

AN ATTEMPT AT RECONCILIATION

Are creation and evolution compatible?

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IN this year in which the Old Testament is again the course of study in the Gospel Doctrine class and a year when the teaching of the theory of evolution in the public schools has become an issue, I have been stimulated to meditate once more on a possible reconciliation between the observations of the paleoanthropologists on the one hand and the story of the creation of man in the Old Testament on the other.

Conflict of Science and Religion

For many years I have been able to resolve the differences between science and religion by recognizing that they deal with subjects which are almost non-overlapping. Science consists of the generation of theories which are consistent with observations, from which critical tests of the theories can be devised (i.e., more observations). The tests serve to either confirm them or require them to be altered. The more extensive the observations explained by the theory (including the confirming critical tests), the more likely the theory may become part of the accepted body of scientific "truth." If more than one theory fits all the observations, the simplest one will be chosen (Law of Parsimony). For the natural sciences where many experiments can be performed, these theories have achieved a high degree of precision. However, even here they have had to become more complex as new experiments (observations) are performed. For example, where once protons, neutrons, and electrons were considered the basic constituents of all matter, now there is a whole branch of physics, called particle physics, investigating hundreds of newly discovered particles. Even some of the old ones, neutrons and protons, are now believed to be composed of smaller particles, called quarks. Usually the new theory must include the old ones as a special case if the old one was successful in explaining a wide

area of observations. Paleoanthropology, like the social sciences, tends to be less precise because it is hard to isolate all the possible forces and because experiments are more difficult to perform.

Moreover, a basic tenet of science is that theories change as more observations are made, not because nature changes but because our perception becomes more extensive. No good scientist would say that his present theory represents absolute truth. He expects there to be many observations both present and future which are not covered by the body of accepted science. In particular, science has not assumed the existence of the spirit. This is because observations of the spirit are difficult to make and quantify. Nevertheless, this does not mean that scientists have proven that the spirit does not exist, merely that in the observations that they have chosen to be covered by their theories, it has not been necessary to assume the existence of the spirit. (Perhaps someday it will.)

On the other hand, religion is concerned centrally with things of the spirit, which include the purpose of life, the existence and purpose of God, and value judgments of good and bad, all outside the present realm of science.

The perceived difficulties between science and religion tend to occur for two reasons. First, because science has been successful in explaining many aspects of nature, there are many who have come to believe that all theories are extensively verified and are universally applicable, even in areas untested by observation. One example is the theory of evolution, where the observations are meager and critical tests difficult to perform. Although there is clear evidence of the evolution of higher life forms from lower life forms and much information on how this might be possible through the operation of natural law without the necessity of divine intervention, there are many

unanswered questions in the field. I don't believe anyone would maintain that the present scientific theories on the evolution of life and man are established with anything like the confidence we have in the "laws" of physics, such as the laws of motion, quantum electrodynamics, or relativity, in the realms where these apply.

The second reason for perceived difficulties between science and religion arises when readers of scripture interpret the words of the prophets as statements of scientific history rather than descriptions of spiritual truths and appropriate behavior for man. These readers often forget that God "speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding" (2 Nephi 31:3). Language changes from age to age as man's experience and knowledge change. For example, when the prophets speak of the "four corners of the earth" in the Bible (Isaiah 11:12, Deut. 32:26, Revel. 7:1), no doubt the people in their day believed the world was a flat square with four corners; today not even the most literal interpreter of those words believes the earth is flat. For myself, I have been content (forgive the wordplay) to render unto the scientists what they truly observe, and render unto religion the realm of the word of God.

Creation vs. Evolution

Nevertheless, whenever I have spoken on science and religion in Church circles, somebody always wants to know how I reconcile the story of Adam and Eve with the discovery of ancient fossil remains of manlike beings and the theory of evolution. My answer has been that I don't know how God brought about the creation, but I am willing to believe that he could have used an evolutionary process to accomplish it. My mind is open to consider whatever the scientists dig up. This seems to be consistent with the attitude of the First Presidency of the Church in recent years, namely, "that the Church has taken no official position on the matter of evolution and related matters."¹

Somehow this never seems to quite satisfy the questioners. They want to know a possible scenario that would be consistent with Genesis. I would like to present a possible sequence of events which builds on my knowledge of the observations of prehistoric man yet tries to preserve the significance of the biblical story.

In the first place, it seems to me the evidence is overwhelming that indicates the existence of manlike beings stretching over several million years. These beings had various degrees of similarity to the bone structure and capabilities of modern man, with the oldest fossils being the most dissimilar. This means we must allow for the existence of such beings at the time of or prior to Adam. For the purposes of my speculation, I shall call those that existed just prior to the creation of man "premen."

Creation of Adam and Eve

Now there are various ways to interpret the biblical story of Adam and Eve: (1) It can be taken as figurative. There is a comment in the temple ceremonies that suggests this. (2) Adam can be considered a plural name since in Hebrew the name is either singular or plural. In Genesis, Adam is sometimes used to mean the plural (Gen 5:2). (3) Adam was a single person.

In trying to decide which is the best interpretation, we must not lose the most significant aspect of the biblical story, that is, that man was created for a purpose by a Supreme Being. Therefore, in all three alternatives we must allow for the existence of preman and for an act (or acts) of creation. It doesn't seem to me that alternatives one and two are any simpler to allow for creation than alternative three. Therefore, I am content to assume the simplest interpretation: that Adam was an individual.

One important question is, "In what way did man differ from preman?" The paleoanthropologists would answer this question on the basis of similarity to the human skeleton. Skeletons of manlike beings are classified into a half dozen or so types. The ones most closely resembling modern man are called homo sapiens sapiens. I suggest that the first man, Adam, could have appeared at any time, even considerably after the appearance of homo sapiens sapiens,² with a skeleton and a body not significantly different from his immediate predecessors. How then did he differ? To answer that I draw on the LDS concept of the soul of man being the union of the body and the spirit (D & C 88:15); the spirit exists long before the body and enters the body after conception. Further, we believe that the spirits of men are the spiritual progeny of God, brought into being sometime before the creation of the earth. I propose that the first man differed from his predecessors in that he had a spirit, which when combined with his body, was "in the image of God" whereas those of his predecessors were not.³ Perhaps this difference was manifest not only in a superior intelligence as defined according to LDS beliefs (D & C 93:36) but also in the capability to be guided by communication with the spirit, particularly through the influence of the Holy Ghost.

Secondly, there is the question, "Did God create Adam as a full grown man or was he born as a baby with parents?" Creationists have generally rejected the latter possibility because it seems to imply there was no creation. I believe, however, that God has the power to create in any way he chooses. In the case of a natural birth, he could have influenced the parents, controlled the circumstances, but most particularly arranged to have the spirit of Adam enter the body to become the first man. It's been my experience that although God clearly has the power to do otherwise he generally works through natural means. Therefore, I assume that God created Adam by arranging to have him born to preman parents.⁴

Adam was a very special soul. As Michael, he played a significant role in the creation of the world and the life that was on it, second only to Jehovah and Elohim. As the creation evolved and preman had progressed to the appropriate state of advancement, Adam was given the opportunity of coming to the earth to receive a physical body with no remembrance of his preexistence. Furthermore, he was offered the unique chance of immortality. If he had not chosen otherwise, he presumably would have been translated in the same manner that later would be the reward of Enoch, John, and the three Nephites.

I have no difficulty in visualizing Adam at some point in his early life being led to a geographical location where

life was easy and painless, the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, God could have arranged to have the first woman, Eve, born in a similar way, join Adam in the Garden of Eden, both being in a state of sexual innocence.⁵ God blessed their union and commanded that they multiply and replenish the earth. He promised them if they stayed in the Garden and kept his commandments that they could live forever.

Knowledge of Good and Evil

Commonly it has been supposed that the forbidden fruit they were commanded not to eat symbolized sexual desire and that the partaking of the fruit was the commencement of the procreational process. I have trouble with this interpretation from both paleontology and the scriptures. Prior to the creation of man the plants and animals had already begun to multiply after their kind and fill the earth (Gen. 1:21-22, 24-25). In fact, the commandment to multiply was given to Adam and Eve even before their partaking of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 1:28). How could they do this or even know what it meant if the basic procreational process were not already in place? I'd like to propose a different interpretation of the forbidden fruit.

For this interpretation, I first recognize the existence of premen outside the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve probably were well aware of these premen since as I have suggested, that is where they came from. Second, I note the commandment given in Gen. 2:24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Although this is commonly taken to apply to Adam and Eve's posterity, it is curious that it is inserted between two verses which describe Adam and Eve's relationship. It seems to me not unreasonable to apply this to Adam and Eve themselves vis-a-vis their interactions with premen. The simplest way for them to preserve their exclusive relationship was to remain isolated in the Garden of Eden. Here "they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). But in order to develop their free agency, they were given a choice. They were commanded to have no association of any kind with premen, that should they transgress, they would be cast out of the Garden and be subject to mortality.

Eve, then Adam, under the influence of Satan were led to transgress God's commandment and associate with premen outside the Garden. They then became subject to all the temptations of their mortal state. In particular, they became acutely conscious of the difficulty of maintaining a faithful relationship in the presence of different standards among the premen. This is symbolized in the biblical story by their discovery of their nakedness (Gen. 3:7) and their desire to cover themselves with modest clothing in the presence of premen. This was the beginning of experiencing good and evil for themselves.

But beyond the conflicts, they became aware also of the growth potential that could come from having to make choices. In the Garden there were no choices and thus no opportunity for growth in the ability to choose—neither for themselves nor for their posterity. It would be necessary to live in the outer world to have this chance to grow.

Thus Adam and Eve launched a new way of life. From their beginning emerged the family, clothed to preserve fidelity, and the start of historical civilization. Their life was not an easy one. It was neither a mindless promiscuous self-indulgence, nor was it a blissful dormant isolation. It was a life full of work to sustain them physically and constant vigilance to maintain the sanctity of the marriage relationship. Nevertheless, it was a life full of satisfactions with accomplishments, personal growth, intimate marital relationships, and the stimulus of intellectual and social exchanges with the members of the preman group. It was a life where man could experience good and evil for himself and learn how to choose the right in the absence of the direct presence of his Father in Heaven and in the face of temptations of the flesh, all the while influenced and guided by communications of the spirit. It was a life in which children could be taught to be responsive to spiritual influences within the loving atmosphere of a concerned family unit. Sad to say it was also a life where men were free to choose the wrong, and most often did.

Conclusion

I hope this attempt at reconciliation will help those who are bothered by the apparent conflict between evolution and the creation story in the Bible. If additional observations do not harmonize with my scenario (or if my awareness of the observations is inaccurate), I am prepared to change the scenario. My intention for writing it was not to explain every scientific observation, present or future, but to illustrate that a belief in God and in his role as a creator need not be threatened by the fossil evidence of an evolutionary development of man. I remain convinced that the story of the creation in Genesis and its expansion in other LDS scripture has deep significance in explaining the purpose of life.

Notes

Since writing the first draft of this article, I am indebted to Duane E. Jeffrey for helpful comments and most particularly for calling my attention to the compilation of articles in *Science and Religion: Toward a More Useful Dialogue*; Volume II—*The Appearance of Man*. These have served to sharpen my thoughts and provide supporting documentation, although for the final interpretations I accept full responsibility.

1. Jeffrey, Duane E., " 'We Don't Know,' a Survey of Mormon Responses to Evolutionary Biology," *Science and Religion*, Vol. II, Paladin House, 1979, pp. 23-37.

2. From the biblical description of Adam tilling the soil (Gen. 3:23), Abel tending domesticated flocks (Gen. 4:2), and Cain building a city (Gen. 4:17), Bernhard E. Johnson compares these activities with the dates of similar Neolithic life and places Adam between 7000 and 4000 B.C., reasonably consistent with Biblical Chronology and at least 20,000 years after the first homo sapien sapien. (Bernhard Johnson, "Primitive Technology and the Advent of Man and Civilization: A Development of Parallelism." *Ibid.* p. 208.)

3. Since first writing this, I have discovered others have published a similar idea. William Lee Stokes, "A Geologist Looks at Evolution," *Ibid.*, p. 134.

4. That Adam was born in a normal way is suggested by Moses 6:59 "... Ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, ..." This is pointed out by Bruce W. Warren, "The Humanization of the Earth," *Ibid.*, p. 76.

5. Adam and Eve presumably had no children prior to their partaking of the fruit of knowledge of good and evil (Moses 5:11, 2 Nephi 2:22-25).

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