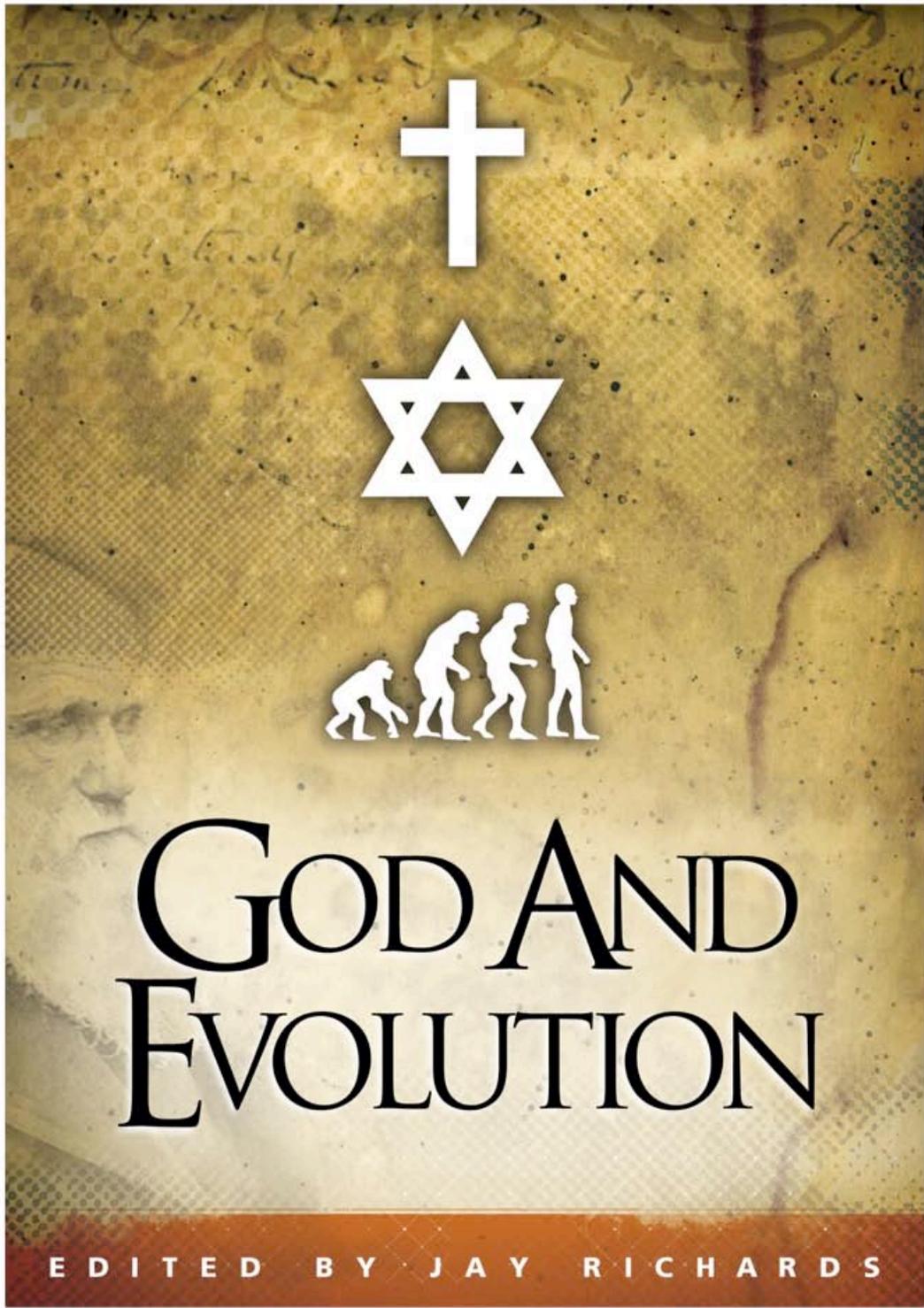


DISCUSSION GUIDE



# GOD AND EVOLUTION

EDITED BY JAY RICHARDS

# INTRODUCTION

Can you believe in God and Darwin at the same time? What is “theistic” evolution, and how consistent is it with traditional theism? What challenges does Darwin’s theory pose for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews? Is it “anti-science” to question Darwinian Theory? Explore these questions and more in the book *God and Evolution* edited by **Jay Richards**.

*God and Evolution* is ideal for use in small groups and adult Sunday School classes, and each chapter comes with discussion questions and downloadable video clips to facilitate educational use. This discussion guide contains suggestions for how to use *God and Evolution* for a 10-session discussion course.

The video clips mentioned in the lesson plans are available for viewing or downloading at <http://www.faithandevolution.org/god-and-evolution>.

## OUTLINE OF COURSE

Session 1: Introduction

### **The Big Issues**

Session 2: Preliminary Considerations

Session 3: The Early Church and Evolution

Session 4: Does Darwin’s Theory Really Corrode Traditional Faith and Morality?

Session 5: Evolution and the Problem of Evil

### **Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Perspectives**

Session 6: Francis Collins and Evolution

Session 7: Front-Loaded Evolution

Session 8: Catholics and Evolution

Session 9: Judaism and Evolution

Session 10: Conclusion

Possible extra session(s): Screening *Case for a Creator* DVD featuring Lee Strobel or *What Hath Darwin Wrought?* DVD featuring David Berlinski, Richard Weikart, and John West.

## SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION

*The purposes of this week's session are (1) to explain why the debate over Darwin is important, (2) to identify the key issues to be explored, (3) to provide an overview of future sessions, and (4) to distribute books and the class schedule.*

1. Welcome everyone and thank them for coming. Show video clip “**Trailer.**”
2. Explain why you decided to offer this course, and what you hope people will get out of it. Describe the discussion format of the course. Describe *God and Evolution* and the biographies of those who have contributed to it. Distribute books or let people know how they can get a book; also distribute a class schedule showing what topics and readings you will be covering each week.
3. Have people introduce themselves and describe why they are taking the class and what they hope to get out of it.
4. Lead people in discussion of the following questions:
  - What do you know about evolution? How would you define the term?
  - What are your views about God and evolution? Do you think God and evolution are compatible? Why or why not?
  - Do you think people of faith should be concerned about evolution? Why or why not?
5. Show video clip “**The Doctrine of Creation,**” and then lead people in a discussion of the following questions:
  - What is the Christian doctrine of creation?
  - How is the doctrine of creation different from “creationism”?
  - Is the doctrine of creation important for Christians? Why or why not?
  - What light do the following creedal statements and Biblical passages shed on the doctrine of creation:
    - Nicene Creed: “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.”
    - Irenaeus (c. 115-202 AD): “It is proper, then, that I should begin with the first and most important head, that is, God the Creator, who made the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein (whom these men blasphemously style the fruit of a defect), and to demonstrate that there is nothing either above Him or after Him; nor that, influenced by any one, but of His own free will, He created all things, since He is the only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, the only Father, alone containing all things, and Himself commanding all things into existence.” (*Against Heresies*, Book II, Chapter 1)
    - John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2
7. Thank people for coming, and invite them back. Assign them to read “Squaring the Circle,” Jay Richards’s introduction to *God and Evolution* for next session.

## SESSION 2: PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

*This is the first of four sessions that will explore the “big issues” raised by Darwinian evolution and efforts to reconcile Darwinian Theory with theism. The purposes of this session are to introduce people to the historical context of the debate over faith and evolution as well as to help them understand key terms and distinctions in the debate.*

1. Welcome people and thank them for coming. Show “**Introduction: God and Evolution**” clip.
2. Using the following questions, discuss Jay Richards’s introduction to *God and Evolution*, “Squaring the Circle”:
  - What popular stories are frequently used to illustrate the supposed “warfare” between science and religion? How have recent historians of science responded to this warfare thesis?
  - How would you answer the question: Are science and religion in conflict?
  - Why does the word “creationism” carry so much baggage? Can you describe the different “creationist” views? What is intelligent design and how does it differ from creationism?
  - Is it possible to believe in both “theistic evolution” and “intelligent design”? Why or why not?
  - What are the main differences between theism, deism, pantheism, and panentheism?
  - What do theologians mean when they say that God can act both primarily and through “secondary” causes?
  - Can you define the different senses of the word “evolution”? Why is it important to distinguish these senses when considering God and evolution?
  - What is the central dilemma in reconciling theism with Darwinian evolution?
3. If there is time, preview next week by showing the clip “**Three Big Questions.**” Indicate that you will be discussing the issues raised by this clip next week.
4. Thank people for coming, and invite them back. Assign them to read chapters 1 and 2 by John West for next session.

## SESSION 3: THE EARLY CHURCH AND EVOLUTION

*The purposes of this session are (1) to acquaint people with the debates in the early church over materialism and Gnosticism and their relevance to the contemporary debate over evolution; and (2) to explain three big challenges Darwin's theory poses to traditional Judeo-Christian theism.*

1. Welcome people. Show **“The Early Church and Evolution”** clip.
2. Using the following questions, discuss John West's essay “Nothing New under the Sun” (chapter 1):
  - Has the doctrine of creation been important historically in Christian theology?
  - Who were the Epicureans and what did they believe? How did early Christians respond to them?
  - What are two common beliefs held by the Gnostics in the early centuries of Christianity?
  - What current debate does John West compare to the debate between the early Christians and the Epicureans? What current debate does he compare to the debate between the early Christians and Gnostics? How do the contemporary debates differ from these early debates?
  - How do most theistic evolutionists today differ from prominent theistic evolutionists who were contemporaries of Darwin, such as Alfred Wallace and Asa Gray?
  - Why does West compare natural selection to the Gnostic idea of a Demiurge?
  - Why does West suggest that many theistic evolutionists depict God as a “cosmic trickster”?
  - How important is the doctrine of a historical fall to Christian theology?
3. Using the following questions, discuss John West's essay “Having a Real Debate” (chapter 2):
  - Does John West think that theistic evolution can win over much of the scientific community? Why or why not?
  - Why, according to West, is there a resurgence of interest in theistic evolution?
  - What do you think of Karl Giberson's “practical” reasons for remaining a Christian?
  - West mentions scientific critiques of Neo-Darwinism. What are they? In your opinion, why do many theistic evolutionists avoid this evidence?
  - West argues: “In their zeal for promoting Darwin, some theistic evolutionists exhibit an almost \_\_\_\_\_ to the authority of scientists to set the agenda for the rest of the culture.” Why does he see this as a troubling tendency?
  - How does West think Christians should respond to claims of scientific “consensus” on controversial issues?

4. If you were not able to show the “**Three Big Questions**” clip last week, show it now as a way of wrapping up the discussion.

5. Thank people for coming, and invite them back. Assign them to read chapter 3 by Casey Luskin for next session’s discussion.

## SESSION 4: DOES DARWIN'S THEORY REALLY CORRODE TRADITIONAL FAITH AND MORALITY?

*The purposes of this session are to explore whether Darwinian Theory really has a corrosive impact on traditional theism and morality as well as to examine the ideology of leading proponents of Darwinian biology and their view of faith.*

1. Welcome people. Show “**Darwinian Evolution, God, and Morality**” clip. Discuss using the following questions:

- What proportion of leading biologists are atheists or agnostics? Did the percentages surprise you? Why or why not? Documentation of the surveys cited in this clip can be found at <http://www.discovery.org/a/10171>.
- What is the connection between Darwinian Theory and atheism according to West? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- What is the impact of Darwinian Theory on morality according to West? Why? What is your view?
- What is West's view of theistic evolution proponents who do not accept a Darwinian account of morality? What is your view?

2. Using the following questions, discuss Casey Luskin's essay “Smelling Blood in the Water” (chapter 3):

- What are the two camps of Neo-Darwinism?
- Casey Luskin argues that the National Center for Science Education's (NCSE) pro-religion stance may be a “posture.” What evidence does he provide for that charge?
- Biologist Francisco Ayala is a former priest who now refuses to state his religious views. What reason does Luskin imply that Ayala might have for doing so?
- What is the “big debate” involving new atheists, the evolution defense lobby, and theistic evolutionists?
- What does NOMA (Non-Overlapping Magisteria) refer to? Why does Luskin think the idea fails?
- What elements in Darwin's theory of evolution (as most textbooks define it) bring it into conflict with theistic religion?
- Why does Luskin think it is foolish for theistic evolutionists to ally themselves with atheists?

3. Thank people for coming, and invite them back. Assign them to read chapter 4 by William Dembski for next session's discussion.

## SESSION 5: EVOLUTION AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

*The purposes of this session are to help people understand the traditional “problem of evil” and why Darwinian evolution makes it worse rather than solving it.*

1. Welcome people. Show “**Evolution and the Problem of Evil**” clip.
2. Using the following questions, discuss William Dembski’s essay “Death and the Fall” (chapter 4):
  - Why does William Dembski think that anyone who accepts “evolution” as Neo-Darwinists understand it will have a hard time holding onto the concept of *imago dei*?
  - What is theistic evolutionist Karl Giberson’s view of the fall, and how does it differ from the traditional orthodox account? Is the fall an important doctrine in Christian theology? Why or why not?
  - Former Catholic priest Francisco Ayala has argued: “A major burden was removed from the shoulders of believers when convincing evidence was advanced that the design of organisms need not be attributed to the immediate agency of the Creator, but rather is an outcome of natural processes.” What burden does Ayala think has been removed?
  - Why does Dembski think that Darwinism is no help to theism in resolving the problem of evil?
  - Theistic evolutionist Karl Giberson has argued: “[T]he gift of creativity that God bestowed on the creation is theologically analogous to the gift of freedom God bestowed on us. Both we and the creation have freedom.” What does Dembski say about the claim that impersonal nature has “freedom”? Do you agree with Giberson or Dembski? Why?
  - Why does Dembski think that Darwinism, if true, would make the problem of evil more rather than less acute? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
3. Thank people for coming, and invite them back next time. Assign them to read chapters 5 and 6 by Jonathan Witt and Jonathan Wells for next session’s discussion.

## SESSION 6: FRANCIS COLLINS AND EVOLUTION

*The next four sessions will explore the views of key Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish defenders of theistic evolution. The purposes of this session are to explain and assess the case for theistic evolution made by evangelical Protestant Francis Collins in his book The Language of God.*

1. Welcome people. Show the **“Francis Collins and Evolution”** clip.
2. Using the following questions, discuss Jonathan Witt’s essay, “Random Acts of Design” (chapter 5):
  - What evidence of intelligent design does Francis Collins affirm?
  - How does Collins characterize ID arguments in biology?
  - Can you summarize Michael Behe’s argument that certain “molecular machines” are irreducibly complex?
  - Some critics have raised an objection to Behe’s argument that the bacterial flagellum is irreducibly complex. What is it? What are the responses to this objection? Does Francis Collins appear to know the details of this debate, including the responses Witt mentions?
  - What is methodological naturalism (or methodological materialism)? Does Collins adhere to this principle consistently? Why or why not?
  - What dilemma does Witt argue plagues Francis Collins’s view of providence?
3. Using the following questions, discuss Jonathan Wells’s essay, “Darwin of the Gaps” (chapter 6):
  - According to Jonathan Wells, it “is not evolution in general, but \_\_\_\_\_ that intelligent design proponents reject.” Why is this distinction important in the question of God and evolution?
  - According to Francis Collins, what evidence “provides ‘powerful support for Darwin’s theory of evolution. . . .’”? What are the two parts of Darwin’s theory? How does Jonathan Wells respond to Collins’s claim?
  - What is the difference between macroevolution and microevolution? Collins’s claims that the distinction is “increasingly seen to be artificial.” How does Wells respond to this claim?
  - According to Wells, what is the evidence against the claim that study of DNA provides overwhelming support for universal common ancestry?
  - What is “junk DNA”? Why does Francis Collins argue that it provides evidence against intelligent design? What is wrong with Collins’s argument, according to Wells?
  - What does Wells mean when he calls Collins’s argument a “Darwin of the gaps” argument?
5. Thank people for coming, and invite them back next time. Assign them to read chapters 7 and 8 by Jay Richards and Stephen Meyer for next session’s discussion.

## SESSION 7: FRONT-LOADED EVOLUTION

*The purposes of this session are to explore and assess the views of two prominent Protestant defenders of theistic evolution: Howard Van Till and Denis Lamoureux.*

1. Welcome people.
2. Using the following questions, discuss Jay Richards's essay "Making a Virtue of Necessity" (chapter 7):
  - What is Howard Van Till's "Robust Formational Economy Principle"?
  - According to Jay Richards, what is the chief advantage of the Principle?
  - Why does Richards think the Principle has closer affinities to naturalism than to theism?
  - According to Richards, what unstated theological principle lies behind the Robust Formational Economy Principle?
  - What does Richards argue is "perhaps the most obvious objection to Van Till's theological aesthetic, at least for Christians"?
  - What, according to Richards, is the "fundamental theological question for justifying one's belief that the Principle holds in our world"?
  - What reasons does Richards give for his charge that Howard Van Till is making a virtue of necessity?
3. Show the clip "**Front-Loading and Theistic Evolution.**" Using the following questions, discuss Stephen Meyer's essay "The Difference It Doesn't Make" (chapter 8):
  - Can you summarize Denis Lamoureux's view of theistic evolution, or what he calls teleological evolution" or "evolutionary creation"?
  - Why does Lamoureux object to the phrase "theistic evolution"?
  - What is Lamoureux's objection to intelligent design?
  - Does intelligent design rely on a specific interpretation of Scripture?
  - Why does Meyer argue that modern ID arguments are not God-of-the-gaps arguments?
  - Why does Meyer argue that repetitive physical laws cannot produce the information we see in the biological world?
  - What are the two ways to understand Lamoureux's argument concerning the origin of biological information, according to Stephen Meyer?
  - What dilemma does Meyer detect in Lamoureux's use of the word "teleological"?
4. Thank people for coming, and invite them back next time. Assign them to read chapters 9-13 by Denyse O'Leary, Logan Gage, and Jay Richards for next session's discussion.

## SESSION 8: CATHOLICS AND EVOLUTION

*The purposes of this session are to explore and assess Catholic views of evolution and intelligent design. If you have time for a longer course, you may want to extend this study to two or three sessions. Otherwise you will need to cover only a selection of the questions provided below.*

1. Welcome people. Watch the “**Catholics and Evolution**” clip.
2. Using the following questions, discuss Denyse O’Leary’s essay, “Everything Old is New Again” (chapter 9):
  - What was the older Catholic apologists’ “main point” against Darwinism?
  - Why, according to Denyse O’Leary, was Wallace neglected and ridiculed, but Darwin lionized?
  - Did Belloc object to “evolution” generally? What did he say about Darwin’s theory?
  - What was Chesterton’s view of Darwin’s theory? What did Chesterton predict would happen to the theory? Was he right?
  - What was Mivart’s critique of natural selection? Do you think it is still relevant today? Why does O’Leary refer to Mivart as a “tragic figure”?
  - Why does O’Leary think that Darwinism continues to prosper despite the lack of evidence in its favor?
  - How does O’Leary depict the Church’s response to Darwin’s theory?
3. Using the following questions, discuss Logan Gage’s essay, “Can a Thomist Be a Darwinist?” (chapter 10):
  - What is an “essence” in Aristotelian and Thomistic thought? According to Logan Gage, how does this concept conflict with Darwinism?
  - What is transformism? Why does Gage think that “those defending the tradition of natural philosophy found in Aristotle and St. Thomas simply cannot accept” it? What does he think the Thomist would need to change in Darwinian Theory to accept transformation of one species into another?
  - What is occasionalism? How did St. Thomas’ view differ from occasionalism?
  - What is an exemplar cause? Why should the concept matter to Thomists who wish to affirm Darwinism?
  - What are the four causes, according to Aristotle?
  - What criticisms have some Thomists raised against ID? How does Gage respond to these criticisms?
  - How do modern ID arguments differ from St. Thomas’ arguments for the existence of God? Must one choose one or the other?
4. Show the clip “**Catholics and Intelligent Design.**”

5. Using the following questions, discuss Jay Richards's essay, "Is There a Catholic View of Creation and Evolution?" (chapter 11):

- According to Catholic teaching, on what basis can we know that God exists?
- How would you explain the "official" Catholic position on evolution, as Richards describes it? Do you think this position is widely understood by Catholics?
- What senses of the word "evolution" can make it hard for Catholics to understand the Church's objections to Darwinian evolution?
- What is creation *ex nihilo*?
- What types of ways does God act in the world?
- Richards argues that the claims of Michael Tkacz "look like deductions from naturalism, rigid Aristotelianism, or a hybrid of the two, not like implications of Thomism." What does he mean? Why does Richards make this charge?
- What types of ID critics does Richards describe? Does he think that ID is well understood by most of these critics?

6. Using the following questions, discuss Jay Richards's essay, "Separating the Chaff from the Wheat" (chapter 12):

- What is the difference between "mechanism" and "reductionism"? Why does Richards argue that Catholics should be careful to distinguish the two concepts?
- What is "teleo-mechanism"? Why, according to Richards, is this a better term to apply to thinkers such as Isaac Newton and William Paley?
- Which of Aristotle's beliefs, according to Richards, is most at odds with Christian theology?
- What is "immanent teleology"? How does St. Thomas' view of teleology differ from Aristotle's?
- How does Thomas' concept of exemplar cause "split the difference between Platonic ideas or forms ... and Aristotelian forms"?
- Why did Robert Boyle object to Aristotelian philosophy? Richards argues that "held together, the contrasting views of nature in Boyle and Aristotle provide a valuable lesson." What is that lesson?

7. Using the following questions, discuss Jay Richards's essay, "Understanding Intelligent Design" (chapter 13):

- Jay Richards argues that ID is a *tertium quid*. What does he mean?
- According to Richards, "Earlier design arguments tended to work with only two categories: order and chance/chaos." How do modern ID arguments go beyond these earlier design arguments?
- Why do ID theorists sometimes contrast intelligent design with natural laws and constants? Does it follow that, according to ID, laws are not the result of design?
- How does the Darwinian "mechanism" differ from other physical mechanisms?
- Why does Richards argue that many Catholics unwittingly adopt a view of

- science that is a hybrid of traditional and modern ideas?
- What problems are there with distinguishing strongly between natural science and other disciplines, such as philosophy? How would St. Thomas have distinguished different areas of inquiry?
  - What is scientism? How are scientism and materialism different?
  - Why do ID proponents often maintain that ID is science?

4. Thank people for coming, and invite them back next time. Assign them to read chapters 14-15 by David Klinghoffer for next session's discussion.

## SESSION 9: JUDAISM AND EVOLUTION

*The purpose of this session is to explore the problems posed for Judaism by Darwinian evolution.*

1. Welcome people. Watch “**Judaism and Evolution**” clip.
2. Using the following questions, discuss David Klinghoffer’s essay, “The Maimonides Myth and the Great Heretic” (chapter 14):
  - According to David Klinghoffer, how have many Orthodox Jews responded to Darwinism? Does he think this response divides Jews “along an easily defined and expected religious divide”?
  - Does Klinghoffer think Maimonides would have sought to reconcile God and Darwin? Why or why not? Was intelligent design a concern to Maimonides?
  - Who is the great heretic? Why does Klinghoffer connect Epicurus and Darwin?
  - Klinghoffer summarizes Ibn Ezra’s teaching in this way: “For the simple, ... simple faith. For the wise, intelligent design.” What does Klinghoffer mean?
  - What “deficiency” or “lack” in the creation does Scripture describe? Why, according to Rabbinical interpretation, would this need to be part of the world God has created?
  - Why, according to Rabbeinu Bachya, did God not accomplish all of creation through one law?
2. Using the following questions, discuss David Klinghoffer’s essay, “God’s Image, Our Mission” (chapter 15):
  - What do you think it means to be made in the image of God?
  - Why does David Klinghoffer argue that Darwinism makes the biblical idea that we are created in God’s image “incomprehensible”?
  - Before reading Klinghoffer’s essay, did you know that the image of God described in the Bible refers not just to our spiritual aspect, but to our physical aspect as well? Why is this important?
  - What is “the moral message of Darwinism”?
  - What does “holiness” mean, according to Klinghoffer?
  - According to Klinghoffer, what “inner logic” did Hitler perceive in “Darwinism that even Charles Darwin did not”?
3. Thank people for coming, and invite them back next time. Assign them to read Jay Richards’s conclusion to *God and Evolution* for next session’s discussion. Encourage them to come with concluding thoughts and things they have learned during the course of the class.

## SESSION 10: CONCLUSION

*The purpose of this session is to allow members of the class to synthesize, summarize, and compare notes on what they have learned during the course of the class.*

1. Welcome people.
2. Hold a discussion about what class participants have learned during the course of the class. Questions you might want to use to guide the discussion include:
  - What are the main facts, ideas, or truths you learned from this class?
  - What things do you understand better now? What topics or issues are still unclear after this class?
  - What new questions do you have because of this class?
  - What things did you agree with during this class? What things did you disagree with?
  - Which chapter of *God and Evolution* had the most impact on you? Why?
  - What common problems does Darwinian evolution raise for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews?
  - What unique problems does Darwinian evolution pose for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews?
  - What are the key scientific objections to Darwinian evolution?
  - Do you think God and Darwinian evolution are compatible? Why or why not?
  - What are the main points made by Jay Richards in his conclusion to *God and Evolution*?
  - How can you apply something you have learned in this class to your life?
3. As a conclusion, you may want to present your own summary of the key points made in the course, especially the points you want people to “take away” from the course.
4. If class members are interested in pursuing further study of the debate over Darwin and intelligent design, you may want to consider additional sessions on specific issues. For ideas, see the next page.

## EXTRA SESSIONS

*If you want to add more sessions or teach another class about the issues surrounding faith, evolution, and intelligent design, you are encouraged to visit the **Faith and Evolution** website for ideas and curricular resources. The Faith and Evolution curricula page can be found at <http://www.faithandevolution.org/resources/curricula.php>.*

*Here are two suggestions among many for additional sessions/classes:*

1. Show the **Case for a Creator** DVD, which presents powerful evidence for intelligent design from physics, cosmology, astronomy, DNA, and biology. Hosted by Lee Strobel, the DVD features interviews with many leading scientists who support intelligent design.
2. Show the **What Hath Darwin Wrought?** documentary exploring Darwinism's impact on ethics and the sanctity of life in Germany and American during the past century. A free discussion and study guide is available for this documentary at [www.whathathdarwinwrought.com](http://www.whathathdarwinwrought.com).