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Patrick Franklin

## Article

# Understanding the Beginning in Light of the End: Eschatological Reflections on Making Theological Sense of Evolution

Patrick Franklin

*This article proposes that a trinitarian eschatological hermeneutic, applied to the doctrine of creation, helps us to make sense of evolution theologically. From this perspective, the Holy Spirit incessantly draws creation to the Father's intended destination for it (new creation) through the cosmic, creative-redemptive work of the Son. This article first develops the proposed hermeneutic in dialogue with scripture and trinitarian theology. It then commends the hermeneutic as a way forward in resolving theologically three important issues in the science-faith dialogue concerning evolution: (1) it avoids both a deistic naturalism/materialism and a crude supernaturalist interventionism with respect to God's interaction with creation; (2) it provides a rich theology of nature while avoiding the pitfalls of pantheism; and (3) it helps us to account theologically for the existence of death as a naturally occurring phenomenon intrinsic to creation.*

Currently, the scholarly scientific consensus is that evolutionary theory best explains the biological origins of human beings.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in terms of comprehensive coherence and explanatory power, evolution as a scientific model really has no serious rival.<sup>2</sup> This article explores the controversial topic of human evolution from a theological perspective. My thesis is that a trinitarian, eschatological hermeneutic, applied to the doctrine of creation, helps us to make theological sense of evolution. From the vantage point of this hermeneutic, when God initially created the universe, God did not create a "finished" product (i.e., in the sense of its being static and complete). Rather, God always intended an eschatological consummation for creation and so

initiated a dynamic, progressive process. In creating, God endowed creation with the intrinsic potentiality to develop, to mature, and to evolve over time. God's creating is also an ongoing work of continuous, active creation, in which the Holy Spirit incessantly draws creation to the Father's intended destination for it (new creation) through the cosmic, creative-redemptive work of the Son.

Let me make two points of clarification. First, the purpose of this article is not to argue the scientific case for evolution but to reflect theologically on its meaning and implications.<sup>3</sup> Second, I do not claim that scripture or the early Christian tradition *teaches* evolution. I reject concordist approaches to interpreting scripture that claim to observe the findings of modern science within the Bible. Instead, my view is that scripture teaches an unfolding, developing creation, in which the Holy Spirit is drawing all that the Father has created toward eschatological fulfillment.

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My proposal, while developed differently, is compatible with the “proleptic” theology of Ted Peters, in which God is “constantly engaged in drawing the world out of nonbeing and into existence with the aim of consummating this creative work in the future. God’s present work in and for the world anticipates the final work.”<sup>4</sup> Similar to Peters, I argue that there is an eschatological dimension to all of God’s creative activity. I wish to offer a complementary perspective that highlights the significance of pneumatology within a trinitarian framework for thinking theologically about God’s interaction with the physical world.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, I offer my own eschatological reading with the aim of helping evangelical readers navigate their way through some apparent difficulties that evolution poses for traditional beliefs about creation, human beings, sin and death, and Adam and Eve.

## Creation in Eschatological Perspective

### *Creation as the Continuous Work of the Triune God*

Creation is the continuous work of the Triune God.<sup>6</sup> Two trinitarian doctrines are relevant for the present discussion, namely the doctrine of the unity of operations and the doctrine of appropriation. The former states that all three persons of the Trinity are involved in everything God does outwardly, while the latter specifies that each divine person is involved in every divine activity in a particular, characteristic way. Moreover, the patterns of divine activity that we observe in the economy of God’s dealings with creation in salvation history (economic Trinity) mirror but do not exhaustively disclose the patterns of relation inherent within God’s own inner life (immanent Trinity). With respect to creation, we can express God’s activity of creating with the following trinitarian formulation: the Father creates *through* the Son and *in* the Spirit.<sup>7</sup> God’s creative activity originates with the Father, is given concrete expression through the Son, and is accomplished in the dynamic, creative power of the Spirit.<sup>8</sup> In Genesis chapters one and two, we observe this formula implicitly at work in the narratives as the Father speaks creation into being with his Word and his Breath (cf. John 1:1–3; Col. 1:15–17; John 3:5–8; 4:10; 6:63; Rom. 8:2, 11; Rev. 22:17).<sup>9</sup>

In terms of appropriation, of the three divine persons, the Holy Spirit is most closely associated with animating and preserving life and then drawing all of creation toward its eschatological goal.<sup>10</sup> As Thomas Oden puts it,

Wherever the one God, Father, Son, and Spirit, works to realize, accomplish, and consummate what God has *begun* and *continued*, that action is more properly ascribed in Scripture as the movement of the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the eschatological hermeneutic proposed in this article focuses particularly on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

Early Christian creeds refer to the Holy Spirit as “the Lord and Giver of Life.”<sup>13</sup> This title for the Spirit is closely related to scripture’s portrayal of the Spirit as the breath of God who gives breath to all living things.<sup>14</sup> The Spirit offers, supports, nurtures, strengthens, and guides all of life, whether plant, animal, or human, according to their own specific natures.<sup>15</sup> Paul alludes to the Spirit as the breath of life in 1 Corinthians 15:45 when, quoting Genesis 2:7, he refers to the first man as a “living soul.”<sup>16</sup> Genesis 6:17 (the beginning of the flood account) refers to God’s plan to destroy “all flesh in which is the breath of life.” Job 32:8 refers to the “spirit in a mortal” as “the breath of the Almighty.”<sup>17</sup> Further, if God “should take back his spirit to himself, and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish” (Job 34:14–15). The Psalmist draws out the parallel between the breath of life and the Spirit of God: “When you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created” (Ps. 104:29, 30). Ecclesiastes 12:7 states that upon death “the breath returns to God who gave it.”

In the New Testament, the Spirit is likewise closely associated with breath and life, as applied to both regeneration and consummation (the latter through resurrection and glorification). John 3:5–8 connects the Spirit to the spiritual rebirth of the person who enters the kingdom of God. In John 4, Jesus refers to the Spirit as a spring of living water gushing up to eternal life (vv. 10, 13–14). In John 6:63, Jesus says, “It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless.” In Romans 8:11, Paul says that the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead “will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.” And in Revelation 22:17, the Spirit and the

Bride say “come,” and all are invited to drink the water of life.

The Spirit’s work in drawing human beings to their eschatological consummation includes transforming what is perishable into what is imperishable. For, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15: “What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable ... It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” and “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (vv. 43, 44, 50).<sup>18</sup> For much of Protestant and evangelical theology, the problem Paul is here addressing is the sinfulness of human beings, which he connects with their being perishable and incapable in themselves of possessing eternal life in God’s kingdom. Much of the Protestant tradition has also assumed that without the problem of human sinfulness, human beings would possess inherent immortality, a view which often depends on interpreting Genesis 1–2 as recording an idyllic state of original innocence and perfection. I wish to affirm the first assumption but challenge the second.

Certainly, Paul does connect the current impoverished state of the human condition with the problem of sin.<sup>19</sup> It is clear from Paul that sinful human beings cannot receive eternal life in the kingdom of God without having been saved by the death and resurrection of Christ in the power of the Spirit. To affirm this, however, is not of logical necessity to affirm that without sin human beings would possess intrinsic immortality. On the contrary, if we follow the symbolism of Genesis 2 closely, we see that human beings do not possess intrinsic immortality,<sup>20</sup> but are radically dependent for their continuing existence upon God, the source of all life (as represented by the tree of life in Genesis 2).<sup>21</sup> Even without sin, they still require “salvation,” in a sense, in order to be transformed from perishable to imperishable bodies. From this perspective, “Genesis 3 can best be read as one not of lost immortality but of a lost *chance* for immortality.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, human salvation is primarily about deliverance from sin (and sin does pervade human existence), but it is secondarily about deliverance from perishability and corruptibility.

To be clear: it is not that being perishable is sinful; rather, as perishable beings we are in need of eschatological consummation and completion. God created us perishable and corruptible, but predestined us in Christ to be imperishable and incorruptible.

Joel Green clarifies, “This transformation is not the release from the human body of a nonperishable soul, but the resurrection of the human person as ‘a body for the realm of the Spirit.’”<sup>23</sup> The writings of the early church fathers support this position.<sup>24</sup> For example, Athanasius writes that human beings were created “by nature corruptible, but destined, by grace following from partaking in the Word, to have escaped their natural state, had they remained good.”<sup>25</sup> It is also supported by many modern biblical scholars and theologians, who argue in various ways that the notion of the intrinsic immortality of the soul derives not from the Bible but from Greek philosophy (i.e., Platonism).<sup>26</sup>

### *The Creation of Human Beings*

When we explore and reflect on the biblical account of the creation of the world and of human beings, we discover that God creates a dynamic creation, one that God intends to grow and develop over time. Moreover, God intends human beings to play a crucial role within this developing creation.<sup>27</sup> Amazingly, scripture regards human activity as being essential to the full flourishing of God’s creation.<sup>28</sup> God creates human beings to share in his work of continuous creating.<sup>29</sup> Of course, humans do not participate in God’s unique work of creating *ex nihilo*; rather, their role is to participate in the ongoing development of creation by managing, directing, shaping, and cultivating what God has made, in ways befitting God’s own purposes and character—and this includes participating in shaping their own destiny as human beings.<sup>30</sup> To see this, we will briefly consider the portrayal of human beings as stewards, priests, and gardeners in the early chapters of Genesis.

First, many biblical commentators and theologians have pointed out that the declaration in Genesis 1 that human beings are made in God’s image occurs together with the mandate to have dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26).<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Psalm 8:3–8 indicates that God made human beings to be rulers over God’s created works. In light of such texts, Middleton asserts that “the fundamental human task is conceived as the responsible exercise of power on God’s behalf over the non-human world.”<sup>32</sup> Middleton explains that in the ancient Near Eastern culture, ruling over the earth had to do primarily with the development of agriculture and animal husbandry (the basis of human societal organization), but it also

included by extension the advancement of culture, technology, and civilization.<sup>33</sup> Such ruling does not merely serve human plans and ambitions (certainly not exploitative ones) but must faithfully represent God's goals and purposes for creation. Human rule over the earth is not sovereign kingship but faithful stewardship. Human beings were created to be God's stewards or vice-regents, God's counterparts here on Earth.<sup>34</sup>

Second, Genesis 1 portrays the created universe as God's temple and human beings as priests of creation.<sup>35</sup> Rikki Watts suggests that the depiction of creation as a temple is unsurprising when one considers the contextual realities of the ancient world as well as the ancient belief that the actions of kings paralleled the cosmic activity of the gods. In such ancient societies, it was the king who defeated enemies and provided protection, who upheld the law, and who supervised the construction of barriers to restrain the floods. Moreover, upon establishing his kingdom and entering into victorious rest, the king would build a palace for himself and a temple for his nation's deity.<sup>36</sup> This pattern resembles the Genesis account of God differentiating, restraining, and ordering creation to function as God's temple-palace, in which God comes to dwell and to rule on the day of Sabbath rest.<sup>37</sup> Watts finds additional support for the temple-palace depiction of creation in the forming of humanity in the image of God. In the Ancient Near East, the last thing placed within a temple was the image of the deity, who was then invoked to indwell the temple.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, in Genesis 1, God forms the human being in God's own image as the culminating act of creation; in Genesis 2, God breathes the divine Spirit into the human creature to impart life and to call it into blessing (Sabbath rest) and dominion.<sup>39</sup>

In his recent books, *The Lost World of Genesis One* and the more detailed *Genesis One as Ancient Cosmology*, John Walton lends further support to the idea that scripture depicts creation as God's temple-palace and human beings as God's priests and stewards.<sup>40</sup> Walton argues that Genesis 1 should be interpreted not as an account of the material origins of creation, but as an account of God establishing creation's proper functioning and purpose.<sup>41</sup> Walton's crucial insight is that Genesis 1, being representative of ancient cosmology, operates with a functional ontology and is thus function-oriented.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Middleton observes, "The underlying picture is of God as a cosmic ruler of a harmonious, well-functioning realm."<sup>43</sup>

Walton and Middleton view Genesis 1 as a temple text, in which the six days of creation culminate on the seventh when God "rests" from his creative activity and thereby takes up residence in God's cosmic temple.<sup>44</sup> The function of human beings in this context is to be priests of God's temple (creation).<sup>45</sup>

While the image of steward or vice-regent highlights the human vocation of ruling creation on God's behalf, the image of priest suggests that authentic governance requires worship of the one and only Creator God.<sup>46</sup> Thus oriented and motivated, authentic human governance of creation is worship. Moreover, as priests, human beings act as "worship leaders" within creation, coming alongside all of creation to shape and direct it to further glorify and to worship the Creator. Conversely, an autonomous and idolatrous orientation (wherein humanity has attempted to usurp God's rightful place) leads inevitably to the corruption of governance, the desecration of God's temple (creation), and disorder in creaturely relationships. Accordingly, in the context of "fallen" creation, human beings as priests of creation (fallen yet redeemed in Christ) are called to resist the destructive undoing of creation in both nature and human culture, and to call and direct creation toward redemption in the new creation (note that this calling, in the case of humans, requires repentance and regeneration).<sup>47</sup>

Third, Genesis 2 portrays human beings as gardeners who are needed to "work the earth" in order for things to grow.<sup>48</sup> According to Paul Evans, this necessity for cultivation recalls God's commission in Genesis 1:28 for humans to "subdue" the earth, which suggests that "creation from the beginning was 'wild,'" that "some coercion on the part of humans was necessary," and that "this subduing would change and develop creation over time."<sup>49</sup> This image of taming and shaping the wild fits with the portrayal of human beings as gardeners. As James Peterson suggests,

A garden is more ecologically complex than a wilderness. As with a wilderness there is an intricate interrelationship of life-forms and energy, but a garden has the added dimension of the gardener's intent. Human beings are placed in a unique position of being part of the earth. We are from the dust and to dust we shall return. Yet human beings are uniquely created in God's image (Gen. 1:27-31).<sup>50</sup>

Beautiful and fruitful gardens do not simply come into existence by themselves without intervention. They require the hard work of gardeners to plant and cultivate them. Thus, the garden imagery in Genesis suggests that God intends human beings to develop what God has made, not to leave it alone in some supposed pristine natural state. This mandate does not grant human beings license to treat the natural world any way that they wish. “The earth, like the garden, is God’s gift to us ... ‘Stewardship’ in an environmental context must mean that humans act as caretakers of the earth, not as lords over it.”<sup>51</sup>

Extending the gardener metaphor, human advancement in art, culture, architecture, medicine, technology, the human and physical sciences, and the general pursuit of knowledge are seen in a positive light. As Middleton argues,

The Bible itself portrays the move from creation to eschaton as movement from a garden (in Genesis 2) to a city (in Revelation 21–22). Redemption does not reverse, but rather embraces, historical development. The transformation of the initial state of the earth into complex human societies is not part of the fall, but rather the legitimate creational mandate of humanity. Creation was never meant to be static, but was intended by God from the beginning to be developmental, moving toward a goal.<sup>52</sup>

As with the rest of creation, God created human beings to advance and develop over time. In addition to the three metaphors for human beings found in Genesis 1–2 (steward, priest, and gardener), early church fathers such as Athanasius and Irenaeus provide a fourth metaphor. They believed that God created human beings, not in a state of full maturity and perfection, but in a developmental stage of infancy or childhood. Irenaeus argued that the creation of human beings in the image of God points not to a static quality or possession but to a dynamic reality toward which they are moving.<sup>53</sup> Osborn explains, “While Adam is in one sense perfect, the possibility of further perfection is set before him.”<sup>54</sup> This image was present in human beings at creation in embryonic form as a promise of what would later be realized more fully through their union with Christ in the Spirit.<sup>55</sup> It would reach full maturity only at the final resurrection and is therefore ultimately an eschatological reality.<sup>56</sup>

Irenaeus links the re-creation of sinful human beings in the image of Christ to Christ’s redemptive work of

recapitulation, whereby Christ assimilated or “took up [humanity] into himself” and thereby restored human beings by means of his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension.<sup>57</sup> Jesus Christ came to “recapitulate” human existence—being born as an infant, growing into adulthood, and then dying a human death—in order to live the truly genuine and faithful human life that sinful men and women had failed to live and thereby to “accustom” humanity to God and God to humanity.<sup>58</sup> He incorporated fallen humanity into his own life of faithfulness before the Father, demonstrated how we ought now to live as creatures renewed in his image, and pointed the way forward to our eschatological future as mature image bearers.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, God’s original intention that humans be stewards, priests, and gardeners of creation is reaffirmed, but with renewed gratitude, focus, hope, and power, because of their union with Christ by the Spirit and their glorious eschatological destiny.<sup>60</sup>

## Making Theological Sense of Evolution in Light of an Eschatological Hermeneutic

Now it is time to ask how this trinitarian, eschatological hermeneutic helps us to make theological sense of human evolution. I will suggest three ways in which it does this.

### *1. It avoids deistic naturalism/materialism and crude supernaturalist interventionism.*

The debate over creation and evolution in recent history, especially but not exclusively at the popular level, has all too often been tainted by the use of aggressive and combative rhetoric to promote extreme positions (i.e., young-earth six-day creationism versus atheistic evolution).<sup>61</sup> This has given rise to the unfortunate (and mythical) popular impression that science and the Christian faith are inherently incompatible.<sup>62</sup> Both of these extreme positions are prone to reductionism. The evolutionary atheist focuses almost exclusively on physical reality and downplays or ignores the significance of nonphysical or spiritual reality (material reductionism) whereas the creationist focuses almost exclusively on spiritual reality and downplays the significance of physical reality along with the insights and discoveries of the sciences that carefully and methodically study it (supernatural reductionism).<sup>63</sup>

In contrast, the trinitarian eschatological hermeneutic promoted in this article pushes back against both of these extremes. It suggests that the Spirit of God pervades all of reality, giving breath to all created life and acting with sovereign love and freedom to shape and direct the unfolding of creation and human destiny. The Spirit's activity should not be understood in crude interventionist terms, in which a god of the gaps intervenes from "the beyond" to create every living organism by means of a special, unique act of divine intervention. Rather, the Spirit *is continually present and active* within the created order in sustaining the world and drawing it toward fulfillment.<sup>64</sup> Much of the time, the Spirit's work in this regard goes unnoticed and may well be scientifically undetectable.<sup>65</sup> Sometimes, however, the Spirit's presence and power *intensifies* in order to actualize and/or to make manifest specific intentions or communications of the divine will (e.g., prophecy, miracles, the conception, incarnation, and resurrection of Christ).

In a recent article in *Pneuma*, Canadian Pentecostal theologian Andrew Gabriel employs the metaphor of intensification to provide a more coherent theological account of how Spirit baptism, as found in the New Testament book of Acts, relates to the Spirit's presence generally in the rest of the Bible and especially in the Old Testament.<sup>66</sup> His thesis is that Spirit baptism is a particular experience of the intensification of the presence and power of the Spirit of God, which already pervades and upholds all of reality and animates all life (e.g., Jer. 23:24; 1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 1:23; 4:6).<sup>67</sup> Gabriel demonstrates that in the Old Testament, God's Spirit (*ruach*) animates not just human life, but all of life. The Spirit's animating presence intensifies among human beings in a unique way, and further intensifies with respect to particular human beings for special purposes (e.g., fills, comes to rest upon, empowers, and brings visions, prophetic utterances, and acts). So, already within the Old Testament, we observe sequential, subsequent fillings—or better, *intensifications*—of the Spirit's presence and power.

In the New Testament, we observe further intensifications in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies proclaiming the Spirit's future coming in power (e.g., Joel 2; cf. Acts 2). We see it in the ministry of Jesus, in the conversion of people to Christianity (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:3; John 3:5–6), in the life and ministry of the church and individual Christians whom Paul exhorts to be *continually* filled with the Spirit

(Eph. 5:18), and finally, in the experience of Spirit baptism in Acts.<sup>68</sup>

We can employ Gabriel's intensification model constructively to discuss the Spirit's activity in guiding creation in a manner that is active and intimate without being crudely interventionist.<sup>69</sup> In the intensification view, the Spirit is the one who undergirds and supports all life and reality, including the physical laws of nature. Thus, the "miraculous" does not introduce a radical disruption into nature, as in the special arrival of a God who is usually elsewhere (the "beyond") and inactive (such that natural laws are "broken" and the structure of the physical realm is violated by God "breaking in"). Rather, the miraculous, the charismatic, and the mystical are instances of the intensification of the presence and power of the Spirit, who already pervades and upholds the universe.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the concept of intensification allows for a more nuanced and holistic understanding of God's interaction with physical and spiritual reality.<sup>71</sup>

## 2. *It provides a rich theology of nature while avoiding the pitfalls of pantheism.*

One of the things that many Christians find threatening about evolution is that it gives an important place to chance (e.g., random genetic mutation, natural selection influenced by changing ecosystems and environments), which is difficult to explain from the perspective of much of traditional theology. For some, accepting the role of chance would threaten their understanding of God's sovereignty.

A trinitarian, eschatological hermeneutic helps us to account theologically for the chaos, randomness, and chance (perhaps the writer of Ecclesiastes would add "meaninglessness"! ) that we observe in the natural order—particularly in evolution. One of the fascinating things about evolution is that it involves a dynamic interplay between chaos and order, randomness and self-organization, chance and purpose.<sup>72</sup> Often popular or high-school-level literature places an undue, one-sided emphasis on the randomness of evolution. However, this is misleading, because the randomness within evolution works only because it is combined with nonrandom natural laws and processes. "Evolution happens within the given necessity of natural law," according to John Polkinghorne.<sup>73</sup>

Arthur Peacocke similarly writes, "One might say that the potential of the 'being' of the world is made manifest in the 'becoming' that the operation of chance makes actual." Then, reflecting theologically on the significance of this, he writes, "Hence we infer *God is the ultimate ground and source of both law ('necessity') and 'chance.'*"<sup>74</sup> In addition, while randomness is crucial to evolution at the microbiological level of genetic mutation, it does not characterize the overarching direction of evolutionary history.<sup>75</sup> In fact, evolution has certain propensities that favor consistent, progressive outcomes.<sup>76</sup> The universe, it seems, is on a journey: its trajectory is not aimless but progresses toward increased complexity and the flourishing of life.<sup>77</sup>

Far from being a problem for Christian theology by threatening God's sovereignty, chaos and randomness, as intrinsic elements of creation, actually ensure it. From this perspective, "Chance is just a shuffling mechanism for exploring potentiality."<sup>78</sup> As an "open system" creation neither locks God out nor imprisons God within the bounds of the created order.<sup>79</sup> God remains sovereignly loving (thus immanent) and sovereignly free (thus transcendent). The Spirit's intimate presence within creation, to draw and guide it toward its eschatological consummation through creation's own natural processes, does not entail that the Spirit is enmeshed with creation, as in pantheism. The mainstream Christian tradition rightly stresses that divine being and created being cannot be conflated or mixed. Moreover, pantheism is also misleading, because the present created order is not wholly sacramental: to be sure, it is filled with the presence of God and declares God's glory (Psalm 19), but it is also entangled with the reality of evil and, as such, its mediation and revelation of God's presence and character remain distorted and ambiguous.<sup>80</sup>

To illustrate the way that God interacts with the order and openness of the world to direct it according to his purposes, Polkinghorne appeals to information systems theory. He writes, "God may be seen as interacting with creation by the input of information within its open history."<sup>81</sup> Such information exercises top-down control over the system without violating the processes inherent within the system. Similarly, we could employ a computer analogy in which hardware parallels the physical world; software, the natural laws, forces, and processes that govern the world; and input capacities, the openness

of the system to the direction of God (as the user or programmer). Notice that in this analogy the software not only depends on the physical hardware to run, but also exercises top-down control over it via its programs and information inputs.<sup>82</sup> Such analogies, while imperfect, help us to think about God's interaction with the world in a way that preserves both God's immanence and transcendence.

### *3. It helps us to account theologically for the existence of death as intrinsic to creation.*

On the basis of evidence obtained across a wide range of scientific fields, contemporary scientists infer that death is a naturally occurring event, intrinsic to all creaturely life. Moreover, death is not a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of creation, but existed long before the arrival of human beings and extends all the way back to the emergence of simple cell life some 3.5 billion years ago. Furthermore, the universe itself is inherently finite and has, in its future, a definite, foreseeable end. Polkinghorne observes that, ultimately, "the whole universe is condemned to a final futility, either as a result of the bang of collapse back into the Big Crunch or as a result of the whimper of decay into low-grade radiation, expanding and cooling forever." Thus, "if things continue as they have been, it is as sure as can be that all forms of carbon-based life will prove to have been no more than a transient episode in the history of the universe."<sup>83</sup> In addition, our own sun on which all life on Earth is dependent for existence has a limited life-span (about five billion more years).<sup>84</sup>

Thus, it seems that the world that God created is a finite, mortal one, in need of deliverance from decay, corruptibility, and perishability. As I argued earlier, part of the Spirit's work in drawing human beings to their eschatological consummation is to transform what is perishable into that which is imperishable. Moreover, creation itself awaits such deliverance. As Paul writes, "creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God," whereas in the meantime "we know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now" (Rom. 8:21-22). Salvation includes transformation from mortality to immortality; and immortality is a gift and a goal, not an intrinsic endowment of human beings, possessed from the outset of their



existence.<sup>85</sup> This insight can alleviate some of the discomfort Christians feel when considering the universal pervasiveness of death throughout the history of creation. However, other problems remain, three of which I will address briefly now.

*First, some see the pervasiveness of death in the history of evolution as being wasteful, meaningless, disheartening, and perhaps even depressing.* But surely this is to see the glass half empty. For one thing, such a perspective overlooks the beauty and diversity of life that the evolutionary process has made possible. A flower is not wasted because it withers and dies; its withering and dying is a necessary part of the cycle of seed-bearing life. The incredible variety of creatures throughout the ages has been a source of delight and enjoyment to God, even if many species have long since vanished and are known to us now only through the fossil record. In addition, the “glass half empty” view of death in evolutionary history overlooks *the amazing persistence of life*, despite all odds stacked against the probability of its emergence.<sup>86</sup>

Scientists have observed that the emergence of life requires an extremely “fine-tuned” universe, one that is so statistically improbable that we rightly marvel with awe and wonder at the fact that we actually exist and indwell such a universe. So, in light of this remarkable fact, the truly interesting question crying out for explanation is not “why do living things die?” but “*why is the universe so biased toward life?*” As Moltmann declares, evolution does not narrate a “war of nature” but the triumph of life!<sup>87</sup> Theologically, what accounts for the triumph of life is the presence and activity of the eschatological Spirit of God.

*Second, for many people, the pervasiveness of death raises serious questions about the goodness of God and the moral integrity of creation.* The existence of suffering, death, and the natural extinction of so many living creatures just seems to be morally wrong. Scripture’s portrayal of the moral significance of death is complex. At times, particularly when it is linked with human sin, death is seen as a great tragedy, the judgment of God on human depravity (e.g., Rom. 1:32; 5:12; 6:16, 23; 7:5, 11; 8:2; James 1:15; Rev. 21:8) and the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26; cf. 1 Tim. 2:10; Rev. 21:4). At other times, however, death is assumed to be a natural part of the created order.<sup>88</sup> Ecclesiastes expresses this well: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time

to be born, and a time to die ...” (3:1ff.). The Psalmist writes, “As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more” (Ps. 103:15). The writer of Ecclesiastes assumes that all people await a common destiny: the righteous and the wicked, the good and the evil, the clean and the unclean, those who sacrifice and those who do not sacrifice—all of them alike depart to “the realm of the dead” where “there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom” (Eccles. 9:2, 10, NIV).<sup>89</sup>

In such passages, death is portrayed in negative terms as a tragedy for human beings not because of its connection with sin and judgment but because it represents an existential crisis: it extinguishes human hopes and dreams and is the end of human subjectivity. The Psalmist protests to God, “In death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?” (Ps. 6:5). Ecclesiastes 9:4–6 laments,

whoever is joined with all the living has hope ... but the dead know nothing; they have no more reward, and even the memory of them is lost. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished; never again will they have any share in all that happens under the sun.

Death is not tragic simply because it is the end of life in general; death is tragic because it is the end of *personhood*. The death of nonhuman creatures, including the prehuman ancestors of modern human beings, is not tragic in the same sense or degree that human death is tragic.<sup>90</sup> Death as a naturally occurring phenomenon becomes *morally relevant* only with the emergence of personhood, because it threatens *personal existence*, not merely creaturely existence. To be sure, human beings share much in common with other living beings. Like all other creatures, they are animated by the breath of life and are molded from the same biological material, the basic building blocks for life, and along with other creatures of the sixth day (Gen. 1:24–26), they are produced from the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7). As Ray Anderson puts it, “creatureliness is an undifferentiated field on which the occasion of the human occurs.”<sup>91</sup> Theologically, however, humans are unique; by God’s design, calling, and covenant, they transcend mere creatureliness and exist as persons made in God’s own image and likeness. With the emergence of human persons, death gains existential and ethical significance. Life and death now pose ultimate questions to human

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beings about their nature, purpose, calling, and destiny.

To understand the moral and spiritual relevance of death that is unique to human beings, let us briefly consider an analogy: sexuality. Like death, sexuality becomes morally and spiritually relevant only with the emergence of personhood. For nonhuman creatures, sexuality is not a moral, ethical, or existential question; it is merely a biological function of creaturely existence. However, for human beings made in God's image, sexuality is not simply a biological function of creaturely existence but is now deeply integrated with personhood, and thus with subjectivity, personal dignity, individual and social identity, interpersonal relations and ethics, and spirituality (becoming "one flesh," as Gen. 2:24 puts it).

The good news of the gospel is that the Son of God became one of us, entering into our perishable human form and suffering our fate.<sup>92</sup> Thus, God deals with the problem of suffering and death *by entering into it* in the person of Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross in solidarity with humanity and resurrection from the grave gives us eschatological hope for everlasting life in the new creation. The Bible offers us not a rationalization for the existence of suffering and death, but the promise of resurrection through participation in Christ. Thus, it offers us eschatological hope.<sup>93</sup>

*Third, the Bible, in particular Paul, teaches a perspective about death that seems to contradict what science is telling us about evolutionary history.* According to Paul, in passages such as Roman 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, death entered the world through the sin of Adam, whom Paul depicts as being the first living man (along with his wife Eve, the first living woman). In traditional evangelical readings, Paul appeals to the creation and fall of Adam and Eve to explain the universality of sin based on the solidarity of all human beings with Adam and his sinful state, resulting in death. Modern science raises at least two problems with the traditional (more or less literalistic) evangelical understanding of this passage. First, as discussed earlier, modern science has demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that death existed long before the emergence of human beings. Second, genomic evidence indicates that the original human population consisted of at least several thousand individuals; we do not all descend from one original human couple.<sup>94</sup>

A number of biblical scholars have wrestled with the implications of modern evolutionary science as it relates to the historicity and theological significance of Adam and Eve.<sup>95</sup> Denis Lamoureux argues that Genesis teaches theological truths in outmoded cultural forms (ancient science and cosmology). This allows Lamoureux to retain important theological commitments, such as the universality of human sin, while dispensing with the historical Adam and Eve. While Lamoureux's overall approach is very helpful, his rhetoric here unfortunately tends to suggest that what really matters is the "kernel" of theological truth within the text, not the "shell" of its cultural-textual form. Thus, Lamoureux (perhaps unintentionally) erects a false dichotomy between form and content.<sup>96</sup> I agree with John Collins that "the worldview is not an abstraction from the story; one cannot treat the story simply as the husk, which we then discard once we have discovered the (perhaps timeless) concepts." Such concepts only "gain their power from their place in the story."<sup>97</sup> Much better are Lamoureux's statements about divine accommodation, which explain that "the Bible is the Word of God delivered in the words of humans" (p. 69).<sup>98</sup> Both form and content are crucial to what God is doing in revelation, even if we must subsequently apply hermeneutical tools to grasp the text's present significance.

Collins defends the position that Adam and Eve were historical people whose sin constituted a historical "fall," which caused the universal condition of human sinfulness (often termed depravity). However, in order to account for the findings of contemporary science (namely common descent from prehuman forms, the emergence of modern human beings at least 40,000 years ago, and an original human population size of perhaps several thousand), he proposes that Adam and Eve were "at the headwaters of the human race" as the chieftain and queen of an original human tribe.<sup>99</sup> While Collins's view is helpful in that it aims to take science seriously, his proposal falls prey to two sets of weaknesses. On the one hand, biblical literalists will reject it for taking too many liberties with the text. They have a point; Collins is explicitly attempting to retain the historicity of the creation and fall of a literal Adam and Eve, but he clearly goes beyond the narrative with his original tribe solution. On the other hand, those holding to literary interpretation will criticize Collins

for not going far enough in recognizing the narratives as theological rather than historical literature.<sup>100</sup>

Peter Enns rejects a literal-historical interpretation of Adam and Eve in favor of a theological-literary one. For Enns, Adam is a literary, proto-Israel and proto-Christ figure.<sup>101</sup> He argues that Paul reads the Adam story (and the Old Testament generally) *theologically* in order to explain the significance of Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>102</sup> Thus, "Paul's understanding of Adam is shaped by Jesus, not the other way around." Similarly, with regard to sin and salvation, "the solution reveals the plight," not the other way around.<sup>103</sup> Tremper Longman III also advocates a literary view, which classifies Genesis 1-3 as "high-style prose narrative." Consequently, Longman believes that it is not necessary to regard Adam as historical in order to stay true to the text.<sup>104</sup> Concerning passages such as Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, Longman suggests that Paul's interpretive strategy was to employ a literary-historical *analogy*. He approvingly cites Conor Cunningham's statement that "Paul was not interpreting the [Genesis] story in and for itself; he was really interpreting Christ through the use of images in the story."<sup>105</sup>

My own view is that Adam and Eve are theological-literary figures to whom Paul refers analogously (in agreement with Longman and Enns). How then do I explain the universality of sin? Collins asserts that only a historical reading of the creation and fall of Adam can preserve the Christian doctrines of original sin, the universality of sin (human depravity), and by extension certain aspects of Christian soteriology.<sup>106</sup> Collins's own proposal succeeds on one level, but it does so only by pushing the problem back to Adam. Thus, a nagging question persists: why did Adam sin?<sup>107</sup> This question is particularly troubling when one considers that Adam's circumstances were, in the traditional reading, much more ideal than ours. In the traditional view, Adam had a perfect parent (God himself!), a perfect spouse, a perfect physical and psychological constitution, and a perfect natural and social environment in which all of his needs were met in abundance. Considering this, I suggest that it is actually more difficult for the traditional view to explain *why Adam sinned* than for those endorsing a theological-literary Adam to explain why human beings universally sin. It is possible to observe that all human beings suffer the effects of a "sin of origin" (to which all are enslaved, unable to free themselves) without requiring the Augustinian

doctrine of "original sin" (a fall from original righteousness at the dawn of human history).<sup>108</sup>

In the theological-literary view, *Adam is sinful humanity*.<sup>109</sup> As F. F. Bruce explains,

It is not simply because Adam is the ancestor of mankind that all are said to have sinned in his sin (otherwise it must be argued that because Abraham believed God all his descendants were automatically involved in this belief); it is because Adam *is* mankind.<sup>110</sup>

The force of Paul's argument in its appeal to Adam is not to ground the universality of sin historically, but to *illustrate* it by depicting human solidarity in sin (in Adam). He employs the illustration in the service of his larger purpose, which is to *ground* the salvation of human beings in Jesus Christ, this salvation being universal in scope (thus the Adam-Christ typology), but particular in application (the "many" in Romans 5), as it is appropriated through faith. Thus, "The effect of the comparison between Adam and Christ is not so much to historicize the original Adam as to bring out the individual significance of the historic Christ," says James Dunn.<sup>111</sup>

### *Sin and Death in Eschatological Perspective*

In light of the eschatological view of becoming human as proposed in this article, sin is an existential possibility that arises only with the emergence of human personhood. Previously, as creatures who had not yet attained personhood, the prehuman ancestors of modern humans behaved in ways similar to other animals because such behavior had long promoted survival.<sup>112</sup> According to modern human standards, we would find much of this behavior reprehensible but not *sinful* in the proper theological sense (e.g., it is not sinful for a predatory animal to kill and eat its prey). With the emergence of the human, however, we now have beings with whom God relates personally, beings whom God uniquely equips and calls to reflect the divine image by emulating God's character and pursuing God's own purposes for creation as God's representatives. Creaturely patterns and behavior that were formerly morally neutral gain ethical significance because they must now be considered within the emergent domain of *human personhood*. Accordingly, along with the emergence of human beings comes also the existential possibility of sin (and the theologically

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conceived possibility of spiritual death).<sup>113</sup> Sin results from the willful refusal to follow God's gracious call to transcend mere creaturely existence; it is a refusal to embrace our eschatological destiny as image bearers and partakers in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).<sup>114</sup>

The call to be human is both a gift to be received in the present and an eschatological destiny to be pursued into the future by God's active, initiating, and enabling grace. While "being human as gift" is something that we simply receive from God, "being human as destiny" is something that we can resist, distort, and even finally reject. No one can become fully human in the ultimate sense without God's ongoing, consummating grace; and, in light of sin, no one can become fully human in the redemptive sense (i.e., new creation, new humanity) without God's active, redeeming, and saving grace. We all inevitably experience the reality of sin and are culpable in perpetuating it, but by God's justifying, sanctifying, and glorifying grace, we are forgiven, cleansed, and look forward to our final transformation into Christ's likeness. This transformative, saving work of the triune God thus both pervades and transcends our evolutionary development. As Ted Peters suggests, God's eschatological new creation is a pull from the future, not merely a push from the past.<sup>115</sup>

Our final transformation in Christ shares continuity with our evolutionary history but is not causally determined by it. God's "ultimate" act of saving grace with respect to the present creation is transcendent and contingent, rather than immanent and necessary, even as it enters, directs, and imparts coherent meaning to the present "penultimate" order.<sup>116</sup> Our prototype is Christ, not Adam; it is only by sharing in Christ's resurrection that we will finally and fully enter the new creation, even as our hope-filled anticipation of that resurrection reorients and redefines our present existence "in Christ."

## Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that a trinitarian eschatological hermeneutic, applied to the doctrine of creation, helps us to make theological sense of evolution. My intention has not been to attempt to settle all of the questions that evolution raises for theology, but to offer a theological framework within which we may discuss such questions fruitfully and propose provisional solutions that respect the integrity

of both science and theology as we seek to understand the complex and glorious world that God has created. 

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Karl W. Giberson and Francis S. Collins, *The Language of Science and Faith: Straight Answers to Genuine Questions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 49.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth R. Miller, *Only a Theory: Evolution and the Battle for America's Soul* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2008), 109; see also Dennis Venema, "Evolution as a Scientific Theory," *Evolution Basics: An Introductory Course on Evolutionary Biology*, <http://biologos.org/blog/evolution-basics-evolution-as-a-scientific-theory>.

<sup>3</sup>Many Christians in the sciences have mounted effective arguments in favor of evolution. For example, see: Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* (Oxford: Monarch, 2008); Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2007); Karl W. Giberson, *How to Be a Christian and Believe in Evolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008); Denis O. Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008) and *I Love Jesus & I Accept Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009); and Dennis R. Venema, "Genesis and the Genome: Genomics Evidence for Human-Ape Common Ancestry and Ancestral Hominid Population Sizes," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62, no. 3 (2010): 166-78. Others provide indirect support for evolution by employing it as the scientific model that best accounts for observations encountered in various scientific fields. For example, see Ian Tattersal, "Origin of the Human Sense of Self," and Ian Hodder, "An Archeology of the Self," in *In Search of Self: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Personhood*, ed. J. Wentzel van Huyssteen and Erik P. Wiebe (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 33-49, 50-69; Graeme Finlay, "The Emergence of Human Distinctiveness: The Genetic Story," and R. J. Berry, "Evolution of *Homo sapiens*" in *Rethinking Human Nature: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Malcolm A. Jeeves (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 107-48, 149-75; R. J. Berry, "Nothing in Biology Makes Sense except in the Light of Evolution," *Science and Christian Belief* 18, no. 1 (2006): 23-9; and J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>4</sup>Ted Peters, *God – The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 132.

<sup>5</sup>My position is also compatible with the pneumatological eschatology of Amos Yong, as set forth in *The Spirit of Creation: Modern Science and Divine Action* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011). Yong offers an excellent survey of past proposals and outlines his own unique view from a Pentecostal perspective.

<sup>6</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 196, 205-10.

<sup>7</sup>See Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 523. For this theme in Irenaeus, see Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 91.

- <sup>8</sup>See David Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 123. For a discussion of the Spirit of God in concert with God's vocalizing of creation into being in Genesis 1, see J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005), 86–7.
- <sup>9</sup>Athanasius makes the same connection: "The Father creates all things through the Word, in the Spirit" (*Letters of St. Athanasius to Serapion, Concerning the Holy Spirit* 3.4, quoted in Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 523).
- <sup>10</sup>Kelsey writes, "It is appropriate ... to characterize 'the power of the Spirit,' in which the Father creates, as the divine triune love's vitalizing, enlivening, and empowering life-giving power" (Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 124).
- <sup>11</sup>Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 523. Similarly, Kelsey states, "The Spirit, sent by the Father with the Son, draws creation to eschatological consummation" (Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 125–26).
- <sup>12</sup>Pannenberg brings these themes together effectively when he writes,  
Pneumatology and eschatology belong together because the eschatological consummation itself is ascribed to the Spirit, who as an end-time gift already governs the historical present of believers ... Thus we are to view the presence of the eschatological future by the Spirit as an inner element of the eschatological consummation itself, namely, as a proleptic manifestation of the Spirit who in the eschatological future will transform believers, and with them all of creation, for participation in the glory of God. (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998], 553)
- <sup>13</sup>See, for example, the Creed of Constantinople (381 AD), included in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longman, 1972).
- <sup>14</sup>Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 516. Drawing on Basil, Oden writes,  
God's own Spirit is shared effortlessly with their spirits without ceasing to be entire, as a "sunbeam whose kindly light falls on him who enjoys it as though it showed for him alone, yet illumines land and sea and mingles with the air." (p. 517)
- <sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 530.
- <sup>16</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Toward a Theology of Nature: Essays on Science and Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 123. Genesis 2:7 says that the human being became a "living soul" after having received the breath of life from God.
- <sup>17</sup>Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
- <sup>18</sup>Paul's argument assumes a trinitarian inner logic. Through the Spirit's regenerating and glorifying work, human beings are drawn to participate in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (being made alive "in Christ"), who is "the first fruits of those who have died," and so enter the eternal kingdom of God the Father.
- <sup>19</sup>Paul frames his discussion of death and resurrection, perishable and imperishable, within the basic gospel narrative, beginning with, "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). He then goes on to argue for the importance of belief in bodily resurrection, because of the absolute centrality and sole efficacy of Christ's bodily resurrection for the Christian faith. For, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (v. 17).
- <sup>20</sup>Genesis 2 indicates the inherent mortality of human beings through its depiction of humanity's creation from the dust. See John H. Walton, "Reading Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology," in *Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 166.
- <sup>21</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 3, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 801–93, 111–20.
- <sup>22</sup>George L. Murphy, "Roads to Paradise and Perdition: Christ, Evolution, and Original Sin," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 58, no. 2 (2006): 117. Murphy's statement is indebted to James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992).
- <sup>23</sup>Joel B. Green, "Humanity—Created, Restored, Transformed, Embodied," in *Rethinking Human Nature: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Malcolm A. Jeeves (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 293. For his discussion of Paul's *sōma pneumatikon* in 1 Corinthians 15, see pp. 290–3.
- <sup>24</sup>Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 101–2, 107, 111, 113.
- <sup>25</sup>Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 5.1, in NPNF2–04. *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature, 1892), 38. Pannenberg observes that several other early church fathers thought along similar lines, including Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, and Clement of Alexandria. However, he also notes that Irenaeus and Tertullian believed in the intrinsic immortality of the soul (incorrectly, in the case of Irenaeus if we follow Osborn's reading of him). See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 571; and Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 101–2, 107, 111, 136, 222, 235.
- <sup>26</sup>Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984), 277–8; Green, "Humanity," 293; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 571, and *Theology of Nature*, 125, 153.
- <sup>27</sup>Paul S. Evans, "Creation, Progress, and Calling: Genesis 1–11 as Social Commentary," *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* (2011–2012): 77; cf. Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 89–90, 204–12.
- <sup>28</sup>It should be noted that other parts of creation also contribute to the unfolding and development of the created order. For example, as Paul Evans notes, in Genesis 1:11 the earth is called to "bring forth" plants and is thus clearly "participating in bringing forth new creatures" (Evans, "Creation," 83, note 53). Similarly in Genesis 1:20, God commands, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures," and in verse 24, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind."
- <sup>29</sup>As Brueggemann puts it, "The role of the human person is to see to it that the creation becomes fully the creation willed by God." See Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1982), 33.
- <sup>30</sup>James C. Peterson, *Changing Human Nature: Ecology, Ethics, Genes, and God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010); Evans, "Creation," 82.
- <sup>31</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 196–7 and *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 174, 177–8; J. Richard Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Case for a Holistic Reading of

the Biblical Story of Redemption," *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 11 (2006): 80–1.

<sup>32</sup>Middleton, "A New Heaven," 81. Similarly, Dallas Willard writes: "In creating human beings God made them to rule, to reign, to have dominion in a limited sphere. Only so can they be persons" (Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* [New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998], 21).

<sup>33</sup>Middleton, "A New Heaven," 81.

<sup>34</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 32; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 157; Evans, "Creation," 80; Green, "Humanity," 274; Middleton, "A New Heaven," 81; Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, chapter 7.

<sup>35</sup>Another important representative text is Isaiah 66:1: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?" See Rikki E. Watts, "Making Sense of Genesis 1," paragraph 47, online article for the American Scientific Affiliation, <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/topics/Bible-Science/6-02Watts.html>.

<sup>36</sup>For a detailed discussion, see Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, chapter 3.

<sup>37</sup>See also Walton, *The Lost World*, 72–92, and Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 212, about the meaning of the seventh-day Sabbath rest in relation to the cosmos as God's temple and human beings as God's representatives and emissaries.

<sup>38</sup>John Walton notes that the purpose of a temple in the ancient world was not primarily to be a place where people gathered for worship (like modern churches), but rather a "home" and "headquarters" or "control room" for the deity (Walton, *The Lost World*, 75).

<sup>39</sup>Of course, there are also important, well-known differences between the Genesis account and other Ancient Near Eastern myths. See Watts, "Making Sense," paragraphs 30, 36, 49, and 55; Evans, "Creation," 78–82; and Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, chapter 5.

<sup>40</sup>John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IL: Eisenbrauns, 2011). For Walton's most recent summary of his basic position, see his essay "Reading Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology," in *Reading Genesis 1–2*, ed. J. Daryl Charles, 141–69.

<sup>41</sup>The main thesis of *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* is that Genesis 1 never was an account of material origins but that, as the rest of the ancient world, the focus of the creation accounts was to order the cosmos by initiating functions ... Genesis 1 is founded on the premise that the cosmos should be understood in temple terms. (p. ix)

<sup>42</sup>Walton, *The Lost World*, 26–27; *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*, 43.

<sup>43</sup>Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 70.

<sup>44</sup>Walton argues that the language of resting points unambiguously to a temple context. He writes, "Deity rests in a temple, and only in a temple," consequently, "without hesitation the ancient reader would conclude that this is a temple text and that day seven is the most important of the seven days" (Walton, *The Lost World*, 72).

<sup>45</sup>In light of its context (the symbolic world of the ancient near east), Middleton interprets Genesis as depicting the cosmos as God's Kingdom, craftsmanship, and cosmic sanctuary or temple (*The Liberating Image*, 70–88).

<sup>46</sup>Genesis 1 mixes royal imagery (creation as God's palace, human beings as God's stewards or vice-regents) with priestly imagery (creation as God's temple, human beings

as God's priests). Walton connects these two themes when he explains that, in the ancient world, a temple was constructed so that a deity could have a center for its rule. The significance of day seven in the Genesis account, then, is that God comes to indwell creation and thus to fill and rule over it.

<sup>47</sup>In the eloquent words of T. F. Torrance, "It is now the role of man in union with Christ to serve the purpose of God's love in the ongoing actualization of that redemption, sanctification and renewal within the universe." Quoted in Eric G. Flett, "Priests of Creation, Mediators of Order: the Human Person as a Cultural Being in Thomas F. Torrance's Theological Anthropology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 2 (2005): 181.

<sup>48</sup>Evans, "Creation," 76.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 76–77. Strictly speaking, it is more appropriate to say that the necessity for cultivation *resonates with* (rather than *recalls*) God's commission in Genesis 1:28 for humans to "subdue" the earth. This avoids conflating the two narratives.

<sup>50</sup>Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 19. Peterson interprets the image of God as including three aspects: *representing God* as his stewards, which our *capacity for reason* and our *unique personal relationship* with God make possible.

<sup>51</sup>Peter Bakken, Diane Jacobson, George L. Murphy, and Paul Santmire, "A Theological Basis for Earthcare," *Lutheran Forum* (Pentecost 1995): 25. The authors note that the words *'abad* and *shamar* in Genesis 2:15, while frequently translated "till" and "keep," are also used in the Old Testament to describe the acts of serving and guarding God's tent of meeting in the wilderness (e.g., Num. 3:7–8, 4:47; 16:9). Hence the vocation of tending the earth. God's garden, has a priestly dimension.

<sup>52</sup>Middleton, "A New Heaven," 76. We should also note that there are many features of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 22 that allude back to the Garden of Eden (e.g., the river of life, the trees of life, the absence of the curse, and the intimate presence of God). Thus, we have a renewed garden that has become a city-garden. Moreover, human stewardship is restored and redeemed human beings "will reign forever and ever" (v. 5). In addition, several features of the text of Revelation 21 identify the New Jerusalem as God's eschatological temple. See also Watts, "Making Sense of Genesis 1," paragraph 48.

<sup>53</sup>Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV/11.1–2; 38.1–4; V/8, 10, 15, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001). See also Julie Canlis, "Being Made Human: The Significance of Creation for Irenaeus' Doctrine of Participation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 4 (2005): 434–54; Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 6, 25, 127, 171; Matthew C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2008); and F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 235–42.

<sup>54</sup>Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 85.

<sup>55</sup>Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V/16.2 (p. 544); Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 79, 92. We need not follow Irenaeus's exegetical move of separating the "image" and "likeness" of God (the former given at creation, the latter to be given in Christ) in order to learn from his dynamic, developmental view of creation.

<sup>56</sup>Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 172–3; and *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 147–8, 177.

<sup>57</sup>Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III/16.6 (pp. 442–3). Osborn observes that the concept of recapitulation pervaded the theology of the second century, being found in Justin, Clement, and Tertullian (Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 97). For a thorough explication of Irenaeus’s doctrine of recapitulation see Osborn, *Irenaeus*, chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 97–140).

<sup>58</sup>For Irenaeus’s many comments about recapitulation, see *Against Heresies* II/22.4; III/16.6, 21.10, 23.1; V/12.4, 14.1, 19.1, 21.1. Osborn observes that one of the major themes in Irenaeus is that of “accustoming,” noting that “the first purpose of the economy was to accustom man to God and to accustom God to man.” The incarnation marks a new and particularly significant phase in the process of accustoming, as “in Christ, man is able to see God, to contain God, to accustom himself to participate in God while God is accustomed to live in man” (2.30.3). Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 80, 81.

<sup>59</sup>In light of this forward-pointing dimension, Peters suggests that the term “precapitulation” might be more appropriate than Irenaeus’s “recapitulation” (which Peters suggests gives the impression of a completed event in the past). Thus, “Christ establishes ahead of time what it is that will define who we as humans shall be” (Peters, *God – The World’s Future*, 152).

<sup>60</sup>I explore these themes in greater detail in my book *Being Human, Being Church: The Significance of Theological Anthropology for Ecclesiology* (Paternoster, forthcoming).

<sup>61</sup>For a nuanced exploration of six different approaches to origins, three of which affirm evolution but only one of which affirms atheism, see Gerald Rau, *Mapping the Origins Debate: Six Models of the Beginning of Everything* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012). For an excellent recent example of an atheist who rejects naturalistic materialism on philosophical grounds, see Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>62</sup>For a recent philosophical critique of this mythical war between science and religion, see Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>63</sup>One of Kenneth Miller’s greatest concerns about young-earth creationism is its tendency to fear and elude scientific truth. He writes,

Traditional creationists, after all, rejected not just evolution, but nearly all of mainstream science. They quarrelled with geology over the fossil record and the age of the earth, with astronomy over the distances of stars and galaxies, with cosmologists over the age and origin of the universe, and even with physicists over the laws of thermodynamics. (Miller, *Only a Theory*, 117)

<sup>64</sup>The transition of the world to its final eschatological consummation as the new creation is both gradual/progressive (in history) and sudden/fulfilled (at the end of history), and it involves both continuity and discontinuity with the present creation. A good analogy for the final transition is the resurrection of Jesus as applied to those who are “in Christ.” Just as believers have been regenerated and now, by the grace of God and sanctifying work of the Spirit, are progressing in love and holiness—yet must nevertheless undergo death and bodily resurrection to fully enter the new creation—so the present creation progresses for a while (by the Spirit’s drawing) but then must be remade as the new creation (whether or not it,

too, dies before being remade depends on the timing of the Lord’s final coming).

<sup>65</sup>As Ted Peters writes,

Through the ages of science what we see is the sequence of secondary causes. We do not see miracles, nor do we see primary causation. Science is free to limit itself to secular explanations for natural phenomena. Science provides theories of explanation within the self-imposed parameters of secondary relationships. (Peters, *Anticipating Omega: Science, Faith, and Our Ultimate Future* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006], 22)

<sup>66</sup>Andrew K. Gabriel, “The Intensity of the Spirit in a Spirit-Filled World: Spirit Baptism, Subsequence, and the Spirit of Creation,” *Pneuma* 34 (2012): 365–82.

<sup>67</sup>Gabriel, “Intensity of the Spirit,” 370–2. Note that only one of these biblical texts refers explicitly to the Spirit. However, theologically, the Spirit is implied in all of them (e.g., Eph. 1:23 and 4:6 refer to Jesus and the Father filling all things, but theologically we understand that it is by the Spirit that they do so, just as it is by the Spirit that Christ is present to and fills the church). Gabriel also cites a number of theologians in the Christian tradition who affirm that the Spirit pervades and fills all of creation, including Hilary of Poitiers, Gregory of Nazianzus, John of Damascus, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, Ives Congar, Kallistos Ware, Charles Hodge, Bernard Ramm, and Amos Yong.

<sup>68</sup>Gabriel, “Intensity of the Spirit,” 373–81.

<sup>69</sup>This view bears some similarity to that advocated by C. S. Lewis in his book *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), which views miracles as compatible within the framework of the dawning of the kingdom of God (as hidden possibilities in the present). For an excellent survey of recent approaches to relating divine action to physical reality (including necessitarian, regularist, and antirealist approaches), see Yong, *The Spirit of Creation*, 106–12. With respect to miracles, Yong extends Lewis’s insights in pneumatological and eschatological directions that envision “the Holy Spirit as working in and through nature and its laws, but also proleptically and continually transforming such in anticipation of the general shape of the coming kingdom” (p. 125). Miracles are “the proleptic signs of the world to come” (p. 128) and “Christian life in the Spirit suggests our capacity in this world to walk according to the ‘laws’ of the coming kingdom” (p. 129). In light of this eschatological approach, Yong suggests (in constructive dialogue with C. S. Peirce) that “the laws of nature should be defined in habitual, dynamic, and general rather than in necessitarian terms” and are “real possibilities and tendencies through which the Holy Spirit is bringing about the coming kingdom.” Thus, they are “amenable to the basic actions of God and sufficiently flexible so that they can be miraculously redeemed to usher in the patterns and habits of the coming world (p. 131).

If my reading of Yong is correct, part of what confuses the discussion of miracles is a static and closed understanding of the laws of nature. If, however, the laws of nature are (a) themselves emergent phenomena rather than timeless universals, and (b) open to the future reality of God’s eschatological kingdom (a wider reality in which God will finally “fill all” and be “all in all” according to Eph. 1:23 and 1 Cor. 15:28), then it becomes possible to understand God’s interaction with natural laws theologically as *inten-*

sifications of the eschatological Spirit's presence and power within the present order to draw it ever toward the reality of the present-yet-coming kingdom of God.

<sup>70</sup>It is important to note that what I am attempting to do here is provide a *theological* account of God's interaction with physical reality, rather than a scientific or causal explanation. Theology operates within the realm of symbolism and metaphor to point to that which is beyond the material realm. So, the primary theological question is: what metaphorical language does the most justice to both divine revelation (scripture) and the physical realities we observe? My suggestion is that the metaphor of "intensification" does better justice to the reality of God's interaction with the world than does that of "breaking the laws of nature." In the future, theology might propose better, more fitting, and comprehensive metaphors; however, the question of precisely how spiritual reality interacts with material/physical reality will always remain mysterious on some level (especially when discussing nonemergent spiritual reality—the transcendent Spirit of God—as opposed to emergent spiritual realities, for instance, the human "soul").

<sup>71</sup>This perspective may help create space theologically to integrate the insights of intelligent design with those of (often nonteleological) evolutionary theism. It could be relevant, for example, to Ralph Stearley's critically constructive interaction with Stephen C. Meyer in Stearley, "The Cambrian Explosion: How Much Bang for the Buck?," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 65, no. 4 (2013): 253–5.

<sup>72</sup>Evolution is just one among many processes in the natural world in which scientists have observed this interplay. See Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural, Divine, and Human* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 115; and John C. Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity: The Christian Encounter with Reality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 82, 83.

<sup>73</sup>Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity*, 68.

<sup>74</sup>Peacocke even argues that the presence of human beings represents an inherent inbuilt potentiality of that physical universe in the sense that intelligent, self-conscious life was bound eventually to appear although its form was not prescribed by those same fundamental parameters and relationships that made it all possible. (Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*, 119)

<sup>75</sup>Berry, "Nothing in Biology," 28.

<sup>76</sup>Peacocke identifies the following propensities: increase in complexity, information processing and storage, consciousness, sensitivity to pain, and even self-consciousness (Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*, 220).

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 106–7.

<sup>78</sup>Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity*, 67.

<sup>79</sup>Moltmann discusses creation as an "open system" in *God in Creation*, 196, 205–8 and *Science and Wisdom* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 33–53.

<sup>80</sup>Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity*, 165–6. I agree with Polkinghorne that we are wise to reject pantheism as a present reality, but we may look forward with eschatological hope to a sacramental pantheism in the new creation. See also Peters's discussion and critique of pantheism in *God—The World's Future*, 131–2.

<sup>81</sup>Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity*, 84.

<sup>82</sup>Some might wonder why God would choose to create a world characterized by openness, randomness, or chaos. The likely answer is that such openness was necessary to

create the kind of world, and more specifically the kind of beings (humans) God envisioned. Peacocke argues that such a world is necessary for producing beings that are fit for fellowship with God (i.e., endowed with freedom and the capacity to love). Polkinghorne agrees, arguing that the existence of free creatures who return God's love is a greater good than the existence of "perfectly behaving automata." See Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*, 125–6, 157; and Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity*, 165.

<sup>83</sup>Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity*, 85–6, 144.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>85</sup>Intrinsic eternal life is properly and uniquely an attribute of God; all created life is contingent life. We live "on borrowed breath," as David Kelsey eloquently puts it (Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, part one).

<sup>86</sup>See Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*, 106–12; Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity*, 68–72; Miller, *Only a Theory*, 121.

<sup>87</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *Sum of Righteousness, Arise! God's Future for Humanity and the Earth* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 218. See also Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, 73–92, and Dennis Venema's helpful posts: "From Variation to Speciation," Parts 1–4, *Evolution Basics: A New Introductory Course on Evolutionary Biology*, <http://biologos.org/blog/series/evolution-basics>.

<sup>88</sup>In addition, Peters notes that death may be interpreted in light of either the law or the gospel.

According to the law it is our just deserts for acting sinfully. According to the gospel, it is a gift that opens the door to an everlasting life free of the sufferings we undergo in this life. (Peters, *God—The World's Future*, 323)

<sup>89</sup>Death is also described in terms of rest or sleep (e.g., Pss. 13:3; 90:5; Dan. 12:2).

<sup>90</sup>This does not mean that we should be complacent about or complicit in the needless suffering of animals. Rather, the argument clarifies the basis on which human responsibility for animals rests. We should care about and have compassion for animals, not because they possess intrinsic dignity (animals are not "persons"), but *because we do*. Mistreating animals and other nonhuman parts of God's creation, mars the nobility and dignity of human beings and distorts their calling as stewards, priests, and gardeners. Such behavior is undignified and unfitting.

<sup>91</sup>Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 21. Anderson explores this theme throughout the second chapter of the book.

<sup>92</sup>Jürgen Moltmann gives classic expression to this theme in *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>93</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 161–3, 203, 213, 224–9.

<sup>94</sup>Dennis R. Venema, "Genesis and the Genome," 166–78.

<sup>95</sup>C. John Collins proposes a helpful typology of four basic approaches to interpreting Genesis. See his article, "Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62, no. 3 (2010): 149.

<sup>96</sup>For example, he writes, "Our challenge as modern readers of the Bible, then, is to identify this ancient vessel [ancient science] and to separate it from, and not conflate it with, the life-changing message of faith." Similarly, "passages in Scripture that deal with the physical world feature



both a *Message of Faith* and an *incidental ancient science*." Thus, he suggests that "if evolution is true, then there is no reason why the biblical origins accounts could not be re-accommodated for our generation by using modern evolutionary science as an incidental vessel to transport the Messages of Faith in Gen. 1-3." See Lamoureux, *I Love Jesus*, 18, 69. The problem is not with Lamoureux's suggestion that we need to reflect on the ancient context hermeneutically in order to discern its primary message(s). Certainly we must do this. But this does not mean that the "vessel" of ancient science is "incidental" to the narrative's message. Such a move would seem to suggest that we could (theoretically) rewrite Genesis by substituting modern for ancient science without losing anything in the narrative. I fear that his distinction fails to account for the full richness (or "thickness") of what is going on theologically in the text, precisely *in and by*—not *in spite of*—the "ancient vessel" that is its form.

<sup>97</sup>Collins, "Adam and Eve," 150.

<sup>98</sup>On the theological importance of this point for our understanding of the nature of Scripture, see John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 21-5.

<sup>99</sup>Collins, "Adam and Eve," 159-60.

<sup>100</sup>For example, Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012).

<sup>101</sup>In his book, *The Evolution of Adam*, Enns devotes much attention to Paul's reading of the Adam story in passages such as 1 Corinthians 15 and especially Romans 5. What is unique about Enns's approach is that he argues that while Paul believed that Adam was a historical person, we do not have to follow Paul in this respect. We may take Paul's theological point about the universality of sin and the consequent need of all people for salvation in Christ without accepting Paul's explanation of *the historical cause* of the human sinful condition.

<sup>102</sup>According to Enns, Paul employs literary strategies and interpretive practices that were typical of Second Temple Judaism. Thus, "Paul does not feel bound by the original meaning of the Old Testament passage he is citing, especially as he seeks to make a vital theological point about the gospel" (*Evolution of Adam*, 103). Enns goes on to demonstrate this thesis by reviewing several instances of Paul reading the Old Testament theologically in light of Christ (2 Cor. 6:2 and Isa. 49:8; Gal. 3:11 and Hab. 2:4; Rom. 11:26-27 and Isa. 59:20; and Rom. 4 and Gen. 15:6). In addition, Enns notes that Paul, in his reflections on the creation and fall of Adam, goes well beyond the teaching of Genesis and the Old Testament as a whole. The Old Testament actually gives scarce attention to Adam and does not relate universal human sin, death, and condemnation to Adam's sin. Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 81-2. On this point, see also Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 276-8.

<sup>103</sup>Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 122, 131.

<sup>104</sup>Tremper Longman III, "What Genesis 1-2 Teaches (and What It Doesn't)," in *Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles, 122-5. The early chapters of Genesis are difficult to classify in terms of genre, as they seem to be neither purely historical nor purely metaphorical. Westermann says that they are not "historical chronology" but rather "primeval events" (Westermann, *Genesis 1-2*, 275-8). Brueggemann comments that his "exposition will insist that these texts be taken neither as history nor as myth. Rather, we insist that the text is a

proclamation of God's decisive dealing with his creation" (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 16).

<sup>105</sup>Quoted in Longman, "What Genesis 1-2 Teaches," 124.

<sup>106</sup>Perry Yoder points out that the abandonment of original sin tied to a historical fall causes little difficulty for Mennonites and other traditions that believe children are born into a state of innocence and only subsequently reach an age of accountability. Perry Yoder, "Will the Real Adam Please Stand Up!," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 58, no. 2 (2006): 99.

<sup>107</sup>In traditional Calvinist theology, Adam sinned because God withheld his saving grace and so *passively* rendered Adam's sin certain (this is posited in order to harmonize God's sovereignty with the problem of original sin without thereby attributing evil to God). To bring about salvation, God then actively and effectually calls the elect, justifies and then progressively sanctifies them in love and holiness. I do not personally hold to this Calvinist perspective; what I find helpful about it, however, is the insight that we cannot become fully human (in terms of God's ultimate destiny for us) on the basis of our own merit or by our own strengths and inherent capabilities. Becoming fully human in this sense requires the redemptive work of Christ and the sanctifying and perfecting work of the Spirit in drawing us toward eschatological consummation and finally effecting our transformation in glory.

<sup>108</sup>See the arguments of Murphy, "Roads to Paradise," 111.

<sup>109</sup>In addition, most scholars argue that the early chapters of Genesis *read in light of their original context within the Old Testament* are primarily about explaining the existence of Israel—its calling, purpose, and mission—with the recognition that Yahweh, who delivered Israel from Egypt in the Exodus, is, in fact, the one and only God, the Sovereign Lord over all nations and Creator of all peoples. As Westermann writes, "God's action, which Israel experienced in its history, is extended back to the whole of history and to the whole world"; and "The reason why this chapter is at the beginning of the Bible is so that all of God's subsequent actions—his dealings with humankind, the history of his people, the election and the covenant—may be seen against the broader canvas of his work in creation" (Westermann, *Genesis 1-2*, 65, 195).

Wenham articulates a similar view:

Clearly Gen 1-11 serves simply as background to the subsequent story of the patriarchs, and their history is in turn background to the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt and the lawgiving at Sinai which forms the subject matter of Exodus to Deuteronomy. (Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, xlv)

Or, according to Brueggemann, the text

is not an abstract statement about the origin of the universe. Rather, it is a theological and pastoral statement addressed to a real historical problem. The problem is to find a ground for faith in this God when the experience of sixth century Babylon seems to deny the rule of this God. (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 25)

<sup>110</sup>F. F. Bruce, *Tyndale Commentary on Romans* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1963), 160; Quoted in R. J. Berry, "Adam or Adamah?," *Science and Christian Belief* 23, no. 1 (2011): 41.

<sup>111</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8, Word Biblical Commentary* 38A (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 290.

<sup>112</sup>Daniel Harlow expresses this well when he writes, "Here a range of evidence establishes that virtually all of the acts considered 'sinful' in humans are part of the

## Article

### *Understanding the Beginning in Light of the End: Eschatological Reflections on Making Theological Sense of Evolution*

natural repertoire of behavior among animals ... including deception, bullying, theft, rape, murder, infanticide, and warfare, to name but a few. [Thus,] far from infecting the rest of the animal creation with selfish behaviors, we humans inherited these tendencies from our animal past. (Daniel C. Harlow, "After Adam: Reading Genesis in an Age of Evolutionary Science," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62, no. 3 [2010]: 180)

See also Murphy, "Roads to Paradise," 114.

<sup>113</sup>Harlow makes a similar point (Harlow, "After Adam," 191).

<sup>114</sup>I do not intend here to offer an exhaustive definition of sin (a complex concept conveyed through diverse and rich narratives and metaphors throughout scripture), but only to present the sinful condition in eschatological perspective.

<sup>115</sup>Peters's statement that God creates "from the future, not the past" must be held in balance with what he says elsewhere. I would prefer to speak of God's creating in the midst of the past, present, and future, as the Spirit's presence and power intensifies to draw creation forward toward God's envisioned consummation. God both

"pulls" the present and past into the future (eschatological drawing) and pushes creation forward from behind (as God's past creative work has ongoing effects in the present). With respect to our being transformed in Christ, while the resurrection of Jesus has determinative significance for human beings with respect to our future (we will rise with him), his incarnation has significance for our present (we are still dying in him). Thus, I find the following statement by Peters more satisfying: "Each moment God sustains the cosmos in being, provides an array of potentialities that makes contingency possible, and releases the present moment from the absolute grip of past determinism" (Peters, *Anticipating Omega: Science, Faith, and Our Ultimate Future* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006], 12, 14).

<sup>116</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 6, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 146-70.

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