



209. Feb. 14/27,1976 St. Cyril Equal-to-the-Apostles

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : October 10, 2016

Dear Alexey,

Just a note to accompany the (separately mailed) American Scientist and Xeroxes. Eugene Zavarin has sent his first general comments on the “scientific” part of our evolution study, to be followed by a detailed criticism. He has two main criticisms:

(1) He thinks the “author” (we didn’t tell him who wrote it) is too harsh on the dating systems—he will comment more fully on this.

(2) In general, while the article is “well written and displays familiarity with scientific facts well above that of our average priest” etc., “at the same time his familiarity is below that of a college graduate in the field relating to some aspect of evolution,” which leads to his second main criticism— “over-reliance on popular and high school texts. The high school graduates are commonly served over-doctored theories with holes neatly covered up. One should rely more on opinions of people having experimental experience with evolution. (Dobzhansky, thus, he approves.) Author is apparently unaware that teaching of evolution in high school was under criticism (Dr. Wenner—enclosed Xerox), and that evolution has a good chance of being separated from taxonomy (philosophically) (Sneath and Sokal—enclosed). Constance, in one of his papers (article also enclosed) thinks of relegating evolutionary schemes to poetry and metaphors. This does not say that authorities cited do not believe in evolution, only that their beliefs and thinking must be correctly assessed.”

To me it looks as though Genya’s viewpoint will suffer from exactly the opposite weakness which he finds in our paper—too much reliance of technical studies which (to judge from my brief glance at the material he sent, all of which I am passing on to you) make no difference at all in the main point, the philosophical approach which these scientists have.

I myself would say (before seeing his detailed criticism) that our basic framework of popular and high school texts is the right one—for that is how it is taught and understood and where the evolutionary philosophy comes through loud and clear. But it would be good to strengthen our position with more reference to “sophisticated” scientific sources—to show we are aware that scientists don’t believe everything they give the high school student, and even realize that much there comes from “faith”—but still have the basic evolutionary faith that the universe “explains itself” and can be understood in “natural” terms. I don’t recall if we have made it clear anywhere yet that our argument is only secondarily against the particular theory of evolution, and primarily against the larger idea of naturalism—that the universe explains itself. That will probably come out in



the “philosophy” section which I hope to send you soon.

Anyway, maybe these articles will give you food for thought. Keep them in your “evolution file.”

Pray for Paul Bartlett. He writes that he is about to “give up” on Orthodoxy and is “weary” from not having found what he has been searching for 16 years! Sadly, a typical convert story (one of the basic types)—emptiness inside, and he wants to get something from Orthodoxy without working on himself i.e., giving something to God. I’m writing him to read the Confessions of Bl. Augustine—a good “convert” book, although of course Bl. Augustine had very much inside to begin with! Interestingly, in Book 7 he describes how he and 10 of his friends wanted to start a commune—but then they thought how wives would fit in, and the whole plan collapsed!

The new Nikodemos is very inspiring. Please add to your subscription list (and send some back copies if you can) to: Peter Herrin, 1814 Ogden Dr., Burlingame, Ca 94010.

St. Gregory of Tours is tremendously inspiring! We’ve found a 10th-century Life of him taken mainly from his own works—one of the most moving Lives I’ve read.

Seraphim, monk