

Preface

I am a thoroughly committed and unapologetic born-again Christian who holds a PhD in theology. And I am a thoroughly committed and unapologetic evolutionist who also has a PhD in biology.

I OFTEN BEGIN PUBLIC lectures by stating these facts, and as most can appreciate, it certainly captures the attention of my audience! The common perception both inside and outside of the Church is that Christianity and evolution are forever irreconcilable. Their relationship is viewed as the main conflict in the so-called war between science and religion. Nearly everyone would suspect that a person claiming to be both an evangelical theologian and an evolutionary biologist either fails to appreciate the logical incompatibility between this religious tradition and scientific theory, or compromises the foundational principles of one or both. So, can a Christian be an evolutionist? Most people today say, “No.”

My answer to this question is a resounding, “Yes.” This book explains how a Christian can be an evolutionist, and even argues why it is important for those who love Jesus to accept evolution. The view of origins I will present is evolutionary creation. It asserts that evolution is purpose driven and not the result of blind chance. Stated more precisely, this position claims that *the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created the universe and life through an ordained and sustained evolutionary process*. To be sure, mentioning the Trinity and evolution in the same sentence is rarely heard in church, if ever. To some this might be offensive. But no insult is intended, and I will ask my brothers and sisters in Christ for their patience as they read this book.

Arriving at the belief that the Lord employed evolution as His creative method is not only challenging, but also takes time. Christians who accept this origins position often use the phrase “coming to terms with evolution” to describe the intellectual and spiritual process they experienced

Preface

over an extended period. On this journey a wide range of issues are considered. To mention a few, God's miraculous activity in the world, His existence reflected by intelligent design throughout nature, the interpretation of the biblical creation accounts, and the theological implications of humans descending from primitive forms of life. Consequently, anyone engaging the ideas in this book will find that it is not a quick read. Coming to terms with evolution is a gradual process that involves numerous struggles. At times it is not comfortable. And most importantly, it is done on our knees in prayerful reflection.

Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution rests upon the time-honored belief that divine revelation flows from two major sources—the Book of God's Words and the Book of God's Works. Together the Bible and the physical world complement each other in revealing the glory and character of the Creator. In particular, I will explore Christian faith and evolutionary science through a Two Books model and propose an intimate and fruitful relationship between Scripture and science. A summary of the book is as follows:

The first two chapters introduce basic terminology and outline five primary positions on the origin of the universe and life. Regrettably, many Christians and non-Christians see origins as a simple black-and-white issue, and this forces them into choosing between two options—either evolution or creation. However, the opening chapters reveal that there is a spectrum of possibilities; namely, young earth (six-day) creation, progressive (old earth or day-age) creation, evolutionary creation, deistic (impersonal god) evolution, and dysteleological (atheistic) evolution. A description of the strengths and weaknesses of these positions allows readers to begin the process of making informed decisions with regard to their own views. Most will come to the conclusion that it is time for everyone to move beyond the so-called “evolution” vs. “creation” debate.

Chapter 3 explores God's activity in the world and the notion of intelligent design from an evolutionary creationist perspective. I want to make my position clear at this point: I believe in miracles and I have experienced them personally on many occasions. I see design and intelligence reflected every day in the beauty, complexity, and functionality of the physical world. As Scripture states, “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps 19:1–4) and the creation discloses His “eternal power and divine nature” (Rom 1:18–23). And I believe that every person is accountable before the Creator with regard to this revelation in nature. To the surprise

Preface

of many, the third chapter argues that instead of undermining Christian faith, the evolutionary sciences strengthen and expand the argument from design by including the divinely ordained and sustained natural processes that created the universe and life over eons of time.

A central issue in the origins debate involves the interpretation of the opening chapters of the Bible. Today there are a lot of questions being asked by Christians. Are the six days of creation in Gen 1 literal 24-hour days or do they represent long periods of millions of years? Was Noah's flood a global event or was it limited to a local region? Was Adam the first person in history and have all human beings descended from him? Chapters 4 to 7 are the core of this book and they focus upon the interpretation of Scripture. I will present a counterintuitive approach to reading passages that deal with origins. But this proposal is rooted deeply in biblical evidence. Once more, I want to make my beliefs clear at this time: Scripture is the Holy Spirit inspired Word of God. As the apostle Paul states, it is "God-breathed" (2 Tim 3:16) and contains "the very words of God" (Rom 3:2). I came to Christ through reading the gospel of John, so I know personally the soul and mind-impacting power of the Bible. And I continue to drink deeply from it in daily morning devotions for my spiritual nourishment. Despite the innumerable ways that men and women throughout history have interpreted Scripture, those sincerely searching for God have always met the Lord Jesus while on their knees before The Word.

An assumption embraced by many Christians is that God revealed scientific facts in the Bible hundreds of generations before their discovery by modern science. This view of biblical inspiration asserts that the Holy Spirit dictated information about the natural world to secretary-like writers. As a result, there is purportedly a correspondence or alignment between Scripture and science. This is known as "concordism." Christians often claim that it is a feature of biblical inerrancy and infallibility. However, chapters 4 and 5 review the astronomy, geology, and biology in Scripture and conclude that the science in the Bible is an ancient understanding of nature—the science-of-the-day a few thousand years ago. According to this perspective, the Holy Spirit descended to the knowledge level of the inspired authors by using their conceptualization of the physical world in order to communicate as effectively as possible inerrant and infallible Messages of Faith. This approach to biblical revelation is modeled on the greatest act of revelation—the Incarnation. God revealed

Preface

Himself by descending into human flesh through Jesus, and in a similar way, the Bible uses a human understanding of the structure, operation, and origin of the world.

Chapters 6 and 7 examine Gen 1–11 in order to determine whether concordism characterizes the relationship between the biblical origins accounts and the facts of history. Like the ancient science in Scripture, it will be shown that these opening chapters include an ancient understanding of the origin of the cosmos and humanity. This ancient history is a vessel that transports inerrant and infallible foundations of the Christian faith: the universe and life were made by the God of the Bible, the creation is very good, only men and women are created in the Image of God, the Lord intended us to be in relationships with one another and in particular with Him, everyone has fallen into sin, God judges humans for their sinfulness, and He has chosen a special people through which to bless the entire world. Together, the four chapters on scriptural interpretation conclude that concordism is not a feature of Gen 1–11, and as a result there is no conflict with the modern understanding of origins offered by academic disciplines of science and history.

This conclusion opens the way for a Christian approach to human evolution. An instructive parallel assists believers to conceptualize this challenging idea. As the Lord created each of us in our mother's womb through embryological natural processes, He also made humankind using His ordained and sustained evolutionary laws of nature. In both embryology and evolution, the Image of God is mysteriously manifested. Similarly, in a way that cannot be fully understood, during these creative processes people become morally responsible and then all fall into sin. Chapter 8 also investigates the issue of justifying how the God of Love could have created humans through a method that includes suffering and death. In fact, the question that *always* arises in my public lectures on evolutionary creation is the relationship between the beginning of physical death and the original sin of Adam. Genesis 3, Rom 5–8, and 1 Cor 15 clearly state that death entered the world because Adam sinned in the garden of Eden. However, biological evolution asserts that death appeared hundreds of millions of years before human beings. The arguments in this book are set up to deal with the sin-death problem. The successful defense of evolutionary creation will depend on offering a solution that satisfies Christians.

Preface

Our generation has become particularly sensitive to the importance of personal stories. The topic of origins has consumed me throughout most of my adult life. It has shaped my beliefs, and consequently, the way I have lived. By the time I finished a course on biological evolution in my first year of college, I had lost my Christian faith. In coming to the Lord seven years later, anti-evolutionary arguments were foundational in my developing worldview. They influenced me so much that I left a rewarding professional career and followed a calling to become a six-day creation scientist in order to attack universities and the teaching of evolution. In preparation for battle, I pursued graduate school training both in theology and biology with a focus on origins. Chapter 9 presents in more detail my spiritual and intellectual adventure in opening the Book of God's Words and the Book of God's Works.

The last chapter offers some reflections on the origins debate. As much as I find this topic fascinating, my central motivation for having an academic career centered on it is pastoral. So much damage has resulted from the evolution vs. creation mindset that grips most people. Let us for a moment assume that the Lord created the universe and life through an evolutionary process. Can anyone imagine how much of a *stumbling block* (2 Cor 6:2-3) Christian anti-evolutionists have been to non-Christian scientists who see the physical evidence supporting evolution every day in their laboratories? Or what happens to the child who was taught anti-evolutionary views in a Christian school or a Sunday school, and then he or she discovers the scientific data for evolution first hand in the biology department of a college? I have personally lived that disastrous result, and I have seen it too many times at my university. Today, origins are an important discussion both inside and outside of the Church. If we are going to be credible witnesses of Jesus to an unbelieving world, then what are we to say regarding this issue?

Finally, a couple of qualifying comments are in order. I must underline that this book focuses on theology and not science. Occasionally I will appeal to scientific evidence, but only to facts held by most people (e.g., the structure of the solar system). Four short appendices offer some basic evidence and arguments for biological evolution. Of course, those familiar with the complex and overwhelming data that supports this scientific theory know that such an introduction hardly scratches the surface. Yet in drawing a modest sketch, my hope is that Christians who are skeptical

Preface

of evolution will be encouraged to open the Book of God's Works to see this amazing evidence.

I strongly advise that the chapters in this book be read in sequence. The conclusions in later chapters are dependent on the terms and arguments presented in earlier ones. A short glossary is found at the end of the book to assist readers with the terminology. I suggest that they introduce themselves to these concepts before starting.

No doubt about it, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* is provocative. Readers must be warned that I will make a number of pointed and even disturbing statements, especially with regard to the meaning of several biblical passages. Yet as the epigraphs of this book reveal, Christian leaders in our generation are coming to terms with evolution. The Reverend Billy Graham tersely states, "The Bible is not a book of science." He acknowledges that Christians "have misinterpreted the Scriptures many times" and implies that concordism is a "mistake."¹ Pope John Paul II recognizes that the inspired authors of the Word of God held an ancient understanding of nature. He also affirms the credibility of evolution as "more than a hypothesis."² But most importantly, these two historic Christian figures focus on a primary intention of Holy Scripture—revelation of our relationship with the Lord.

In many ways, the debate over origins today is a recycling of the Galileo affair. As the seventeenth-century Church wrestled with the scientific fact that the earth is not stationary nor at the center of the universe, so too we will come to terms with the reality that we evolved from earlier forms of life. Hopefully, this book will offer a few suggestions in making that process somewhat more comfortable.