

TEACHING ABOUT CREATION, EVOLUTION AND THE AGE OF THE EARTH

Introduction

In our culture, there are two basic positions regarding ultimate reality and thus the origin of the universe. (Here and below, *universe*, *world*, and *nature* are used to refer to the sum total of all matter and energy in existence.) The first position is **theism**, which holds that the universe results from the action of a purposive supernatural being (God). The second position is **naturalism**, the belief that matter and energy are all that exist, or at least all that affect events in the universe. Naturalism holds that undirected, purposeless natural processes have accidentally resulted in the existence and characteristics of everything.

The Primary Issue

Christian orthodoxy has always held that the God of the Bible is the ultimate cause of the universe around us; thus **all Christians agree that God made everything**. (The term *Christian* is used here to denote those who believe that the Bible is *inspired*—God’s supernatural revelation to mankind—and who believe the historic creeds of the Christian church.) Christians agree that God made everything because the Bible clearly and repeatedly says so (e.g., Genesis 1:1, Exodus 4:11 & 20:11, Job 38:4, Proverbs 3:19, Isaiah 51:13, Jeremiah 32:17, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:10, Revelation 14:7, and many other places). Christians also find support for this conviction from science. The more scientists learn about the structure and function of the universe, the more we appreciate the degree to which it is just right for the existence of human life.

Consistent with Scripture and historic Christian belief, Delaware County Christian School insists that God made the universe. The school teaches that the universe does *not* exist by accident, and that the better we understand its structure and function (which is the goal of science), the more impressed we will become with its Maker (Psalm 19:1, Proverbs 3:19).

Secondary Issues

It is important to recognize that while Christians agree that God made everything, **we do not agree about exactly how and when God did it**. The most obvious reason is that the Bible speaks much less clearly and frequently about how and when God made everything, than of the fact that He did so. As a result, Christians reach different conclusions about what God is saying regarding the timing and method of creation. Christians also differ in their awareness of relevant scientific data, and in their convictions regarding how such data should be used to clarify their understanding of the Bible.

Virtually all Christians now believe that the earth orbits the sun, despite objections to this idea by such a hero of the faith as Martin Luther. Evidence from science eventually convinced us that we had *misunderstood* figurative Biblical language (such as references to the sun’s rising and setting, and statements about the sun— not the earth—standing still in Joshua 10). However, Christians today have not reached consensus on whether we have misunderstood the *Bible*, the *scientific data*, or *both*, about how and when God created.

The result of this disagreement is that Christians who believe in the inspiration of Scripture may be found in each of the following three camps: young-earth creationists, old-earth creationists, and theistic evolutionists.

At Delaware County Christian School (DCCS), we believe that solving puzzles like how and when God created requires careful attention to *both* God's special revelation in the Bible and His general revelation in nature. **We teach our students that neither God's Word nor His world lie to us, although both can be misunderstood. Thus, accurately discerning how and when God made everything requires careful study of both the Bible and nature.** This is one reason why it is a high calling for Christian young people, confident of the Bible's reliability, to pursue training in the sciences.

In light of the diversity of opinion among Christian Bible scholars and scientists regarding exactly how and when God created, DCCS chooses not to take an official position on either question. We emphasize that God made everything, but we do not require or expect students to accept a particular view of how or when God did it. Younger students are taught that God is the maker of the universe, that we exist for a purpose, and that it is false to claim that life (or anything else) exists by accident. We do not consider specific arguments or teacher assertions for or against special creation, evolution, a young earth, or an old earth to be appropriate in the early grades. With younger students, we prefer to leave discussion of these matters to families and churches. In the elementary school library, we avoid stocking books that forcefully advocate a particular view of how or when God created, although passing references to these issues are unavoidable in books on some subjects. Older students are taught that *naturalistic* (i.e., impersonal, undirected, accidental) evolution is *not Biblical*, but that Christians hold a variety of other views on how and when God created. Without saying or implying that they should accept a particular view, we want our older students to understand the following positions: theistic (i.e., *God-ordained*) evolution, special creation, belief in a young earth (i.e., thousands of years old), and belief in an old earth (i.e., billions of years old).

Four Christian Views on Origins

Much confusion surrounds origins issues. This is partly because terms are often used carelessly. The word *evolution*, for example, has so many meanings that it is almost useless. With this in mind, the sections below briefly describe four broad positions which Christians hold, and which we want our older students to understand. The descriptions below are generic; individuals within each group differ (sometimes widely) in their specific views.

Two Views on *How* God Made *Living Things*

SPECIAL CREATION

God created the basic kinds of living things by miracle. Since then, natural processes like genetic drift and natural selection have produced small changes in the original stock, resulting in *new varieties of the same basic kind of creature*. For example, creationists believe that God miraculously created elephant-kind, and then the natural processes God built into nature produced African and Indian elephants (and perhaps mastodons and mammoths) from the original stock. The process of producing such minor variations in organisms is sometimes called *microevolution*. Creationists have no argument with this level of evolution. The many breeds of domestic dogs provide further examples of the result of microevolution: they are new varieties, but all are still dogs. Creationists believe that God has placed limits on how far natural change in organisms can go. Variation can occur *within a created kind*, but no new kinds will arise this way. For example, no matter how much time is available for variations to occur, no group of hoofed land mammals would ever give rise to anything as different as a whale. *Young-Earth* creationists believe that God made the basic kinds of organisms over a period of six 24-hour days, perhaps 10,000 years ago. *Old-Earth* creationists believe that God made them (by miracle) at various times over a period of several billion years. **Creationists do not agree about the age of the Earth.**

THEISTIC EVOLUTION

Theistic evolution is *God-ordained evolution*. Theistic evolutionists are convinced that God used a *process* and not *miracles* to make the major groups of creatures (this is what defines them as evolutionists and not creationists). *But theistic evolutionists reject the naturalistic idea that evolution is ultimately accidental and purposeless.* They believe that God very much gets credit for the existence of all creatures because *He invented* the process of evolution; it was *His tool* to bring about the living things *He wanted*. Theistic evolutionists do not agree with those naturalistic evolutionists who claim that the evolutionary process makes belief in God unnecessary. Christian theistic evolutionists also disagree with those who deny the reality of miracles. They accept Jesus' virgin birth, His walking on water, His resurrection, etc. They believe in a miracle-working God, who for His own reasons chose to create living creatures using an evolutionary process. (Special creationists wonder why theistic evolutionists accept these miracles but do not accept miracles in creation.)

Thus, theistic and naturalistic evolutionists disagree about *why* evolution happens, but there is little disagreement between them about the general history of *how* living things have developed over the ages. The discussion below outlines the theory of evolution as a theistic evolutionist might explain it (i.e., God is given credit for the process).

God used natural processes to eventually produce whole new basic kinds of creatures. Unlike creationists, evolutionists do not believe that God imposed strict limits on natural change in living things. Given enough time (all evolutionists believe the old-earth view) and the right circumstances, a group of organisms can diversify into forms so different from the original stock that a whole new kind of creature has appeared. This production of a whole new kind of creature is called macroevolution. For example: Evolutionists hold that variation in some fish gave rise to amphibians, variation in some amphibians produced reptiles, and variation in different groups of reptiles gave rise to mammals and birds. **Note that the evolution–creation debate is not about whether creatures change, but about *how far natural changes can go*.** Creationists agree with microevolution but disagree with macroevolution.

Evolutionists debate among themselves about exactly *how* macroevolution occurs. The standard textbook explanation used to be that *multitudes* of small changes (i.e., *lots and lots of* microevolution) gradually add up and result in the existence of a very different sort of creature than existed before. In other words, macroevolution is just the logical end product of micro-evolution carried on for a very long time. This model is sometimes called Darwinian evolution, since it reflects Charles Darwin's idea that evolution occurs in accumulated small steps.

However, most leading evolutionists today do not believe that the evidence supports strictly Darwinian evolution. They are committed evolutionists in that they believe *there are natural processes*—rather than a series of miracles—that explain the existence of modern living things. However, they do not think that accumulated microevolution is the sole cause of macroevolution. Research and debate continue as to what the processes behind macroevolution might be.

Obviously, any Christian view on origins must explain the first few chapters of Genesis. Christians who are theistic evolutionists have many different ideas about exactly what God is telling us in Genesis; some take the creation story as something like a parable. However, DCCS believes that Genesis clearly teaches the reality of an historical Adam, made sinless in God's image, who later sinned and brought judgment on humankind.

Two Views on *When* God Made the *Earth and Universe*

YOUNG-EARTH VIEW

(Also called *Young-Universe, Recent-Creationism, Scientific Creationism, Flood Geology*)

God made everything in six 24-hour days, roughly 10,000 years ago. He used miracles (rather than natural processes He had set in place) to make the stars and planets. Many of the geological features on earth's surface appear to have taken millions of years to form, but are more accurately understood as effects of Noah's Flood. The Flood covered the entire planet, deposited most of earth's sedimentary rock layers, buried most of the fossils, and radically reshaped earth's surface.

All who believe that earth is young are also creationists, since 10,000 years is not nearly enough time for evolution to have produced the living things on earth today. But many creationists do not hold a young-earth view.

Young-earth creationists are convinced that the early chapters of Genesis indicate a recent creation date, and believe that other interpretations (including those of old-earth creationists) compromise the reliability of Scripture. They consider the scientific arguments for billions of years of Earth and space history to be misleading. This might be because the evidence has been misinterpreted by scientists with a bias against Biblical truth and/or because scientists are wrongly assuming that studying present natural processes will tell us how events happened in the past ... a past in which God did spectacular one-time miracles (e.g., creation, Noah's flood). The universe and Earth may thus *look old* in some ways, but not actually *be old*. This is a widespread view among evangelicals today. However, it is a minority view among scientists, including Christians who are scientists. This is especially true among scientists who deal directly with the evidence for the age of the earth and universe (e.g., geologists and astronomers).

OLD-EARTH VIEW

God used natural processes to form the stars and planets, beginning about 14 billion years ago with the Big Bang. Earth is about 4.6 billion years old and the fossils were buried in separate local incidents over the last few billion years of that time.

In response to accumulating evidence that earth was very old, the scientific community began to accept an ancient age for the earth before Darwin published his theory of evolution. **Most scientists today, both Christians and non-Christians, accept an age for the earth of billions of years. Some of these Christians are theistic evolutionists, but many are not. Many Christians who reject the theory of evolution accept an ancient earth; they are old-earth creationists.**

Christians who hold an old-earth view understand the early chapters of Genesis in various ways. As mentioned above, many *theistic evolutionists* take them figuratively. Many old-earth *creationists* take them literally, with the *days* in chapter one being understood in various ways: from very long periods of time, to 24-hour days in which God revealed the story to Moses. Although Christians who accept an ancient earth believe that young-earth creationists misunderstand the Bible regarding the creation date, both groups agree that the Bible is God's Word and that God is the maker of everything.