

Theistic Evolution

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In the last issue of Reformed Witness pamphlet, we began a discussion of the Scripture doctrine of creation. We did that by considering the popular theory of atheistic evolution which opposes the teaching of Holy Scripture concerning God's creation of the heavens and the earth. After presenting the main tenets of the theory of evolution, we lodged several objections against this false teaching. First of all, we oppose the theory of atheistic evolution because it is a fundamental denial of the existence of God. We oppose it because of its inherent atheism. Secondly, we reject the theory of atheistic evolution because it is a fundamental denial of the absolute authority of the Word of God. It is inherently rationalism. Thirdly, on the basis of the teaching of Scripture we reject the very idea of evolution. We reject the idea that the creation derived its existence out of itself and develops along the lines of a natural selection in an ever increasing ascendancy. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews not only teaches in Heb. 11:3 that the worlds were framed by the word of God. But he goes on expressly to state: "so that things which are seen were NOT made of things which do appear."

In this issue of the Reformed Witness pamphlet we want to begin a discussion of what has come to be known as theistic evolution. It's important for the church today to address itself to this form of the teaching of evolution, as she strives to defend and maintain the truth of the doctrine of creation. It's important for the church to do this, first of all, because it is this form of the false teaching of evolution, this compromising position, that poses the greatest threat to the members of the church. It is a much more subtle and deceptive teaching than outright, blatant evolution. Therefore it is a more dangerous teaching. In the second place, it's important for the church to address itself to the position of theistic evolution because of the increasing acceptance of this position in fundamentalist and Reformed circles. Where in the past the doctrine of creation was maintained and taught in these circles, today that doctrine of creation has been replaced by the teaching of theistic evolution. In many of the Christian high schools and colleges of our land, the view of the origin of all things that is presented is the view of theistic evolution. In many of the churches and denominations, the interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis has become an open question. There is a crying need for the church and for believers today to speak out against this wrong view of theistic evolution and take a firm stand for the Scripture doctrine of creation.

The fundamental difference between atheistic evolution and theistic evolution is that, whereas atheistic evolution proceeds from the presupposition that God does not exist, theistic evolution is based on the premise that God does exist. The theistic evolutionist professes theism, that is, he professes belief of a faith in God. The theistic evolutionist teaches that indeed God created all things in the beginning. All things ultimately owe the origin of their existence to the Creator God. But, says the theistic evolutionist, God created all things by means of an evolutionary process. God's creation of all things was not instantaneous, but took place in the way of evolution. God, then, created the very first cell, the earliest and most basic forms of life. But that was the extent of God's creative activity. After that initial creation, God stepped back and allowed the entire world to develop on its own, governed by certain fixed natural laws. The theistic evolutionist is fond of saying that the Bible reveals the fact of creation, but not the method of creation. The method of creation is something that must be determined by science. And on the basis of scientific research and discovery, it is plain that the method of creation that God employed was the method of evolution.

One of the more recent variations of this view of theistic evolution is the view that is known as progressive creationism. One of the leading proponents of progressive creationism has been Bernard Ramm. Ramm sets forth his views in his book, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*. Although many progressive creationists, including Ramm, are vehement in differentiating their position over against the position of theistic evolution, the fact of the matter is that these two positions are very similar. The only main difference is that whereas the theistic evolutionist posits only an initial creative work of God at the beginning of the evolutionary process, the progressive creationist teaches that at several crucial junctures in the evolutionary process God intervened with a creative act. What these junctures were and when they occurred, of course, progressive creationists do not agree among themselves. One point at which God undoubtedly intervened was the point at which the ape-like ancestor of man had reached a sufficient state of development that God made and placed a soul in one of them by a special act of

creation. This was the creation of Adam. For the rest, the evolutionary process continued, interrupted only by a greater or lesser number of Divine creative acts.

On the face of it, both theistic evolution and progressive creation are mediating positions. They represent a compromise between the historic, Biblical doctrine of creation and the modern scientific view of evolution. They attempt to retain God and the view that God is the Creator, and at the same time allow room for the evolutionary theory.

One of the major problems that confronts both the theistic evolutionist and the progressive creationist is that apparently Genesis 1 does not teach an evolutionary view of things. In particular, on first reading, Genesis 1 does not allow for the long periods of time which the evolutionary process requires. Apparently Genesis 1 teaches that God created all things in 6 days. And the problem is complicated by the fact that this has been the historic position of the church. By and large, the church down through history has taught, on the basis of Genesis 1, a creation of the heavens and the earth by God in 6 literal days.

This presents a problem for the theistic evolutionist because he professes to be a theist. He professes to believe in God and professes to receive God's Word, the Holy Scriptures. In order to maintain his evolutionary position, he is forced to do something with the teaching of Genesis 1 that God created all things in 6 days. While acknowledging to receive Genesis 1, he must at the same time go to work to change the interpretation of Genesis 1 so that Genesis 1 fits in with the theory of evolution.

In especially two ways the theistic evolutionist alters the teaching of Genesis 1 to make room for the eons of time necessary for evolution. First of all, some theistic evolutionists have set forth what is called the "gap theory." According to this view, the 6 days of the creation account mentioned in Genesis 1 were literal days. But these days were not successive days, one day following immediately upon another. Rather, between these six days of creation were gaps of long periods of time, millions of years, during which the evolutionary process took place.

The second way in which some theistic evolutionists alter the teaching of Genesis 1 concerning a 6 day creation, is to teach the "period theory." According to this theory, the six days of creation mentioned in Genesis 1 were not 6 literal days of 24 hours. But the days of Genesis 1 were actually long periods of time. These men teach that we must not understand Genesis 1, and particularly the word "day" in Genesis 1, literally. Instead "day" must be understood in a figurative, symbolic way. "Day", then, stands for long periods of time.

This is basically the position of the theistic evolutionist. We have attempted to be fair and accurate in defining his position. Necessarily we have outlined only the main tenets of the position. In the next issue of the Reformed Witness pamphlet we hope to begin to evaluate this position in the light of the Scripture's teaching concerning the truth of creation. We hope to see that the position of the theistic evolutionist does not harmonized with, and is a departure from, the Scripture doctrine of creation.