

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debated recently among American Evangelicals.²⁵ One of the articles in that issue provoked controversy and later was withdrawn by the author,²⁶ after which other clarifications related to this issue were published.²⁷ This issue of *Concordia Journal* raised discussion here at CTSFW,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,²⁸ 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.²⁹

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

²⁵ *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 3 (2017).

²⁶ "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 Jurchen has requested that it be withdrawn.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.

²⁷ E.g., Arand, "Regarding the Editorial Process for the *Concordia Journal*."

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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.³¹ 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.³² 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.³³

³⁰ 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/>.

³¹ “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).

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

³³ “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).³⁴ 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*.³⁵

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,

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>).

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

³⁵ 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,³⁶ and paradox.³⁷ 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.³⁸

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.³⁹
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.⁴⁰
4. Science is regarded as trustworthy; scriptural exegesis must sometimes be accommodated to phenomena. For example, Joshua 10:13, “the sun stood still,”⁴¹ refers to how the movement of the sun is perceived

³⁶ 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.

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

³⁸ 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).

³⁹ 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).

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

⁴¹ 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.⁴²
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

⁴² 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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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.”⁴⁵

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.⁴⁶

One such Lutheran slogan is “continuous creation.”⁴⁷ 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,

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

⁴⁴ 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>.

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

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*.⁵⁰ Here Flacius gives us a treatise entitled “Demonstrations of the Certainty of Holy Writ and of the Christian Religion.”⁵¹ 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

⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ *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.⁵²

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 things⁵³ 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.⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵

⁵² *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).

⁵³ Read *aliquae* instead of *aliqua*.

⁵⁴ *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).

⁵⁵ *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.⁵⁶

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

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).

⁵⁶ *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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