



Best of the *Spectrum Blog*:

Discussing Evolution | BY ALEXANDER CARPENTER

Recently, in a thread of blog conversations about religion and science and Richard Dawkins, Cliff Goldstein, asked for book references that make the case for evolution without turning believers into Seventh-day Dawkinians. Here's some of the conversation that followed. For more, go to http://spectrummagazine.typepad.com/the_spectrum_blog/2007/03/uncconcluding_sc.html.

Cliff Goldstein: Be an Adventist or be an evolutionist, but don't go around with the charade of believing you can be both.

Pastor Greg: What can I believe and still be an Adventist? Or more to the point: what can my daughter (who is majoring in biology) believe and still be an Adventist? Must she believe the world is six thousand years old, for instance—or can she stretch it to ten thousand years? A million?

Blake: This is a chilling ultimatum, Cliff. Surely you don't comprehend the repercussions of such hectoring rhetoric to the faith-development of our increasingly science-savvy youth.

Darius (statrei): The SDA Church runs the same risk the Catholic Church ran in Galileo's time when it insists on holding on to ideas that have been scientifically proven to be false. We may preserve our base (and the jobs of church leaders) but we lose credibility.

Jared Wright: So let's say for argument's sake that these evolutionary-minded posts actually ARE

contrary to what God would have us know—in parable terms, the weeds (I'm not saying that, but just proposing it for argument's sake). The way that Jesus suggested responding clearly is not about uprooting. He was quite blunt about the damage that pulling up the so-called weeds causes. And the huge number of disenfranchised former Adventists attests to the accuracy of what Jesus was saying. The guiding metaphor for God's people is one of promoting growth, not one of weeding out. Risky? Maybe. Right? Definitely.

Carmen: I recently read Dawkin's book and I felt like a lot of the nonscientific problems with religion that he highlights could also be addressed with a coherent, realistic, view of biblical inspiration.

Cliff Goldstein: What is the problem with [Intelligent] D[esign]? Or is that not sophisticated enough, or too fundamentalist, for some of the cognoscenti on here? Forget about my literal six-day creationism (Adam and Eve, the talking snake, Noah's ark), certainly most of you should be able to accept at least in theory ID?

Peter: Last year, I had some interactions with Phillip Johnson, the founder of the Intelligent Design movement, and I discovered an excerpt [from a Richard] Feynman speech in an article that Johnson had written. Johnson called the Feynman excerpt "such a magnificent statement, I wish it could be set to music. Richard Feynman's kind of science has the virtue of humility at its very core. Honesty and humility." What an irony. It enabled me to put a name to just what was bothering me not only about the ID movement but about every church I've been to, especially SDA ones, and also Christian publications. Name-

ly, that Christian standards of intellectual honesty are, in practice, WAY, WAY, WAY lower than those in the scientific community.

Cliff Goldstein: the issue isn't how old the earth itself is. I lean toward it being billions of years old itself; that is, the opening verses of Genesis are ambiguous enough to allow for that. It's the incorporation of evolution in the schema that's totally preposterous and a denial of everything that we as Adventists stand for.

Alexander: To Cliff, a short chronology literalist, if you want a serious discussion of Genesis it takes integrating hermeneutics, history, science, theology, sociology, archaeology, climatology, etc. but most of all it means engaging these ideas on their own terms, not just filtered through the literalist opposition. I recommend reading Thomas L. Thompson's *The Bible in History: How Writers Create a Past*. He says: "The Bible is a theological interpretation of the past with its own motivations apart from the historical that need to be considered in every interpretation." To treat our Scriptures as theology and not science does not smack of atheism—in fact, I believe that's what makes great faith.

Ronald Osborn: My own view, in sum, is that we need to steer clear of both the Scylla of wooden literalism and the Charybdis of academic liberalism, with its conceit that theology is about "spiritual" things that have nothing to do with factual realities "in time and space." Time and space is where I currently reside and I see no reason to embrace a theology that tries to move me "beyond" either—not any more than one that tells me God can be pinned down beneath a microscope. ■