

Rev. Steven C. Clunn
First United Methodist Church
Schenectady, New York

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Has Eighty Year's Taught Us Anything (Scopes 2)?

Our lives are a never ending journey of striving to understand God, life itself, and our place in it. At the heart of the debates are these questions: How do we (people of faith) celebrate God as creator and do good scientific inquiry at the same time? Can it be done? Should it be done?

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals." For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. (Psalm 90:1-6)

Back on March 13th, 1925, the Tennessee State legislature passed the Butler Act, which forbade the teaching, in any state-funded educational establishment in Tennessee, of "any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals." This is often interpreted as meaning that the law forbade the teaching of any aspect of the theory of evolution.

The ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) had offered to defend anyone accused of teaching the theory of evolution in defiance of the Butler Act. George Rappelyea, who managed a number of local mines, convinced a group of businessmen in Dayton, Tennessee, then a town of 1,800, that the controversy of such a trial would put Dayton on the map. With their agreement he called in his friend, 24-year-old John T. Scopes, who was the Rhea County High School's football coach and who had substituted for the principal in a science class. Rappelyea pointed out that while the Butler Act prohibited the teaching of the theory of evolution, the state required teachers to use a textbook - Hunter's Civic Biology - which explicitly described and endorsed the theory of evolution, and that teachers were therefore effectively required to break the law. Scopes couldn't actually remember having covered the section on evolution in Hunter's textbok, but he told the group "If you can prove that I've taught evolution and that I can qualify as a defendant, then I'll be willing to stand trial." It lead, of course, to the famous case has often been called the "Scopes Monkey Trial".

Rappelyea got his wish; it became the first ever American trial to be broadcast live on national radio, and was the subject of tens of thousands of column inches in newspapers all around the world. The end result was that John T. Scopes was found guilty of violating the Butler Act and was fined \$100. In a later appeal to the Tennessee Supreme Court, Scopes' conviction was set aside on a technicality. It wasn't until 1968 that the US Supreme Court ruled in another case, Epperson vs. Arkansas (393 U.S. 97) that such bans were found to contravene the Establishment Clause (unconstitutionally establishing a state religion) because their primary purpose is religious. (Tennessee had previously repealed the Butler Act the prior year.)

Today, eighty years later, the issues surrounding creationism vs. evolution are still alive and well. However, the creationist model is being reframed, as "Intelligent Design," so as to appear less obviously religious (and more specifically, Christian). The focus case is Kitzmiller et al v. Dover Area School District; which some are calling "Scopes 2".

"The proponents of intelligent design, a school of thought that some have argued should be taught alongside evolution in the nation's schools, say that the complexity and diversity of life go beyond what evolution can explain. Biological marvels like the optical precision of an eye, the little spinning motors that propel bacteria and the cascade of proteins that cause blood to clot, they say, point to the hand of a higher being at work in the world. In one often-cited argument, Michael J. Behe, a professor of biochemistry at Lehigh University and a leading design theorist, compares complex biological phenomena like blood clotting to a mousetrap: Take away any one piece - the spring, the baseboard, the metal piece that snags the mouse - and the mousetrap stops being able to catch mice (*In Explaining Life's Complexity, Darwinists and Doubters Clash*, By Kenneth Chang, Published: August 22, 2005, *New York Times*)."

In Dover (PA) on Oct. 18, 2004, the Dover school board voted 6 to 3 to require ninth-grade biology students to listen to a brief statement saying that there was a controversy over evolution, that intelligent design is a competing theory and that if they wanted to learn more the school library had the textbook "Of Pandas and People: the Central Question of Biological Origins." The book is published by an intelligent design advocacy group, the Foundation for Thought and Ethics, based in Texas.

In 10th grade (1977), I had a wonderful biology teacher, Mrs. Rogers, who while teaching us Darwin's theory of evolution, tried to talk about how some people thought this theory was in conflict with the teachings of the Bible. She added in that in her opinion, they weren't in conflict at all. She mentioned that early cultures often misunderstood nature and they had an obvious lack of knowledge (Dinosaurs). Then she cited the 90th Psalm and said that "if it were a time thing, whose to say that our understanding of time and God's aren't completely different?" She finished this two minute pre-introduction to teaching evolution by saying something along these lines; "I see evolution as a process that God may very well have initiated, but we need to talk about it from the perspective of science, what is observable and can be tested out by utilizing the 'scientific method.' The rest is left up to you, your beliefs and your imaginations." I appreciated her honesty and candor. It was a formative moment for a youth that was a rather poor science student, but who valued the importance of the free exchange of ideas. However, while I may have found it helpful and heartfelt, I certainly wouldn't want any teacher to be required to offer such an opinion. I even wonder how many other students really listened to her brief testimony. Would it then be required to be on a test or quiz to ensure that they had listened? I hope not!

The questions that we need to ask are this; is "Intelligent Design" a true scientific theory that challenges the scientific evidence that we have acquired around the theory of "Evolution?" Or, is this an attempt by religious extremists to get the concept of a divine creator (the basis of Biblical creationism) back into the curriculum at schools? Does the sheer complexity and intricacy of "higher forms of life" necessarily prove the existence of an intelligent force (God) behind it all? Is the real goal of those who are proponents of "Intelligent Design" to call into question the "Theory of Evolution" to the point that a literal view of the Bible can then be seen as a more plausible concept to promote among believers? And, will all of this ultimately lead to anti-scientific, anti-intellectual societal mood that will leave those who can hold science and faith in creative tension being labeled "unfaithful and in need of saving" by the institutions of religion?

I'm looking forward to our upcoming adult forum on "Intelligent Design/Evolution" and the ongoing discussions that may last another eighty years. I also understand that we may be having

a Family Sunday event marking the 50th anniversary of the movie, *Inherit the Wind*.” As for me, I tend to agree with Mrs. Rogers, not because she got to me first, but because in a world of wonder and observation, I too can see the need for both verifiable science and the presence of God. I like to talk about science being our attempt to understand God’s creation. I see evolution as one of those processes, not as something that contradicts my beliefs. What are your beliefs? Isn’t what this is really all about... the free flow of ideas and freedom of beliefs?
With Prayers for and In the Peace of Christ!

For more information, the *New York Times* did a series of articles on the current controversies and can be accessed online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/pages/science/sciencespecial2/index.html>