

"Creation or Evolution – do we have to choose?"

A talk by Dr Denis Alexander

Nearly every one of the 150 chairs in Faringdon Corn Exchange was filled on Friday 3rd December for the second talk in our series "Science & Faith: Big Questions". We expected to hear an expert in this important – and sometimes contentious – area and we were not disappointed: our speaker, Denis Alexander, is undoubtedly a master of his subject.

Denis began by pointing out that choice is not necessarily exclusive, using some everyday examples to explain this, and concluding that in the case of creation and evolution, accepting one does not preclude the other. He contrasted this with statements by Richard Dawkins, who states very dogmatically that if you believe in evolution then it is impossible to believe in God as Creator - and so, therefore, scientists must be atheists.

Evolution was initially described by Darwin and others as the best explanation of the biological world we see around us. The diversity, relationships and development of all organisms are all well-explained and make coherent sense, although there are many detailed aspects we do not yet understand. Denis noted that the concept of evolution has now extended to become a philosophy which is applied to many areas of life – politics, economics, sociology, etc.

He explained that the process of evolution consists of two steps. First, a variation (scientifically called a mutation) in the genome* of an organism occurs.

Such a mutation in the genome may result in a change in some characteristic of the animal, plant, bird, fungus, bacteria, etc. If the organism is able to reproduce successfully and if the progeny have some advantage over their parent(s) and other, competing organisms then the mutated organism may be naturally selected and that change will continue into future generations. This is often called "survival of the fittest". This process over many millennia has resulted in the world we see around us today.

But evolution does not explain how everything started, where everything came from. The early chapters of Genesis are not a scientific textbook, but are meant to emphasise the fact that God was and is behind everything that exists in the universe. God's created everything and his sustaining involvement in his creation is referred to frequently in both Old and New Testaments of the Bible. He is not just a "God of the gaps", which grow smaller, although not necessarily fewer, as our scientific knowledge increases.

Denis concluded by reiterating that there is no need to choose between evolution or creation; we are looking at complementary aspects of the same reality.

The meeting finished with a lively question and answer session.

Keith Thrower

* *A genome is the complete set of genetic information in an organism's DNA and provides all of the information required by an organism to function and reproduce.*