Did you read in Newsweek a couple of weeks ago the *God Debate* (April 9, 2007, Rick Warren & Sam Harris)? Recall that this was a debate about the existence of God. Sam Harris, a devout atheist, wrote *Letter to a Christian Nation*. In that book he argues against God and religion. Rick Warren as many of you probably know is author of *A Propose-Driven Life*. He is the founding pastor of the Saddlebrook Church in Lake Forest, California. They each debated whether God existed from their particular belief perspective.

Now I felt left out and overlooked in that debate. I’m certainly not an atheist and clearly disagree with a great deal of what Harris’ believes. So I couldn’t find myself in his camp at all. But I also have significant issues with Warren’s Christian beliefs. He did not represent this Christian in this debate.

Warren is a biblical literalist and reads Genesis chapters 1 and 2 as a precise and literal historical account of creation. He clearly states he doesn’t believe in evolution. By which I presume he means that he doesn’t believe that evolution is an accurate description of how God is creating.
The other issue I have with Warren is his Christian exclusivity. He believes that Christianity is the one, true religion that supersedes all others. You have to accept Jesus to be right with God no matter how good a person you are. I don’t agree with this either. I believe God offers us many paths to the Divine and Christianity is just one.

I believe that religion and science can work together constructively to understand what God is doing in the world and how we should respond. It takes both. Neither has an exclusive claim to knowledge.

There’s a way to think progressively about this that arises from both science and religion. Both science and religion are gifts from God. They are two sides of God’s revelation. God reveals to us through science what the creation is and how the creation runs. God reveals to us through religion why God creates and who we are in relation to the creation and to the Divine.

So we can start either with religion or science to draw a picture that helps us see this union of revelations. I think it’s also a picture that can point us to how to heal the brokenness and divisiveness in our world today. So let’s start with Evolution and Cosmology. These two fields arise from the thinking of Charles Darwin and his successors in the evolutionary biological fields and Albert Einstein and his successors in the physics and astronomical fields. And what they point to is that we humans along with all other creatures in the universe live and thrive in a web of life and love. We are all kin of each other. When God said, “Let there be light!” the universe in a Big Bang came into existence billions of years ago. And through a variety of processes still being discovered the universe began evolving from the sub-atomic particles of that Big Bang. Over the billions of years stars formed and died, and planets formed and died all descended from that genesis Big Bang. Our sun and planets arise from the ashes of previous generations of stars.

Out of that star dust, the Earth and Mars and the moon and the other worlds in our Solar System was formed. The Earth evolved with an environment that is dynamic, rich and diverse. From the stuff of that environment, biological life arose in simple cell creatures. From those original simple cell creatures all the diversity of life on earth descends, including us.

When you study what’s become known as neo-Darwinian evolution, it describes a profoundly rich and beautiful web of life here on earth. Every living creature is connected to every other living creature on this planet. Indeed, we are brothers and sisters to all of life on this world. We are ecologically entangled with the earth and the stars. We are not only not alone, we are not isolated islands. We affect the world around us and we are affected by it.
This web is a beautiful, colorful diverse interaction and interconnection of life. The diversity of life on this planet is astounding. We discover new creatures to this very day. Almost any month you can open a National Geographic or watch on the Discovery channel something wonderful about this web. And all of this arises not from a strict set of step by step rules, but by processes driven by random events …

Warren and Harris both interpret this last like so many before them … that the creation is a mindless accident. Harris sees no intrinsic purpose in this random process. And Warren suggests what purpose can a random descendant of mindless ooze have? But I think they and so many others misunderstand what God has done here.

And so we turn to our faith beliefs …

God is Love. And God wants us to love God and the divine work. But God cannot coerce us into loving. We must be free to love. And that means we must also have the freedom not to love or even believe in God. So God has given us free choice. That gift of free choice also includes allowing us to choose not to believe in God. God will not do anything that would require a rational person to believe in God. That would violate our free will. Thus, God remains hidden and does not perform miracles that would violate the Laws and Processes of Nature.

So did God simply set the universe in motion and let it run … much like the Deists of our Forebears believed? No. God in fact can and does act actively in nature. When God set the processes of nature in motion, God left a trap door … random events. God can act through those without violating nature … and without being obvious.

We can never prove God, but we can see, if we believe, God’s handprints all over nature. One of the discoveries over the past couple of decades is that nature has a tendency towards diversity, self-organization, and complexity … all of which lead to ever more life and intelligence. I suggest to you that it is God quietly, invisibly, and unobtrusively encouraging the creation towards the Divine.

And God loves this creation. The significance of Genesis is not how God created … because it doesn’t tell us that. The significance of Genesis is that God created the universe out of love and pronounced it good. We are fundamentally good and loved by God. That’s the message of Genesis – a message far more important than any scientific treatise.

And as faithful people we are called to be good stewards of the entire creation and to embrace it in love and care. As Christians we are not allowed to hate or to divide creation into
pieces. We are called to preserve and encourage the interconnectedness of all of us. The web of life and love calls us into radical inclusiveness.

So unlike Warren, I suggest that being a Christian and being an evolutionist are entirely compatible and that a Christian can live and worship side by side with other faiths. We Progressives have much to offer in the healing of the world and of all of God’s creation. We accept and live with a God who has given us both science and religion as gifts, and who calls us to see the human face in every endeavor, in every new technological breakthrough, and in every culture and religion. We know we cannot box God into either science or the bible. We are called to forego dogma and ideology when those would drive us from God’s commandment to love one another. We are inclusive of science, religion, all people and all of creation.

Harris likes to point out how religion has perpetrated great crimes and atrocities. And yes we have abused God’s gift of religion: the crusades, Reformation wars, much of our 19th century missionary work and many more. We have much to repent of. But Harris’ faith … and it is faith no matter how much he may deny it … in science can be called to account also. We have abused that gift too: the Holocaust, Hiroshima, the causes of global warming and now the probability that genes will be manipulated to order up your customized baby. All people, religious, scientific, and political all have a responsibility to care for God’s human and non-human creation.

If we embrace the web of life we are open to the on-going creative Spirit of God. The Spirit binds us all together in the web of life. And if we recognize that science can only describe what it can measure and reason and that religion can only describe what it has experienced, we know that we know only partially. God is a mystery. And that divine mystery is embedded in the creation. No matter how much we learn through science or through religion, there is yet more to be learned. It’s a wonderful and exciting adventure that God calls us into. It’s never-ending. Its surprises are always novel.

God’s grace and love be with you …

Amen.