

Introductory Categories

CATEGORIES ARE THE FOUNDATIONAL concepts that direct the way we look at the world and think about it. They function like our ability to see the many glorious colors in nature. Instead of perceiving the world only in black and white, we have in our brain a genetically constructed capacity to discern a dazzling spectrum of light. The world of ideas is similar to the world of color. We appreciate that many topics are not simple black-and-white issues and that many shades of opinion and understanding exist. Yet in contrast to the world of color, the ability to discern the spectrum of ideas is based more on our education and life experiences than on genetic predispositions. Categories are for the most part learned, and once they become part of our mindset, they act like glasses through which we “see” the world.

Today the origin of the universe and life is often seen in black-and-white categories. For many people, the cosmos and its living organisms came about through one of two ways—either evolution or creation. In other words, the subject of origins is cast as a dichotomy (in Greek *dicha* means “in two” and *temnō* “to cut”). It is an issue that is divided into only two simple positions. Regrettably, this either/or type of thinking fuels the popular perception that modern science and Christian faith are entrenched in an endless war. On one battle line, science is seen not only as a secular and godless enemy, but the theory of evolution is thought to have dealt a fatal blow to the existence of a Creator. On the other, Christianity and the biblical creation accounts are perceived as a hostile force against every new scientific discovery dealing with origins. This categorization has led numerous individuals into believing that they are forced to choose between two opposing sides: evolution or creation, science or religion, a

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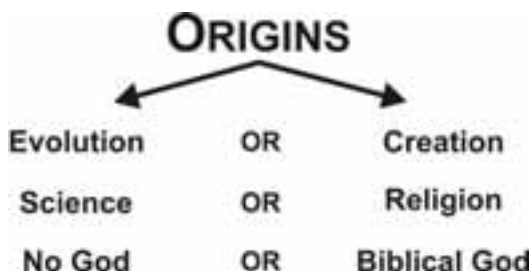


Fig 1-1. The Origins Dichotomy

world without God or one in which He reveals Himself through Scripture. Fig 1-1 presents the origins dichotomy.

The simple either/or approach to origins appears widely both inside and outside of the Church. Henry Morris, the leading Christian anti-evolutionist during the last half-century, asserts:

After all, there are only *two* basic worldviews—the God-centered worldview and the man-centered worldview, creation *or* evolution. . . . There is no evidence whatever—past, present, or possible—that evolution of one kind of organism into a more complex organism has ever occurred, or even *can* occur. . . . There are no proven scientific evidences that the earth is old, and scores of circumstantial evidences that the earth is young. . . . Divine revelation from the Creator of the world [states] that He did it all in six days several thousand years ago (Genesis 1:1—2:3; Exodus 20:8–11). . . . The Bible does contain all the basic principles upon which *true* science is built. . . . The Bible is a book of science!¹

Morris argues, “If there is really a great personal Creator behind the origin and meaning of all things, then we urgently need to know Him and to order our lives according to His will, as revealed in His inspired Word.”² And disclosing his views fully, Morris concludes, “Satan himself is the originator of the concept of evolution.”³

Evolutionist and secular humanist Julian Huxley also upholds the popular origins dichotomy. At the centennial celebration for Charles Darwin’s famed book introducing the scientific theory of evolution, *On the Origin of Species* (1859), he states:

The earth was not created, it evolved. So did all the animals and plants that inhabit it, including our human selves, mind and soul as well as brain and body. So did religion. . . . Evolutionary man can

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no longer take refuge from his loneliness in the arms of a divinized father figure whom he has himself created, nor escape from the responsibility of making decisions by sheltering under the umbrella of Divine Authority . . . Evolutionary truth frees us from subservient fear of the unknown and supernatural and exhorts us to face this new freedom with courage tempered with wisdom and hope tempered with knowledge. It shows us our destiny and our duty.⁴

Huxley concludes that with the discovery of evolution “there is no longer either need or room for the supernatural.”⁵ He then proposes that a secular religion, which he calls “a religion without revelation,” will arise in the future to serve humanity.⁶

Despite the fact that Morris and Huxley embrace completely opposing positions on origins, they recognize the fundamental role that this subject plays in shaping our worldview. Both acknowledge that religion and ethics are connected closely to our beliefs about the origin of the universe and life. How we conceive God, how we view ourselves, and how we live together are intimately related to how the world came into being. Indeed, the topic of origins is undeniably relevant.

A critical factor that fuels the origins dichotomy is the popular use of the terms evolution and creation. These words are often merged inadvertently with concepts that narrow their range of meaning. This problem is known as the conflation of ideas. Defined specifically, conflation is the careless collapsing of distinct categories into one single poorly conceived notion. For many people today, evolution is blended with a godless worldview, and creation is dissolved into a strict six-day literal interpretation of Gen 1. Consequently, the common use of these terms limits thinking and traps the discussion in a never-ending evolution vs. creation debate. In addition, the words evolution and creation are emotionally charged and frequently lead to less than charitable arguments. Thus, a first step toward fruitful dialogue on origins requires moving beyond popular conflations of the terms employed in this discussion.

Another powerful factor contributing to the origins dichotomy is the belief embraced by many Christians that statements in the Bible about the natural world are consistent with the findings of *true* science. This interpretive approach is known as concordism. It is a reasonable assumption since God is both the Author of His Words and the Creator of His Works. For that matter, most throughout Church history have been concordists.⁷ Yet with the emergence of modern sciences dealing with origins,

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Christians have perceived a problem. The theory of evolution does not align with the creation accounts in Scripture. For this reason, many reject the age of the earth in billions of years and the gradual appearance of life evolving through innumerable stages. In fact, some believers harshly criticize modern scientists, claiming they are intellectually incompetent and even spiritually deceived.⁸ But such beliefs only entrench the origins dichotomy. Therefore, a second step toward a better understanding of the creation of the world is to reconsider the notion of concordism.

In this chapter, and the one that follows, I hope to develop one main point: the popular origins dichotomy is a *false dichotomy*. If we look at the origin of the universe and life through the popular black-and-white categories of evolution and creation, then it is a lot like being color blind, and we miss many of the colors in the spectrum of positions. To be sure, this either/or perception of origins is common throughout the Church and the general public. But this categorization is insufficient. It imprisons the mind and restricts our freedom to make informed decisions. This misleading dichotomy also blinds us from envisioning a healthy relationship between our faith and modern science.

To begin the move beyond the origins dichotomy, this chapter suggests that the professional definitions of evolution and creation be employed. Those who use them routinely, scientists and theologians, respectively, best define these terms. Next, the notion of concordism is examined. A decision on whether the science in Scripture aligns with the physical world will have to wait until relevant passages are examined in chapter 4. However, the possibility is introduced that the Holy Spirit did not intend the Bible to be scientifically concordant. The categories introduced in this chapter offer a set of glasses through which we can start to see the wide range of views on origins. In this way, the prospect emerges of an approach that envisions the God of the Bible creating the world through an evolutionary process.

EVOLUTION

For most people the term evolution refers to a biological theory of molecules-to-people that is driven only by blind chance. This word is conflated with an atheistic worldview—the belief that God does not exist and that our existence has no ultimate meaning or purpose. Understandably, this popular use of evolution produces strong negative reactions within the Church. But for some Christians, evolution is simply the method through

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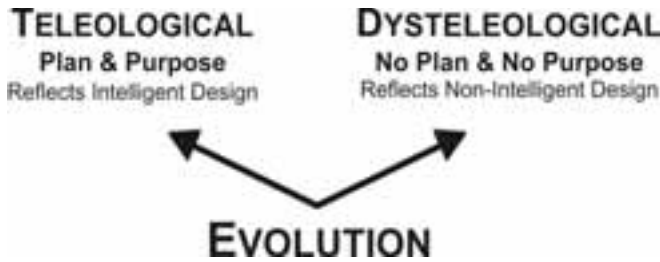


Fig 1-2. Re-Categorization of the Term 'Evolution'

which the Lord created life, including humans who bear His Image. These believers argue that God employed a set of natural mechanisms for the creation of every living organism that has existed on earth in the same way that He uses physical processes to create each individual creature.

Therefore, there are roughly two basic and radically different meanings of the word evolution, and in order to avoid confusion, qualification is necessary.⁹ On the one hand, “teleological evolution” is a planned and purposeful natural process that heads toward a final outcome—the intended creation of life. The Greek word *telos* means end, goal, or destiny. On the other hand, “dysteleological evolution” is an unplanned and purposeless series of physical mechanisms driven by blind chance only. Quite unintentionally, this process generated living organisms, including humans. The term *dysteleologie* was first coined in German and refers to a worldview without any ultimate plan or significance. This belief asserts that existence is marked by nothing but pointless indifference.

Teleological evolution is also connected to the notion of intelligent design in nature.¹⁰ History reveals that the beauty, complexity, and functionality of the world have powerfully impacted men and women throughout time. For most, this experience has led them to the conclusion that the universe and living organisms reflect the work of a rational mind, thus arguing for the existence of a Creator. Teleological evolutionists contend that the natural processes of evolution also mirror intelligent design. In contrast, dysteleological evolutionists believe that the idea of design in nature is nothing but an illusion concocted by the human mind. Of course, they acknowledge the striking elegance, intricacy, and efficiency in the cosmos, but argue that this is only an *appearance* of design that humans misinterpret and impose upon the world. For dysteleological

evolutionists, design in the world is ultimately non-intelligent. Fig 1-2 re-categorizes the term evolution.

Regrettably, there is a categorical blind spot in the mind of many Christians. They find it difficult, if not impossible, to envision evolution as a planned and purposeful process that was ordained and sustained by the Lord. Even more problematic for believers is the notion that evolution reflects intelligent design and declares God's glory. But it is necessary to underline that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not bound to any method of creation, or to the expectations and assumptions of any Christians. God could have created through a teleological evolutionary process—beginning from simple molecules and leading up to incredibly complex humans bearing His Image. In failing to appreciate this categorical distinction, many believers are trapped into seeing evolution only in a sinister light associated with disbelief. They often label Christians accepting biological evolution as “liberal,” and even question their commitment to Jesus. Moreover, they cast suspicion on the scientific community because to them the term evolution is essentially dysteleological. However, this popular myth misrepresents the religious beliefs of modern scientists.

Landmark papers that were published in two of the most prestigious scientific journals today reveal that scientists are not all atheists embracing a dysteleological worldview. In a 1997 report entitled “Scientists Are Still Keeping the Faith” in *Nature*, Edward Larson and Larry Witham outline some basic beliefs of scientists cited in the Who's Who of American Science.¹¹ Respondents were asked to evaluate the following statement:

I believe in a God in intellectual and affective [emotional] communication with humankind, i.e., a God to whom one may pray in expectation of receiving an answer. By ‘answer’ I mean more than the subjective, psychological effect of prayer.

In all, 40% of the scientists accept the statement, 45% “do not believe in a God as defined above,” and 15% “have no definite belief regarding this question.” In other words, nearly half of leading US scientists believe in a personal God who intervenes in their lives in a way that could be termed miraculous. This study also found that 40% of the respondents believe in an afterlife. Therefore, *at least* 4 out of 10 scientists surveyed have a teleological worldview.

It is important to emphasize that the Larson and Witham study employs a very narrow definition of God, that of a personal God, known

as “theism.” A reasonable speculation based on this research suggests that the percentage of leading American scientists holding a teleological worldview is much higher than 40%. More specifically, this study does not account for those who believe in a Creator who does not intervene personally in the world. This view of God, termed “deism,” is popular among intellectuals, and it would not be surprising that a significant number in the scientific community embrace this belief. This report also places pantheists (those who believe that everything in the universe is God; e.g., Buddhism) and pagans (believers in a divine force or entity controlling the universe; e.g., new age religions) in the so-called “disbeliever” group featuring 45% of the scientists surveyed. Though deists, pantheists, and pagans are not Christians, they nevertheless accept teleology and believe the world features a plan and purpose, including the reflection of intelligent design. Finally, 15% of respondents were agnostic (those who have no belief), which means they are not dysteleologists.¹² Therefore, since evolution is the only theory of origins in science, it is reasonable to argue that a majority of leading scientists accept that the world was created through a teleological evolutionary process.

A second landmark paper in another distinguished scientific journal also argues that the modern scientific community does not unanimously accept an atheistic and dysteleological understanding of the world. In a 1997 review entitled “Science and God: A Warming Trend?” in *Science*, Gregg Easterbrook reports on new research being done in prominent universities and the world’s two most powerful scientific organizations:

Both the National Academy of Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science have launched projects to promote a dialogue between science and religion. New institutions aimed at bridging the gap have been formed, including the Chicago Center for Religion and Science, and the Center for Theology and Natural Sciences in Berkeley, California. Universities such as Cambridge and Princeton also have established professorships or lectureships on the reconciliation of the two camps.¹³

This paper also interviews world-class scientists who are Christians and points out that they see no conflict between their religious beliefs and modern science. Easterbrook concludes that “rather than being driven ever farther apart, tomorrow’s scientist and theologian may seek each other’s solace.”¹⁴

Clearly, these two papers in leading scientific journals burst the popular myth that most scientists are atheists defending dysteleological evolution. The gloomy spiritual picture with conspiratorial tones often painted of the scientific community must be revised. Christians need to consider seriously the possibility that teleological evolution is God's creative method and that the evolutionary sciences provide a description of the work of His hands.

Modern science is unified by the theory that the universe and life evolved through natural processes. Three basic sciences integrate the evolutionary evidence into a coherent origins model. Cosmological evolution examines the development of the inanimate world with its galaxies, stars, and planets. Physicists postulate that an explosive event 10–15 billion years ago, termed “the Big Bang,” led to the emergence of space, time, and matter. Geological evolution investigates the formation of the earth. Geologists reconstruct the 4.5 billion-year history of our planet in light of the physical processes ongoing today, such as erosion, volcanic activity, and continental drift. Biological evolution describes the origin of life as revealed in the fossil record. Biologists explore the natural mechanisms that organized inanimate molecules into the first living forms about 4 billion years ago, and that later led to the evolution of all plants and animals, including humans. Modern science concludes that the origin of the world only makes sense in light of evolutionary theory.

Notably, the professional definition of evolution that scientists use in their day-to-day research rarely mentions whether this natural process is planned and designed or purposeless and driven only by blind chance. Science deals only with the laws and mechanisms of the physical world. Scientific methods and instruments cannot detect teleology or dysteleology. Consequently, science is dead silent on the ultimate religious and philosophical character of evolution. Of course, like everyone else, scientists ponder the meaning of life and reflect upon nature in their quest to understand existence. But such intellectual and spiritual contemplation extends beyond science and into the disciplines of philosophy and religion.¹⁵

Finally, a comment is needed with regard to the term “Darwinism.” For most people it refers to dysteleological evolution. This popular definition conflates Darwin's understanding of evolution with an atheistic worldview. However, the historical evidence demonstrates that this is a mistake. In his famed *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin presents

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a teleological interpretation of evolution and makes seven unapologetic references to the Creator. For example, he argues:

Authors of the highest eminence seem to be fully satisfied that each species has been independently created. To my mind it accords better with what we know of the laws impressed on matter by the Creator, that the production and extinction of the past and present inhabitants of the world should have been due to secondary causes like those determining the birth and death of the individual.¹⁶

Notably, Darwin appeals to a parallel in divine creative activity between embryology and evolution. He contended that God ordained the laws of nature. His position in 1859 is proof that the origins dichotomy is a false dichotomy. Darwin believed both in the evolution of life and in the existence of a Creator. Only a few years before his death in 1882, he openly admitted, “I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of God.”¹⁷ Though Darwin’s religious views changed over the course of his life, the historical record reveals that he never embraced dysteleological evolution.¹⁸

History is helpful in understanding the meaning of Darwinism, but a more relevant study for the origins debate examines the use of this word in the scientific community. A computer search of the professional literature reviewing titles, abstracts, and keywords over a ten-year period starting in 1997 demonstrates that Darwinism seldom appears as compared to the word evolution.¹⁹ A survey of all important scientific journals shows the incidence is 349 to 284,904 (0.12%). Limiting the investigation to literature in the biological sciences provides a similar result of 151 to 114,989 (0.13%). Narrowing the search even further to leading publications focused on biological evolution—*Evolution*, *Journal of Evolutionary Biology*, *Journal of Paleontology*, *Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology*—reveals there are 4414 entries for evolution whereas Darwinism appears a paltry 1 time (0.02%). It is clear that modern scientists use the term evolution in their professional work, and rarely Darwinism. Thus, for the sake of historical accuracy and the respect of scientific practice, the word Darwinism should be limited to studies on the beliefs held by Charles Darwin during his career. Its use in the origins debate introduces unnecessary confusion.

In sum, caution is required when reading or employing the word evolution because it carries many meanings and nuances. The popular use

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of this term often refers to biological evolution and it is usually conflated with a dysteleological worldview. However, the professional definition of evolution employed by scientists refers *only* to the scientific theories describing and explaining the origin of the cosmos and living organisms through natural mechanisms with no mention whatsoever of the ultimate religious or philosophical character of these physical processes. If the term evolution is to be employed without a qualifier, then its definition by modern science should be used. In the origins debate, evolution often needs specification with the adjectives teleological or dysteleological.

CREATION

The popular understanding of the term “creation” also contributes to the entrenchment of the origins dichotomy. Most people consider a “creationist” to be an individual who believes that God created the universe and life in six 24-hour days as described by a strict literal reading of Gen 1. In other words, the concept of creation is conflated with *one* interpretation of this biblical chapter. Regrettably, this leads to the common perception both inside and outside the Church that six-day creation is the *official* Christian view of origins. However, during the last quarter of the twentieth century there has been a relatively quiet shift in the thinking of a number of believers. Some are more comfortable with the sciences of cosmology and geology, and they now accept the age of the universe to be in the billions of years. As a result, the categories “young earth creation” and “old earth creation” are appearing in churches.

God’s creative method is not a central topic among professional theologians today, even though many Christians believe that it is fundamental to faith. History reveals that the subject of how the Creator made the world was not included in the great creeds that unite the three main Christian traditions: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. The earliest formulations of faith simply affirm God’s Makership or Creatorship. For example, the Apostles’ Creed (about 150 AD) proclaims, “I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker/Creator of heaven and earth.”²⁰ Similarly, the Creed of Nicaea (325 AD) declares, “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.”²¹ At no time in the history of the Church was a creedal council called to determine the structure of the cosmos, the age of the earth, or how life arose.

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According to professional theologians, the basic meaning of creation refers only to that which God has made. Similarly, a creationist is simply someone who believes in a Creator. Today Christian scholars uphold the historic doctrine of creation and assert that it is a religious belief and not a scientific theory. This doctrine features the basic tenets:

- The creation is radically distinct and different from the Creator (Gen 1:1; John 1:1–3; Heb 1:10–12; Rev 1:8). The entire universe is not God as suggested by pantheism; nor is a part of the world divine as proposed by paganism. The Creator transcends the creation. Yet He is also imminent to His works (omnipresent) and knows their every detail (omniscient). God also enters the world to interact with His creatures at any time and in any way He so chooses (omnipotent).
- The creation is utterly dependent on the Creator (Job 34:14–15; Ps 65:9–13, 104:1–35; Acts 17:24–28; Col 1:16–17; Heb 1:2–3; Rev 4:11). God *ordained* the universe and life into being and He continues to *sustain* their existence during every single instant. The ultimate meaning of the cosmos depends on the Creator. He has ordered a plan and purpose for the world. More precisely, the teleological character of the creation is rooted in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- The creation was made out of nothing (Latin: *creatio ex nihilo*. Rom 4:17; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15–17; Heb 2:10, 11:3).²² God did not fashion the universe from eternal pre-existent material. Nor was there any timeless being or force to challenge His Lordship. The Creator existed before all things and powers, both visible and invisible.
- The creation is temporal (Gen 1:1; John 1:1–3; Matt 24:35; 2 Pet 3:7, 12–13). God not only created physical matter and empty space, but also time. The universe is not eternal. It is bound in time and has both a beginning and an end.
- The creation declares God's glory (Job 38–41; Ps 19:1–4; Rom 1:19–20). Known as “natural revelation,” the Creator has written a transcendent message within the physical world. Similar to the universal language of music, this revelation is non-verbal. That is, it does not use actual words. But it clearly communicates that the universe and life are the work of God, and it even reveals some of His attributes such as His divine nature and eternal power. In particular, the beauty,

complexity, and functionality of the creation reflect intelligent design, pointing to the mind of the Maker.

- The creation is very good (Gen 1:31; 1 Tim 4:4; Rom 8:28). The world offers the perfect stage for God's will to unfold. It includes a myriad of amazing features—joys and hardships, frustrations and freedoms, thrills and dangers, beauty and ugliness, love and hate, sin and grace—all intended by God to work for good. This is a cosmos made ideally for experiencing love and developing relationships between ourselves and between us and our Creator.

The historic doctrine of creation focuses upon the character of the creation and not on God's creative method. The advantages of defining the term creation in the light of traditional understanding are two-fold. First, it frees this theological doctrine from any scientific theory. The history of science shows that hypotheses about the physical world have changed dramatically over time. If God's method of creation as understood by one generation is raised to doctrinal status, then it leaves Christianity vulnerable to new discoveries by later generations of scientists. For example, had geocentricity, the theory that the earth is at the center of the universe, become an article of faith in the fifteenth century, Copernicus would have rejected it in the next century with his sun-centered, heliocentric model of the cosmos. However, the biblical revelation that God created the world is an inerrant Truth that transcends the limitations and fallibilities of human scientific research.

Second, defining creation by its historical understanding protects the Church from discord and potential divisions over the issue of origins. Christians throughout history have held countless views on how God created the universe and life. Despite these differences, the Church has remained united by the belief that God is the Creator. Moreover, the historical fact that no Christian creed or doctrine focuses on God's exact creative method underlines that this issue should never become central in modern theological formulations and statements of faith. To be sure, differences exist today between Christians in their understanding of how God created, and undoubtedly these will continue in the future. But discord and division should never arise in the Body of Christ over origins. Adopting the historic doctrine of creation provides a unifying factor within the Church to avoid this problem.

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To summarize, care is needed with the word creation since it carries many meanings today. The popular use of this term usually refers to six-day creation, giving the impression that this is *the* Christian position on origins. However, such an approach conflates a strict literal interpretation of Gen 1 with the word creation. The definition of this term employed by theologians refers only to that which the Creator has created, and not to His creative method. If creation is to be used without any qualification, then it should be defined in light of the professional and historic doctrinal meaning. The next chapter will elaborate on specified uses of this term such as “young earth creation,” “progressive earth creation,” and “evolutionary creation.”

CONCORDISM

Christians throughout the ages have firmly believed that God reveals both Himself and His will in the Bible. As the apostle Paul states, “All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16) and contains “the very words of God” (Rom 3:2). The transforming power of Scripture is seen in the lives of Christians today. By reading the Bible daily, they are nourished spiritually and enter into the presence of God the Father through the Holy Spirit. In this way, believers enrich their personal relationship with the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Conservative Christian theology is distinguished by the principle of biblical inerrancy and infallibility. This notion asserts that Scripture is inspired by God and consequently free from any error whatsoever. To be sure, this high view of the Bible is foundational to the best theology. However, many people conflate the concept of inerrancy and infallibility with a strict literal interpretation of Scripture. In particular, they often read the creation accounts in Genesis literally as scientific and historical records of actual events in origins. But this interpretive method is problematic if the Holy Spirit, in offering an eternal revelation about creation, inspired a type of writing style that is not a straightforward as-it-happened account. It is reasonable to suggest that God, as a loving Father, came down to the level of the ancient Hebrews and spoke using the concepts of science and history that they understood. Again, the importance of defining categories is evident.

THEOLOGICAL

Character of God

Laws of God



HISTORICAL

Jesus of Nazareth

Israel, Church & Nations

Human Origins

SCIENTIFIC

Structure

Operations

Origins (Including Human Origins)

Fig 1-3. Categories of Biblical Statements. Note that the topic of human origins appears with theological, scientific and historical statements in Scripture.

As noted previously, concordism commonly refers to a method of biblical interpretation that seeks to find a correspondence between science and Scripture. A consistency between God's Words and Works is a rational and legitimate expectation, since both come from the Creator. Moreover, an accord between beliefs and reality is necessary for psychological well-being. No one can live comfortably in a world where our deepest convictions and life experiences are in conflict. It is inevitable, then, that a generation of Christians raised in a scientific age would want to correlate science and their faith, especially with regard to the creation of the universe and life.

The rational and psychological requirement that the Scriptures align with reality extends beyond concordism in the origins debate. The Word of God makes a variety of truth claims. Fig 1-3 outlines three main categories of biblical statements: theological, historical, and scientific. As a result, it could be argued that there are three basic types of biblical

concordism, and distinguishing these is necessary since they deal with different and distinct realms—spiritual reality, human history, and the physical world, respectively.

Theological concordism is the most important type of concordism.²³ It claims that there is an indispensable and non-negotiable correspondence between the theological truths in the Bible and spiritual reality. The central purpose of Scripture is to reveal God, including His character, laws, and acts. Divine revelation also discloses the spiritual nature of the physical world. It declares that the cosmos and living organisms are creations of God and that they are “very good” (Gen 1:1, 31). Scripture affirms that the universe reflects the Creator’s glory, workmanship, and divine nature (Ps 19:1; Rom 1:20). And most significantly, the Bible reveals the two defining spiritual characteristics of humanity—we bear God’s Image and we are sinful (Gen 1:26–27; Gen 3; Rom 3:23). Despite the many ways Christians interpret the Bible and understand God’s creative method, these foundational theological truths always transcend the origins debate. Grasping the deepest truths in Scripture is not only an intellectual activity, but involves conviction and submission at a spiritual level. It takes “ears to hear” (Matt 11:15) the inerrant and infallible Messages of Faith, and it demands that we read the Bible on our knees. The primary purpose of the Book of God’s Words is to deliver spiritual Truth.

Historical concordism asserts that Scripture is a reliable record of a period in human history.²⁴ First and foremost, the Bible offers a trustworthy account of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. It is also a history of the nation of Israel and her interaction with neighboring countries, and it documents the activities of the early Church. For many Christians, historical concordism extends to the first chapters of the book of Genesis and the origin of humanity beginning from a single pair of individuals—Adam and Eve. To be sure, the academic discipline of biblical archaeology confirms the historical dependability of many events recorded in Scripture. For example, there exists a remarkable correspondence between the Old Testament and the archaeological record of nations, kings, battles, etc. in the ancient Near East. Archaeology is also in accord with the New Testament. Notably, the historical reality of a man named Jesus in first-century Palestine stands firmly established, as does the existence of the fledgling early Church that He inspired.

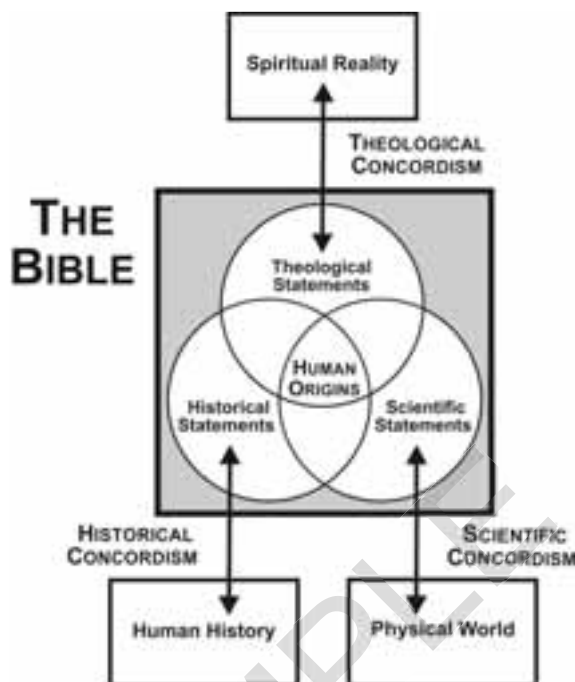


Fig 1-4. Categories of Biblical Concordism

Scientific concordism states that there is a correspondence between the Bible and the physical world. The most common form of this type of concordism aligns the Genesis creation accounts with modern science. It concedes that Scripture offers a simple account of origins, but nevertheless a reliable record of actual creative events. Debate exists among scientific concordists regarding how closely the Bible corresponds to the physical data. Strict scientific concordism accepts creation in six 24-hour days (young earth creation). General scientific concordism views creative events across six vast periods of time hundreds of millions of years long (old earth creation).²⁵ A less common form of scientific concordism insists that Scripture also provides accurate information regarding the present structure and operation of the world. That is, it speaks accurately about astronomy, geology, meteorology, etc. All scientific concordists agree that since the Bible predates the birth of modern science, any correspondence between the scientific statements in Scripture and science today is *proof* for divine inspiration. Only an all-knowing Creator who transcends time could reveal future scientific discoveries to ancient biblical writers.

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Fig 1-4 presents diagrammatically the categories of biblical concordism. A number of questions and relationships arise regarding the different types of statements in Scripture. In particular, Christians face two basic challenges in their reading of the Book of God's Words and the Book of God's Works.

First, do the theological, historical, and scientific statements in the Bible correspond to spiritual reality, human history and the physical world, respectively? Is there actually an accord between Scripture and these three realms of existence? Of course, our rational and psychological inclinations press upon us to expect some sort of agreement if we believe the Bible to be true and relevant to our lives. However, if modern scientific discoveries do not align with statements about nature in Scripture, are Christians forced to choose between science and the Bible? Stated another way, does such a situation drive individuals into either embracing blind faith or rejecting Christianity? Moreover, does biblical inerrancy and infallibility extend to all three categories of concordism? Are theological, historical, and scientific concordism necessary for Scripture to be truly a Holy Spirit inspired revelation? Or can inerrancy and infallibility be limited to only one or two types of concordism?

Second, how do the theological, historical, and scientific statements in the Bible relate to one another? It is clear from Figs 1-3 and 1-4 why human origins is such an important and volatile issue for Christians. The origin of humanity deals with all three categories of biblical statements. But is this overlap essential and indispensable? Or is it incidental and only reflective of the ancient period when these statements were written down? Asked more precisely, are the theological, historical, and scientific claims regarding human origins necessarily connected? Or are these three categories of statements, in principle, independent of each other, having been put together at a certain time in the past by an inspired writer under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? In addition, do the theological assertions in Scripture about the origin of men and women require proof from modern research in science and history for them to be true and relevant for our lives? Is it possible to develop a biblically based theology about humanity without Scripture's historical and scientific statements on human origins?

To appreciate further these two challenges regarding biblical concordism, consider Gen 2:7: "And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." Is this verse a theological revelation about

God's actual creative action? Does it offer a historical truth concerning the beginning of human history? Is Gen 2:7 revealing a scientific fact that men and women did not evolve from lower forms of life? The overlapping relationships between the three types of biblical statements and the correspondence of these statements to reality lead to other probing questions. If scientific and historical investigations reveal that humans arose through an evolutionary process and not from a single individual, does this invalidate the theological truths that God created us in His Image and that we are sinners? Are biblical inerrancy and infallibility dependent on the first man being fashioned quickly from the dust of the ground into a completely developed person? Asked more incisively, is Christianity built on Adam? Or Jesus?

In this book, I deal directly with these important and challenging questions. I contend that two powerful factors fuel the origins debate. First, many Christians cling firmly to scientific and historical concordism in the opening chapters of Genesis, specifically, Gen 1–11. Second, they conflate these two types of concordism with the notion of biblical inerrancy and infallibility. This conflation has led to a categorical blind spot in the mind of Christians that inhibits them from envisioning how God could create the world, including humanity, through evolution. It must be noted that many non-Christians assume that biblical faith depends on scientific and historical concordism at the beginning of Genesis, and they too stoke the origins controversy and deepen the dichotomy. However, using the Word of God itself, I will show that scientific concordism fails. The science in the Bible is an ancient science. It is the science-of-the-day a few thousand years ago in the ancient Near East. Therefore, any attempt to align science with biblical statements about the origin of the world is doomed. In addition, I will argue that the ancient science in Scripture directly informs the account of human origins. In this way, the history in Gen 1–11 is an ancient understanding of history.²⁶ It is an ancient history, the history-of-the-day when these chapters were conceived.* Consequently, historical concordism with regard to the beginning of humanity also fails.

* Note that the term “ancient history” might cause confusion. In many contexts today it refers to *actual* historical events in the past. But in this book, ancient history means the *understanding* of history that ancient peoples formulated from their perspective. In the same way that they held an ancient view of the physical world (an ancient science), they also had an ancient conception of the origins and first activities of humans.

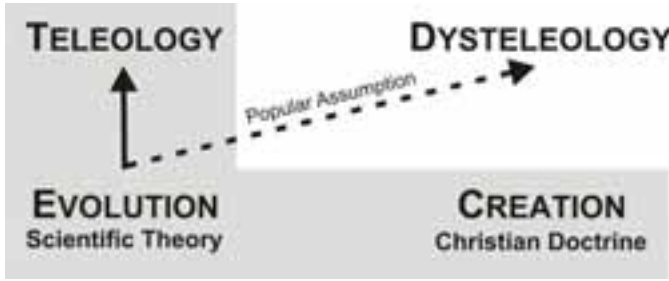


Fig 1-5. Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution. The popular assumption both inside and outside the Church is that evolution is dysteleological and driven only by blind chance. In contrast, evolutionary creationists assert that the universe and life evolved through a teleological process that was ordained and sustained by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As a corrective, I tenaciously defend that theological concordism is the essential feature of Gen 1–11. The intention of these chapters is to start the process of revealing God and His unconditional love for all of us. Biblical inerrancy and infallibility reside in the theological statements disclosed by the Holy Spirit. I also propose that the ancient science and ancient history in Gen 1–11 are incidental vessels that deliver eternal spiritual truths. When revealing to the early Hebrews that God created the world and their community, the Holy Spirit descended to their level of understanding and employed their scientific and historical categories in order to communicate as effectively as possible. Our challenge as modern readers of the Bible is to identify these ancient vessels and to separate them from the life-changing Messages of Faith.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Defining categories is critical in recognizing that the origins dichotomy is a false dichotomy. The popular definitions of “evolution” and “creation” entrench into the mind of many Christians and non-Christians a so-called conflict between science and religion. As a result, the prospect of a healthy relationship that integrates our experience of spiritual reality with our knowledge of the physical world is cancelled instantly by the categories directing the way we think about life. Moreover, the origins dichotomy raises a serious pastoral concern. It conflates Christianity with a literalist six-day view of creation, and evolution with an atheistic worldview. Should God have created the cosmos and living organisms

through teleological evolution, then this false dichotomy sets stumbling blocks between believers and modern science, and between non-believers familiar with the evolutionary evidence and a relationship with Jesus.

Thankfully, intellectual categories are learned and they can be improved and expanded. Professional definitions and concepts open our eyes to a spectrum of possibilities on how God could have created the world. We are beginning to see that there are a variety of evolutionist and creationist positions. In particular, evolution is not necessarily bound to dysteleology as popularly understood. This natural process might be teleological. Widening our categories also reveals that it is reasonable to hold both the scientific theory of evolution and the Christian doctrine of creation. From this perspective, the God of the Bible created the world through an ordained and sustained process of evolution. Fig 1-5 introduces such an approach to origins, termed “evolutionary creation.”

Professional categories also allow Christians to reconsider how God revealed Himself in Scripture. The popular belief that the Holy Spirit disclosed scientific facts in the Bible many generations prior to their discovery by modern science must be re-evaluated in light of God’s Word. It is possible that scientific concordism is not a characteristic of biblical inerrancy and infallibility. Similarly, the record of human origins in Scripture may reflect an ancient understanding of history. Stated precisely, Adam and Eve might be ancient vessels that transport divinely inspired Messages of Faith: humans are created in the Image of God, they have fallen into sin, and God judges them for their rebellion.

The introductory categories presented in this chapter open the way for viewing the colorful spectrum of positions on the origin of the universe and life in the next chapter. These foundational concepts allow Christians and non-Christians alike to make informed decisions concerning origins, and ultimately to develop their worldview.