

Meg paused outside the door. An undergraduate student was in Miriam's office. Meg was about to turn away when she heard a snatch of the conversation through the open door.

"What do you think of evolution?" the student asked.

Meg remained where she was. She felt a little guilty for listening, but she felt riveted, curious to hear Miriam's answer.

"The theory of evolution is a well-supported scientific theory," Miriam responded matter-of-factly. Meg nodded to herself. "By that I mean that after repeated testing, it continues to describe what we see and predict what we should find—and we keep finding what it predicts."

"So you believe it, then?"

"Well, scientific knowledge isn't something we *believe* in as if it were religious dogma, because it is by definition tentative, not absolute. Putting one hundred percent faith in scientific theory is unscientific. Certainly, within the confines of the scientific method, the theory of evolution is the best explanation we have for what we see, and it appears to be correct. But at no point should a scientist jump ship on the scientific process and claim that he has absolute truth. Even the best of theories are subject to revision or overthrow if the data demand it."

"But I'd like to know what you *personally* believe about evolution" the student said, sounding a little uncomfortable. "Dr. Bancroft, I came to you, because someone told me you were religious. You do believe in God, don't you?"

"Yes, I do. Very much." Miriam's tone had softened noticeably.

"So then . . . how do you reconcile that with evolution?"

"Well, God and evolution don't necessarily have to be mutually exclusive. But in any given religion you will probably find a broad spectrum of opinions about that, depending on how people interpret scripture and other statements. For example, in my church, you can be within the bounds of revealed doctrine and hold any number of opinions on evolution—and I know people along the whole spectrum, from rejecting it entirely to accepting it wholeheartedly. That's because, quite frankly, God

has not told us very much about it. But let me ask you something.”

“What?”

“Do I assume correctly that you are a Christian?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. I am, as well. So let me ask you, does the exact mode of creation change the fact that Jesus died for our sins?”

“No.”

“Does it have any bearing on how we ought to treat our neighbor today?”

“Well, some people would say so. Social Darwinism and all that.”

“But as a Christian—is your code of conduct affected by the question of evolution?”

“No.”

“Exactly. Evolution really has nothing to do with the central, most important doctrines of Christianity—it is peripheral. The most important things—like the reality of God and the mission of the Savior—are things we *can* know for certain. Beyond those basics, there is still a lot we simply don’t understand yet.”

“But the Bible does tell us some things about the creation, and it doesn’t seem to jive with evolution,” the student persisted.

“Again, that depends on how you interpret the Bible, and that’s a can of worms I can’t really open as your biology professor. It’s something you will have to research and reflect on prayerfully. I would just advise you not to let it cause you a crisis of faith.”

There was a pause, and then Miriam continued, speaking softly.

“You know, I used to wonder why the Lord hasn’t said more about how he created the life forms on this earth, so that there couldn’t be such variation in scriptural interpretation. It seems like just a little more revelation on the subject could clear up a lot of doubt and dissension. But then I realized one day that if a three-year-old asks you where the new baby came from, you are not about to give

them the details. They are not mature enough to handle or even understand all the information. Instead, you vaguely tell them that the baby's body grew in Mommy's tummy and the baby's spirit came from heaven—and don't hit your brother! Well, we are about three years old, spiritually, and the Lord is not about to tell us the great secrets of creation—the keys to life and death. He reassures us that he created the earth, and he vaguely describes some of the major steps. But for pity's sake, the human race is still struggling with 'don't hit your brother!' It's no wonder the Lord doesn't give us much more than that for now. In the meantime, we don't need to be afraid to explore and see what we can discover, but I really wouldn't get too hung up on it if we can't come to definite conclusions just yet. There's certainly no call for a crisis of faith, nor for rejection of science.”

“But how can I in good conscience continue in science unless I have the issue resolved?” came the quiet response.

“As long as you remember the limits of science, you can. Don't fall into the trap some scientists do of extending science beyond its limits and turning it into a philosophy or a religion of its own. They not only claim to know scientific things with certainty, which none of us can do with our research, but they also begin to present science as the final authority on questions it was never designed to answer—such as the existence of God or the meaning of life. Such 'scientists' are a menace to accurate understanding of truth. On the flip side, as people of faith, we need to be certain we are not claiming to know more than we actually do—that our interpretations do not outpace actual revelation. The key is being willing to withhold final judgment until you know something for certain—and that means that on most things, we can't commit our final opinion yet. Living with that kind of ambiguity is scary for some people, so they start jumping to conclusions too early. But if you have a solid foundation of things you *do* know for certain—like the reality of God, for example—then having to hold off on other things is not so uncomfortable.”

“I guess that makes sense. I'll just have to keep working through it.” The student sighed.

“Thanks for your help.”

“Any time.”

Meg heard the shuffling of a backpack, as if the student were getting ready to leave, and she quickly retreated back into the graduate office before she could be caught eavesdropping.

Meg didn't know whether to feel disappointed or relieved that Miriam, of all people, had basically said “I don't know” in answer to something Meg considered a fundamental question. Again she found herself wondering how Miriam knew the “things we can know for certain,” given that even well-supported scientific theory was something one couldn't know for certain.