

Faith&Thought



Relating advances in knowledge to faith within society

April 2009 No. 46

In this issue:

- **The Challenge of Evolutionary Theory for the 21st Century Church - John Weaver**
- **Nebo-Sarsekim (jeremiah 39.3) Mentioned in a Recently Noticed Babylonian Text - T.C. Mitchell**
- **Dementia and Spirituality - A.B. Robins**

FAITH and THOUGHT

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Contents

| | | |
|---|---------------|----|
| Editorial | | 1 |
| AGM 2008 | | 2 |
| Medical Ethics - Playing God? | | 2 |
| Prize Essay | | 3 |
| The Challenge of Evolutionary Theory for the 21st Century Church | John Weaver | 4 |
| Dementia and Spirituality | A.B. Robins | 20 |
| Nebo-Sarsekim (Jeremiah 39.3) Mentioned in a Recently Noticed Babylonian Text | T.C. Mitchell | 25 |
| Book Reviews | | 3 |

Editorial

There can be few people who are unaware that this year marks both the bi-centenary of the birth of Charles Darwin and the ter-Jubilee of the publication of *The Origin of Species*. Darwin's ideas clearly divided both the scientific and the religious communities of his day and have had a lasting effect. The Victoria Institute was set up in the wake of the publication of *The Origin of Species* and even the editor of the Everyman's Library centenary edition wrote, "I admire, as all biologists must, the immense scientific labours of Charles Darwin and his lifelong, single-hearted devotion to his theory of evolution... But I am not satisfied that Darwin proved his point or that his influence in scientific and public thinking has been beneficial." What do you think? You have an opportunity to give your considered views in the special prize essay 'Darwin: Bane or Blessing?'

We are pleased to include as the major contribution to this issue, an article by the Rev. Dr. John Weaver, who is the Principal of South Wales Baptist College and a valued member of the Victoria Institute. His article 'The Challenge of Evolutionary Theory for the 21st Century Church' was originally given as a lecture in the series '*Darwin Reconsidered*' at Regent's Park College, Oxford. We are grateful to both the author and the college for permission to publish it. The other two contributions are from members of our Council. The one from Dr. Brian Robins is a less academic and more pastoral perspective on the subject of dementia and spirituality and the other is from our chairman, who was, at the time of his retirement, Keeper of Western Asiatic Antiquities at the British Museum

Annual General Meeting : October 18th 2008

The meeting was held on Saturday 18th. October at 2.00 p.m. at Birkbeck College Malet Street London WC1 7HX during the annual symposium and was attended by the majority of the participants.

- (a) The chair was taken by Mr.Terence Mitchell M.A.
 - (b) The minutes of the previous AGM were read and agreed.
 - (c) The President, Vice-Presidents and Honorary Treasurer were elected for further terms of service.
 - (d) The Rev.R.H.Allaway B.Sc.,M.A.,Ph.D, Prof.C.J.Humphreys CBE,B.Sc.,M.A.,Ph.D and Prof.D.W.Vere M.D.,FRCP,FFPM, who formally retire , being eligible for re-election , were re-elected for a further period of service on the Council.
 - (d) The Rev.John Buxton M.A.. presented the annual accounts , which are available upon application . The Chairman thanked the Hon.Treasurer for preparing these accounts.
 - (e) The chairman proposed that we amend Clause 4 of the Constitution - to substitute the words 'originally held in the month of May' in place of 'which shall normally be held in the month of May' thereby retaining the allusion to the month of Queen Victoria's birthday. The proposal was carried unanimously.
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FAITH AND THOUGHT

(THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE)

MEDICAL ETHICS - PLAYING GOD?

Saturday 17th October 2009 • 10.00 am. - 4.30 p.m.

*Speakers include Professor Duncan Vere, Dr.Caroline Berry
and Dr.Andrew Fergusson.*

The venue will be in Central London.

Further details will be sent nearer the date.

Faith and Thought Prize Essay Competition

A prize of £500 is offered for the best essay on the subject

Darwin - Bane or Blessing ?

Closing date 31 January 2010

Competition Conditions:

1. Faith and Thought will own the copyright of the essay, though the author will normally be permitted to embody it in a later, more comprehensive work.
2. It should not exceed 7,000 words, excluding documentation, typewritten, with double spacing and 2 cm margins.
3. It should be submitted to the Honorary Secretary's address, accompanied by a brief synopsis of 200 words setting out which parts are claimed to be original, along with a sealed envelope with a motto outside, and the author's name and address inside.
4. As an encouragement to young writers, candidates, where applicable, may add to their motto the words, 'Under 25' or state their date of birth: neither is published.
5. Entries will be professionally refereed and if the referees consider the prize should be divided between two authors, the trustees' decision will be final.
6. If no submissions are deemed worthy, the right to withhold the prize and to publicise another competition thereafter will be exercised.
7. The prize is normally announced at the subsequent AGM.
8. Officers of the Victoria Institute may not participate.
9. Submission of an entry will indicate candidates' assent to all these conditions.

Honorary Secretary:

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The Challenge of Evolutionary Theory for the 21st Century Church

John Weaver

Prologue:

I grew up in the 1960s in a Baptist Church in Cardiff, where my father was a deacon and Bible teacher, while following his 'day job' as head of Biology in a large Grammar School. He helped me to understand the variety and evolution of the natural world. My own passion was for Geology and at University my two professors were Christians. Frank Harold Trevor Rhodes was the author of the seminal "The Evolution of Life" published by Penguin Books in 1962, and the late Dick Owen, who supervised my PhD, was a beloved Methodist lay preacher and a most knowledgeable speaker on the Geology of the South Wales Coalfield. As I grew up and studied as a Christian in South Wales in the 1960s, biology, geology, evolution, and church sat happily together. So as I explore this subject I ask: What has changed?

In 1960 John Whitcomb and Henry Morris published *The Genesis Flood*,¹ which posited a literal reading of Genesis 1-11, six day creation and Noah's Flood. This seems to have been foundational to creationism and the Creation Science Movement, and to the subsequent rejection of such a position by reductionist science.

Introduction:

The Challenge of Evolutionary Theory for the 21st Century Church is not so much a question about evolution *per se* as about the reaction and perceived implications of the theory for science and for the Christian faith. At its worst the subject provides scope for conflict, but at its best for a constructive dialogue, which provides an opportunity for a Christian apologetic.

We find that there are scientists who believe that everything in this world can only be explained by science, and Christians who believe that the only way to understand the origin of this world and its life is through a literal reading of Genesis 1-3. Both of these extreme positions suggest that the theory of evolution leads to atheism, and both emphasise that the literal interpretation of scripture is at the crux of the argument. This is bad science and bad theology. On the one hand life is reduced to nothing but atoms and molecules, where there is no room for meaning or for human freedom, and on the other hand, a biblical interpretation that fails to recognise the context and genre of the text – giving a one-size-fits-all approach to the reading and understanding of scripture.

At the end of 2008 *Theos* (the public theology think tank) commissioned a survey by the polling company ComRes of people's views of evolution. The poll of 2060 people revealed that although the evidence for natural selection is overwhelming, and even with the incontestable evidence for evolution from recent advances in genetics, still

some 32% of those questioned believe that God created the world sometime in the last 10,000 years. However, 37% believe that Darwin's theory of evolution is 'beyond reasonable doubt' and 42% of people believe that evolution presents some challenges to Christianity but that it is possible to believe in both.

A survey of 630 member churches of the Evangelical Alliance in the same year² revealed that a belief in a literal six day creation has remained unchanged at about 36% over the last ten years, while those who believed that the biblical account of creation is symbolic rather than literal rose from 27.5% in 1998 to 34.5% in 2008. It also revealed that while 26.4% considered the universe to be less than 10,000 years old, 38.5% believe it to be billions of years old.

Meanwhile in his popular book, *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins maintains that Darwinian evolution "shatters the illusion of design within the domain of biology, and teaches us to be suspicious of any kind of design hypothesis in physics and cosmology as well."³ He completely rejects any supernatural agency. As he draws his argument to an end he states:

As a scientist, I am hostile to fundamentalist religion because it actively debauches the scientific enterprise. It teaches us not to change our minds, and not to want to know exciting things that are available to be known. It subverts science and saps the intellect.⁴

This view is supported by Keith Porteous Wood of the Secular Society, who states that

Creationism is anti-science. Teaching it to children is a form of intellectual child-abuse, because it gives them the wrong facts about life.⁵

At the other end of the spectrum of opinion is Ken Ham, the founder of 'Answers in Genesis,' whose organization has opened a Creation museum in Cincinnati (2007) which covers 70,000 square feet and cost \$27 million to build. It's motto at the entrance reads "Prepare to believe." In Britain a more modest museum, 'Genesis Expo' is found in a former bank, next to the bus station, on the harbour front in Portsmouth. It was opened in 2000 by the Creation Science Movement.⁶ Both present displays in which human beings are seen to be walking on the earth with a variety of extinct species, including dinosaurs.

The Revd Greg Haslam, minister at Westminster Chapel, London, is quoted as saying;

The materialist explanation of creation has nothing to offer – if we came from nothing and go to nothing, then that encourages people to lead reckless and materialistic lifestyles.

Evolution is a world-view that leads to futility. It's no wonder people are dissatisfied with it.⁷

However, we can take note, or even readily agree with Jerry Coyne (a geneticist who is not a Christian), who concludes his exploration of evolutionary theory with these words:

6 FAITH AND THOUGHT

Although evolution operates in a purposeless, materialistic way, that doesn't mean that our lives have no purpose. Whether through religious or secular thought, we make our own purposes, meaning and morality.

Deriving your spirituality from science also means accepting an attendant sense of humility before the universe and the likelihood that we'll never have all the answers.⁸

There is a false dichotomy in the more extreme views that posit nature in opposition to God. This is far removed from the ways in which both scientists and theologians of 17th and 18th centuries viewed the world. They saw the discoveries of science as revealing the ways in which God worked in the world.

Darwin's theory of evolution put God back into the world as an active participant, rather than the machine minder of Sir Isaac Newton, who was outside of his creation.

It was therefore no surprise that Christian scholars Charles Kingsley, Frederick Temple, Aubrey Moore and John Henry Newman in the UK, and Benjamin Warfield, James Orr and Asa Gray in USA welcomed Darwin's ideas. In fact Darwin himself and also his keenest advocate, Thomas Henry Huxley, both left room for God in their assessment of the origin of the world.

Current church leaders have a similar approach. Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury interviewed by the *Guardian* in March 2006 about teaching creationism in schools said:

I think creationism is, in a sense, a kind of category mistake, as if the Bible were a theory like other theories. Whatever the biblical account of creation is, it's not a theory alongside theories. It's not as if the writer of Genesis Sat down and said well, how am I going to explain all this 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'⁹

Father Marc LeClerc SJ of the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome said concerning a conference in spring 2009 that discussion was necessary because Darwin is "increasingly discussed in ideological terms rather than, as was intended, in scientific terms."¹⁰

Nick Spencer of *Theos* believes that Darwin needs to be recued from the 'militant godly' and the 'militant godless', both of whom think that evolution undermines belief in God.¹¹

This paper summarises the scientific understanding of evolution, including the reductionist views of people like Richard Dawkins; briefly outline some of the key issues surrounding biblical interpretation, and a theological understanding of creation, including the views of creationists and their more recent successors in Intelligent Design, before moving to what we might describe as a more fruitful approach: a dialogue between science and the Christian faith.

Evolution as a foundation stone in the natural sciences:

Julian Huxley, grandson of Thomas Henry Huxley, comments that Darwin's voyage on *The Beagle* "was to change not only his attitude to life, his beliefs and basic concepts, but it was to provide food for thought for millions of people, it was to produce schisms in the church and a century of argument among scientists. It was also to lay the most important foundation-stone for a fuller understanding of living things and the world we live in."¹²

In discussion of the foundation laid by Darwin's theory we can explore the findings of a variety of biologists both those with a Christian belief and those with none.

There is little doubt in the scientific community that the neo-Darwinian synthesis of natural selection and genetic inheritance is the explanation for the development and distribution of all animal and plant life on the planet. Geneticist, Jerry Coyne (a non-Christian), notes that evolution is "a mechanism of staggering simplicity and beauty" and if there was ever a question over the theory it was in the 19th century, when the evidence for a mechanism of evolution was unclear.¹³

Christians working in various fields of biology are agreed in their view that evolution is true, in as much as it is the best explanation of the facts that we find in palaeontology, anthropology and genetics. Coyne asks why it is that people today still doubt this theory, and comments, "We don't doubt in the existence of electrons or black holes, despite the fact that these phenomena are much farther removed from everyday experience than is evolution What's *not* a problem is the lack of evidence."¹⁴

Denis Alexander, who is the Director of the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, Cambridge, states that "the purpose of Darwinian theory is to explain the biological diversity that we see all around us on our planet we're looking at a world of immense diversity in which we are accustomed to encountering hundreds of different biological species in the normal course of everyday life."¹⁵

Evolutionary theory seeks to explain where the 10-20 million living species have come from. Biological evolution is a slow process taking place over billions of years since early after the formation of the earth some 4,566 million years ago.

Evolution is based on two principle ideas: diversity in the genome, for example mutation resulting in differences of ability to survive and reproduce; and natural selection, that is, genomes generating organisms with slightly better or slightly poorer survival. Differences in genomes are accumulated through mutation, sexual reproduction and gene flow. Alexander comments that natural selection takes place through successful reproduction that ensures that the individual's genes are passed on to the next generation, and that "natural selection therefore acts as a rigorous filter to reduce the amount of genetic variation in the population."¹⁶

8 FAITH AND THOUGHT

Evolution is not a smooth curve from the very simple to the very complex. Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldredge observed long periods of stasis with little change interspersed with rapid speciation during short periods. "Speciation could occur rapidly if a small population was geographically isolated."¹⁷

Evolution has also been affected by changes in the earth's environment. For example, by 600 million years ago the ozone level would have been sufficient to cut out the DNA-inactivating ultraviolet radiation. This would have opened up the oceans to the development and growth of photosynthesizing phytoplankton, which would in turn lead to a large increase in the amount of oxygen in the atmosphere. By 420 million years ago the oxygen content of the atmosphere had reached a level where land plants could survive. Their growth led to further, more rapid, increase in oxygen levels. It has been suggested that at this time the oxygen level had reached 10% of its present day level. The result gave rise to an immediate evolutionary response with many groups of land plant and animal species developing from their marine counterparts.¹⁸

Alexander comments that biological diversity is late in the earth's history, as before the Cambrian (c.600 million years ago) most living creatures were rarely more than a millimeter across.¹⁹ During the succeeding eras mass extinctions have played an important part in triggering new waves of species diversification. More than 99% of all species that have ever lived on this planet are now extinct. About 65 million years ago, at the Cretaceous/Tertiary boundary, about 60-75% of all species (including the dinosaurs) became extinct, probably as a result of an asteroid collision.²⁰

There has often been reference to the so-called 'missing links' in the fossil record. While it is true that in Darwin's day there were not sufficient fossilized examples to demonstrate one species evolving into another, palaeontologists have turned up numerous fossils fulfilling Darwin's predictions. Jerry Coyne affirms

We can now show continuous changes within lineages of animals; we have lots of evidence for common ancestors and transitional forms (those missing ancestors of whales, for instance, have turned up); and we have dug deep enough to see the very beginning of complex life.²¹

As a geneticist Alexander goes on to make an important point that

unlike the fossil record, there are no gaps in the genetic record. By that I do not mean that we have a complete record of all the genome sequences of every species that ever lived – of course we do not and never will have because 99% of them are no longer around to get DNA samples. Nevertheless, in the 1% that remains we have a DNA record, including disused genetic fossils that take us back to the dawn of life.²²

By genetic fossils Alexander means that "all genomes of organisms that have evolved recently are littered with ancient genes, still in use, that we can identify as going deep

back into evolutionary time. But in addition they are replete with relics of genes no longer in use” that are signatures of evolutionary histories.²³

Alexander expresses his view of evolution that “virtually no biologist in the research community actually doubts [whether evolution happened], but about mechanisms, interpretations, classification disputes there are debates. Evolution is no ‘holy cow’ – “it is every biologist’s dream to make discoveries that would upset some cherished theory” – your career would be made.²⁴ In answer to those anti-evolutionists he challenges them to understand that “really serious objections to evolution, if there are any, have to be presented the tough but proper way, by publication of solid results in respectable scientific journals.²⁵ Once we see evolution as God’s chosen way, it ceases to be a ‘bogey man.’²⁶

Both Alexander and Sam Berry,²⁷ former Professor of Genetics, University College London, note the significant genetic relationship between human beings and our closest animal relative, the chimpanzees. Berry notes that the DNA difference between the two species of chimpanzee: *Pan troglodytes* and *Pan paniscus* is 0.7%, and between chimpanzees and human beings 1.6%. He then draws attention to the fact that the difference between the two extant species of gibbon is 2.2%, which is greater than the difference between human beings and chimpanzees.²⁸

Alexander draws the inescapable conclusion that human beings are directly related to the rest of animal life, unless God has planted misleading evidence, or set out to deceive us.²⁹

His preferred model to understand human beings as God’s creation is *Homo divinus*. He sees Genesis as proto-history, in which God reveals himself to a couple of Neolithic farmers in the Near East, as a result of which they become spiritually alive.³⁰

Can we find a consensus in the views about evolution?

Alister McGrath quotes the late Stephen Jay Gould, an atheist, who stated that “either half my colleagues are enormously stupid, or else the science of Darwinism is fully compatible with conventional religious beliefs – and equally compatible with atheism.”³¹

Richard Dawkins on the other hand would not disagree with the biological evidence discussed above, but would be diametrically opposed to the conclusions drawn:

I am continually astonished by those theists who seem to rejoice in natural selection as ‘God’s way of achieving his creation’. They note that evolution by natural selection would be a very easy and neat way to achieve a world full of life. God wouldn’t need to do anything at all!³²

Dawkins is astounded that any scientist might invoke the divine in discussion of evolution, and has even less time for the biblical literalist.

My own view is that evolution is a process within the universe’s history. This history is not a chance process but is constrained by the physical (God-given) parameters of

the universe's beginnings and by its (God-given) laws. I believe that we should recognize that this is the way in which God has brought the universe and life of planet earth into being, and through this recognition praise God for his faithfulness, his creativity, and every aspect of his grace that we find for our lives in this world.

So now we need to turn to a discussion of the biblical account of creation.

The biblical revelation of truth³³:

The Bible essentially explains why things exist rather than how they came into being. We are presented with a revelation of God who is transcendent – God who brought creation into being; God who is immanent – God involved with creation; and God who is personal – God who enters into relationship with human beings. We are encouraged to discover the God who has created and is creating, who is the beginning and the future of all life.

Sam Berry observes that “the Genesis account of creation is of a progress from nothing (or more strictly, God only) through geological and biological change to humankind. Nowhere in the Bible are we told the mechanisms God used to carry out his work; indeed it is only by faith that we know that God is involved (Hebrews 11:3).”³⁴

One key aspect of any dialogue is our interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis. It is important to hear the views of early Christian theologians such as Origen, Jerome, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Augustine, and many Jewish scholars of the time, who all saw the accounts of creation as allegory and symbolism. When we appreciate their views we are led to recognize that the creation stories are theology rather than history. The six days of Genesis 1, for example, are literal 24 hour days because we are presented with the focus on Sabbath worship (on the seventh day) of the God who has faithfully and lovingly ordered creation, and has declared it to be good.

Michael Roberts observes that a strict six-day creation and a 4004BCE beginning were never “the dominant view and was the official position of no church in Europe or America (until the late twentieth century). The chaos-restitution interpretation [a long period of chaos during which the long geological time span of earth’s history occurs] promulgated first by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) ... opened the door for the churches’ acceptance of geological time.”³⁵

When Israel proclaimed its creation faith, recorded in Genesis 1:1-2:4, she was in the darkest period of her history; in exile in Babylonia. The removal of the leadership of Judah to Babylon at the beginning of the sixth century BC was a body blow to the nationhood and religious life of Israel. The Exile is a watershed in Israelite history.

It is in this context that the writers of Genesis 1 began to reflect upon the faith of Israel. This priestly writer, or group of writers, reflected upon the traditions of their faith, the writings that the religious community had preserved and brought with them into exile, and upon the history of God’s dealings with his people. To this they added their

experience of the world, and the religious views held by their Babylonian captors. The writers took all these experiences, and, through their faith in Yahweh, a newly edited version of the Scriptures took shape. The very first belief that they wanted to express was that the covenant God of Israel was the God of all creation. Through Genesis 1-11 creation is linked with the history of Israel as God's chosen people, beginning with Abraham. The God of the covenant, the sustainer and redeemer of Israel is the creator of the universe.³⁶

The Genesis account of creation plays an important part in the redefinition of the faith of Israel, as she comes to terms with defeat, destruction, deportation and exile. If Genesis 1 is not to be taken literally, does it therefore fall into the realm of myths and legends? Ancient stories about creation were all channels of meaning, to help societies cope with their experiences of the world in which they were born, lived, and died. They were not essentially accounts of the observable 'scientific' features of the earth and sky, but rather they were vehicles of the hopes, aspirations, and even fears of people. Cosmologist John Barrow comments:

The primitive belief in order and in the sequence of cause and effect displayed by myths is consistent with the belief that it is necessary to have some reason for the existence of everything - a reason that pays due respect for the natural forces that hold life and death in their hands.³⁷

If Genesis 1 falls into this category then a final reflection on the function of myths from Bruce Masse *et al* may prove helpful. Myths are semi-historical stories believed to be true by the cultures in which they are told – they combine realism with supernatural mythic elements. They are to be considered as truthful - they are accounts of “major events that typically happened in the remote past of that culture, when the world was different to today The concepts of world view and science are intimately related, and it may be said that myth is the science of cultures which do not verify ‘truth’ about nature by experiment.”³⁸

Mythology provides information about past events that can be remembered in a non-literate culture. One instructive example comes from the tribes of the Andaman Islands who survived the tsunami of 26th December 2004. They had a myth about a “wave that eats people” brought about by the angry spirits of their ancestors. To avoid its clutches they had to run for high ground if the sea suddenly receded.³⁹

Genesis 1 is different in literary form from the rest of Genesis and indeed of the Old Testament; it is neither exhortation, parable, prophecy, song, nor a list of the contents of the storecupboard of creation. Indeed, the first eleven chapters of Genesis tell the story of the primal history of the world. It begins with creation, in primordial time and space. After this the universal history becomes focused into the history of God's chosen people, through Abraham and his descendents.

12 FAITH AND THOUGHT

It is an expression of Israel's living awareness of her dependency on nature and God's faithful will, even in times of darkness and despair. Christians find this exemplified in the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, who the Apostle John describes as co-creator with God (John 1:1-3). God's relationship to creation is a personal covenant of gracious love.

We can conclude that a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-11 does not do justice to the text and misses out on the depth of God's truth that it contains.

Let me show you a more excellent way - Dialogue instead of conflict:

It is helpful to consider the views of Denis Alexander and Alister McGrath, especially in their respective critiques of Intelligent Design and scientific materialism, and then explore the thesis put forward by Nancy Murphy on reconciling science and faith.

Alister McGrath in his Christian critique of Richard Dawkins' position notes that

Dawkins holds that the explanatory force of Darwinism on the one hand, and the aesthetic, moral, and intellectual failings of religion on the other, lead the honest person directly and inexorably to atheism.⁴⁰

He summarises Dawkins' hostility toward Christianity as:

- the Darwinian world-view makes God unnecessary
- religion is based on faith with no rigorous evidence to support it
- religion offers an impoverished view of the world
- religion leads to evil

But we will want to observe that Dawkins does not engage with alternative views. There are important questions to ask about what sort of God Dawkins finds to be redundant or discredited. For example in *River out of Eden* he says that "the universe we observe had precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference."⁴¹

The problem with this argument is that Dawkins, like many creationists and those who subscribe to Intelligent Design, places Darwinism and God in opposition. Science is not the field of intellectual discourse in which God can be proved or disproved. The view that since Paley's watchmaker God has been disposed of by Darwin's thesis, God does not exist, is almost laughable. The concept of God the watchmaker has long been rejected by theology. The critique of the teleological argument presented by David Hume still holds true.⁴²

McGrath takes Dawkins to task over his view that faith is blind trust in the absence of evidence.⁴³ He notes that Dawkins moves from 'not proven' to 'therefore equals false', which is in itself a bad argument. Dawkins use of 'improbable' to describe God has no rational support and is, in McGrath's words "a populist swashbuckling rhetorical exaggeration."⁴⁴

John Lennox supports this view when he observes that when Dawkins suggests that evolution and God are mutually exclusive alternatives, he implies that God and evolution belong to the same category of explanation.⁴⁵

McGrath maintains with historians, such as John Brooke, the view that conflict between science and Christianity is a piece of Victorian propaganda and relates to a time at the end of the 19th century when “professional scientists wished to distance themselves from their amateur colleagues” mostly clergymen, and so become independent of the church.⁴⁶

Far from a case of smallmindedness, McGrath confirms that the Christian approach recognises an immediate sense of wonder at the beauty of nature; a derived sense of wonder from the mathematical representation of reality; and a derived sense of wonder at what the natural world points to. We can agree with his opinion that “if anything, a Christian engagement with the natural world adds a richness which I find absent from Dawkins’ account of things, offering a new motivation [for us all] for the study of nature.”⁴⁷

Spencer and Alexander suggest that the attacks on faith by Darwinian fundamentalist do not help people to understand and accept evolution, and in fact drive them into the hands of the creation science movement.⁴⁸

However, the arguments presented by those who ascribe to creationism and its newer version, intelligent design, are likewise unhelpful. They treat evolution as an anti-religious philosophy rather than science. Their views move away from the immanence of God, leave us perilously close to a ‘God of the gaps’ argument, and in an attempt to protect scripture’s final authority devalue scientific investigation, while also denying the significance and authority of God’s revelation in the created world.⁴⁹ This is far removed from early scientists like John Ray who spoke of holding the book of God’s word in one hand and the book of God’s works in the other.

Intelligent Design is a form of episodic creationism. Some of its supporters hold to an old earth, but many of their arguments are similar to those held by creationists, for example in their denial of macroevolution. A key exponent of this position, William Dembski,⁵⁰ is concerned that modern theology, mistakenly, has a theodicy and theology of nature that rules out intervention. Intelligent design is defined as design which is due to an actual intelligence. In further defining intelligent design, as opposed to the design argument, the author suggests that we need to distinguish between design that may be the result of natural causes and that which exhibits features characteristic of intelligence. This raises the same concern that we have noted elsewhere of separating God from nature, as if God were not the author of natural processes.

Dembski consistently places intelligent design in opposition to Darwinism, suiting his theological thesis, which seeks to exclude evolution as a principle in theological debate. He states that if it is not excluded we find that the unchanging God of traditional

theology gives way to the evolving God of process theologies. Thus traditional theism with its strong transcendence is ousted by panentheism, with its modified transcendence wherein God is inseparable from and dependent on the world. Dembski's position here runs the danger of being contrary to scripture, where God is clearly seen to be active within creation.

Alexander notes that Michael Behe,⁵¹ another advocate of intelligent design, proposes that some entities are so complex that they could not have appeared by chance. One such entity that Behe identifies is the bacterial flagellum. It is an example of an irreducible complex system. But Alexander observes that "most of the components of the flagellum have roles and functions that are widely known and are widely spread through living organisms," and the evolution of the flagellum has now been demonstrated.⁵² Alexander recognizes that Intelligent Design is proposing an "ill-defined designer in the gap of our present ignorance,"⁵³ which is a version of the 'God of the gaps' argument.

In discussing naturalism Dembski concludes that the naturalist is likely to posit Nature (writ large) or the Universe (also writ large) or mass-energy or superstrings or some such entity as the final resting place for explanation, and that Darwinism conduces toward naturalism whereas intelligent design, at least in contemporary Western culture, conduces toward theism.

Alexander addresses one of the fundamental theological flaws in the Intelligent Design position, when he poses the question where does DNA come from? He believes that it really doesn't matter as this is God's work in creation. He points out that the Intelligent Design and creationist literature speaks of "the impossibility that life could emerge out of chemicals by sinister sounding 'blind materialistic, naturalistic forces.' But wait a minute, these are God's chemicals, God's materials, that are being talked about here. A mystery bigger than the origin of life is why Christians should ascribe pagan-sounding characteristics to God's world."⁵⁴

Coyne rightly recognizes that the heart of the problem is the fact that evolution raises profound questions of purpose and morality, and the emotional consequences of facing this fact.

Yet he does not believe that evolution leaves us in such a barren naturalistic and materialistic world. He observes: "Yes, certain parts of our behaviour may be genetically encoded, instilled by natural selection in our savanna-dwelling ancestors. But genes aren't destiny. He states that "there is no reason ... to see ourselves as marionettes dancing on the strings of evolution." One lesson that all geneticists know, but which doesn't seem to have permeated the consciousness of the public, is that "genetic" does not mean "unchangeable".⁵⁵ He recognizes that while the world is full of selfishness, immorality and injustice, we also find kindness and altruism.

So let us turn to the more fruitful discussion through dialogue.

Nancey Murphy develops a model for thinking about the relations among theology, ethics, the natural sciences and the human sciences, which understands them as hierarchically ordered and intrinsically interconnected.

It is the level of explanation that is important. Her central thesis is that biological evolution requires the higher level of explanation which only theology can give. Humankind, created in God's image, is created to participate in God's creativity, in its splendour and its suffering.

When she considers God's action in the natural world, Murphy, considers the modern views under three headings: deism – activity restricted to initial creation; interventionism, where God's continuing action is one of intervention through specific events; and immanentism, where it is seen that if God works in the universe then every event in some sense is an act of God – so God acts through nature and history.

The discoveries of science: Newton's laws of motion; evolution; the fine tuning of an expanding universe; and the anthropic principle push us in the direction of immanentism.

In a later work⁵⁶ she rightly points out that the conflict between science and biblical faith is an argument about the ways in which God acts. She then states that, for example, in opposing creationism our arguments should not centre on proving evolutionary theory (which only some are equipped to do) but rather on the creationist's view of divine action.

We can propose a move away from the interventionist model of God's action found in the creationist and intelligent design arguments and explore an understanding of God's immanent action within creation, which is more securely biblical. Here we find the God who accompanied the people of Israel as pillar of cloud and pillar of fire; who directed them through his servants the prophets, who was incarnate in Christ, and who is ever present as Holy Spirit.

Murphy examines attacks on evolution that emphasise waste and suffering, and affirms that evolution requires death. For example, we needed to be meat eaters to develop the metabolism to support large brains. She also asks why we should be concerned that species die out. Do we want the dinosaurs around now? She also notes that pain is necessary if there are to be animals that exhibit complex behaviour, and that we need pain in order to protect ourselves from self-destruction. She concludes:

If God is to create life, and this means real life, life that actually lives in its environment in an ecosystem and not just toy creatures that have to be kept alive by constant divine action, then the biological world has to be very much the way it is. Most of the suffering in nature (that is not caused by us) is *natural*; it simply needs to be present in order for there to be life at all, especially for there to be life like ourselves.⁵⁷

Coyne concludes that

We are the one creature to whom natural selection has bequeathed a brain complex enough to comprehend the laws that govern the universe. And we should be proud that we are the only species that has figured out how we came to be.⁵⁸

This can be a true conclusion for both the scientist, and the Christian seeking to understand God's world.

Conclusion:

It is a problem when words are hi-jacked – I am a 'creationist' in as much as I believe that God is the creator of all that exists or has been or will be in this universe. The sadness of the modern Creation Science Movement is that they cut themselves off from the revelation of God in scientific research, and they fail to find the depth of God's revelation in scripture by treating Genesis 1 as if it were a divinely dictated text. As John Polkinghorne observed:

Mistaking poetry for prose can lead to false conclusions. When Robert Burns tells us his love "is like a red, red rose", we know that we are not meant to think that his girlfriend has green leaves and prickles.⁵⁹

Richard Dawkins has exploited the more extreme views surrounding evolution in his 2008 television series, which explored the life and work of his hero, Charles Darwin.⁶⁰ The media find the conflict model an easy one to present, whereas the dialogue between Christianity and Science, explored by many writers,⁶¹ is far more complex and time-demanding.

For many theistic evolutionists today, Polkinghorne's summation of Charles Kingsley's reaction to the *Origin of Species* is a helpful position to hold:

Kingsley said that no doubt God could have created a ready-made world, but it had turned out the Creator had done something cleverer and more valuable than that, in creating a world so endowed with potentiality that creatures "could make themselves" through the shuffling explorations of natural selection. The God who is the Creator of nature can as properly be seen to be at work through natural processes as in any other way.⁶²

(Footnotes)

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- 5 Quoted in Julian Joyce 'Who are the British Creationists?' BBC NEWS Magazine.
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- 22 Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, p.119
- 23 Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, p.108
- 24 Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, p.130
- 25 Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, p.131
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- ⁵⁹ John Polkinghorne, 'Shining a light where science and theology meet', <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article4790446.ece?print=yes&randnum> accessed 23.09.08
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Dementia and Spirituality

A B Robins

This article has arisen from personal experience over a number of years, and which, it is hoped, might prove of interest.

My involvement in an inner-city parish as a 'lay reader' has led to unexpected developments in the area of pastoral care. Within the parish boundary there are two homes for the elderly. One is part of South London and Maudsley (SLAM) and the other has units for the Elderly Mentally Infirm (EMI). As a consequence of frequent visits to these homes, and helping with occasional worship there, it was suggested that I might like to join a Dementia Care Course for Health Care Workers. My brief was to 'bring up the rear' at the end of each 12-week course with particular reference to Dementia and Spirituality. Those who organise such courses are very conscious of the spiritual needs of the residents, as much as their physical needs.

The task given to me was a 45–60 minute talk to a different group of health employees every 12 weeks. This has been continuing for about 4 years. To help with such an assignment one obviously needs to do quite a bit of research, and I have been surprised how much has been, and continues to be, written on the subject. I hope the following may help others who are concerned with the issues when the need arises. I have been greatly helped by the Christian Council on Ageing which I joined at the start. They publish many helpful articles, and these, and others, have been appended here.

Dementia

This is a wide subject with a variety of manifestations. Alzheimer's is a word in common usage, but there are other types of dementia, eg multi-infarct dementia. Sometimes these need sophisticated methods of diagnosis. Nonetheless, a brain scan, which is non-invasive and easy to carry out, will usually show how much of the brain tissue has been lost, and in which areas. In severe cases, loss can be considerable. Of course we recognise some of the symptoms of the sickness, such as memory loss, challenging behaviour, apparent loss of identity, etc. About 1% of the UK population suffers from some form of dementia, and this may increase as time progresses and the population ages. It should be stressed, however, that dementia is not always a problem in old age, and Alzheimer's, for example, may occur in the 50's.

I have been greatly helped by a series of books from Jessica Kingsley Publications (see Bibliography). They continue to publish books in this field, and I would refer especially to one of these, namely 'The Simplicity of Dementia' by Buijssen. This author describes quite clearly what he calls 'Two Laws of Dementia'. Briefly, the first law is the 'disturbed encoding' in the brain. The diseased brain has lost the ability to 'fix' events which are more than a minute or so old. Hence, loss of short-term memory. 'I remember my childhood, but have forgotten what I ate for breakfast'. This could be the result of

breakdown of protein or RNA synthesis, so that memories are not 'fixed' for future recall.

The second law the author calls 'roll-back memory'. The latest happenings in a person's life are gradually lost, even though they were once there to recall. As disease progresses, this 'roll-back' moves further back in time, until towards the end only childhood memories remain. It has also been shown that the inter-neuron contacts which the developing brain builds up from birth, regress until only the early contacts remain. The sufferer regresses to childhood in many ways.

So what is left of the human personality? Where is the person's identity? How does the Christian cope in this situation – either the dementia sufferer or their family? It is time to move on to the second strand of this discussion.

Spirituality

At the start of my 'brief' in the course I have described, I was reminded that we are talking of spirituality, and not necessarily of religion. Some of the members of the course may be of different faiths, or of none. Is spirituality linked to religion, or not? That is, a religion which uses scriptures, symbols, rituals, etc? Is spirituality more vague, elusive maybe, but still of great relevance?

As part of our course we tried to 'brain-storm' to obtain students' views on this. Each time this was done, in each course, the response was very similar. For example, spirituality was 'having a purpose in life', 'knowing that I matter', 'knowing that I am loved', 'feeling for other people', etc. The religious definition only procured a few 'votes' as also 'having a soul'. Somehow these 'softer' definitions of spirituality were more relevant to the carers than more formal religious definitions. But this is not to say that the dementia sufferer would be satisfied with this. There are many recorded instances and much anecdotal evidence that rituals, hymns, prayers, sacred objects, etc, touch something deep within a person's memories (see Hammond, Seifert). The video which we used in every session and which can be thoroughly recommended, shared wonderful examples of this in care homes. The feelings and experiences of a dementia sufferer cannot readily be appreciated. We are not able to enter someone else's mind, but must rely on observation and what may be said to us. A good account of this is given by Davis in his book "My Journey into Alzheimer's Disease" (1993). Davis is a clergyman who has been able (with his wife's help) to describe how the sudden onset of dementia affected him over time. He feels cut-off from worship in church and by sheer faith, against his feelings, clings to the fact that he is still kept in the love of God. We must always remember that the dementia sufferer is never lost in God's purposes.

One could elaborate at length about philosophical matters, but the purpose of this article and the course it describes is pastoral rather than philosophical. We accept that we have a brain, and that the mind is the brain's software, so to speak, but what of the soul (psyche)? We are here up against the monist-dualist controversy. The Hebrew

understands body, mind and spirit as a unity – it was the Greeks who introduced the soul as a separate entity, which survived the body's death. This is elaborated fully in the article by Allaway, who describes the task of the pastor trying to help the sufferer with depression. Together with depression we can also link dementia – a more serious and terminal condition at the present time. Allaway takes the monist view, ie the equivalence of mind and soul. He suggests that though the soul may be lost on death, God has a “back-up copy” of every individual. Luhman on the other hand takes a dualist view, in particular when dealing with the resurrection of the body. Luhman finds it hard to comprehend how all the physical bodies of those who ever lived can exist in the universe, large as it is. To echo Paul, “I tell you a mystery”.

A definition which tries to reconcile this controversy is ‘non-reductive physicalism’ (Murphy, Jeeves). These matters are more for philosophical debate and were not considered relevant for the course we were involved in. What we always tried to keep in mind was the personality of the dementia sufferer, which Christians believe survives death. whatever the understanding of this, and not merely in the memories of those who are bereaved. Two Biblical quotes that encourage this view are John 14 1–6 and 1 Thess 4 14–18 – ‘forever with the Lord’.

There is an enormous amount of work in progress concerned with consciousness – the ‘last great mystery’. What will be the outcome of all this, we do not know. It may indeed take us nearer to understanding ourselves – how our minds work, and what has happened to those minds which seem to have lost their way. From the point of view of the course we are discussing, these matters, though interesting, are academic. For those at the ‘coal-face’ the need is to help those who are struggling, and to be positive about their status in God's eyes. In an autobiography by Alan Bennett, he describes how embarrassed he was when trying to communicate with his mother who had dementia for many years. The staff could get close to her, almost speaking to her as a child, and to which she responded. He could not do that – his university education got in the way.

It is a great pity, albeit understandable, that the Christian within the Body of Christ finds it hard to accommodate the dementia sufferer within their understanding and care. Of course there can be embarrassing and challenging occasions, as we acknowledge. Hammond in her “Wells of Life” recounts some of these, often amusing. These must be accepted as the sufferer is living in a different and confusing world. Another inspiring account of personal meetings with the dementia sufferer by a clergyperson is given by Shamy in her book – highly recommended. Seifert and Baker also tell of cases, especially where a resident has been denied access to a personal treasure for security reasons. They instance a crucifix which could only be seen but never touched. When access was allowed, all trouble ceased and peace resumed.

There are numerous examples in the literature of triggers to memory occasioned by prayers (especially The Lord's Prayer), communion, symbols, hymns, etc. These of

course especially apply to once-practising believers. The Church must always be open to the needs of such people and not embarrassed or upset by unusual responses (Goldsmith, especially page 180). Christ welcomes all into His Kingdom. Maybe such sufferers are closer to him than we might care to think.

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24 FAITH AND THOUGHT

Audio Visual

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Blessed are the Forgetful CCOA Conference (1992) Audiotape 71 mins, 74 Eden Way, Beckenham, Kent BR3 3DH

Organisations

Christian Council on Ageing (CCOA) publishes quarterly (PLUS), Chairman: Jo Kennedy, Hornby Road, Appleton Wiske, Northallerton DL6 2AF (Tel: 01609 881 1408; Email: joseph.kennedy@ukgateway.net)

CCOA Dementia Newsletter, Editor Rev'd A Jewell, 63 Moor Grange View, Leeds LS16 5BH (Email: ajjewell@aol.com)

Methodist Homes for the Aged (MHA) Epworth House, Stuart Street, Derby DE1 2EQ (publish many papers on visiting and worship)

Grove Books Ltd, Ridley Hall Road, Cambridge CB3 9HU (Tel: 01223 464 748) see Volume P89 James Saunders, *Dementia: Pastoral Theology* (2002)

The Alzheimer's Society, Gordon House, 10 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1PH (Tel: 0207 306 0606)

Spiritual Care for Older People, Oxford Diocesan Church House, North Hinksey, OX2 0NB (Tel: 01865 208213)

Personal Experience

Taylor, R *Love in the Shadows. Alzheimer's – a Carer's Story* Scripture Union 1996

Davis, R *My Journey into Alzheimer's Disease* Scripture Press 1993

Worship Resources

Reeve, Buddy *Fifty Services of Christian Worship for Use in Care Homes* PARCHE, St Elizabeth's Church, 268 Victoria Drive, Eastbourne BN20 8QX (Tel: 01323 438 527) 2008

Hymns that Live – 74 Hymns for Care Homes Fairway Folio Alsager, Cheshire (Tel: 01270 874 662)

Hymns we've always loved – 72 Hymns and Carols (3 CDs) Kevin Mayhew

Nebo-Sarsekim (Jeremiah 39: 3) Mentioned in a Recently Noticed Babylonian Text

T.C. Mitchell

Reports appeared in many newspapers recently giving an account of a cuneiform text dating from the 6th century B.C. which mentions a man who can be identified with the Nebo-Sarsekim known in the account given by Jeremiah (39:3) of the last days of Jerusalem. This cuneiform tablet (BM.114789), which is dated to 595 B.C., was acquired by the British Museum in 1920, and is one of a group of economic texts being prepared for publication by Professor Joseph Jursa of the University of Vienna. It is part of the collections of the Department of the Middle East (formerly Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities) in the British Museum, which holds over 100,000 cuneiform tablets and fragments. The text concerns a Babylonian official named Nabû-šarrūssu-ukīn *rab-ša-reši*, who is clearly to be identified with Biblical Nebo-Sarsekim who has the title *rab-sāris*.

The text of the tablet reads¹

“1½ manû of gold, the property of Nabû-šarrūssu-ukīn, *rab ša-reši*, which he sent to Esangila in the care of Arad-Bānītu *ša-reši*: Arad-Bānītu has handed [it] over in Esangila. In the presence of Bēl-usāti son of Alpaia the royal *ṭābiḫū* [and of] Nādin son of Marduk-zēr-ibni.

Month šabaṭu, day 18, year 10, Nebuchadnezzar.

In this, 1½ manû was the equivalent of about 1.65 lbs (c.756 grammes), a quantity of gold appropriate for a senior man such as Nabû-šarrūssu-ukīn (*rab ša-reši*) to present to Esangila (perhaps better known as Esagila), the temple of Marduk the principal god of Babylon. The title *rab ša-reši*, “chief of the head”, indicates that he held an office near to the ruler, superior to that of Arad-Bānītu *ša-reši*, “(he) of the head”, who conveyed the gift to the temple. *Ṭābiḫū*, literally “butcher”, the title of Alpaia, the father of one of the witnesses, perhaps indicates in this context some such office as “bodyguard”, since the man in charge of the king’s food was in a position which virtually amounted to that.

All three of the Akkadian titles in this text, *rab ša-reši*, *ša-reši*, and *ṭābiḫū*, are found also in the Old Testament, in the Hebrew transcriptions *rab-sāris*, *sāris* and *ṭabbāh*.

Akkadian *rēšu*, the common word for “head”,² is found in the phrase *ša rēši*, literally “of the head”, in contexts which show that this usually had the meaning “attendant, soldier, officer, official”.³ There is evidence, however, that in some contexts in Middle Assyrian (c.1500-1000 B.C.) and Neo-Assyrian (c.1000-600 B.C.), and possibly in Old Babylonian (c.2000-1500 B.C.), as well as in the literary dialect known as Standard Babylonian (late second to late first millennium B.C.) it had the meaning “eunuch”.⁴ The longer phrase *rab ša rēši*, mentioned in Middle Babylonian (c.1500-1000 B.C.) and Neo-Babylonian Neo-Assyrian (c.1000-600 B.C.) texts, referred to a more senior official (Akkadian *rab* meaning “chief” or the like) who can be described as “commander of the court attendants or officers”.⁵

The Akkadian phrases *ša rēši* and *rab ša rēši* were borrowed in Hebrew in the forms *sārīs* and *rab-sārīs*, very possibly early in the first millennium B.C. before the rise of the Assyrian Empire,⁶ in which case they could have had the specific meanings “eunuch” and “chief eunuch”, and it has indeed been argued that Hebrew *sārīs* always had the meaning “eunuch” the Old Testament.⁷ In some contexts this was clearly the case (Is. 56:3-4; Est. 2:3; and probably 2 Ki. 20:18), and even Potiphar the Egyptian official whose wife tried to seduce Joseph (Gen. 37:36; 39:1), could have been a eunuch, his wife possibly having sought solace with the young Hebrew because of what Potiphar was. In other passages, however, this translation could be debated (1 Sam. 8:14-15; 1 Ki. 22:9; 2 Ki. 8:6; 9:31-33; 23:1; 24:15; 25:19; Jer. 29:2; 34:19; 38:7; 41:16).

Hebrew *ṭabbāḥ* had the meaning “butcher, cook” (1 Sam. 9:23-24), from *ṭābah*, “to slaughter”, but it could also designate an official in a senior position not directly connected with food, “provost” or something of the kind.

The passage in the Hebrew text at Jeremiah 39:3 which contains the name of Nebo-sarsekim runs *nērgal šar-’ešer samgar-nēbū šar-sēkīm rab-sārīs nērgal šar-’ešer rab-māg*. The Rabbinic scholars (Masoretes) who preserved the Hebrew text were evidently not themselves familiar with some of the details of this passage. The hyphen (called maqqēp in Hebrew) was only introduced by them early in the Christian era, and is not found, for instance, in any of the Biblical manuscripts from Qumran. In this passage it is used correctly in most of the forms, but the link in *samgar-nēbū* is incorrect, and this error was carried over into the Authorised Version, which renders the passage as though it gives a list of six personal names, including one repeated twice: “Nergal-Sharezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim, Rab-saris, Nergal-Sharezer, Rab-mag”.

After the decipherment of cuneiform it became clear that three of these forms, *samgar*, *rab-sārīs*, and *rab-māg* were Babylonian-Assyrian official titles: *samgar*, Babylonian *simmagir*, “royal commissioner” or something of the kind; *rab-sārīs*, Babylonian and Assyrian *rab ša rēši*, mentioned above; and *rab-māg*, Babylonian *rab mugī*, another official whose role has not been precisely identified. This means that

nērgal šar-’ešer, found twice, and *nēbū šar-šēkīm* were personal names, and that the passage in Jeremiah 39:3 should be rendered in English as “Nergal-sharezer, *samgar*, Nebo-sarsekim, *rab-sāris*, and Nergal-sharezer, *rab-mag*”.

The NIV (1979) does better than the AV, though it takes Samgar as a place name, with the translation “Nergal-Sharezer of Samgar, Nebo-Sarsekim a chief officer, Nergal-Sharezer a high official”, and the ESV (2001), though it recognises that *rab-saris* and *rab-mag* were titles of officials, wrongly retains the *samgar-nēbū* of the Hebrew text, with “Nergal-sar-ezer, Samgar-nebu, Sarsekim the Rab-saris, Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag”.

The main historical events of this time can be summarised in the accompanying chart. In this the Babylonian kings are placed on the right, and the kings of Judah on the left, with the headings Jerusalem and Mizpah, indicating that after the final Babylonian conquest, the capital was moved to the latter site.

When Nebuchadnezzar succeeded Nabopolassar as king of Babylon in 604 B.C., Jehoiakim (strictly Jehoiakim) was the Judaeen king in Jerusalem. He had been placed there by the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho, with his name changed from Eliakim (2 Ki. 23:34). When he died in 598 he was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin (strictly Jehoiakin) who surrendered Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar on 16 March 597 after a short siege, and was deported with his family to Babylon where he was relatively well treated (2 Ki. 24:10-15). At that time Nebuchadnezzar placed Mattaniah, Jehoiakin’s the uncle, on the throne in Jerusalem with a change of name to Zedekiah (2 Ki. 24:17 = Jer. 37:1). After some years Zedekiah rebelled against Babylonian rule and Nebuchadnezzar made a final destruction of Jerusalem (2 Ki. 25:1-3; Jer. 39:1-2; 52:3-7) in 586 B.C. Zedekiah escaped from the city before its fall, but was captured, blinded, and taken captive to Babylon (2 Ki. 25:4-7; Jer. 39:4-7). With the principal figures of Judah in Exile in Babylonia, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah, a member of a distinguished Judaeen family, as Governor of Palestine (2 Ki. 25:22). Since Jerusalem had suffered destruction, he made his capital at Mizpah (2 Ki. 25:23), about eight miles to the north. Gedaliah was subsequently murdered by dissidents (2 Ki. 25:25; Jer. 40:13-41:2).

While the date of the first fall of Jerusalem is known to have been 597 B.C., that of the final fall, given above as 586 B.C., is uncertain. This is because the series of tablets known as Babylonian Chronicles which give brief annual summaries of the events of Babylonian history between 747 and 539 B.C. have gaps in the sequence. One of the tablets (BM.21946) covers the years 605-595 B.C. and therefore includes 597, the year of the first Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, but there is a gap of thirty-seven years in the series, and the next surviving tablet (BM.25124), covers only the year 557 B.C., and the following one (BM.35382, the so-called Nabonidus Chronicle) covers the years 556-539 B.C. Though there is thus this gap in the evidence, it is generally agreed that the final destruction of Jerusalem took place either in 587 or 586, most probably 586 B.C.

Concerning the final destruction in 586 B.C. I will take the liberty of quoting from a contribution I made to the *Cambridge Ancient History* in 1991..

“The Book of Jeremiah reports, in a slightly confused passage, that when the Babylonians had gained possession of Jerusalem a group of senior officers, including Nergal-sharezer, *samgar*, Nebu-sarsekim, *rab-sāris*, and Nergal-Sharezer, *rab-māg*, sat in the Middle Gate, presumably thus establishing themselves as a military government (Jer. 39:3). The three titles are those attaching to senior positions in the Babylonian hierarchy: *simmagīr*, something like ‘royal commissioner’, the *rab ša rēši*, and the *rab muḡi*, another official of uncertain responsibility. It is not clear, however, whether there were two Nergal-sharezers or whether one man of that name occupied both the offices of *simmagīr* and *rab muḡi*; and the identity of the *rab ša rēši* is uncertain, because, according to the account in Jeremiah, only a little over a month later, when it is hardly likely that a new man had assumed the office, he is named Nebushazban (Jer. 39:13). There is at present no satisfactory explanation for this. The name *Nērgal šar’ešer* presents no difficulty, since it clearly represents Babylonian *Nergal-šar-ušur*, and there is a strong possibility that the man in question was the son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar, the Neriglissar of the Greeks, who twenty seven years later became king of Babylon (559-556 B.C.). The administration established by these officers was only an interim one, set up to deal with immediate issues until further instructions were received from Nebuchadnezzar, who had evidently remained at Riblah. About a month later Nebuchadnezzar sent one of his senior officers, Nebuzaradan (Babylonian Nabu-zer-iddin), to Jerusalem to complete the neutralization of the city. This officer, who is designated *rab-ṭabbāhīm* (‘chief cook’) in the Old Testament (II Ki. 25:8,11; Jer. 39:9-10) is known from a passage in a building inscription on a clay prism of Nebuchadnezzar listing court officials, among whom he is named first, with his office, *rab nuḡatimmu* (‘chief cook’), or, perhaps, ‘master of the royal kitchen’, clearly the designation of a man of rank and importance.”⁸

I would add today, concerning the titles in this passage, that, while Akkadian *nuḡatimmu* means “cook”; Hebrew *ṭabbāhīm*, plural of *ṭabbāh*, is more precisely “butcher” than “cook” from *ṭabāh* “to slaughter”, found also in Akkadian *ṭabīḫu*, “butcher” from *ṭabāḫu*, “to slaughter”.

It is clear that Nabû-šarrūssu-ukīn, *rab ša-reši*, named in the tablet, can be identified with the Nēbû-šar-sēkīm, *rab-sāris*, of the Biblical account. This equivalence can be seen more clearly perhaps by comparing the names with consonants only: Babylonian nb-šrskn and Hebrew nb-šrskm. Concerning the consonants š and ś, the Biblical Hebrew script has marks (introduced in the Christian era by the Masoretes), which make a distinction between them, whereas the cuneiform writing system represents both š and ś by the same syllabic characters, all

conventionally transliterated as š.

In 1991 I wrote “the identity of the *rab ša reši* is uncertain”, but the information supplied by this new tablet removes that uncertainty, and since the man in question, Nabû-šarrūssu-ukîn, is shown by the text to have held the office of *rab ša-reši* already in 595 B.C., nearly ten years earlier than the reference to him in Jeremiah, there would be no real problem in assuming that in the shifting situation when the Babylonians were setting up an administration in Jerusalem, he was replaced in that office by a different man, Nebushazban. This means that my comments in 1991 that “it is hardly likely that a new man had assumed the office”, and that “there is at present no satisfactory explanation for this”, can be set aside. This illustrates the process of changing conclusions in the light of new evidence.

References

- ¹ Published by M. Jursa in the note, “Nabû-šarrūssu-ukm, rab ša-reši und ‘Nebusarsekim’ (Jer. 39:3) - BM 114789”, in *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires [NABU]*, 2008, 1 (March), pp.9-10, no.5. The tablet was included in the temporary exhibition on Babylon held in the British Museum during the winter of 2008-2009, and is illustrated in the exhibition catalogue, I.L. Finkel and M.J. Seymour (eds), *Babylon. Myth and Reality* (London, 2008), in a colour photograph (fig.128) with a brief description (p.145).
- ² E. Reiner and M.T. Roth, eds, *The Assyrian Dictionary [CAD]*, 14, R (Chicago, 1999), pp.277-289.
- ³ *CAD*, R, pp.292-296; J.A. Brinkman, *A Political History of Post-Kassite Babylonia 1158-722 B.C.* [Analecta Orientalia 43] (Rome, 1968), pp.309-310.
- ⁴ Brinkman, *Political History of Post-Kassite Babylonia*, pp.309-310; *CAD*, R, p.296.
- ⁵ *CAD*, R, pp.289-290.
- ⁶ As argued by H. Tadmor, “Was the Biblical sārîs a Eunuch?” in Z. Zevit, S. Gitin and M. Sokoloff, eds, *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots. Biblical, Epigraphic and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield* (Winona Lake, Indiana, 1995), pp.317-325, specifically p.324.
- ⁷ Tadmor, “Biblical sārîs”, pp.319-321.
- ⁸ T.C. Mitchell in Chapter 30, “Judah until the Fall of Jerusalem (c.700-586 B.C.)” in J. Boardman, et al eds, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, III.2 (2nd ed.; Cambridge, 1991), specifically pp. 407-408.

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Jerusalem | Nabopolassar |
| Jehoahaz | |
| -----609----- | |
| Jehoiakim (<Eliakim) | -----604----- |
| [Appointed by | |
| [Necho | |
| -----598----- | |
| Jehoiachin | |
| -----597----- | |
| [Taken to Babylon | |
| Zedekiah (<Mattaniah) | |
| [Appointed by | Nebuchadnezzar |
| [Nebuchadnezzar | |
| | |
| [Rebelled | |
| -----586----- | -----561----- |
| [Taken to Babylon | |
| EXILE | |
| Mizpah | Amel-Marduk |
| Gedaliah | (Evil Merodach) |
| [Appointed by | [Jehoiachin released] |
| [Nebuchadnezzar | -----559----- |
| | |
| [Murdered | Nergal-šar-ušur |
| | (Neriglissar) |
| | -----556----- |
| | |
| | Lābāši-Marduk |
| | -----555----- |
| | |
| | Nabu-na'id (Nabonidus) |
| -----539----- | -----539----- |
| | |
| [Return of the Jews] | Cyrus |

Book Reviews

Denis Alexander *Creation or Evolution: Do we have to choose?* 2008 Oxford Monarch pb..£10.992008 ISBN 978.1.85424.746.9

Denis Alexander comes to the debate on evolution and faith well equipped, having the necessary credentials in both modern science and the Christian faith. He is a research scientist in immunology with a good grasp of the rapid developments in genome research. He has been a committed Christian for many years and has written about science and faith on both its historical and contemporary aspects. He is also the Editor of 'Science and Christian Belief'. In this latest work he presents the powerful evidence for biological evolution which has come from the analysis of the genomic sequences of various species. This evidence is not too easy to explain briefly, resting as it does on a fairly detailed understanding of genes and their inheritance. He tackles this very well providing a good overview of the current state of the relevant science for anyone keen to evaluate the new findings. It is often a complete failure to grasp this new evidence that flaws discussions of this subject. No such criticism can be levelled at the author of this book.

The author gives an excellent review of this recent evidence for evolution, which he concludes provides a correct explanation and is now generally accepted in science. He fully recognises the consequences for the Christian who wishes also to give accurate interpretations of the biblical references to God's work in creation and to provide a responsible integration. He demonstrates how science and faith have been brought together in various ways and evaluates the success of these different approaches in achieving a harmony between faithful interpretation of both science and scripture. He shows his preference for the schemes that accept the generally held interpretations of science. His inclusion of different views enables the weaknesses and strengths of each to be weighed. However, this makes the book complete though perhaps less direct.

There is a great need for a short and easily digested book in this area written by someone with the kind of credentials that this author has. This study is too thorough to be that book. It is, however, exactly the kind of book that is needed for students, Christian leaders or anyone wanting to get a grasp of the science behind the current debate. It makes it clear that the work of integrating science and faith requires more effort from many on the faith front. These often expect to re-write science rather than look at their own discipline's responsibilities to give better studied exposition. The author certainly has worked hard at examining his own faith as well as his science and has begun to study ways to integrate scripture with the latest ideas on human evolution. This is an area many simply avoid but it is brave of him to tackle it. We should see this as an encouragement to others to work for a careful and full exploration, one that enables the findings of science and the truth of scripture to be accepted without sacrificing personal integrity in either field. Although this work will find opposition from those who hold a young earth creationist position. Alexander shows that their

approach will not hold up under the weight of the new discoveries that compel honesty and integrity to acknowledge the logic of the conclusions now so overwhelmingly backed up by recent investigation. The author quotes Augustine who argued that it was disgraceful for someone without faith to hear a Christian talking nonsense when seeking to give the meaning of scripture in the light of the science of his day.

The book tackles different aspects of the debate including the origin of living things from the earth's elements and finishes with a useful analysis of the Intelligent Design Argument. Here again the subject is treated scientifically and by careful analysis the main arguments used in that area are shown to be wanting. He clearly accepts that God has intentions in creation that in some way are worked out so that the whole may be described as God's work in creation. He distinguishes this from the narrower goals of the Intelligent Design Schools that seek to demonstrate the input of the intelligent activity.

The overall impression of the book is one of a very well researched and presented account of how modern science provides overwhelming evidence for the process of biological evolution and shows how the main work for the Christian holding a high view of scripture must be a very careful exposition of that revelation that enables a proper harmonisation with God's message as spoken through nature itself.

Although this review refers to the major new material that the author brings to the debate and his work on the harmonisation of evolution and scripture, the book outlines the whole field of evolution. The material on this topic could well serve as an introduction to evolution worthy of a good monograph. There is an excellent treatment of dating, fossils, and the way science works.

The chapters can be read separately though they make a comprehensive whole. A background in both science and scripture will greatly help in the reading. For anyone coming afresh to the subject who may not follow all the material, the author's clear faith and his obvious concern for objective and careful analysis will help to give confidence to the acceptance of his conclusions. He also uses some lighter touches to help keep the reader onboard.

This is a major contribution to the field and a much needed re-connection of good science with sincere biblical faith.

Reviewed by Dr. E. Gwyn Jordan

Anthony Flew *There is a God* 2008 New York HarperOne pb. \$14.95 (available from Amazon) ISBN 978.0.06.133530.3

The book is subtitled 'How the world's most notorious atheist changed his mind' which the author is happy to endorse. Anthony Flew has been a leading British philosopher and promoter of atheism for much of the twentieth century. I first encountered Anthony

Flew's work about forty year's ago and was impressed that, unlike Bertram Russell, who seemed to know little about the Christianity that he claimed not to believe, Flew was able to argue cogently against Christianity and in favour of atheism. This is hardly surprising, as his father was the president of the Methodist Conference and he attended a Christian school. (Incidentally in the preface to the book Roy Abraham Varghese, the co-author, recounts how Russell's daughter wrote that her father's "...whole life was a search for God. Somewhere in the back of my father's mind...there was an empty space that had once been filled by God and he never found anything else to put in its place.") Flew claims that he became an atheist at the age of 15 and that his scepticism regarding the existence of an omnipotent God of love was fuelled by his visits to Germany with his father in the 1930s and his encounter with Nazi anti-semitism.

His consistent maxim, taken from Plato, has always been to follow the argument wherever it leads and this led to his changing his mind on a number of philosophical issues that he had previously strongly defended such as the writings of Hume, freewill and determinism and finally belief in God. It was in May 2004 at the beginning of a debate with the Christian philosophers Gerald Schroeder and John Haldane that he announced that he now accepted the existence of God. What had led him to this was the complexity of DNA and the increasing difficulty of claiming that life could originate from non-living matter and that it could gain the capacity to reproduce itself. Also the evidence from cosmology about the fine-tuning of the universe and the problem of where the laws of nature originated played a large part as did the careful arguments of Christian philosophers like Richard Swinburne in rebutting his former objections. He writes, "I have followed the argument where it has led me and it has led me to accept the existence of a self-existent, immaterial, omnipotent and omniscient Being." (p.155) Flew points out that he is in good company as many scientists like Darwin, Einstein, Planck, Heisenberg, Dirac, Schrödinger and in more recent times Paul Davies, have believed in an ultimate intelligence who created the universe without necessarily ascribing to belief in a personal God.

Some atheist critics have claimed that his was a 'death bed' conversion due to his advancing years. Flew dismisses this by maintaining that he still does not believe in an afterlife. He takes his atheist colleagues to task, especially Richard Dawkins and challenges them in a similar way to the challenge he gave out to Christians five decades ago. "What would have to occur or to have occurred to constitute for you a reason to at least consider the existence of a superior Mind?"

The book both highlights the fact that honest enquiry can lead to truth and gives hope to Christian parents whose children have turned away from their faith. Flew has yet to have a personal encounter with God. But perhaps this will come before he dies. In the second of two appendices in the book he discusses with Dr.N.T.Wright, the bishop of Durham, the evidence for Jesus' life and resurrection. Flew believes that Wright presents "the best case for accepting Christian beliefs that I have ever seen". Flew also said of

Christianity that the combination of the charismatic figure of Jesus and a first-class intellectual like Paul, “If you’re wanting Omnipotence to set up a religion, this is the one to beat.” (186)

The book is obviously intended for an American readership with its many americanisms and the English terms and customs explained. This has prompted some critics to suggest that the co-author Varghese has misrepresented and manipulated Flew, who was in a serious state of mental decline. Flew has denied this, although he admits that Varghese did the writing but that the book belonged to him and represented his thinking. Since the publication of the book Flew has reiterated his claim that he is now a deist, though not a theist and does not believe in revelation or in a personal God. (For further details see the Wikipedia article on Flew on the internet)

Reviewed by Reg.Luhman

Ken MacLeod, *The Night Sessions*, Orbit, 2008, ISBN 1781841496511

When they find that this is a detective novel involving robots, science fiction fans will see an allusion to Asimov. Unlike Asimov’s novels, though, MacLeod’s show far more awareness of possible changes in the structure of society. His earlier novels often play with political philosophy, rather like Le Guin in *The Dispossessed*.

This novel also plays with theology! One of its central premises is that humanoid robots might be attracted to ‘Creationist’ Christianity. Knowing themselves to be the products of intelligent design by humans, they see the humans as products of intelligent design by God, and, being shunned by humans, see Christ, who welcomed the outcasts of his day, as a sympathetic figure. I will not say any more as it would spoil the plot.

Fans of science fiction will enjoy it, but those who are also Christians will find an extra dimension. Though as far as I am aware MacLeod is not a believer, he can see both the good and the bad in Christianity.

Reviewed by the Rev.Dr. R.H.Allaway

Colin A. Russell *Saving Planet Earth:A Christian Response*. 2008 Milton Keynes. Authentic pb. 131 pp. ISBN 978.1.85078.771.6

Colin Russell was formerly professor of the history of science and technology at the Open University and is both a member of the Victoria Institute and of Christians in Science. This is a very different book to those he normally writes, as he himself admits in the preface. Readers may be familiar with his more academic works, like *Cross Currents*, from which a number of the illustrations in this volume are taken. The object of writing the book was to inform ordinary busy Christian people about environmental issues and how their faith fits in. He first of all makes a case for the study by looking at common objections such as that it is a depressing and difficult subject, which can deflect a

Christian from more important things, like preaching the Gospel. It also seems to challenge the biblical view of man's dominion of the planet and seems unnecessary in the light of the belief that God's intends to re-create it in any case.

Russell reiterates the now familiar arguments from fine tuning and the anthropic principle, in addition to recounting the biblical evidence, that the earth is a special creation of God which has been spoiled by mankind's fall into sin. He gives numerous examples of damage to the environment by the use of insecticides, crop destruction, water and air pollution, the destruction of habitats and the effects on the environment of uncontrolled hunting and the human population explosion. It is not all doom and gloom, however, because he shows how pollution can be turned round and how some apparent pollutants can, in the right circumstances be beneficial. He points out that mankind have made a large contribution to climate change by showing that carbon dioxide levels and earth's temperature began to rise at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the onset of the Industrial Revolution.

The book is intended for Christians and the author is at pains to show that the earth is the Lord's, who created and cares for it and that we are his stewards responsible for looking after it. We are accountable to God for the way we care for the earth and its inhabitants, especially the poor, by providing fresh water, adequate food, secure homes and health care. He concludes by saying that we need to work at the environment as though everything depended on us and yet pray as though everything depended on God.

Colin Russell deliberately avoided making the book too academic by omitting copious footnotes and an extended bibliography. It is a pity therefore that in one of the only two footnotes he quotes two words written in Greek characters (surely the layperson would not understand these and would be better off with a transliteration!) where the Greek letter sigma is written incorrectly. However, despite this caveat, I would heartily commend the book to Christians who want to know about environmental issues and what they can do to lessen the damage being done.

Reviewed by Reg. Luhman

Fazale Rana and Hugh Ross *Origins of Life: Biblical and Evolutionary Models Face Off* 2004. Colorado Springs NavPress hb £12.59. 300 pp. ISBN1.57683.344.5

'Origins of Life' is written by two scientists - an astronomer and a chemist - the latter of particular interest to the reviewer who is also a chemist. Most of the book is an investigation of the possibility that life could have originated by purely naturalistic, physical means. Thus the various chapters explore the evidence from many points of view. We start with the primeval 'soup', then inorganic to organic precursors. Then follows the problem with chirality; life molecules such as proteins and nucleic acids are

either right-handed or left-handed, whereas undirected synthesis leads to a racemic, non-functional mixture. Did proteins or did nucleic acids come first? As complications develop we move on to membranes and cells; the authors claim that for these to develop conditions must be 'just right'. Genomes follow where the minimum size for a self-replicating unit is about 1500 gene products, perhaps less for parasites. Later chapters deal with extremophiles - organisms that thrive in extremes of temperature, pressure, salinity etc. This leads to a discussion of conditions inside volcanoes and at the bottom of oceans, where some life forms could have existed 3.9 billion years ago. The possible origin of life on Mars, the moon and other planets form the subject of later chapters. This is a fascinating tour through a large amount of data from many different sources. The authors have a reference for every statement they make. There are about 40 pages of references alone and a comprehensive index - a commendable achievement.

To move on to the model in which the book is set, what is called the 'Reason to Believe (RTB)' model. Having demolished, so they claim, the naturalistic explanation, there remains creation by divine intervention. To the reviewer the RBT model is 'Intelligent Design' by another name. My objection would be the use of Genesis 1-2 at the beginning of the book to claim that life appeared on earth very early after the earth's origin. We need more thought on this, especially from Hebrew scholars. Moreover, through the various chapters I wondered if the role of catalytic surfaces, minerals etc. in directing synthesis had been explored. How can we explore this today, so long after the events? The authors state several times that God could have started creation and then restarted it later after it failed in its objective. Also what about 'junk' proteins and 'junk' RNA and DNA?

I conclude by setting out the RTB model's claims for our acceptance or rejection.

- (1) Life appeared early on the earth in its primordial state
- (2) Life originated abruptly in hostile conditions
- (3) The first life exhibited complexity in its primitive form.
- (4) Life chemistry displays design.
- (5) The first life was different from life on creation 'days' 3, 5 and 6
- (6) A purpose can be postulated for life's early appearance even if it needed to be recreated.

Thus the RTB model defines the book's *raison d'être* from the start. Nonetheless it is a fascinating read.

Reviewed by Dr.A.B.Robins.

The book is now somewhat dated but has recently been re-issued along with others in the series (ed.)

PAST PRESIDENTS

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| 1865 - 1885 | The Right Hon. The Earl of Shaftesbury KG. |
| 1886 - 1903 | Sir George Gabriel Stokes, Bart., DCL, FRS. |
| 1903 - 1921 | The Right Hon. The Earl of Halsbury, PC, FRS. |
| 1921 - 1923 | The Very Revd. H. Wace, MA, DD, Dean of Canterbury. |
| 1927 - 1941 | Sir Ambrose Fleming, MA, DSc, FRS. |
| 1941 - 1946 | Sir Charles Marston, FSA |
| 1946 - 1952 | Sir Frederic Kenyon, GBE, KCB, D.Litt, LLD, FBA. |
| 1952 - 1965 | Professor F.F. Bruce, MA, DD, FBA. |
| 1966 - 1976 | Professor Sir Robert Boyd, CBE, DSc, FRS. |
| 1977 - 1985 | Professor Sir Norman Anderson, OBE, QC, MA, LLD, DD, FBA. |
| 1985 - 2001 | Prof. D.J.E. Ingram, CBE, DL, MA, D.Phil, DSc. (Oxon), C.Phys, F. Inst.P. |

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