Augustana College

Chapel of Reconciliation

Brian Juber

“The Language of God”

19 Nov 2010
Good morning everyone – and thanks for being here today. I want to begin my message by posing a question: What’s the first thing that comes to mind when I say the words, “Science and Religion”? Is it centuries of conflict? Or unending debates, where nothing ever gets resolved? Perhaps two things that are so polar opposite, so irrevocably and permanently different, that I probably shouldn’t even be using them in the same sentence, let alone during a sermon?

As a Biology major here at Augustana, as well as someone who takes my faith seriously, I have had to confront my own personal beliefs regarding the study of science and what I hold true about religion. I have also found there are a variety of different reactions when these topics are brought up. For instance, I distinctly remember three years ago as a freshman, sitting in my introductory biology class, and the professor began to discuss Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. Promptly, as he began lecturing, a girl sitting in the second row packed her bag and left the room, clearly offended at the thought of evolution being taught in this class. Indeed, looking back, I felt some of the same emotions that she did – but am grateful a thousand times over that I stayed in the class, which began to challenge the way I perceived the interactions of science and religion. But in my opinion, this is exactly the problem that occurs when trying to talk about science and religion – people tend to become polarized on two fronts, immediately putting up walls around themselves in order to defend their position. The first involves the thought process of, “I study science – therefore God has no place in the natural world” and the second being “I believe in God – and thus I won’t bother with science because it takes the focus off God and onto seemingly random events which have shaped the history of our world.” I stand in front of you today saying these two polarizations do not have to be, and CANNOT be, our only two options. There must be a way to incorporate both aspects of science and faith into our daily lives.

One of the best books that I have read in the last few years has not been a textbook – big surprise there, right? I take the title of my sermon from this book – The Language of God, in which
Dr. Francis S. Collins chronicles his own religious awakening and faith journey, while at the same time having the reputation as one of the most influential and respected scientists of our generation. Dr. Collins is a physician-geneticist who was the director of the Human Genome Project, an 11-year undertaking that resulted in the sequencing of the human genome, the simultaneously divine and molecular instruction book that God used to create both humans and all other forms of life on Earth. Over the course of the book, he argues that everyone can accept both science and religion and both need to be respected in their own rights. I found myself enthralled with his eloquent words, the pages flying by as I soaked in every word he had written.

As I have been immersed mainly in the sciences since I arrived at Augustana three years ago, I have developed a strong respect and awe for the complexity, intricacy, and elegance of the world around us. Every part of creation presents an opportunity to worship – an opportunity to glorify God, who created and crafted this beautiful green and blue planet we call home. I have had opportunities to study the mysterious origins of life on this planet and how that initial spark of life has changed, developed, and exploded into the millions of species that share the earth with us today. I have delved into the most basic and tiny components of matter and the amazing mathematical precision that even the smallest, most basic forms of matter follow. I have observed what happens when these molecules are linked together in the precise, specific arrangement and conformation that allows for life to thrive on this planet, and for me, this has been the most exciting and rewarding aspect of choosing to study biology. And I have had the opportunity to see how ecosystems work entirely in concert, every form of life working together for the glory of God.

Our text from today, a Psalm written by King David, proclaims, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.” Scientific exploration and discovery should not be shunned by those who consider themselves followers and believers of God – it should be embraced as the way to study God’s beautiful and elegant creation, which is endlessly praising its creator. Dr. Collins
considers every scientific discovery, from the seemingly most mundane lab experiment to something as monumental as the sequencing of the human genome, as an opportunity to worship the God who made this world possible – and I could not agree more. To those who do not believe, I challenge them to simply look at the world around them! Observe God in the amazing complexity and diversity of life that surrounds us!

In order for both a strong basis of science and a firm belief in religion to coexist in an individual, it is absolutely essential that we understand and accept science’s strengths along with its limitations. According to Dr. Collins in his book, “Science is the only reliable way to understand the natural world, and its tools, when properly utilized, can generate profound insights into material existence. But science is powerless to answer questions such as, ‘Why did the universe come into being?’ ‘What is the meaning of human existence?’ and ‘What happens after we die?’” These questions, along with humans’ search for meaning, are both nearly universal human desires. What are the chances that these questions have been present in nearly every one of the estimated 106 billion people who have lived on this earth, if there ultimately are no answers? This force inside of us, which pushes and drives us toward the divine and is unable to be resolved by scientific progress and discovery, is a direct signpost to God. Those who wish to believe in God while at the same time practicing science need to accept that God is beyond the realm of our simple minds, understanding, and experiments. He is so complex, mighty, and wonderful that we need to simply accept Him for who He is – our God, the ultimate Source of knowledge and truth in the universe, and the only plausible explanation for the amazing complexity and elegance of the universe, especially life on Earth.

In a 2006 *Time* magazine debate between Dr. Collins and Richard Dawkins, an outspoken evolutionist and atheist, Dawkins called this statement, from a scientific point of view, “the mother and father of all cop-outs,” as it does fail to scientifically “prove” the existence of God. Referring to the questions posed earlier, which science is incapable of answering, Dr. Collins fires back, “If you
refuse to acknowledge their appropriateness, you end up with a zero probability of God after examining the natural world because it doesn’t convince you on a proof basis. But if your mind is open about whether God might exist, you can point to aspects of the universe that are consistent with that conclusion.” Dr. Collins stresses the importance of scientists having an open mind about religion – and if the scientist is willing to do this, God will reveal Himself through the natural world that He has created. However, Dr. Collins also warns that this works in reverse as well – a self-fulfilling prophecy will occur if the scientist is unwilling and thus unable to see God in the natural world.

I hope that, over course of this message, I have answered more questions than I have risen regarding the topics of science and religion. This topic of discussion is much like science itself – every answer poses three or four more questions and propagates into an amazingly complex web of questions, answers, and information. I would encourage anyone who has questioned, struggled with, or simply wants more information regarding how science and religion fit together to read Dr. Collins’ book, as I have barely scratched the surface of what he covers in its pages. I would like to end with a quote that one of the biology professors has as a signature on his e-mails. The quote is from St. Augustine, and it reads: “Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book – the appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note it. Read it.”

If you are struggling to hear God in today’s overstressed and overworked society, if you want to see innumerable miracles that God has performed, if you want physical proof of God’s existence – simply step outside this chapel at the end of this service and take a moment to look around at the amazing world we live in, and listen to the language of God. Amen.
MORNING WORSHIP
Friday, November 19, 2010

Prelude  “Hosanna” by a. Willaert
Trumpet Trio: Collin Block, Marni Shoemaker, Lizzy Reid

Welcome/Announcements

Scripture  Psalm 19:1-7, 13-14  Rachel Hurley

Special Music  “Saraband from Sonata No. 8, Op. 5” by A. Caselli
Joanna Qualm, Flute; Jesi Hendricks, Piano

Message  “The Language of God”  Brian Juber
Hometown: Worthington, MN
Major: Biology

Hymn  “Earth and all Stars”  ELW #731, vv. 1, 2, 4, 5

Prayer and Lord’s Prayer  Kim Hibma

Benediction & Dismissal
L:  May the Lord bless you and keep you.  May the Lord make his
face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.  May the Lord lift
up his countenance upon you and give you peace.
C:  Thanks be to God.  Amen

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CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

WINTER CLOTHING DRIVE -There are several drop boxes around
campus (one in the chapel Narthex) to collect new or gently used winter
clothing, specifically hats, gloves, scarves, etc.  All donations will be
given to the Banquet and the Children’s Inn.  The deadline to contribute
is Thanksgiving Break.

FAITH FEST - Volunteers are needed for small group leaders and
overnight chaperones.  The event for middle schoolers will be on
campus on Feb. 19th and 20th.  You will receive a free t-shirt!!  Please
contact Sydney Ipina if you are interested  saipina09@ole.augie.edu

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CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Monday (22nd)  Morning Prayer

Wednesday - Sunday - THANKSGIVING BREAK (no worship)

Sunday (28th)  Chapel decorating party - 8:30 pm -
Food/Fun/Fellowship!  Everyone is welcome to come and help!!

Monday (30th)  Morning Prayer, 10 am

Wednesday (1st)  Holy Communion, 10 am - Pr. Paul - Chapel Banner
Dedication

Friday (3rd)  Morning Worship, 10 am - Nicole Lauck, ‘11;
Association Meeting
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