

## 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 Jurchen has withdrawn the article, I do not consider the positions in that article as reflecting his own views.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 ׀תָּ 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], יחַד, 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 בָּקֵר 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 בָּקֵר 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).

<sup>18</sup> From the New American Standard Bible® (NASB), Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org.

<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.