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Religion in the Garb of Science? (The Associate Editor's Desk)

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Edwin Reynolds

Anyone who has kept up with the news lately could hardly have overlooked the recent rekindling of interest in matters related to how science and religion tend to come together in the debate over origins. Not that it has ever been laid to rest, but the recent resurgence of discussion is owed in large part to the efforts of a group of scientists who are lending their influence to a movement called Intelligent Design (ID).

This movement argues that the complexity of the mechanisms that make up living organisms and permit them to survive and adapt to their environments, even to thrive, is such that it so far exceeds the bounds of statistical probability that it can only be explained as a product of intelligent design, as opposed to purely materialistic and random, accidental evolution. One has only to consider a few small examples of this complexity, such as the metabolism of proteins, DNA, the function of the eye, or the human reproduc-

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tive system, to imagine what the odds are against the whole living ecosystem having developed and remained in balance purely by chance mutations. The

ID movement studies this improbability in a wide range of specialized features of life and uses scientific statistical calculations to assess the odds of these features developing by random, accidental evolution.

Despite the fact that their theory is supported by scientific data and studies, it is being widely rejected by materialistic scientists as “religion in the garb of science.” It does not matter that most leading ID proponents are well-qualified scientists and that many do not support the biblical account of a recent six-day fiat creation. The very idea of bringing God into the picture of origins scares the materialistic evolutionists because it comes from science rather than religion, and it strikes a scientific blow at the heart of their own theories. If it were accepted as genuine science rather than as religion, it would be devastating to materialistic evolu-

tion; therefore, it is imperative to label it as “religion in the garb of science.”

Listen to the network news. Read the newspapers and news magazines. Notice the lack of content in describing the ID movement, and notice the labels being applied. There is a lot of fear and negative labeling without letting people know what the real issues are. Yet people are intelligent and want to be able to make decisions for themselves, if only they can have access to the facts.

A very recent poll conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and reported in the *New York Times* on August 31, 2005, revealed that nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of Americans now say that creationism should be taught alongside evolution in public schools, even though only 42 percent hold strict creationist views (down from 47 percent in a Gallup poll reported by *Newsweek* on December 23, 1991). This clearly does not mean that 64 percent of Americans support a biblical creation, but it means that Americans value open, honest discussion of different viewpoints and do not want their children to be subject to only one point of view in such an important matter as the origin of life. It means also that they are not entirely afraid of religion as an influence in

the discussion, though they want to see the arguments for and against each theory of origins discussed on a level playing field.

The Christian has to evaluate what becomes the foundation of authority in arriving at decisions in such areas. What are the respective roles of science and the Bible as authorities for the Christian? Once one surrenders faith in the authority of Scripture in favor of scientific evidence that may appear to be in conflict with it, what are the implications for the whole set of doctrinal beliefs that one once held? Can one surrender confidence in the literal understanding of the Creation account in Genesis 1–2 without surrendering confidence in the whole of Scripture? Does not the rest of Scripture—including Jesus Himself—treat the Genesis account as literal? Is not the Creation account integrally tied to the account of the Fall into sin and death?

What happens to our theology about the origin of sin and its consequences if we accept the view of materialistic evolution, which places death before sin and posits a long history of upward progress in the complexity of life and intelligence rather than a deterioration as a result of sin? What happens to our view of a God who acts within history, as the Bible claims, as opposed to a God who is timeless and cannot act within history, as even many



Christians believe, based on philosophy? Is there room for supernatural events like prophecy, miracles, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Second Coming, and so forth? What happens to our understanding of the purpose of the plan of redemption, the Incarnation, the atonement, the judgment, and the new creation? What happens to our understanding of God's plan for marriage, for human dominion and stewardship, and for the Sabbath, which is explicitly enshrined within the Decalogue?

These theological issues have their origin in the account of Creation and the Fall as recorded in Genesis 1–3. Can we somehow blend with our theology a theory that is fundamentally at odds with biblical theology? These are pressing questions.

This issue of *PD* addresses some of these questions. The answers are not always easy, but as we ponder the issues in the debate, we may be enriched by probing their depth and scope. We trust the reader will at least be stimulated by the discussion.