

“Truth, Reality, Facts”

By Harry T. Cook

Majority of Americans Reject Theory of Evolution

NEW YORK Oct. 23 (AP) - Most Americans do not accept the theory of evolution. Instead, 51 percent of Americans say God created humans in their present form, and another three in 10 say that while humans evolved, God guided the process. Just 15 percent say humans evolved, and that a god was not involved.

Oh, well then. Charles Darwin and about a million scientists since Darwin must be mistaken.

Who would want to be marked down as saying that he or she did not want to know the truth, experience reality or to be given the facts? To be sure, people in certain circumstances, while they may wish to have the facts, would just as soon they be kept from others. As to truth, it is the pearl of great price for the seeker. As for reality, someone has said it “is that which, when you refuse to accept it, refuses to go away.”

I quote here my friend and colleague, Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine:

The truth is problematic. Some people do not like the truth. It forces them to face unpleasant facts. It destabilizes their fixed beliefs. It often compels them to change their minds. Even when the truth confirms what they already believe, the process of testing gives them anxiety . . . Only an open mind can pursue the truth with success. People with privileged premises, with opinions they are unwilling to change, are not interested in the truth . . . An open mind listens to new ideas even when they are outrageous. It cultivates new ways of thinking even when they are threatening . . . It is willing to alter its convictions even when the change is painful. An open mind is a servant only to evidence./I

Those words were prefatory to a recent three-day colloquium featuring two of the world’s most acclaimed contemporary biblical archaeologists: Israel Finkelstein and Amihai Mazar. At issue was the real – as opposed to the imagined – history of the Jews.

Question: Did the much-celebrated Exodus as chronicled by the biblical book of the same name and that is the entire rationale for the tradition celebration of Pesach – or Passover – actually occur? Answer: No archaeological evidence supports such a thing, and, in fact, puts up a firm argument against it.

Question: Was the Land of Canaan (today’s Palestine) entered and occupied in triumphant conquest by Israelites under the sponsorship of Yahweh as described in the Book of Joshua and so often used geo-politically to support the claims of the modern State of Israel? Answer: No archaeological evidence supports that assertion, and, in fact, all evidence points to other origins of the people called Israel. As for Yahweh, who could know?

Question: Was the Jerusalem of David and his celebrated reign as real as the Bible says, or was it largely imagined? Answer: Imagined. Little evidence supports the idea of a glorious Davidic kingdom, and lots of evidence undercuts it.

For traditional Jews, all this is disturbing news because it is incontrovertible evidence that what the Bible says turns out not to be true – at least in a literal sense. Without going into detail here, similar problems arise for traditional Christians and some of their beliefs, *viz.*, in the virgin birth and resurrection of Jesus – though it’s pretty hard to see how the validity of either could be settled by archaeology. Obstetrics and mortuary science, perhaps, but not archaeology. See my book *Christianity Beyond Creeds./2*

The Exodus, the resurrection and now evolution. – As Rabbi Wine wrote: *An open mind is a servant only to evidence.*

The news item that appears atop this essay was surprising to me. I know that some significant number of people refuse to accept the evidence modern science has turned up where evolution is concerned. I just didn’t know how many. That’s a lot of closed minds.

The evidence – archaeological, geological and biological – to support the refinements over a century and a half in the Theory of Natural Selection is overwhelming. No serious scientist in any relevant field of endeavor doubts it. Tries to falsify it? Absolutely. Attempts to disprove Darwin’s conclusions have been under way ever since 1859 when *The Origin of Species* was published. That’s how it works. That’s how a set of hypotheses is elevated to the rarified level of “theory.” Therewith: reality.

A not irrelevant footnote: Not long ago my pastoral counsel was sought by a family, one of whose loved ones had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. The family, as it turned out, wanted my help in keeping that truth from the person in question. “It’ll scare him,” they said. They meant that it scared them. “We shouldn’t just tell him the truth, should we?” I insisted and eventually prevailed.

The person, now deceased, was actually comforted in learning the truth about himself. It gave him what he called “room to maneuver,” to say what needed to be said to those to who needed to hear it. He told me in one of our last conversations that, and I quote, “There is no substitute for reality.” No, indeed.

Reality is that which when you refuse to believe it refuses to go away.

/1 Sherwin T. Wine, “Shabbat Celebration: Digging for the Truth: Archaeology and the Bible,” Friday, October 21, 2005, pp. 9, 11

2/ Harry T. Cook, Center for Rational Christianity, ISBN 0-9660728-0-4. pp. 19-21, 24-25

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