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Dear Friends,

I realize that what I am about to write can and may well be misunderstood. That is a risk I am prepared to take because I believe a fraud is being perpetrated. I also know that that may well be somewhat immoderate language. I use it because I believe the issue is critical.

I have followed the debate about religion and science for many years. Some 5 years ago I was instrumental in setting up a 26-week study course entitled, "Science and Religion". An ordained scientist moderated it. More recently I have been a signatory to an open letter, instigated by Michael Zimmerman of the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh. The letter is approaching the target of 10,000 signatures from clergy affirming that science and religion can and do exist comfortably alongside each other.

Ever since Darwin's "origin of Species" was published 'popular' science and 'popular' theology have used it to further their own prejudices. Of course, they would not use the term, 'prejudice'.

As I understand both science and religion, they seek to try to interpret the 'data' that they have before them. They do it differently, and not as opponents. They are not in conflict.

In the case of science, again as I understand it, the data is gleaned from that which can be observed, from the cosmos to the soil. On the basis of that observable data, a theory is advanced that seeks to explain the data. It does not seek to impart meaning to the data. So when Darwin, or Einstein, for example, advanced their explanations of the data before them, they were advancing theories based on that data. Einstein was a very good example of how the process works. In one particular instance, Einstein advanced a theory based on

his observations. Later in his life he revised the theory. Subsequent science suggests that he might well have been right in the first place. That is the nature of scientific endeavor. First collect the data, then observe it with great care, and then put together the best explanation you have for the material. Then test it and retest it. Science, therefore, is theory under continual examination. No scientist I have ever met would object to having his theory tested and retested, for the

scientist knows that that is how science is advanced, rather than fossilized. Equally, as new data comes to light, good science will test that against what is already known. Scientific endeavor is not a closed system and does not seek to be so. Science knows there are gaps and continues to gather data.

The theory of evolution is agreed by the vast majority of scientists worldwide to be the best explanation of the data we have before us, gleaned from observable data, from the soil to the cosmos. As theory it is constantly to be tested against new data.

The fraud that I believe is being perpetrated is in seeking to set science and religion as opposing explanations of the same phenomena. The decision of the school board in Kansas is a good example of that attempt. The decision of the school board in Dover, PA seeks to avoid it. To advance a particular interpretation of Christian scripture as if it were scientific theory is clearly fraudulent. Worse still, from my point of view, it does violence to the nature of the scripture and the science.

I hold scripture in the highest regard as the search of people through many centuries to enter into that dimension of life we call sacred, or holy. It is a sanctity that I understand is shared by all life, even by those with whom I disagree most strongly and whose world view conflicts with mine! Scripture is a way of seeing the world and a way of seeking to give it meaning. It is also a developing tradition. In the Hebrew Scriptures the idea of God, the holy, the sacred, is not static. The God of Judaism did not come shrink wrapped. God was one among many throughout the earlier books of the bible and in the Psalms. The idea of one God was developmental.

That way of seeing and interpreting the world in no way conflicts with science. The goal of science is not to give something meaning, but rather to seek to interpret the phenomena that it observes. The argument for 'intelligent design', that because the cosmos is so complex it must have an intelligence behind it, is an opinion, or even an article of faith. It cannot be argued as scientific theory. It may be your way of seeing the world and I would defend someone's right to see it so. I would challenge their right to force me to see it the same way. The problem with the idea of 'intelligent design' is that it is neither. In order to distance itself from its predecessor, formerly known as 'creationism', it has removed the six-day creation, 4-6,000 year old Earth, and the God of the bible and inserted talk of questions and the inexplicable! I recently saw 'intelligent design' described as the same 'creationist' vehicle, but without engine, or transmission this time round. As such it is empty. It is not a threat but is a fraud.

Science and theology bring different and crucial insight into my understanding of my self and my world. The best science and the best theology are the result of rigorous examination. I am deeply grateful for both. Complexity, variety, multiplicity, intricacy and even impenetrability speak powerfully to me both of the wonder of the created order and of God, the Holy and the Sacred. The simple, one-dimensional God that I can fully explain is no God at all. The God that cannot stand up to rigorous examination is no God. The God that needs to be taught in schools, emblazoned in stone in a courthouse like some idol, through legislation, is no God at all. That which is Holy and Sacred does not legislate, or bomb, or terrorize, or threaten, or exclude its way into our hearts and thus into our communities. God, the Sacred, the Holy is the Life within all life, not just some mythical creator that set it all in motion and then, at best became a silent partner, at worst, retired. I find God, the Sacred, the Holy, 'the More' deep within the mystery at the heart of creation, cosmic and microcosmic; deep within my heart and deep within your heart. I need science and theology to help me plumb those deep places of living into all that is, seen and unseen.

David