

The Origin of the Species

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Dear friends in Christ: Let me say at the outset that I firmly believe in evolution. There: it's out in the open. There's no point in me trying to deny it or deceive anyone about it. What? Does it surprise you? Do you think that by saying that I believe in evolution that I am somehow denying the creation account we heard again as this morning's Old Testament reading? By no means; it's precisely because I believe the Bible's account of creation that I believe in evolution because that is very clearly what it teaches.

But I'd better explain. First, when I say I believe in evolution I don't mean that popular pseudo-scientific theory proposed by Charles Darwin that says life began spontaneously in the warm ooze on the edges of some primordial ocean when the correct combination of chemicals just happened to come together in precisely the right way, and that higher life forms then slowly evolved from simpler ones over vast ages of time by the blind processes of random mutation and natural selection – that is, the survival of the fittest. Nor do I mean the theologically dishonest adaptation of that theory called “theistic evolution”, which says pretty much the same thing, except that it throws “God” into the mix and suggests that he prodded and poked the process along here and there as required over hundreds of millions of years to make it come out the way it did. Neither of those is even close to what mean when I say I believe in evolution.

No, what I mean instead is that the Lord God who created the heavens and earth and everything in them didn't start with a finished product. He could have, you know. He could have brought everything into existence just the way it is right now, to include everything we think of as history and all the memories you have of your own life—he could have done that in an instant less than a second ago, and you would never know the difference. He could have; but he didn't. How do we know for sure – especially since I just said we'd never know the difference? Easy: he said so. We have his Word on it that tells us when he did it and how.

And in his Word, he tells us that he did the original creation in six days. But have you ever wondered about that? Why he took six days to do what he could have done in no time at all? I mean, c'mon, it's not like he needed time to work it all out, or that it was too much for him to handle all at once. But for some reason he stretched it out – deliberately slowed himself down so that he didn't do it all at once like he could have. Why do you suppose he did that?

One answer might be that if he had done it all at once and still wanted to go with a seven-day week he'd be setting a pretty poor precedent for us. Why, then we'd have just one day on which we worked for a tiny bit of time and then the rest of that day and the next six days would be off. As it is, only pastors keep such a schedule; but imagine how it would be if everybody did. Nothing would ever get done.

Okay, that was supposed to be a joke; but a lot more seriously, it's important to understand that there's more going on in the story of creation than just the Lord God making everything. If that's all there were to it, then he could have done it all at once in a flash. But you see, the Lord is not just creating, he's also relating to and interacting

with what he has made. There's a conversation going on. Every time the Lord says something, it tells us something about him: who he is, how powerful he is, how ordered and wonderful are his thoughts, and so on. So, he reveals himself as he speaks. And as he speaks to creation it responds to his voice. With every word of God, the creation is improved.

And this is what I mean when I say I believe in evolution. The initial creation starts with the earth dark, formless, chaotic, and empty. It's a lifeless, water-covered mess. It seems that no good can ever come of it. Ah, but that changes as God draws near and lavishes his unique attention and individual focus on this favored planet, we call home. We read that the Spirit of God hovered above the face of the deep. This is what we theologians call an immanent presence of God. Yes, God is everywhere in creation in a transcendent sort of way; but he doesn't manifest his presence everywhere in the same way. In certain places he makes his *gracious* presence known. This is what's going on as he begins to create. He locates himself above the water as if to say, "Here I am. Here's where you find me. I am with you and want you to know that I'm *this* close." And that's important because his intent is to have a close, personal relationship with his creation and specifically with mankind whom he will create in his own image as the highest and brightest crown of all that he makes.

Okay, so now with the Holy Spirit in place above the waters, God the Father and Creator begins to speak. And of course, if it's God who is speaking, naturally what he speaks is the Word of God – which as we know from St. John's Gospel is not a *thing* but a *person*. Namely the Word of God is God the Son. So, what I'd have you see is that in the first three verses of the Bible the Lord has already begun to disclose to us the mystery of his essential Trinity – and that all three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are playing a part in work of creation.

I hope you're still with me because it gets better. The first thing God says is, "Let there be light", and boom! The light comes on. But this is a light that precedes by three days the creation of the sun, moon, and stars, which are the sources of natural light. So, the question is: where is the light coming from? And the answer is from God himself. Or say it another way, this is a divine light by which God who is by nature an invisible spirit makes himself visible and by which he makes it possible for us to see him and everything else. Now, couple that with the fact the light appears when God speaks the Word, and understanding that the Word is God the Son, if you'll forgive the pun, it sheds a lot of light on what Jesus means when he says, "I am the light of the world." It's in Jesus Christ that God reveals himself and his glory becomes visible to us.

All right, then the evolution of God's creation continues with the separation of light and darkness into day and night – which itself is a theologically loaded concept; but suffice it to say for now that what's being established is a way to keep track of time. Sure, the grand clock gets more elaborate later when he adds the sun and moon to track months and seasons and what not; but for the time being, he's started the clock ticking.

And what follows are five more days of creative effort as by his Word the Lord God continues to shape and improve his evolving handiwork – and at the same time the creation interacts with him by responding to his voice. So, the atmosphere and seas are created. The dry land appears. Plants and then the animals are formed. And finally, man and woman in the image of God. But what I'd have you see is that the creation is entirely passive throughout the whole process. It doesn't evolve on its own; it only

changes for the better when it hears and responds to him. And so, the whole thing is rather like an increasingly complicated dance with the Lord God leading and his creation – the beautiful object of his attention – answering his lead. It (or if you'll allow me, *she*) steps in time with him to the rhythm of the divine music, both rejoicing in each other. “Thus the heaven and earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his labor.” And it was very good.

But, as you know, it didn't stay good. The man and the woman created in God's image who were given dominion over all the things God had made decided to try their hand at evolving on their own. And not only did they try to do it without God's Word; they did it in direct defiance of what God had said. The result was catastrophic not just for them; but also, for the entire creation that plunged with them into spiritual darkness and became subject to the curse of death and decay. By taking the initiative in their evolution, they caused the death of their own and every other species.

But God resolved to set things right again. He promised our erring first parents redemption and recreation of all that he had made. He promised them a new creation even better and more evolved than the first. And in the account of the initial creation we are given the keys to how the Lord operates, as well as an outline of his work of recreation. What do I mean? Well, first that he does all the work. The creation itself is passive. It (*we*) cannot act for our own benefit. We only make things worse. To move forward, we must be acted upon by God. Second, that God's work is always done by his Word. He speaks, and it happens. And, as I said, the Word is God the Son. So all of God's work is done by and through the Son. Third, that he doesn't do all the work at once in an instant; rather he takes his time so that there is an evolution of improvement as his creation responds to his Word. By this process he's doing more than creating; he's also building an interactive relationship between Creator and creature. And finally, it all begins when God draws near with his Spirit and makes his gracious presence known.

So, it is that the Lord sent his Word, his Spirit, and his gracious presence to Noah, to the Patriarchs, and to the prophets to prepare the way for the complete revelation of God that happened when the Word became flesh and made his dwelling with us in the person of Jesus Christ. The Light of the World came into the world to swallow up the darkness of human sin in himself. On the cross he suffered and died to pay the penalty of the curse that had fallen on all creation. And then, when all his labor was complete—when he given everything he had: his body, blood, and Spirit, on the seventh day God rested in the tomb.

And then he reset the clock, so to speak. He stepped out of the tomb on the first day of a new order of creation – because it was impossible for death to hold the Author of life. He came forth the first fruit of the new creation, the first of an entirely new species of man. Remember the old species is dead.

And that's what we are we come into this old, cursed world: dead in sin and trespass. In a spiritual sense we are dark, formless, chaotic, and empty. It looks as if no good can ever come of us. But God in his grace draws near and introduces himself. He positions his Spirit over the water and we hear his voice, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”—and boom! The light comes on. Trust and personal knowledge of Christ begins. And the regenerating benefit of his suffering

and death for sin is applied through the water and the Word and we rise to new life with him as part of the new creation.

But we're not done yet—not by a long shot. “Baptize and *teach*” he told his apostles. That’s how he told them to make disciples – a word that means “trainees” or “students”. It’s a word that implies we’re still under construction, still evolving as we continue to hear, respond to, and be shaped by his Word.

So, like I said, I believe in evolution – the kind driven by God’s gracious and powerful Word. Even now we are being improved as God continues to speak in order to conform us again to his own image. What we will fully become has not yet been revealed. But one thing is sure: when God is all done with his work, he will look upon everything he has made, and behold, it will be very good. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!