



From Creation to Calvary

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. *Luke 24:27*

Every so often events unfold in a way which causes one to realise that The LORD is taking the initiative over some particular matter. The debate in Liverpool Cathedral in March this year was one such event. On this occasion it was not the opposition to the arrangements which caught my attention, but the way in which things came together with very little effort on our part. It soon became apparent that through there was still much to arrange, Britain's most prominent theistic evolutionist, Rev. Dr. John Polkinghorne KBE, FRS would debate Creation Research's International Director, John Mackay, in England's largest cathedral. I was always confident that two well known speakers such as the "two Johns" would attract a significant number, but admit to being amazed when around 1100 people gathered on a Tuesday evening to hear the arguments put forward in response to the question, **"Is evolution compatible with the Christian Faith?"**

Creation Theology

John Polkinghorne was the first to speak and he sought to justify his belief that there is no conflict between evolution and Christianity. From the start his reasoning was apparent - **the final authority to interpret the Scriptures rests with scientists.** They are the ones who have been equipped to understand God's "book of nature" and it is through that book that the "book of revelation" has to be interpreted. It was very noticeable that John Polkinghorne's reasoning failed to consider any theological implications arising from his view. Later in the evening this caused the very first questioner to ask him why he had not mentioned Jesus Christ at all in his opening statement! This was a surprising omission for one who has the post of Canon Theological at that same cathedral.

The audience could not help but be struck by the contrast of John Mackay's approach to the question under consideration. Quoting from the teachings of the New Testament, he argued that the very processes required to make evolution work denied the **goodness** of God, as the essential processes are both blind and cruel. It was these very things which Jesus brought to an end as He went about doing good - hunger, disease, disabilities, dangerous environments and even death itself. He also argued that passages such as Romans 5 demand the record of Genesis 1 to 3 to be actual history, or else Christ's sacrificial death could not have made life and righteousness available to all people. If more than one man had brought sin and death into the world, then more than one man would be needed to rescue mankind from them.

Why did the "two John's" give such contrasting answers to this important question? Simply, put it arises out of where they believe ultimate authority is invested. John Polkinghorne stated that his confidence is in scientists and in one particular view of the world, "The best spectacles to wear are those based on a carefully evaluated

uniformitarianism - that the present is the key to the past." John Mackay made it clear that his confidence was in The LORD and what He has preserved for us in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments. Uniformitarianism is an approach to geology and science in general popularised by Sir Charles Lyell. John Mackay pointed out during the question time that in a letter written in 1830, Lyell had acknowledged that his objective was to "free the science from Moses." It is no wonder therefore that in 2 Peter 3 we find this mind-set being cited as the reason why people scorn the prospect of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to judge both the living and the dead. It is interesting to note that after the debate, it was John Mackay who was thanked by several Anglican ministers for his clear presentation of the Gospel.

A Hot Topic

It is to be deeply regretted that for many years Evangelical Christians have lacked a confidence in the Scriptures which would equip them both to understand and to preach the Gospel as a message which encompasses the whole of history. Since Lyell, and later Darwin, determined to undermine the Christian faith, Evangelical leaders have sought to establish some kind of compromise with the followers of these men. Many Evangelical organisations, for example, avoid addressing the validity of the early chapters of Genesis altogether. This has not only undermined our ability to preach a clear gospel, but it has also weakened our capacity to comprehend the whole counsel of The LORD. It is simply not true that it doesn't matter what we believe about creation - for what we believe about creation is what we believe about our Creator, Jesus Christ.

The Evangelical Alliance (EA) is amongst those organisations which has distanced itself from an open commitment to either a literal view of the Biblical account of creation such as we hold in Creation Research, or theistic evolution as taught by John Polkinghorne and others. In reality, neutrality on this topic can only be claimed by those who do not understand its importance - in other words, by those who at the very least suspect that Darwin was right. It is also an unsustainable position, for before long one has to drop off the fence onto whichever side one's legs have been dangling down. This seems to be what has happened to the Evangelical Alliance recently. The May edition of IDEA (their member's magazine) carried an article by Dr. Denis R Alexander, a fellow of St Edmund's College Cambridge, in which he sought to answer the question, **Can a Christian believe in evolution?** This was part of a series of articles addressing frequently asked questions about the Christian faith (which interestingly carry the same overall title as the Liverpool debate - The Big Question). Denis Alexander is the editor of Science & Christian Belief, the journal of Christians in Science, an organisation that actively promotes the rejection of a literal understanding of Genesis (and by

inference all other passages which speak of creation) in favour of blending Christianity with Darwinism. It is no surprise therefore that Alexander's article expressed total confidence that one can be a Darwinist yet not discredit the Scriptures. In fact he accused those who believe in the historical accuracy of the Biblical account of creation of abusing the Bible "by trying to treat it as a scientific textbook".

Theology without substance

One of the most striking things about the IDEA article is the way Alexander's arguments mirror those used by John Polkinghorne. The editor chose to highlight one phrase on the second page: the mid-text headline reads, "*It is up to scientists to find out how exactly God carries out His creative handiwork.*" We are not sure if John Polkinghorne would describe himself as an Evangelical, but Denis Alexander does and EA is considered to be the leading Evangelical organisation in Britain. **Is it not bizarre to find Evangelicals handing over the final authority to interpret the Scriptures to secular scientists?**

In common with Polkinghorne, Alexander also failed to discuss the implications which turning Genesis into a religious myth might have on the theology of the Gospel. Like Polkinghorne, he does not see Adam as the first man. Taking his lead from John Stott, Alexander suggests, "It is perfectly feasible that God bestowed His image on representative Homo sapiens already living in the Near East to generate... Homo divinus, those who first enjoyed personal fellowship with God but who then fell most terribly from their close walk with God." However, these "Adams" cannot be the ones through whom sin and death came into the world, as their evolving ancestors had previously experienced death for many generations before these notional "men" sinned. If these sinners were not the first Adam, then how many last Adams must there be? We must ask which is most feasible - the invention of a hybrid race or the testimony of Scripture to a single man created in the image of Jesus Christ?

Creation Research's supporters will not be surprised to learn that when we were alerted to this article, we wrote to Joel Edwards, General Director of EA, to make our concerns known. As a ministry we are not a member of EA, but we know many of our supporters are and we were sure you would wish us to express concern that an article like Denis Alexander's could be published by EA, without any clarifying comment on their part. Two points from that letter are worth highlighting here. The first is that we had only just received details from them of the answers given to one question in their 1998 survey. This survey had been quoted on the BBC's web site as revealing that a third of the EA's membership "believe Adam and Eve were created within six days of the start of the universe." Not wanting to misrepresent anyone, we sought to clarify the accuracy of this report. The actual results were slightly more encouraging. Of the 30% of churches which replied to the questionnaire, "36.9% selected: World was created in six 24 hour periods; 29.6% selected: World was created in six days but each corresponded to a geological period; 27.5% selected: the Biblical account is intended to be symbolic (6.0% gave no reply)". Whilst we would hope that most churches believed Genesis to be literal, we are at least

encouraged that amongst British Evangelical Churches, the largest group do so. It has also to be noted that the smallest group are those who agree with Denis Alexander and John Polkinghorne, that the Biblical account of creation (which incidentally runs from Genesis through to Revelation) is "intended to be symbolic".

Deep Roots

Given such information, it has to be asked why Rich Cline, IDEA's editor, thought it acceptable to promote a minority view without expressing any reservation about its implications. Clearly, others in EA are regretting his decision. In response to our letter we have received one short email which stated that our comments had been noted and "You will be interested to know that a follow-up article putting a creationist position is scheduled to appear in the next edition of idea magazine." We know who has been asked to write this article, and are pleased to say that he does recognise that the theological implications are central to this debate. However we would also point out that he was only asked to write his article after the May edition of IDEA was sent out - this suggests something of a rearguard action and it will be interesting to see if the next edition carries any meaningful editorial comment on why there has been a change of plan. (The next "Big Question" article was advertised as "Isn't the Bible sexist?")

So how could Denis Alexander's article be published and then so quickly regretted? (If that is what is to be read into the very brief response we have received from EA.) One possible reason is that Cline, in common with many church leaders today, misread the reality of the situation. Of those in prominent leadership positions in the Evangelical Church, it appears the majority would agree with Polkinghorne and Alexander. **This seems to have brought about a false sense of security in what might be called the "Evangelical establishment"**. They wrongly assumed that because there is widespread acceptance of theistic evolution amongst their peers, this is reflected in the wider Evangelical community. The reality is that it is not and that they seem to be as out of touch with the ordinary believer as the European political elite has been with the people of France and Holland. However this gap is a concern, because the Bible repeatedly witnesses that in time the people do follow their leaders' example - no wonder the Scriptures also warn, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgement."

This problem is not a new one though and **we are now reaping the fruit of the sowing of unbelief amongst Evangelicals for over 150 years!** Rev Dr David Hilborn, Head of Theology at the EA [see footnote], participated in a debate at the Cambridge Union earlier this year. He opposed the proposition 'This House Believes Religion is No Longer Needed.' and the full text of his address is on the EA's web site. In this he provides an insight into the foundations of the EA. "Despite the caricatures presented by the Proposition, most Christians do not believe that the universe was made in six days six millennia ago. One of the key shapers of the Evangelical Alliance in the mid-Nineteenth century, the Cambridge Professor T.R. Birks, integrated Christian concepts of creation with Darwinian evolution and natural selection soon after the publication of

the Origin of Species in 1859.” The LORD asked Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.” Later David asked, “If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?” Any Christian ministry which has been built on flawed foundations will, when the time of need arises, find itself unable to stand for the truth in those areas where weakness has been inbuilt, unless its present day leaders are prepared to turn from the unbelief of their predecessors.

Some will no doubt protest that we are not addressing essentials here, just the side issue of creation. However, as we have sought to demonstrate above, what we believe about creation is what we believe about our Creator and what we believe about Him shapes our beliefs about His Gospel. Jesus made this link when He told the Jewish leaders, **“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”**

Lost Message or Lost Faith?

Today the Evangelical church in Britain is having to address a clear example of how the rejection of Moses’ writings is undermining the Gospel. During John Mackay’s recent visit, several people expressed concern to him about the debate over the atonement which has arisen amongst Evangelicals in the last year. They were disturbed by Steve Chalke’s appeal in his book “The Lost Message of Christ” (co-authored with Alan Mann) which was stated even more clearly at an EA sponsored debate in October, for Evangelicals “to abandon the preaching of Penal Substitutionary Sacrifice altogether.” (Dave Allen - Joy Magazine March 2005).

In some ways Chalke is reacting against what he perceives to be a harsh version of the gospel and in that light Chalke’s concerns can be appreciated. However, closer examination of some of the many articles which have been written on both sides of the current argument reveal more fundamental concerns about his and others’ Biblical understanding. Standing back from the headline issue for the moment, we see that Chalke is part of the “Evangelical establishment” which does not accept the Biblical testimony to a six day creation. In July 2004 he told EducationGuardian.co.uk, “My personal belief is that... those who wish to read into Genesis chapter one that God made the world in six days... are not being honest and scholarly. It won't be taught in the school because I think it's rubbish. It's a bizarre thing to claim the Bible suggests that.” **Could it be that having relegated Genesis from history to myth, Chalke is also demonstrating his willingness to treat the central message of the cross in the same way?**

In their book Chalke and Mann’s initial caricature of substitutionary sacrifice stated, “the cross isn’t a form of cosmic child abuse - a vengeful Father punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed” (p.182). In other articles Chalke has described “penal substitution” as a relatively new teaching influenced by the legalistic mind of Calvin and more recently developed by Charles Hodge in the nineteenth century, and states that this teaching “doesn’t cohere well with either biblical or Early Church thought”. Many of his objections are based on his claim

that Hodge’s teaching has become predominant and portrays “a righteous God [who] is angry with sinners and demands justice. His wrath can only be appeased through bringing about the violent death of his Son.” This he sees as being in conflict with his conviction that “the most profound theological truth expressed in the whole canon of scripture is that ‘God is love.’ (1 John 4:8).” Is Chalke right? If he is, has he found the right remedy? Certainly, any version of the Gospel which portrays the Father as solely an angry deity is deficient. However, to define The LORD as only being love, especially to a society which has become focussed on self-love to the almost total exclusion of sacrificial love, is just as great a mistake. Today it seems there are many in the Church calling for a seeker-friendly gospel, one which will attract, not offend and in this respect “The Lost Message of Christ” is not a solitary appeal, nor are its authors out of step with many of their peers.

First Blood!

Chalke has not sought to hide his disregard of the historical value of Genesis. Could his “scholarly” opinions of this book be causing him to overlook its theological worth, in common with Polkinghorne, Alexander and many others? Greg Haslam provided a robust rebuttal of Chalke’s views in Christianity Magazine (Nov. 04) which included the very welcome comment, “There’s a blood-stained path running through the whole Bible.” However Haslam cited the first “clue” to that path as coming in Ex. 12 with the Passover lamb. **It seems that Chalke is not alone amongst today’s Evangelicals in overlooking the foundation of the doctrine of atonement found in the book of Genesis!**

In chapter 3 Adam and Eve witness their Creator make the first ever substitutionary penal sacrifice – a guiltless animal had its blood shed to provide a covering for them by the grace of God. Adam did not pay the immediate penalty for his sin in full - the animal did! Was this an act of appeasement or mercy? Who provided the sacrifice and for whose benefit? Was this an historical event or a myth? This was an act which demonstrated how the first prophecy about Christ - “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” - would be fulfilled. There can be no doubt that the foundations of our understanding of the Eternal Gospel are laid in the opening chapters of Genesis. If these foundations are undermined by our deference to secular scientists, then so is the whole ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Biblical foundations of the sacrificial substitution of the innocent for the guilty does not disappear from the text after Adam and Eve leave Eden, only to re-emerge during the preparations for the Passover. From the Fall onwards, blood was an essential part of all acceptable sacrifices for sin. Cain failed to learn from the inadequacy of his parents’ attempt to provide their own bloodless covering for sin. Why was his offering of plants not acceptable to The LORD? After the Flood (Gen. 9) The LORD explained to Noah that the life of humans and animals is in their blood. Effective, and therefore acceptable, sacrifices are those where sinless life is poured out for the guilty.

Further insight into the foundation of this important New Testament doctrine is found in Gen. 22, where Abraham's faith in The LORD is rewarded when God provides for Himself a substitutionary sacrifice. Modern Christian thought commonly finds expression in a man-centred Gospel, "Christ died for me". The events on Mt. Moriah, summarised by the words of Abraham in answer to Isaac, emphasise that the prime beneficiary of Calvary is the Father. This is no selfish act though, for its purpose is that Christ might be the firstborn among many brethren, this by bringing many sons to glory! It is to be deeply regretted that today the early chapters of Genesis are considered as myth by the majority of Evangelical leaders and that these historic events commonly do not feature when they seek to understand life on earth from Heaven's perspective.

Bathwater and Baby?

If Steve Chalke is right in his claim that Hodge's teaching dominates Evangelical understanding of penal substitution, he is right to seek to remedy an over-emphasis. However in taking the course he has, and it seems he has done nothing more than put into common language what "Evangelical theologians" have been musing about for some years, Chalke has lacked the discernment to hold on to the baby whilst disposing of the bathwater. We suggest that if he and other prominent Evangelicals believed Genesis to be real history, they would have a far better foundation for all aspects of their thinking than is provided by those who invent ideas of divinely anointed monkeys as substitutes for the one man through whom The LORD has made every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth. There is more we could consider about the beliefs which Chalke and others hold about the overall direction of history, and how this affects the gospel they seek to preach. However space will not permit this here, but it is very relevant to understanding why he is so passionate about this matter.

Why are many Evangelical leaders so ignorant of the implications of the early chapters of Genesis for life in today's modern world? Certainly it is not what they have been taught in most of our theological colleges. Could it be because many in the church have sought approval from those who seek to discredit the Bible - those who desire to be ignorant of the authority of their Creator? From New Testament times, Church history shows that Christians have always been under pressure to accommodate the world's thinking. The last century and a half since Darwin is no exception, and it is a matter of deep regret that we find institutional unbelief so deeply embedded amongst Evangelicals.

Adapt the Gospel or change the people?

We are thankful that the ministry we are involved in at Creation Research gives us the opportunity to preach the Gospel continually and without compromise. It is our desire to encourage Christians everywhere that Biblical truth does not need to be cut back to make it acceptable to

people today. **Authority to interpret the Scriptures rests with the Holy Spirit, not secular scientists.** Whilst we must test all things and be equipped to give an answer for the hope within us, we have no need to be afraid of those who would ridicule us for our confidence that our God does not lie. Peter tells us why - "scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.'" It is because they have accepted a uniformitarian view of the world as promoted by Charles Lyell, and which was a catalyst for Darwin's thinking on the origin of species.

The cry which needs to be heard in and outside the Church today is one calling for a return to the Everlasting Gospel which warns all to fear and worship the God who made heaven and earth. If we heed this call there will be no need for us to avoid preaching truths such as the innocent being sacrificed for the guilty, for this is at the very heart of the Good News of salvation. We don't know if Steve Chalke or the EA will learn from recent and ongoing events, but we do pray that many in the Church will. Taking Biblical creation seriously is about far more than defending the early chapters of Genesis as fact. **These chapters are cited in the rest of Scripture as laying the foundations for many areas of life.** They are the basis for our understanding of marriage and the family; they provided guidance for our life together as the church; they furnish us with a understanding of society in all its forms and especially why it is so permeated with selfishness. John Polkinghorne, Denis Alexander, Steve Chalke and others may be happy to modernise the gospel so as to lessen its offence, but in so doing they are short-changing those they seek to influence.

Will Evangelicals in Britain (and around the world) wake up to what is happening, or will we continue to say it does not matter if we set aside what Moses wrote? Unless ordinary Christians and their local pastors wake up to what is happening, it won't be long before Evangelicals lose their place as the successors of men such as Wesley, Whitfield, Bunyan, Finney and Wigglesworth. More importantly, we should seek to follow the example of John, James, Peter, Paul, and the other New Testament writers - **men who preached Jesus Christ, the One through whom all things were created.**

Randall Hardy - June 2005

[Footnote: In January 2006, David Hilborn, contacted us saying he had spotted an error in the written text of his address to the Cambridge Union, quoted above. He said, "The original was a verbal presentation from notes so I'm not sure quite how this mistake occurred in the script that was typed up from those notes, but... T.R. Birks was actually a vigorous **opponent** of evolutionism not a supporter of it." He continued, "The basic point that EA at that time included several prominent supporters/assimilators of evolutionism holds good, however:" Given that it is only the citing of Birks which is amiss and not the strength of his argument, we consider this note is sufficient to correct any misleading information above arising from this mistake.]

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