



Here's Jonathan Wells on destroying Darwinism – and responding to attacks on his character and motives

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In a recent interview for *Salvo* magazine, I was asked what advice on junk DNA I would give to Francis Collins or Richard Dawkins.

On November 3, UD posted my response. According to the first comment following that post,

Jonathan Wells is the last person from whom Richard Dawkins and Francis Collins would solicit advice.

I agree. But the commenter, “Single Malt,” went on to question whether I’m qualified to give advice to anybody about anything in biology:

For those not familiar here is a quote...? “Father’s [Sun Myung Moon's] words, my studies, and my prayers convinced me that I should devote my life to destroying Darwinism.” That’s incredibly damning if true. It basically tells us that before Wells had even studied the subject he had been instructed to devote his life to destroying it!” Does this not color completely anything Wells publishes concerning the biological sciences?

Now, I don’t know who “Single Malt” is. To the best of my knowledge he (or she) has never met me, spoken with me on the telephone, or corresponded with me by letter or email. Since I like single malt scotch, however, if he or she had contacted me I would have been happy to explain over a friendly drink why I wrote the sentence quoted above.

Here’s what I would have said:

As an undergraduate at Princeton and Berkeley in the 1960s I studied mathematics, geology, physics and biology (with minors in philosophy and German). Along the way—despite my upbringing as a nominal Presbyterian—I became an agnostic and a Darwinist. (*Note:* By “Darwinism,” I mean the claim that all

living things are descended from one or a few common ancestors, modified solely by unguided natural processes such as variation and selection. For the sake of brevity, I use the term here also to include Neo-Darwinism, which attributes new variations to genetic mutations.)

In 1963, I dropped out of Princeton and drove a New York City taxicab until I was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1964. While spending two years in Germany as a medical laboratory technologist, I became opposed to the Vietnam War, and after I was separated from active duty in 1966 I transferred to Berkeley and joined the antiwar movement.

The Army called me back as a reservist in 1967, but I refused and spent a year and a half in prison. After being released from Leavenworth in 1969, I completed my bachelor's degree at Berkeley. By 1970, however, I was repulsed by the increasingly violent and hypocritical Berkeley Left, and I soon headed for the hills. Living in a cabin I built in the mountains of Mendocino County, I was transformed by the beauty, peace and evident design around me. I ceased being an agnostic and a Darwinist.

In 1974 I joined Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church. In 1976 I entered Unification Theological Seminary in New York, where I studied the Pentateuch under a Romanian Orthodox Jewish rabbi; the New Testament under a Reformed Church of America minister; the Early Church Fathers under a Greek Orthodox priest; philosophy under a Polish Roman Catholic priest with three earned doctorates; medieval theology under a Church of Christ missionary with a doctorate from the University of Tübingen; and Reformation and modern theology under a Presbyterian with a doctorate from Harvard.

I read—and was repelled by—modern theologians who took Darwinism for granted and tried to re-fashion Christian doctrine in the light of it. I also took advantage of a weekly seminary shuttle to New York City to do research at the Columbia University biology library, where I became convinced that the Darwinian mechanism of accidental mutations and natural selection is incapable of producing the changes required by evolution.

As I researched more I concluded that the Achilles' heel of Darwinism is its assumption that genetic programs control embryo development, with DNA mutations supplying raw materials for evolution. At the time, however, I did not question Darwin's claim that all living things are descended from a common ancestor.

Reverend Moon occasionally criticized Darwinism in his speeches, because it conflicted with reason and denied design. He often visited the seminary during my two years there, and we students would walk with him in the nearby fields and woods. He urged us (among other things) to pray in order to find out what God wanted us to do with our lives. I followed his advice, and my prayers strengthened the conviction I had arrived at through my studies that Darwinism (like Marxism and Freudianism) is materialistic philosophy masquerading as empirical science—and that I should set out to destroy its dominance in our culture.

In 1978, I was one of a score of seminary graduates awarded church scholarships to pursue doctorates in religious studies at other schools. I went to Yale, where I did research on the nineteenth-century Darwinian controversies and received a Ph.D. in theology in 1985. After that, I was appointed Director of the Unification Church's inter-religious outreach organization in New York City.

I still felt called to devote myself to toppling Darwinism, however, so in 1988 I resigned from my position to return to graduate school—this time in biology. I applied to several schools in California and moved there with my family, only to learn that I had not been admitted anywhere. I took a job as a medical laboratory technologist (the Army had taught me a trade!) and sometime afterwards went back to New York to attend a meeting between Unification Church leaders and Reverend Moon. When he learned

that I was planning to go back to graduate school he admonished me not to do it, saying that I was too old (I was 45 at the time). After the meeting, however, I prayed for a long time and decided that I had to continue on my course.

I returned to California and applied again to various graduate schools. In 1989 I was granted interviews at Cal Tech, Stanford, U.C. Berkeley, and U.C. Davis. I chose Berkeley, where I completed a Ph.D. in molecular and cell biology in 1994. By then—having been exposed to the actual evidence—I was skeptical of Darwin's claim that all living things share a common ancestor.

A senior Unification Church leader then asked me to write something for other church members explaining why I went for a second Ph.D. even after Reverend Moon had admonished me against doing so. I wrote an essay that I thought would be for in-house use only, but it was subsequently posted on the Internet without my knowledge or permission.

I first learned that my essay was available online in 2001, when Jerry Coyne made it the alpha and omega of his review in *Nature* of my book *Icons of Evolution*.

Since then, many of my critics have quoted the now-infamous line, "Father's words, my studies, and my prayers convinced me that I should devote my life to destroying Darwinism." (For a sampling, just do a Google search on the words.) Remarkably, Darwinists never quote much else from my essay, even though the 18 words in this one line represent only 1% of it, while a subsequent passage dealing with my scientific reasons for rejecting Darwinism represents 37%. Talk about quote mining...

Nor (as far as I know) have any Darwinists bothered to learn anything about the context in which I wrote the essay. If they had, they would know that Reverend Moon did not instruct or command me to destroy Darwinism (though years later he commended me on publishing *Icons of Evolution*.)

So, can I be trusted to say anything concerning the biological sciences? I freely admit that I was motivated to pursue a biology Ph.D., in part, because of my religious views. On the other hand, Francis Crick freely admitted (to historian Horace Freeland Judson) that he went into biology, in part, because of his atheistic views. What ultimately mattered in Crick's case was not his motivation, but whether his biological claims were consistent with the evidence. The same is true in my case. That's why I cite abundant scientific references in my publications—such as *Icons of Evolution*, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Darwinism and Intelligent Design*, *The Myth of Junk DNA*, and "Why Darwinism Is False", a detailed critique of Jerry Coyne's book, *Why Evolution Is True*.

I encourage readers not simply to take my word for anything, but to go the scientific literature and check for themselves. After all, nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evidence.

Now, wouldn't it have been more enjoyable listening to that over a glass of Glenlivet or Macallan?