How do you understand the relationship(s) between science and your religious or secular tradition? – Dr. Lee Meadows, Presbyterian (PCA)

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Lee Meadows: 00:28 I grew up in a fundamentalist Christian Church and I'm a Christian still, not fundamentalist. And I always see the world around me through the eyes of a person who believes in God as the Creator. I take walks at home in the Oaks Forest of Alabama, and I see the beauty of the sky, I see the stars at night, and I'm always struck by this sense of wonder and awe that always makes me think and remember that there's a God who created it all. And I was that way since I was a child, growing up in a small town in North Mississippi, and at the same time, I was also the science nerd kid, the kid who loves science in school. I'm a science educator now, I've been a science teacher. And I also, I see the world through a worldview of God as Creator, but I also see the world as through a worldview of science as a great way to explain the world, to make sense of the world. (01:41)

I have a deep respect for scientific data, for the evidence, and for how scientists explain all that, using natural law to explain the world around them, but then when it comes to evolution and even human origins, that puts me in this odd position of what many people back at home, that when I talked to them, they'll wonder how can you be a Christian and how can you be a scientist? Because in their minds, there's an inherent conflict there and those two traditions, the traditions of historical Christianity and the traditions of science, do seem to have these conflicts. But for me, they're not resolved. There's too much differences in them, but I understand them through what, I go to a Presbyterian church now, and what Presbyterians have said for a long time about how God is sovereign over everything that happens, all the way down to the role of a dice. (02:56) And so when I look back over the long stretch of human history, of the creation of the world, this really, really long story, what I see is, and I see the story, how the world was created. I really see it, the way that science tells the story, billions of years, evolution of the universe, evolution of the earth, evolution of life on the earth. And yet I see that God was sovereign over every single thing that science would say was random. A random occurrence, a random mutation. I see all of that as God hidden in the midst of all of that, creating the world really through evolution. (03:56)

My work in the American South has focused on the teaching of evolution in public schools and talk about
challenges. Anybody who’s lived in the South, like I’ve lived in the South all my life, there are many communities in the American South where a high school biology teacher who teaches evolution, that's going to be a really difficult thing for that teacher to do, that's going to be a difficult thing in the schools. That's going to be a difficult thing for the children, because evolution is so controversial, still in many areas of the South. So what I've been doing for many years, is trying to work with public school teachers on that challenge, how do they teach evolution and I am not an advocate of creationism, I'm not an advocate of intelligent design, even though I’m a Christian myself, I don't think that those are the right things to do in public schools. (04:56) So there's that big challenge, but then also, I think there's a big opportunity for teachers because what I've been working on is how can they teach evolution well, when they're teaching biology, but at the same time, how can they do that with a deep respect for the children that come into their classroom worried about evolution, who are coming out of faith, communities that tell them that evolution is wrong, and how can teachers teach in that way that’s respectful to children, treat these children in ways that respect their home, their faith communities, and it sounds like another contradiction. How do you teach evolution and then also respect children who come from families that really have some significant questions about evolution and I've worked that out through an inquiry-based approach, an approach that really models respect and even love for children, to let them try to understand evolution, without necessarily believing in it. (06:07) And as I've worked with science teachers, that seems to be a real way forward for teachers, a real opportunity to help them teach, when they realize that they can teach the science very well, but they don't have to require children to believe it or not. Just that children can understand the evidence for evolution and understand how scientists explain that evidence, sticking to natural law. That would be, in my mind, that's a great goal for evolution education in a public school in the South, is that kids understand evolution, understand it well and deeply and at the end of the day, the children make their own decisions about what they believe or not. (06:49) Most of my work is with high school teachers and high school teachers work with teenagers, teenagers make their own decision about what they believe anyway. I don't know where we get this crazy idea that we have to change kids' ideas about what they should believe at the end of an evolution unit but my work is really about the opportunity for teachers to take that pressure off. They don't have to change children's beliefs. In fact, I don't think that's even the right thing for a public school teacher to do. And at the same time, teach the science, teach it very well, very respectful for
the science, but also respectful for the children at the same time.

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