

Darwin and the Gospel Commission: How Does Our View of Origins Impact the Evangelistic Mission of the Church?

Stephen Bauer
Southern Adventist University

In 1991, James Rachels, professor of philosophy at the University of Alabama, Birmingham from 1977 until his death from cancer in 2003,¹ published *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism*.²

¹ James Rachels (1941-2003) first served as chair of the philosophy department, then as dean of arts and humanities. He returned to regular professorship in 1983 and continued in that capacity until his death from cancer in 2003. According to the University Radio Station, WBHM, his textbook, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, is about to become the most sold ethics textbook in history, currently used as required reading in about one-third of all university ethics courses in U. S. colleges and universities. See, WBHM, "In Memoriam: James Rachels 1941-2003," Undated, <http://www.wbhm.org/News/2003/rachels.html> (18 May 2004). For an obituary of James Rachels copied from the *Birmingham News*, see, "James Rachels, Ph.D. 1941-2003," 6 September 2003, <http://www.bradpriddy.com/rachels/obituary.htm> (18 May 2004).

² James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991), 1-4. Hereafter cited as *CfA*. Rachels' book has a well-done presentation on the history of the debate between Christians and evolutionists regarding the moral implications of Darwinian evolution. See also, C. Leon Harris, *Evolution: Genesis and Revelations* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1981), 17-18, who also presents a series of fundamentalist assertions regarding the moral implications of evolution. A more general history is found in Duane McCampbell, "The Development and Failure of the Nineteenth-Century Evolutionary Theory of Ethics," *Restoration Quarterly* 26 (1983): 161-71. For a conservative Christian overview of evolutionary ethics, see Ian T. Taylor, *In the Minds of Men: Darwin and the New World Order* (Toronto: TFE, 1984), 340-430. Taylor credits Darwinism for being the root of today's teaching of situation ethics. He likewise cites a humanist author as declaring that Darwin's discovery sounded the death knell of religious and moral values (421-22).

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

In this work Rachels sets out to demonstrate how Darwinism (or any other materialist view of origins) undermines traditional Judeo-Christian morality. Rachels sees traditional morality as centered on the protection of human rights at the expense of the rest of the natural world. His significance is that he seeks to establish the moral implications of Darwin's theory by directly attacking traditional Judeo-Christian ethics and morality.

As part of this attack on Christian morality, Rachels identifies two ways that Darwinism undermines forms of theism compatible with classic Judeo-Christian theology. The first way is through the problem of natural evil, which I shall only briefly explore in this article. The second is to argue that Darwin's theory centers on the rejection of teleology, i.e. design, and that any form of theism based in divine will and design is incompatible with Darwinism.³ This article will focus mainly on this second issue to see if Rachels' claims hold true.

In order to get to the implications of Darwin's theory for the mission of the church, I shall first make a moderately extensive investigation of Rachels' claims concerning the impact of a non-teleological view of God on morality and theology. I will do this, in part, by examining views expounded by the new discipline of evolutionary theology. The reason for examining the discipline of evolutionary theology is that its theologians do not have the strong bonds of biblical tradition to hinder taking the implications of a theology based on Darwin to its logical conclusions, unlike many SDA scientists and theologians who have such traditions to limit their intellectual explorations. Hence, the evolutionary theologians provide evidence independent of our presuppositions regarding the implications of evolution for theology.

This exploration of moral and theological implications of Darwinism is necessary to set up key moral and theological concepts that will become the basis of my exploration of the possible impact of Darwin's theory on the mission of the church. I will particularly focus on how such theological views may impact the mission of the Seventh-day Church.

³ Rachels sees the human-preference element of traditional ethics as grounded in two principles that he labels the "image of God thesis" and the "rationality thesis." In the first, humans are entitled to special protection since they are the image of God while animals are not, while the second argues that humans hold a privileged position because they have reason and animals do not. Rachels summarizes his work at the end of chapter 4 in *CfA* by stating that chapter 3 is dedicated to showing how Darwinism undermines the image-of-God thesis, while chapter 4 is focused on undermining the rationality thesis (171).

BAUER: DARWIN AND THE GOSPEL COMMISSION

The unifying question for this article, then, is this: Can an interpretation of God devoid of design adequately support our current identity and mission?

A final observation is in order before embarking on our task. The scope of this article means that I cannot expend much effort in rebutting the various views of God, the problem of evil, and more, while keeping to the focus of my core question. Some footnotes will refer you to other work I have done in this area, but overall, the limits of this paper prevent me from playing the apologist in these matters. With these matters in mind, let us turn to our core question: Can an interpretation of God devoid of design adequately support our current identity and mission? To begin our search for the answer, we must address the question of how Darwinism undermines teleology in theology.

Overview of Rachels' Position

We shall open our inquiry by examining Rachels' use of the problem of evil to undermine Christian morality and theology. As Rachels notes, "The existence of evil has always been a chief obstacle to belief in an all-good, all-powerful God. How can God and evil co-exist? If God is perfectly good, he would not want evil to exist; and if he is all-powerful, he is able to eliminate it. Yet evil exists. Therefore, the argument goes, God must not exist."⁴ Rachels lists five traditional answers offered by theologians⁵ and then argues that the excessive amount of evil in the world and the distinction between moral and natural evil combine to undermine these traditional answers.⁶ However, he admits that "All these arguments are available to reconcile God's existence with evil. Certainly, then, the

⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁵ 1. "Perhaps evil is necessary so that we may appreciate the good. . . . 2. Perhaps evil is a punishment for man's sin. Before the fall people lived in Paradise. It was their own fault sin that resulted in their expulsion. Therefore, people suffer because they have brought it on themselves. 3. Perhaps evil is placed in the world so that, by struggling with it, human beings can develop moral character. . . . 4. Perhaps evil is the unavoidable consequence of man's free will. In order to make us moral agents, rather than mere robots, it was necessary for God to endow us with free will. But in making us free agents, God enabled *us* to cause evil, even though he would not cause it himself. 5. Or, if all else fails, the theist can always fall back on the idea that our limited human intelligence is insufficient to comprehend God's great design. There is a reason for evil; we just aren't smart enough to figure out what it is." *CfA*, 104.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

simple version of the argument from evil does not force the theist to abandon belief.”⁷

In reference to the theism issue, Rachels asserts that Darwin’s theory would expect natural evil, suffering and unhappiness to be widespread as it is, while the divine hypothesis view would not. “Thus,” asserts Rachels, “Darwin believed, natural selection accounts for the facts regarding happiness and unhappiness in the world, whereas the rival hypothesis of divine creation did not.”⁸

This last point is especially crucial for Rachels. He notes that Darwin sought an account of origins and life that most easily fits the facts of suffering with the least amount of explanatory contortions. On this account, Rachels claims that “Divine creation is a poor hypothesis because it fits the facts badly.”⁹ In the mean time, the current patterns of suffering are said to be just what Darwin and his theory would expect with natural selection in process. Rachels thus argues that the biblical doctrine of creation is less parsimonious than Darwinian evolution, particularly in ex-

⁷ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁸ Ibid. For a fuller exploration of the problem of evil and Christian responses to it, see Stephen Bauer, “Moral Implications of Darwinian Evolution for Human Preference Based in Christian Ethics: A Critical Analysis and Response to the “Moral Individualism” of James Rachels” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 2006), 243-266. A couple of interesting arguments I examine include Casserly’s argument concerning the problem of good: If our world is merely a system of natural cause and effect, where did all the good in this world come from? A purely atheistical viewpoint should not expect such levels of good. He concludes that the problem of evil for the theist is not nearly as vexing as the problem of good is for the atheist (J. V. Langmead Casserley, *Evil and Evolutionary Eschatology: Two Essays*, ed. C. Don Keys. Toronto Studies in Theology, vol. 39. [Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1990], 11; Idem, *Man’s Pain and God’s Goodness* [London: Mowbray, 1951], 38-39). See also, C. S. Lewis, who makes a similar argument, quipping, “It is mere nonsense to put pain among the discoveries of science. Lay down this book and reflect for five minutes on the fact that all the great religions were first preached, and long practiced, in a world without chloroform” (*The Problem of Pain: How Human Suffering Raises Almost Intolerable Intellectual Problems* [New York: Macmillan Co., 1962], 15).

Additionally, it seems that most who challenge Christianity with the problem of evil seem to have an overly optimistic view of human abilities in wisdom and knowledge. Hence, if we cannot understand why God permits something, there must be no good reason. The assumption is biblically fallacious, denying our limits and indicting God based on a hubris devoid of humble recognition of those limits.

⁹ Ibid., 106.

plaining the presence of natural evil.¹⁰ Since Darwin has, in Rachels' view, presented an alternative to divine creation that is viable and exhibits greater parsimony, the divine creation hypothesis is now undermined by good reasons. Feeling he has established this point, Rachels now turns to the issue of teleology.

Teleology: The Central Issue

Rachels credits Marx with pinpointing the "philosophical nerve" of Darwin's theory. According to Rachels, Marx declared the theory of evolution to be "the death blow . . . to 'Teleology' in the natural sciences."¹¹ Thus, it may be that the most significant aspect of Darwin's theory is his overall rejection of teleology in nature. Rachels reminds us that "a teleological explanation is an explanation of something in terms of its function and purpose: the heart is for pumping blood, the lungs are for breathing, and so on."¹² Teleology thus implies a purpose or design, which must have been determined by the intentions of a maker. But there can be no designer in Darwinian evolution, and as Rachels notes, "If there is no maker—if the object in question is not an artifact—does it make sense to speak of a 'purpose'?" The answer is, "No," says Rachels. Any purposes attributed are merely those *we* assign. Thus, "the connection between function and conscious intention is, in Darwin's theory, completely severed."¹³

Rachels has thus highlighted the debate over the design argument (offered by Paley), which is considered by many to be definitively refuted by Hume.¹⁴ The problem is, notes Rachels, that Hume and other critics of the design argument only pointed out logical deficiencies in the design argument, but "they could not supply a *better way* of understanding the apparent design of nature. . . . Darwin did what Hume could not do: he provided an alternative, giving people something else they could

¹⁰ Tom Regan places much emphasis on the principle of parsimony or simplicity in his argumentation, including some discussion and description of the principle. See *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983), 21-24.

¹¹ Rachels, *CfA*, 110-111.

¹² *Ibid.* Rachels admits, "It is an exaggeration to say that Darwin dealt teleology a death blow; even after Darwin we still find biologists offering teleological explanations. But now they are offered in a different spirit. Biological function is no longer compared to the function of consciously designed artifacts" (112).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

believe. Only then was the design hypothesis dead.”¹⁵ For Rachels, then, it is the fact that Darwin’s theory provided a rational alternative to teleology that makes Darwin’s theory so capable of undermining any form of theism necessary to sustain traditional Christian morality.

The issue here, however, is not the efficacy of the design versus materialism argument. It is, rather, that to accept Darwin’s theory is to accept that there is no purpose or design in nature at all. This completely opposes classic Judeo-Christian theism, in which there is a cosmic design and purpose, often articulated by Adventists in terms of the Great Controversy motif. Rachels asks his clinching question: “Can theism be separated from belief in design? It would be a heroic step, because the design hypothesis is not an insignificant component of traditional religious belief. But it can be done, and in fact it has been done, by eighteenth-century deists.”¹⁶

Deism, he notes, rejects any personal-relational view of God, replacing that with a God who created natural laws, made the world, and now lets it run itself by those natural laws. The God of deism is hands-off and not concerned with details. Thus, there is theism without teleological design.¹⁷ What is the significance of this for Rachels? Rachels declares, “Since deism is a consistent theistic view, it is tempting simply to conclude that theism and Darwinism must be compatible, and to say no more. But the temptation should be resisted, at least *until we have made clear what has been given up* in the retreat to deism.”¹⁸ In the words of Sigmund Freud, the God of the deists is “nothing but an insubstantial shadow and no longer the mighty personality of religious doctrine.”¹⁹ All

¹⁵ Ibid., 120. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶ Rachels, *CfA*, 125.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott (New York: Liveright, 1928), 57. Of further interest is that between pp. 25 and 35, Freud argues that deities are human inventions to personalize the forces of nature so that man can feel he has a relationship with these forces that will enable man to manipulate nature or at least be protected from it. Thus, Freud casts human culture as a tool to aid the dynamic of man versus nature. This clearly depicts a culture where man is viewed as special apart from nature and juxtaposed against it. In relation to Rachels’ use of the quotation in the text above, it is significant that Freud asserts, “And *the more autonomous nature becomes and the more the gods withdraw from her*, the more earnestly are all expectations concentrated on the third task assigned to them” (p. 31, emphasis mine). Freud astutely connects autonomy of nature to a withdrawal from divine dominance, thus underscoring Rachels’ assertion that deism is too anemic a theism to support traditional morality.

that is left is the concept of God as the original cause. But, says Rachels, Darwin has asserted that to say the original cause is God is merest speculation. It can be asserted but no good reasons can be given to substantiate it. And, in fact, Rachels asserts that if we can accept that God is uncaused, then there is no good reason to reject the assertion that the universe is uncaused.²⁰ Thus, for Rachels, Darwinism clearly undermines biblical theism so severely that, in Rachels' words, "the atheistical conclusion can be resisted, but only at great cost."²¹ For Rachels, the cost is severe enough that he asserts that a theism compatible with Darwin's theory is too weak to support traditional Christian morality.

Darwinian Theism

Introduction. Rachels has asserted that if theism is maintained with belief in Darwinism, then the type of theism permitted cannot support traditional ethics, especially in the matter of human preference. But how efficacious is this claim?

There are two issues imbedded in Rachels' conclusion. First, all the argumentation concerning God, from Darwin to Rachels, presupposes a particular doctrine of God. What doctrine of God is thus depicted? Second, are there any theologians who have attempted to build a theological view of God based on the principles of Darwinism? If so, what are some of the implications for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its mission?

Darwin's God. Plantinga offers us an initial answer to the first question. He notes that the only arguments for incompatibility between God and evolution "have turned from deductive to *probabilistic* arguments from evil." Thus, "the typical atheological claim at present is not that the existence of God is *incompatible* with that of evil, but rather, that the latter offers the resources for a strong probabilistic argument against the former."²² However, the probabilistic argument (a type of parsimony assertion) itself assumes a particular doctrine of God. This issue is superbly developed by Cornelius Hunter.

Hunter cites numerous claims by evolutionists, giving various reasons why "God would not have created [the present natural order] in this way."²³ He calls this approach "negative theology" because it is offering

²⁰ Rachels, *CfA*, 108, 126.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 127, 126.

²² Plantinga, 71.

²³ In many parts of this book Hunter quotes or cites an evolutionist making such a claim. For examples see, Hunter, 12-13, 44-49, 63-64, 81-84, 98-99, 109-110.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

proof by negative instead of positive evidence.²⁴ But in so doing, argues Hunter, “they are beholden to a specific notion of God, and notions of God, no matter how carefully considered, are outside the realm of science.”²⁵ Thus, a major assumption of the evolutionary position is not scientific at all! And this point is foundational to why Hunter calls Darwin’s theory the “evolution theodicy.”²⁶ But why does Hunter see Darwin as so theological?

Hunter argues that a seminal influence on Darwin was Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In Hunter’s view, Milton was addressing the problem of evil, and solved it by distancing God from the creation. “Both men were dealing with the problem of evil—Milton with moral evil and Darwin with natural evil—and both found solutions by distancing God from evil. And most important, the two held similar conceptions of God.”²⁷ However,

Darwin’s solution distanced God from creation to the point that God was unnecessary. One could still believe in God, but not in God’s providence. Separating God from creation and its evils meant that God could have no direct influence or control over the world. God may have created the world, but ever since that point it has run according to impersonal natural laws that may now and then produce natural evil.²⁸

Therefore, “Darwin was now increasing this separation to the point that the link between creation and God was severed.”²⁹ According to Hunter, the result is that “God, on the one hand, is seen as all-good but not necessarily all-powerful, or at least does not exercise all his power. God is virtuous, not dictatorial.”³⁰ But notice, then, that elimination of God is no longer necessary. “The end result of Darwin’s theory is not that there is

²⁴ Ibid., 47-48. See also 97, 103.

²⁵ Ibid., 92.

²⁶ Ibid., 13. Hunter frequently calls evolution a theodicy and, on 173-175, closes the book on this theme.

²⁷ Ibid., 12.

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

²⁹ Ibid., 17. Mattill makes an observation similar to Hunter’s by asserting that when Darwin proposed natural selection as the creative force, “Darwin rewrote Genesis and transferred God’s workload to the process of evolution, even as Newton had transferred another part of the divine workload to gravity. Biology and astronomy were *dislodging God from governing the world*.” A. J. Mattill, Jr., *The Seven Mighty Blows to Traditional Beliefs* (Gordo: Flatwoods Free, 1995), 26. Emphasis mine.

³⁰ Ibid., 146.

no God, but rather, that God is disjoint from the material world. . . . In evolution theodicy, the Creator must be disjoint from creation, but no more than this is required.”³¹ Thus, Hunter disagrees with Rachels that Darwinism makes atheism difficult to resist, but agrees that the theory of evolution does entail a view of God not compatible with traditional Christian theism. Is Hunter on the right track in arguing that Darwinism offers deliverance from the problem of evil through a reinterpretation of God that saves God’s goodness by limiting his power?

A Theology of Evolution

Introduction. From the late twentieth century until the present, we find movement in the direction of promoting such a theology. First, authors such as Michael Ruse and Kenneth Miller deny that Darwinism is incompatible with belief in God.³² Both seem to leave the door open for a variety of theological options. But how wide is a wide array of options? Ruse recognizes that for those who read Genesis literally, “the Darwinian reading of Genesis is going to give you major problems—insoluble problems, I suspect.”³³ Thus, the portal to religious Darwinism may not be as wide as is touted. Not all may enter, though some have, and the results are fascinating.

Putting Darwin into Theology. John F. Haught, possibly the leading scholar in the recently formed movement of evolutionary theology, laments that it is not just the discipline of theology that has failed to grapple with the implications of Darwin’s theory; neither have the philosophers. “If theology has fallen short of the reality of evolution, however, so also has the world of thought in general. . . . Philosophy also has yet to produce an understanding of reality—an ontology—adequate of evolution.”³⁴ Thus he charges that, “to a great extent, theologians still think and write almost as if Darwin had never lived.”³⁵

³¹ Ibid., 165.

³² Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?: The Relationship between Science and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 138, 216, 217; Kenneth R. Miller, *Finding Darwin’s God: A Scientist’s Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), xii.

³³ Ruse, 217.

³⁴ John F. Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder: Westview, 2000), 1.

³⁵ Ibid., 2. One might be tempted to think that Haught has forgotten the work of Teilhard de Chardin in combining theology with Darwinian evolution, but Haught assures us otherwise. “Although Teilhard himself was a profoundly religious thinker, he was not a professional theologian, and so his own efforts to construe a ‘God for evolution’

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Haught responds to this problem by proposing the possibilities of a theology informed by evolution.

I shall argue in the pages ahead that Darwin has gifted us with an account of life whose depth, beauty, and pathos—when seen in the context of the larger cosmic epic of evolution—expose[s] us afresh to the raw reality of the sacred and to a resoundingly meaningful universe.³⁶

Haught expresses high hopes about the prospects of a Darwinian theology: “I cannot here emphasize enough, therefore, the gift evolution can be to our theology. For us to turn our backs on it, as so many Christians continue to do, is to lose a great opportunity to deepen our understanding of the wisdom and self-effacing love of God.”³⁷

But what would such a theology be like? First it is not the same as natural theology. Haught declares: “Evolutionary theology, unlike natural theology, does not search for definitive footprints of the divine in nature. . . . Instead of trying to prove God’s existence from nature, evolutionary theology seeks to show how our new awareness of cosmic and biological evolution can enhance and enrich traditional teachings about God and God’s way of acting in the world.”³⁸ Diarmuid O’Murchu further asserts that: “Evolutionary theology wishes to keep open the possibility that all forms of creaturehood (plant and animal alike) are dimensions of divine disclosure and can enlighten us in our desire to understand God more deeply and respond in faith more fully. Evolutionary theology is committed to a radically open-ended understanding of how the divine reveals itself in and to the world.”³⁹ This means that in evolutionary theology, nature is not used as evidence to prove classical attributes of God. Rather, both Darwinian evolution and God’s creatorship are assumed to be true. Thus, evolution shows us how God created, and this method of creating, in turn, deepens our understanding of who God is and how He operates. However, Haught cautions, “trying to locate God’s

stopped short of the systematic development his intuitions demanded.” See, John F. Haught, *Deeper than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in the Age of Evolution* (Boulder: Westview, 2003), 162.

³⁶ Haught, *God After Darwin*, 2.

³⁷ John F. Haught, *Responses to 101 Questions on God and Evolution* (New York: Paulist, 2001), 114.

³⁸ Haught, *God After Darwin*, 36.

³⁹ Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Evolutionary Faith: Rediscovering God in Our Great Story* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 88.

BAUER: DARWIN AND THE GOSPEL COMMISSION

activity within or at the level of natural biological causation really amounts to a shrinkage of God. This approach is known as ‘god-of-the-gaps’ theology. . . . A god-of-the-gaps approach is a science stopper. . . . But, even worse, it is theologically idolatrous. It makes divine action one link in the world’s chain of finite causes rather than the ultimate ground of all natural causes.”⁴⁰

This, in turn, means that we cannot ascribe specific activity to God, just as Rachels predicted. The result, as O’Murchu notes, is that “evolutionary theology borrows liberally from process thought.”⁴¹ O’Murchu further asserts that “the process position challenges the assumption that our God must always be a ruling, governing power above and beyond God’s own creation.”⁴² Why is the tendency to favor process theology significant? O’Murchu explains, “What conventional believers find unacceptable about the process position is the notion of a vulnerable God, allegedly at the mercy of capricious forces as are all other creatures of the universe.”⁴³ Thus, the first significant theological impact of Darwin that we shall examine is the limiting of God’s power in order to save His goodness.

Limiting God’s Power to Save His Goodness. The limiting of divine power is one of the early issues that Haught examines in his book, *God After Darwin*. Early in the book, Haught examines David Hull’s argument that the present order is incompatible with the concept of God. Hull asks, “What kind of God can one infer from the sort of phenomenon epitomized by the species on Darwin’s Galapagos Islands?” He eventually answers, “The God of the Galapagos is careless, wasteful, indifferent, almost diabolical. This is not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.”⁴⁴ But would this not impeach the goodness of God, as Hull has charged?

A number of theologians and philosophers would answer this question, “No.” They argue that natural evil is unavoidable for God because His power is limited. Bertocci argues that “*the evidence indicates God is not omnipotent,*” and goes on to argue that only by having limited power

⁴⁰ Haught, *101 Questions*, 18-19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ David L. Hull, “The God of the Galapagos,” *Nature* 352 (August 8, 1991): 486. The last lines are quoted in Haught, *God After Darwin*, 6.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

can God's moral goodness be preserved.⁴⁵ C. Don Keyes states that through the work of Julian Casserley, he has come to the conclusion that

God ought not to be defined primarily in terms of sovereignty and power. The implications of this statement liberated me from interpreting God's omnipotence as the kind of coercive power capable of always preventing evil. Instead, I now firmly believe with Plato that the goodness of God is his most essential quality and that he is the author only of the good things that happen. Ultimately 'power' and 'good' are different kinds of reality, but of the two, good is more absolutely attributable to God. The power of the good is almost always indirect.⁴⁶

Keys gives no good reasons for ascribing goodness as an absolute quality while treating omnipotence as a symbolic or relative quality, other than the ability to explain evil, and possibly the support of Plato. It is also significant, as we shall soon see, that goodness becomes the supreme, untouchable attribute of God to which all other attributes, including power, seem to be subjugated.

Korsmeyer echoes the refrain in which God's power is limited in order to preserve his goodness.

The painfully slow evolution of life, spreading in great diversity into all available niches, trying out all possible avenues of advance, the huge role of chance, the stumbling advances to greater complexity, all these things suggest a divine nature *at*

⁴⁵ Bertocci, 413-414. Emphasis in original. See also 466-467, where he repeats his argument that limited power is the only way to maintain God's moral goodness.

⁴⁶ C. Don Keyes, "Julian Casserley's Hope," in *Evil and Evolutionary Eschatology: Two Essays*, xxii-xxiii. Casserley actually says little about God's power, but what he says seems to agree with Keyes's reaction to his work. In this quote, Casserley is combating a form of humanism he perceives to focus on developing human power but not human morality:

"Strangely enough, most of those humanists who seem drawn towards a humanism of power are precisely the people who are most apt to react against a conception of God as kind of a celestial policeman wielding absolute powers over men. For myself, I not only object to a conception of God that thinks of him merely, or even primarily in terms of sovereignty and power, but I object also to any conception of man that thinks of him merely or even primarily in terms of sovereignty or power, and I object to both doctrines for the same reason, that they misapprehend the true value and excellence of personality [i.e., character]. The person, whether divine or human, finds authentic self-expression in the range and integrity of his loving and in the wide variety of his values. A humanism of power is as objectionable as the Calvinistic-type of theism and for precisely the same reasons." Casserley, *Evil*, 27. Emphases mine.

BAUER: DARWIN AND THE GOSPEL COMMISSION

*odds with the omnipotent God of classical theism. The universe, as we know it, was not created in an instant of absolute coercive power. . . . The universe's story is suggesting that divine power is different from what we have imagined. It is like the power of love, persuasive, patient, and persistent. . . .*⁴⁷

All of these authors speak as if their position on limiting God's power is so self-evident that there can be no criticism of it.

Kraemer offers three rebuttals to the limited power view of God. First, is God only limited in power as claimed? If He is limited in power, why not in knowledge and goodness as well? Why limit God's power only? Second, he picks up Hume's argument that if God were this limited in power, He should have created fewer animals with better faculties for happiness. Third, Kramer questions if such a limited, imprudent God is worthy of respect and worship. He reminds us that "other great but limited beings, saints and heroes, clearly merit respect, but not worship. Once God is similarly limited, the problem of justifying the worship-worthiness of God needs to be addressed."⁴⁸

The Hidden, Humble God of Evolution. Haught proposes that his non-omnipotent view of God depicts Him as actually being more deeply involved in the world than a deity who controls things by external power. This depth of involvement is based on a panentheistic doctrine of God. Thus, His work is "interior to the process of creation."⁴⁹ But why should we believe such a God inhabits nature? Is there any evidence for this conclusion?

Ironically, the answer is no. Three times in as many pages, Haught asserts that the concept of divine humility better explains the evolutionary data than does traditional theology or materialism.⁵⁰ In another work, he argues that "nothing less than a transcendent force, radically distinct from, *but also intimately incarnate in* matter could ultimately explain evolution."⁵¹ Haught describes this immanent presence as God's "self-withdrawal," "self-absenting," and "self-concealment," so as to not have any external influence or exercise of "coercive power" over the universe.⁵² "God is present in the mode of 'hiddenness.'"⁵³ Twice more he

⁴⁷ Korsmeyer, 84. Emphases mine.

⁴⁸ Kraemer, 11.

⁴⁹ Haught, *101 Questions*, 119.

⁵⁰ Haught, *God After Darwin*, 53-55.

⁵¹ Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 163

⁵² Haught, *God After Darwin*, 195, 197, 203.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 195.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

asserts that God is present in the form of “ultimate goodness.”⁵⁴ Thus, Haught associates the limited power of God, represented by His hiddenness, as being ultimate goodness.

It seems ironic, with Haught’s dedication to modern science, that he claims this hidden God can only be detected by faith. Says Haught, “The world is embraced constantly by God’s presence. But this presence does not show up as an object to be grasped by ordinary awareness or scientific method. It is empirically unavailable, in other words. . . . Only those attuned to religious experience will be aware or appreciative of it.”⁵⁵ This is amazing! Haught is appealing to subjective experience for a major pillar of his theology. And he makes the appeal more than once: “The raw ingredients of evolution flow forth from the depths of divine love, a depth that will show up only to those whose personal lives have *already been grasped by a sense of God.*”⁵⁶ A few phrases later he reiterates,

The very fact that nature can lend itself to a literalist reading is a consequence of the humble, hidden and vulnerable way in which divine love works. The very possibility of giving an atheistic interpretation of evolution is that God’s creative love humbly *refuses to make itself available at the level of scientific comprehension.*⁵⁷

Haught further claims to base this subjective discovery of God in nature from Tillich’s concept of God as infinite depth, which is self authenticating.⁵⁸

The pantheistic hiddenness of God has been argued by Haught to be an expression of divine humility to protect the absolute freedom of the universe. This concept of divine humility is significant, for Haught treats it as a metaphysics for grounding his theology.

The theological basis of this metaphysics of divine hiddenness and humility is the *kenosis* passage of Phil 2. For Haught, the *kenosis*, especially as seen in the crucifixion, is the *primary method* by which God

⁵⁴ Ibid., 197, 203.

⁵⁵ Haught, *101 Questions*, 119.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 60-61. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁵⁸ Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 27-29. Haught also appeals non-Christian sources for this view of God as well: Indian, Taoist, Buddhist, and Platonic beliefs are all based on the concept of a hidden, deeper reality than the visible world. He further asserts that Christ espoused a similar concept by declaring that God’s Kingdom is within us (29-30). See also O’Murchu, 34, 88, 90, where he makes the same argument as Haught.

BAUER: DARWIN AND THE GOSPEL COMMISSION

relates to creation, from and throughout eternity. God hid himself through the incarnation in the humble servant-form of the man, Jesus Christ. Thus, for Haught, “It is to this image that Christian theology *must always repair* whenever it thinks about God’s relationship to the world and its evolution.”⁵⁹

The application of this metaphysical principle leads to an openly espoused pantheism advocated through the concept of a divine incarnation with the material universe. For example, Haught describes his God of evolution as “a promising God already incarnate in matter.”⁶⁰ Commenting on the saying of Jesus, “if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me,”⁶¹ Haught offers an alternative model of incarnation, declaring, “This image suggests that the most glorious form of power is that which humbly invites other beings to enter into *organic unity* with God of their own accord, and not out of compulsion.”⁶²

Love’s Power Is Non-Coercive. For evolutionary theology, a key implication of this pantheism is that a truly loving God must be non-coercive. Haught makes this fundamental connection by stating:

The doctrine of grace proclaims that God loves the world and all of its various elements fully and unconditionally. *By definition*, however, love does not absorb, annihilate, or force itself upon the beloved. Instead it longs for the beloved to become more and more ‘other’ or differentiated. . . . To compel, after all would be contrary to the very nature of love.⁶³

Miller argues in a similar fashion that the divine love is not a controlling power in the universe. “A world without meaning would be one in which a Deity pulled the string of every human puppet, and every material particle as well. . . . By being always in control, the Creator would deny His creatures any real opportunity to know and worship Him. *Authentic love requires freedom, not manipulation.*”⁶⁴

Haught uses emotive and almost pejorative language to describe the traditional view of God in contrast to his humble, vulnerable God.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 111. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁰ Haught, *101 Questions*, 115.

⁶¹ John 12:32, KJV.

⁶² Haught, *101 Questions*, 117. Emphasis mine.

⁶³ Haught, *God After Darwin*, 39-41. Emphasis mine. Haught repeats these types of arguments on pp. 112-114.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 289. Emphasis mine.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The God of Jesus is utterly unlike . . . our traditional images of God understood as divine potentate or ‘designer.’ Theology is offended by evolution *only when it assumes a rather imperious concept of divine omnipotence.* . . .

Evolutionary science, however, demands that we give up once and for all the *tyrannical* images we may have sometimes projected onto God.⁶⁵

By contrast, evolution invites us to “recapture the often obscured portrait of a self-humbling, suffering God *who is anything but a divine controller or designer of the cosmos.*”⁶⁶ The evolutionary God “refrains from wielding the domineering power that both skeptics and believers often project onto their ideal of the absolute.” Yet God is not “a weak or powerless God incapable of redeeming this flawed universe, but one whose salvific and creative effectiveness is all the more prevailing because it is rooted in a divine humility.”⁶⁷ Thus Haught asserts that, “in the final analysis, persuasive power is more influential, more ‘powerful’, than coercion.”⁶⁸

This rejection of any kind of hands-on rulership and intervention by God has some important implications for soteriology and eschatology. Korsmeyer expresses the ultimate destiny of the world in terms of apotheosis.

The divine life is constantly receiving the lives of everyone in the world, and adding each moment to the collected moments of their past. All these moments are experienced by God with no loss of intensity or immediacy. *The past of the world enters the everlasting present of the divine immediacy. The world is*

⁶⁵ Haught, *101 Questions*, 127. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, *Deeper than Darwin*, 81.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 82. See also, Korsmeyer, 94, 96. In arguing for a power-sharing God, Korsmeyer sounds not unlike Mill. Mill argues that the problem of evil makes us worship a contradictory god, for “the ways of this Deity in Nature are on many occasions totally at variance with the precepts, as he believes, of the same Deity in the Gospel.” The only non-contradictory view of Deity for Mill is one that posits two competing principles or powers, one good and one evil. But this seems, for Mill, to diminish the good god’s power, for, “a virtuous human assumes in this theory the exalted character of a fellow-laborer with the Highest, a fellow combatant in the great strife; contributing his little, which by the aggregation of many like himself becomes much, towards that progressive ascendancy, and ultimately complete triumph of good over evil, . . . as planned by the Being to whom we owe all the benevolent contrivance we behold in nature.” Mill, 113, 116-117.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

BAUER: DARWIN AND THE GOSPEL COMMISSION

*transformed in God, who weaves everything that is worthwhile into greater harmony, a greater whole.*⁶⁹

For Korsmeyer,

Perhaps we have been called into existence to assist the great divine evolutionary plan to move the whole universe toward divinity, to be co-workers, co-creators in bringing about the Kingdom of God among us. Perhaps eschatology has to be rethought.⁷⁰

Evolution, Soteriology, and Eschatology. Korsmeyer asserts that “the idea of God bringing the universe to an end in the near future through Christ’s second coming is not compatible with the evidence of the divine efforts in the universe for fifteen billion years.”⁷¹ O’Murchu likewise affirms, “I no longer believe in the anthropocentric myth of the end of the world. There is every likelihood that we humans will destroy ourselves, but not creation. Creation has an infinite capacity to cocreate.”⁷² Haught likewise denies, based on an evolutionary perspective of our world’s history, that there was an original, perfect world that lost its perfection and will once again be restored. “Thus, a scientifically informed understanding of redemption may no longer plausibly make themes of restoration or recovery dominant. . . . It would be absurd, therefore, to seek the restoration of a chronologically primordial state of material dispersal.”⁷³ Not only does evolutionary theology overturn our concept of God, but it also seems unable to support the hope of a restored, sinless perfect world. The second coming of Christ disappears

⁶⁹ Korsmeyer, 102. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 88. In saying God has an evolutionary plan, Korsmeyer may be treading on dangerous ground. In the 1980s, one Protestant denomination combined the concepts of an evolutionary view of origins with the biblical doctrine of human dominion over nature to concoct a Christianized form of Julian Huxley’s Moral Darwinism, where man takes over the supervision of his own evolution. This included advocacy of eugenics and abortion as tools for managing our evolution. For more information see, Stephen Bauer, “Genesis, Dominion, and Ethics: A Critical Analysis of Ethics Based on the Concept of Dominion in Genesis 1:26-28,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 6, no. 2 (1995): 77-108.

⁷¹ Korsmeyer, 88.

⁷² O’Murchu, 4.

⁷³ Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 170.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

from the theological radar screen.⁷⁴ And it is in the context of this concept of eschatology that our evolutionary theologians see fit to raise the issue of human preference.

For Haught, “It would be callous indeed on the part of theologians to perpetuate the *one-sidedly anthropocentric and retributive* notions of pain and redemption that used to fit so comfortably into pre-evolutionary pictures of the world.”⁷⁵ Korsmeyer holds a similar position:

Any ‘exclusive’ theology, which in effect suggests that God is only concerned with one group of people on one planet of one small star, is not credible. It is the product of a theology that considers Scripture in a literalist manner, convinced it provides a comprehensive scientific worldview, and has not considered the scientific evidence of who we are, where we are, and how we got here.⁷⁶

Evolutionary theology clearly has catastrophic implications for biblical eschatology. But this would seem to be the logical outcome of reinterpreting God without teleology (design). If God does not relate to the material universe through designs and purposes, the key elements of the biblical views of the plan of salvation, end-time judgment, and eschatology all crumble with the loss of teleology. A non-coercive, evolving God of limited power who is found in panentheistic hiddenness, a ground of being instead of a personal being, is what is offered instead. Rachels seems fundamentally correct in asserting that traditional Christian morality and theology cannot survive the implications of Darwin’s theory.

These implications, especially the theological ones, have a direct bearing on the biblical mission of the church. It has taken a moderately extensive excursus to identify those implications. We are now in a position to evaluate how belief in evolution would impact the Adventist identity and its understanding of its mission as a church.

⁷⁴ Even without doing evolutionary theology, Darwin’s theory has historically shown a penchant for undermining the biblical doctrine of the second coming. One good example is, Zachary Hayes, *What Are They Saying about the End of the World?* (New York: Paulist, 1983), 40-46. Hayes cites a number of scholars holding to this denial. Of significance is that Hayes explicitly ties denial of the *parousia* to evolution.

⁷⁵ Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 169. Last emphasis mine.

⁷⁶ Korsmeyer, 89.

Implications for the Mission and Identity of the Adventist Church

Rachels alluded to the Ten Commandments as part of the biblical picture of God's regard for man. But if Darwinism is accepted as factual, then the lack of teleology means there can be no divine design for morality, just as there was none for creation. Why would God avoid design in creation only to have design in morals? The designless theism that Rachels rightly demands of Darwinism would have to eliminate the Ten Commandments and all other direct moral guidance by God, as shown in the Bible. In such a scenario sin is eliminated since there can be no divine law or design to violate.⁷⁷ Thus, Darwinism clearly undermines the foundations of biblical morality, yet our identity as Adventists lies heavily in the imperative to call people to obedience to God's commandments. How can we do so if our scientific paradigms eliminate the veracity of the Ten Commandments? It seems likely that Darwinism is quite toxic to this dimension of our mission as a church.

The elimination of the Ten Commandments (since there is no more divine design) means one would eliminate the ability to sin, since there is no design to rebel against. Furthermore, judgment becomes impossible since there can be no moral design as a standard to which one can be held accountable. For Seventh-day Adventist theology, this is especially devastating due to the great emphasis on the "investigative judgment." Such a judgment is incompatible with Darwinism or deism, leaving man with no real accountability to God. Neither Deism nor Darwinism can sustain such a doctrine. Our mission of announcing the judgment and calling people to acknowledge their accountability to God is incompatible with the implications of Darwin's theory.

This undermining of the doctrines of sin and judgment, in turn, removes the need for salvation from sin and its penalty, for there can be no sin or penalty without divine design and sovereignty. This would mean, therefore, that there would be no need for an incarnation and sacrificial death by Christ. Furthermore, the incarnation event was a designed, planned, unnatural act incompatible with Darwinism or a deistic god who uses no design. Removing teleology thus undermines several key pillars of Christian faith that are crucial to the salvific mission of the church.

Additionally, if there is no divine design, how can such a theism have any meaningful eschatology? If suffering and death are tools of evolutionary progress, then death and suffering are natural. Death is no

⁷⁷ Rom 4:15; 5:13; 7:7. Paul here argues that sin is not reckoned where there is no law and that he would not know what sin is except for the law.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

longer an enemy as the Scriptures declare (for example, 1 Cor 15:26). If Darwin is right, then why should we hope for a world to come in which death and suffering will be no more (Rev 21-22)? Man's importance in the plan of salvation and divine future is replaced by an uncertain future of natural selection, personal insignificance, and death. There can be no special destiny since there is no divine design that calls for it.

Conclusion

There is much more that could be done to explore the implications of Darwin's theory for the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our core identity has been forged in the Great Controversy motif in which there is a battle of rival governing powers—something impossible if there is no teleology. Our mission is to prepare people to give account of themselves to a sovereign, yet loving, almighty moral governor and to prepare them for the eschatological restoration of all things which begins at the second coming of Christ in glory. It seems clear that the expulsion of teleology required by Darwinism will be catastrophic to the mission praxis of the Adventist church.

To attempt to mix Scripture with Materialism is to mix teleology with anti-teleology. This may appear to be successfully performed for a season because the pioneers of such a shift usually cling to enough tradition that they are unable, or unwilling, to pursue the new interpretation to its logical conclusions. Haught and his cohorts have no such tradition to restrain them. Thus, they are free to pursue the full implications of Darwin for theology. The Adventist church cannot maintain its mission and current identity while affirming Materialism. Sooner or later, a generation will arise whose sense of tradition is weak enough that they will take Darwinism to its full conclusions, and in so doing, will radically alter the mission and purpose of our church.

By contrast, those who hold to a biblical protology should have a robust theism capable of supporting the biblically defined mission of the church. God is sovereign. He rules and lays claims on us. A divine imperative impels us to labor for the salvation of souls and to call people to obedience to God's commandments as an expression of their faith and submission. The biblical God designs, decides, and reveals His will to man. We have the privilege of calling people to renounce rebellion against God's express will and surrender to God's divine designs in morals and lifestyle. Our mission, like Paul expressed to the Corinthians, is thus something that can reveal God's power in ways that mere arguments cannot. Adherence to the Genesis doctrine of Salvation provides not only

BAUER: DARWIN AND THE GOSPEL COMMISSION

the moral and theological foundations needed for mission, but a framework for God to empower that mission. Belief in non-teleological theories of origins inherently emasculate the mission of the church from the biblical concepts needed to make it effective.

Steven Bauer teaches at Southern Adventist University.