



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 205-930-9681 / 205-907-9447

Visit stsymeon.com

July 3, 2016

All Saints of North America

Martyr Hyacinth of Caesarea in Cappadocia (108 AD)

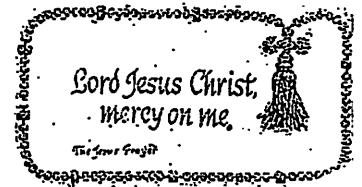
Hieromartyr St. Phillip, Metropolitan of Moscow (1569)



✠ **Holy Baptism – Saturday, July 16, 3:00pm**

- Child David Johnson

The Saints of America



On the Second Sunday after Pentecost, each local Orthodox Church commemorates all the Saints, known and unknown, who have shone forth in its local territory. Accordingly, the Orthodox Church in America remembers the Saints of North America on this day.

Saints of all times, and in every country are seen as the fulfillment of God's promise to redeem fallen humanity. Their example encourages us to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily besets us" and to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). The Saints of North America also teach us how we should live, and what we must expect to endure as Christians

Although it is a relatively young church, the Orthodox Church in America has produced Saints in nearly all of the six major categories of saints: Apostles (and Equals of the Apostles); Martyrs (and Confessors); Prophets; Hierarchs; Monastic Saints; and the Righteous. Prophets, of course, lived in Old Testament times and predicted the coming of Christ.

The first Divine Liturgy in what is now American territory (northern latitude 58 degrees, 14 minutes, western longitude 141 degrees) was celebrated on July 20, 1741, the Feast of the Prophet Elias, aboard the ship Peter under the command of Vitus Bering. Hieromonk Hilarion Trusov and the priest Ignatius Kozirevsky served together on that occasion. Several years later, the Russian merchant Gregory I. Shelikov visited Valaam monastery, suggesting to the abbot that it would be desirable to send missionaries to Russian America.

On September 24, 1794, after a journey of 7,327 miles (the longest missionary journey in Orthodox history) and 293 days, a group of monks from Valaam arrived on Kodiak Island in Alaska. The mission was headed by Archimandrite Joasaph, and included Hieromonks Juvenal, Macarius, and Athanasius, the Hierodeacons Nectarius and Stephen, and the monks Herman and Joasaph. St Herman of Alaska (December 13, August 9), the last surviving member of the mission, fell asleep in the Lord in 1837.

Throughout the Church's history, the seeds of faith have always been watered by the blood of the martyrs. The Protomartyr Juvenal was killed near Lake Iliamna by natives in 1799, thus becoming the first Orthodox Christian to shed his blood for Christ in the New World. In 1816, St Peter the Aleut was put to death by Spanish missionaries in California when he refused to convert to Roman

Catholicism.

Missionary efforts continued in the nineteenth century, with outreach to the native peoples of Alaska. Two of the most prominent laborers in Christ's Vineyard were St Innocent Veniaminov (March 31 and October 6) and St Jacob Netsvetov (July 26), who translated Orthodox services and books into the native languages. Father Jacob Netsvetev died in Sitka in 1864 after a life of devoted service to the Church. Father John Veniaminov, after his wife's death, received monastic tonsure with the name Innocent and became the first Bishop of Alaska. He departed this life in 1879 as the Metropolitan of Moscow.

As the nineteenth century was drawing to a close, an event of enormous significance for the North American Church took place. On March 25, 1891, Bishop Vladimir went to Minneapolis to receive St Alexis Toth (May 7) and 361 of his parishioners into the Orthodox Church. This was the beginning of the return of some 35,000 Uniates to Holy Orthodoxy, by the efforts of St. Alexis!

St Tikhon (Belavin), the future Patriarch of Moscow (April 7, October 9), came to America as bishop of the diocese of the Aleutians and Alaska in September 1898. As the only Orthodox bishop on the continent, St Tikhon traveled extensively throughout North America in order to minister to his widely scattered and diverse flock. He realized that the local church here could not be a permanent extension of the Russian Church. Therefore, he focused his efforts on giving the American Church a diocesan and parish structure which would help it mature and grow.

St Tikhon returned to Russia in 1907, and was elected as Patriarch of Moscow ten years later. He died in 1925, and for many years his exact burial place remained unknown. St Tikhon's grave was discovered on February 22, 1992 in the smaller cathedral of Our Lady of the Don in the Donskoy Monastery when a fire had made renovation of the church necessary.

St Raphael of Brooklyn (February 27) was the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated in North America. Archimandrite Raphael Hawaweeny was consecrated by Bishop Tikhon and Bishop Innocent (Pustynsky) at St Nicholas Cathedral in New York on March 13, 1904. As Bishop of Brooklyn, St Raphael was a trusted and capable assistant to St Tikhon in his archpastoral ministry. St Raphael reposed on February 27, 1915.

The first All American Council took place March 5-7, 1907 at Mayfield, PA, and the main topic was "How to expand the Mission." Guidelines and directions for missionary activity, and statutes for the administrative structure of parishes were also set forth.

In the twentieth century, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, countless men, women, and children received the crown of martyrdom rather than renounce Christ. Sts John Kochurov (October 31) and Alexander Hotovitzky (December 4 and August 7) both served the Church in North America before going back to Russia. St John became the first clergyman to be martyred in Russia on October 31, 1917 in St Petersburg. St Alexander Hotovitzky, who served in America until 1914, was sent to the Gulag and died in 1937.

St. John (Maximovitch) of San Francisco (July 2) was a holy, wonderworking Russian Bishop in the Far East, Europe and America, departing this life in honor and veneration in 1965 in San Francisco at his Cathedral Joy of All Who Sorrow. He has worked many intercessory miracles since his blessed repose and is venerated by Orthodox far and wide.

In addition to the Saints listed above, we also honor those saints who are known only to God, and have not been recognized officially by the Church. As we contemplate the lives of these Saints, let us remember that we are also called by God to a life of holiness. ✠ ✠ ✠

We must be super-conservative in preserving the Orthodox Faith and super-modern in propagating it." ~ St. Nikolai Velimirovich, who served in America (+1956)

Sermon on the SUNDAY OF ALL SAINTS

Fr. Deacon Ephraim Rivers, June 19, 2011

Today is the feast of All Saints in the Orthodox Church. The Church remembers the Saints on the Sunday following Pentecost because the Saints are the product (the produce) of the Holy Spirit. The Greek word for saint is "agios", (the same word for "holy"), which means "not of this world". The Saints are our spiritual ancestors who have renounced this world for the world to come, for the heavenly kingdom, where, as we see in the Book of Revelation, the Saints surround the throne of God, perpetually worshipping Him and praying to God for the world.

In his vision of heaven, St. John wrote in the 8th chapter of the Book of Revelation: "Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. And he was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the Saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense with the prayer of the Saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand." So in this one passage we have a glimpse of worship in heaven, which we try to imitate here on earth but we also learn from this passage that the prayers of the Saints are being offered before the throne of God.

What are the Saints praying for? After all, they're already in heaven. They're worshipping God, offering continual adoration, but they are also praying *for us!* We believe that in a mystical way the Saints hear us when we call upon them for help. Their prayers are our prayers. They intercede on our behalf before the living God.

We heard this morning in St. Paul's epistle to the Hebrews that we are, "surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses," the Saints. We are reminded of this and are aided in our prayer to the Saints by being surrounded by their icons in church and in our homes. We take a saint's name at Baptism to honor a saint but also to come under the protection of the saint who stands at the throne of God, always praying for us.

St. John of Damascus wrote that, "The Saints have become according to grace that which the Lord Christ is according to nature. The Saints in their lifetime were already filled with the Holy Spirit,...and when they died the grace of the Holy Spirit was still present with their souls and with their bodies in the graves, and with their images and with their holy ikons not because of their nature but because of grace and its activity... the Saints are alive and with daring they stand before the Lord; they are not dead...And it is not only to get help and intercession that the Holy Spirit teaches every believer to pray to the glorified Saints but also because this calling on them, through communion in prayer, deepens the consciousness of the catholic unity of the Church....." In other words, the "communion of the Saints" is a means of uniting the earthly and the heavenly church.

Our veneration of the Saints is not limited to those who came after Christ since we remember all of God's righteous ones since Adam and Eve. (See icon). In fact the subject of today's Epistle is actually the Old Testament Saints, the prophets and righteous, who, despite terrible sufferings and persecutions were faithful to the end, receiving their reward. The first record of the healing effect of sacred relics comes from the Old Testament account of the man being brought back to life after his body was placed onto the relics of the Prophet Elisha.

The earliest Christian Saints were the martyrs—those Saints who literally offered their own bodies to Christ in the ultimate witness to their faith. In fact the word for "martyr" comes from the Greek word meaning "witness". From the life of St. Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of St. John the Theologian, we have a very early record of the veneration of the earthly remains of the Saints.

Every Orthodox holy table or altar contains the relics of a saint in imitation of the earliest altars which were often the catacomb tombs of the Saints.

Saint Ephraim the Syrian relates the following concerning the holy Martyrs: "Even after death they act as if alive, healing the sick, expelling demons, and by the power of the Lord rejecting every evil influence of the demons. This is because the miraculous grace of the Holy Spirit is always present in the holy relics."

Metr. Hierotheos reminds us that the ultimate work of the Church is the making of relics, that is, the sanctification and deification of the human being to the point that even their earthly remains are saturated with grace and in turn become vehicles of grace and healing, just as the holy icons are contact points between the earthly and heavenly kingdoms.

St. Justin Popovich said, "The mystery of holy relics is at the heart of the universal mystery of the New Testament: the incarnation of God. The full mystery of the human body is explained by the incarnation, the embodiment of God in the God-Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason, then, the Gospel message concerning the body: "The body for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (I Corinthians 6:13)...By man, who is sanctified in the Church by the holy mysteries and the holy virtues, the creation and even matter are sanctified, united to Christ. There accrues to this also a joy—the myrrh-streaming property of many relics. This wonder of myrrh has been given to the holy relics in order to indicate that Christians are truly "a sweet-savour of Christ unto God" (II Corinthians 2:15), sweet-smelling to God and to heaven. The truth of the Gospel is that the sin of man is a foul odor before God and every sin pleases the devil. Through the holy mysteries and holy virtues, Christians become "a sweet-savour of Christ unto God." For this reason, then, the holy relics of the Saints pour forth myrrh."

How many millions of martyrs have there been in the 2000-year history of the Church? On this day of All Saints, the Church takes the opportunity to remember all the Saints, even them whose names are known only to God.

In our comfortable world of over-abundance and spiritual lukewarmness, we simply cannot imagine how difficult it was for our predecessors to preserve our Orthodox Christian faith for 2000 years. It is for this reason that the Church, always instructing us like a loving mother, sets its best examples, the Saints before us as sources of strength to encourage us in times of weakness and doubt.

St. Justin Popovich wrote, "...by His bodily resurrection, the ascension of His body into heaven, and its eternal session at the right hand of God the Father. In this way, the Resurrected Christ extended the promise of resurrection to the nature of the human body—"having made for all flesh a path to eternal life." Thus man now knows that the body is created for eternity through union with the God-Man and that his divine work on earth is to struggle, with the soul, for eternal life; to struggle, with all those means that convey grace and virtue, to make himself grace-filled, fulfilled by Divine grace, and created anew as the temple of the Holy Spirit, the temple of the Living God."

The goal of the Christian is to be holy—to be otherworldly in a world that tells us that our purpose in life is to make our lives as comfortable as possible without regard for the consequences. The Saints are our witnesses to the truth that our real hope is not of this world— that our lives on this earth are to be lived for Christ, so that at the end of our brief lives, we too might stand with all the Saints around His throne.

May Christ our God, Who has poured out the Holy Spirit on the Church, through the prayers of all His Spirit-filled Saints, grant that we might be found worthy to stand with them in His heavenly kingdom! AMEN

The Big Bang Blows Atheism Sky High: Even Science May Eventually Catch Up to God's Word

God's Word declares, "The fool hath said in his heart 'there is no God'" (Psalm 14). For three decades, until his death in 1953, Josef Stalin was the mass-murdering atheist dictator of Soviet Russia. He was also a fool.

In his 1994 book, "Can Man Live Without God," famed Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias recounts a story [1] he heard firsthand from British Journalist Malcomb Muggeridge "that stirred [him] then and still does even yet."

Muggeridge had collaborated with Svetlana Stalin, Josef Stalin's daughter, on a BBC documentary about her God-hating father. She recounted his last act of defiant rebellion against the Creator: "[A]s Stalin lay dying, plagued with terrifying hallucinations, he suddenly sat halfway up in bed, clenched his fist toward the heavens once more, fell back upon his pillow, and was dead."
"[H]is one last gesture," observed Zacharias, "was a clenched fist toward God, his heart as cold and hard as steel."

In my experience it is something common among atheists: an inexplicable, incongruent and visceral hatred for the very God they imagine does not exist. Indeed, Romans 1:20 notes, "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."
Yet excuses they make. Psalm 19:1 likewise observes: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

The manifest intentionality and fine-tuning of all creation reveals design of breathtaking complexity. The Creator is of incalculable intelligence and infinite splendor. As I see it, atheism provides a case study in willful suspension of disbelief – all to escape, as the God-denier imagines it, accountability for massaging the libertine impulse.

"Wouldn't the atheist 'suspend belief?'" you might ask. No, the phrase is properly "suspension of disbelief." It is defined as "a willingness to suspend one's critical faculties and believe the unbelievable; sacrifice of realism and logic for the sake of enjoyment."

In the case of the atheist, or the "freethinker," as they paradoxically prefer, that which is unbelievable is that somehow everything came from nothing – that there is no uncaused first cause; that God does not exist, even as knowledge of His being is indelibly written on every human heart and proved by all He has made.

Be they theist, atheist or anti-theist, on this nearly all scientists agree: In the beginning there was nothing. There was no time, space or matter. There wasn't even emptiness, only nothingness. Well, nothing natural anyway. Then: bang! Everything. Nonexistence became existence. Nothing became, in less than an instant, our inconceivably vast and finely tuned universe governed by what mankind would later call – after we, too, popped into existence from nowhere, fully armed with conscious awareness and the ability to think, communicate and observe – "natural law" or "physics."
Time, space, earth, life and, finally, human life were not. And then they were.

Writing in the Wall Street Journal, Christian author Eric Metaxas notes, "The fine-tuning necessary for life to exist on a planet is nothing compared with the fine-tuning required for the universe to exist at all. For example, astrophysicists now know that the values of the four fundamental forces – gravity, the electromagnetic force, and the 'strong' and 'weak' nuclear forces – were determined less than one-millionth of a second after the big bang. Alter any one value and the universe could not exist. For

instance, if the ratio between the nuclear strong force and the electromagnetic force had been off by the tiniest fraction of the tiniest fraction – by even one part in 100,000,000,000,000,000 – then no stars could have ever formed at all. Feel free to gulp. ... It would be like tossing a coin and having it come up heads 10 quintillion times in a row. Really?"

Secular materialists claim it can't be – that such explanation is a "God of the gaps" explanation and, therefore, must be banished from the realm of scientific inquiry. They demand that anything beyond the known natural is off-limits. Atheists attribute all of existence to, well, nothing. It just kind of happened. Genesis 1:1 of the materialist bible might read: "In the beginning nothing created the heavens and the earth." Even in the material world that's just plain silly. Nothing plus nothing equals something? Zero times zero equals everything?

And so, they have "reasoned" themselves into a corner. These same materialists acknowledge that, prior to the moment of singularity – the Big Bang – there was no "natural." They admit that there was an unnatural time and place before natural time and space – that something, sometime, somewhere preceded the material universe. That which preceded the natural was, necessarily, "beyond the natural" and, therefore, was, is and forever shall be "supernatural."

Reader, meet God.

In short: the Big Bang blows atheism sky high.

Fred Hoyle is the atheist astronomer who coined the term "Big Bang." He once confessed that his disbelief was "greatly shaken" by the undisputed science, writing that "a common-sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with the physics, as well as with chemistry and biology."

Albert Einstein, who is often dishonestly characterized as having been an atheist, agreed that God-denial is foolishness. He once said of non-believers: "The fanatical atheists are like slaves who are still feeling the weight of their chains which they have thrown off after hard struggle. They are creatures who – in their grudge against traditional religion as the 'opium of the masses' – cannot hear the music of the spheres."

"I'm not an atheist," added Einstein. "The problem involved is too vast for our limited minds. We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn't know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent human being toward God. We see the universe marvelously arranged and obeying certain laws but only dimly understand these laws."

Illustrious NASA scientist (and agnostic) Dr. Robert Jastrow (1925-2008) put it this way: "For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountain of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."

Yes, with time and chance, even science may eventually catch up to God's Word.

Matt Barber is founder and editor-in-chief of BarbWire.com. He is an author, columnist, cultural analyst and an attorney concentrating in constitutional law.

This and That

This theater of the absurd, at which we find ourselves the unwilling audience, has moved off-Broadway and is coming to your town.

...For Americans, nature is whatever you want. Human reason abstractly applied to the observable workings of the human body is no longer guided by any prior truth—certainly not by Scripture or Church tradition, but also not by human tradition. In the recent past, a Christian might have concluded that a boy who shrieks and writhes at others' insistence that he is not a girl is subject to diabolical influence. But even adherents of yesterday's scientism would have witnessed the behaviors of the so-called transgendered and concluded that something was wrong. In fact, they did just that, looking for chemical imbalances, asking the nature versus nurture question, and formulating treatment plans.

The real question is, what allows us to leap from the possibility of an organic antecedent, a biological inclination, to a moral affirmation of a debilitating delusion? The answer is the Sexual Revolution, whose anything-goes ethic informs and guides not only the research done on the transgendered but the treatment plans offered them—which are actually treatment plans for society. ~ Aaron Wolf, *Chronicles*

Sexual confusion isn't unique to our age, but the scope of it is. No society can sustain itself for long if marriage and the family fall apart on a mass scale. And that's exactly what's happening as we gather here today. The Supreme Court's Obergefell decision approving same-sex marriage last June was a legal disaster. But it didn't happen in a vacuum. It fits very comfortably with trends in our culture that go back many decades, even before the 1960s. It's useful to read or reread Wilhelm Reich's book from 1936, *The Sexual Revolution*. Reich argues that a real revolution can only be made at the level of sexual freedom. And it needs to begin by wiping away institutions like marriage, family and traditional sexual morality.

What's interesting about Reich's work is that, *80 years ago*, he saw the United States as the most promising place for that kind of revolution, despite its Puritan history. The reason is simple. Americans have a deep streak of individualism, a distrust of authority and a big appetite for self-invention. As religion loses its hold on people's behavior, all of these instincts accelerate. The trouble is that once the genie is out of the bottle, sexual freedom goes in directions and takes on shapes that nobody imagined. And ultimately it leads to questions about who a person is and what it means to be human.

~ Roman Catholic Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia

Fr. Stephen Freeman:

"I listened to a local radio program (at least part) that was discussing the topic of "gender fluidity." This asserts that gender is a purely social construct. A few years ago, this was an extreme fringe concept, but seems to now have become mainstream, at least in the US Justice Department (which means a growing number of places). I think it is an utterly extreme assertion that would be disastrous for a society's ability to nurture families and children. It is, in fact, among the most purely "modern" ideas, an assertion that the will creates even the most fundamental realities. This assertion is not about how you're born, or chromosomal issues. It's simply the assertion of gender being "whatever I want it to be today, and you'd better get over it."

"Children require stability. Their socialization will not flourish in fluidity. This is not a call for some form of patriarchy (or other things so easily dismissed these days). But gender is resoundingly binary, regardless of the issues that a tiny minority may struggle with. A culture can tolerate a fair range of diversity and be truly kind. But kindness does not require the destruction and dismissal of the primary place held by procreative biology. We are mammals, and that comes with a goodly amount of baggage."

"However, we seem poised for a period of insanity. The early Bolsheviks experimented with this. There's pretty much nothing new in Queer Theory – it's just old Marxism in a new guise. It was so disastrous that Stalin abandoned it (and that's got to be a lot of disaster!)."

How ironical that the cause of liberation of the self leads to profound alienation from God, nature, others and ultimately from oneself.

- Fran Macadam

What Distinguishes Evolution from Other Sciences ~ Fred Reed

Early on, I noticed three things about evolution that differentiated it from other sciences (or, I could almost say, from science). First, plausibility was accepted as being equivalent to evidence. And of course the less you know, the greater the number of things that are plausible, because there are fewer facts to get in the way. Again and again evolutionists assumed that suggesting how something might have happened was equivalent to establishing how it had happened. Asking them for evidence usually aroused annoyance and sometimes, if persisted in, hostility.

As an example, it seems plausible to evolutionists that life arose by chemical misadventure. By this they mean, I think, that they cannot imagine how else it might have come about. (Neither can I. Does one accept a poor explanation because unable to think of a good one?) This accidental-life theory, being somewhat plausible, is therefore accepted without the usual standards of science, such as reproducibility or rigorous demonstration of mathematical feasibility. Putting it otherwise, evolutionists are too attached to their ideas to be able to question them.

Or to notice that others do. They defend furiously the evolution of life in earth's seas as the most certain of certainties. Yet in the November, 2005 *Scientific American*, an article argues that life may have begun elsewhere, perhaps on Mars, and arrived here on meteorites. May have, perhaps, might. Somewhere, somewhere else, anywhere. Onward into the fog.

Consequently, discussion often turns to vague and murky assertion. Starlings are said to have evolved to be the color of dirt so that hawks can't see them to eat them. This is plausible. But guacamayos and cockatoos are gaudy enough to be seen from low-earth orbit. Is there a contradiction here? No, say evolutionists. Guacamayos are gaudy so they can find each other to mate. Always there is the pat explanation. But starlings seem to mate with great success, though invisible. If you have heard a guacamayo shriek, you can hardly doubt that another one could easily find it. Enthusiasts of evolution then told me that guacamayos were at the top of their food chain, and didn't have predators. Or else that the predators were colorblind. On and on it goes. But...is any of this established?

Second, evolution seemed more a metaphysics or ideology than a science. The sciences, as I knew them, gave clear answers. Evolution involved intense faith in fuzzy principles. You demonstrated chemistry, but believed evolution. If you have ever debated a Marxist, or a serious liberal or conservative, or a feminist or Christian, you will have noticed that, although they can be exceedingly bright and well informed, they display a maddening imprecision. You never get a straight answer if it is one they do not want to give. Nothing is ever firmly established. Crucial assertions do not tie to observable reality. Invariably the Marxist (or evolutionist) assumes that a detailed knowledge of economic conditions under the reign of Nicholas II or whatever substitutes for being able to answer simple questions, such as why Marxism has never worked. This is the Fallacy of Irrelevant Knowledge. And of course almost anything can be made believable by considering only favorable evidence and interpreting hard.

Third, evolutionists are obsessed by Christianity and Creationism, with which they imagine themselves to be in mortal combat. This is peculiar to them. Note that other sciences, such as astronomy and geology, even archaeology, are equally threatened by the notion that the world was created in 4004 BC. Astronomers pay not the slightest attention to creationist ideas. Nobody does—except evolutionists. We are dealing with competing religions—overarching explanations of origin and destiny. Thus the fury of their response to skepticism.

I found it pointless to tell them that I wasn't a Creationist. They refused to believe it. If they had, they would have had to answer questions that they would rather avoid. Like any zealots, they cannot recognize their own zealotry. Thus their constant classification of skeptics as enemies (a word they often use)—of truth, of science, of Darwin, of progress. This tactical demonization is not unique to evolution. "Creationist" is to evolution what "racist" is to politics: A way of preventing discussion of what you do not want to discuss. Evolution is the political correctness of science.