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EVOLUTION: Defining temporal terms helps square science, Bible

By Suzanne Ashford

I am not a Catholic or a practitioner of any other religion. I attend a Catholic school only because of my parents' concern about the quality of education at the public school that I would otherwise attend. My school teaches evolution in its biology classes, and the practicing Catholics I know seem to accept evolution as part of God's plan.

I strongly believe in evolution and am very interested in why some people who practice religion don't accept evolution.

The Nov. 21 news article about how the state biologists were 100 percent in favor of using the word "evolution" rather than the phrase "change over time" was curious. "Change over time" seems to be a larger, more descriptive and mathematically rigorous term. For example, it would help if we keep the actual "time" part in focus.

Time is:

■ The 10 billion to 15 billion years since the Big Bang.

■ The 4 billion to 5 billion years since the Earth was formed.

■ The 2 billion to 3 billion years since life began on Earth.

■ The 600 million years since vertebrates appeared on Earth.

■ The 64 million years since dinosaurs suddenly disappeared.

■ The 30 million years since the Americas separated from Africa, and the New World and Old World monkeys divided.

■ The 10 million years since apes appeared.

■ The 2 million years since the human lineage divided from the apes.



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Defining TIMES open mike



A forum for readers under 30

The view for the biblical scholar may not be so different if we understand what "time" means in the Bible. When the writers of the Bible used the phrase "40 days and 40 nights" — voyage or Jesus' sojourn in the wilderness — they meant a long time, not literally 40 days on the calendar.

Before the Jews traveled to Egypt in 1000 BC, they measured time in cycles of the moon. So we can understand that Methuselah was actually 969 "moons" old — not years as has been erroneously translated into English — which is actually 74 modern years, still a good record for the oldest man in the history of that time.

What those who believe in creationism must come to terms with is their own semantics. A "day" during Creation represents a time whose duration is not accurately specified by the writers of the Bible. It is a mistake for anyone to consider that the writers intended this to represent a 24-hour span. The issue is the development of language and the words to describe time measurement.

Evolutionists and creationists have a lot to learn. Much has changed over time. Part of that change over time has occurred in the nature of life and might be referred to as biological evolution. However, much has also changed over time in society, language and even religion.

Thus, scripture writing has also changed over time as part of social evolution. It might be better if evolutionists and creationists would stop arguing over semantics and work together to improve our understanding of the world and the educational system in Kentucky.

Right way to mark time

Leave it up to an astute young woman to show remarkable insight and knowledge on a touchy issue like evolution versus creationism.

Suzanne Ashford's Dec. 12 Open Mike column is a corrective to much verbosity on the subject. Her scholarship regarding evolution and time concepts in the Bible show how traditional Christendom enslaves minds and souls.

A classic point Ashford makes is that before the Jews' sojourn in Egypt, they measured time by the cycles of the moon. Thus, her example, Methuselah, instead of living 969 years, lived 74 years, our measure.

The Bible makes no claim to a rigid chronological time. In the New Testament, Peter's second letter says that a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day.

What this exposes is the danger of biblical literalism. As Ashford further points out, the idea of a literal 24-hour day, implying six literal chronological days of Creation is wrong.

This agrees with what qualified seminarians have been trying to say. Ashford's insight is a resounding plus for her generation.

Don Cassidy
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