



Monkeying About

Evolutionary naturalists hear no truth, see no truth and speak no truth

There is a deep divide running thorough the church in Australia today regarding whether the theory of evolution can be reconciled with the Genesis account of creation. Leading evangelicals such as Dr Broughton Knox, the former principal of Moore College, have criticised any attempt to accommodate evolution with God's special act of creation.

In his Moore College Lectures for 1979, Dr Knox said:

"Just as the idolaters could not see the foolishness, indeed the stupidity, of worshipping gods of wood and stone, which have no life, nor purpose, nor mind, so modern believers in the theory of evolution cannot see the foolishness of that theory, which not only lacks evidence to support it, but also runs counter to such evidence of origins as is available."

For Dr Knox, compromise was impossible. But now, new voices are calling for a different approach: an approach that essentially links Christians with modern naturalistic science. I was recently shown a statement by an influential evangelical scholar who said, *"It seems to me that the evidence of science currently weighs against a six 24 hour day creation period ... The evidence for evolution, on the other hand, is comprehensive and powerful, and in my opinion, persuasive."*

His solution for dealing with the inherent contradictions between the theory of evolution and the Genesis account of creation was the tried but untrustworthy method of limiting the authority and reliability of the Bible to matters of salvation and ministry. His proposal is not novel. But it has enormous consequences, one of which is to undermine the believer's trust in the historical reliability of the Scriptures. Is there a better solution to hand?

There is an alternative that treats the biblical literature seriously. As a lawyer, I have spent much of my professional life interpreting documents and evidence, and I believe that a correct hermeneutical approach is the only way to resolve these issues. We must first try to understand the genre and literary context of the early chapters of Genesis. However, at the outset we must realise how the dispute over these first chapters of the Bible arose.

During the Reformation in the 16th century, theologians of all persuasions understood Genesis 1 and 2 to be God's account of creation. They believed that in these chapters God provided through Moses the details of how, in the exercise of his omnipotent power, he created the world in six ordinary days ex nihilo (i.e. out of nothing).

Although these scholars were battling over other issues of biblical interpretation at the time, there was no disagreement about the six-day miracle. They all accepted that Genesis was a factual account of how the world began.

But in the centuries that followed, scholars who called themselves Higher Critics challenged the authority of the Bible. Then in 1859 Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution, casting doubt on the reliability of the scriptural account of origins. Later in the 19th century, archaeologists discovered some ancient Near Eastern creation myths that seemed to have some similarities to the creation account in Genesis. Was Genesis dependent on them in some way? And if so, was Genesis also a myth? Many theologians and churches decided this issue by abandoning the traditional way of interpreting the Bible as God's revelation. Instead, they saw it as a fallible document.

No longer was Scripture allowed to be its own interpreter. The world-view of modern science and the self-understanding of modern man became the principles by which to interpret the Bible. Genesis 1 and 2 were moved from the category of “narrative” to “myth” or “poetry”. Scholars said that these chapters only tell us “who” created the world and “why”. If we ask “how”, we are told that Moses never intended to provide any such information (despite evidence to the contrary), and to go to the theory of evolution for guidance and understanding.

Radical theologians such as Bultmann and Tillich didn’t stop at creation. For them the Bible was full of myth and had to be demythologised if its message was to be correctly understood. While many evangelicals have rejected their approach, some find it difficult to resist what amounts to a demythologising of the Genesis creation account by replacing the Genesis “how” with the scientific (so-called) theory of evolution. Is that justified?

Not according to a number of Bible-believing scholars. They reject the modern classification of Genesis 1 and 2 as myth, poetry or ancient hymnody. These scholars, whose approach to Genesis is based on literary type, have found Genesis 1 and 2 are in the form of narrative prose, and should be interpreted accordingly.

One of them, a leading Old Testament scholar in the USA, Dr Walter Kaiser Jnr, has said,

*“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 to 50. If we want a sample of what the author’s poetry, with its Hebrew parallelism and fixed pairs, would look like, Genesis 4:23-24 will serve as an illustration.”*

Other Old Testament scholars agree. Professor John Currid from Reformed Seminary, Jackson, has said, *“There is no indication of figurative language in Genesis 1.”* Likewise Dr J. Barton Payne has pointed out that *“the rest of Scripture ... assumes throughout its (Genesis 1 and 2) literal historicity.”* This has led Professor Douglas Kelly to conclude that *“the writer of Genesis means what the historic Christian Church (until the mid-19th century) believed he said. That is, he intended to speak factually of what happened at the beginning, with no less historical reality than the Chronicler speaks of Hezekiah or Luke speaks of the Virgin Birth of Christ.”*

Obviously, what Moses intended to convey and what influences the Near-Eastern mythologies may have had on the way he compiled his material are important questions. However, God’s intention ultimately overrides all of that. Jesus told us, quoting the God of the Old Testament, that *“men shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”* For us today, that means every word of the Bible. To “live” by Genesis 1 on the issue of origins, for example, means examining and understanding the words of Genesis 1 in the context from which they come (i.e. the whole of Genesis, and in particular, the first 11 chapters).

Significantly, I have noticed that there is a tendency by theologians and churches who say the early chapters are something other than narrative, not to give a great deal of attention to Genesis 1-11, much less to “every word” in Genesis 1. Are the words of Genesis 1 too embarrassing for modern, scientific people?

One of the most persuasive arguments in favour of Genesis 1 and 2 as historical narrative is that the rest of Scripture assumes its literal historicity. As Douglas Kelly points out, *“No amount of exegetical straining can find the slightest poetic view of Genesis 1-11 in the books of the New Testament. One can disagree with the New Testament’s literal, historical usages of Genesis 1-11, but one cannot honestly find in its pages anything less than a straightforward reading of these chapters as literal, relevant facts.”* Jesus himself referred to both Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 in a way which indicates that he understood those chapters in a straightforward literal way as well. (Matt. 19:4-5)

Secular specialists in Hebrew agree that the Genesis account is historical narrative and should be read accordingly. James Barr, Professor of Hebrew at Oxford University, and a hostile critic of evangelicals, says,

“so far as I know there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writers of Genesis 1-11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that

- a. Creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours that we now experience;*
- b. the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the Biblical story; and*
- c. Noah’s flood was understood to be world-wide and to have extinguished all human and land animal life except for those in the ark.*

To put it negatively, the apologetic arguments which suppose the ‘days’ of creation to be long years of time, the figures of years not to be chronological, and the flood to be a merely local Mesopotamian flood, are not taken seriously by any professor, as far as I know.”

One final consideration deserves mention. I have noticed that apart from Genesis 1 and 2, the God of the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament continually demonstrate their power and control over the natural world by the use of miracles. God uses miracles throughout the history of the Bible as part of the way he works. We note that miracles take place instantly on command. In criminal law that kind of evidence is called “similar fact” evidence. As the late Mr Justice Lionel Murphy of the High Court explained, *“events may occur which constitute a sequence or pattern in which the only common factor is the accused. These may be such that as a matter of Euclidean proof or certainty, the accused is responsible, that is, the cause of the events ... Such methods of reasoning are acceptable.”* By analogy, and using ordinary common sense, should not God’s demonstrated power to create instant miracles in the rest of the Bible be regarded as significant evidence on the question of how to interpret what God says in Genesis 1 and 2 and Exodus 20: 11?

In my judgement, the evidence for accepting Genesis 1 and 2 as narrative prose, to be understood in a straightforward and literal manner, far outweighs the suggested evidence for a contrary view. Indeed, the evidence is so strong that one looks to other reasons as to why so many evangelicals reject the traditional straightforward interpretation. The major reason, conceded or otherwise, is that these scholars have accepted the reigning world-view on origins, the belief that the world came into existence over billions of years through macro-evolution.

It is important, therefore, to examine the evidence for macro-evolution. Does it justify the conclusion that it should be accepted today as fact, or is it a theory which has become a world-belief system, a new religion masquerading as science?

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