

**Christ Church Bromley, S.E. London, UK
Science and the Bible Evening, 2nd April 2008**

An open debate on the Bible and Origins

**Speakers Ard Louis (presenting the case for Theistic Darwinism)
and Tom Seidler (presenting the case for Young Earth Creationism)**

On 2nd April 2008 Christ Church Bromley hosted a Science and the Bible evening on the vexed issue of how we understand the biblical account of creation. Two invited speakers, Ard Louis, a research scientist, advocating Theistic Darwinism, and Tom Seidler, a director of the Good Book Company, advocating Young Earth Creationism, presented a lively and robust – yet thoroughly irenic – debate, which was much appreciated by a large audience.

Two members of the audience pen here an open response to Ard and Tom, expressing our gratitude and offering a few points of hopefully helpful critique ...

Dear Ard and Tom,

We are hugely grateful to you both for presenting your cases so clearly and humbly; your good natured approach was marked by irenicism, integrity and good humour – you were able to take opposing viewpoints without rancour, and your gesture of goodwill towards one another was a very helpful example to us. So thank you, both of you. You gave us a lively and robust discussion, but without it becoming (as so often happens) ill-mannered.

Thank you too for coming at the matter, just as we asked, with an eye to the handling of the early chapters of Genesis. We wanted it to be an evening in bible handling rather than esoteric scientific arguments, and in this you served us well. Permit a response, would you, from a couple of bible teachers who were present, from two different churches.

Ard, you based your argument on a good question, namely “how do we obtain knowledge about the world, especially where the scriptures are silent about the normal workings of God?” Here you introduced a category, “the normal workings of God” without really justifying it, we thought. Can it really be argued that there are “normal” and “abnormal” workings of God, we ask, when in the bible God does everything by a spoken word – whether it’s the stilling of a storm (abnormal, i.e. miracle, on your paradigm?) or the creation of the universe (normal, i.e. scientific processes, on your paradigm?). Did you really convince us that scripture really is silent on these matters? And did you really convince us that yours wasn’t fundamentally a worldview argument (Darwinism) looking for scriptural justification? Tom, you specifically made this point, and made it well, we thought.

Tom, you argued well that if we don’t accept the historicity of Genesis 1-3 then we have no reason for accepting 4-11 (or 12 onwards) historically either. We don’t agree with you though. We would have agreed, had you argued that there is no *a priori* reason for dismissing narrative texts as being non-history just because a historical interpretation is inconvenient to our preconceived notions. However, you can’t argue that all narrative that appears to be history necessarily has to be history – each case needs to be argued from its

own genre on its own merits (not an exact science, of course). Interestingly, you conceded (in a couple of private conversations at the end) that you do actually respect the so called framework hypothesis for Genesis 1 that Ard described so helpfully. We were intrigued – we’ve never met before a Young Earther who is willing to give house room to such a non-historical, non-‘literal’ interpretation of Genesis 1. We were also very interested to hear you base your arguments principally on the genealogies and the pre-fall ‘grim reaper’, rather than on the insistence on 24 hour solar days (as is more common).

Similarly, Tom, you argued that because Jesus and Peter assumed the historicity of the creation accounts, so should we; but the assumption of this argument can be countered by the suggestion that Jesus and Peter simply used inherited genre forms. Not that this settles the matter one way or the other, but (unlike Ard, who addressed genre generally and in particular the question of whether the genre of Genesis 1-3 might be comparable to the genre of Revelation) you didn’t really tackle the genre issue.

Ard, the biggest concern we had with your presentation is the way you blithely assumed that evolution, as you understand it, is a theistic mechanism. You never argued this, and you neatly side-stepped the question you were asked, “What is the material difference (i.e., as observed within the scientific disciplines) between (a) non-directed Darwinian evolution as Darwin originally conceived it (natural selection operating on random difference), and as neo-Darwinism still conceives it to be ruled purely by chance, on the one hand, and (b) theistically directed Darwinian evolution as you theistic Darwinists conceive it, on the other”. The way you avoided the question was, when pressed, to say “I don’t know” – we have to honour you for this, because these three simple words of humility are all too rarely heard within this debate, and in many others. Would that others would say, when they don’t know something, “I don’t know”, instead of posturing. So thank you for your honesty there.

Nonetheless, you did not have an answer to Tom’s grim reaper argument. Nor have we ever yet heard a theistic Darwinist do more than briefly acknowledge that it’s a problem for old-earthers (a problem of epic proportions in the view of young earthers), entailing as your view does a belief that bloodshed, violence and untimely death were in the world for millions of years before the fall. The suggestion that we shouldn’t judge animal pain by human standards, and shouldn’t assume we know what God thinks of animal pain, has not impressed young earthers. Theistic Darwinists often retort that pain is a God-given learning experience, but such a view, which necessarily has to be from the bible if God is in the equation, can only possibly be true post-fall – it’s a fallen world in the bible that ‘groans in travail’ as it waits for its final redemption. It’s an assumption that has to be made by Theistic Darwinists (for their case to work) that pain and wholesale destruction existed pre-fall, but you’d be hard pressed to demonstrate that by biblical argument, we humbly submit.

If you had not so humbly ducked out of the ‘material difference’ question (2 paragraphs above), Ard, you would have been pressed with this follow-up question: “Is there any material difference (i.e., as observed within the scientific disciplines) between the laws of nature (the normal workings of God, as you see it) pre-fall and the laws of nature/the normal workings of God post-fall?” Presumably your answer would be an emphatic No! to that. But do you Theistic Darwinists actually have a cogent explanation for how the bible does seem all over the place to assume that the fallen state of the world is radically different from its idyllic nature pre-fall (thorns and thistles, pains of childbirth, groaning in travail, etc.)? We don’t think we’ve heard one yet. And in insisting that a human being is an ordinary hominid

animal into which God has infused a spiritual nature (his image), are you not degenerating into Greek philosophical dualism (on the grounds that there is no difference at the physical, scientific level between the workings of the hominid (*homo sapiens*) and the workings of the human being (*homo divinus*))? Or if you protest that there is a difference, haven't you then negated your insistence that the normal scientific workings are the same before and after? We never hear Theistic Darwinists speak of these matters.

The following bothers us, Tom, about your whole approach, and that of your fellows – namely, that embedded in your assumptions, it seems, is that to oppose Darwinism you necessarily have to be a young-earthier. You don't seem to make any room for the category of old-earth non-Darwinist (which are a-plenty). But the discipline of geology concluded that the earth is old long before Darwin arrived on the scene. We acknowledge that you can make your two principal arguments (grim reaper and genealogies) against any old-earthier, but how sure are you that the real driving force behind your case isn't simply your implacable opposition to Darwinism with its (as you see it) inherent atheism. Would you wish so trenchantly to oppose an honest, thoughtful non-Darwinist old-earthier? This much ignored group are deeply convinced of an old earth for geological and astronomical reasons, but like you find the case for Theistic Darwinism to be grossly lacking. Admittedly, they still have a massive problem with the pre-fall bloodshed and violence.

Likewise, Ard, you assumed that your old-earth convictions and your Darwinism go together. At least, you did not differentiate clearly enough between these to allow discussion of one separately from the assumptions of the other. We thought you made your geological and age of the universe case better than you made your evolution case. Nor, re. the latter, did you distinguish between adaptation within species (which just about everyone agrees on) and the creation of new species by Darwinian evolution.

Within your carefully argued cases, both you Ard and you Tom, we heard appeals to an emotional response. You, Ard, appealed to the heightened sense of grandeur that your belief in theistic Darwinism engenders, and you suggested that evolution was the most beautiful way God could have created. This was not based upon any of your previous arguments. You, Tom, relied quite heavily on your stated belief that "it couldn't possibly be like this; it must surely have been like that". Whilst the two of us, being soppy old things ourselves, are all in favour of emotional responses, we do just think that they make poor debating points.

But hey, you really did serve us well that Wednesday evening chaps, and we're hugely grateful. This is just a response – we're not seeking to trump you. We were ever so impressed by the thoughtfulness and care with which you presented your cases, and you sent us away with ample understanding of where you're coming from in this hotly debated arena. Thank you.

Marcus Honeysett and Vernon Wilkins

(At time of writing, April 2008:

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