

## **Darwin and Dakota Wesleyan University**

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The recent debate about evolution and intelligent design continues across our country and here in Mitchell.

The central question from the religious side of the debate is how best to understand the Bible regarding the origins of life in Genesis 1 and 2. However, merely appealing to the Bible adds little to the discussion. Why? All written documents need to be interpreted, whether the Bible, the Constitution of the United States or a car insurance policy.

Although there are many ways to interpret the Bible, I am persuaded that an originalist perspective may shed some light on this important topic.

An originalist interpretive perspective is much in the news these days. President Bush and many political conservatives strongly advocate the importance of placing an originalist jurist on the U.S. Supreme Court. Such an interpretive perspective seeks to understand the Constitution consistent with what the framers' intent and purpose of the constitution and amendments were when adopted. This is a careful method of interpretation. It seeks first to understand what the text meant, and then makes a cautious and timeful application to what it means now. An originalist resists efforts to "read" contemporary questions, rights, debates and problems into an ancient text.

Following an originalist approach, the central theme of Genesis 1 and 2 is that God created the earth, humanity, and animal and plant life. The Biblical creation account does not say how or when God created the world, the age of the earth or the process used.

What then does this mean for science, school boards across America, church communities, Dakota Wesleyan University and how we understand the origins of life?

- The Bible is a theological and spiritual document, not a scientific treatise. It is concerned about God, community, ethics, meaning and how we ought to live. Seek not spiritual meaning, theological doctrine or ethical insight from Darwin, nor a scientific explanation of creation from the Bible.
- Thoughtful Christians and Jews ought to "sound the alarm" when attempts are made to twist or manipulate the creation accounts of the Bible to say what clearly they were not intended to say.
- Let the debate about the origins of life continue – especially at faith-affirming universities like Dakota Wesleyan University. But this debate needs to focus on the biological, geological and cosmological data. Evolutionists, creationists, and intelligent designers ought to be able to make and defend their positions based on the data itself. The burden of proof for the evolutionists, literal seven-day creationists and intelligent designers is the same—the data itself.
- Since the Bible does not deal with the when or how of creation, a person may affirm both a fervent belief in God **and** in evolution. No one has to choose either faith in God **or** belief in evolution.

- By definition a Christian college must be passionately committed to full exploration of truth as difficult and controversial as that journey may be. In the end, all truth is God's truth, whether in theology, biology, the social sciences or astronomy.

Dakota Wesleyan University is part of that great tradition of Christian universities that encourages intensive study. We joyfully embrace the challenge from John and Charles Wesley (the founders of the Wesleyan and Methodist churches) to "...unite knowledge and vital piety." And, if Dakota Wesleyan University is successful in this compelling Christian and Wesleyan educational mission, then our students will achieve a better understanding of God, God's world and the end for which they were created.