

Compromisers

Compromises can be useful and necessary, or they can be disastrous. It's no easy task differentiating a helpful compromise from one that's terribly wrong because of the need to keep in mind all the issues and ramifications that may be involved. Early in the Gospel of Matthew the devil, faced with the advent of the promised Davidic Kingdom and consequent loss of his authority, offered an enticing compromise arrangement. With the famous words, "Away with you, Satan," or as we would say today, "Get lost," Jesus summarily rejected the deal.¹ Some things are just not compromise-able.

Confronting the church today is a particularly problematic compromise. It's one that many church leaders, pastors and theologians, believe is necessary and right, namely, joining evolution to creation.² We need to think this through carefully.

The Scriptures unhesitatingly and repeatedly refer to God as Creator. The Bible clearly reveals creation as having occurred in the near past, about 6,000 years ago (see below), and it occurred by the Word of God. It was a fiat creation. Out of nothing God brought all things into existence. And at the end of creation week, like a skilled builder having constructed and furnished a house, God declared it "very good." Creation was accomplished, it was over. It was a completed creation. After evil entered God's good creation, and the fall of man into sin, redemption became necessary. And then, because of rampant sin, there was a world-wide flood that destroyed all life except those that God preserved—an event prophetic of future greater judgment. Until the Enlightenment, no one in the Church doubted any of this. Even atheists acknowledge this is what the Bible declares regarding the origin of things.

But during the Enlightenment, this revelation began to be questioned. Earth history was reinterpreted. And a new paradigm for understanding life on earth was developed, Darwinism. So today scientists tell us that, regardless what the Bible claims, the universe is 20 billion years old, planet Earth is about 5 billion years old, life spontaneously came into existence, and all living forms developed by an ongoing process of evolution. Scientists have gone even further and proclaimed that, as God cannot be observed, examined or analyzed, there is no God.³ All that exists, they say, is nature, as we see it and experience it. And that progress, the ineluctable and spontaneous development of order and complexity, is inherent in nature.

These evolutionary beliefs have been variously described as materialistic, rationalistic, naturalistic, secularistic, atheistic, and scientific. It's not that we're throwing another label into the mix, but there exists one way to understand all that mainstream science believes and promotes: It's a religion, and the religion is pantheism. Pantheism is not an obscure Eastern religion. It's very much with us, although totally unapparent because of the Western world's lack of familiarity with it. Its two main tenets or affirmations are there is no personal Being who created, and everything that is came about by a

¹ Matthew 4:10.

² Over the decades, so many schemes and attempts to harmonize the two have been published that it's hard to keep in mind all the terms that have been used and the subtle nuances of each. For the sake of argument, and to keep the issue on a conceptual level, in this paper we're going to simply refer to all these attempts by the general term, "theistic evolution." Theistic evolution as used here means holding to some form of evolutionary development of living forms over vast periods of time, acceptance of deep time, and denial of the global flood that's described in Genesis 7—8, while affirming belief in the God of the Bible and the integrity of the Scriptures.

³ The statement is patently illogical. To overcome the absurdity of the claim, atheists turn the tables and demand that theists demonstrate the existence of God. Contra this argument, see the climactic statements at John 20:29-31. God holds us accountable for our response to His Word!

progressive, on-going process that occurs spontaneously in nature. Pantheism encompasses all that modern science believes about origins.

So, two diametrically opposite truth-claims are presented to us, either biblical creation or what we'll refer to for the sake of discussion as evolution. Theism or pantheism. They can't possibly both be true. A person should logically (and morally) decide for one or the other and then, in all integrity, build a world view consistent with that choice. Here the compromisers enter. Theistic evolutionists want both. They give priority to science as being able to discover real truths in our world, as having authority in declaring how the cosmos came into existence. Yet they want to believe as true the rest of biblical revelation. What results are the many attempts to harmonize these two opposing accounts of origins. Let's look at three of these attempts to fuse the two to see what can be learned.

I

In his latest "Lost World" book, Old Testament scholar, John Walton, holds that the Adam and Eve of Scripture weren't really the very first humans, but they were the first ones that were "significant" for God's purposes.⁴ As Walton sees it, a whole race of humanoids or anthropoids had developed by an evolutionary process. But at a specific point in time, God chose and designated a certain couple, named Adam and Eve (who Walton insists were real historical persons), to be His priestly representatives for all those other pre-Adamites. He argues that Adam was not the first man, he was not made of the dust of the earth, nor was Eve derived from Adam's body. In Walton's view, since antiquity readers have misunderstood chapters one and two of Genesis as referring to the material creation, when the text really only deals with God assigning order and function to His creation. So Walton re-interprets the Bible's account of origins in order that science may have the priority. As Walton and other theistic evolutionists see it, if scientists say Earth is billions of years old, and if life forms developed progressively by an evolutionary process, then obviously the Scriptures are wrong; therefore it's necessary to invent new interpretations so that the Bible can be in harmony with what science says.

But Walton is not thinking clearly, on several counts. First, he may be right that a purpose of these early chapters is to show functionality, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the biblical account isn't also intended to reveal the origin of the material cosmos. Scripture, coming ultimately from the Author of language, often has more significance than at first seems apparent. Arguing that a passage means B when everyone else understands it to mean A should have raised the possibility in Walton's mind that the text might mean both A and B – unless of course he has a motive for wanting it to mean B and not A.

Second, Walton doesn't know biology. At conception, when the secondary oocyte is fertilized by a spermatozoa, only the 23 chromosomes (and one centrosome) from the sperm cell enter the female gamete. All the cytoplasmic organelles (the mitochondria, the lysosomes, the endoplasmic reticulum, etc) for the zygote come from the female gamete. So all the mitochondria and the other cytoplasmic organelles that are in the new person's cells are maternal. What this means is, Adam had to have been specially made by God! Because otherwise, where did all his mitochondria come from? And if Adam were not the first specially-made male, we would have to go back further into the past to get to the first male, who would have to have been specially made by God. And there would have to be a first male, because the male alone has the Y chromosome; that does not come from the female. So all Walton is

⁴ Walton, John H., *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2 – 3 and the Human Origins Debate*, Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity, 2015. His other "Lost World" books are *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority*, by the same publisher, 2013, and *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*, also by the same publisher, 2009.

doing with his fanciful interpretation is pushing back in time God's making of the first man – a totally unsatisfying proposal. No logician or philosopher will accept an infinite regress to explain anything. All Walton's interpretation does is allow for billions of years and for evolutionary progress. And anyway, why compromise?? Evolutionists cannot explain sexual reproduction. They cannot explain the appearance of the Y chromosome in the male and the fact that only the female gamete contributes the cytoplasmic organelles. Only the Scriptural account explains it. Although our discussion at this point is focused on John Walton, *all* theistic evolutionists, supposing that Adam and Eve emerged by a process of evolution from earlier hominids, are caught in this trap.

Third, Walton and others bent on compromising the uncompromise-able seem oblivious to a now super-abundant literature that capably argues for a recent, literal creation followed by a universal flood. Books, DVD's, and websites by Answers in Genesis, Creation Ministries International, Institute for Creation Research, and many others have made readily available potent reasons that confirm the Bible's account of origins. The literature creationists have generated deals with scientific evidence, it is reasonably argued using scientific principles, and it passes peer review. Even those who hold to intelligent design present compelling arguments against the standard evolutionary model. Is Walton unaware of this mountain of evidence that supports the biblical revelation? Does he believe it's all wrong?

And fourth, Walton fails to understand that all that scientists have to offer as an alternative to Scripture are speculations. Evolutionary science is not inquiry based on measurable evidence. Computer models and extrapolations are not the same as repeatable and confirmable observations. Science is no more able to explain the origin of life than can the tooth fairy. It can only offer speculations and conjectures, camouflaged as they are by the use of technical methodology and abstruse jargon to give the appearance of a certain and fixed knowledge.⁵ The claims of evolutionary scientists are carefully couched in phrases such as "It thus may be that..." and "It can be surmised on the basis of these observations that..." or, "Based on this evidence we can reasonably assume that..." Most readers miss these revealing wiggle phrases. Does Walton not realize that the speculations scientists offer to explain origins may be nothing more than fantasy? *All* theistic evolutionists, not just John Walton, need to answer this question: Precisely *why* should science have priority over the Word of God regarding origins?

II

Another severely misguided attempt to compromise is found in the work of the evangelical leader, Johnny Miller, and theologian and exegete, John Soden.⁶ These authors (as do Walton and others) believe that we discover the correct interpretation of Scripture only by understanding the culture in which it was written. The cultural context determines the meaning. Thus, as Miller and Soden argue, the Israelites having just left Egypt, the context for Genesis had to have been that pagan country's religion and culture. So Genesis' account of origins can only be understood in view of the ancient Egyptian understanding of origins. Thus, how the original readers understood the text is how we should take it as well. Implicit in their book is the underlying acceptance of billions of years and evolutionary processes;

⁵ Biophysicist Cornelius G. Hunter, who knows the vocabulary and understands the methodologies well, on his blog and in his several books points out that the evidence offered for evolution shows that *at most* the concept of evolution is only plausible; it doesn't demonstrate evolution.

⁶ Miller, Johnny V. and John M. Soden, *In the Beginning ...They Misunderstood*. Grand Rapids, MI, Kregel, 2012. John Soden continued this argument in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172(685): 45-66, 2015, in his article, "From the Dust: Creating Adam in Historical Context."

both authors clearly state that they reject a young earth model of origins. The authors repeatedly affirm their belief that scientific claims regarding earth's age and origins are trustworthy and authoritative.

Miller and Soden contend that the Israelites leaving Egypt would have understood Genesis chapter one as simply correcting the scheme of origins they'd picked up in Egypt. Those unsophisticated Israelites would only have understood the Egyptian culture they'd been immersed in, so their origins text had to adapt familiar pagan mythology to teach belief in Jehovah. Moses re-used polytheistic Egyptian motifs and cosmologies, including days of a week, to communicate that Jehovah was Israel's greater, creator God, not the Egyptian gods. So what's written is merely a theological statement without reference to a true material creation of all things. The Genesis chapter one account, in other words, is a fanciful literary creation unconnected to truth or to reality; it has nothing to do with origins. It is not historical narrative.

Miller and Soden are compromisers. They want the Scriptures to harmonize with the scientific explanation of origins, which they uncritically accept as true. So they invent this bizarre interpretation of Genesis. One problem with this attempted compromise resides in the failure to accept Scripture as being the product of a superintending Holy Spirit. Who says God didn't reveal to Moses that the cosmos and all life came into existence and was completed in six literal days in the knowable past – and that the revelation was for all people for all time? There's no compelling reason to doubt the traditional understanding of Genesis, certainly not because of supposed scenarios modern science generates.

And why do Miller and Soden give priority to ancient Near Eastern mythologies and not to the testimony of those who actually lived during the Genesis time period and would have had direct knowledge of those catastrophic events (the Flood, for example, and the Babel episode). Don't people who experience seismic events pass on the history, orally if not in written form, to subsequent generations? We should expect that a record of those events of Genesis would have been handed down in some form until they found their way to Moses. It is far more likely that the biblical account was first and the Egyptian myth was nothing more than a later corruption of it (or a counterfeit of it) than the story that Miller and Soden would have us believe.⁷

How to choose which origins account has priority depends entirely on one's presuppositions. If somebody wants science's claims to be true, Miller and Soden's story avoids having to say that Scripture got it wrong. If however a person wants to honor God, then accepting the biblical narrative as true history, as true truth, as having come from God, and rejecting evolution with its millions and billions of years, can be done with full intellectual integrity because science's story is entirely man-made. We believe what we want to believe.

III

A third example of a bad compromise is in the writings of theologian, author and exegete, N. T. Wright.⁸ He rejects young-earth creationism because it makes Christians look ignorant and foolish. He supposes, as do his friends, that evolution is a proven truth; so holding to evolution is the smart thing to do.⁹ But Wright fails to understand that science's claims are based on nothing more than speculation. It's simply conjecture that animals with similar forelimb anatomy descended from a common ancestor. It's merely

⁷ The Mesopotamian creation and flood myths were in fact formulated *subsequent* to the events written in Torah; see the two papers by Murray R. Adamthwaite in *J. Creation* 27(2):99-104, 2013 and *J. Creation* 28(3):80-85, 2014.

⁸ Wright, N. T., *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging with Contemporary Issues*. New York, HarperOne, 2014.

⁹ Wright dedicates this book to his friend, Francis Collins, a theistic evolutionist who founded BioLogos, a foundation dedicated to making evolution acceptable to Christians. Phillip Johnson calls BioLogos "evangelicals and atheists together." Hugh Ross and his "Reasons to Believe" website would be in this category of compromisers too.

conjecture that life arose spontaneously from chemicals. No truth claim that evolutionists make is based on demonstration. Indeed, it *cannot* be! The only way anyone can know anything truly true about origins is by revelation. So, what ultimately is the issue? Is it, what is *true*? Or is it, what is the sophisticated and intellectual thing to believe? Wright also scorns Christian fundamentalism and dispensationalism; in his view they too are not intellectual. It appears that Wright holds the same prejudices as the prestige-coveting elites of academia who pride themselves on respectability.

Theologian and exegete, Bruce Waltke, and famous pastor and author, Tim Keller, have similarly voiced concern that holding to young-earth creation makes Christians look like fools.¹⁰ So, as with Wright, they seek a compromise. They want to have faith in Scripture yet accept what science alleges to be true regarding origins. They believe what scientists say: Earth is billions of years old, and hominids emerged thru an evolutionary process. And Genesis chapter one is “poetry.” They suppose that by believing what the world believes they can have a Savior on a cross and a resurrection and still remain credible. They don’t want to become mocked, marginalized, or labeled a bigot. It seems as if they prefer to be regarded as fellow intellectuals with the intelligentsia of academia rather than follow Christ, the despised and rejected One.

The theology of compromise is ugly. If evolution is true, if it’s how God “created,” then God used death to create. Some attempt to soften the horror of evolution by referring to natural selection in terms of “differential reproduction.” But that’s a sophistry. There’s no getting around the facts of extinction and of predation, and of the death of billions of creatures as God apparently haplessly experimented for millions of years with what works and what doesn’t until the modern era arrived. And God then pronounced all this ghastly horror as “very good.” What sort of God do compromisers believe in? Moreover, if death reigned for millions of years while living forms evolved, in what sense is death a judgment on sin?¹¹ If evolution is true, as theistic evolutionists foolishly believe, death is unconnected to sin, however cannily they try to work around it. And so the thread of redemption in the Scriptures that they seek to preserve becomes meaningless. Compromisers abandon core doctrine, and don’t even realize anything’s been lost! There simply can be no compromise between two diametrically opposite views of origins!

“What accord hath Christ with Belial?”¹²

Committed pantheists earnestly seek the extinction of the church. Physicist and Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg says, “Anything that we scientists can do to weaken the hold of religion [ie, Christianity] should be done and may in the end be our greatest contribution to civilization.”¹³ Countless others voice the same sentiment. A religious war is going on in the West, it’s the pantheist religion against biblical theism. Why then should Christian leaders attempt a compromise between the two? The two main

¹⁰ Waltke and Keller participate in BioLogos, along with Wright.

¹¹ A biblical view of creation understands predation, extinction, natural disasters, and much of the pain and suffering creatures experience to be God’s judgment upon His very good creation as a result of man’s fall into sin, as described in Genesis chapter three. (Pain and suffering is of course also a result of man’s sinfulness, e.g., because of wars, exploitation, etc.) The Scriptures promise, in fact, that God’s curse on His good creation one day will be lifted, and it then will enjoy the blessings of peace and harmony that were originally intended. The world we today inhabit is decidedly not what God had originally created, and it certainly does not indicate how He created. Evolutionists err grievously in assuming that the workings of the world observed today can be extrapolated into the past to explain origins. Compromisers, ignoring the plainly revealed truths of Scripture, own this error as well.

¹² 2 Corinthians 6:15

¹³ This and other anti-theistic quotes by Weinberg are at http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Steven_Weinberg.

weapons pantheists wield against the church are evolution and billions of years. And the strategy they employ is ridicule. It's how the "principalities and powers" in this modern era keep people from trusting the Bible, or lure them away from the Bible. So compromisers commit egregious folly. In the first place, they betray the One who rescued them from their sin and destined them to blessing. Anyone thinking deeply about the Scriptures should realize that God is accomplishing something of cosmic scope in His interactions with humans. So there must be some transcending purpose in our response of loyalty to Him, for God enjoins faithfulness upon us repeatedly in all parts of the Bible.¹⁴ And second, as we've discussed above, compromise simply makes no sense.¹⁵ It's totally unnecessary.

Christian philosopher and apologeticist, Norman Geisler, writes, "There is no necessary conflict between Genesis and the belief that the universe is millions or billions of years old."¹⁶ No conflict? Granted, the Bible doesn't state the date of creation, but it certainly does give the data we need to calculate it. From the genealogies in Genesis, the date was approximately 4200 BC.¹⁷ The great ages scientists tell us for the age of the universe flat-out contradicts what the Bible says. So one of the two is wrong. Now, if the Bible can't be trusted in what it says in its opening pages, which is history, that which actually happened, how can anyone believe what it says in its closing pages, which hasn't happened yet and is therefore unknowable? Or let's ask this: Is the Bible just another book from the hands of finite and fallible humans? Or is it the Word of the living God? If it's the product of an omniscient and all-powerful God, we must accept the Bible's dates as true and reject what scientists tell us. Compromise between truth and error is likewise error.

Doubtless, some Christian leaders suppose that to keep young people in the church, and to help them deal with the onslaught of evolution in their college courses, it's strategic to teach them that the Bible is compatible with evolution, with what science teaches. That may be why they present to the church the variety of compromises we've sampled here. But human experience screams that the opposite is more likely: why merely compromise with evolution when it would be more consistent (and easier) simply to go over to the other camp? If evolution and billions of years are true, why isn't everything else the anti-theists allege also true? The compromisers of this generation are more likely than not to generate the atheists of the next generation – of our own youth in the church! Compromise can be deadly. What young people today need to see are their church leaders courageously committed to the truth of the Scriptures, regardless what deniers and skeptics allege, regardless what loss of prestige may result, and regardless what ridicule pantheists heap on them.

The attempts to fuse pantheistic beliefs to biblical creation, joining the religion of those in rebellion against God to a core doctrine of theism, is syncretism – something to be eschewed. Readers are urged

¹⁴ A text that's especially compelling is 1 Kings 18. Elijah's words in verse 21 are equally challenging to the church today, "Stop hopping between two boughs [ie, opinions]; if the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, follow him."

¹⁵ Theistic evolutionists own all the problems and issues creationists have identified with evolution, e.g., the inability to account for the spontaneous origin of life, the inability to account for the design and purpose that's ubiquitous in nature, the inability to account for the existence of complex information systems in all living forms, the problem of genetic entropy, etc. The list is very long. Wanting to be in this camp is to place oneself in a terribly unenviable position. The evolutionist accepts these problems with equanimity because of his religious commitment, his commitment to pantheism. The theist who wants to possess these problems is a fool.

¹⁶ Geisler makes this unfortunate and thoughtless statement on p. 272 of his *Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (1999). Geisler seems not to understand that the "millions and billions of years" that scientists proclaim are nothing more than their interpretations of certain physical data, and those interpretations necessarily reflect underlying presuppositions and assumptions, which in turn are the outworking of pantheist religion.

¹⁷ See the analysis, "Old Testament Chronology and its Implications for the Creation and Flood Accounts," by J. Paul Tanner in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 172(685):24-44, Jan-Mar 2015.

to commit to biblical creationism, a recent six-day creation, followed by a universal flood because of sin. Such a view is logical, it's coherent, it cannot be refuted, and good evidence has been adduced to confirm its truth. Moreover, it glorifies God our Creator and it honors His Word.

In the final analysis, we believe what we want to believe. And God holds us accountable for our choice.