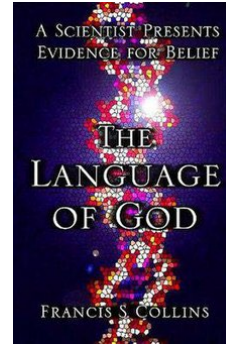


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Celebrating 10 Years of The Language of God

by Ryan Bebej

During the summer of 2006, I was browsing at a bookstore when I came across a new book by renowned geneticist Francis Collins called *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*. The book instantly grabbed my attention. I had just finished up my first year as a Ph.D. student studying paleontology and evolutionary biology at a major university, and I was only a few years removed from what was nearly a crisis of faith.

I was raised in a devout Christian family and wonderful church community. While the incompatibility of evolution and Christian faith was never explicitly preached from the pulpit or discussed at home, this notion was certainly implicit. I clearly remember discussing evolution in my first college biology class. I was skeptical of evolutionary theory itself, and I wondered what place such ideas had in a Christian college curriculum.

Yet, in a moment of honest self-reflection, I realized that I had never really considered the evidence for evolution and common descent, nor did I truly understand what the science proposed. As I studied more in the biological and physical sciences, it became clear to me that what I saw in the natural world seemed to conflict with the understanding of God and the Bible that I had gleaned while growing up. Within the paradigm I had when I arrived at college, this was quite alarming because there was not any way to reconcile this scientific evidence with my Christian beliefs. Thankfully, I was at an institution full of science professors who were committed Christians, who could help me with my questions and doubts and walk alongside me as I wrestled with the ramifications that an ancient, changing universe might have on my faith. In hindsight, I sincerely believe that I may have lost my faith had I not been in such a community of believers when I encountered the subjects that have become the focus of my scientific research.

It was in this context that I encountered *The Language of God*. Here was a prominent scientist—one I had even learned about in college courses—promoting the idea that modern science and

biblical Christian faith were not incompatible. As I voraciously read the book (I recall it taking me less than two days), I found validation for my thoughts and questions. I was stimulated by new ways to think about things. But most importantly, I was encouraged to see that my scientific pursuits and my deeply held faith could be held together in harmony—a notion that I had previously thought to be impossible. Like so many, I had somehow been led to believe that I had to choose between young earth creationism and my Christian faith on one hand or modern science and its accompanying atheism/agnosticism on the other. Through a thoughtful and honest reflection on these positions, Collins gave words to this sense I had that neither one of those options were satisfactory. Instead, it is fully possible to embrace and revel in the discoveries of modern science, for we can see them as an uncovering of the intricacies of God’s creative activity. Near the end of the book, Collins writes, “Science is not threatened by God; it is enhanced. God is most certainly not threatened by science; He made it all possible. So let us together seek to reclaim the solid ground of an intellectually and spiritually satisfying synthesis of *all* great truths” (pp. 233-234). As a young Christian in science, I found this call to be extremely inspirational and invigorating.

Within a week or two of finishing the book, I had a chance to meet Collins at the annual meeting of the American Scientific Affiliation. I greatly enjoyed his plenary session and was thrilled to hear that he wanted a chance to meet with the students at the meeting. After his presentation that evening, Collins sat cross-legged on the floor with me and about twenty other students, telling his story, discussing the challenges of his work, and answering all of the questions we had about being Christians in science. I remember being immensely encouraged by this evening, feeling an even stronger call to pursue my scientific work as a Christian.

Since *The Language of God* was first published, I have recommended it to many friends, family members, colleagues, and students, and I am certain that it has impacted the lives of many people the way it impacted mine. In 2007, Collins launched the BioLogos Foundation as a way to continue the conversations that he started with his book. This organization has developed a wealth of resources dealing with a wide array of issues related to an evolutionary understanding of God’s creation. Whereas I felt like I needed to be in the right place at the right time and surrounded by the right people to retain my faith when wrestling with evolutionary theory, I am hopeful that that need not be the case for others today. I am immensely grateful that *The Language of God* and the continued work of the BioLogos Foundation can serve as accessible and thought-provoking resources for people in search of God’s truth.

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