

Kenmore Baptist Church, Message Outline: LOGOS 13<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2011  
**GOD'S TWO BOOKS ... Integrating Science and Scripture<sup>1</sup>**

"The Heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork"  
(*God's Book of Scripture, Psalm 19*)

"The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference"  
(*Scientific Naturalist Richard Dawkins commenting on the Book of Nature*)

Nature is like a book to be read. And along with most people across Western history, I suspect this book was authored by God, just like the Bible. God's two books, Scripture and Nature, hand in hand. *But times have changed.*

As Galileo said, "God's first book is about how to get to heaven, not how the heavens go." From the 16<sup>th</sup> century on, Science became the tool of choice to understand God's second book of nature. How do planets orbit? Why do nerves twitch? How do reptiles reproduce? *Got questions? Go to science.* Nature dances to Newton's laws. Is God now an 'unnecessary hypothesis'?

***This isn't about 'evolution' versus 'creation'.***

For most theologians, the jury is out. Perhaps God supervised some form of "evolution" to bring the world about. The deepest issue is not **process**, but **principal cause**. As I study the book of nature, does it point to an impersonal cause, or a personal designer?

Can all that *is* be explained by purely natural mechanism? ...a big bang, planets coalescing, continents drifting, life generating, and complexity increasing as we journey from microbe to man. Or does the book of nature point toward the kind of Designer described in Genesis? Can a modern, scientific person really believe that "God forms us," without being "ignorant, stupid, insane or wicked"? ***How do God's two books relate? Can Science and Scripture integrate?***

Natural science merely *describes* the world—what *is*. What *ought* I to do, and *how* shall we live? This is the stuff of metaphysics. If we could find a way to integrate God's two books, everyone wins. As Einstein said, "Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind."

Before the panel opens the discussion, let me make two bald yet well supported assertions:

*First, science was inspired by the Bible.* Scientific naturalism and atheism undercut trust in our senses and rationality. It was the belief in a Law Giver that fuelled the search for natural order.<sup>2</sup>

*And second, both books, Nature and Scripture, require careful reading.* All knowing—both religious and scientific—involves trust, and all knowing has a subjective element.<sup>3</sup> To assume "methodological naturalism"—that God doesn't interfere with nature—is special pleading.

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<sup>1</sup> To continue the conversation, **download the Small Group Discussion Guide** (including full manuscript, activities and questions, extra fact sheets, and recommended reading) from <http://logos.kbc.org.au/blog/gods2books/>. See also "New Wineskins: Toward a Nuanced Engagement of Science by Evangelicals," <http://www.mediafire.com/?y5nmylojmmn>.

<sup>2</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Naturalism Defeated* (1994), <http://philofreligion.homestead.com/files/alspaper.htm>; M. B. Foster, "The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science," *Mind* 43 (1934): 447; Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God*, chapter 2 "God's Handiwork: The Religious Origins of Science," pp. 121-200; Alvin Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization*, chapter 9, "Science: Its Christian Connections," pp. 218-247.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowing*; John Polkinghorne, *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology*, p. 4; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*, 2d ed., 41, 54, 82; Tim Morris and Don Petcher, *Science and Grace: God's Reign in the Natural Sciences*, 1-48; Alister McGrath, "Religious and Scientific Faith: The Case of Charles Darwin's 'Origin of the Species'" [http://www.westminster-abbey.org/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/22494/ESA-lecture-2009-i.pdf](http://www.westminster-abbey.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/22494/ESA-lecture-2009-i.pdf); Alister McGrath, *Science and Religion: A New Introduction*, 2d ed., pp. 51-58; Alvin Plantinga, *Naturalism Defeated* (1994), <http://philofreligion.homestead.com/files/alspaper.htm>.

## Q1 ... Why should I trust an account written by shepherders, over today's scientists?

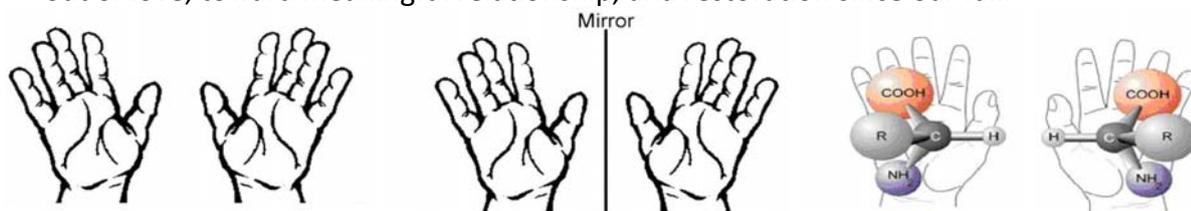
- ❖ The key question: is this text *inspired*, offering a view from above?
- ❖ If so, then it's not shepherder vs. modern scientist, but instead revelation from God vs. limited human observation ... "In the beginning, God" (Genesis 1:1)
- ❖ Try this thought experiment: *if* Genesis was inspired, what would you expect to find? ... How might a timeless, all knowing, and personal being offer a divine signature that couldn't be forged by time-bound tales from shepherders?
- ❖ First, Genesis support the claim that God is relational ... not an impersonal book dropped from above, but a personal communication gradually unveiling who God is, and who we are. God doesn't force belief by unassailable proof, but He does build relationship with us over time
- ❖ Second, Genesis grounds the best of modern day science (making sense of an ordered world accessible by observation), and modern day psychology (answering core questions of origins, meaning, morality, and destiny)
- ❖ Third, Genesis uniquely and squarely answers *why we love*. We image God who *is* love ... more than a chemical romance as materialistic stories assert, love is real and central
- ❖ Fourth, Genesis accounts for the glory and horror of humankind, our deep brokenness
- ❖ Fifth, Genesis cohesively fits with the rest of the Bible, making sense of Jesus as our redeemer to set a broken world right. In turn, Jesus (arguably the only genuine 'God-man') affirms the inspiration of this creation account
- ❖ The Small Group Discussion Guide addresses issues of 'correspondence'—historical warrants for trusting Genesis. But in summary, this story is not a shepherder's tale. The materialistic account is pale in comparison. This book resonates with life in all its colours.

## Q2 ... Why should I even grant God's existence? Isn't this now an unnecessary hypothesis?

- ❖ Like the 'software' I write, the world in which we live *seems* designed. Allowing for this possibility, a study of cosmology reveals significant warrants for believing in God's existence
- ❖ First, current science suggests the material universe had a beginning. This suggests a *first cause* that is timeless, unchanging, and immaterial. This fits Genesis, and matches 'God'
- ❖ Second, the ordered and mathematically accessible universe fits an intelligent Law Giver
- ❖ Third, as atheist cosmologist Fred Hoyle recognized, "A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature." This universe is finely tuned to an incredible degree necessary for life (called the *anthropic principle*). Neither chance (1 chance in  $10^{229}$  according to cosmologist Lee Smolin) nor appeal to an untestable 'multiverse' (an ad hoc 'explanation') sufficiently explains *this* kind of universe
- ❖ Putting it together, either an uncaused universe popped into existence, and by chance was fine-tuned to an incredible degree to permit life, OR, this universe points to an intelligent and powerful *first cause* who deliberately designed the orderly, intelligible universe to support life
- ❖ Is God an 'unnecessary hypothesis'? To me, the answer is clear. At the very least, it is *plausible* to consider an immaterial intelligence as the primary cause of this universe, and special pleading on materialistic grounds to *a priori* exclude such a 'God' from the discussion.

Q3 ... Even if we grant that Genesis is inspired, what is the *point* of this text? Is the cosmos 'young'?

- ❖ Genesis was written in an ancient near eastern culture in a genre we are not familiar with, unlike the original readers. If it is inspired, it fits that God wanted this creation story to reach everybody at a basic level in every time and every place. Historically, though, what happened?
- ❖ *View One:* Genesis is a mytho-poetic creation story conveying core truths of identity, unconcerned with literal history or scientific material origins. 'Theistic evolution' (a.k.a. 'evolutionary creationism') suggests God guides a seemingly naturalistic process to His goal. This view has pre-scientific roots in theologians like Augustine (5<sup>th</sup> Century) arguing that the days need not be taken literally nor that the creation be a few thousand years old. The world could have been made by God with certain potencies that unfolded over time.
- ❖ *View Two:* Genesis is a literal and historical account of how God created the whole universe in six twenty-four hour days, such that life on earth is perhaps ten thousand years old. In this view, God created life with all the genetic information and elements needed for further diversity, upon which natural selection and mutation acted over time, forming small and genetically 'downhill' changes sufficient for minor speciation like finch beak modifications, but insufficient for genetic information increases such as from ape-like ancestors to humans. Noah's global flood is used to account for the fossil record. This view explains why death is an unnatural enemy, and is arguably the orthodox interpretation, challenging naturalistic science.
- ❖ Other interpretations fall along the spectrum between poetic and literalistic readings, such as the framework theory and progressive creation. Christianity has multiple readings of the Genesis account, so the text is *somewhat* open concerning cosmic age. Regardless of mechanism, *all views agree on the point of this story:* God exists and He formed the universe out of love, toward meaningful relationship, and restoration since our fall.<sup>4</sup>



Q4 ... Is the Grand Theory of Evolution 'the only game in town'? How solid is the naturalistic account?

- ❖ Time permits only an exploration of the 'origin of life' (abiogenesis), but note that a growing body of scientific literature questions the sufficiency of *natural selection + mutation* in accounting for increases in genetic complexity over time (cf. <http://www.discovery.org/csc/>)
- ❖ Naturalism offers *no* sound mechanism for development of first life from non-living chemicals ... even Richard Dawkins admits we know little more than Darwin concerning abiogenesis
- ❖ How implausible is the unguided generation of the first cell? Let's just consider 'chirality'. Even the simplest organisms such as bacteria contain no less than 10,000 amino acids (all 'randomly' left-handed) and 100,000 DNA nucleotides (all 'randomly' right-handed). But in nature there is equal chance of either form. Flip a coin and get 100,000 heads and 10,000 tails. Try winning 43 million state lotteries in a row. Spontaneous life is one chance in  $10^{40,000}$  (a 1 with forty thousand zeros after it), yet a probability of  $< 1$  in  $10^{50}$  is 'impossible'
- ❖ There is no known mechanism able to overcome the sheer improbability of abiogenesis. This is 'naturalistic faith'—a naturalism of the gaps. In contrast, design is a fitting thesis.

<sup>4</sup> For a mytho-poetic view, see for instance Francis Collins, *The Language of God*. For an historical/literalistic reading of Genesis, see for instance [www.creation.com](http://www.creation.com), *Creation Magazine*, and Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise*. For an exploration of the Ancient Near Eastern Culture's functional (rather than material) ontology, see John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*.

Q5 ... But this sounds like "God of the Gaps"—glorified ignorance. Does *nature* support 'Intelligent Design'?

- ❖ Dietmar Hutmächer, Chair of Regenerative Medicine @, QUT, aka 'Professor Nerd'
- ❖ My daily research centres on complex tissue engineering strategies in the lab to regenerate cells as the key building blocks of our bodies, particularly working with cartilage
- ❖ Consider the exquisite design of articular cartilage. It perfectly fit its 'purpose' (or 'telos') as a complex and efficient mechanical damper for the bones. It outperforms any human design when considered for optimisation across multiple factors such as strength, absorption, friction, compressive properties, and ability to self-regenerate
- ❖ This layered design of articular cartilage is essential to provide the tissue with the biomechanical characteristics that are required for proper and life-long sustainable joint function. We have no known biomolecular process by which this kind of tissue can develop in an unguided step-wise fashion. It displays *specified complexity* (like a key to a lock) and *irreducible complexity* (like a mouse-trap ... remove one or more features, and the overall function falls apart), both features being definite characteristics of intelligently designed systems inherent in engineering and industrial design
- ❖ It takes dozens of intelligent scientists using multi-million dollar labs to form a tissue that could even potentially be an artificial substitute for organic articular cartilage. Whilst I have not outlined a step-by-step defense of 'design' on a metaphysical level, just considering this one instance among millions of apparent design in nature, it is very difficult to imagine that these multiple tissues and organs formed purely by chance as naturalism asserts.

Layers of Complexity, but SO WHAT? ... A Call to Humility, Wonder, and Worship

Putting the pieces together, are *Science* and *Scripture* eternal enemies?<sup>5</sup> Well, yes and no.

Science and Scripture are eternal enemies if you don't know *how to read Nature*—if you rule out God's existence before you even look at the evidence. And Science and Scripture are eternal enemies if you don't know *how to read the Bible*—if you ignore that Genesis was written to an Ancient Culture, who cared about form and function more than scientific questions of process and time. As Calvin explained, just like a nurse with an infant, "God 'lisps' in speaking to us." This incredible and inspired story is an artistic representation of origins—a cosmic history in which God lovingly formed the universe, planted a garden, and placed us there to cultivate the world. And it's a story of how we turned away, and our thinking has been off centre every since.

We are finite and fallen, limited and biased. But for all our limitations, I think we have good reason to believe two things.

*First, this is a wonderful world.* It's tragic to study this universe and treat it as an argument. Instead, our attitude should be *wonder*. We are thrown into this strange new world and invited to explore the neighbourhood. This requires the *tenacity* of a scientist, but the *humility* of an infant.

And *second, this is God's wonderful world.* The beauty, the complexity, the fine-tuning ... it all points to a Creator. When paired with the Bible's view from above, we discover both the *what* and the *why* of Creation and our place therein.

Humans alone were given tongues to echo praise in return: "God, this *is* very good."

May God's book of nature inspire wonder, and may God's book of Scripture direct worship.

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<sup>5</sup> See René Breuel, "Do Science and Religion Contradict One Another?" <http://wonderingfair.com/2011/02/21/do-science-and-religion-contradict-one-another/>.