



# Genesis 1 & 2

## CREATION AND EVOLUTION FROM A FALSE DICHOTOMY TO A DEEPER FAITH

By The Reverend Bill Keane ©2009

Often science and religion are portrayed as being opposites on the spectrum of understanding the origin and operation of the Universe. This study will attempt to promote the view that scientific theory and faithful belief are not poles apart. They are unique and important ways of encountering the world around us.

When subjects are placed in a forced opposition that is not valid, we might say a “false dichotomy” has been set up...

***“Are you married or are you happy?”***

***“Which are better, apples or oranges?”***

***“Are you a Democrat or a good American?”***

***“Where did you come from? God, or your parents?”***

False dichotomies are often deliberately set up to force an individual into making an “either/or” choice when in reality a “both/and” option is available. Without exploring potential motives for posing such dichotomies, the problem inherent in such queries is that one cannot come up with a good answer to a bad question.

***A basic premise of this study is that the question, “Do you believe in Creation or Evolution?” is a false dichotomy.***

In addition, it will be shown that such a forced tension between these two dynamics is not only unnecessary, it is dangerous and undermines the healthy exploration and practice of both science and faith.

*Evolution is a spiritual fact as well as a scientific reality.*

***For further clarification, the beliefs of the author of this study are as follows:***

1) Genesis chapters 1 & 2 are God’s inspired word imparting fundamental and profound truth to all people in every era, however, the accounts represented therein do not primarily attempt to articulate literal, material, “scientific” truth.

2) Adam and Eve are in each of us, and their story is our story, yet like the Prodigal Son, they never actually existed as such. Thus the author of this study finds questions asking whether or not Adam and Eve had navels, to be both very silly and very sad. (Yes, someone once did ask this!)

3) Genesis 1 & 2 present in language, style and content, 2 entirely different renditions of the Creation that are not materially consistent. The compilers of Genesis knew this and also knew these facts had no bearing as to whether or not these accounts are “true.”

4) Evolution is both an observable fact and a theory which explains those facts. It is not atheistic and is not in the least inconsistent with the biblical doctrine of Creation.

5) Creation, as intended by God, and written about in the Bible, actually encourages scientific investigation and the discovery of dynamics like Evolution.

6) Evolution is a spiritual fact as well as a scientific reality. Anthropology and Theology both demonstrate an increasing sophistication when it comes to what people believe about God. Over thousands of years we have moved from pantheism and polytheism to monotheism. Instead of worshipping the Sun-god or the Moon-god, we worship the unseen, eternal God Who made the sun and moon. Instead of fearing a capricious and violently unpredictable god, we now believe in a God of love. Instead of offering

pagan sacrifice to appease a cranky god, we now proclaim a God Who offered himself for us in the Atonement. Understanding the Evolution of belief is crucial in understanding why the God of the Old Testament sometimes seems so different from the God of the New Testament revealed in Christ. God does not change, but

people, and their ability to perceive God, most certainly do!

***If worshipping an unseen God was difficult for the Israelites, then hearing a God Who said, "Love your enemies" would have been impossible.***

Even today, we still don't quite "get" it. Note that when angry Christians wish to uphold the death penalty, they move back into the Old Testament to find justification, thus "devolving" from Grace back into Law!

***Preliminaries out of the way, let's begin...***

While it only has 5 letters, Truth is a rather big word that comes in many different forms...

Consider entering a room and finding dominoes arranged in a pattern suggesting they had been deliberately set up in a row to knock into one another and fall down. Observing only the physical evidence, a scientist would be able to speak volumes about the forces of gravity, kinetic energy and inertia, telling us a great deal about

perspective. Naturally, for one or the other of us to negate or try to invalidate the other's rendition of the "truth" would be unfounded at best.

***As an important aside, note that within my explanation of the events, I am as responsible for the movement and destiny of the last domino in the chain (even though I did not directly push it) as I am the first.***

On a different note...(No pun intended)... Individual notes on a keyboard can be truthfully discerned by a scientist with the proper equipment as being certain frequencies within the spectrum of audible sound. This scientist may be speaking complete truth about those frequencies, without being able to say one word about why they were arranged as they were and what they mean.

***What may simply be a repetitive arrangement of sound frequencies to a scientist may be something a musician knows as Beethoven's 5th. Science analyzes the notes, while theology perceives and declares the symphony.***

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how the dominoes fell. Assuming the scientist was knowledgeable and stayed within the realm of commonly accepted theory, the explanation we would hear would be the "truth." But while it might be entirely true, it would not be the whole truth. For instance, staying only within the realm of physical science, the scientist could not tell us who set up the dominoes, who set them in motion, or perhaps most importantly, why they were set up to begin with.

From a different angle on the same phenomenon, I might then indicate that I have had a personal encounter with the one who set them up, I know who knocked them down at an earlier time (me), and I believe I know the reason why they were arranged and toppled to begin with. (This reason being that God should be praised for the order of Creation, the beauty of Evolution and the reliable Laws of the Universe upon which all existence is based.) Assuming I am not lying, my explanation would also be entirely true, yet totally dependent on being a matter of faith. In this case, while the scientist's explanation of the facts can be measured and evaluated physically, mine cannot.

Both of us are telling the truth about the exact same event, yet from an entirely different

By recognizing that different levels of truth can be discerned within the same event, we may find that science and religion do not have to be at odds with each other. They can be seen in harmony, with each as part and parcel of the whole truth.

Keep in mind, in order to understand the Scripture in general and Christianity in particular, one must be able to see and discern different levels of truth. In John, chapters 2 and 3, the primary problem with the Pharisees and Nicodemus' misunderstanding of Jesus is their inability to see beyond literal truth. In addition, the whole basis of Psalm 19 is the assumption that the reader understands both literal prose and metaphorical poetry.

When we consider the Bible as a whole, or in part, is the purpose of Scripture to be used as Biology, Astronomy or Physics? In reference to Christ, Colossians 1:17 says, "...in him all things hold together." If a student is asked on a science test about the basis of sub-atomic, molecular attraction, is "Jesus Christ" an acceptable answer? Holding to only that answer, would you like that student to one day run a nuclear power plant in your neighborhood?

***What if a new cardiologist about to perform bypass surgery on you said, "I haven't looked at a medical text in 10 years, but I assure you I have read every passage in the Bible that mentions the word 'heart'!" Would that be your choice of doctors?***

In short, while science does a great job in uncovering the "notes" of our existence, it is the job of religion to discern and proclaim the music. These disciplines are able to enhance one another; they need not be at odds.

### *Creation is not chaotic, but knowable and reliable.*

***Like most other accounts in the Scripture, Genesis is not so much interested in method, but meaning. Who more than how. Why more than when. Not finite processes, but the first and the ultimate cause.***

In 1961, Yuri Gagarin returned from space in a Soviet Capsule claiming he did not "see" God. As people of faith, we understand the ludicrous nature of such a statement. Yet it is just as unfortunate as saying God cannot be seen in space when we as Christians say he cannot be seen in Evolution.

In some communities, the real issue when it comes to Creation and Evolution is not our inability to understand science, but our inability to comprehend the meaning and purpose of Scripture... Unchecked, this trend will lead to the downfall of both.

***Young people forced into either taking the Bible literally or not accepting it at all will eventually have to deny scientific reality or deny their faith. Their continued adherence to the Scripture will come to depend on their prolonged ignorance of the world. Such an eventuality is particularly sad when we claim salvation by the One who said, "I am the way and the Truth..."***

### ***Now let's look at the actual text!***

**Read Genesis 1:1-2:4a**

**Vs. 1** "In the beginning, God..." Perhaps this is the most telling statement of all. Nothing was, before God. Later, note the word "created". This is from the Hebrew "bara" which implies calling into being out of nothing – not making from other pre-existing material. Classically, this doctrine is creation "ex-nihilo." As a concept, it is itself a

mutation in belief, an evolution in theology. Revelation always is! "Bara" is only used in the Bible in connection with God. People do not "bara" anything, they "make." In this section the word for God is "Elohim"...

**Vs. 2** Note the earth being "without form and void" is reminiscent of the Babylonian creation myth where there is a pre-existent chaos that God merely "cleans up" and brings to order. The Israelites had their particular revelation, but they were also influenced by the beliefs of those

around them. This is why they turned to worship a golden calf, instead of the unseen God. What with our own "materialism" we see that old habits die hard and we are all "pagans" at heart!

**Vss. 3-13** Note the creative Word, where God "speaks" the universe into being. (See John 1:1ff.) "Light" is created before the sun and moon... "Evening and Morning" (according to the Jewish conception of a new day beginning at sundown.) A central theme here is the order of creation where everything performs its function according to God's plan. This order and reliability are the basis of scientific enquiry and theory. In other words, the force of gravity which is the same as it was yesterday will be the same again tomorrow. Creation is not chaotic, but knowable and reliable. Forces of nature are not unpredictable personal deities, but physical elements to be studied, not feared. This belief is in stark contrast to the superstitions prevalent in the cultures surrounding Israel.

Note the refrains, "And it was so," and "And God saw it was good." These are repeated each 6 times in this opening story and are an indication that this account was originally a song or a liturgical "responsive reading" not just a plain narration. "Firmament" reflects the belief that the sky was akin to a solid dome.

Note the progression from dry land to vegetation to animals... which then produce offspring... This is known as "secondary causality" with God as the "primary" or "first cause." The creation creates!

**Vss. 14-25** The stars are created things, not beings (such as the Greeks believed) They delineate seasons and signs, but they do not exert control over human destiny. The 2 great

lights (sun and moon) are created on the 4th day and it is apparent that the Israelites saw the blue sky as being alight with something not limited to the sun – perhaps because darkness often surrounds the moon.

**Note that God blesses the animals, speaking to them in a way different from the earlier elements... Why? Note that theologically speaking, we are intimately related to the earth and sea which bring forth life. This is the basis for a healthy ecology which does not worship the creation, but still reverences it.**

The fact that atoms and microbes are not mentioned is irrelevant. This is not a science text, it is a story of faith.

**Vss. 26-31** What does it mean to be created in God's image? God has hands and feet? Or something more sophisticated? Indeed, people can reason, plan, engineer their own destiny in a way animals can't. A squirrel doesn't wake up and say, "I'm tired of the nut thing. I think I'd like to travel. Swim in the sea..." People can philosophize, people can follow their own path, people can love, people have a strong sense of right and wrong..."

Note, both men and woman are created in God's image! Equality! This is the passage that makes all sexism and racism sinful and a violation of God's will and purpose. Equality is a theological fact, not just a political idea.



Note that only plants are given as food. This may be the author's assertion that the later practice of killing animals for food, whether by humans or by other animals, is a sign of the brokenness of creation, not part of God's original plan.

Still, creation is "very good."

**Chapter 2 Vss. 1-4a** Knowing God doesn't get "tired," why then does God "rest"? The answer to this question has direct bearing on how we view our own work, meaning and purpose...

In general, the notion that the 6 day creation was meant to convey 6 "time periods" which may each have been thousands or millions of years in duration is a misguided attempt to make this account "fit" science. It has no scientific or doctrinal validity and does not enhance the truth or value of these verses one iota. Using the Bible, but perhaps not perceiving the Word of God, James Usher dated the creation as having taken place on 4004 BC (About 9:00am if memory serves...!) There is no reason to suggest the original author meant to be taken so literally and as far back as the fourth century AD, Augustine warned against such an approach to this text! Why, in the 20th century has this tendency reappeared?

*...while science does a great job in uncovering the "notes" of our existence, it is the job of religion to perceive and declare the symphony.*