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RECONCILING CREATION, GENESIS, AND SCIENTIFIC COSMOLOGY

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Creation, Cosmology, and Genesis

by

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## Introduction

The debate over human origins is one that has increased in recent centuries as technology, knowledge, and questions about humanities place and role in the universe have expanded exponentially. However, it is not a new question; from ancient documents until today, creation myths and stories have been documented. In many cases, the debate on material beginnings is framed as an either/or scenario; either one believes in God, or one believes in science, with the implication being that the one is not compatible with the other. Peter Enns suggests that this conflict is rooted not in scientific or even theological concerns, but in a fear of losing a shared group identity and all that it offers.<sup>1</sup> Walton points out that the greater concern is not the motivation for the debate, but rather, that the church's pattern of teaching in this area has led young people to grow up believing they must choose between God and science, and when confronted with convincing arguments in college for evolution and other similar theories, the result has been a mass exodus from the church. He contends that finding a path towards faithfulness that is not a compromise diluting scripture, but does open the doors to embracing faith and science is essential for the church.<sup>2</sup>

This paper seeks to demonstrate that if God is the Creator of all that exists, including the foundations of science, then the one should not contradict the other. As Psalms 19:1 (NIV) asserts, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), 145.

<sup>2</sup> John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 216.

## Background

While different religions have posited different explanations for origins, American culture largely accepted creationist theory well into the twentieth century. Variations of the evolutionary theory can be documented as early as ancient Greece, with others addressing and developing the theory more significantly in the 1600's.<sup>3</sup> However, it was not until the 1800's and the arrival of Charles Darwin, that the theory became widely known and began to gain popularity.<sup>4</sup>

The topic became controversial in the early twentieth century during the Scopes Trial in 1925.<sup>5</sup> A evolutionist teacher chose to break pro-creation laws that existed at the time and taught evolution to his students, ultimately landing him in court. While the teacher lost the trial, the nation was captivated by the coverage and it began the process of moving public opinion towards evolution and away from creationism. Almost 90 years later, the debate has not cooled off, as evidenced by examples such as the Bill Nye and Ken Hamm debate, a topic of national conversation which drew over three million live viewers during the event,<sup>6</sup> as well as several million more viewers in the years since.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, popular astrophysicist Neil deGrasse

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<sup>3</sup> Fowler, Thomas B., and Daniel Keubler, *The Evolution Controversy*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 43-45.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>5</sup> Tim M. Berra, *Evolution and the Myth of Creationism: A Basic Guide to the Facts in the Evolution Debate* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 132.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.charismanews.com/us/42677-3-million-watched-evolution-creation-debate-but-how-many-minds-changed>

<sup>7</sup> <https://youtu.be/z6kgvhG3AkI>

Tyson's pro-evolution tv series, "Cosmos: A Spacetime Exploration," had as many as 5.8 million viewers during its first season.<sup>8</sup> It becomes quickly evident through the nations appetite for podcasts, television shows, and books that the question of origins is one that continues to be an important one.

Rather than see tensions calm, they have only escalated. Many in the pro-evolution, scientific community feel overwhelmed at what they see as the incredible financial resources of the pro-creation religious community to find legal loop holes to discredit or deny access to resources discovered and created by the scientific community. This has left the scientific community feeling like the American nation is behind other parts of the world in this arena as a result.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, creationists fear that the debate is not simply one of origins, but an agenda focused on removing God from humanity. Sigmund Brouwer contends that "science without God leads to cynicism and a sense of life without meaning."<sup>10</sup>

### **Theories**

While there are a great number of theories regarding origins and the development of the universe, this paper will highlight four as representatives of a much larger field of study. While the scientific community also has a great number of theories, those who reject Christian faith are often confused at the high level of disagreement within the faith community on this topic, as well

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<sup>8</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmos:\\_A\\_Spacetime\\_Odyssey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmos:_A_Spacetime_Odyssey)

<sup>9</sup> Berra, *Evolution and the Myth of Creationism*, 120.

<sup>10</sup> Sigmund Brouwer, *The Unrandom Universe* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 41.

as the tendency to question each other's level of faith commitment.<sup>11</sup> This paper will look at Intelligent Design, Evolution, Young Earth Creationism, and Old Earth Creationism.

### Intelligent Design

William Dembski writes that Intelligent Design, at its core, is the theory “that intelligent causes are necessary to explain the complex, information-rich structures of biology and that these causes are empirically detectable.”<sup>12</sup> It is a theory that leaves out the divine, thus fitting secular standards of scientific process, yet defends the intentional nature of the universe as opposed to a chaotic, random universe as proposed by most evolutionists.<sup>13</sup> During the past century, as the courts determined creationism to not be science, the theory of intelligent design created a way for a form of creationism, even if does not acknowledge itself as such, to reenter the public school system.<sup>14</sup>

Its approach is simple; without any suggestion of religion, God, or the supernatural, it centers its focus on the complex nature of the cosmos, the intricate details of the systems, and argues that there are patterns of design too complicated to be anything other than the result of an intelligent or intentional design process. Proponents of Intelligent Design assert that random or natural occurrence cannot reasonably explain the formation of the universe.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hitt, Austin M., *The Evolution of Creationism In America*, *Science Educator*, 18.1 (Spring 2009), 58-68.

<sup>12</sup> William Dembski, *Intelligent Design*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 106.

<sup>13</sup> Kurt P. Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time: What the Bible Teaches and Science Confirms About Creation and the Age of the Universe* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2002), 281.

<sup>14</sup> Fazale Rana with Hugh Ross, *Who was Adam? A Creation Model Approach to the Origin of Man*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005), 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

Phillip Johnson, one of the originators of the Intelligent Design theory, wrote, “The literature of Darwinism is full of anti-theistic conclusions, such as that the universe was not designed and has no purpose, and that we humans are the product of blind natural processes that care nothing about us. What is more, these statements are not presented as personal opinions but as logical implications of evolutionary science.”<sup>16</sup> For Johnson, there was an obvious contradiction in that the subjective theories of evolutionists were treated as fact while creationists following the rigors of scientific discipline in creating theories were discounted as unscientific because of their religion. Consequently, Johnson endeavored to find a way to redefine the terms and establish an approach to creationism that would both stand up to scientific expectations as well as create room for the divine. Dembski wrote, “Christ is indispensable to any scientific theory, even if its practitioners do not have a clue about him.”<sup>17</sup> Towards this end, Intelligent Design has three propositions:<sup>18</sup>

1. Evolution promotes an atheistic worldview and therefore must be resisted by believers in God.
2. Evolution is fundamentally flawed, since it cannot account for the intricate complexity of nature.
3. If evolution cannot explain irreducible complexity, then there must have been an intelligent designer involved somehow, who stepped in to provide the necessary components during the course of evolution.

“Irreducible complexity” is a defining aspect of Intelligent Design. Essentially, it is defined as a system consisting of multiple connected and dependent parts, with the removal of

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<sup>16</sup> Darrel R. Falk, *Coming to Peace with Science: Bridging the Worlds between Faith and Biology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 40.

<sup>17</sup> Dembski, *Intelligent Design*, 210.

<sup>18</sup> Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God*, (New York: Free Press, 2006), 183.

any part destroying the system's ability to function.<sup>19</sup> As such, the question then arises, how could evolution create one step at a time over long periods of time a system so dependent on all parts being fully developed simultaneously?

Opponents to Intelligent Design contend that it is simply creationism in disguise, an attempt by those who are religious to create a way to reinsert their belief systems and creationism, even if they do not use that terminology, back into secular establishments and schools.

### Evolution

While the concept of evolution has been around in varying forms for centuries, what Darwin was able to accomplish, as opposed to his predecessors, was the popularization of the theory and communicate it to the public at large to a degree never before seen.<sup>20</sup> The theory of evolution essentially presents the idea that the universe is not the product of a unique creative act by a deity, rather, that the universe, and humanity, “are the end product of a process of trial-and-error adaptation and natural selection.”<sup>21</sup> Evolution can be defined as “development,” with the theory contending that species naturally develop and change through random mutations over long periods of time, with the strongest surviving as they adapt. This development can happen on both a micro and macro scale in a species, or even result in the development of new species.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Dembski, *Intelligent Design*, 147.

<sup>20</sup> Douglas Jacoby, *Genesis, Science & History*, (Billerica, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 2004), 167.

<sup>21</sup> Enns, *The Evolution of Adam*, Kindle location 209.

<sup>22</sup> Jacoby, *Genesis, Science & History*, 169.

Tim Berra defines micro and macro evolution as follows:<sup>23</sup>

- Microevolution: Change in gene frequency within a population, which may lead to the formation of new species.
- Macroevolution: Involves evolutionary change above the species level, as for example in long-term trends within whole lineages, or in mass extinctions.

Many may argue this point, but to some degree, the theory of evolution is almost universally accepted. Specifically, the evidence in support of microevolution has become widely accepted, with much of the debate centered on the question of macroevolution. Jacoby notes that “the dispute is not really over whether evolution has occurred, but the extent to which it has occurred.”<sup>24</sup>

Often, creationists from a traditional church background frame the debate as an attempt by atheists to rid the world of God. However, for many pro-evolution scientists, that is not the goal at all. Rather, their focus is to answer the question, “how did life develop?”<sup>25</sup> Austin Hitt, a secular evolutionist, has expressed confusion over why the conservative Christian community has been so antagonistic on this topic specifically, as well as the perceived mistrust of the scientific community in general.<sup>26</sup> Hoffmeier confronted this mistrust when he observed that evolution and the sciences are merely descriptive; they are not tasked with addressing the who or what was behind the science. He writes, “Even if one recognizes that biological evolution

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<sup>23</sup> Berra, *Evolution and the Myth of Creationism*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Jacoby, *Genesis, Science & History*, 169.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Hitt, *The Evolution of Creationism In America*, 58-68.

occurred, the Bible demands that we view this as *how* God created. God is the *who* behind the processes and He sovereignly controls them creating according to His will.”<sup>27</sup>

Critics of evolution question the evidence supporting the claims of evolution, as well voice concern that many accept as fact something still considered a theory.

### Young Earth Creationism

While there are similarities between the Intelligent Design theory and Young Earth Creationism, Intelligent Design focuses on a more scientific approach to hint at the divine while Young Earth Creationism directly explains origins as a deliberate act of God. Proponents of this view understand Genesis as a historical document, accurate due to its inspiration by God, and therefore see the creation event as being a literal six 24-hour day process as they understand the first chapter of Genesis.<sup>28</sup>

This approach to scripture is called “concordism,” which “seeks to give a modern scientific explanation for the details in the text.”<sup>29</sup> This approach asserts that the inerrancy of scripture demands that science must align with scripture to be accurate. Thus, they have proposed drastic changes to earth due to creation, the fall of man, and the flood, to align the science of Genesis with the science of today.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Charles Halton, ed., *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither? Three Views On the Bible's Earliest Chapters (Counterpoints: Bible and Theology)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 144.

<sup>28</sup> Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time*, 45.

<sup>29</sup> John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 16.

<sup>30</sup> David Snoke, *A Biblical Case for an Old Earth*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 115.

With creation taking a week, and Adam and Eve viewed as literal individuals and the beginning of the human race, Young Earth creationists then used the genealogies in scripture that trace Adam to Jesus to determine the age of the earth. Irish Anglican Archbishop James Ussher was the first to do so, from which he arrived at 4004 BC as the year of creation.<sup>31</sup> This would put creation's total age at approximately 6000 years. Kurt Wise contends that the genealogies in scripture, with the age of the fathers at the birth of their sons, were "specifically designed for chronology and were intended to be utilized in that manner," as a tool from God for having an accurate historical record of creation and humanity.<sup>32</sup>

Dating methods used by the scientific community for both determining the age of earth, as well as astrological data used to determine age are in direct conflict with the age proposed by Young Earth creationists and therefore rejected as inaccurate as they conflict with what they see in scripture. Young Earth proponents have advocated for alternate dating methods that confirm a young earth explanation as one possible explanation. Another possible explanation used is that God created a "Mature Creation."<sup>33</sup> This is defined as a creation with all the light particles created in transit, an earth at full development; while the data may seem to indicate old age, the reality is that it was created mature, much like Adam and Eve were created fully developed and mature (Genesis 1-2). Another example of God working in this way is Christ's first miracle in

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<sup>31</sup> Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), 82.

<sup>32</sup> Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time*, 49.

<sup>33</sup> D. Russell Humphreys, *Starlight and Time: Solving the Puzzle of Distant Starlight in a Young Universe* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 1994), 43.

which He turned water into fully mature wine in an instant, a process that normally takes long periods of time (John 2).

Critics of this approach accuse it of being based on faulty assumptions, faulty data, a misapplication of principles, laws and equations, and a failure to consider opposing evidence.<sup>34</sup>

### Old Earth Creationism

Old Earth Creationism has in common with Young Earth Creationism a recognition of God as the prime mover in creation, as well as scripture as being from God. How scripture is understood and the methods used by God, however, is where this view separates itself from Young Earth Creationism. This approach sees value in scientific evidence as well, generally not as something that trumps scripture, but rather as something that can reveal God's working in creation. Old Earth creationists accept astrological data that places the age of the universe at significantly old, as well as dating methods on earth itself; for example, coral reef formations and sediment accumulations in bodies of water, both of which would take millions of years to form.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the fossil record indicates a long process of ongoing creation, with new species gradually coming into existence over time.<sup>36</sup>

Hugh Ross writes, "Science is an attempt to interpret the facts of nature. Christian theology is an attempt to interpret the words of the Bible. Since, according to that theology, God created the universe and is also responsible for the words of the Bible, and since He does not lie

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<sup>34</sup> Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective On the Creation-Date Controversy* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress Publishing Group, 1994), 103.

<sup>35</sup> Snoke, *A Biblical Case for an Old Earth*, 32.

<sup>36</sup> Ross, *Creation and Time*, 50.

or deceive, there can be no contradiction between the words of the Bible and the facts of nature.”<sup>37</sup> He goes on to explain that any seeming contradictions are instead due to human misinterpretation.

In this viewpoint, there are a number of different approaches to reconciling both scripture and the scientific evidence regarding the age of the earth. One theory that gained popularity in the twentieth century was the “gap theory,” in which it was proposed that there was a large gap of time between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2; this allowed for both an old earth as well as a young humanity.<sup>38</sup> Others have used some of the various ways that “day” can be translated to suggest that the “days” of Genesis 1 refer to “ages,” or long periods of time. Some theories have suggested a long period of time between Genesis 2:3 and Genesis 2:4.<sup>39</sup> Others propose that Genesis 1-11 is not actually history, and it is certainly not a scientific textbook; rather it is mythological stories that convey God’s truth, much like Jesus used parables to communicate truth.<sup>40</sup> Through these different explanations there is a great deal of flexibility when it comes to understanding the beginning of Genesis, from a very literal creation story similar to Young Earth creationists to a view much more similar to that of Evolutionists, with the major difference being that the process is guided by God rather than random chance.

Old Earth creationists have as one of their guiding questions the issue of Genesis’ purpose and the creation narrative found there. Was it intended to be a scientific text revealing

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<sup>37</sup> Ross, *Creation and Time*, 11-12.

<sup>38</sup> Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 115.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Halton, *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither?*, 138.

information beyond the understanding of ancient near eastern cultures? Does it instead accommodate what would have been the understanding of the world at the time rather than reveal actual details? Is it meant to be historical, chronicling the human race's history? Or is its purpose something else? Many Old Earth creationists would opt for something along the lines of the last one, viewing Genesis 1-11 not as science or even precise history, but rather something more significant.

John Walton notes the poetical aspect of these early chapters of Genesis, and while there are historical details, the focus is more along the lines of man's relationship with God and the demonstration of a need for a covenant with God.<sup>41</sup> The way language is used would have been clearly understood at the time of the writing of Genesis, based on other similar Ancient Near Eastern documents, as ascribing function and creating temple space (the Garden of Eden), not material creation.<sup>42</sup> He goes on to observe that Genesis 12-50 then describes the formation of the covenant. This approach fits the larger focus of scripture in God's desire to see a fallen humanity restored to Him, beginning with Adam and culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is just one example of many approaches to Genesis that seek to both honor the scriptures while at the same seeing a way for science to be compatible rather than in conflict.

Critics of Old Earth creationism come from both sides of the fence; evolutionists reject the inclusion of the divine in a process they view as strictly random. Young Earth creationists reject what they view to be a non-literal view of scripture, as well as an emphasis on other

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<sup>41</sup> Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 37.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

ancient religions and secular sources, accusing it of trying to mix spiritual and secular with the result being only a watered-down scripture with God's work in creation reduced.

### **Conclusion**

There is a danger to human arrogance, a lesson that can be learned over and over through history. One of the great risks in discussing creation and origins is overconfidence in one's interpretation or knowledge. There was a time when the scientific knowledge of the day was convinced the universe rotated around the earth. Up until a century ago, it was accepted as fact that the universe was static. The Pharisees were so convinced of their centuries of study and tradition regarding the prophecies of the Old Testament that they were unable to recognize the Messiah when He arrived. The church has used scripture to defend slavery, racism and oppression of women. Scientists look back and marvel at how wrong they were, while Christians look back and wonder how they could have ever used scripture in such erroneous ways. In 2018, Nasa will launch a mission that will go closer to the sun than has ever been achieved; coming within four million miles of the sun, this will yield vast amounts of new data, potentially shattering current accepted scientific theories based on information gathered from between 50 million to 90 million miles away.<sup>43</sup>

Walton points out that one of the dangers in reading scripture as scientific text is the constantly changing nature of scientific understanding; at what point in time would God have targeted this message? That approach would assume "that the text should be understood in reference to current scientific consensus, which would mean that it would neither correspond to

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<sup>43</sup> <https://www.nasa.gov/feature/goddard/2016/nasa-s-solar-probe-plus-mission-moves-one-step-closer-to-launch>

last century's scientific consensus nor to that which may develop in the next century."<sup>44</sup> The concordist approach suffers from the flaw of assuming scripture would not be understandable for the generations up until now, while at the same time making it antiquated to the generations to come.

Walton observes that "there is not a single instance [in scripture] in which God revealed to Israel a science beyond their own culture."<sup>45</sup> God appears to have chosen deliberately to communicate in ways in which the people of the day could understand and relate, while at the same time passing on timeless truths applicable to all humanity. There was no need to go beyond that level of revelation because ultimately, the purpose of scripture was not to convey scientific principles, but to restore a broken and fallen humanity to the perfect state of unity with Him He intended through His plan of redemption.

The goal of this paper is to demonstrate that if God is the Creator of all that exists, including the foundations of science, then the one should not contradict the other. This approach to scripture, with a humility recognizing that only God knows all truth, both spiritual and scientific, allows believers to see not only the truths of scripture, but to also view scientific discoveries not as threats to faith but rather as a confirmation of God's power throughout the universe.

"Though [God's] message transcends culture, the form it was given in is, to some extent, culture-bound."<sup>46</sup> Scripture is intended for all humanity, for all time, but it was written largely

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<sup>44</sup> Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 17.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> John H. Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 19

from a Jewish perspective thousands of years ago, with cultural influences from all around them. Believers today are interpreting messages from long dead cultures and languages, deciphering meaning and intent that requires humility and caution. Likewise, the pursuit of science is a constantly changing pursuit, with current theories and opinions facing the potential of further confirmation or rejection at any time. It would be inappropriate to force meaning on texts beyond what they were intended to communicate, just as it would be inappropriate to trust current scientific understanding as infallible.

Ross points out that conflict between theology and science must be attributed to human misunderstanding, without fear for the integrity of scripture or outrage against science, but instead “accepted for the time being as indications that further research is needed,” research and study that ultimately will lead to a greater understanding of God’s design and plan for creation.<sup>47</sup>

As Psalms 19:1 (NIV) promises, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”

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<sup>47</sup> Ross, *Creation and Time*, 12.

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