

Feature Article: JAR1323

## CREATION: FULL OF BAD DESIGN AND POINTLESS WASTE?

Reviews of *Thank God for Evolution* and *Saving Darwin*

by Sean McDowell

This article first appeared in the *Christian Research Journal*, volume 32, number 3 (2009). For further information or to subscribe to the *Christian Research Journal* go to: <http://www.equip.org>

---

The explosion of intelligent design (ID) is undoubtedly one factor that has united the efforts of the New Atheists such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. There is another, lesser-known group that has also been provoked by the progress of ID: theistic evolutionists. Criticisms of ID and support for Darwinian evolution are now coming in full force from inside and outside the church. *Saving Darwin* by Karl Giberson and *Thank God for Evolution* by Michael Dowd are representative samples of this effort.<sup>1</sup>

*Saving Darwin* begins with Giberson's personal journey from Homo fundamentalis (i.e., Christian fundamentalist) to an evolution-believing Christian who currently teaches physics at Eastern Nazarene College. Giberson's conversion began with some troubling questions regarding his creationist worldview: How could vegetation survive the third day before creation of the sun on the fourth? Why would God create species only to have them go extinct long before Adam even had time to name them? He concludes that a literal interpretation of Genesis is both untenable and ridiculous.

New Atheist philosopher Daniel Dennett famously described evolution as a "universal acid" that dissolves the very foundation of religion. "Darwin's idea," writes Dennett, "eats through just about every traditional concept, and leaves in its wake a revolutionized worldview."<sup>2</sup> Along with Dennett, Giberson believes that evolution melts away traditional Christian ideas such as the inerrancy of Scripture, the historicity of Adam and Eve, the reality of the Garden of Eden, the origins of sin, Christ as the "second Adam," and the uniqueness of human beings as made in the image of God. Nevertheless, Giberson is convinced that embracing evolution does nothing to dissolve the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and other central tenets of Christianity.

While many consider the Incarnation senseless, ridiculous, and intellectually challenging, Giberson says that Christianity is based on "faith, not the conclusion of a logical argument" (emphasis in original).<sup>3</sup> Giberson favorably cites Tertullian who said he believed in the divinity of Jesus partly because of its absurdity. This puts Giberson in an unusual predicament: if Creationism should be abandoned because it is "ridiculous," then why not abandon the claims of Christ for the very same reason? Why the double standard? If he takes the Incarnation on faith (even though he considers it logically absurd), then why not take Creation on faith? One can't have it both ways. If we accept the "acid" of Darwinian evolution, then why stop at the biblical account of Creation? Why not dissolve the Resurrection as well?

"Creation," claims Giberson, "is a secondary doctrine for Christians" (emphasis in original).<sup>4</sup> While he concedes that *Creator* may certainly be one of God's attributes, it "takes a backseat to God's other attributes such as love, wisdom, and grace."<sup>5</sup> This is hard to reconcile with the biblical and historical position of the church, however. In *Against Heresies* (c. 180) Irenaeus said, "It is proper, then, that I should

begin with the first and most important head, that is, God the Creator, who made the heaven and earth, and all things that are therein.”<sup>6</sup> The Nicene Creed begins with God as the Creator, too: “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.” It is no coincidence that the first attribute we learn about God in the Bible is that He is the Creator: “In the beginning God *created*” ([Gen. 1:1](#), emphasis added). We learn that God is the Creator before we learn that He is love, just, gracious, Trinitarian, and even holy.

As William Dembski and I write in *Understanding Intelligent Design*, every worldview has three critical components:

**ORIGIN:** How did it all begin? Where did we come from?

**PREDICAMENT:** What went wrong? What is the source of evil and suffering?

**RESOLUTION:** What can be done about it? How can the world be set aright?<sup>7</sup>

Creation by a loving God is the biblical *origin* account. In the Fall, however, humans rebelled against God and brought evil into the world—not just personal evil, but natural evil that has corrupted all of God’s creation. That is our *predicament*. Redemption is found in Jesus Christ. In Jesus, God becomes human, takes the sin of the world on Himself at the Cross, and in His Resurrection restores the life of the world. One day the world will recover its original truth, goodness, and beauty; and we will be united with God, able to see Him face to face. That is the *resolution* to our predicament. Here is the problem with relegating creation to a secondary doctrine: the resolution to the Christian story makes sense only if we get the origin account (Creation) and predicament (sin) right. As John West, author of *Darwin Day in America*, observed in a public debate with Karl Giberson, “Without God as creator the rest of the Christian story makes no sense.”<sup>8</sup>

Giberson has both religious and scientific objections to ID. Religiously, he believes nature is full of bad design, instinctual cruelty, and pointless waste. Evolution (allegedly) gets God off the hook because bad design is brought about indirectly. This ignores the underlying problem, however, which is that a Creator God has set up the conditions under which bad design emerges. God acts directly in the case of ID and indirectly according to theistic evolution; yet in both cases God is responsible. What difference does it make whether a hunter catches his prey with his own hands (by direct means) or employs a trap (indirect means) to accomplish the same thing? The hunter is responsible in both cases. The same is true for a Creator God who raised Jesus from the dead (directly) or employed wind to split the Red Sea (indirectly). Thus, there is no theological advantage to embracing evolution.

As for his scientific objections, Giberson gives five “indisputable” evidences for evolution: (1) the fossil record; (2) biogeography; (3) comparative anatomy; (4) developmental similarities; and (5) comparative biochemistry/physiology. Two key problems confront this evidence. First, even if his arguments are sound, they offer no evidence that the blind, material mechanism of natural selection can account for all the diversity and complexity we find in the natural world. His arguments fall short of substantiating Darwin’s grand claims. Second, all the evidence fits equally well from the perspective of design. For instance, Giberson asks, “Why would the bones in our ears resemble those in the jaws of reptiles? Evolution answers this question.”<sup>9</sup> While technically true, this evidence fits just as smoothly from the perspective of common design, canceling out this particular evidence.

*Thank God for Evolution* also begins with the author’s departure from fundamentalism. Rather than maintaining traditional beliefs about Jesus (like Giberson), Dowd has become an “exuberantly born-again evolutionary evangelist.”<sup>10</sup> Unlike Giberson, Dowd believes the acid of evolution eats away every thing in its path. He spends his life writing and speaking on how the “Great Story” of evolution can bring both personal and planetary transformation. He longs for the day when all people who study for ministry will be trained in evolutionary thinking. Ultimately, Dowd considers his book an expression of faith and a call

to action for everyone worldwide to integrate and celebrate an evolutionary, ecological worldview. For Christians, this means rethinking how concepts such as original sin, salvation, resurrection, heaven, and the nature of God can fit within an evolutionary framework.

Dowd claims that one of the benefits of evolutionary thinking is that it is hard to be an evolutionary fundamentalist. Like modern proponents of tolerance—who accept all viewpoints except those that reject their cherished notion of tolerance—Dowd criticizes religious fundamentalism, but then introduces a fundamentalism of his own. He repeatedly criticizes revealed religions as antiquated, divisive, and immoral. He uses the derogatory term “flat-earth faiths”<sup>11</sup> to refer to religious traditions that are scripturally based (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). While his goal is to include people of all walks of life, it is evident that such inclusion is only for those who abandon traditional religious views and eagerly embrace evolutionary dogma.

Dowd believes that science (what he calls “day language”) provides objective knowledge of the world, whereas religion (“night language”) merely brings subjective meaning.<sup>12</sup> He clearly embraces the two-story view of reality, exposed by Francis Schaeffer, in which science occupies the upper story of public knowledge and religion occupies the lower level of private beliefs. Dowd says, “Private revelations, as subjective claims for which no evidence for or against would be universally compelling, can only be believed or not believed. Private revelations, thus, cannot be *known*” (emphasis in original).<sup>13</sup> Thus, he calls those who base their religious orientation on public knowledge “religious knowers” as opposed to “religious believers” who base their religious orientation on Scripture.<sup>14</sup>

While it is true that many religions are based on subjective experience and blind adherence to a particular Scripture (such as Mormonism), Dowd’s criticism rings hollow when applied to Christianity. Jesus did miracles in the presence of His disciples ([John 20:30–31](#)) and He also did *public* miracles that could be investigated by His enemies ([Acts 26:24–26](#)). Jesus did not merely make subjective claims about the meaning of life—He made public demonstrations so people would know that He was the Son of God. For instance, after publicly healing the paralytic, Jesus said, “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on Earth to forgive sins...I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home” ([Mark 2:10–11 NASB](#), emphasis added). Jesus did the miracle so that people would *know* that He was divine, and as a result, place their trust in Him. These miracles can be investigated historically. There are also some objective scientific claims in Scripture, such as that the universe had a beginning ([Gen. 1:1](#)). While Dowd is to be commended for his attempt to reconcile science and religion, his solution is unacceptable for those who take the possibility of religious knowledge seriously.

There is an important lesson to be learned from *Thank God for Evolution*. Dowd describes his shift from Bible-believing fundamentalist to evolutionary evangelist: “First,” says Dowd, “I came to know and trust several students and teachers before learning that they held evolutionary worldviews.”<sup>15</sup> The final step in Dowd’s conversion involved a friendship with a “Buddhist-Christian” whom Dowd considered the most Christ-like man he had ever met before learning that he held a process theology understanding of evolution. Dowd was persuaded by arguments for evolution but, more importantly, through relationships he built with people of opposing perspectives. While good arguments must always be in the arsenal of every Christian, we must never underestimate the power of relationships and an authentic lived-out faith. As several recent books and studies have indicated, many non-Christians have extremely bad impressions of Christians and Christianity.<sup>16</sup> Sadly, this can prevent many people from taking our arguments seriously. Like Paul, we must not only impart the truth of the gospel, but also our very own lives ([1 Thess. 2:8](#)). The origins debate will be won not only with good arguments and strategies, but by Christians who live out the truth they proclaim.

—Sean McDowell

**Sean McDowell** graduated summa cum laude from Talbot Theological Seminary with a double Master's degree in Philosophy and Theology. He teaches Bible at Capistrano Valley Christian Schools, is a nationally recognized speaker, and has authored many articles and books, including *Understanding Intelligent Design* (with William A. Dembski; Harvest House Publishers, 2008).

## notes

1 Recent examples include Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006); Francisco J. Ayala, *Darwin's Gift to Science and Religion* (Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry Press, 2007); Kenneth R. Miller, *Only A Theory: Evolution and the Battle for America's Soul* (New York: Viking, 2008).

2 Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 63.

3 Karl Giberson, *Saving Darwin: How to Be a Christian and Believe in Evolution* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 11.

4 Giberson, *Saving Darwin*, 10.

5 Ibid, 161.

6 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 2, chap. 1.

7 William A. Dembski and Sean McDowell, *Understanding Intelligent Design* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2008).

8 "Can a Christian Be a Darwinist?" Debate between John West and Karl Giberson at Biola University, February 5, 2009.

9 Giberson, *Saving Darwin*, 200.

10 Michael Dowd, *Thank God for Evolution: How the Marriage of Science and Religion Will Transform Your Life and Our World* (New York: Viking, 2007), xxi.

11 Ibid, 26.

12 Ibid, 73.

13 Ibid, 68.

14 Ibid, 83.

15 Ibid, 2.

16 David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007); Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).