

Evangelical Syncretism: The Genesis Crisis

Code: B150217

by Cameron Buettel

Most of us are familiar with politicians who obfuscate simple questions with complex political answers. Who can forget Bill Clinton's "It depends upon what the meaning of the word 'is' is"? Unfortunately, obfuscation exists in the realm of theology as well. God may not be "a God of confusion" (1 Corinthians 14:33), but there are scores of biblical scholars, theologians, and pastors who insert plenty of it into the first few chapters of Genesis.

Evangelicalism abounds with theologians who don't know what the meaning of the word "day" is. The Hebrew word for day, *yom*, appears more than two thousand times in the Old Testament and would attract virtually no debate were it not for six specific appearances in Genesis 1. But those six days of creation are now at loggerheads with modern scientific dating methods. Rather than stand firm on the biblical account, church leaders acquiesce to unprovable theories and confuse the clear and consistent biblical teaching on origins.

A History of Skepticism

A French naturalist of the 1700s, Comte de Buffon, scoffed at the six days of creation and the straightforward biblical genealogies that dated the earth around six thousand years old. He said it had to be much older—about seventy-five thousand years old. Since that day, scientific dating results have followed the same trajectory as the American debt ceiling. By 1862 it was 100 million years; by 1913, 1.6 billion years. Today the estimate sits at 4.5 billion, but it will surely change again as soon as someone comes up with a better, more convincing guess.

The truth is, science can't offer us one, comprehensive answer for how we got here. There are lots of acceptable theories—except, of course, the plain reading of the Genesis account.

The Mythical Middle Ground

Regardless of historical science's inability to get its story straight, its various conjectures are given unquestioned authority and exert enormous academic and ideological pressure. And in the face of that pressure, many theologians and biblical scholars attempt to harmonize creation and evolution in hopes of maintaining both their academic credibility and their orthodoxy.

Popular author and theologian Tim Keller is a good example. Keller uses a false dichotomy to justify his attempt to harmonize evolutionary theory with the biblical text, saying that we shouldn't have to "choose between an anti-science religion or an anti-religious science." [1]

http://biologos.org/uploads/projects/Keller_white_paper.pdf, page 1

It's worth remembering that true empirical science is measurable, testable, repeatable, and observable. Therefore evolutionary theories require at least as much blind faith as the Genesis account, if not more. And yet the wonky religions of Big Bang Cosmology and Darwinian Evolution have done an amazing job of frightening theologians with their façade of pseudo-scientific evidence.

Theologians who refuse to compromise and cave to that façade are not "anti-science." They are against bad science. If a scientific theory conflicts with God's inerrant Word, it is the theory that requires revision; not Scripture. True biblical scholarship seeks to arrive at exegetical conclusions in conformity with the biblical text, not impose humanistic conclusions upon the text, thus changing its meaning. Those who insist on mixing oil with water combine pseudo-science with pseudo-exegesis and come up with convoluted solutions that neither scientists nor scholars can agree on.

Accommodating Lies

Celebrated theologian N.T. Wright actually claims that he sees "emerging hominids" when he reads the opening chapters of Genesis:

Genesis one, two, and three is wonderful picture language, but I do think there was a primal pair in a world of emerging hominids, that's the way I read that. ... the way that I see it is that God called one pair of hominids and said "OK, this place is a bit chaotic, you and I together, we're going to have a project. We're going to plant this garden and we're going to go out from here and this is how it's going to be." [2]
<http://www.premierchristianradio.com/Shows/Saturday/Unbelievable/Episodes/NT-Wright-on-Paul-Hell-Satan-Creation-Adam-Eve-more-Unbelievable>; Listen from 32:10

N.T. Wright is a proud supporter of BioLogos, an organization Phil Johnson has aptly renamed "Evangelicals and Atheists Together." BioLogos is an organization with the mission of inviting "the church and the world to see the harmony between science and biblical faith as we present an evolutionary understanding of God's creation." [3]
<http://biologos.org/about> That's like being on a mission to draw a round square. They're trying to make evolution compatible with the Bible when it's not even compatible with science.

Phil Johnson points out that BioLogos is evangelical syncretism taken to a whole other level, labelling them an "evangelical trojan horse":

In every conflict that pits contemporary “scientific” skepticism against the historic faith of the church, BioLogos has defended the *skeptical* point of view. BioLogos’s contributors consistently give preference to modern ideology over biblical revelation. Although the BioLogos PR machine relentlessly portrays the organization as equally committed to science and the Scriptures (and there’s a lot of talk about “bridge-building” and reconciliation), the drift of the organization is decidedly just one way. That should be obvious to anyone who ignores the organization’s own carefully-crafted PR and simply pays attention to what the BioLogos staff and contributors actually blog about.^[4]
<http://teampyro.blogspot.com/2010/06/trojan-horse.html>

Tim Keller, while remaining ambiguous as to his own views, is a willing spokesman for BioLogos. On their website, Keller professes his openness to Derek Kidner’s theory that God forming man from the dust of the ground could be a description of evolution:

“The intelligent beings of a remote past, whose bodily and cultural remains give them the clear status of ‘modern man’ to the anthropologist, may yet have been decisively below the plane of life which was established in the creation of Adam... Nothing requires that the creature into which God breathed human life should not have been of a species prepared in every way for humanity.”

So in this model there was a place in the evolution of human beings when God took one out of the population of tool-makers and endowed him with ‘the image of God.’ This would have lifted him up to a whole new ‘plane of life.’^[5]
http://biologos.org/uploads/projects/Keller_white_paper.pdf; Pages 10-11

Renowned Hebrew scholar Bruce Waltke believes the church must accept evolution’s terms of surrender to preserve its credibility:

I think that if the data is overwhelming in favor, in favor of evolution, to deny that reality will make us a cult, some odd group that’s not really interacting with the real world. . . . And to deny the reality would be to deny the truth of God in the world and would be to deny truth. So I think it would be our spiritual death if we stopped loving God with all of our minds and thinking about it, I think it’s our spiritual death. It’s also our spiritual death in witness to the world that we’re not credible, that we are bigoted, we have a blind faith and this is what we’re accused of. . . . And I think it is essential to us or we’ll end up like some small sect somewhere that retained a certain dress or a certain language. And they end up so . . . marginalized, totally marginalized, and I think that would be a great tragedy for the church, for us to become marginalized in that way.^[6]

<https://thedesignspectrum.wordpress.com/2010/04/10/full-transcript-of-bruce-waltke-video-clip/>

The doctrine of inerrancy becomes useless when men like Wright, Keller, and Waltke let atheists weigh in on what parts of the Bible are acceptable to believe. And while they don’t explicitly deny Scripture, their reinterpretation relegates it to a meaningless text. It is true that not all scholars who

take such positions call themselves evangelicals, but they wield great authority in evangelical circles, and their capitulation is spreading like a disease.

Clarity vs. Confusion

Genesis 1 could not be a more straightforward biblical narrative describing God's creation week, as John MacArthur explains:

The simple, rather obvious fact is that no one would ever think the timeframe for creation was anything other than a normal week of seven days from reading the Bible and allowing it to interpret itself. The Fourth Commandment makes no sense whatsoever apart from an understanding that the days of God's creative work parallel a normal human work week.^[7] John MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning*, p. 22.

MacArthur adds:

If the Lord wanted to teach us that creation took place in six literal days, how could He have stated it more plainly than Genesis does? The length of the days is defined by periods of day and night that are governed after day four by the sun and moon. The week itself defines the pattern of human labor and rest. The days are marked by the passage of morning and evening. How could these not signify the chronological progression of God's creative work?^[8] Ibid., p. 21.

There are only two ways to deny a six-day creation: ignore the text or reject the text. Scholars ignore the actual text by blinding themselves to the genre, grammar, and layout in order to insert their own. Skeptics simply reject the text as erroneous. Either way, the result is the same—a clear text becomes a confused text.

Why It Matters

Some people like to dismiss this debate as a secondary issue, not directly related to the gospel. But it is clearly an issue that goes to the authority of Scripture. And furthermore, as MacArthur rightly points out, it has massive repercussions for the gospel:

If Adam was not the literal ancestor of the entire human race, then the Bible's explanation of how sin entered the world makes no sense. Moreover, if we didn't fall in Adam, we cannot be redeemed in Christ, because Christ's position as the Head of the redeemed race exactly parallels Adam's position as the head of the fallen race: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). "Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's

obedience many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:18–19). “And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam became a life–giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45; cf. 1 Timothy 2:13–14; Jude 14).

So in an important sense, everything Scripture says about our salvation through Jesus Christ hinges on the literal truth of what Genesis 1–3 teaches about Adam’s creation and fall. There is no more pivotal passage of Scripture.^[9] Ibid., p. 19-20.

The opening chapters of Genesis are not up for debate, nor are they negotiable. The academic credibility of our faith is meaningless if we’re so quick to sacrifice the meaning of Scripture at the altar of public opinion. Better to be counted a fool for the sake of God’s Word than to be embraced for our willingness to compromise it.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org/blog/B150217/evangelical-syncretism-the-genesis-crisis>

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