

## **Evangelicals Must Evolve: Why Quashing Science Does Nothing to Advance the Cause of Christ**

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It's time for people of evangelical conviction (I am an evangelical pastor myself) to drop our posture of protest toward mainstream science. It doesn't do anyone any good and it's bad for the gospel. To test the latter thesis, go to any coffee shop in town and ask anyone who will engage you in casual conversation, "What's up with evangelicals and science?" You will get an earful. You will find many Ann Arborites with the well founded impression that the more one speaks of a personal relationship with Jesus the more likely one is to protest the teaching of evolution in schools and the less likely one is to want to do something about global warming. All because of the current evangelical alliance with conservative politics and the attending culture war approach to science. Who called us to engage in such a culture war? Certainly not Jesus of Nazareth.

Evolution, so far as I understand it, simply asserts that all life is related by common descent; that species change over time through natural breeding; that populations tend to become more like the members who breed the most; and that this process is advanced by the fact that variations in the copy mechanism of the information imbedded in every living cell very rarely confer an advantage to the body in which the variation is imbedded. These copy variations tend to be passed along at a higher rate than variations that confer no advantage or harm the body in which they are imbedded. None of this strikes me as blasphemous, or irreligious, or threatening to the cause of Christ in the world.

But suppose that by some reasoning I'm not privy to, it is. What good is done for the cause of the gospel when Christians assert their rights and political power by organizing to restrain the teaching of evolution in schools or to advance a perspective that is friendlier to their faith as an alternative, such as Intelligent Design Theory? What's our goal, to make a society a little friendlier to our views, or to reach the culture with the transforming power of the gospel? The gospel advances most when Christians are willing to yield their rights rather than assert them.

We've had a lot of rights assertion by evangelicals in recent years, a lot of throwing our weight around politically, but in the process we are creating a deep reservoir of ill will toward Christianity among those who are on the outside of faith looking in. The gospel has become a Red State phenomenon; it's thriving in the Bible Belt but in the Biology Belt it's hurting, and little wonder!

Intelligent Design theory, the latest in a long line of alternatives to mainstream science, claims no loyalty to any God or any sacred text. Rather it claims that the scientific method is able to pin down the presence of Intelligent Design in the natural realm. This

strikes me as a theological stretch from my evangelical perch. The biblical God is a being who is both too intimately involved and too infinitely beyond the natural order to be definitively discerned by the work of human hands, which the scientific enterprise most decidedly is. How is the cause of Christ advanced by jumping on a bandwagon that asserts the power of science to discern what can only be discerned by faith? As my Bible says, "By faith we understand the universe was formed at God's command" (Hebrews 11:3) Faith, not sight. Faith, not science.

Besides, we've got bigger fish to fry than tampering with the science curriculum, based on a religious protest aimed against one of the most important narratives in modern scientific thought. There's a world of poverty and hurt to attend to; homeless citizens to feed, single moms and their kids to support; a society weary of culture wars and high volume polemics that don't do much earthly or heavenly good for anyone.

Wouldn't we do better to listen to the story science tells--as carefully and sympathetically as we would want our story listened to--and discover what common ground can be found between the story of science and the story of God in search of humanity? Our story, after all, is not one that can be imposed from without, but is meant to become a transforming presence from within. Or have I been reading my Bible all these years for naught?

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