

Darwinism and the Church

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ABSTRACT

Darwinism and the church have been in conflict right from the inception of the former. A recent expression of this conflict has appeared in the form of the Concept of Intelligent Design (ID), which amounts to the special creation concept, which is in religious scriptures. ID is not science, and the Natural Selection Theory of Evolution, propounded by Darwin, is a well established scientific theory. Intermixing science and religion, as ID is, is not advisable. However, science and religion are both human needs.

Keywords: *Intelligent Design, Natural selection, Religion, Special Creation.*

The Darwinian Theory of Natural Selection has been in conflict with the church since its birth. In 2008 we have celebrated the 150th anniversary of the publication of the evolutionary theory. While it has been universally accepted among biologists, who have reshaped every branch of their subject area in view of the process of evolution, it has been opposed and criticized by religious quarters in the west. In the recent past the opposition has come in the form of Concept of Intelligent Design (ID).

Intelligent Design

In some parts of the world, specially in USA, the Theory of Natural Selection is being rejected, and replaced by “Intelligent Design” (ID), perhaps because citizens of those advanced countries are fed up with materialism, and are overzealously turning to theology. ID is only an ‘incarnation’ of the special creation concept, as given in the ‘*Book of Genesis*’ in the Holy Bible. As per this concept every species in the organic world has been specially created by the Creator, and has continued unchanged since its origin. The ID is a little modified version of the Special Creation concept, modified to give it a scientific flavour. Rozenhouse and Branch (2006) have pointed out that in media generally equal time/space is given to biologists and to the neo-creationists or supporters of ID, “creating illusion of scientific equivalence”.

Rev. George Coyne, the Jesuit Director of the Vatican Observatory, has said, “Intelligent Design isn’t science, even though it pretends to be” (Verma, 2006).

Darwinism, a scientific theory

A university Professor of Zoology, under influences of a religious sector, during a personal talk, said that the Darwinian notion of evolution through natural selection was only a hypothesis. In fact the Darwinian theory is a well established scientific theory with ample empirical support. In an earlier communication the present author with a coauthor (Verma & Saxena, 2010) have cited several observations, demonstrating clearly the role of natural selection in evolution of adaptation. Some of those instances are briefly described here :

1. The case of the Tasmanian Devil in Tasmania attaining sexual maturity earlier in females with spread of an infectious facial cancer, which kills older and sexually mature females.
2. The case of mustard plants in California in USA, where during 2000 to 2004 there was serious drought; hence seeds produced during this period reached the stage of flowering earlier than the seeds, collected during earlier than or after the drought period.
3. In Australia in 1935 an invasive species of toads, the cane toad (*Bufo marinus*) got introduced. This toad is large bodied, and is poisonous to most snakes. Among snakes, those with a large mouth gape, on eating the toad, would die. After some time a steady decrease in the mouth gape size in snakes there was noted.
4. The Darwin’s finches (*Geospiza fortis*) in different islands of the Galapagos archipelago showed different beak size and form in correlation with variations in the size and hardness of the available seeds.

Natural selection in action may be demonstrated under a microscope using cultures of the bacterium *Diplococcus pneumoniae*, which causes bacterial pneumonia in man, and is highly sensitive to the antibiotic streptomycin. When the bacterium is grown in a culture medium, it forms colonies, which appear as rough tiny masses. Occasionally smooth round colonies appear. Such smooth colonies are encapsulated, being covered with a shell, and are resistant to streptomycin. If to such a culture of the bacterium a tiny dose of

streptomycin is added, generation after generation the microbe will show a rise in the proportion of smooth colonies.

In view of the extensive empirical support to it the Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection may even be referred to as a natural law.

Do we need both, Science and Religion?

Yes, we need both. Humans are curious and eager to learn about and explain every phenomenon in and around this planet, the Earth. Science, which has the discipline of a systematic approach in investigation, satisfies this human proclivity.

Human behaviour is shaped by his highly developed intelligence. But at times we come across an event or happening, which makes us miserable, and we feel lonely. We have not foreseen such a situation. But, if one is a firm believer in the Superpower or God, who steers life of every organism, and in that God will do whatever is best for him, the level of misery is lowered, and the feeling of loneliness is gone. It is on record that post-surgery recovering patients require less of analgesics or pain killer drugs, if they are believers than if they are nonbelievers.

Besides every organized religion has an ethical part, which is needed to keep a society healthy and functional.

It is due to such reasons that every human population follows and practices some sort of religion.

Are scientists non-believers?

Scientists in general are not non-believers. According to a survey about 40% among scientists in USA believe in the existence of God (Editorial, 2006). As Padian (2009) has pointed out, Charles Darwin was a deist (i.e. having belief in the existence of an all-powerful Creator).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Both science and religion satisfy human needs, but an overlap of the two is undesirable, as is ID. The two represent two different human mental attitudes. While science is the attitude of enquiry, religion is a matter of faith. Intermixing the two only produces a state of confusion.

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