

a little), giving a light feel to this book even when discussing technical topics. Much of this book is also faithful to the historicity of the biblical creation account. The only significant problem in this book is Andrews's wholesale adoption of big bang cosmology, ignoring the problems this creates for any attempt to take Genesis as real history. It mars what is otherwise an outstanding book.

### References

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3. Some of the important critiques of classical foundationalism have originated from Christian philosophers, notably Alvin Plantinga. See the essays in Plantinga, A. and Wolterstorff, N. (Eds.), *Faith and Rationality*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1983. For an accessible summary, see Naugle, D., Alvin Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology: Analysis and Critique; paper presented at the Southwest Commission on Religious Studies, Dallas, TX, March 18–19, 1994, available at [www3.dbu.edu/naugle/pdf/Plantinga\\_Reformed\\_Epistemology.pdf](http://www3.dbu.edu/naugle/pdf/Plantinga_Reformed_Epistemology.pdf).
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5. See also Weinberger, L., Harmony and discord: A review of *The Language of God* by Francis S. Collins, *J. Creation* 21(1): 33–37, 2007.
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## Theistic evolutionary doublespeak

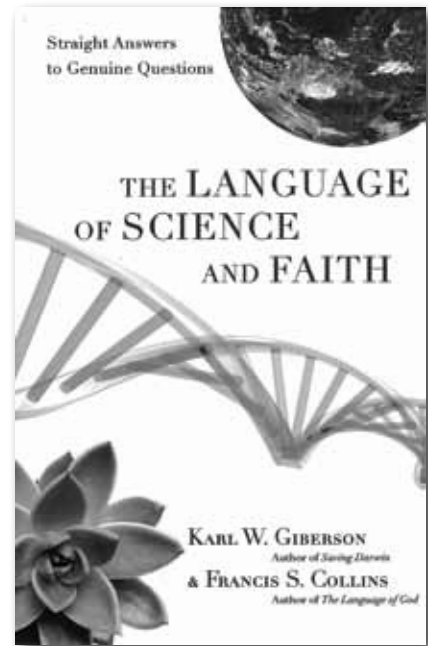
A review of  
*The Language of Science  
and Faith*  
by Karl W. Giberson and  
Francis S. Collins  
InterVarsity Press, 2011

Lita Cosner

Many Christians ask whether it is possible to accept modern science while being faithful to the Bible's teachings on origins. So when professing evangelical authors write a book that claims to give a biblical take on the issue, it is sure to be popular. Unfortunately, *The Language of Science and Faith* hits a lot of sour notes in their attempt to reconcile modern science and biblical faith. This should surprise no readers familiar with their previous works.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Stereotyping creation

The authors adopt a paternalistic, condescending tone toward creationists very early in the book, presuming to lecture the reader about what they must and must not accept. They tell the reader in no uncertain terms that "there are truths about the natural world that must be confronted, no matter how disturbing they seem" (p. 8). Moreover, "[t]he Bible is not a science text and should not be read that way" (p. 106) and the biblical authors "all lived before there was science" (p. 107). The tone is condescending. The result is both simplistic and insufficient to deal with the concerns of those who have considered the issues at length and have come to a different conclusion from that of the authors.



This attitude toward creationist Christians is also evident in how they are characterized throughout the book. For instance, the authors show contempt for creation views by citing theologians and scientists for pro-evolution views, but characterizing creationist views with straw men and lay people. For instance, the authors cite B.B. Warfield's view: "I do not think that there is any general statement in the Bible or any part of the account of creation ... that need be opposed to evolution." But for a creationist view, they cite the wife of the bishop of Worcester, England: "Descended from the apes? My dear, let us hope it is not true. But if it is, let us pray that it will not become widely known" (p. 42). This is only one example of a tendency that holds throughout the whole book. But had they wanted to be fair to the creation view, they could have cited respected theologians like Edward Young, who said:

“[They say] Whenever ‘science’ and the Bible are in conflict, it is always the Bible that, in one manner or another, must give way. We are not told that ‘science’ should correct its answers in light of Scripture. Always it is the other way around. Yet this is really surprising, for the answers which scientists have provided have frequently changed with the passing of time. The ‘authoritative’ answers of pre-Copernican scientists are no longer acceptable; nor, for that matter, are many of the views of twenty-five years ago.”<sup>3</sup>

But the Christian reading *The Language of Science and Faith* is given no indication that such dissenting voices even exist in the educated world. Instead, the authors confidently assert that “The leading YEC proponents are not, in fact, biblical scholars and have limited training in the relevant biblical scholarship (p. 69)” and that “educated Christians had been comfortable with an ancient earth for decades [before Darwin]” (p. 152). Not only is this wrong, it’s a case of pot meet kettle, because neither of the authors is a biblical scholar!

### **Overly optimistic about science**

The authors begin “by recognizing that *most* of science does not connect in any meaningful way to *most* of religion” (p. 81) and “God’s revelation in nature, studied by science, should agree with God’s revelation in Scripture, studied by theology” (p. 70). But when the two seem to conflict, there is no question in the authors’ mind about which should be reinterpreted. The authors are enthusiastic about science—unfortunately they are naïve about scientists’ objectivity. They say:

“BioLogos also embraces science as a reliable way to understand the world. We believe science is

an enterprise with great integrity, and that scientists are, in general, honest and objective in their work, and trustworthy in their conclusions. In embracing science we accept that the biological theory of evolution is a reliable explanation for the development of the diversity of life on our planet” (p. 19).

But scientists are *human*, and bring the same motivations to their work that affect all other spheres of life. Evolutionists are anything but objective when it comes to the evidence, as can easily be witnessed any time most of them are asked to consider whether evolution might be a flawed theory.

They argue that science is self-correcting (p. 110), and this may be true in an ideal world where people aren’t motivated by bias and the multitude of ways one can be invested in a certain theory being true. But in a system where peer review is used to filter out dissenting voices and reinforce the status quo, it is hard to see how the self-correcting can occur. Furthermore, their argument is self-refuting: if it is self-correcting, it entails that the current theory might not be correct. So it’s folly to pretzelize Scripture to fit, just as Young’s quote, above, pointed out.

Furthermore, for the authors, evolution is equated with science. Twice the authors compare the certainty of evolution being true to that of the earth going around the sun. It is “the core of biology” (p. 21), and they seem to equate rejection of evolution with rejection of science itself. The authors lecture the reader that “When there is a near-universal consensus among scientists that something is true, we have to take that seriously, even if we don’t like the conclusion” (p. 29). They claim that only a vanishingly small minority of scientists question evolutionary theory.

Of course, there is the issue of the ‘Dissent from Darwin’ list of 500 scientists who are skeptical of evolution—the authors claim that, for various reasons, these scientists don’t count. First, many of the scientists are not biologists, which the authors claim makes them ineligible from commenting on the validity of evolution. But evolution depends on certain things in chemistry, geology, and other scientific areas being true, so scientists in these disciplines are well qualified to comment on those aspects of evolution. But the authors are quick to dismiss them, saying, “No doubt they are sincere in their views, but do we need to take their concerns about evolution seriously?” (p. 32)

Furthermore, many of them are old—meaning that they “would have finished most of their education a half-century ago, before the developments of the past few decades provided so much support for evolution.” (p. 32) But this is disingenuous—if Dawkins and the late Stephen Jay Gould are acceptable evolutionists, despite their age, then their contemporaries in the creation camp cannot be dismissed simply because of when they went to school. Further, these scientists would argue that the recent amazing discoveries of the cell’s machinery and information-storage systems further *undermine* evolution.

They go on to cite the NCSE’s list of evolutionists named Steve, containing over 1,000 names, as if creationists were not sufficiently aware that the majority of scientists are evolutionists. Finally, they claim that “scientific truth is not decided by the number of names on a list” (p. 33)—this from the same authors who lecture the reader on the inescapable significance of the evolutionist consensus in the scientific community, and on the same page as the citation of the list of evolutionist Steves which illustrated how many more scientists are evolutionists! One wonders if the irony was intentional.



**Figure 1.** The authors fail to grapple with the implications of taking a different view of Adam from that of Scripture and the NT authors.

### An evil exposition of the problem of evil

The authors' most disappointing statements have to do with the problem of evil. As biblical creationists have often pointed out, theistic evolution leaves the Christian with no satisfying answer for the problem of evil, because death and suffering are actually the agents of God's creation according to theistic evolution. But nowhere has this been more clearly evidenced than when Collins and Giberson attempt to tackle the problem of evil. What do they have to say when it comes to a subject that has challenged the faith of more Christians throughout history than perhaps any other issue?

"The problem of evil has no simple answer; alas, it also has no complex answer. In fact it has no satisfactory answer whatsoever. If it did, the smart philosophers and theologians of yesteryear would have resolved it already" (p. 128).

Collins and Giberson would have us believe that philosophers and theologians, pastors and academics alike, throughout all of history, have answered the complex problem of why there is suffering in the world with a unified shrug, throwing up their hands in despair. And because they were 'smart', we shouldn't look any further than that!

The authors do put forward a few weak arguments—humans cause a lot of evil (p. 128), but they (the authors) can't explain bad things that humans can't control, or bad things that preceded humans for millions of years according to the evolutionary timeline.

But one thing the authors are certain about—the biblical teaching of a creation without evil before sin cannot be literally true. They say, regarding the biblical creationist position:

"... the proposed solution requires considerable imagination and far-fetched speculations that go well beyond the biblical account of the Fall. We have to suppose that almost every animal on the planet had its way of life dramatically transformed by the curse. Sharp teeth and poison glands—and the genetic code to produce them—had to pop into existence, since animals were now going to start killing each other for the first time. Thorns had to suddenly appear on bushes. Vast numbers of vegetarian animals became carnivorous. And all this had to happen without leaving any trace in the fossil record ... Imagining a world like this is, quite simply, impossible" (p. 131).

Aside from making their own apparently lackluster imagination the standard for whether something is plausible or not, here, as in other places, Collins and Giberson apparently fail to think of any possible way around their arguments, and therefore assume the backwards creationists cannot possibly have thought about these objections to sufficiently answer them. The most basic creation material, such as CMI's *Creation Answers Book*, covers the origin of carnivory—e.g. that the genetic code for new features did not pop into existence but was switched on at the Fall. Our own embryonic development precedes by programs that switch genes on

and off. So it is also inexcusable that someone would write a book talking about young-earth creationists without understanding something as basic as the creationist belief that most of the fossil record was created during Noah's Flood, hence after the Curse (they protest it is not recorded in the rock layers).

The authors finally posit that evolution makes a *positive* contribution to the problem of evil—they claim that just as God created humans with freedom, so it is that humans, not God, are responsible for evil human deeds). He has programmed the same sort of freedom of creative power into the world. Thus God is absolved of responsibility when it comes to evil and suffering that arose through evolution—for example, "When nature's freedom leads to the evolution of a pernicious killing machine like the black plague, God is off the hook" (p. 137). So apparently, the authors want us to feel better about evil, because God really isn't in charge of it at all! And apparently He is not responsible for setting up a system where death, which He calls 'the last enemy' (1 Corinthians 15:26), is His means of bringing about a 'very good' creation (Genesis 1:31). One fails to see how their answer to the problem of evil is better than that of the atheist.

The authors argue that this world was the 'best of all possible worlds'—that an 'interesting' world with suffering would have been better than "bland worlds without the possibility of disasters or worlds where God constantly intervened to prevent disasters" (p. 139). Once again, their apparently deficient imagination cannot come up with an interesting world without evil.

### Dodging the central question

A book that has the expressed purpose of justifying a non-historical interpretation of Genesis in favor of evolution should devote substantial time to showing how a serious



Christian can take the evolutionary view when Jesus and Paul take Genesis as a historical text and base core Christian doctrines on it. The authors protest that “Nowhere in the entire Bible do we read anything that even hints that the writer is trying to teach science” (p. 108). But we *do* get the indication that the Bible is teaching *history*. The authors admit that Paul seems to take Genesis literally:

“The apostle Paul, for example, compares Adam and Jesus in the book of Romans, describing Adam as a sort of representative of humanity who sinned and brought on a curse. Adam is contrasted with Jesus, the new representative, who brings life. ... Jesus, of course, is clearly a historical figure, and Paul seems to be referencing Jesus and Adam in the same way, thus suggesting that he thought of Adam as a historical figure” (pp. 210–211).

But instead of tackling this crucial issue for their position head-on, the authors move on to Peter Enns’ hypothesis that the story of Adam is actually a retelling of the origins of Israel, not mankind. The problem with this is, of course, that no-one would get this view from the Genesis text itself, or anything the rest of the Bible teaches about Genesis.

No BioLogos author has, to date, really grappled with the implications of taking a different view than that of the authors of inspired Scripture. This is probably because a consistent theistic evolutionist *must* have a low view of Scripture’s authority.

They have a number of weak explanations as to why they cannot take the Bible at face value:

“The Genesis account says little about how God created. Adam was created from dust and God’s breath; Eve was created by from Adam’s rib ... . None of these ‘explanations’ can possibly be actual descriptions. Human beings are mainly water, not

dust, and there is no process by which an adult person can be made quickly from a rib ... . Based on what we know today about both science and the ancient world of the Hebrews, it is simply not reasonable to try to turn the brief comments in Genesis into a biologically accurate description of how humans originated” (p. 206).

But their protests fail to understand that the Bible teaches a fundamentally *supernatural* account of creation—the ancient Hebrews surely knew that people didn’t *normally* come from ribs, as much as the Jews of the first century understood that virgins don’t *normally* give birth, and that dead men *usually* stay dead. But a God who was bound by such laws of nature would not be a God worth worshipping.

### Science and theology: disappointing treatment on both fronts

When Christians pick up a book about science and faith, most want to hear that their faith is not threatened by true science—the Bible can be trusted. But one looks in vain for a faith-affirming message in *The Language of Science and Faith*; instead, the authors chip away at faith, telling the reader which parts of the Bible Christian can no longer really believe.

There is no sufficient space to refute every error in *The Language of Science and Faith*; that would require its own book. But many of the errors have been covered in other responses to BioLogos material.<sup>4</sup> Other errors have been refuted by reputable creationists for so long that one wonders how the authors failed to come across these in their research for their book.

There is a rich tradition of philosophical, theological, and scientific inquiry into the question of human origins. Unfortunately, Giberson and Collins show no



**Figure 2.** The authors raise, but never adequately answer, the issue of Paul’s references to Adam as a historical person.

awareness of this in their writing. They occasionally raise a question worth exploring, and a few times they raise questions they should certainly answer if they want those uneasy about evolution to accept that it is a viable Christian belief system. But their attempts are, without exception, disappointing, and do not rise to even the level of the better evolutionist writings. This flawed attempt to reconcile the Bible and science results in neither good theology nor good science.

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