Keith Hudson, Calvary Episcopal, Wilmington DE
October 2005 newsletter

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, an Anglican Archdeacon named William Paley came up with an argument for the existence of God, known as the Argument from Design. It went like this. If you were walking along a seashore, Paley said, and you saw a rock on the shore, you would not take much notice of it. You would think it had probably been there for ever and wasn't very interesting. (In this, you might well be wrong, but that's what he said.) But if you saw a watch, you would pick it up and examine it. You might open the back, and see all the workings, intricately interlocked, making the hands go round on the face. And you would think: "This is too complicated an object to have occurred through chance. Somebody must have made it". Hence, he said, by analogy, the world is complicated, and living beings are complicated; so somebody (i.e., God) must have made them; they couldn't have happened by chance.

Fifty years after Paley, Darwin published his "Origin of Species", and since that time the Argument from Design has not seemed so impressive. But recently a slightly more sophisticated version of it has appeared in what is being called the theory of Intelligent Design. Now there are attempts to have this included in school science curricula as an alternative to Darwinian evolution.

In one way, this appeals to the American sense of fair play and balance; the belief that ideas should be given a fair hearing, and "equal time". Sometimes this belief goes too far, and the ideas of an eccentric 1% fringe are given as much exposure as the ideas of the 99% who have seriously studied the subject. It's been said that if George Bush said today that he thought the world might be flat, the New York Times would have a headline tomorrow reading "Views Differ As To The Shape Of The World".

We have such a situation currently in regard to Intelligent Design. In spite of the fact that the overwhelming majority of scientists accept Darwinian ideas of evolution as being factual, school boards throughout the country are being pressed (by religious conservatives, not scientists) to accept Intelligent Design as an equally credible account of the world's origins, and have it taught as such in science classes.

Intelligent Design states that there are things in the universe that cannot be accounted for by known natural causes, and they show features that look like intelligence and purpose. In particular, that living organisms are too complex to be explained by natural processes; they can only be explained by assuming that they were built by an intelligent designer. Complexity, they say, suggests design, and design suggests purpose. An eye, for example, is an extremely complex organism, and it was designed so that its owner could see. So some intelligence must have designed it for that purpose.

Darwinians, by contrast, say that life evolves by means of random mutation and natural selection. Random mutations happen everywhere, all the time, and most of them don't help survival, and don't last long. But just occasionally there is a mutation that can improve the chances of survival. At some stage in evolution, a mutation occurred that caused some surface cells on some living creatures to become sensitive to light. (Not so far-fetched; our own surface cells are sensitive to heat, some more than others.) That would be a great advantage for a creature in finding its way around, and in surviving to breed more creatures with the same ability. And if a later mutation formed these cells into a cup shape, then that would help the creature to sense not only light and shade, but where light and shade were coming from. A predator would cast a shadow; so a creature that could tell where the shadow was would have a much better chance of evading it, and thus surviving to breed with others of its species who shared this ability.

This is how natural selection works; the creatures with the helpful mutation survive and tend to pass on the mutation to their offspring. If a predator were to appear that killed all humans with (say) big ears, only those of

us with small ears would survive to produce children. Those of our children who had big ears wouldn't survive to produce children in the next generation, and the children of the next generation with big ears wouldn't survive…etc. It's easy to understand that within a short time (in terms of evolution) almost all children would inherit the small ears of their parents. We would have adapted to counteract the threat.

Evolution, in fact, makes no claim to explain why things exist. It recognizes that questions of purpose are outside the sphere of science. It explains how things came to be, and how they are likely to develop. Religious truth and scientific truth are two totally different things. You cannot deduce purpose from evolution. Eyes were not evolved or created with the purpose for creatures to see. It's the other way around; eyes evolved and developed because creatures who had them survived (and bred) better than creatures who didn't have them.

When you look back at things you have lived through, your mind may make sense of it; you may feel that you can see how you were led to a better place; you may believe you can see a purpose, a pattern. But while you're actually living through the events, you don't see sense; you've no idea where it may end up. The sense you make is afterwards, retrospective; it arises in your mind as you reflect on your experience, in your vision of what life is about, in your belief system, in your faith. Somebody else might live through exactly the same events, and make a different sense, or no sense at all. It's entirely personal; nobody can tell you that you are wrong. It's a matter of faith. It cannot be proved or disproved by science; it is a totally different kind of truth. It may be part of your religion; but it's not science at all.

Intelligent Design advocates give Mount Rushmore as an example of a designed object. You look at it, and you can tell, they say, that it didn't happen by chance. Somebody got chisels and drills and shaped it like that. That is so, but near where I grew up there was a rock formation known as Toad Rock. It looked exactly like a toad sitting on a boulder. You might think it had been carved; but it wasn't. Humans saw something that had happened naturally, and then imposed sense on it by naming it – after it had happened. Because it looks like something, it doesn't always mean that it was designed to look like it. The idea of design is in your mind.

We can actually see the process of natural selection happening. Sixty years ago, we discovered that penicillin would kill fever-inducing bacteria. Doctors prescribed it, and it was effective. But a few bacteria had mutations that allowed them to survive it. Over a period of time, the bacteria killed by penicillin were replaced by those that were immune. We have invented more sophisticated antibiotics, but every time we introduce a new one, a few bacteria are immune and survive, and produced new immune strains. That's natural selection.

Unlike this process, Intelligent Design can't be seen in operation, or tested by experiment. Science always tests theories, to see how well they stand up, and modifies them in the light of test results (as Darwin's original theories have been modified). But you can't test Intelligent Design. This is why most scientists have ignored it; it isn't science. It is a statement of faith, not a scientific theory. As such, there can be no objection to its being taught in religion classes, but every objection to its being taught in science. Scientific evidence for evolution is clear, and many Intelligent Design advocates will admit that at least some evolution has happened; but they claim that all it has done is to modify organisms that had already been created as extremely complex.

There is some dishonesty here, since clearly Intelligent Design cannot support the idea that dinosaurs and humans once shared the earth together, or that the earth was created only a few thousand years ago. But the theory has been seized on, as justifying such ideas, by religious fundamentalists, who seem more interested in finding holes in Darwinian evolution than in seeking a coherent alternative. (The idea that the world was created in six days, with plants on day 3, the sun, moon and stars on day 4, and birds and fish on day 5, can hardly be considered a coherent alternative.) If you tell them that Intelligent Design can't be proved, they will respond by saying that scientists aren't agreed about Darwin, either. It's true that there are differences between scientists as to specific details of how evolution has worked, but there is no disagreement that evolution is a fact, and that the

earth is a good deal more than a few thousand years old. Normally, when a scientific theory is put forward, the next step is to stimulate research into how it may be used to benefit humankind (and evolution is one of the most successful scientific theories in this respect). There has been no such research into Intelligent Design, and I can't imagine how there could be. It doesn't lead anywhere. It simply tries to discredit evolution.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this is a political issue. After the Columbine High School massacre, Tom Delay claimed that it was the result of teaching evolution. If we believed that we simply evolved as a result of natural selection, he said, it would make us feel that we had no control over ourselves and our destinies, and we would therefore inevitably fall into despair; we would have no reason to prevent us killing ourselves and others. (He also claimed that Columbine was the result of not posting the Ten Commandments in schools.) But you could argue the other way, and say that disasters like the New Orleans hurricane must be God's will (part of this intelligent design), and that therefore we should accept them and not try to do anything about them. The wrong view of religion can provoke just as much despair and hopelessness as the wrong view of science.

Why does this controversy matter? It matters to both sides. Firstly, if this country wants to maintain its preeminence in scientific research, it must teach good science and produce good scientists. A good scientist is one who follows the evidence wherever it appears to lead and isn't limited by any kind of dogma as to what areas he/she can probe or what experiments he/she can undertake to validate or invalidate ideas and theories. Because of the present political/religious attitude to stem cell research or cloning, for example, we are already seeing other countries making progress toward medical discoveries while our own scientists are obstructed and discouraged (and tempted to emigrate). It is impossible to pursue good science if you are told that there are some questions that you cannot ask; there are some answers that you cannot challenge. That was one of the disadvantages that Soviet scientists had to work under; the science had to match the state ideology.

But it matters also, and more importantly (to me), in religion. I believe that an honest inquiry into truth is as essential for religion as it is for science. Science that deliberately ignores evidence because it does not agree with existing theories is bad science. Similarly, theology that refuses to face difficult questions of faith because they might challenge dogma or lead towards doubt is bad theology. You cannot close off areas of inquiry as out of bounds, either in science or theology. No church, no Christian has a monopoly on the truth; none of us knows it all. There is always more to discover, and if there are directions from which we must avert our eyes, we hinder the discovery. Jesus said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life". We accept that "way" and "life" are dynamic, constantly moving, changing, developing. Why should "truth", then, be fixed and static?

What's worse, the present conflict suggests that you have to choose either one or the other; that you cannot be a good Christian and a good scientist at the same time; that you must believe either in science or in religion, but you can't have both. This clearly isn't true. There are scientists who are Christians; there are scientists who are atheists, or agnostics. There are also many scientists who are Moslems, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists. Most of them will say that their observations and explorations of the natural world have given them a deepened sense of awe and wonder at the greatness of creation and the mystery of our existence. If we believe that God is within and behind all creation, then any scientific exploration has the potential to bring us closer to an understanding of his nature. If we believe this, then we understand that every scientific discovery must be used in accordance with his will. One of the great truths of the Adam and Eve story in Genesis is that God put man into the garden of Eden "to dress it and to keep it"; that he gave man the responsibility of caring for creation and nurturing it. Science can help us learn ever more about God's creation; but the will to nurture it can come only from religion. It is vital that the two work together – not in opposition.

Our 150th Anniversary Celebrations were, it seems to be agreed, a great success. On Saturday, the Evensong according to the 1789 Prayer Book was surprisingly popular, and many people commented on the beauty of the

old language (and the Anglican Chant, which we don't hear too often these days). Following Evensong, a good crowd milled around greeting old friends and meeting new ones, and reviewing the historical material we had gathered about Calvary. Many memories were revived and refreshed. About 140 people then sat down to a roast beef dinner in the Auditorium, and we heard many complimentary comments about the meal, and especially about how bright and colorful the Auditorium looked, and how it added to the festivity of the occasion. Many people were able to stay on for the evening concert, by the Serafin String Quartet, of beautiful music exquisitely played and warmly appreciated.

On Sunday, we were pleased, as we always are, to welcome the Bishop, who celebrated and dedicated our new Peace Post, raised to mark our 150th birthday. I should tell you that there ought to be a plaque on the post, with its date and purpose, but that when it arrived from the maker, we found that we were described as "Calvary Epicopal Church". A corrected replacement will soon be here. We then provided a splendid reception for the Bishop, which he seemed to enjoy as much as we did. He made us all feel good about our history, our present, and our future at Calvary.

The bishop also confirmed two of our young people: David Boselli and Shelly Ross. Our prayers are with them and their families as they take this important step in their Christian lives.

We can justifiably congratulate ourselves on how well the celebration went; but we need to remember how much we are indebted to the small but devoted band of volunteers who put so much thought and effort into ensuring it they would be so impressive and memorable. It is sometimes invidious to pick out individuals, but I don't think any of the other helpers will mind me giving special thanks to Jeff Brown, who so cheerfully did so much of the necessary heavy lifting involved in the setting up and taking down. Those tables were really heavy – and there were a lot of them. And to Heather Brown and Mary Morgan, who worked well into the night to set up and take down. We are all indebted to them.

It may seem surprising, but life goes on after the Sesquicentenary, and on Friday and Saturday, October 7th and 8th, the National Acolyte Festival will be held at the National Cathedral in Washington DC. Anyone who is interested in going should talk to Debbie Snipes or Laura Glazar as soon as possible.

As announced last month, there is a proposal to start a Girl Scout Troop at Calvary. It will be meeting in the Guild Room on Wednesdays, from 6.00.pm. to 7.30.pm. If you know of anyone with a daughter of appropriate age who might be interested, please contact Julia Diebold, at 761-9203.

Adult Class. A new series of six weekly adult classes will begin on Sunday, October 9th, after the service. Having dealt with the place of women in the Bible over the last two series, we will carry on to explore the place of women through the history of the church. Everyone is welcome, either to listen, or to comment, or to question, or all three.

All Saints. We will celebrate All Saints this year on Sunday, October 30th. If you have names of family members and friends whom you would wish to have remembered on that occasion, please let Brooke in the office know.

The Serafin String Quartet's concert at the Sesquicentenary was a foretaste of Calvary's Community Concert Series, returning this year for its second season. The first event of the season will be a concert of the honors students from Wilmington Music School, and will be held on Sunday, November 6th at 2.00.pm. in the church. Do not be put off by the youth of the participants in this concert. Everyone who attended the equivalent event last year was impressed and delighted by the quality of the music making. As usual, there is no charge. Please invite friends and neighbors whom you think would be interested. There will be a reception in the Guild Room following the concert.

On Saturday, November 12th, there will be a Parish Life Day at St. Anne's Episcopal School, Middletown, running from 8.30.am. to 3.15.pm. There will be a variety of workshops and displays, as well as an all day Children's Program. The cost is $10.00, including lunch. Brochures are available in the church, and we look forward to having a good representation from Calvary.

Stewardship Sunday this year will be on Sunday, November 13th. The joint Chairs of the Stewardship drive will be Laura Glazar and Debbie Snipes. Please give careful consideration to what Calvary means to you, and how you feel able to support its work through another year.

The United Thank Offering will be held on Advent Sunday, November 27th. Don't forget to look out your UTO boxes in readiness.

As yet another cultural event, we will be presenting a short play, entitled "Mrs. Meadowsweet", on Sunday, December 4th, at 2.00.pm. in the church. It is amusing, but also thought provoking. Again, there is no charge, and again, please invite friends and neighbors. We would like everyone in the area to be at least aware of our existence and activity.

And, once more, looking ahead to December, make a note of some more important dates:

Saturday, December 3rd: The Christmas Bazaar. See Heather Brown for details.

Saturday, December 10th: Bus Trip to New York. $30.00 per person – a real bargain. See Kathryn Jakabcin for details.

Wednesday, December 14th: Advent Dinner.