

## Theological Observer

### A Response to Day-Age Creationism

In an article in the Summer 2017 issue of *Concordia Journal*, John Jurchen explained the position known as old earth creationism or day-age creationism.<sup>1</sup> Here I would like to respond to the idea of old earth creationism. There will also be limited discussion of another position: theistic evolutionism or evolutionary creationism.<sup>2</sup>

The proposal by day-age creationists and theistic evolutionists that each of the days mentioned in Genesis 1 and 2 was an era consisting of millions or billions of years is generally due to one of two reasons. One reason is to allow for evolution, as does theistic evolutionism. The other is to accommodate, as does old earth creationism, a “scientific” analysis of the available evidence (including the fossil record and evidence from the fields of geology and astronomy) which concludes that the earth is billions of years old.

By “evolutionism,” I do not mean belief in microevolution (changes within a species), which has occurred. Rather, the term *evolutionism* in this article refers

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<sup>1</sup> John Jurchen, “The Age of the Earth and Confessional Lutheranism: Speaking the Truth in Love,” *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 3 (2017): 64–74. To be clear, my article *is not* an attack on Jurchen or his article. Jurchen wrote a letter on January 6, 2018 (printed in the Winter 2018 issue of *Concordia Journal* [44, no. 1, pp. 13–14]), in which he stated, “A Young Earth Creation perspective with six normal days is taught throughout the clear Word of God”; “I consider the 5th article of A Brief Statement an excellent exposition of our LCMS Doctrine of Creation”; “I did not mean to imply in my article that pastors and teachers should promote an extended duration for the days of creation”; “I did not endorse in my article . . . biological evolution, Theistic or otherwise”; and “I was in error to imply that the LCMS has acknowledged Day-Age theory as an acceptable exegesis of the Creation account of Genesis 1 & 2.” Indeed, Jurchen has asked *Concordia Journal* “to withdraw the article due to the lack of clarity and concerns raised.” Here I am dealing simply with the issues raised in that article, since it is a matter of public record and summarizes positions taken by others elsewhere. Since Dr. Jurchen has withdrawn the article, I do not consider the positions in that article as reflecting his own views.

<sup>2</sup> On the terms *young earth creationism*, *old earth creationism*, and *evolutionary creationism*, see the following articles: Charles P. Arand, “A Travel Guide to the Evangelical Creation Debates: Introduction,” *Concordia Theology* (blog), December 12, 2017, <https://concordiatheology.org/2017/12/evangelical-creation-debates-travel-guide>; Charles P. Arand, “A Travel Guide to the Evangelical Creation Debates: What Is Young Earth Creationism?,” *Concordia Theology* (blog), February 23, 2018, <https://concordiatheology.org/2018/02/a-travel-guide-to-the-evangelical-creation-debates-what-is-young-earth-creationism>; Charles P. Arand, “A Travel Guide to the Evangelical Creation Debates: What Is Old Earth Creationism?,” *Concordia Theology* (blog), February 21, 2018, <https://concordiatheology.org/2018/02/a-travel-guide-to-the-evangelical-creation-debates-what-is-old-earth-creationism>; Charles P. Arand, “A Travel Guide to the Evangelical Creation Debates: What Is Evolutionary Creationism?,” *Concordia Theology* (blog), February 28, 2018, <https://concordiatheology.org/2018/02/a-travel-guide-to-the-evangelical-creation-debates-what-is-evolutionary-creationism>.

to the position that seeks to explain the origin of the universe and of biological species according to completely mechanical processes (or principles) of nature. In this view, a cosmic “big bang” happened to occur, and then life developed according to survival of the fittest, or natural selection. Its proponents admit that this type of evolution of life forms (macroevolution)—which they claim came about mainly because of random mutations—takes billions of years for species to develop into new species and the various life forms to emerge. This is the evolutionism that had its classical formulation with Charles Darwin; its purpose is to describe development from a one-celled organism to *Homo sapiens*.

This evolutionism is popularly referred to as a theory, but a more accurate term is *model*. A theory has all the available evidence behind it; a model is an attempt to put the evidence together. Macroevolution by no means is scientifically proven fact. That is, it has not been demonstrated in the laboratory to be true by repeatable and verifiable experimentation. Further, evolutionism is a model with a multitude of problems, as demonstrated by very capable creationist scientists.<sup>3</sup> It is well beyond the scope of this short article to go into a review of the arguments against evolutionism put forth by these scientists.

It is important to recognize that how one interprets the evidence which is available regarding the primeval history—origins and the early history of this earth—depends on one’s starting point. Evolutionism has atheism as its foundation. That is, in speaking of the primeval history, evolutionism does so, once again, by referring to completely mechanical processes of nature, entirely and intentionally leaving out from the discussion any intervention by a Supreme Being. Creationism has as its foundation the assumption that there is a God, and this Supreme Being is responsible for the primeval history—that the whole universe with all of its complexity and different life forms is due entirely to his personal creative work, his direct intervention.

The question arises as to why one would try to bring evolutionism—with its stance of excluding God from consideration—together with the notion that a Supreme Being was involved in the existence of this universe and biological species. This effort by theistic evolutionists or evolutionary creationists really is illogical—like trying to be a meat-eating vegetarian, or a Lutheran Calvinist (to borrow the phraseology of David Kaufmann<sup>4</sup>). They certainly should not feel compelled from an intellectual standpoint to accept evolutionism to a certain degree. On the one hand, evolutionism has been shown to be a model with serious, indeed fatal,

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<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., the multitude of publications from organizations such as Answers in Genesis and the Institute for Creation Research.

<sup>4</sup> David Kaufmann, “Theistic Evolution – No Way!,” *Affirm* (October 1994): 4.

flaws. On the other hand, theistic evolutionists or evolutionary creationists seem to ignore, or not take seriously, the scientific and legitimate explanations put forth by young earth creationists in distinction from evolutionary proposals.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, old earth creationists have put aside these explanations and have chosen an interpretation of the available evidence that concludes the earth is billions of years old. In contrast to theistic evolutionism and old earth creationism, let it be stated clearly that young earth creationism is perfectly viable for the scientist studying origins.

Most theistic evolutionists, in trying to bring together evolution and the activity of a Supreme Being, are content with proposing that God created matter, life, and energy, following which he set in motion the process of evolution and then let everything develop via evolution. Along with this, they hold that it took billions of years for the changes to take place and, wanting to bring in Scripture, explain that the six days of creation were really six eras or epochs.

Old earth creationism (or day-age creationism) varies from theistic evolutionism to a lesser or greater extent. Jurchen explains that according to old earth creationists, God, during the billions of years, “periodically intervened in creative acts” and he notes that “old-earth creation . . . posits that God worked actively throughout his creation.” Those adhering to old earth creationism believe they “can accept the standard, secular interpretation of the geological record [that is, billions of years] while still holding to an exegetically credible six-day (*yom*) creation.”<sup>6</sup>

However, the old-earth- or day-age-creation position is seriously challenged by the following observations and questions.

1. Genesis reports that God made Adam and Eve on the sixth day and God “rested” on the seventh day; then, after the seventh day, Adam and Eve fell into sin, and after the fall, they lived on earth for a period of time. So, Adam and Eve lived through part of the sixth day, all of the seventh day, and for quite a while beyond that. Are the day-age creationists prepared to say that Adam and Eve lived for billions of years? If so, this would contradict Genesis 5:5, which reports that Adam lived 930 years. Each day, according to Genesis 1, consisted of a time of light

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<sup>5</sup> Young earth creationists vary in their understanding concerning the age of the earth. Most would take a position on a spectrum ranging from a little over 6,000 to about 15,000 years. The 6,000 figure derives from taking the genealogies of Genesis as complete and as providing all the information necessary to calculate how old the earth is. I side with those young earth creationists who believe that the earth is older than 6,000 years, due in part to the conclusion that there are gaps in the genealogies. See, e.g., Andrew Steinmann, “Gaps in the Genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174, no. 694 (2017): 141–158. The impression given by Scripture, though, is that the gaps are not that many or that large so as to venture an estimation beyond 10,000–15,000 years for the earth’s age.

<sup>6</sup> Jurchen, “The Age of the Earth and Confessional Lutheranism,” 71.

and a time of darkness. If a day was a billion years, were there periods of darkness lasting millions of years? On the sixth day, God made Eve somewhat later than Adam. If a day was a billion years, did God make Eve, say, about 100,000 years after Adam?

2. Outside of Genesis 1 and 2, whenever a number occurs in the rest of Genesis in connection with the Hebrew word יוֹם (“day”), the sense is always a twenty-four-hour period of time.<sup>7</sup> If that is the meaning elsewhere in Genesis, one would think that should also be the sense in Genesis 1 and 2. Moses wrote Genesis 1 and 2 (and 3) to be interpreted as historical and not as figurative or mythological accounts. There is no decisive reason to take these chapters as figurative language. Rather, Genesis 1–3 consists of historical narrative prose, as indicated, for example, by the frequent use of the definite direct object marker ׀ַתְּ and the *waw*-consecutive imperfect.<sup>8</sup> The language of Genesis 1 can be called exalted, and there is repetition of phraseology, but this is due to the nature of the event Moses describes, which was a one-time, awesome event. Moses does the same thing in Genesis 1–3—relating what actually happened and was spoken—as he does in the rest of Genesis and the rest of the Torah. Genesis 4–50, the remainder of the Old Testament, and the entirety of the New Testament all take Genesis 1–3 as historical.

3. In the Old Testament, outside of Genesis 1 and 2, when the words עֶרֶב (“evening”) and בֹּקֶר (“morning”) occur together in the same verse, the reference is

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<sup>7</sup> The passages are Gen 7:4, 10, 12, 17, 24; 8:3, 6, 10, 12; 17:12; 21:4; 22:4; 24:55; 27:45; 30:36; 31:22, 23; 33:13; 34:25; 40:12, 13, 18, 19, 20; 42:17; 42:18; 50:3, 10. Gen 27:44 and 29:20 do not pertain to this discussion. These verses use the word יְחָדִים (the plural of “one”), with the sense “few” or “some” (F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907], דָּד, 1; *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, ed. D. J. A. Clines [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2011], 1:181, 1c; L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 4 vols. [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–1999], 1:30, e). Also not pertinent are those passages in which “days” occurs along with a number that is associated with “years” (e.g., throughout Gen 5, starting with v. 4; Gen 6:3; 9:29; 11:32; 25:7; 35:28; 41:1; 47:9, 28). An article by James Stambaugh published by the Institute for Creation Research (“The Meaning of ‘Day’ in Genesis,” *Impact: Vital Articles on Science/Creation* no. 184 [October 1988]: ii) asserts that outside of Gen 1 and 2, throughout the rest of the Old Testament, whenever a number occurs in connection with יוֹם, the sense of the Hebrew word is always a twenty-four-hour period of time.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Kaiser (“The Literary Form of Genesis 1–11,” in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. Barton Payne [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1970], 59–60) correctly observes with regard to the genre of the first major portion of Genesis, chs. 1–11: “Genesis 1–11 is prose and not poetry. The use of the *waw* consecutive with the verb to describe sequential acts, the frequent use of the direct object sign and the so-called relative pronoun, the stress on definitions, and the spreading out of these events in a sequential order indicates that we are in prose and not in poetry. Say what *we* will, the author plainly intends to be doing the same thing in these chapters that he is doing in chapters 12–50.”

always to a twenty-four-hour day.<sup>9</sup> If that is the case elsewhere in the Old Testament, including the writings of Moses, one could argue that should also be the understanding within Genesis 1 and 2.

4. If Moses had wanted to relate that creation involved long periods of time, he would not have used the noun *day* but instead phrases that clearly expressed this reality, such as “many years,” “many generations,” “ten thousand times ten thousand years” (cf. Dan 7:10), or something else.<sup>10</sup>

5. Most theistic evolutionists believe that God set evolution in motion and then through evolution, everything came about, including animals. This position goes against a natural reading of Genesis 1 and 2, which presents God as directly and immediately making the animals and does not lead one to think of the evolution of any creature. For example, in Genesis 1, the same verb—בָּרָא, “create”—is used for God making the water creatures and the winged flying creatures, and for his making man (Gen 1:21, 27). In Genesis 2:7, Yahweh formed (the verb יָצַר) the man of dust from the ground. But in Genesis 2:19, the same verb appears again, also associated with the ground: “Now Yahweh God had *formed* from the ground every living thing of the field and all the birds of the heavens.”<sup>11</sup> This shows that as God formed the man, so also God formed the field creatures and the birds, and that they did not come into existence by evolution.

Many old earth creationists reject altogether the notion that all or some of the animals came into existence via evolution. Rather, they would explain that God over billions of years periodically intervened in a direct manner to create each and every new species of life.<sup>12</sup>

However, all old earth creationists (as all theistic evolutionists) affirm that there was death, including animal death, before the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. They take such a position because the animals, according to their way of thinking, existed millions or even billions of years before the fall and because of their interpretation of the fossil record. Jurchen writes that the old earth, day-age perspective “carries

<sup>9</sup> Representative passages are Gen 49:27; Exod 16:8, 12, 13; 18:13, 14; 27:21; 29:39, 41; Lev 6:13 (E 20); 24:3; Num 9:21; 28:4; Deut 16:4; 28:67; 1 Kgs 17:6; 2 Kgs 16:15; 1 Chr 16:40; 2 Chr 2:3 (E 4); 31:3; Esth 2:14; Ezra 3:3; Job 4:20; Ps 30:6 (E 5); 55:18 (E 17); 65:9 (E 8); 90:6; Eccl 11:6; Isa 5:11; Ezek 24:18; 33:22; Dan 8:26; Zeph 3:3. The word לַיְלָה (“night”) occurs with בִּקְרָא in, e.g., Lev 6:2 (E 9); Judg 16:2; Ruth 3:13; 1 Sam 19:11; Ps 92:3 (E 2); and Isa 21:12, but the combination refers to a twenty-four-hour day. Also with this sense is the combination of נֶשֶׁף (“twilight”) with בִּקְרָא in Isa 5:11. In Dan 8:14, “evenings” and “mornings” refer to evening and morning sacrifices. See Andrew Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 404–406.

<sup>10</sup> See Douglas Judisch, “The Length of the Days of Creation,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 52 (October 1988): 265–271.

<sup>11</sup> All Scripture translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>12</sup> Arand, “A Travel Guide to the Evangelical Creation Debates: What Is Old Earth Creationism?”

with it the associated fossil record and the expectation that myriads of organisms lived and died in the ages that constitute the creation week and predated the sin of Adam.”<sup>13</sup>

This could be seen as having a terrible consequence with regard to the gospel. One could logically conclude that if death preceded man and was not a result of Adam’s sin, then sin is a fiction; and if sin is a fiction, then there is no need for a Savior.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, old earth creationism does not accept this conclusion. Day-age creationism tries to bypass this issue by asserting that Scripture does not say whether animals died before the fall.<sup>15</sup> Thus, according to this view, one is free to believe that long before the sin of Adam and Eve, animals were dying because of fatal mutations, not being fittest for their environment, disease or parasites, old age, or because they were killed by other animals.

In response, one could begin by saying that this position holding to animal death before the fall presents a different characterization of God and a different view of the world than what is derived from a straightforward reading of Genesis 1 and 2. With such a reading, those chapters portray a benevolent God whose word is almighty and who gave the plants and the fruit of the trees as food not only to the first humans but also “to every living thing of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to every creeping thing on the earth” (Gen 1:30; thus, all these creatures were vegetarians), a God who at the end of the sixth day saw that all he had made “was very good” (Gen 1:31). Yahweh looked on a beautiful, harmonious, peaceful earth.

This picture of God and the earth is drastically altered by the idea that animal death preceded the sin of Adam and Eve. If pain and death were a part of pre-fall history, then it follows that pain and death were part of God’s plan before the fall into sin. One could ask, “How can God be considered benevolent?”<sup>16</sup> Wayne Grudem observes that “the kind of earth we have today, with . . . poisonous snakes and venomous scorpions, malaria-spreading mosquitoes, and . . . [dangerous] sharks and lions, can hardly be thought to be the best kind of creation that God

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<sup>13</sup> Jurchen, “The Age of the Earth and Confessional Lutheranism,” 72.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Richard Bozarth, “The Meaning of Evolution,” *The American Atheist* 20, no. 2 (1978): 19, 30.

<sup>15</sup> Jurchen, “The Age of the Earth and Confessional Lutheranism,” 72.

<sup>16</sup> Garrett DeWeese, “Theistic Evolution and the Problem of Natural Evil,” in *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*, ed. J. P. Moreland et al. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 683–684.

could make, a creation that would cause God to say, ‘and behold, *it was very good.*’<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, old earth creationists, with their thinking that the present reality of animal death basically matches, and in essence is a continuation of, the reality in the pre-fall animal world, go against Romans 8:19–22. The apostle Paul writes,

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.<sup>18</sup>

As Guy Waters comments, “That creation ‘was subjected to futility’ means two things. First, the present state of affairs here described by Paul did not characterize creation at its inception. Second, creation did not choose, as it were, its present condition. God has consigned the creation to its present condition.”<sup>19</sup> The “present state of affairs” or “present condition” mentioned by Waters includes animals dying for various reasons. God consigned creation to its present condition because of the fall by the first humans. Romans 8:19–22 is an obvious reference to Genesis 3 and a partial commentary on Genesis 3:17–18, where God curses the ground due to Adam’s sin. Further, in Romans 8, Paul proclaims that this present groaning creation longs for the ultimate liberation of the children of God, which will take place on judgment day. Then this sin-ruined, cursed creation will be destroyed and God will bring forth a glorious, perfect, new creation.<sup>20</sup>

Old earth creationist William Dembski recognizes that animal death is not compatible with God’s pre-fall good creation and that such death is due to God’s judgment on human sin. Yet, he also believes that, given an old earth, “natural evil” (which includes animal death) must have been widely prevalent before the creation of humans. He resolves the issue of how the fall into sin could then be responsible for natural evil that predates humanity by proposing that just as the death and resurrection of Christ are responsible for the salvation of believers throughout all

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<sup>17</sup> Wayne Grudem, “Theistic Evolution Undermines Twelve Creation Events and Several Crucial Christian Doctrines,” in *Theistic Evolution*, 818 (italics original).

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<sup>19</sup> Guy Waters, “Theistic Evolution Is Incompatible with the Teachings of the New Testament,” in *Theistic Evolution*, 897.

<sup>20</sup> See also, e.g., the discussion of Michael Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 669–675; and Ps 102:25–28; Isa 51:6; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33; 1 Cor 7:31; 2 Cor 4:18; Heb 1:10–12; 12:26–28; 2 Pet 3:7, 10–13; 1 John 2:17.

time, so the fall of Adam and Eve is responsible for every natural evil throughout all time (future, present, past, and distant past preceding the fall).<sup>21</sup> However, if that was the reality, there was never a time when God would have looked at the world and announced that it was “very good.”

This leads to another response that can be given to those taking the position that animals died before the fall, in part because some animals killed other animals and then often devoured them. The prophet Isaiah portrays the peace and blessedness of God’s spiritual kingdom here on earth, and the peace and blessedness of heaven and of the new creation, as paradise restored.<sup>22</sup> There was once an Eden; that Eden was lost; but God in his grace grants to those who have saving faith an Eden-like existence already now, in greater measure in heaven, and to the fullest degree in the world to come on judgment day. Consider the language used by Isaiah to describe the peace of this restored experience of Eden:

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze; their young will lie down together; and the lion like the ox will eat straw. Also the nursing child will play on the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will stretch out his hand over the viper’s tunnel. (Isa 11:6–8)

To be sure, the prophet under inspiration uses figurative language to depict spiritual realities and realities beyond the reach of our human language and our limited comprehension. But one can assume that this imagery chosen by Isaiah comes from his and other believing Israelites’ comprehension of how it was in the first Eden, *before the fall into sin*, and that their understanding was correct. What they believed was the opposite of the vicious, violent scenario in which animals attack and kill other animals.<sup>23</sup>

Judging from how they wrote, Moses, Isaiah, other Old Testament authors, and the New Testament authors never thought of the six days of creation as each consisting of millions or billions of years, that evolution was mainly or entirely the way the universe developed, nor that there was death before the fall into sin—nor

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<sup>21</sup> William Dembski, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (Nashville: B and H, 2009), 50, 110–111, 130, 162.

<sup>22</sup> So also does, e.g., Ezekiel. One such passage in his book is Ezek 47:1–12. See Horace Hummel, *Ezekiel 21–48*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 1332–1347.

<sup>23</sup> See also, e.g., Edward Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–18* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 389–391. Note Isaiah’s description of the new creation in Isa 65:17–25 (especially v. 25), and see, e.g., R. Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 56–66*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 441–443.

did later readers of their writings until (a) the advent of evolutionism or (b) the “scientific” interpretation of fossil, geological, and astronomical evidence that leads to the assumption of billions of years for the age of the earth. Then exegetes with a prior commitment to that interpretation of the evidence or to evolution tried to force an interpretation other than the natural one onto, or into, the biblical texts.

This leads to a concern caused by old earth, day-age creationism (and also by theistic evolutionism). J. P. Moreland’s comment regarding theistic evolutionists also applies to old earth creationists:

Given the widespread scientism—the view that the hard sciences are the only or the vastly superior way to know things, especially in comparison to theology and ethics—in our culture, theistic evolutionists reinforce this view by constantly revising biblical teachings and interpretations because science says so. Thus, by adopting this unbiblical epistemological outlook, theistic evolutionists weaken the rational authority of biblical teaching among Christians and non-Christians. As a result, the Bible is no longer regarded by many as a genuine source of knowledge, and fewer and fewer people take the Bible seriously. In this way, perhaps unintentionally, those who adopt theistic evolution marginalize Christian truth claims in the church and the public square.<sup>24</sup>

Further, this fiddling with Scripture by interpreters until they get it to turn out the “right way”—that is, so that it conforms to *so-called* science—has made, or will make, it easier to alter the natural, traditional interpretations of other portions of God’s word.

In summary, old earth, day-age creationism (along with theistic evolutionism) is antagonistic to the Lutheran hermeneutical principle of the perspicuity of Scripture. It puts “science” over the clear teaching of God’s word. It has no place in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Walter A. Maier III

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<sup>24</sup> J. P. Moreland, “How Theistic Evolution Kicks Christianity Out of the Plausibility Structure and Robs Christians of Confidence that the Bible Is a Source of Knowledge,” in *Theistic Evolution*, 633–634.

### Creation, Science, and God's Omnipotence

The *Concordia Journal*, published by our brothers at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, set forth an issue last year that focused on the doctrine of creation and challenges to that doctrine from natural science, particularly as these issues have been debated recently among American Evangelicals.<sup>25</sup> One of the articles in that issue provoked controversy and later was withdrawn by the author,<sup>26</sup> after which other clarifications related to this issue were published.<sup>27</sup> This issue of *Concordia Journal* raised discussion here at CTSFW, too, as well as at a joint meeting of the LCMS seminary faculties in Milwaukee on May 23, 2018, at which I gave a few remarks. The editors of our journal then asked me to share these remarks with our readers, which I do here below, along with other observations.

*Concordia Journal* had an opportunity to help the church in dealing faithfully with the question of how Scripture and science relate to each other, but two possibly unintended messages came across in that issue: that secular science should not be challenged on biblical grounds,<sup>28</sup> and that Christians can hold secular scientific worldviews as long as they also hold to some kind of double truth in which, according to their faith, central aspects of the scientific worldviews are false.<sup>29</sup>

I'm thankful that *Concordia Journal* discussed this question, but as the subsequent controversy showed, that issue of the journal did not present the most helpful pastoral and theological response. What I looked for in that issue and did not find was a clear rejection of evolutionary creationism (often called "theistic

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<sup>25</sup> *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 3 (2017).

<sup>26</sup> "Regarding the Article by Dr. John Jurchen in *Concordia Journal*," *Concordia Theology* (blog), January 7, 2018, <https://concordiatheology.org/2018/01/regarding-the-article-by-dr-john-jurchen-in-concordia-journal>. Charles Arand, speaking for the editorial board of *Concordia Journal*, opines that it is improper to comment further on Dr. Jurchen's article, since Dr. Jurchen has requested that it be withdrawn. (Charles P. Arand, "Regarding the Editorial Process for the *Concordia Journal*," *Concordia Theology* [blog], January 11, 2018, <https://concordiatheology.org/2018/01/regarding-the-editorial-process-for-the-concordia-journal>). I agree that it should no longer be regarded as a statement of Dr. Jurchen's views. Nevertheless, the fact that it was published makes it indelibly part of the public, historical record. Therefore, one may not be forbidden to discuss the ideas set forth therein, so long as Dr. Jurchen's and *Concordia Journal's* distance from the article is acknowledged.

<sup>27</sup> E.g., Arand, "Regarding the Editorial Process for the *Concordia Journal*."

<sup>28</sup> Charles P. Arand, "The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation: Lutherans & Science," *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 3 (2017): 8–9; Charles P. Arand, "The Scientist as a Theologian of the Cross," *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 3 (2017): 30; Charles P. Arand and Joel Okamoto, "Concordia Seminary and the Science for Seminaries Grant," *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 3 (2017): 80.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Russell Moulds, "Science, Religion, and God's Two Kingdoms: A Lutheran Framework for Instruction," *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 3 (2017): 39–42; John Jurchen, "The Age of the Earth and Confessional Lutheranism: Speaking the Truth in Love," *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 3 (2017): 71.

evolution”) and old earth creationism.<sup>30</sup> That issue of *Concordia Journal* also made ambiguous statements, such as that the Bible did not intend to teach science or cannot challenge science on statements of fact.<sup>31</sup> Such statements can be read and understood (or misunderstood) as though the Bible does not say anything historical or concretely factual if modern theories of the origin of the world disagree, and that people can and should believe whatever science tells them and reinterpret Scripture to correspond with science. The reinterpretation of Scripture is not what the editors of *Concordia Journal* intended, however.<sup>32</sup> It appears that at least one intention was that we should not identify with *any* party in the Evangelical science-revelation culture war, not even with young earth creationism, such as is set forth by Answers in Genesis and others.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> On these terms, see Charles P. Arand, “A Travel Guide to the Evangelical Creation Debates: What Is Young Earth Creationism?,” *Concordia Theology* (blog), February 23, 2018, <https://concordiatheology.org/2018/02/a-travel-guide-to-the-evangelical-creation-debates-what-is-young-earth-creationism/>; Charles P. Arand, “A Travel Guide to the Evangelical Creation Debates: What Is Old Earth Creationism?,” *Concordia Theology* (blog), February 21, 2018, <https://concordiatheology.org/2018/02/a-travel-guide-to-the-evangelical-creation-debates-what-is-old-earth-creationism/>; Charles P. Arand, “A Travel Guide to the Evangelical Creation Debates: What Is Evolutionary Creationism?,” *Concordia Theology* (blog), February 28, 2018, <https://concordiatheology.org/2018/02/a-travel-guide-to-the-evangelical-creation-debates-what-is-evolutionary-creationism/>.

<sup>31</sup> “Christians can fall into this danger as well. This can take at least two forms. . . . One might argue that it is not ‘real science’ or seek to reinterpret the data that scientists unearth to support a particular reading of the Bible that specifies a precise age for the universe. Even though the Bible gives the impression of a relatively young universe with its six-day creation it does not give an age; for this reason the age of the earth has not been considered a doctrinal issue. . . . The Bible doesn’t address many scientific matters. That’s okay, too, for the Bible wasn’t written for that purpose” (Arand, “The Scientist as a Theologian of the Cross,” 30, 32). “We need a theological approach to science that includes humility when it comes to interpreting the Bible in absolute terms about what must or must not be in the world” (Arand, “The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation,” 9). “When science that informs the Christian about the world, its fallen condition, and Christian and non-Christian perceptions of that condition, is censored or silenced, Scripture reveals God’s left-hand strategy. . . . And when other pronouncements exceed evidence, data, and theory in the sciences and begin making ultimate claims about the nature of existence itself, Scripture reveals God’s right-hand strategy” (Moulds, “Science, Religion, and God’s Two Kingdoms,” 43).

<sup>32</sup> Arand, “The Scientist as a Theologian of the Cross,” 32–33; Arand and Okamoto, “Concordia Seminary and the Science for Seminaries Grant,” 79.

<sup>33</sup> “Other established insights from the Lutheran tradition about the world and God’s activity provide the framework for teaching the sciences in their left-hand kingdom secularity and for teaching that science is a human construct not exempt from God’s word and work. This framework distinguishes Lutheran higher education in the sciences from efforts among other Christian traditions to address the emergence of the natural and social sciences. Those efforts, informed by important but often limited themes from Scripture and selected in response to a particular controversy, have generally yielded a rather static approach toward the sciences. While well intended, such efforts tend to stall as, ironically, they become part of the controversy, mired in the secular arguments deployed by partisans” (Moulds, “Science, Religion, and God’s Two Kingdoms,” 43). “It has been something of a learning experience to see what kinds of positions are being taken in these sometimes heated debates within that conservative wing of Christianity

Yet it is important that a clear rejection of old earth creationism and evolutionary creationism be made, since groups outside the LCMS actively seek to weaken our doctrinal position in order to allow for an old earth (based on geological and astronomical observations) or even macroevolution (based on some biological observations and theories).<sup>34</sup> These must be rejected. The acceptance especially of macroevolution would be catastrophic for Christian dogma. If evolution was God's plan for the creation of life, then God's goodness has to be redefined: no longer would death be the wages of sin (Rom 6:23). If God created the world with defects and death, then there is no created perfection, and sin (or at least death, the wages of sin) is of God's will. If man evolved from other species, then the soul of man may have to be redefined as a function of man's physical nature, since to posit a special creation of the soul instead of an evolutionary development thereof would conflict with the evolutionary model. Finally, if evolution is true, then there was no historic Adam, in which case the parallel between Adam and Christ (Rom 5) would be destroyed or reduced to a metaphor. Thus, the doctrine of creation matters and must be a central concern for all Christians. The old-earth and evolutionary creation models should have been clearly rejected in that issue of *Concordia Journal*.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, I commend *Concordia Journal's* pastoral concern for scientists in our congregations and others who struggle with the seeming conflict between Scripture and science on creation. Yet are there not other ways to be a Bible-believing scientist than those set forth in that issue of *Concordia Journal*?

### *Models for Coordinating Scripture and Science*

Recently, Christians discussing divine revelation and natural science have tended to think in terms of four or five categories, such as conflict, independence,

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broadly referred to as Evangelicalism. . . . For these reasons, I caution against identifying too closely with any specific camp or approach to the science-faith issues they address" (Charles P. Arand, "A Travel Guide to the Evangelical Creation Debates: Introduction," *Concordia Theology* [blog], December 12, 2017, <https://concordiatheology.org/2017/12/evangelical-creation-debates-travel-guide>).

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., "The Lutheran Option?," The BioLogos Forum, accessed September 12, 2018, <https://discourse.biologos.org/t/the-lutheran-option/37658>.

<sup>35</sup> A subsequent blog post by Charles Arand discouraged readers from identifying too closely with any of the three Evangelical models for coordinating the biblical doctrine of creation with science (see Arand, "A Travel Guide to the Evangelical Creation Debates: Introduction").

dialogue, integration,<sup>36</sup> and paradox.<sup>37</sup> But these categories actually hide within themselves subcategories that are fundamentally at odds with one another, and the categories do not explain what happens when there are conflicting truth claims. For example, the model of independence, or non-overlapping magisteria, does not actually function that way in practice. Either the magisterium of revelation is held supreme, and it rules out whatever conflicting data science may set forth; or science is unrestrained and thus supreme, and it invades the turf of theology.

Christians have dealt perennially with the seeming conflict between what God revealed to humanity through his prophets and apostles on the one hand and our experience of this world and the way things work on the other. Through the centuries, certain basic positions of how to coordinate these two sources of knowledge can be observed.<sup>38</sup>

1. Science (empirical observation) is simply rejected whenever it conflicts with Scripture (divine revelation).
2. Science is affirmed, though it is hypothetical, explaining the world as it is observed empirically. Yet it is not allowed to overrule or reinterpret scriptural statements, even those that do *not* deal with ultimate truth. Scripture is seen as absolutely true; science is subordinated to it. This is a traditional Lutheran approach.<sup>39</sup>
3. Truth is regarded as double: the same thing can be true according to reason but false according to theology. This would allow one to say, for example, that macroevolution is true scientifically but false theologically.<sup>40</sup>
4. Science is regarded as trustworthy; scriptural exegesis must sometimes be accommodated to phenomena. For example, Joshua 10:13, “the sun stood still,”<sup>41</sup> refers to how the movement of the sun is perceived

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<sup>36</sup> Denis R. Alexander, “Models for Relating Science and Religion,” Faraday Papers, no. 3 (2007), [https://faraday-institute.org/resources/Faraday%20Papers/Faraday%20Paper%203%20Alexander\\_EN.pdf](https://faraday-institute.org/resources/Faraday%20Papers/Faraday%20Paper%203%20Alexander_EN.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Roger E. Timm, “Does Luther vs. Copernicus = Luther vs. Science?,” *Lutheran Forum* 51, no. 1 (2017): 34–37.

<sup>38</sup> Many of these categories played a role in seventeenth-century conflicts in Europe when new views of the world arose. See Klaus Scholder, *The Birth of Modern Critical Theology: Origins and Problems of Biblical Criticism in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. John Bowden (London; Philadelphia: SCM Press; Trinity Press International, 1990).

<sup>39</sup> This is the approach of Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *In Christ All Things Hold Together: The Intersection of Science & Christian Theology* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Russell Moulds’s application of “two kingdoms” to this question (Moulds, “Science, Religion, and God’s Two Kingdoms”).

<sup>41</sup> Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

from the standpoint of the biblical writer but does not rule out the possibility that a simpler model for understanding the movement of the solar system puts the sun in the center.

5. Science is regarded as trustworthy; scriptural exegesis must be accommodated to the *prejudices* of Scripture's original audience. In this way, Enlightenment thinkers ruled out angels, demons, and miracles.
6. Reason (including empirical observation) interprets Scripture, but some things are above reason and nature. In this way, early seventeenth-century Socinianism ruled out the Trinity but still affirmed miracles.<sup>42</sup>
7. Reason (including empirical observation) interprets Scripture, and nothing is above reason or against nature. Similar to point 4 above, center-Cartesianists in the seventeenth century argued in this way.
8. Reason attacks the reliability of Scripture and undermines its credibility (the Enlightenment).
9. Progressive divine revelation beyond Scripture is posited. This fits well with evolution and Process Theology but presents a different god than the eternal, immutable, ever-blessed Trinity.

Those who operate according to models 5 through 9 are united in placing knowledge gained from experience or reason above knowledge gained from special revelation. In these models, to varying degrees, one puts confidence in one's experience and on that basis contradicts or reinterprets Scripture. On the issue of creation, one would say that if geology, astronomy, or biology present data that conflicts with Genesis 1–2 and with the age of the earth based on the chronology of the rest of Scripture, then Scripture must be negated or reinterpreted allegorically. But Christians should not do this. Those who do so risk hearing: "Who *is* this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? . . . Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38:2, 4).

Perhaps most Missouri Synod pastors think in terms of options 1, 2, or 4 above. Within any of these ways of thinking, there are then specific ways of dealing with empirical data that might indicate an old earth. For example, stars and supernova millions of light-years away would seem to argue that the universe has existed long enough for that light to travel at a constant speed and reach our eyes. Yet we have divine authority that on the fourth day of creation, stars were already

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<sup>42</sup> Perhaps George Murphy's attempt to use the slogan "theology of the cross" to posit the goodness of death and evolution would fit here (see BioLogos Editorial Team, "Surveying George Murphy's Theology of the Cross," BioLogos, December 4, 2012, <https://biologos.org/blogs/archive/surveying-george-murphys-theology-of-the-cross>).

visible, and presumably these are the same stars that we see now (Gen 1:14–19). Perhaps trees were created with many rings, already on day three (Gen 1:11–13). Maybe Adam and Eve were created with belly buttons. This observation, formally dubbed the “omphalos [navel] hypothesis,” may be the default worldview for most LCMS pastors.<sup>43</sup> This worldview is commonly dismissed as implying that God was deceptive and implanted false evidence in the world to make it look very old when it actually is about six thousand years old. It is also dismissed because it is unfalsifiable—a tidy way to deal with uncomfortable scientific observations.<sup>44</sup> Yet these are the arguments used by unbelief throughout the ages against every aspect of the Christian faith, and they should not trouble anyone who believes in divine revelation. As David Adams and Charles Arand rightly observe in one of the clarifications to the oft-mentioned issue of *Concordia Journal*, “These creative acts (the initial *opera ad extra* of the Trinity) are *miracles*, and miracles are by definition not accessible to human reason or empirical science.”<sup>45</sup>

#### *Resources from the Lutheran Tradition*

If we want a distinctively Lutheran voice in this discussion, we should learn from the pre-Enlightenment Lutherans in Germany, where the Enlightenment was forestalled for nearly a century. We should not pluck slogans from Luther and reapply them in new contexts in order to justify evolution, as some Lutheran theologians do.<sup>46</sup>

One such Lutheran slogan is “continuous creation.”<sup>47</sup> In classic Lutheran theology, *creatio continua* meant the same thing as “providence,” the fact that God maintains and preserves his creation, and if he did not, everything would fall back into nothing immediately. This was denied by the Deists and other eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers, who thought of the creation as not needing God’s specific preservation. For them, the world was like a clock made by a clockmaker,

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<sup>43</sup> It was first proposed formally by Philip Henry Gosse, *Omphalos: An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot* (London: J. Van Voorst, 1857).

<sup>44</sup> E.g., Pete Enns, “Al Mohler and the ‘Apparent Age’ of the Cosmos,” *Pete Enns* (blog), October 13, 2011, <https://peteenns.com/al-mohler-and-the-apparent-age-of-the-cosmos>.

<sup>45</sup> David Adams and Charles P. Arand, “A Few Reflections on Creation in Genesis 1,” *Concordia Theology* (blog), March 5, 2018, <https://concordiatheology.org/2018/03/a-few-reflections-on-creation-in-genesis-1>, emphasis original.

<sup>46</sup> E.g., BioLogos Editorial Team, “Surveying George Murphy’s Theology of the Cross.” Charles Arand cites Murphy on this topic with approbation in Arand, “The Scientist as a Theologian of the Cross,” 20.

<sup>47</sup> Arand, “The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation,” 8; Joel Okamoto, “Modern Science, Contemporary Culture, and Christian Theology,” *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 3 (2017): 60. Related to this, Russell Moulds claims that there is “dynamic relation” between God and creation (Moulds, “Science, Religion, and God’s Two Kingdoms,” 38).

which now runs on its own. The Lutheran doctrine of God's *creatio continua* speaks against that error.<sup>48</sup> In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, however, various theologians have taken the phrase *creatio continua* and co-opted it for their own unwholesome purposes. They have used it crassly to justify macroevolution. And they have also used it more subtly to argue for progressive revelation and a mutable natural law, or even forms of pantheism.<sup>49</sup>

Such forays and misapplications of Lutheran slogans help nothing and prove nothing. It would be better to reappropriate the Lutheran, catholic doctrine of God's omnipotence and truthfulness. As Lutherans grappling with the conflict between revelation and empirical science regarding the origin of the world, we can and should draw on our heritage—the wisdom of the past—to find tools to assess our current issues. But rather than taking a theological maxim from Luther and applying it where he never did (such as “theology of the cross,” “two kingdoms,” or “two kinds of righteousness”), we should look for tools used by doctors of the church to deal specifically with the apparent conflict between experience and revelation.

Just such a tool was gifted to us by Matthias Flacius (1520–1575) in his *Key to Holy Scripture*, a work that Concordia Lutherans esteemed and used even after Flacius's views on original sin were rejected in the 1580 *Book of Concord*.<sup>50</sup> Here Flacius gives us a treatise entitled “Demonstrations of the Certainty of Holy Writ and of the Christian Religion.”<sup>51</sup> After giving fifty-two scriptural-theological arguments for the plenary truthfulness of Scripture, Flacius gives some rational arguments that will help us, too, in our discussions on revelation and empirical science. Since this text has never before been translated, I include my translation here, with the original Latin in footnotes.

*Principle 1.* One must not make judgments about God's nature on the basis of human reason or the order of this earthly nature, since he is its potter, so to speak, and he surpasses it in all points infinitely. Instead, one must state that his essence [*eius essentiae . . . rationem*] can be far different than what our mind

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<sup>48</sup> For more on this, see Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 2, *God and His Creation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 194.

<sup>49</sup> See Whitney Bauman, *Theology, Creation, and Environmental Ethics: From Creatio Ex Nihilo to Terra Nullius*, Routledge Studies in Religion 12 (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2009); Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 209; cf. Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 33–35.

<sup>50</sup> Matthias Flacius, *Clavis Scripturae S. seu de Sermone Sacrarum literarum*, 2 vols. (Basel: Episcopius, 1580); Matthias Flacius, *Clavis Scripturae S. seu de Sermone Sacrarum literarum*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt: Bibliopolae Hasniensis, 1719). I cite the 1580 edition, vol. 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Demonstrationes Certitudinis Sacrarum Literarum, Et Religionis Christianae* (Flacius, *Clavis Scripturae S.* [1580], 441).

can understand or think. Therefore, those who pursue the contrary do just as if someone were to see clay pots and conclude that the potter himself was made of clay.<sup>52</sup>

*Principle 2.* God is an utterly free doer or cause. Therefore, he does not always act in the same way, and just as he has now created and ordered this nature and humanity [*hominem*] in this way, so he will perhaps change some things<sup>53</sup> either now or at its own time, such as at the end of the world, bringing about the resurrection and making man to live [*agentem*] without food, procreation, and other things of [his] nature.<sup>54</sup>

*Principle 3.* God is all-wise. Therefore, he can think up infinitely more forms and ideas of things (so to speak), which by his choice he expresses in his works, than we can conceive and understand, even if they were explained to us. How infinite is the variety of natural things [*rerum Physicarum*], and of the individual species among them, such as of animals, plants, trees, and various fruits, and the supports necessary for humanity. Every region has many species unique to itself, of apples, pears, nuts, cherries, and other fruits. Therefore, just as before our eyes he has set forth an infinity and variety of ideas, so he is able now to have or later to create new species of things, creatures, and his own actions. Therefore, any would-be scholars or natural scientists or others who want to reason from the present nature of natural things—that “Nothing is made out of nothing,” and “Time, what is moved, and what is movable are joined; and therefore the world is eternal”; again, “No individual thing is perpetual, therefore the soul is not immortal, nor is there a resurrection”—such wise people, I say, act just as if someone, with mediocre diligence, were to look at all the works now effected in the workshop of an excellent artificer and would deny that [the artificer] knows how to do works of another kind, or had ever made them, or would ever make them. Nevertheless, no one has dared to make this judgment about a human artificer, yet about the living God Epicurean men dare.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *I. Principium. De Dei essentia non est iudicandum ex humana ratione, uel terrenae huius naturae ordine: quandoquidem ipse tum ueluti figulus eius est, tum etiam eam in infinitum excellit in omnibus: sed statuendum, posse eius essentiae longè aliam esse rationem, quàm nostra mens assequi uel cogitare possit. Quare qui contrarium sequuntur, perinde faciunt, ac si quis conspectis luteis ollis, etiam ipsum figulum luteum esse rationcinetur* (Flacius, *Clavis Scripturae* S. [1580], 444–445).

<sup>53</sup> Read *aliquae* instead of *aliqua*.

<sup>54</sup> *II Principium. Deus est liberrimum agens aut causa. Ergo non semper eodem modo agit: & sicut nunc hanc naturam & hominem sic condidit aut ordinavit: sic fortè aliqua uel iam, uel suo tempore, ut in fine mundi, mutabit, efficiens resurrectionem, & hominem agentem sine cibo, procreatione, & alijs naturalibus* (Flacius, *Clavis Scripturae* S. [1580], 445).

<sup>55</sup> *III Principium. Deus est omniscipiens. In infinitum igitur plures formas & ueluti ideas rerum, quas suo arbitrio operibus exprimat, excogitare potest, quàm nos, si nobis exponantur, animo*

*Principle 4.* Everyone says that God is omnipotent. Therefore, even if something is handed down in Scripture as being done by God beyond the order of nature or the opinion of our reason, with regard to his omnipotence it is usually (as it should be) considered true, even by the heathen. For it must entirely be affirmed that nothing that God wills is impossible for him. For since he is the author of nature and [its] creator, and he created it in the way he chose, it is certain that also by his choice he can change it, and that all of nature stands firm by his command and power as long as he wills, and on the other hand if he does not will it, it all collapses. . . .

Therefore, all things in Scripture that are absurd to reason can be referred to these principles and defended by them. Since not even reason itself can deny them, it is a false slander of atheists to say that Scripture completely conflicts with all reason.<sup>56</sup>

Flacius uses these arguments from God's omnipotence not to tweak the clear meaning of Scripture (as though God could work contrary to how he revealed his creative acts in Scripture) but to show that reason and our experience of this world are not in a position to conclude that what Scripture says is false or that it needs to be reinterpreted. This insight can help us today. Just because we see the world functioning in a certain, consistent way does not mean we can conclude that God could not act otherwise. For example, currently light travels at a constant speed, but

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*concupere ac intelligere. Quam infinita uarietas est rerum Physicarum, & singularum inter eas specierum, ut animalium, herbarum, arborum & variorum fructuum, & homini necessariorum subsidiarum. Singulae regiones habent plurimas proprias species pomorum, pirorum, nucum, cerasorum, & aliorum fructuum. Sicut igitur nobis ante oculos infinitatem & uarietatem idearum proposuit: ita potest uel iam habere, uel postea condere nouas rerum, creaturarum & actionum suarum species. Qui ergo erudituli uel Physici, uel alij, ex praesenti naturalium rerum natura ratiocinari uolunt, Ex nihilo nihil fieri: & tempus, motum ac mobile esse coniuncta: igitur mundum esse aeternum. Item nullum indiuiduum est perpetuum: igitur anima non est immortalis, nec est resurrectio. Isti, inquam, tales sapientes perinde faciunt, ac si quis mediocri diligentia perspectis omnibus iam effectis operibus, in alicuius praestantis artificis officina, negaret eum alterius generis opera facere scire, aut unquam fecisse, uel facturum esse. Hanc tamen sententiam nemo de artifice homine ferre ausit: at de Deo uiuente audent homines Epicurei (Flacius, Clavis Scripturae S. [1580], 445).*

<sup>56</sup> *III Principium. Deum esse omnipotentem omnes fatentur. Itaque etiamsi quid in Scriptura traditur à Deo fieri praeter naturae ordinem, uel rationis nostrae opinionem, omnipotentiae eius ratione habita, pro uero etiam à gentilibus haberi solet & debet. Omnino enim statuendum est, Deo nihil impossibile esse quod uelit. Quandoquidem enim ipse author naturae & creator est, eamque pro suo arbitrio ita creauit: certum est eum etiam suo arbitrio illam mutare posse: & in eius nutu ac potestate totam naturam consistere donec uelit, rursus cum nolit totam collabi. . . . Omnia igitur absurda rationi, quae in Scriptura sunt, possunt ad haec principia redigi, eisque defendi: quae cum nec ipsa ratio negare possit, falsa est atheorum calumnia, Scripturam penitus cum omni ratione pugnare (Flacius, Clavis Scripturae S. [1580], 445).*

at the beginning, God could have made it otherwise, bringing the light of stars millions of light-years away to earth in a matter of days or seconds, or instantly. Christians who believe that God made the world out of nothing should not doubt his power to do this.

Lutherans are especially equipped to resist efforts to reinterpret the biblical doctrine of creation to conform to natural science. The doctrine of the Lord's Supper presents to us the same problems as the doctrine of creation. Let us use a thought experiment here. If we had a device that could scan the molecular composition of the consecrated, distributed bread and wine as they were being consumed, would we find human cells and human DNA? We would not. Scientific examination fails here, since it presents evidence that would seem to conflict with the clear words of Christ. And yet we believe, and must believe, that Christ's words are true. The bread in the Holy Supper is his body, and the wine is his blood. In this case, empirical evidence must be set aside, though not denied, and reason must be constrained simply to accept the word of Christ as true. So also with creation: if there is empirical evidence that conflicts with the word of God, the word of God must be believed. If a supernova millions of light-years away is observed on earth, yet the word of God says the universe was created less than ten thousand years ago, then the empirical evidence must be set aside, though not denied, and reason must be constrained to accept simply the word of God as true. People who cannot believe that the world is young and was created in six days, if they are consistent, will also not be able to believe that the Lord Jesus puts his body and blood into our mouths in the Holy Supper. Therefore, the Lutheran approach to the question of whether to believe Scripture or empirical science regarding creation is the same approach that is given to all the mysteries of the faith. We believe something that conflicts with experience because of the authority of divine revelation.

### *Pastoral Approach*

So what should be our pastoral approach to people in our congregations and to Christians in our wider circles who have become persuaded that because of geological, astronomical, or biological science, the biblical accounts of creation cannot be taken literally? Here I will give my own suggestions. We can say the following. We were not there when the world was created, but God was, and he has revealed how it happened. God is credible. If we believe him in other areas, why not believe him in this area as well? We do not, however, need to deny or reject any data that science presents (though the theories and models that account for the data should be critically assessed). All scientific models are tentative, and all scientific findings must be scrutinized. And there should be room for Christian scientists

to challenge the models of an old earth and macroevolution. But if a Christian scientist finds evidence that indicates the world is older than a few thousand years, he should not let this bother him. When our scientists observe the created world, they must account for it as they find it. Yet at the same time, they should refrain from concluding rationally, on the basis of their experience, that God must have created the world at a time or in a manner different from what he has revealed.

As pastors work with congregation members and others who have been persuaded that the biblical doctrine of creation must be taken nonliterally, I think it is important to avoid one particular argument. The history of the seventeenth century should teach us not to set up all-or-nothing situations where we say, "The world must be so, since otherwise our faith would be false." This manner of argumentation was often used by Orthodox Lutherans against the Socinians and others, but its effectiveness in converting them is dubious. That is, we should not say, "Evolution is false *because* it would undermine nearly all Christian dogmas." Such an argument could lead someone who is on the doubting edge between faith and unbelief simply to cast off faith. Rather, we should simply oppose macroevolution and say that it is false and destructive of faith. At the same time, if our member still has a weak faith, then we must not use any argument that could snuff out the smoldering wick or crush the bruised reed of faith (cf. Matt 12:20). We should not argue as though by accepting an old earth or even macroevolution, the entire truth of the Christian religion is overthrown, even though a consistent application of reason to revelation would in fact lead there.

Perhaps we need a multi-layered approach that *rejects* some positions outright (such as old earth creationism and especially evolutionary creationism), *keeps distance* from others, claiming them as tentative or possible (such as young earth creationism and the omphalos hypothesis), teaches dogma clearly, and at the same time does not snuff out the smoldering wick of faith. We should also, with the aid of scientists, help our people to read *science* critically, and to be open also to scientific data that would indicate a young age of the earth or would conflict with macroevolution.

At the same time, we should help our people to realize that it is not narrow-minded to believe the literal sense of the Bible. Perhaps some conservative Christians are indeed narrow-minded, rejecting both the theories and the data of science whenever it seems to conflict with Scripture. But we must assert and constantly affirm that it is not narrow-minded to believe that the world was created over the span of six days, and that this happened about six thousand years ago. This is not narrow-minded, and we must not be ashamed of it.

At a scholarly conference several years ago in Fort Worth, I conversed with an editor of a reputable German publishing house. He expressed his shock at having met and talked with a Bible-believing Texan who asserted his faith in a six-day creation *ex nihilo*, and who reproached my German colleague for holding to a faith in an old universe and macroevolution. The German was shocked, opining that only narrow-minded rednecks from Texas could believe such a thing. So what was I to do? If I remained silent, I would have tacitly agreed to his rejection of what *God* has revealed about creation. If I confessed, then my colleague's vehemence would be turned against me, and the enjoyable evening would be at an end. "I believe that," I said. "The world was created in six days, and it's young." So he mocked me too. For him, my faith and mind were too narrow, since I clung to the literal sense of Scripture as God's word. He admonished me to open my mind to the whole realm of possibilities: extraterrestrial intelligent life, evolution, even the truth of other religions. I took the abuse for a while, said something about respecting science, but also said, "Nevertheless, I trust the words of the prophets and apostles. I am a Christian." The fun evening was over.

Why are the true Christians labeled "narrow-minded"? Just the opposite is the case. It takes a strong faith and an open mind to recognize the conflicts between Scripture and experience, to take them seriously, and yet still to believe the plain meaning of God's scriptural revelation more than one's own senses. It calls for a mind that is open not to reinterpreting Scripture (much less relegating it to myth!), but that is open to God's omniscience and omnipotence. Our minds must not be narrowly enslaved to our own sensory experience. Our minds are truly open when they are open to God and then to exploring his created world.

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