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**Using Scientific Facts to Correct Religious Belief and Religious Experience to Counter Scientific Dogmatism... Truth Matters!**(Presented at: Religion in Society conference, UC Berkeley campus on 4/16/2015.)

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The context of this paper is the contest between Judeo-Christian faith and science.  It is the author’s belief that over the last two hundred years Western civilization has shifted from a philosophy of origins based on religious dogmatism to one based on scientific dogmatism.  Today, belief in an intelligent creator with a purpose for human beings is neither politically correct, nor academically acceptable in most non-religious circles.  This paper is the result of
​ a lifelong search for a viable understanding of both science and faith.

While both science and religion presumably hold truth in high esteem, neither has proven to be without fault in the rational pursuit of truth.  The biblical fundamentalist automatically discards any scientific fact that conflicts with his or her interpretation of the Bible.  On the other hand, many scientists accept dogmatic conclusions that are based more on their materialistic faith rather than on scientific fact.

Faith, in this author’s opinion, is a conclusion about ultimate reality.  It is an extrapolation from the known to the unknown.  It should, however, be based on the best facts and reasoning available, not emotion, culture, or tradition. Faith is a necessary component to give meaning and purpose to human life.  For faith to be both effective and lasting it must be founded on the best possible information.  It should also be capable of being modified as new information comes along.  Faith is the substance of things that cannot be seen.  Science is the substance of things that can be seen.  But truth is trump.  Faith and fact must be complementary, not contradictory, to be valid.

By rejecting the rich source of knowledge and understanding available from geology, paleontology, and archaeology the fundamentalist is separated from fact and reality.  The biblical writers place a high value on knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.  The God of the Bible is portrayed as a God of truth.  Certainly scientific truth should also qualify.

The fundamentalist mindset and approach, a form of religious dogmatism, eliminates the possibility of correction of wrong interpretations and conclusions by scientific fact.  On the other hand, the traditional Creation v. Evolution argument is structured in a way that a truthful resolution is not possible.  The reality is, however, relatively simple.  Evolution over time can be scientifically proven.  The fossil record, based on science, is abundantly clear on that.  What can’t be scientifically proven is what caused this evolution to occur.  When evolution and natural selection are combined as one, indivisible unit, the argument becomes biased and unreasonable. This is where scientific dogmatism enters the picture.

While it is true that natural selection can make changes in living organisms, it is a great extrapolation to conclude that natural selection created the complex genetic system and made all the major changes found in the fossil animal lines.  Such conclusions are not reproducible and thus are not really science.  They are outside the toolbox of scientific methodology.  Such a conclusion is verified by two prominent American paleontologists.

First, Alfred Romer, a dean of American paleontologists, who taught for years at Harvard University….
"Philosophers and other non-scientists have often suggested that evolution may have been due to some Supernatural agency or some mysterious “drive” within the animal itself. **No one can prove, of course, that this is not the case**.  But as scientists we attempt to explain the phenomena of nature in terms of natural laws before resorting to supernatural interpretations."  (Alfred S. Romer, TheVertebrate Story, p. 5, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1959).

Next, Elwyn Simons of Yale University…

"Nevertheless, much of what appears to be a basic human need, that of understanding the place of man in the universe, lies outside the area of descriptive and interpretive science.  These other parts have traditionally been dealt with by theologians and philosophers.  Consequently, this book will deal with what happened in the history of the close relatives of man and of man himself. (That is the actual fossil evidence)  Why this happened remains a matter of individual belief."  (Elwyn L. Simons, Primate Evolution: An Introduction to Man’s Place in Nature, p. v, The Macmillan Co., 1972).

Both of these paleontologists clearly show that this question is outside the realm of proof by scientific methodology and in the realm of belief, faith, or personal preference.  Modern scientific dogmatism overrides and hides this simple reality.

Consider that evolution is a fact of nearly all aspects of life.  Societies evolve.  Languages evolve.  Nearly every technology evolves.  Computers, automobiles, airplanes, telephones … even paper clips and bottle closures evolve.  The real question is why does this evolution occur?  It occurs because of intelligence.  This evolution is driven by human intelligence.

Why should it be thought strange that organic evolution might not also have been driven by intelligence of a higher form?  Such a conclusion actually fits the facts of paleontology even better than natural selection, but neither can be tested by scientific methodology.  They are a matter of personal preference, belief, and faith.

In this author’s judgment, the complexity of the natural world, and especially the human mind and body, cry out for creation by intelligence.  The fossil record shows the footprints of such a developmental process over time.

It is abundantly clear, and scientifically provable, that living organisms have evolved through long periods of geologic time.  It is also abundantly clear that they can be modified by both natural selection and artificial selection by human intelligence.  Cichlid fish would be suggested as a prime example for natural selection, while dogs are a good example of artificial selection by humans.  Wolves have been modified only slightly by natural selection over long periods of time. On the other hand, dogs have been separated into 400 varieties within a few hundred years through artificial selection by human intelligence.

The Bible is an example of collective religious experience.  It is a corpus of many varied historic writings that have been assembled into one unit. It describes an ever living, intelligent creator with a purpose for humankind.  Is this not significant?

Much is being done to discredit the Bible as a source of valid information and history.   A materialistic philosophy and faith requires that the Bible be discredited.  Scientific dogmatism assists with the process.  A flawed fundamentalistic approach also discredits the Bible as a source of valid information and history.

I believe this is a key example of collective religious experience that should not be summarily discarded.  At face value, the Bible is a historic record of a supernatural power interacting with human beings over a long period of time.  It was written, edited, and translated by numerous people.  How these writings are interpreted is a key factor in evaluating their credibility.  A strictly literal fundamentalistic interpretation is found to contradict prehistoric reality and so is unreasonable.  Allowing the Bible to be a humanly written and edited book about real experiences would seem to better fit the nature of the Bible.  Such an interpretation does not exclude a writer from being inspired by a higher intelligence but it does allow for the irregularities found within the writings.  It would seem to be a more accurate approach for correctly understanding the Bible.

There are rational reasons to believe the basic biblical narrative.  The fact that there is a Bible that defines an eternally living, reasonable Creator with a purpose for human life is significant.  The experience of Abraham’s family with that Creator for nearly 2,000 years is also significant.  Scientific proof?  No, but reasonable to believe. Consider a few reasons to believe the biblical narrative.

The Bible establishes a consistent, simple, and profound morality.  From the ten key points of law introduced in the Old Testament, to the amplified spiritual principles of the NT summarized by Paul as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self control.  Both of these form a simple, consistent, uniform, moral code.  The whole biblical emphasis is about establishing a moral society and faithful, moral individuals.

Consider a few historic biblical examples.

Saul who became Paul…  A high ranking Pharisee who was so convinced the new Christian faith was  wrong he was dragging people off to prison to combat it.  He had a blinding vision on the way to Damascus to imprison Christians.  Was it a fraud?  It ruined his reputation and made the rest of his life very rigorous, yet he held on to that major U-turn till his death.  We have evidence of his belief in many letters recorded in the Bible.

The Apostles of Jesus…  These were common men who spent three and a half years with Jesus, witnessing his teaching and miracles.  They were so convinced of the truth of their experience with him they continued teaching, writing, and preaching through persecution and even death for many.  Is it irrational to believe the examples of so many eye witnesses?

Jesus himself…  A historic figure and a Jew from Abraham’s family line of the extensive biblical story.  If we believe what the apostles have written, he was a very special and different human being with incredible powers to prove it.  Jesus was apparently not formally educated but was literate and a spiritual genius whose understanding put to shame the religious leaders of the day.  He was killed on the very same day that commemorated the killing of lambs to prevent death in Egypt, and to establish Israel as a nation.  Even though he wrote no book, he said his words would not perish.  Today, 2,000 years later, they are some of the most often printed words in the world.

There was an Israel in Palestine before 1200 BCE …  This history fits the biblical history.  A stele of Pharaoh Merneptah found in Egypt and dated to 1209 BCE confirms their presence.  It that states: “Israel is devastated, her seed is no more, Palestine has become a widow for Egypt.”  (Wording from p. 157, Chronicle of the Pharaohs, Peter A. Clayton).  His bragging about wiping them out was typically exaggerated as the Pharaohs were wont to do.

Is it significant that Merneptah was the son of Ramses II, the supposed Pharaoh of the exodus?  Was he exonerating his father’s loss?  Did he know of Israel because of his father’s experience with Israel?

Abraham and his family…  Proof of the story of Abraham and his family is certainly not something you would expect to verify in the archaeological record.  However, the cultural features of the story are consistent with the archaeological evidence from the times involved.  That there is a long, lineal record of that family’s genealogy throughout the Bible is unique and a vote for creditability.

There are many reasonable and rational reasons to believe that the Bible is history and not mere human imagination!  But it is history and religion, not science.  Science requires verification by reproducibility.

**In Conclusion**
The Bible is a record of approximately 2000 years of religious experience.  It should not be summarily trashed based on materialistic philosophy.  Faith serves an important role in human life.  But faith, to be valid and useful, must be based on the best facts that can obtained.  Faith is necessary because everything in life cannot be proven by scientific methodology.  Man cannot live by science alone.

Faith must be modifiable as new understanding becomes available.  Faith should become truer and more accurate with time.  A deuce of truth trumps an ace of belief.  Always!  Why would one not use true scientific facts to modify one’s faith?

While creation by intelligence is a reasonable and rational conclusion, it should not be forced into the science classroom.  It is not science it is history, faith, and religion.

What is really needed is to take the unscientific extrapolation of natural selection and scientific dogmatism which is based on materialistic philosophy out of the science classroom.  They also are not science.  They are belief and philosophy.

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