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Evolution: When Atheists and Baptists Agree?

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Writing at “On Faith,” a joint project of *The Washington Post* and *Newsweek*, Rachel Held Evans calls for me to stop arguing against evolution and get with the program. She takes particular aim at this statement I made at the 2010 Ligonier Ministries National Conference: “The theory of evolution is incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ even as it is in direct conflict with any faithful reading of the Scriptures.”



Evans, author of *Evolving in Monkey Town*, a memoir about growing up in Dayton, Tennessee, scolds me for presenting the theory of evolution as inherently contradictory to Scripture. Furthermore, she insists that the net effect of my opposition to evolution will be an exodus of evangelical young people who will believe me when I insist that this contraction is irreconcilable. She accuses me of presenting a “false dichotomy.”

She writes further:

Mohler would be wise to consider the words of St. Augustine, who, (centuries before anyone had heard of common descent), said this of his interpretation of Genesis: “In matters that are so obscure and far beyond our vision, we find in Holy Scripture passages which can be interpreted in very different ways without prejudice to the faith we have received. In such cases, we should not rush in headlong and so firmly take our stand on one side that, if further progress in the search for truth justly undermines this position, we too fall with it.”

There are few figures so influential in my own thinking as Augustine, and his wise counsel about allowing the plain texts of Scripture to interpret the more obscure is inherently healthy. But it is Rachel Held Evans who must bear the responsibility to explain how any acceptance of evolution can avoid “prejudice to the faith we have received.”

Her glib and superficial endorsement of evolution and its reconciliation with Christianity is all too common and all too irresponsible. If she is going to quote Augustine, she should deal with the consequences. How are we to reconcile the absence of an historical Adam, for example, with Paul’s very clear and unambiguous affirmation of Adam’s headship and its centrality to the gospel? The age of the earth is not the central question, though it is an unavoidable and important question.

Most of those who urge a reconciliation of evolution and the Christian faith do so at the most superficial level, without ever acknowledging the near-total transformation of Christian theology that must result if serious minds ask the serious questions and do the serious work of actually thinking seriously.

The impact of evolution on the Christian gospel cannot be reduced to “both an old earth and a loving God.” That just does not represent intellectual honesty. Those who think responsibly about these questions must deal directly with the theological implications — something totally missing from Rachel Held Evans’ article.

She is frustrated that atheists and Baptists (to use her terminology) agree that evolution and Christianity are incompatible. She may be frustrated, but on this score the atheists and the biblical Christians are both correct, and both

understand what is at stake.

Rachel Held Evans, "[When Atheists and Baptists Agree](#)," On Faith, *The Washington Post/Newsweek*, Tuesday, September 28, 2010.

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