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Integration of Evolution and Christianity

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Integration of Evolution and Christianity

Campbell North

Scientists who existed pre-Darwin predominantly practiced the Christian faith, believing that “a creator God...had endowed humans with the ability to discover the deep principles by which He had created the universe” (Polkinghorne). The Darwinian Revolution catalyzed the rift between science and religion on the necessity of God in the evolutionary equation. The developing insight into evolution and evolutionary processes converted some previously religious scientists into atheists. However, new understandings and interpretations of scripture and Christianity can help in bridging the gap created years ago. Evolution and religion can exist in a cohesive relationship when evolution is viewed as a mechanism that will bring believers closer to God and a divine state.

The *Homo divinus* model embodies this interrelation because it makes an important distinction about how God played a role in human biological evolution. The model states that “God conferred his likeness upon a member of the ape family and brought into being *Homo divinus*, the ape-in-the-image-of-God, with the unique capacity to know, love, and serve its creator” (Finlay). These first members can be interpreted as being Adam and Eve from the creation story in Genesis. By encompassing both ideas that “biologically, [humans] are apes” and that “theologically [humans] are creatures who share vital characteristics with God,” evolution can be seen as the necessary means that allow humans to become divine and reach a sanctified state (Finlay). In Christianity, God is omniscient and consequently, one of the characteristics humans share with Him is the limitless capacity for knowledge and awareness. This understanding of how modern-day humanity arose holds that humans evolved from other primates and thus leaves room for Darwinism and the theory of evolution to maintain their legitimacies. It also does not discredit the natural selection and evolutionary processes that occur in other organisms. Evolution in this sense lends “insight into the scientific details of how God did these things” (Polkinghorne). Besides the process of natural selection, humanity evolved to know love and God.

Natural selection for larger brain sizes in humans can be acknowledged as a way through which evolution brings people closer to God and divinity. Anthropologists have found that “religions that share supernatural features – belief in a non-corporeal God...belief in the afterlife...belief in prayer” such as Christianity “are found in virtually every culture on earth” (Henig). This ubiquity has caused scientists “to look for a genetic explanation” for why religion may have emerged. An increase in brain size leads to a larger expanse of cognitive processes and abilities. Religion is credited as a byproduct of this evolution. Byproduct theorists explain that one of the reasons that religion has persisted is because “children are born with a tendency to believe in omniscience, invisible minds, immaterial souls — and then they grow up in cultures that fill their minds, hard-wired for belief, with specifics” (Henig). This may seem to detract from the validity of religion because it explains religion as simply a repercussion of evolution.

However, Justin Barrett, supporter of the byproduct theory and practicing Christian, argues that it supports religion because “Christian theology teaches that people were crafted by God to be in a loving relationship with him and other people...why wouldn’t God, then, design [humans] in such a way as to find belief in divinity quite natural?” (Henig). Although science has found explanations for certain mental phenomena, such as religion, science does not make those phenomenon any less valid asserts Barrett. His argument asks skeptics to “suppose science produces a convincing account for why I think my wife loves me — should I then stop believing that she does?” (Henig). Humanity’s evolutionary progression towards larger brains size supports the existence of God. It also connects with the *Homo divinus* model by citing a reason that allowed humans to become theological creatures, when God separated them from the apes by exposing himself, helping them know truth and love. It explains the evolutionary purpose for bigger brains: to give humans a greater capacity for understanding this divine knowledge God revealed.

New interpretations of scripture allude to God as *logos*, which also support the idea that natural selection for bigger brains help people get closer to God. *Logos* is the word that describes “logic, reason, and rationality” (White). The Gospel of John explains that “in the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* was with God, and the *logos* was God” (White). If God in this context is to be construed as reason and logic, then it makes sense that humans developed larger brains as a mechanism to get closer to understanding divine reason. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin proposed the concept of the Omega Point, which explains this notion in terms of an increase in consciousness that helps one reach a state of divinity.

The Omega Point, a state of divine consciousness, emphasizes the importance of evolution as a way to reach God because it “introduces the concept of God as Omega” or final destination (Barbour 248). Teilhard suggests that the rise in consciousness that accompanies biological evolution will ultimately bring humanity toward a divine state. He “follows the evolutionist understanding of an evolutionary progression” but notes that the progression is always accompanied by “an increase in consciousness” (Kazlev). According to Teilhard, humanity has crossed a threshold of “self-conscious thought, or mind” that other life has yet to cross (Kazlev). This notion connects with the *Homo divinus* model by pointing to God’s gift of awareness as the reason humans evolved differently from other primates. Teilhard’s theory, described in his novel *The Phenomenon of Man*, explains that God as the Omega Point and “the convergence of evolution” are the two principles necessary “to explain the persistent march of things towards a greater consciousness” (Barbour).

However, higher levels of consciousness are not essential for life, as different life forms have varying levels of consciousness. Natural selection for larger brains can be pointed to as the scientific aspect of this evolution and the theological explanation for an increase in consciousness is to reach an ultimate conscious state and therefore know God. In this context, the incarnation of Jesus Christ can be legitimized as a necessary part of evolution, “a continuation and fulfillment of a long cosmic preparation” rather than “an intrusion into the world” (Barbour). This “preparation” is done through Christ in “uniting all reality and bringing it into union with

God” (Kazlev). His presence is helping bring humanity closer toward understanding a state of divination. However, it is important to note that an increase in consciousness is not directly controlled by God, but is rather a byproduct of evolution that is designed to reach a divine state.

While God has been recognized as having influence in the part of the evolutionary process that helped distinguish humans from the other primates, it does not mean that He directed every step of evolution. Evolution is the “interplay between chance and necessity” (Polkinghorne). Necessity in this sense is a “gift of God’s steadfast faithfulness” and chance is the “gift of a free openness” (Polkinghorne). God has endowed life with infinite, “inherent potentiality” and the natural rules and laws of the corporeal world that act on this potential (Polkinghorne). For example, eyes have evolved differently in vertebrates depending on varying environmental pressures. The eyes of a dolphin, for instance, which can see clearly in saltwater are very different than those of a human, whose eyes sting every time an ocean wave crashes down on them. Each eye form allows for vision, but they do not perform uniformly in different conditions. These separate, but similar forms of evolution are “signs of the inherent potentiality,” which have been instilled within life by God, but have been affected by environment (Polkinghorne). This concept also applies in the context of free will. Humans still have free will and are allowed to “make themselves” in whatever way they choose (Polkinghorne). This embodies the theory of top-down causality, which explains God’s role as being a “constraint or boundary condition” for the natural processes that happen at lower levels of life (Barbour).

While evolution can help humanity move closer toward a divine state, it is a naturally driven process and not directly governed by God. God is not controlling the levers that move the conveyor belt of life that bring the creatures riding it closer to Him. Rather environment-driven processes and a willingness to acclimate to a notion of divinity will allow humanity to eventually know God. Life is the opportunity through which every human has the chance to try to understand God through personal experiences and hopefully help future generations reach a higher state of consciousness. Religion and evolution both need to be appreciated as necessary in the process through which humanity progresses.

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