

Concerning the six-day creation

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by Matthew C. Harrison

Creation is a mystery. Just as science will forever have a problem with Jesus being God and man, with His virgin birth, or with His resurrection, so science will forever scoff at or, at best, view the creation account in Genesis as mythology. Though I'm no scientist, I've had challenges myself believing that the creation accounts are history. When will a talking snake appear believable to reason? How, in the face of the dominant theory of evolution, will the special creation of Adam out of dust and in a flash appear reasonable? And what of Eve from a rib? How can I possibly hold to an actual creation of all things in six natural days?

The LCMS's classic statement on creation was made a long time ago in the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (1932), and it still holds today:

We teach that God has created heaven and earth, and that in the manner and in the space of time recorded in the Holy Scriptures, especially Gen. 1 and 2, namely, by His almighty creative word, and in six days. We reject every doctrine which denies or limits the work of creation as taught in Scripture. In our days it is denied or limited by those who assert, ostensibly in deference to science, that the world came into existence through a process of evolution; that is, that it has, in immense periods of time, developed more or less of itself. Since no man was present when it pleased God to create the world, we must look for a reliable account of

creation to God's own record, found in God's own book, the Bible. We accept God's own record with full confidence and confess with Luther's Catechism: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures."

Over the centuries, there have been a plethora of attempts to alleviate the "scandal" of the creation accounts and to understand them in a way that is less offensive to human reason. Although it is true that the Synod has not defined as biblical doctrine a specific age of the earth, attempts to alleviate the scandal of the creation accounts by suggesting that the earth is somehow millions or billions of years old actually compound the scandal in my view. Can we somehow stretch the meaning of a "day" in Genesis 1 into an eon or long period of time? If so, then how is it that light is created prior to the sun? How is it that vegetation is created before the sun? How is it that God creates fish and birds prior to the other animals?

You simply cannot stretch the days of Genesis 1 into eons in order to somehow accommodate science or evolutionary theory (or even some version of Old Earth Creationism based on a non-literal understanding of a "day") in any meaningful or coherent way. Either the account in Genesis 1–2 is myth, or it is history — albeit, history written in a profoundly simple way to express profound truths. There is no middle ground. And if humankind is the result of some evolutionary process, then death was built into creation from the beginning — a view that the Scriptures categorically reject. In the end, there can be no historical Adam and Eve in a mythical Garden of Eden. So-called "Old Earth Creationism" largely runs aground.

Why do I believe that the creation accounts are historical? I believe them because I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior. And I hear in the words of Jesus that He himself believes the creation accounts are historical. (See MATT. 19:3–9.) I hear in the words of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, the voice of my Savior. And both He and the Scriptures bear witness to their absolute inerrancy and infallibility. With Luther, when I come to passages that are hard to believe, "I doff my hat to the Holy Spirit and figure that He is wiser than I am." Or as Luther said elsewhere regarding Genesis 1: "We assert that Moses spoke in the literal sense, not allegorically or figuratively, i.e., that the world, with all its creatures, was created within six days, as the words read. If we do not comprehend the reason for this, let us remain pupils and leave the job of teacher to the Holy Spirit" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 1, page 5).

What about our faithful scientists and others who struggle with these issues? There will always be a struggle between faith and reason. In matters of clear teaching of the Bible, I must hold to the Scriptures. However, there are many disciplines that operate under the category of reason, e.g., the scientific method, etc. And many Christian scientists have and will continue to make arguments based upon their best scientific inquiry to defend the historicity or the very reasonable possibility of the Bible's accounts being true. That's called apologetics. More power to them. As Lutherans, we are not anti-science. Nevertheless, the truths of Holy Scripture — and that includes God's creation of everything *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing") — are most often well beyond human reason.

Despite scientism and evolutionary philosophy, the advances of science (far from disproving God) have only demonstrated a deeply complex and amazing universe. A recent study of the human genome concluded, by tracing markers on the male chromosome, that all human beings have one common male ancestor. That's phenomenal to consider! Christians should not be against science, but only against philosophies which would eliminate God from creation, deny His existence or attack the veracity of His Word.

In the 1970s, some thought that if one only believed the Gospel, other issues taught by Scripture were up for grabs. In response, Synod adopted *A Statement of Biblical and Confessional Principles* (1973), which clarified Synod's teaching on the Scriptures:

Since the saving work of Jesus Christ was accomplished through His personal entrance into our history and His genuinely historical life, death and resurrection, we acknowledge that the recognition of the soteriological purpose of Scripture in no sense permits us to call into question or deny the historicity or factuality of matters recorded in the Bible.

We therefore reject the following views ...

That recognition of the primary purpose of Scripture makes it irrelevant whether such questions of fact as the following are answered in the affirmative: Were Adam and Eve real historical individuals? Did Israel cross the Red Sea on dry land? Did the brazen serpent miracle actually take place? Was Jesus really born of a virgin? Did Jesus perform all the miracles attributed to Him? Did Jesus' resurrection actually involve the return to life of His dead body?

In short, I believe in the Gospel of free forgiveness, made incarnate in history — in the conception, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the God-man. Because I believe the Gospel, I recognize the words of my shepherd, Jesus, in Holy Scripture. If I reject what Scripture teaches as history about creation, why should I not then reject everything else (including the resurrection itself) that appears contrary to reason?

Even as we say "I believe; help my unbelief" (MARK 9:24), we should be very humble as we approach this mystery of creation, and humble and kind to those who struggle with the issue. It's a cross that many of us will bear in this life, until we see Him "face to face" (1 COR. 13:12).

God help us.

– Pastor Harrison

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