

Biologos: Harmonizing Science and Religion

By: Meghan McCarthy

In his book, *The Language of God*, Francis Collins argues that scientific and religious worldviews are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As the leading physician and a geneticist who lead the Human Genome Project, he experienced a radical change in his beliefs on the existence of God that was fueled by one-on-one experiences with his patients and his encounter with the writings of C.S. Lewis. In *The Language of God*, he outlines the story of his conversion and proposes the concept of Biologos, a philosophy that accepts science as true but also permits the belief in the existence of an all-loving, omnipotent God.

The majority of Collins' book argues that a person can accept both the ideas of science and faith in God as true. The issue of the origin of the universe, namely evolutionary theory, triggers one of the most passionate debates among people of different beliefs. Collins provides an interesting perspective on this issue as a devout Catholic convert and the director of arguably the most important scientific project in recent history. He categorizes four different general groups of thought that surround this issue: Atheism and Agnosticism (When Science Trumps Faith), Creationism (When Faith Trumps Science), Intelligent Design (When Science Needs Divine Help) and Biologos (Science and Faith in Harmony). His arguments to refute the first three categories utilize his own logical thought and the philosophies of different theologians and scientists, including C.S. Lewis, Dr. Ken Miller (author of *Finding Darwin's God*), and Richard Dawkins (author of *The God Delusion*).

His proposition is Biologos, a concept that contrasts all of the other worldviews in that it embodies the concept of "Theistic Evolution." This philosophy affirms that religion and science together can be and do exist as harmonious schools of thought. Collins argues that because so

much intellectual work focuses on Darwinian Evolution, Creationism and Intelligent Design, most dedicated scientists believe that science and religion are always contradictory. However, Collins asserts that the novel idea of Theistic Evolution, although not well known, resolves the clash between the worldviews.

The premises of the concept of Theistic Evolution are that the Big Bang formed a planet approximately 14 billion years ago that is amazingly compatible with life through the work of a Creator. It varies from the “theory” of Intelligent Design in that it states that God did not play a role in the evolutionary processes that created the complex diversity of life (i.e. Natural Selection). However, it emphasizes that humans have a unique spiritual quality that inspires a common Moral Law and a persistent longing for God among all cultures of the world. This philosophy offers an intellectually satisfying explanation of uniting the theories of modern science and religion.

Collins makes many important references to the writings of C.S. Lewis in his arguments about the belief in a God in light of modern science. Although Lewis’ ideas on evolution somewhat varies in his career, he never argues that the combination of Darwin’s ideas on evolution and spirituality is impossible. In both his fiction and his Christian apologetic works, he alludes to and explains evolution in different ways.

In *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis states that the idea “that man is physically descended from animals, I have no objection...For centuries God perfected the animal form which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the image of Himself.” (*The Problem of Pain*, 77) However, he emphasizes the necessary distinctions between the human “animal” that descended from the ape from the human being that holds an inherent Moral Law and a soul that naturally seeks God. He describes this as a spiritual being with “a new kind of consciousness which could say “I” and

“me,” ...which knew God...[and] could make judgments of truth, beauty, and goodness...” (*The Problem of Pain*, 72-77)

Lewis also uses the concept of evolution as a metaphor to explain the Fall of Man in *The Problem of Pain*. He writes that although science cannot explain sin, there was an “emergence of a new kind of man—a new species, never made by God, [that] had sinned itself into existence.” (*The Problem of Pain*, 83) This quote draws an interesting parallel between the evolutionary concept of the passing down of hereditary traits and the persistence of original sin in humanity. It seems as though Lewis would say that just as the geographical separation of the finches on the Galapagos Islands created variations in beak sizes and other traits in the species, the Fall of Man has created a completely new lineage of human beings that is infected with sin. Although both the finches and the humans are similar to their original descendant, they embody stark and notable differences. This is a fascinating way to consider a symbolic connection between scientific and religious ideas.

However, C.S. Lewis does warn all believers against taking on the interpretation of “scientism,” a view that assumes that scientific observations of the world can explain everything in the universe. Although he would support the idea of Theistic Evolution, Lewis strongly argues against a belief that science has the ability to provide all of the answers. He encourages faithful people to remember the importance of God in the creation of the universe and in their everyday lives. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis describes science as a procedural and technical method of explaining the way things happen but stresses that science falls short of explaining the most important questions of life, the existential questions that begin with “why” and “how.” He writes, “But why anything comes to be there at all, and whether there is anything behind the things science observes--something of a different kind--this is not a scientific question.” (*Mere*

Christianity) Although Collins does not emphasize this as much in *The Language of God* as Lewis does, his concept of Biologos aligns with the distinction between scientism and theism with an acceptance of the truth of science.

Works Cited

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