick and Sean Pitman (8/20/11) It used to be that the debate between religion and science was primarily over naturalistic evolutionism vs. Biblical creationism. No longer. Theistic evolutionism, once in the backseat in these discussions, has come to the forefront in no small...

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It used to be that the debate between religion and science was primarily over naturalistic evolutionism vs. Biblical creationism. No longer. Theistic evolutionism, once in the backseat in these discussions, has come to the forefront in no small part because of the efforts of Francis Collins. Collins was the director of the Human Genome Project, and is currently serving as the director of the National Institutes of Health, so he is no lightweight in science. Also, Collins claims to be an evangelical Christian. When a person of his caliber speaks on the relationship between science and faith, people sit up and listen. And, in his 2006 best selling book, The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief, Collins argues that anatomically modern humans emerged from primate ancestors perhaps 100,000 years ago—long before the Genesis time frame—and originated with a population that numbered “something like 10,000, not two individuals.”

In response to the theistic evolutionism of Collins and other prominent Christian scientists coming to the forefront, Al Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said:

“The moment you say ‘We have to abandon this theology in order to have the respect of the world,’ you end up with neither biblical orthodoxy nor the respect of the world.”

So, why are conservative evangelical Christians like Mohler and others like him so upset by the challenge of theistic evolutionism? Perhaps it is because Dr. Mohler knows more than the average person about the relationship between science and faith? Of course, Mohler isn’t the only one who sees efforts to mix any form of modern evolutionism with Christianity as misguided at best. Consider, for example, the view of Richard Dawkins regarding this effort. In his fairly recent book, The God Delusion, Dawkins suggests that the whole Gospel story of Jesus and the reason for his life and death fall apart if the Genesis account of Adam and Eve is not literally true:

“Oh, but of course, the story of Adam and Eve was only ever symbolic, wasn’t it? Symbolic? So, in order to impress himself, Jesus had himself tortured and executed, in vicarious punishment for a symbolic sin committed by a non-existent individual? As I said,
barking mad, as well as viciously unpleasant.”

For such reasons Dawkins pulls no punches when dealing with Christians who want to also hold to modern evolutionism:

“I think the evangelical Christians have really sort of got it right in a way, in seeing evolution as the enemy. Whereas the more, what shall we say, sophisticated theologians are quite happy to live with evolution, I think they’re deluded. I think the evangelicals have got it right, in that there really is a deep incompatibility between evolution and Christianity…”

It seems that, given his starting premise, Dawkins makes very good sense here. The effort to mix modern evolutionism with Christianity will end up destroying the very basis of Christianity. It really does make Jesus appear to be the lunatic Dawkins makes him out to be. The Gospel hope of Christianity, with regard to the futuristic claims of Jesus and the meaning of his life and death, simply don’t hold together in a rational way if the literal nature of the Genesis narrative is undermined.

