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**Reviewing *The Language of God:
A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief***



***The Language of God:
A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief***

by Francis S. Collins

Free Press (a division of Simon and Schuster: New York

Copyright 2006. 320 pages

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by

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The Language of God, written in 2006, spent a good bit of time on the *New York Times* Bestseller List. It has been the subject of many discussions, debates, and probably even quite a few arguments. Many scientists will probably claim that Francis Collins has “crossed the line” by improperly (in their view) intermingling science with faith. In contrast, many Christians probably welcome this passionate, intellectual believer.

Collins, who earned a Ph.D. in physical chemistry from Yale and an M.D. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, gained worldwide name recognition as head of the Human Genome Project and is considered one of the world’s leading scientists. The ground-breaking work of the Human Genome Project succeeded in unlocking the genetic codes embedded in the famous and wondrous aspect of organic chemistry known as DNA.



Dr. Francis S. Collins

Summary

The title and subtitle of the book, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*, very accurately state its main thesis. The book itself is arranged in three main parts: (1) The Chasm between Science and Faith, (2) The Great Questions of Human Existence, and (3) Faith in Science, Faith in God.

In Part 1, Collins introduces us to his youth and early adulthood, as he was growing up with little familiarity with the Bible and without what many might consider “common knowledge” of matters of faith and religion. Collins says that not only did he lack training in matters of faith in his early years, but as he matured and studied science at the university, he moved through agnosticism to active atheism. This is where he found himself at the time he was invited to participate in one of the grandest scientific investigations of our time, the Human Genome Project. At that time he was also involved with near-end-of-life patients, and it was one of these patients who challenged Collins to verbalize what he believed about life. Collins amazed himself about how inarticulate he was on this issue.

In his subsequent search for Truth, Collins was introduced to *Mere Christianity*, in which C.S. Lewis explains the concept of the Moral Law, which all humankind seems naturally to understand. After more study and investigation and using the methodical investigation methods of a trained scientist, Collins became convinced that faith is actually a rational and logical response to evidence observed in the natural world.

In Part 2, Collins methodically analyzes the evidence discovered by numerous other scientists while studying the origin of the universe, the origin of life, and the design and architecture of life. During this analysis he learns about the Anthropic Principle, which states that the Earth, the Universe, and all of Creation was designed and exquisitely fine-tuned specifically for the benefit of humanity, for just this point in time in cosmic history. The author recites numerous well-known physical constants and physical laws that support the Anthropic Principle.

Collins works to unite his views with some lesser-known statements by Charles Darwin, where Darwin alludes to the failure of his theory of evolution by natural selection to account for the Causal Agent (Darwin even referred to such an agent as “the Creator”) that designed and initiated life. Collins then explains his observations from his study of the human genome—that the origin of DNA certainly needed an architect to design and create the exquisite, complex, and wondrous set of instructions that govern all life.

In Part 3, Collins compares four options that he views as possible worldviews that can be tested and/or simply adopted. Collins clearly ascribes to Option 4 and takes considerable care to develop and support his position.

- **Option 1:** A *naturalist* view that all of the observable universe can be explained by purely natural causes and that any reference or appeal to an intelligent causal agent is unneeded and unwarranted (i.e., science trumps faith).
- **Option 2:** A *creationist* view that no matter what may be discovered by scientific investigation and analysis regarding the processes and time periods apparently required to explain the current state of Earth and the Universe, the best view is a simplistic one that God simply created all of the observable universe in a short period of time, in essentially its current form (i.e., faith trumps science).
- **Option 3:** A *deist* view that an intelligent causal agent (to many, God) designed and created the initial conditions and established all of the mechanisms and processes that we currently observe, then set it all in motion, and presumably now is simply observing the expressions and development of that initial handiwork.
- **Option 4:** A “*biologos*” view that takes the deist view a step further, in that the Causal Agent (i.e., God) is also an Active Agent throughout cosmic history, actively guiding and directing the natural processes of cosmic physics and of biological evolution over the history of life on planet Earth, and even intervening supernaturally on occasion when deemed necessary.

The final chapter of the book, entitled “Truth Seekers,” is a kind of epilogue, where Collins further develops the story of his journey that he began in Chapter 1. He invites both believers and scientists to join him in their own quests for Truth, pursuing equally-important examinations of evidence that is discoverable in Biblical scripture *and* in the record of nature as described by science. In the “A Final Word” section, he issues an appeal: “It is time to call a truce in the escalating war between science and spirit. The war was never really necessary” (Collins, 2006, pp. 233). He also exhorts his readers to “... together seek to reclaim the solid ground of an intellectually and spiritually satisfying synthesis of *all* great truths” (Collins, 2006, pp. 233-234).

The final section of the book is a lengthy appendix entitled “The Moral Practice of Science and Medicine: Bioethics.” In it he further develops the concept of the Moral Law he discussed in Part 1 and presents a cogent, rational discussion about how it should be applied today in questions of scientific research and medical treatments. He touches on many current

themes, including medical genetics, personalized medicine, DNA testing, stem cells, cloning, and human enhancement. He argues that science alone is ill equipped to answer moral and ethical questions in these areas, but he recommends caution about the sufficiency of faith-based approaches to provide answers, as well. He rather recommends a holistic approach where both sets of voices are heard and considered.

Critique and Recommendation

Dr. Collins' book is engaging, informative, and challenging. He shares his mind *and* his heart with us, and it is refreshing to see a famous scientific personality pull back the curtain and let us vicariously experience his scientific and spiritual quest for Truth.

Collins does a credible job of summarizing four options in a spectrum of positions that one may select when dealing with questions of our origins, with processes leading to our current state of being, and with the level of involvement of a causal agent, which may be considered deity by some or many. The "biologos" view that Collins presents as his chosen worldview is essentially what many now refer to as "theistic evolution." In this position, the theoretical process of evolution is embraced, but it is wedded with the idea that the process could not have simply started without the intervention of a causal agent or deity. This position further invokes the continued involvement over time of the causal agent, who empowers and "steers," as it were, the "natural" selections referenced by evolutionary theory.

It is disappointing to note Collins's total omission of a viable fifth option that was introduced over 20 years ago, but that has only just recently become more widely known and accepted by many as a preferable theory and testable model. That model is the "old-earth creation" model, described by Dr. Hugh Ross and other researchers at the California science-faith think tank, [Reasons to Believe](#). In this model the scientifically-testable and measurable age of the cosmos and Earth are fully embraced and acknowledged. However, a growing wealth of data in this model refutes the notion that life could have been initiated and then varied to its current state of diversity by any strictly naturalistic or even by theistically-assisted mutational means, in no small part due to the *brevity* of time actually available for evolution to occur after the "Big bang" and after the multiple mass extinction events that are now known to have occurred in history. Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection was proposed and widely adopted before astronomers proved that the universe has not existed forever but instead had a specific time of creation about 14 billion years ago. When pressed on the issue, honest naturalistic evolutionists will concede that this is much too brief a time for probabilistically-adequate explanatory power of natural selection to result in the current biological makeup of the Earth.

Like Collins' "biologos" option, the Reasons to Believe model requires a causal agent to get life processes started and to develop diversity in the biomass of the Earth. However, in the old-earth creation model, the causal agent continues with a vast series of "special creation" events, each of which results in the appearance of a new species, culminating with the creation of Man. This model is squared with the Biblical account of creation in that the Hebrew word for "day" (pronounced "yom") in the Genesis account is understood to refer to a longer specific time period or age, rather than a literal 24-hour period on Earth. With this apparent "relaxing" of the time constraint, the unfolding of physical events and ordered appearances of various life forms are still found to occur in precisely the order described in the Judeo-Christian scriptures.

One cannot help but think that had Collins been exposed to this fifth option, he likely might have chosen it rather than the theistic evolution theory he espouses in his book. With his

stated admonition that one should consider all the competing ideas and theories from science and faith, it would be almost inconceivable that he would have simply rejected the old-earth creation model out of hand and not included in his list of worldview options. This leads to a somewhat uncomfortable conclusion (for this author) that the well-read Collins was simply unaware of this highly viable, fifth option.

With this being said, the question arises, “Is Collins’ book, *The Language of God*, worth the reading?” Absolutely! The book provides a “ray of hope” to scientists who may be struggling with how to rectify their faith, beliefs, and values against the demands of other scientists that involving faith while conducting scientific inquiry is somehow wrong or is an impure approach. Indeed, Collins’ shares that he himself used to be one of those scientists who found scientific fidelity unfulfilling and even lacking in explanatory power. He shares how embracing contributions afforded by his faith allowed his scientific investigations a new richness and meaning. Reading Collins’ book is definitely recommended, but the reader is encouraged to also investigate the “neglected option” (<http://www.reasonstobelieve.org>) that is not included in Collins’ list of worldview options.

References

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