



# **Saving Darwin: How to Be a Christian and Believe in Evolution**

*Karl W. Giberson*

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Intelligent design, creationism, and evolution have always been hot topics for debate in America. Creationism and intelligent design are usually seen as the province of religious people, while evolution belongs to the scientists. More often than not, both camps see the other as "the enemy." But what about committed Christians who find something lacking in the ideas of both creationism and intelligent design? Can you still be a Christian and support the idea of evolution?

Scientist Karl Giberson believes you can. Raised a fundamentalist and influenced as a boy by Henry Morris's creationist classic *The Genesis Flood*, Giberson firmly believed in creationism through his college years. But while working on his Ph.D. in physics, he began to doubt that science could have gotten everything as thoroughly wrong as the creationists suggested, and he gradually abandoned his creationist beliefs—but not his belief in Christianity. Through careful research, Giberson concluded that Christianity and evolution do not have to be incompatible. In *Saving Darwin*, Giberson paints a clear picture of the creation/evolution controversy and explores its intricate history, from Darwin to the current culture wars, carefully showing why—and how—it is possible to believe in God and evolution at the same time.

## **Saving Darwin: How to Be a Christian and Believe in Evolution Details**

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# **From Reader Review Saving Darwin: How to Be a Christian and Believe in Evolution for online ebook**

## **Stinger says**

Karl W. Giberson was raised to believe in young earth creationism and sought to follow in the footsteps of the famed Christian fundamentalist and scientist, Henry Morris. However, while in college Giberson gradually came to fully embrace the more naturalistic explanation of origins provided by Darwinian evolutionary theory. Having experienced such a conversation and given his background in science and teaching upon science and religion, the author is well motivated and fairly qualified to write on the subject of the book.

The task in his book, *Saving Darwin*, is to save Darwin from being the kingpin of American cultural decay, a role assigned by some creationists, and also from serving as the patron saint of atheism, a persona crafted by some outspoken popular figures of science. The author, whose evolutionary conversion story is mentioned above, was motivated to write *Saving Darwin* in an effort to dispel false beliefs about the supposed inconsistency between Christianity and Darwinian theory. In Giberson's opinion and that of Francis Collins, who writes the forward to the book, "faith in a literal interpretation of the book of Genesis . . . is utterly in conflict with what science tells us about our own own origins." Hence, the book centers on providing an overview of historical episodes in America of confrontations between creationists and Darwinian theory as well as on answering questions arising from the attempt to integrate the Christian faith with evolution.

Giberson's book is broadly organized in a manner such that the majority and middle sections of the book cover subjects in the history of the creationist movement and responses by those seeking to affirm evolution. The edges of the book, its beginning and end, contain much of the author's personal testimony and thoughts concerning the subject of the book. It is the author's contention that a healthy and reasonable middle ground exists between the unscientific creationist and ID movements on the one hand and anti-religious popular science writers on the other hand.

*Saving Darwin* boasts endorsements from such eminent scientists as Collins and John Pokinghorn as well as well-respected historians of science, Ronald Numbers and Owen Gingerich. Giberson writes in a way that is easily readable by any layperson with regards to science. The author is to be commended for pointing out the obvious flaws in holding to a view that the earth is only a few thousands of years old; he also severely chastises best-selling science authors like Richard Dawkins and Stephen Jay Gould for being condescending, if not outright belligerent, in attitude toward persons with religious beliefs. The book is thorough in detailing the development of the young earth creationist movement in America over the past century. The author, raised in this tradition, relates the tale of this movement in an engaging manner.

Nevertheless, despite its many strengths, the faults to be identified within its pages are many. I will mention only a few here. Perhaps the most troubling has to do with the failure of the author to deliver on the subtitle of his book, *How to Be a Christian and Believe in Evolution*. As well, Giberson comes off as arrogant in sections, and his comments concerning Christian fundamentalists often drip with sarcasm. One is left with the impression that the author has been emotionally wounded by his fundamentalist upbringing; otherwise, why would his comments be so caustic? The author, while attempting to stake out a reasonable middle ground in the creation-evolution debate, instead, has alienated a large portion his intended audience, thus driving them back to the extremes from which he sought to attract them.

I question Giberson's statement that Darwin "was, in fact, a sincere religious believer who began his career

with a strong faith in the Bible. . . ." Darwin's father was an atheist, and his grandfather, an agnostic. Prior to entering Cambridge, he was heavily influenced by an atheistic professor at the University of Edinburgh. The story of Darwin's gradual change from "sincere religious believer" to agnostic is overstated.

I cannot agree that Giberson accomplishes the chief goal he set forth of "saving Darwin." He provides an entertaining history of the creationist-evolutionist debate, but does not give thorough theological or philosophical answers to the problem at hand. Perhaps, that was not the purpose of his book, but if not, then he should have titled and prefaced it differently.

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### **Steph Fisher says**

I like the book so far--he begins with the history of Darwin and the world/church's reaction to his theory before the fundamentalist culture war against evolution began. Also includes his own journey from fundamentalist to scientist who maintains his faith and his intellectual cred.

But I hate the subtitle.. as if it were a "How To" manual with workbook pages. C'mon.

**\*\*Update\*\***

So, the title is a little misleading. It is certainly not a "How To" but rather a history of the culture war between fundamentalists and evolution, with the authors commentary along the way -- "can't we all just get along?" I liked the book for what it was, a good primer on evolution, science history, the legal history to keep intelligent design and creation science out of the classroom, etc. As I neared the end, I kept waiting for something more substantially related to Christianity. However, it was much more ecumenical in scope (not a bad thing). A more appropriate, yet mushier, subtitle might have been "How to believe in God and evolution".

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### **Emma says**

". . . evolution has become the focal point of a culture war, which means that the goal of the protagonists is to *win*, not to discover the truth. Conceding minors points to your opponents, using inoffensive language, working out compromises, and finding middle ground are simply not allowed. Too much is at stake for such wimpy pussyfooting" (pg 172).

If Giberson had started his book with this quote, instead of waiting until fifty pages from the end to bring up this idea, I think this book would have been five stars. As it is, this book doesn't quite fulfill on its promise of reconciling Christianity and evolution.

Giberson has an incredibly readable style, but most of his book is taken up with background on this history of evolution and the tension between Christianity and evolution. While this background is informative and lays the groundwork for the arguments which come later, I didn't pick up this book to read about that history.

The last third of the book is where Giberson really gets into how evolution can be reconciled to the idea that

God created the universe and his assertions are quite incisive and timely. For those who are interested in this history of evolution and the debate surrounding it, this book would probably be an excellent resource, but for readers seeking a theological discussion, I would recommend skimming the first two thirds of the book or looking for more theological resources.

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## **Mark says**

The book does not quite live up to its subtitle, since there are 205 pages of support for evolution and just a punchline really, offering a last toehold for theists to perch upon. That is only to say this book surprised me. I began it suspiciously, after an uncomfortable week spent with the rhetorical fundamentalist Michael Novak. Giberson spends much of the book outlining the history of the argument between creationism and evolution, and argues that it need not be so, that you must choose between republican and democrat, "grass roots" or intellectual, genesis or the big bang, your father either God or a monkey.

But I think that is reasonably the case, that science stakes out ever more turf while modern conciliatory theists lay claim to little enough that's not manifestly Caesar's already.

Giberson offers that, "perhaps the unfolding of history includes a steady infusion of divine creativity under the scientific radar." I think it is not stretching the point too much to say that he means God is operating in the tiny, crucial chances that split a gene, make that critical mutation. He's up there aiming the cosmic rays "just so" to make the universe, it's (seeming) accumulation of uncountable random chances come out so miraculously as it has.

There is no further argument: I have expounded upon it more already than Giberson ever did. In the chapter just preceding, he did offer a negative slant on falsifiability, that recent yardstick of scientific legitimacy. But disparaging that had a chilling effect on me. It is not the flash and crack of an expedition to a solar eclipse watching light bend that matters here, but rather whether anything matters, at all. To understand means to say "it works like this, and so..." If you can't fill in the ellipsis, then anyone can match you with pixies, or God. So I must reject the subtle gibe at falsifiability.

Giberson makes that case because he must, since the essence of his spirituality is based on what he **wants** to believe is happening "under the radar" and, as before, I think Hawking said it best when he noted that if God is out there, he's not participating in any way we can detect. Giberson is on solid ground, but there's just a thin, unfalsifiable strip of it. It is hard to imagine this too won't be mown out from under him soon enough.

Perhaps oddly, I think he deserves great credit for an honest and forthright approach. I think I agree with almost all of the book, and certainly with the thesis that Americans should leave their ridiculous fundamentalism behind (as, apparently has the rest of the world, already) and join in a general advancement of science that leaves religion's magisterium circumscribed under the heading of wonder that it all works so fantastically well for us. That we wouldn't be here otherwise is of course obvious, but that doesn't take the fun out of it, any more than knowing "my genes made me do it" takes the fun out of sex.

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## **Matt Hill says**

probably would've given this a 5-star--it's a very readable and well researched book--but the \*extremely\*

misleading title had to knock it down a peg . . what this is is a nice mini-history of darwin himself, then a long history of the creation/evolution debate in the US, then a quick chapter on why evolution makes sense, ending with a bit of theological reflection/repercussion . . it is \*not\* at all about the very relevant and tricky issue of conceptually joining belief in evolution with christian belief . . there are books that actually do this, but this book isn't it . . that being said, for what it actually is, this book was enjoyable and informative, esp. in terms of giving historical context to things like darwin, fundamentalism, the scopes trial, the ID movement, etc. . .

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### **Melissa says**

Overall, I was somewhat disappointed with this book, as the title and subtitle were quite misleading regarding the book's contents. About 95% of the book is dedicated to cataloging the struggle between creationists and evolutionists over the past couple centuries, and only a small portion of the book was devoted to helping the reader make peace with the assumed conflicts of being a Christian and believing in evolution.

With that being said, I think the author did a great job of detailing the history of the evolution/creation debate, and treated all parties with deliberate fairness, both praising and critiquing each side as was appropriate. The author writes in a comforting candor and presents the topic in a way that makes a Christian feel brave and comfortable enough to consider evolution being true, realizing they don't have to give up their faith to consider the scientific theory of evolution.

I think the issue of misrepresentation in the book title and cover jacket was likely a decision of the publisher, who surely sold more books promising to resolve the conflict between evolution and Christianity than they would have had they painted the book as a historical overview of the conflict. Also, there were several annoying typos, including accidentally listing Dawkins as an agnostic rather than an atheist, which clearly didn't make sense in the context of its sentence, and didn't align with other parts of the book where it correctly listed Dawkins as an atheist. So, again, editor/publisher error.

Overall, the book was a good introduction into the historical conflict between evolution and creationism, and is likely to start a good conversation, if not internally, regarding this historical controversy.

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### **Lauren says**

This just didn't hold my attention well enough and was picked up and put down more times than I could count. I don't think that Giberson needed an entire book to get his message across; I found this to be more of a story of a man who was Christian and also understood evolution. As such, the title is misleading. And while the story has some element of intrigue (if only for the insight into Darwin's life), it just wasn't enough for me.

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### **Kent J. says**

It is an interesting read by someone who is obviously Christian and just as obviously accepts the scientific evidence for evolution. He summarizes his journey from not realizing that Christianity and evolution are

compatible to realizing that they are. He also summarizes the evidence that lead him to think this. The book also gives a nice history of the American view of this issue, from the publication of Darwin's book, to the Scopes trial, and after. I was unaware of much of that history. What I was disappointed in was that he did not discuss any of the theological issues that arise when accepting old Earth evolution - who was Adam? What was "The Fall"? etc.

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### **Adam Ross says**

This book was equal parts interesting and frustrating. It never really lived up to the promise of its subtitle, "How to be a Christian and Believe in Evolution." It was closer to being an historical survey of the development of the evolution vs. creationism controversy. It has some captivating things to say about Darwin and the history of this controversy, but he spends his time on arguing how \*not\* to be a "scientific creationist" instead of on how to be a Christian evolutionist. Certainly, his points regarding scientific creationism are well taken, and the book contains a number of insights about how the whole debate goes wrong, but that isn't the premise I wanted to read about. He has zero interaction with Scriptural interpretation and a few of his "implications of evolution" for Christianity made me more than a little uncomfortable (creation is not God's "handiwork" anymore, for one; the specific question of Genesis 1-11 aside, Psa. 19 declares the world to be God's handiwork, and I would think this must be the case regardless of whether one accepts evolution or not). As I say, it did not live up to its promise or its premise.

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### **Larry says**

Giberson presents a comprehensive summary of the social forces and the arguments for and against Darwinism as it intersects with the Christian world view. Giberson started out as a Creationist, and early in the book tells how his investigation of the evidence led him to change his stance. I recommend this book to everyone who cares about this topic. This subject is so fraught with emotional investment. I say, step back. Look at how the argument has unfolded. Then think about your core values. You may, or may not, agree with Giberson's conclusion, but you will, at least understand the foundation of your own position.

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### **Paul Heidebrecht says**

Yikes, this book rattles my cage like few others on this subject. After Francis Collins' Language of God, read this.

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### **Paul Bruggink says**

Karl Giberson's book is a very enjoyable history of the "Darwin wars," particularly in America. Near the end of the book, he makes a short but convincing case for the theory of biological evolution, summarizing the evidence from the fossil record, biogeography, comparative anatomy, developmental similarities and genetics. However, he does not address the theological implications of biological evolution. He is, after all, a scientist, not a theologian.

He provides some interesting observations on Darwin's personal religious views, the Scopes trial, the Arkansas trial, the Dover trial, the background of Whitcomb & Morris's book "The Genesis Flood," and the culture war between Richard Dawkins & co. and Phillip Johnson & co.

He makes a number of very blunt negative observations about Young Earth Creationism [YEC], e.g., " 'The Genesis Flood' was intellectually disastrous on two fronts," and "There is no reason for anyone, Christian or otherwise, to take these [YEC] claims seriously."

I highly recommend this book to Christians who want a relatively brief and very readable introduction to how we got to the point where half of America's Christians do not accept the theory of biological evolution and to Young Earth Creationists who are having doubts about their position on this issue.

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### **Benjamin says**

Overall I think this is a good book. Giberson is actually a good writer, and the whole thing is put together quite well. I was expecting more on the evidence for and against creation/evolution, but there is very little of that. The material is more designed to cover the actual controversy, the legal battles, the ideological battles, and Giberson's personal struggle with faith and science. It's a very "real" book in that respect, as in, Giberson gives, I think, a realistic account of how he's wrestled with these topics. I also think, as far as I can currently tell, that Giberson's treatment of the controversy is more or less accurate. Creation science has had an unfortunate legal and political history. I find problems with ID, and of course so does Giberson, but at the same time, it's hard to absolutely refute some of their claims. Indeed it's difficult to absolutely, 100% certainly refute the claims of creation science, but what we're dealing with here are "best" explanations; most "probable" explanations. Where I think this book greatly falls short is in its treatment of how science and faith/religion/Genesis/Christianity can be reconciled. Giberson keeps on eluding to this idea that Genesis and Science (evolutionary science) can be reconciled and are in harmony. This may indeed be the fact, but you will not find cogent reasoning for this hypothesis in this book. He simply states it and that's it. The last chapter on faith and science is also very disappointing. I'm going to go ahead and say Giberson has zero formal training in any theological discipline, and now I wonder if he even has any informal training in theology or religious studies. He's very well educated as a scientist, but is incredibly undereducated as a theologian. His thoughts are still interesting, just inadequate, so in another respect, uninteresting. If you believe in young earth creationism this book will unsettle you. Probably an important read in the whole controversy, and most likely worth your time.

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### **Patrick says**

Written from the point of view of a biology professor who went to and has taught at fundamentalist Christian schools, this is geared more toward folks of that bent, as opposed to lapsed Catholics like me, who have never bought into any of the creationist mumbo jumbo that conservative anti-intellectuals like to embrace.

That said, it has a fascinating history detailing the history of the battles that conservative religious people have waged against Darwin, and vice versa. After reading this, I'm really no more likely to follow in the footsteps of extremists of any bent, and that includes people like Richard Dawkins. The brouhaha over evolution that most people are familiar with in the headlines actually has very little to do with biology, which is what it's fundamentally about, and more about the culture wars that have been waging in the United States



since well, it was founded.

I can't recommend this book enough.

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### **Jaime says**

Having already reconciled my own beliefs about being a Christian and believing in evolution, I picked this book up more because I was curious about what the author would have to say on the subject than because I felt like I needed persuading either way. The prologue hooked me. I spent an evening reading and skimming a lot and found it to be an very interesting history on the development of different creationism vs. evolution theories. I very much enjoyed the science that was cited in the book, and it was rather refreshing to read my own thoughts and beliefs written on the pages of a book. While I was studying at BYU, an evolutionary biologist there once said that he was sure that God wanted us to not only marvel at his creations but also marvel at the process by which all was created, and I thought this book embodied that statement. Overall the book was too wordy (hence all the skimming), but I did enjoy it--mostly for all the science experiements he used as examples and for the history in it.

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