

Portion of an open letter by Maria McDowell, Orthodox Theologian and Ethicist:

I write as a North American Orthodox, a lifelong member of the Orthodox Church, an Orthodox theologian and ethicist, and the daughter of two educated scientists, a physician and a geologist...

Science describes how the world works, the mechanism of its diversity, its change, its growth, and yes, even its evolution. The more I read biological theories of the human person, of our genetic structure and our brain development (areas of interest and curiosity), the more awed I am at a Creator who brought into existence from nothing a world full of beauty, complexity, pattern and rhythm, chaos and order. In other words, scientific knowledge adds to my faith. It does not detract from it.

The reason for this is, in part, that I am Orthodox. Orthodoxy does not posit knowledge of God against knowledge of the world. Rather, Orthodoxy allows me to see the world as a location of God's awesome creativity and mystery. Through the world (informed by Orthodox theology), I see a God who created so that all humanity (indeed, all creation!) might be in communion with God. This same God became Incarnate, bringing all matter (molecules, atoms, protons, neutrons, the waves and particles that is light!) to fullness and communion in God through Christ, by the Spirit. The book of Genesis remains among my favorite books to read. Unlike certain types of Protestantism, the Orthodox tradition does not teach me to read the creation stories as literal history standing in contradiction to geology, biology, or astrophysics. Instead, the Church teaches me to see in the text a God who participates in creation, who brings it abundant life, and calls humanity to protect and care for creation by participating in its flourishing.

This point of biblical literalism is extremely important. Orthodoxy is not, and has never been, a literalist tradition. Our theologians approach scripture as allegory, analogy, typology, as story and narrative, poetry and prose. Our interpretation of scripture allows room for knowledge gleaned from science, philosophy, sociology and psychology. This does not mean that any of these disciplines override our firm belief as Orthodox that scripture reveals to us the living God who continues to work in and through the world.

But our balanced approach allows us to understand that knowledge of God and God's creation is not limited to a single, literal interpretation of scripture. Unfortunately, this is precisely the approach taken by defenders of creationism or Intelligent Design, that scripture must be literally true in its historical details. This erroneous understanding of

the complex texts in the bible, an understanding with little knowledge of scripture's context, results in a false choice: faith OR science. If we Orthodox suddenly decide that knowledge of God's world cannot include science, then we put our children in an untenable position where they must choose between knowledge of the world God created and the study of its magnificence, and an interpretation which denies the witness of their God-given senses, their God-given mind, in the name of a narrow, literal interpretation of scripture.

Having said this, there are certainly theories posited by scientists which are incompatible with Orthodoxy. However, they are usually theories which also stretch beyond the bounds of good science. Just as biblical literalists force scripture to say more than it actually says about creation, so do some scientists say more about God than actual science allows. Any use of science by communists to "disprove" God must be addressed as a distortion of scientific research...