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### February 13, 2011: Happy Darwin Day

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Title: Happy Darwin Day

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2/13/2011—OK, it was probably yesterday—Darwin Day is a little vague. Nevertheless, this is the time to celebrate the scientific discovery of evolution. I just don't think religious people should be all that fired up about it.

Why are religious liberals so publicly supportive of evolution, when they don't say much about any other scientific theory, for instance quantum theory? Religious liberals do not even get as excited about greenhouse gases and global warming. A typical example—except much more thoughtful—is Paul Wallace, former Astronomy Professor and current divinity student, this week in Religion Dispatches: [Why Evolution Should Be Taught in Church](#). Wallace wants evolution taught everywhere, because we should live in “the real world, which is so beautiful and surprising and rich”.

The answer to the question about liberal religious support of evolution is theological and political. The fight over evolution is a fight over the nature of scripture and the nature of God. Liberal religion in America is more or less defined as opposition to a too literal reading of scripture. The more open reading of scripture allowed a more open understanding of what the symbol “God” might represent. Wallace specifically refers to “small-god-ism” as standing behind opposition to evolution.

As I argue in *Church, State, and the Crisis in American Secularism*, (you'll be able to read it in May), there are two levels to monotheistic opposition to evolution. On one level, that opposition is based on scripture, whether the Bible or the Koran. Evolution is just not how these books describe the universe and therefore the scientific accounts must be false. But this religious position must also ultimately oppose a great deal of science, including astronomy and geology.

The other level of opposition is highlighted by Philip Kitcher in *Living With Darwin*. Evolution may be surprising and rich and maybe even beautiful in its complexity, but it is certainly brutal and amoral. Kitcher does not so much argue as simply assume that evolution is a process inconsistent with any kind of caring God.

Wallace suspects as much, it seems, for he ends his essay with the following paragraph describing a kind of process God: “If ‘God’ is not large enough to contain this universe in all its immensity and complexity and age, then it's just not God. God is not a thing; God does not exist like we exist, or like the moon exists. God is like nothing we can know in language or image. God transcends these things and all we can know or imagine. This includes what we know of evolution, cosmology, geology, and any other science. Christians have absolutely nothing to fear.”

How exactly does this kind of God send his son to save the world, let alone resurrect that son? How does such a God have any plan or thought at all? How can such a God be described as good? More importantly, how do I pray to such a God?

Of course Christians have reason to fear Wallace's conclusion. Thinking along this line drove me out of Judaism. I agree that religion can come to terms with evolution, but only through radical change that might one day blur the line between belief and unbelief. Liberal religion has not yet seriously confronted this challenge and Wallace does not do so in his paean to evolution.