

A history of the United Methodist Church's opposition to creationism and intelligent design

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The United Methodist Church's opposition to both creationism and intelligent design was reviewed. It was concluded that the membership is generally in support of the creation worldview, but the high-level leadership, especially the bishops, in general, support the Darwinian worldview and oppose the creation worldview. According to its website, the church's official policy is that all life, including humans, evolved from a common ancestor by the accumulation of mutations selected by the survival-of-the-fittest mechanism called natural selection.

For much of the last century, the United Methodist Church (UMC) leadership has played an important role in the pro-Darwinian, anti-creation/intelligent design movements. The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968 as a result of a merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church. The 1800s Methodist Church split over slavery is not covered here except to note the split was not only their view of slavery, but also creationism and other topics.¹ The UMC organisation is episcopal, consequently bishop leadership plays a crucial role in all major church policies. Some leading Methodists accepted Darwinism very early, and “within a decade of the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* they had found a way to reconcile evolution with the Gospel”.²

Thomas Yorty, in a review of academic Methodist thought, wrote that “use of the argument from design abounds in the [UMC’s] *Review*. Significantly, however, the [design] argument after 1877 seems to be used as a way to accommodate or modify Darwin’s ideas.”³ Yorty concludes that after 1877 the accommodationists’ view, often articulated as theistic evolution, or where God used evolution to create life, often dominated Methodist academic thought. The role of God in theistic evolution is often fuzzy or even undefined, but this view is often pure Darwinism with a thin veneer of theism. Church historian Robert Chiles wrote after the civil war, “Methodism gave more and more attention to the challenge of science, particularly as expressed by Darwin and the evolutionists. Methodism’s response [then] varied from outraged rejection to cautious acceptance.”⁴ The most detailed study of the creation issue in the UMC also confirms this.⁵ Chiles added: “Darwinism could not be ignored or rejected indefinitely and gradually was accepted by making God the dynamic power immanent in man and the universe.”⁶

Chiles concluded that the most influential Methodist theologians, including William Warren, argued for the

“restatement of the evangelical doctrine of sin in terms compatible with scientific and philosophical tenets. [Leading UMC theologians] Bowne, Knudson, and others accepted many of the implications of Darwinism which led to belief in man’s ascent [evolution from apes] but not his fall.”⁷ Of course, rejecting the Genesis Fall negates Christ’s sacrifice, and thus guts the core of Christianity. Thus, Darwin’s goal to murder God succeeded by replacing God with another creator, namely natural selection and survival-of-the-fittest, with the less fit perishing.

Professor Dawn Digrius, in a review of how theistic evolution became established in Protestant churches, and specifically the UMC, observed that Rev. Lyman Abbott’s mission was to persuade Americans that “science and faith were compatible and ... as he and John Fisk believed, ‘Evolution was God’s way of doing things’ and ... there had never been any conflict between science and religion, nor was there any need for reconciliation, because harmony had always existed.”⁸ As an advocate of evolution, Congregationalist Lyman Abbott (1835–1922) naively assumed the scientific evidence supported Darwinism and focused on accommodation of evolution with Protestantism. Church historian William Warren Sweet wrote Abbott was so important that “no religious leader in the modern period has exercised a more abiding influence” on American Protestantism, including on the Methodist Church.⁹

Digrius then traces the influence of Fisk and Abbott to Methodist minister Lynn Harold Hough (1877–1971), who supported the accommodationists’ view, and taught that Christianity could assimilate evolutionary concepts without compromise. As a dean at Methodist Drew Theological Seminary, where he had been a professor since 1930, and dean since 1934 until he retired in 1947, he was involved in training thousands of ministers and other church leaders.¹⁰ Typical of the accommodationists’ view was Robert William

Rogers (1864–1930). As Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis at Drew, he reconciled Genesis and geology by stratagems such as the “acceptance that six days equals six eons, and that the Bible was a book of religion, not science”.¹¹

The Hough Phelps affair

As a result of the support by Abbott, Hough, and other Darwinists, “by the 1920s evolutionary theory had been generally accepted by liberal American theologians, who ‘adapted their theological positions to it.’”¹² The fundamentalist movement challenged the general acceptance of Darwinism which Hough, in turn, challenged by defending evolution. Hough was known to be a man of unusual insight, winning him distinction for his many pursuits, scholarly and theological.¹³ Hough was listed as one of “the twenty-five most influential preachers in America” by a vote of 25,000 Protestant clergymen.¹⁴ Hough’s seminary training and his “exposure to liberal theology and modernism had left him open to accept the validity of Darwinian evolutionary theory”.¹⁵

About this time, William H. Phelps, editor of *The Michigan Christian Advocate*, wrote that the conviction of John T. Scopes in Dayton, Tennessee, produced “careful thinking on the part of every one of us”. He concluded Methodists should “begin to use evolution a bit instead of abusing the scientists!” and to “welcome every hand, scientific or theological, that offers to help us enthrone Christ”.¹⁶

As a result of this statement by Phelps, on Monday, 31 August 1925, formal charges were brought against Hough and William H. Phelps by Rev. Bird led by Dr E.J. Warren of the Detroit Conference. Consequently, the Methodist Episcopal Church was forced to respond to the heresy charges. Congregants who agreed with the views of Hough recalled the enthusiasm with which his sermon was received locally. Although the committee was reticent to have the press present at the meeting, Bird demanded media coverage, and the committee reluctantly agreed. Bird declared he opposed the “encroachments of the evolutionary theory upon religion” and believed that “the doctrine of evolution was going to split the church in two”.¹⁷

The UMC committee met and recommended the Detroit Conference refuse to even consider Bird’s charges. When the UMC conference received the report, they responded with “loud and prolonged cheering”.¹⁸ Widespread coverage of the heresy proceedings strongly supported Hough over Bird. This event was important in solidifying

the Darwinists’ position in the UMC. Digrius asserted that those persons like Hough wish to deflate the conflict, a goal that includes groups such as *The Clergy Letter Project*. Their goal is to bring clergy and scientists together in an effort to convince them that “numerous clergy from most denominations have tremendous respect for evolutionary theory and have embraced it as a core component of human knowledge, fully harmonious with religious faith”.¹⁹ In fact, the project’s goal actually silences Darwin critics in the church.

The acceptance of evolution by leaders of the Methodist Church was by no means unanimous. Among those who rejected the Darwinian worldview were L.W. Munhall and Charles Roads, editor and associate editor respectively, of the *Eastern Methodist*. They wrote: “As to evolution . . . it is but a hypothesis, un-sensible, unscientific, and unscriptural.”²⁰

The situation today

An example of one who supported Darwinism is Methodist Bishop, Rev. Kenneth Hicks; he supported Darwinian evolution *against* efforts to rectify the all-too-common indoctrination of this view in public schools, at the famous Arkansas trial.²¹ The judge, Methodist layman William R. Overton, acknowledged in his decision, dated 5 January 1982, that those who opposed the law (designed to protect teachers who conclude the science evidence against the view that ultimately genetic mutations are our Creator), included the UMC Arkansas Bishop as well as the Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.²²

When the 1986 Louisiana Darwinism anti-indoctrination case designed to protect teachers’ right to objectively present the evidence for and against evolution in the classroom was before the Supreme Court, several UMC bishops filed a brief *against* this bill. Specific Methodists involved included Bishop Kenneth Williams Hicks of the Arkansas UMC Conference and Bishop Frederick C. James of the African Methodist Episcopal Church of Arkansas.²³ The editor of



Figure 1. John Wesley (1703–1721), founder of the Methodist denomination

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the journal *Church and State* concluded that the support of 12 clergymen, including the Methodist bishops, was critical in the judge's ruling that resulted in the termination of the careers of many creationists.²⁴

Other Methodists involved in supporting Darwinism include Rev. Earl B. Carter, minister of the United Methodist Church and program director of the North Arkansas UMC Conference; the Rev. George Panner, a UMC minister and program director of the Little Rock Conference of the United Methodist church; and Dr John P. Miles, minister of St. James UMC in Little Rock, Arkansas. Miles was also vice-chair of the aggressively anti-creationism/anti-intelligent design *Americans United for Separation of Church and State* in Arkansas.²⁵

Americans United have a long record of opposing those who argue against mandated Darwinism indoctrination in public schools. The senate bill they opposed was framed to help prevent Darwinian indoctrination and prohibit the common problem of discrimination against creationist teachers and professors.²⁶ Conversely, the Free Methodist Church of North America, which split from the Methodist church over the issue of slavery, argued *against* the Darwinian worldview.²⁷

The major published histories of both the original Methodist Church and the United Methodist Church, including those that cover doctrine, are largely silent on this issue. Even the word evolution is generally not used except to describe changes in church policies, and the word creation is used as a general term for the natural world, usually in connection with environmental issues.²⁸ One historian mentioned only that after the civil war there existed some "virulent opposition to theories of evolution" in the Methodist Church.²⁹ Hymns written by Wesley (figure 1), the founder of Methodism, touched "on every important biblical teaching [including] creation" referring not to creationism but to the beauty in the natural world.³⁰

The official position is Darwinism

The official position of the UMC since at least 2008 is very clear: theistic evolution, which translates into evolution with a thin coat of theism.

"United Methodist General Conference passed three petitions that accept the theory of evolution. One opposes the introduction of any faith-based theories such as creationism or intelligent design into public-school science curricula. The addition made to 160 F of the Social Principles states in part: '... science's descriptions of cosmological, geological, and biological evolution are not in conflict with theology.' The Book of Resolutions 2008 [figure 2] includes two resolutions that address the topic: #1027, 'God's Creation and the Church,' and #5052, 'Evolution and Intelligent Design'."³²

Another example officially supporting evolution is in answer to a question published on the official church website: "What is the UMC's position on evolution?" The answer was: "the official statement is, 'We find that science's descriptions of cosmological, geological, and biological evolution are not in conflict with theology.'"³¹ Under the subtitle "It's time for people of faith to accept evolution," we read that the UMC needs

"... to overcome its qualms about evolution for the sake of our children, each other and the future of society ... in accepting the findings of science. Together we need to correct the misconceptions and discard the myths. Eugenie C. Scott, the executive director of the [aggressively anti-creationist] National Center for Science Education, says that rejecting evolution puts at risk the high level of scientific achievement that has helped propel the United States to a position of economic, technological and political leadership. ... Delegates to The United Methodist Church's 2008 General Conference overwhelmingly passed three petitions clarifying the denominational

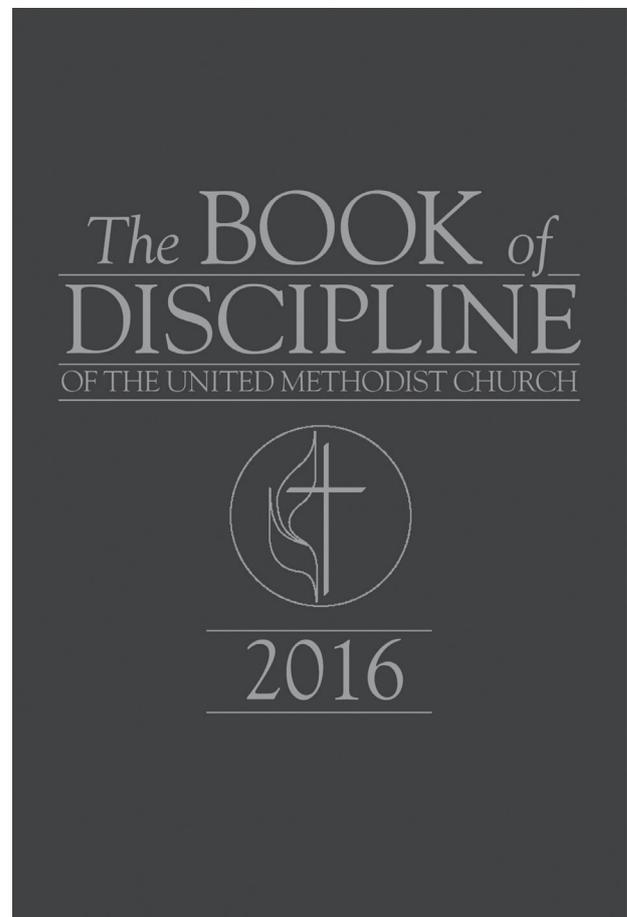


Figure 2. The 'Methodist Discipline', which the church is required to uphold, states: "We find that science's descriptions of cosmological, geological, and biological evolution are not in conflict with theology."

position regarding evolution. One endorses The Clergy Letter Project that provides resources for churches on this subject.”³²

To clarify that he is referring to the same process as non-theistic evolutionists accept, Kuelling added: “Scientists investigating biological evolution have concluded that every living thing in existence today ... shares a common ancestry from long ago. Evolutionary change involves different processes, including natural selection.”³²

“The concept of biological evolution is the fundamental cornerstone—the glue, so to speak—that binds together the biological sciences. Within the scientific community, evolution has long been accepted worldwide. Almost every organization of professional scientists has endorsed the teaching of evolution as an integral part of science education. A 2009 poll of U.S. scientists showed that 97 percent accept evolution over creationism; among life and earth scientists, the percentage is even higher (99.85 percent) Biology has shown, like it or not, that we share common ancestors with them, perhaps as ‘recently’ as 10 million years ago. We are distant cousins of the apes.”³²

He added: “many churches and religious leaders have officially accepted evolution. Regrettably, in many denominations including The United Methodist Church, the news has not reached the entire membership.”³²

The *Clergy Letter Project* was established by atheist Prof. Michael Zimmerman³³ to break down some of the barriers to evolution in the church. This organization

“... has been officially endorsed by The United Methodist Church worldwide! The 2008 General Conference added the following statement to The Book of Resolutions: ‘The United Methodist Church endorses The Clergy Letter Project and its reconciliatory programs between religion and science, and urges United Methodist clergy participation.’ This statement was reaffirmed by the 2016 General Conference. ... [as found in a statement] entitled ‘The Rightful Place of Science In Church’ by Bishop Sally Dyck, Minnesota Annual Conference, United Methodist Church.”³⁴

Atheists especially see the UMC as ‘useful idiots’ for their support and court testimony because atheists in general are fully aware that Darwinism is the doorway to atheism.³⁵ It is for this reason that they frequently publish articles in their publications in favour of Darwinism. By supporting evolution the UMC has planted the seeds of its own demise, as documented by recent surveys. One Pew research poll found over half of all adults under 30 were atheists or agnostic or, at the least, unchurched. According to a 24 August 2016 Pew research poll, a major reason for people being unaffiliated with a church is because of “learning about evolution” in school.³⁶

As penned by one of the most respected writers in America, Yale Ph.D. Tom Wolfe, functional atheist Thomas

Henry Huxley (1825–1895), known as Darwin’s bulldog, created the X Club consisting of a group of nine prominent Darwinists, including Oxford Biology Professor Joseph Hooker, who met every month at a restaurant,

“... and set about—very successfully—stacking influential university science faculties with Darwinists. The X Clubbers had a big hand in creating the pro-Darwinist journal *Nature* (which thrives to this day). They attacked every Darwin doubter the moment he dared raise his voice. That mode of intimidation only intensified over time, leading to what is still known today as ‘the Neo-Darwinist Inquisition’.”³⁷

Furthermore, “Huxley became such an ardent Darwinist not because he believed in Darwin’s theory of natural selection—he never did—but because Darwin was obviously an atheist, just as he [Huxley] was.”³⁷ Thus, the goal of Darwinism from the beginning was a wedge to force theism out of society by social and legal pressure, and replace it with functional atheism.

Beliefs of the laity

Many Methodists have been active in the creation movement and some prominent creationists are Methodists, although the majority of those active in the American creation movement are probably Lutherans and Baptists. One of many examples is Methodist G.W. Pool, who wrote the book *The Origin of Man or Evolution or Revolution, Which?* to support creationism.³⁸ Pool evaluated evolution, focusing on life’s origin and human evolution. The problems of evolution he cites include the fossil record, the difficulty of body organs functioning in between evolutionary states, and the problem of interpreting evidence from limited changes to a gross level, such as apes to humans by natural processes. Pool is primarily oriented towards biological and philosophical concerns, although he alludes to theological issues in most of the chapters.

Nor is the anticreationist worldview reflected in older Methodist literature for lay persons (I was unable to find any newer statements on this topic in their Sunday School Literature). David C. Cook, founded as a Methodist publishing house, puts out weekly Sunday School lessons titled *Sprint*. One issue, appropriately timed to be used at the beginning of the school year, asks: “How did the world begin?”, and answers “The Bible provides the answer to the big questions” such as this.³⁹ The authors of the article proposed several possible answers, including:

1. The universe always was, always will be, and is continually creating itself.
2. Ultimately the universe happened by chance, i.e. the critical elements came together at the right place and time, and with much time and luck, here we are.
3. The Bible’s answer is God created the universe with a specific plan and goal in mind.³⁹

The lesson does not imply the answer is theistic evolution, and is specifically critical of evolution as a whole. It summarizes the basic evolutionary position as follows: “Some evolutionists claim believing that God created the universe doesn’t make scientific sense. The theory of evolution, in its most basic form, says that all living things developed (‘evolved’) from simpler living things. Some even say that life, like the universe, began by chance (the right molecules in the right place at the right time).” The authors concluded “it takes a lot of faith to believe all of that”, writing:

“Scientists have searched for years to find fossil evidence to link one species to another. Genetic changes do occur within each species. But no evidence links one species of life to another. The Bible clearly states what happened at the beginning. The living God created life. He spoke matter into being, then created many different creatures—each after their own kind. We see variety in living beings because God made them that way.”³⁹

They not only point out some of the primary evidence creationists use against evolutionism, but note “lack of evidence casts doubts on evolution’s truth ... at least three scientific principles support belief in creation.” They are: 1) conservation of energy; 2) second law of thermodynamics; and 3) evolution’s mathematical improbability. The authors conclude there exist only two options, namely: “it all happened by chance or by God’s choice. *In the beginning God created*, is not simply a Christian answer to the *big question*. It just might be the *only* reasonable answer.”³⁹

Lesson 20 of this series discusses the conflicts that can occur over this issue in schools.⁴⁰ The author noted: “certain school subjects can also challenge the faith of young teens today. ‘I know my science teacher thinks I’m weird because I don’t believe in evolution’, says Tony. ‘When I told him I believe the world was created, he just gave me a strange look and kept talking. Of course, I have to learn the material and take the tests, but I feel better knowing that I spoke up once.’”⁴⁰

The lesson, written by Elaine McCalla, stresses both *how* and *why* Christian students should speak out about their Christian faith in opposition to Darwinism in their various classes. In the science section, the author states:

“... science easily lends itself to conversations about God. Christian students in biology class have many chances to express their faith. Take the theories of evolution and creation, for example. Christian students can point out the marvelous way things are made and how these [examples] point to a marvelous Maker—as discussed below an organization that does just this was banned. Or, how about a question that is often asked: ‘Is man an animal?’”⁴¹

The ironic fact is many UMC leaders are not cognizant of the beliefs and feelings of, not only their members, but often beliefs expressed in their church publications.

The UMC teacher’s manual for this lesson explains the implications of these student workbook discussions.⁴² It says: “imagine yourself in school ... in your biology or science classroom. It’s the first day of class” when the teacher, Mr Hayes, who has a reputation as a tough but likable teacher, enters the room.⁴² Mr Hayes flips open a huge chart which illustrates marching across the page

“... increasingly complex life forms, beginning with the amoeba and progressing to human beings. You know what’s coming next. ‘Today, class, we’ll get right into our study for the semester: evolution’, says Mr Hayes. ‘We’re going to try to answer this question: Where did it all come from?’ What would be your honest feelings right at this point? Many students will probably express that they experience a sinking feeling. Evolution and the origins of the universe are going to be discussed again from a non-Christian point of view, and they are probably the only Christians in the class. ... One of our common reactions to a situation like this is fear. ... we suspect it’s not reasonable to believe that God created the world. But there are very good logical and Biblical reasons for believing in Creation. Let’s look at some of them.”⁴²

The unit then concludes that the Bible answers questions about where life and the universe come from, and while science struggles with these questions:

“We have a totally creative God ... How did God create everything? The Bible does not describe the creation process in the same kind of technical terms a scientist might use. However, it’s not unscientific. In answering the question of how God created, science could be helpful—as long as it doesn’t ignore the statements the Bible does make. But just keep in mind one thing. Both the Christian, who says God started it all, and the atheist, who says the world just sort of began, are operating on faith.”⁴²

Another example is the Methodist Holy Baptism for Children, which includes the following words: “In the days of Noah you [God] saved those on the ark through water. After the flood, you set in the clouds a rainbow. When you saw your people as slaves in Egypt, you led them to freedom through the sea. Their children you brought through the Jordan to the land which you promised.”⁴³ Ironically, the church hierarchy has frequently testified in court *against* this conclusion, and those persons who hold these beliefs.

Contrast this to the UMC Bishop of Indiana who wrote: “four major views of creation exist, Biblical creationism, religious rationalism, scientific theism and evolution science”.⁴⁴ He then gave his conclusion that “no effort is made to promote one view as superior to any other”. Nonetheless, not all bishops agreed with this view, especially those that served in the past. Bishop Warren A. Candler (1857–1941) was a Southern Methodist Church bishop who

considered the scriptures inerrant and railed against those who supported biblical criticisms and evolution.⁴⁵

A survey of a typical United Methodist Church

To evaluate the claim that the average Methodist rejects the Darwinian view, in March of 2018, with the permission of the pastor and the elders, I surveyed the members of the local St Paul’s United Methodist Church in Montpelier, Ohio, where I am a lay speaker. The survey forms were placed in the bulletin and I explained the purpose of the survey was part of a paper I am writing. The local bishop noted that our church (St Paul’s of Montpelier) is a typical solid middle-class Ohio UMC.⁴⁶

Most of the congregants are teachers, and professional people including bankers and business owners. Five congregants are, or were, professors at the local college, and two board members of the college attended St Paul’s. The average weekly attendance is close to 124, and a few absent members were given the opinionnaire at the next service. The nearly 100 returned surveys (80% of the total average attendance) was an excellent response. Some did not fill out the one-page form because advanced age made it difficult to read the form, or they did not understand the questions.

The results found 84 of those who completed the form accepted some form of creation, and only 16 accepted theistic evolution. A total of 79 persons accepted biblical creation, 3 supported progressive creation, 2 intelligent design, and not a single person supported choice E, orthodox evolution. Of those who accepted theistic evolution, 6 were college age or younger, 4 young adults (31–50) and 6 over age 50. Of the 79 that accepted biblical creation, 19 (25%) were college age or younger, 10 (13%) age 31–50; 31(39%) age 51–70 and 19 (24%) age 71 and above.

According to my experience speaking in several hundred churches, the results of my survey are typical for many

mainline churches. Last, 50 (63%) of the 79 biblical creationists were above age 51. The number in each category was comparatively small, but the results are what was expected from other surveys. The most significant number is the 83% that accepted some form of creation in contrast to the opposition to this view discussed in the next section.

United Methodist conferences

When the creation issue was brought up at recent conferences, all efforts to deal with the current Darwinism dogmatism were consistently voted down. The conference dealt with doctrine, policy, and other church concerns and has occasionally discussed the creation-evolution issue. For example, efforts at the UMC annual conference in Mobile, Alabama, on 4 June 2013, considered creationism.⁴⁷ Delegates voted down petitions that would have sent requests to the 2016 General Conference regarding creationism and evolution. One petition would have *removed* language stating “evolution is not in conflict with theology”.⁴⁷ Another would have added language supporting the teaching of intelligent design along with evolution in public schools. All were voted down after lively discussion.

Supporters included Rev. Ralph Sigler of The Harvest UMC in Dothan, Alabama, who correctly observed “Christianity is our worldview”, and the Apostles’ Creed, “our most well-known creed”, references the “maker of heaven and Earth”, and parents who want the theory of intelligent design taught to their children may find that “their church stands against them”.⁴⁷

Those who spoke against the petition to support teaching intelligent design included recent high school graduate Trevor Warren who opined that the petition goes against the separation of church and state, adding: “We do not send our children to school to learn about religion. I thought that was the church’s job.”⁴⁷ Senior pastor of First UMC in Pensacola, Florida, Rev. Wesley Wachob, said: “no conflict” exists between science and theology, adding that “creationism is not science but rather ‘bad theology’”.⁴⁷

Obviously, judging by these comments, the critics not only have very little understanding of the controversy, but a great deal of misunderstanding. The fact is, as well documented by an examination of the textbooks used in public school today, theology is widely taught in our public schools, specifically the anti-creation, anti-intelligent design, pro-evolution worldview theology. The view prohibits the wealth of evidence against Darwinism.



Figure 3. A typical United Methodist Church

Image: Joe Ravi/CC BY-SA 3.0

Banning persons who believe what UMC publications teach

The UMC has since then become even more hostile against any opposition to Darwinism, and church bishops are not innocent in this controversy. In 2016, they were given the title ‘censor of the year’ by the Discovery Institute for banning a group of Christian educators and scientists from displaying scientific literature at the Oregon conference, even though many other groups, including some very controversial ones, were allowed space to present their literature.⁴⁸ The banned scientists were part of the Discovery Institute that produces books and films about the wonders of nature that give testimony to the Creator. The films include topics such as the wonders of bird design, the dolphin’s sonar system, butterfly metamorphosis and design, and even the privileged position our home planet has in the solar system.

Their rejection of these films is ironic in view of the fact that the most common reason people give in surveys for believing in God is the wonders of creation that the films document, and even many theistic evolutionists accept. As Romans 1:20 says: “For ever since the world was created, people have seen ... through everything God made, his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.” This view was also reflected in the 2016 UMC Lent program, which says: “Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, you brought all things into being and called them good. From the dust of the earth you formed us into your image and breathed into us the breath of life.”⁴⁹

The specific source of the ban to exclude the Discovery Institute from the church’s General Conference is unclear, but the result was to censor discussion of intelligent design. When the Discovery Institute inquired about the source of the ban, they were told only that Commission ‘leadership’ made the decision. The UMC—although its motto is “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors”—refused to disclose who made up this shadowy ‘leadership’ group.⁴⁸

Many Methodists have expressed the concern described above by leaving the church. This may be part of the reason why, according to official church data, the US UMC has lost 116,063 members in the last two years alone. This is the equivalent to losing a 318-member local church every day of the year. In 1964, the UMC had over 12 million members; in 2015, 7.2 million, and the average weekly attendance is now only about 2.8 million; less than the Mormons, a church founded only in the late 1800s. As of December, 2015, the once-tiny Mormon Church membership was approaching 19 million. Total wards and branches were 30,016, and full-time missionaries were 74,079. Mormon converts last year alone totalled 257,402.

Why it matters

The concerns outlined above were documented by pollster George Barna, who in 2016 completed an extensive analysis of the spiritual condition in the US by means of a large nationwide polling sample.⁵⁷ The conclusions refer to Protestants and Catholics in general, including:

- “A majority argues that co-habitation, sexual fantasies, sex outside of marriage, giving birth outside of marriage, divorce, doctor-assisted suicide, homosexual relations, and same-sex marriage are now all morally acceptable endeavors.”
- “During the past decade alone there have been huge declines in the proportion of people ... who claim to have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ.”
- “Belief in God, trust in the Bible, and reliance on Jesus alone for salvation have all declined precipitously. Fewer than one in five adults believes that absolute moral truth exists and is defined in the Bible.”
- “The unchurched population is growing like cancer”
- “The Bible is taking a big hit. ... Only one out of three adults believes it is accurate in all of the principles it teaches.”

Churches that do nothing to stop this slide into a moral crisis and atheism ultimately contribute to it. Just as the Methodist hierarchy in the past has defended or condoned slavery, and even Nazi eugenics, they now indirectly condone sexual behaviour that is detrimental to health and longevity. They also actively oppose those who openly support the main reason people give for their belief in God, namely the evidence and wonders of creation. In contrast, a 1991 survey found 6% of Americans identified their religious affiliation as ‘none’. By the end of the 1990s, 14% of the public claimed no religious affiliation, a number that rose to 20% by 2012. Today, one-quarter (25%) of Americans claim no formal religious identity, making this group the single largest ‘religious group’ in the United States.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The Methodist colleges and the church hierarchy have in general concluded that Darwinism is based on solid settled science and for this reason is consensus science. The response has been to capitulate, and rather than risk a Galileo-like confrontation they have chosen to accommodate this worldview, a compromise termed theistic evolution. They have not only chosen to ignore the overwhelming evidence against the Darwinian worldview, but have supported the opposition to the creation worldview by atheists, agnostics, and others. This review is a good example of the conclusions of biology Prof. Willem Ouweneel who wrote: “biologists are generally more willing to listen to and engage opposing arguments than are theologians. This is because biological generalists are often somewhat aware of the weaknesses in the theory of evolution, whereas theologians are not.”⁵¹

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