

Atheists' views: Science or creationism, leave no room for both

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Dr. Carl Evans said the recent round of atheism authors are taking the same approach as fundamentalists: "either ... or";

The authors of four books positing atheism take the position that science and religion are in competition with each other, said Evans, an affiliate member of the S.C. United Methodist clergy and professor emeritus of the University of South Carolina's Department of Religious Studies. "They themselves are mirror-images of what they think fundamentalists are.

"Most of us have not figured out how religion and science relate to each other";

"only in the last 200 years that we have lapsed into the belief that the Bible should be taken literally. "Read the commentaries and you will see they did not believe that the literal meaning was the only way to read Scripture," Evans suggested.

The authors of *The God Delusion*, *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* and two other books are "absolutists," Evans said. They attribute the social ills on religion, saying "Religion kills," and "The problem is religion." The creationists claim that ills are because of evolution.

Why this rash of books on atheism? They are all post-9/11 books, responding to terrorists.

"But why have they become best-sellers? What does that say about us?" Evans asked while giving a talk at a Columbia nondenominational church. "We're worried about religious extremism in a minority of people. So these books hook into something we're worried about";

The authors "put us all in the same basket," Evans said. "They think we're all fundamentalists";

What's new about the new atheists, Evans said, is that they "attack religious tolerance";

They use "bombastic rhetoric," and "create exaggerated caricatures of God. They gleefully announce they have destroyed religion";

Evans said author Richard Dawkins has a simplistic way of reading Scripture and that the authors have little to no understanding of theology over the centuries. "They refuse to believe that a Christian can believe both the biblical story of creation and science.

They believe that only empirical information — something that can be taken into a laboratory — is valid.

Evans said, even though there are historical as well as biblical accounts, the authors doubt that Jesus even existed.

"Religion has reasons that science does not know and reasons that you and I can validate every day," Evans said. "Their theological ineptness is evident on every page. They confuse the nature of faith," he said as he talked about how "believing in" means "having confidence in God," trusting God.

The creation story, believed to be written during the Babylon exile, urges Jews to maintain their identity and to honor the custom of keeping the Sabbath. "It is a story that tells us a fundamental truth," Evans said. Quoting a book in response to the atheists by Karen Armstrong, he suggested we must make the truth a reality in our own lives.

Wrong responses to earthquake

Some clergy's recent responses to the Haiti earthquake are the sort of thing that the new atheists are rebelling against, Evans said, and rightly so.

A Roman Catholic priest was quoted as saying, "It's all part of God's plan." But Evans argues, "God's relationship to the earthquake is not as the planner, but as the one who joins in the suffering and identifies with the people who are hurting.

"God is not up there calling all the shots, but is down here sharing all the blows. We somehow don't get that. That leaves out of the picture free will and natural forces," Evans said. That kind of thinking reduces God "to much less than the infinite reality that God is. They want to shrink God down to an understandable size and that does him a great injustice";