

Matters of Faith

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February 11-13 is the annual Evolution Weekend, a time for people of faith to celebrate that science and religion are not adversaries, but each explore and communicate truths about all-that-is. They can co-exist peacefully in more than mere *detente*; in a way that recognizes that each, along with art, music, poetry, literature, and other arts are necessary lenses of exploration of and language to describe our complex and wondrous universe. Evolution Weekend is sponsored by the Clergy Letter Project, a growing mass of more than 14,000 clergy and scientists who believe the myth that we must choose either science or religion is just that: a myth. A myth invented by the “new atheists” (such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens), who claim religion holds no value for humanity because it is unscientific, and the creationists (who also call their movement Intelligent Design) who are suspicious of science, especially evolution, because they believe scientific findings are contrary to their narrow and literalist interpretation of scripture.

To the new atheists, I say that whether something is scientific simply cannot be the sole criterion for an idea’s value, unless the idea is claiming to be scientific. Honest religion, however, does not claim to be scientifically based, and those claim to are straying quite far from biblical witness.

To the creationists I say that the Bible does not make scientific claims. Each of the creation stories are poetic and theologic, but neither is scientific. Unfortunately, both the new atheists and

the creationists attempt to use the creation stories in the Bible as scientific textbooks. The former do so to discredit the rest of scripture, the latter to discredit evolution.

To the bystanders who might be watching the “debate” on TV or other media, I say that the “war” between science and religion is mostly a fiction. It is only a handful of the faithful who wage war on science, and only a handful of scientists who wage war on religion. Most of us are quite reasonable and are capable of being in both worlds because, for us, they are not separate but are different facets of the same. And as I’ve said before, reasonable people are not invited to talk to the media, so we do not hear or see them, leaving the bystanders to easily get the impression that there are two, and only two, very clear and easily defined irreconcilable sides to the “issue”.

We who have signed on to the Clergy Letter Project, and the thousands of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim congregations who will celebrate Evolution Weekend, are saying, as loudly as we can in a world where it’s very difficult for us to be heard, that not only are there not two sides to the issue, there isn’t even an issue. Our witness is that our first duty is to the truth, to embrace that which is demonstrably true, in particular, evolution, which has overwhelming evidence and works, and is the only model that works, contrary to what the creationists say. Just as people’s religious/spiritual experiences are clearly more than figments of their imagination or explained away as “just neural activity”, as Dawkins and Hitchens have said.

Though some voices for clanging cymbals and might grab one’s attention for a moment as they tell us that the only rational or ethical choice is to choose either the reality of our spiritual revelation or the reality of scientific revelation because the two are at war, those voices do so

only because they have been handed the megaphone. The majority of us are not in the fight because we know there is nothing to fight over, and we pray that the noise will die down and we may be at peace.

I find curious that the loudest voices shouting at each other have entirely the same literalist and unnuanced approach to reading scripture, which, at least with the Christian Bible, is not an historical or traditional method of reading it.

but most people of faith are and have been quite capable of disenthraling themselves of certain dogmas, such as earth being the center of the universe, or that evolution is contrary to the scriptural account of creation.