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Evolution Sunday? What's Next?

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Yesterday, the 197th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin, was declared "Evolution Sunday" by a group of liberal Protestant ministers. According to *The New York Times*, it was observed in several hundred churches nationwide.

The event grew out of a movement first called the Clergy Letter Project, started by Michael Zimmerman, dean of the College of Letters and Sciences at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. "There was a growing need to demonstrate that the loud, shrill voices of fundamentalists claiming that Christians had to choose between modern science and religion were presenting a false dichotomy," he told the *Times*.

The letter sets the issue clearly:

Within the community of Christian believers there are areas of dispute and disagreement, including the proper way to interpret Holy Scripture. While virtually all Christians take the Bible seriously and hold it to be authoritative in matters of faith and practice, the overwhelming majority do not read the Bible literally, as they would a science textbook. Many of the beloved stories found in the Bible – the Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the ark – convey timeless truths about God, human beings, and the proper relationship between Creator and creation expressed in the only form capable of transmitting these truths from generation to generation. Religious truth is of a different order from scientific truth. Its purpose is not to convey scientific information but to transform hearts.

In other words, "religious truth" lies when it talks about how the world was made, but "scientific truth" tells the truth. The Genesis accounts convey "timeless truths" about God and the world "in the only form capable of transmitting these truths from generation to generation." That form is, presumably, something other than true and factual narrative — something like myth.

The Clergy Letter Project Web site also offers a collection of sermons and articles devoted to the celebration of evolution.

Here is a key section of the report in *The New York Times*:

Mr. Zimmerman said more than 10,000 ministers had signed the letter, which states, in part, that the theory of evolution is "a foundational scientific truth." To reject it, the letter continues, "is to deliberately embrace scientific ignorance and transmit such ignorance to our children."

"We believe that among God's good gifts are human minds capable of critical thought and that the failure to fully employ this gift is a rejection of the will of our Creator," the letter says.

Most of the signatories to the project and those preaching on Sunday were from the mainline Protestant denominations. Their congregations have shrunk sharply over the last 30 years. At the same time, the number of evangelical and fundamentalist Christians has risen considerably, and many of them, because of their literalist view of the Bible, doubt evolutionary theory.

The Clergy Letter Project said that 441 congregations in 48 states and the District of Columbia were taking part in Evolution Sunday, but that was impossible to verify independently. Around Chicago, two churches that were listed on the

project's Web site as participants in the event said they were in fact not planning to deliver sermons on the subject.

One woman who did attend a church that observed "Evolution Sunday" said that she had no problem with evolution because the Bible was based in oral tradition. Science, on the other hand, "is part of our lives."

The Chicago Tribune also reported on the story. According to that paper, "Evolution Sunday" has drawn participation from a variety of denominational and non-denominational churches, including Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Unitarian, Congregationalist, United Church of Christ, Baptist and a host of community churches, including at least 16 congregations in Illinois.

From Long Island, *Newsday* reported: *Today, on Darwin's birthday, some will draw upon the Book of Job to validate the innate human thirst for understanding. Others will lead discussions about how to reconcile a divine Creator with the notion that life evolved through a random process of natural selection. "I believe that instead of suppressing or falsifying science, we people of faith need to go back to the theological drawing board in order to rethink our existing theology in the light of new data — just as Martin Luther and John Calvin did nearly five centuries ago," said the Rev. Byron E. Shafer of Rutgers Presbyterian Church on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.*

Well, at least the agenda is clear. None of these participants in "Evolution Sunday" can explain how God can be truthfully described as the Creator of anything when the entire cosmos is explained in purely naturalistic and materialistic terms. These persons accept a bifurcated world of meaning in which "religious truth" and "scientific truth" exist in separate realms of meaning. Their agenda is to shame Christian conservatives into accepting the hegemony of Darwinism.

It is exceedingly revealing that these liberal churchpersons would set aside a Sunday in order to celebrate Darwinism. Who next? Nietzsche? Marx? Freud?

One more thing. Interested readers should note that the Web site for the [Clergy Letter Project](#) is hosted by the [University of Wisconsin Oshkosh](#). Hmmm. Where are the church-state separationists to demand a stop to this? Is this not an egregious example of someone using a tax-supported platform in order to make explicitly theological arguments, and then to propose how churches should arrange or change their beliefs?

SEE ALSO: [The Discovery Institute](#), "On Evolution Sunday, It's Give Me That Old Time Darwinist Religion;" [The Hartford Courant](#), [The Boston Globe](#), [The Detroit News](#), [Science and Spirit](#).

