

Condon Lecture, Development Theory

By The Oregonian

The lecture reproduced above was published in the *Oregonian* on February 17, 1883. Titled "Development Theory," it was presented by Dr. Thomas Condon (1822-1907), Oregon's first state geologist.

Educated at a Presbyterian seminary, Condon came to Oregon in 1852 to work as a missionary, but he would eventually become the state's most prominent natural historian. Largely self-taught in the geological sciences, Condon was appointed Oregon's first state geologist in 1872, and the following year he resigned his position with the Congregational church and accepted a teaching position at Pacific University in Forest Grove. In 1876 he became the University of Oregon's first geology professor, a position he held for nearly twenty years.

Like many other scientists of his day, Condon struggled to reconcile his religious beliefs with rapidly changing scientific views of the natural world. In an 1874 public lecture, Condon argued that "no conflict existed between the teachings of God and those of Geology." However, he argued, the Bible was not a book of science, and theologians would have to adjust their views to account for new scientific findings.

In the lecture reproduced above, Condon argues that there was no fundamental inconsistency between the Biblical account of creation and scientific accounts of the origin of the natural world. He cites a number of examples from astronomy, chemistry, and geology to explain how, contrary to the dominant Christian view that the earth was created 6,000 years ago, the natural world has in fact developed over many millions of years. But he argues that God created the system that guided how the natural world developed over time. "God did not stop to create a single fact," Condon asserts, "he created a vast system of facts."

The Darwinian theory of evolution was particularly controversial among Christians in the late nineteenth century, but Condon argues that Darwinian evolution did not, as some suggested, encourage atheism. On the contrary, he believed that the account of creation in Genesis could be reconciled with Darwin's theory of the origin of species, and that continued religious resistance to Darwin's theories would be counterproductive. "The church," he argued, "cannot put herself in a position of constant antagonism to science without harm."

Historian Robert Clark concludes that Condon's "determination to accept the findings of geology and Darwin, without giving up his religious beliefs, saved the faith of many and gave both evolution and the methods of science a fair start in Oregon."

PDF version of Condon's entire Development Theory Lecture.

Further Reading: Clark, Robert D. *The Odyssey of Thomas Condon: Irish Immigrant, Frontier Missionary, Oregon Geologist*. Portland, Ore., 1989.

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