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THE CREATION OF THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH

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In recent years, many Christians have found George Gamow's "Big Bang" concept of an expanding universe to provide a convenient gap in scientific knowledge to place the creation of the universe about ten billion years ago. The only significant alternative view presumably available to mid-twentieth century cosmologists, and one that few Christians have been willing to espouse, is the Steady-State theory of Hoyle, Gold, and Bondi; but now this theory has been virtually abandoned by Hoyle himself because of its inability to cope with the "quasar" problem.

Upon closer inspection, however, it must be recognized that the Big Bang theory carries very little resemblance to the creation account of Genesis. It is really more congenial to the god of the deists, who served as a mere philosophical escape mechanism from the absurdities of atheism. After creating the universe, the deists' god was not expected to perform any more miracles, for this would imply that he had failed to create it with sufficient power to operate under its own laws. After all, no experienced watchmaker needs to tinker constantly with his products.

Most cosmologists today, of course, refuse to allow any kind of 'god' to meddle with their Big Bang. Any appeal to God would be a basic betrayal of science at its best. Representative, perhaps, is this statement by William Bonnor, professor of mathematics at the University of London: "It is the business of science to offer rational explanations for all the events of the real world, and any scientist who calls on God to explain something is falling down on his job. . . If the explanation is not forthcoming at once, the scientist must suspend judgment; but if he is worth his salt he will always maintain that a rational explanation will eventually be found."¹

Thus, a consistent uniformitarian will refuse to be pushed into any kind of theological commitment to explain Nature's mysteries. If he is asked where the materials came from that exploded into an ever expanding universe, he can always escape to the Oscillating-Universe concept, which claims that the expansion was preceded by billions of years of cosmic contraction. In other words, the universe has been oscillating between expansion and contraction through all eternity (Allan Sandage of Palomar suggests 80-billion year cycles), so there never was a time when matter-energy did not exist.

This paper was given at Western Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon, as a part of the Bueerman-Champion Lectureship, September, 1966, and has been revised for GRACE JOURNAL.

Actually, these theories do not differ in kind from those held by the ancients, for most philosophies and religions outside of the Hebrew-Christian tradition have held to the eternal existence of matter in one form or another. The Babylonian creation account, for example, presupposes the existence of sweet and salt water when the gods first began to multiply.² The Bible is truly unique in its doctrine of a supernatural creation, and this doctrine could never have been anticipated by mere human reasoning. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts," said God to His people (Isa. 55:9).

EX NIHILO CREATION

The Word of God teaches that all non-living things were created supernaturally, instantaneously, and without the use of pre-existent materials. In the strictest sense, this is the meaning of Hebrews 11:3: "By faith we understand that the worlds (aiōnas, the time-space universe) were framed by the Word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which appear" (cf. Rom. 4:17). This certainly cannot mean that visible material substances are composed of "invisible" atomic particles! Spiritual faith is certainly not required to accept the atomic theory in its current form! The point of the verse is that the physical substances that compose our visible universe did not exist in any form whatsoever, other than in the mind of an omniscient God, until He spoke the creative Word.

Not only was creation ex nihilo, but it also involved the instantaneous appearance of complex physical entities. The evolutionary concept of a gradual development of heavier and heavier elements throughout cosmic history, for example, is excluded by Scripture. Note the emphasis on the immediate effect of God's creative word in Psalm 33:6, 9: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. . .for He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." There is certainly no thought here of delay, or resistance, or a gradual, step-by-step build-up to fulfillment.

Some scholars, in the name of evangelical Christianity, have denounced this view as philosophically "unhealthy" because it does not line up satisfactorily with empirical evidence.³ Not only so, but it is claimed that this position makes God a deceiver.⁴ An appropriate answer to such assertions has been expressed by Lloyd G. Multhauf, Department of Physics, Pennsylvania State University: "If the Bible tells us of a non-uniformity in our fundamental laws and/or that it does not allow for millions or billions of years as the age of the earth, then God is not fooling man, rather man is going on a vain search in spite of what God has said. . . Biblical revelation as well as science is a means of gaining knowledge for the Christian."⁵

Christians who truly desire to honor God's Word do not come to it with preconceived ideas of what could or could not have happened, or what can or cannot be true. To be sure, many of the great doctrines and events set forth in Scripture are foolish to the natural mind, because they are spiritually discerned (I Cor. 2:14). And supernatural creation is one of those doctrines. No amount of philosophical reasoning or scientific empiricism can modify the pure supernaturalism of such passages as Genesis 1:3: "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light." Analogous to this is the absolute supernaturalism, perfection, and suddenness of

God's work of regeneration in the sinful heart of man: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor. 4:6).

THE CREATION OF THE HEAVENS

For convenience of human thought and expression, the Bible refers to three different heavens. The third heaven is that glorious place surrounding the immediate presence of God, to which Paul was carried in a transcendent vision early in his Christian experience (II Cor. 12:1-4). The second heaven seems to be equivalent to what we call "outer space"; while the first heaven consists of the atmospheric blanket surrounding the earth, in which clouds move and birds fly. In the first chapter of Genesis, a distinction may be seen between the first heaven, above which the waters were lifted (vss. 8, 20) and the second heaven in which the luminaries were placed (vss. 14-17). There is certainly nothing crude or "pre-scientific," in the bad sense of that expression, about the cosmology of Genesis, as many able expositors have successfully and repeatedly demonstrated.⁶

What were the "heavens" like at the moment they came from the Creator's hand "in the beginning"? The third heaven was populated with hundreds of millions of angelic beings (Dan. 7:10), each one a "son of God" in the sense of a direct creation by God (cf. Job 1:6) and therefore perfect in all their ways (Ezek. 28:15). They existed on the first day of creation, for Job 38:6-7 tells of their singing and of their shout of joy at the creation of the earth.

The second heaven, the realm of "outer space," was presumably empty and dark, for the sun, moon, and stars were not created until the fourth day, and the special light source which divided the light from the darkness had not yet been spoken into existence.

The first heaven, or atmospheric blanket, had neither vapor canopy nor clouds, for the waters were not yet lifted above the expanse ("firmament") in the form of a vast, invisible thermal vapor blanket, as must have existed until the Flood, and thus there was no rain as in our present post-Flood world. Neither Genesis nor geology gives any support to the idea that earth's primitive atmosphere consisted of ammonia, methane, hydrogen, and water, as the evolutionary theory of spontaneous generation of life requires. Philip Abelson, Director of the Geophysical Laboratory, Carnegie Institution of Washington, has shown that such an atmosphere could not have existed.⁷

Some Bible students believe that the heavenly bodies were created in the beginning, but could not be seen from the earth because of a cloud blanket so dense that darkness covered the face of the deep. However, the waters were not lifted up until the second day, and the light that was created on the first day was clearly visible from the earth. Also, if God's work on the fourth day involved merely the unveiling of previously created heavenly bodies, this idea could have been more clearly expressed by the use of the verb "appeared" as in verse 9: "and let the dry land appear." Instead of this, we are told that God "made" two great lights on the fourth day, and that He "made" the stars also. Although in its general Biblical usage this verb (asah, "made") is not as strong as bara ("created") for conveying the idea of ex nihilo creation, it is

used as a synonym for bara in the creation narrative. This can be demonstrated by comparing 1:21 where God is said to have "created" (bara) great whales, with 1:25 where He "made" (asah) the beasts of the earth. Surely we are not to understand any significant difference between the creation of sea monsters and land animals! Compare also 1:26 ("And God said, let us make man in our image") with 1:27 ("so God created man in his own image"). Thus, the two verbs are used synonymously in this chapter, and the statement that the sun, moon, and stars were "made" on the fourth day means that they were "created" on the fourth day.

THE CREATION OF THE EARTH

The earth, like the heavens, was created without the use of pre-existent materials (Heb. 11:3), which clearly implies that it was created instantaneously as a dynamic, highly complex entity. It was spinning on its axis, for in reference to the light source created on the first day, it passed through a night-day cycle. It had a cool crust, for it was covered with water. The crust, however, had no significant features, such as continents, mountains, and ocean basins, for these were formed on the third day. Nor did it have sedimentary and fossil strata, for these were basically the effects of the great Deluge. But it did contain all of the basic elements and the foundational rocks of our present earth. As a planet, it was perfect in every way, but at this stage of creation week it was not yet an appropriate home for man. It was "without form and void" (tohu wabohu).

DID THE EARTH COME FROM A PROTO-SUN?

If Genesis teaches that the earth was created before the sun, moon, and stars, then Christians who believe the Book of Genesis are obviously in serious conflict with evolutionary theory at this point. For this reason, many Christians feel that Genesis must be interpreted in such a way as to avoid this conflict. After all, is it not perfectly clear from astronomical studies that the earth and the other planets came from the sun or from a proto-sun?

This may be the majority opinion even among evangelical scientists today, but an objective study of the nebular hypothesis reveals numerous insurmountable problems in the evolutionary interpretation of our solar system.⁸

In the light of the true facts of astronomy, it seems to me that evangelical scientists have no right to lend their support to evolutionary cosmogonies. Disappointing indeed, therefore, is the recent article by an evangelical writer who praises Kuiper's gas-dust nebular theory as "truly simple." The author concludes his article with these words: "It is also most gratifying that this process of planetary formation is but a special case of the universal process of binary-star formation, which seems to be one of God's universal Laws. . . Truly God is in his Universe, and all will be right with the World."⁹

In contrast to this attitude, which presumably is quite widespread among evangelical scientists, I have become convinced that the most rational way to explain the origin of our vastly complex solar system is in terms of a direct creation by God. And if this be a reasonable

position within the revealed frame of reference of Biblical theism and in view of the conspicuous failures of evolutionary alternatives, may not the supernatural origin of the astronomic system we know the best serve as a model for the supernatural origin of the stellar systems that lie beyond our own? In other words, if God created ex nihilo the two great lights that rule the day and night, He could also have created ex nihilo "the stars also." In the words of Dr. Paul A. Zimmerman: "The Biblical account of creation by Almighty God has not been disproved by science. It remains today, even from the viewpoint of reason, I believe, the most logical, believable account of the beginning of the earth and the rest of the universe."¹⁰

THE PURPOSE OF THE STELLAR CREATION

Why did God create the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day rather than the first day? One possible explanation is that in this way God has emphasized the supreme importance of the earth among all astronomical bodies in the universe. In spite of its comparative smallness of size, even among the nine planets, to say nothing of the stars themselves, it is nonetheless absolutely unique in God's eternal purposes. It was on this planet that God placed man, created in His image, to exercise dominion and to worship Him. It was to this planet that God came in the person of His Son 1900 years ago to become a permanent member of the human race and to die for human sins upon a rugged cross. And it will be to this same planet that this great God and Saviour will return again to establish His kingdom. Because of its positional superiority in the spiritual order of things, therefore, the earth was formed first, and then the stellar systems; just as Adam was first formed, then Eve (I Tim. 2:13).

Another possible reason for this order of events is that God, by this means, made it clear that the earth and life upon it do not owe their existence to the greater light that rules the day, but rather to God Himself. In other words, God was perfectly able to create and take care of the earth and even living things upon it without the help of the sun. Apart from the Scriptures, of course, this would hardly be an obvious fact to mankind. In ancient times (and even in some parts of the world today) great nations actually worshipped the sun as a god. In Egypt he was called Re, and in Babylon he was known as Shamash. After all, such worship seemed quite reasonable in view of the fact that the sun provided light, warmth, and, apparently, life itself. Even the Jews were greatly tempted to enter into such worship as may be judged by such passages as Deuteronomy 4:19 and 17:3. Job himself confessed: "If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above" (Job 31:26-28).

Perhaps it is not inappropriate to suggest that the evolutionary theory provides a modern and subtle counterpart to the ancient Sun-worship cult, for if we must trace our origin to the sun or to a proto-sun, and if we live, move, and have our being exclusively through its boundless blessings and provisions, then it is our God!

The creation account in Genesis completely undermines all such blasphemies by putting the Sun in a secondary position in reference to the earth. It is not only a mere creature of God, but also a servant to man, the crown of God's creation.

But if the sun, moon, and stars are not ultimately essential to the earth's existence, then why did God create them? Three basic reasons are listed in Genesis 1:14. They are for lights, for seasons (a calendar), and for signs. As lights, they replaced the special and temporary light of the first day. As a calendar, dividing seasons, days, and years, they enable men to plan their work accurately into the distant future, thus reflecting the purposive mind of God. As signs, they teach and ever remind men of vastly important spiritual truths concerning the Creator. David learned from them the transcendence of God and his own comparative nothingness: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:3). The Apostle Paul insisted that men are utterly without excuse for their idolatries, for "the things that are made" give clear testimony to the "everlasting power and divinity" of the Creator (Rom. 1:20).

Apparently, the sun, moon, and stars more effectively accomplish these purposes than one great light source could have. There need be no other reason for their existence than this threefold ministry to man. But would not this have been an unnecessary waste of God's creative energies? Isaiah gives the effective answer: "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard? The everlasting God, Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of his understanding" (Isa. 40:28). The heavens are the work of God's "fingers" (Psa. 8:3), and when they have fulfilled their God-intended purpose, they will flee away from His face and no place will be found for them (Rev. 20:11). The eternal city will have "no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it," for the glory of God will lighten it, and the Lord Jesus Christ will be the lamp thereof (Rev. 21:23; cf. 22:5). Christ and His Word, therefore, must be our final guide as we seek to understand the origin, meaning, and destiny of the heavens and the earth.

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4. J. Laurence Kulp, "The Christian Concept of Uniformity in the Universe," His Magazine, May, 1952, p. 23; Leith, op. cit., p. 122.
5. J. A. S. A., June, 1966, p. 63.
6. cf. R. Laird Harris, "The Bible and Cosmology," Bulletin of the E. T. S., March, 1962, pp. 11-17.
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