

CREATION AND EVOLUTION

Evolution and worldviews – asking a basic question

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I came across this quotation the other week and thought it summed up well the perceived popular contemporary relation between evolution and Christian faith. 'Evolution will triumph over religion because its central premise, the survival of the fittest, complements free-market economics. But there's a twist in the tale – and it's not just the credit crunch. Recent research suggests that we are hard-wired to believe in divinity. In which case I've got a faulty circuit. So if there is an intelligent designer, s/he's clearly not a competent one.'¹

It would appear that whilst the cultural tide is against belief in a God who creates, the evidence suggests religious belief is not alien to being human. So, why is it that we confront often a wall of sheer prejudice when it comes to the subject matter of creation and evolution? Let me suggest that it has to do with our view of reality. As sociologist Peter Berger puts it, 'Every human society has its own corpus of officially accredited wisdom, the beliefs and values that most people take for granted as self-evidently true.

Every human society has institutions and functionaries whose task it is to represent this putative truth, to transmit it to each new generation, to engage in rituals that reaffirm it and sometimes to deal (at least in words) with those who are benighted or wicked enough to deny it.'² This is our "worldview" which James Sire defines as, 'a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions...which we hold...about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.'³ With it

we make sense of our existence. And that is the issue at stake when we engage with the whole question of the origin of creation and the human species.

Because our worldview empowers us to answer the basic questions of life and death it must make sense of the ultimate answer to these questions:

- 1 What is prime reality?
- 2 What is the nature of the world around us?
- 3 What is human being?
- 4 What happens to a person at death?
- 5 Why is it possible to know anything at all?
- 6 How do we know what is right and wrong?
- 7 What is the meaning of human history?⁴

Our worldview is, thus, 'the shared framework of ideas held by a particular society concerning how they perceive the world...The worldview gives shape and order to the multitude of outward manifestations of a culture.'⁵ In general terms, it provides the means of both making sense of as

well as holding together the disparate elements of our cultures, whether they be politics, religion, law, education, health, family, ecology or the arts.

It is of tremendous importance then, that we can identify the dominant worldviews around us. It also matters that we are able to locate the meaning of life in relation to them since, if we think about it, each one acts like a “mental map” and attempts to, ‘tell us how to navigate the world effectively.’⁶ Tom Wright identifies four criteria for this task, all of which are pertinent to articulating a contemporary Christian worldview:

- Worldviews provide the stories with which we understand reality
- The worldview-stories enable us to answer the basic question of human existence
- We express our answers to such questions through cultural symbols
- Our worldview provides ways of living in the world.⁷

Put simply, our worldview acts as a unifying principle. It is what glues us together. As such what we believe about our origins must also make sense of how we can live best in this world. Within the context of worldviews let me suggest that popular perceptions of evolution on their own are incapable of producing a viable worldview in which all human beings have worth whatever their status or capacity. Ultimately, therefore, evolution as a theory falls at the hurdle of “worldview”. Indeed, as Jesus Christ reminds us, the ultimate survival will take place not on the grounds of being “the fittest”, or the lucky one to adapt the right gene, nor even in being the most selfish. Rather, those who will survive at the end will be those who live a life of faith and love – even at the expense of their own survival.

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¹ Gary Day, “Nature of the Beast” in *Times Higher Education*, 12 February 2009, p30

² PL Berger, *A Far Glory*, The Free Press: NY, 1992, p9

³ JW Sire, *What is a Worldview?*, Illinois: IVP, 2004, p122

⁴ Sire, *ibid*, p122

⁵ D Burnett, *Clash of Worlds*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993, pp13-14

⁶ N Pearcey, *Total Truth, Crossway*, 2004, p23

⁷ NT Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, London: SPCK, 1993, 123-4