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Lindsay Robertson ponders

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## A missing link

Christians' attitudes to the creation account in the Bible could be grouped into 3 broad categories:

1. Those who adopt a view based solely on a personal interpretation of scripture, and consider that any other view must have a fatal flaw (even if such has not yet been discovered).
2. Those who implicitly adopt a scientific view, and are little concerned by the biblical accounts.
3. Those who seriously want to understand the biblical account, and to see it reconciled with the "scientific" information that enlightens and enriches our world.

This paper is directed at the latter group and reviews the key issues of creation, and comments on the nature (if any) of apparent divergence between the "special revelation" (scriptural) and "general revelation" (scientific) accounts. Listed and compared in this way, I suggest that there are only a very limited number of aspects on which it is difficult to reconcile these accounts. The biblical dating of "Adam" is one such aspect.

Having defined what I believe to be a major aspect requiring explanation, I want to propose an explanation that reconciles both the known geological and anthro-

pological evidence of the origin of homo sapiens, the biblical accounts of the creation of "Adam", and the datings indicated by the biblical genealogies.

The conclusion I propose also contributes to defining the quintessential difference between humanity and the remainder of creation – and so (should this conclusion be accepted), suggests some important implications for some current issues.

**An overview of creation issues.** The "Creation issue" is large and complex, and while an overview is important, it is also important to separate the key topics that can be discerned from either special or general revelation. The following sections review these key issues and comment briefly (I hope not too superficially) on the degree of apparent correlation between science and scripture for each.

**The pre-existence of God** – Science has little evidence for or against a sentience that pre-existed the creation of the physical universe. The physical sciences also give us little help regarding either the selection of the timing of the "beginning", or the triggering of the events. The biblical account adds three insights: firstly it asserts that

a sentient God pre-existed the creation event, secondly that He initiated it, and thirdly that He explained his actions to mankind – long before mankind had become aware of the nature of the creative event.

**The fact of creation** – Several authors (e.g. Price,<sup>1</sup> Yule<sup>2</sup>) have correctly pointed out that, until a very few decades ago, secular theorists held that the universe had always existed in a similar state (having neither a beginning, nor anticipating an end). The philosophical leap, from this assumption to the recognition that at least one creative event has occurred in the life of the universe, is of huge proportions. The now widespread acceptance of the "big bang" is a spectacular example of a case in which science has lately come to accept a conclusion that had been long-held by Judeo-Christian theologians.

**The early history of creation** – In addition to drawing attention to the unusual phenomenon of science belatedly reaching the conclusion quoted by the Bible (the fact that the physical universe had a beginning), Yule goes further, and claims that the discoveries from the field of physics and astronomy add credence to the biblical account of the beginning, rather than detract from it.<sup>3</sup> While it is true that there

are anomalies in the fossil record, and the possibility of such things as changes to the speed of light have not been ruled out, nevertheless the overwhelming weight of evidence points to an old creation date (13 billion years) for the physical universe.

**The creation of life** – Theories of how life originated can be generally grouped into three categories:

- a) Random creation (exemplified in the writings of Dawkins).
- b) Extra-terrestrial origins (Panspermia) – for which there is very limited evidence.
- c) “Intelligent design” (ID) theory, linked closely to the “irreducible complexity” concept. Proponents of “ID” assert that one or more divinely executed “creations” were involved in the process by which we arrive at today’s variety and sophistication of life.

The Bible records more than one separate, identifiable “creative event” relating to life – and the comment “each according to their kind” suggests that these creative acts may have corresponded to particular divisions/categorisations of life. These “events” are spaced throughout Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 2:8. There is evidence in the text of Genesis 1 that the time intervals between these separate creative events were not those of our current word-definitions. This implies that the “young earth creationists’” insistence on 24-hour periods is poorly supported.

Although the earth’s fossil record is certainly incomplete (and in some cases ambiguous), nevertheless there are large numbers of good-quality fossil remains within the order primate. These remains, from many locations, indicate dates of about 6 million years ago as the point at which “hominids” emerged. The combination of the fossil record and the available dating does strongly suggest a progression in the phy-

sical evolution of hominids. Note however that the fossil record is certainly not complete enough to display the exact process by which one species diverges from another, and becomes distinct.

There is considerably less consensus between theological and secular thought on this topic, however while many authors argue strongly for one or other view, only the most extreme of the secularists would be prepared to deny the possibility that an external sentience was involved in the creative events.

**The creation of humanity** – Anthropologists have suggested that the period required for one species to diverge from another can be of the order of a few thousands or tens of thousands of years – i.e. a short time compared to the time that a species may exist distinctly. Although the issue is debated sci-

while science speaks of the gradual divergence of populations into distinct species.

**The nature of mankind** – A very clear distinction is made throughout the Bible between humanity and the rest of creation. In the creation account, God says “let us make man in our own image”, and elsewhere divine permissions are given to “subdue creation”, to “kill and eat” (animals) etc. The Mosaic covenant included the command not to murder, but included no equivalent comment prohibiting the slaughter of non-human species. More specifically, man (alone) is identified as a “spiritual being”, capable of communion (indeed partnership) with God.

The Bible offers two separate accounts of the creation of man – in Genesis 1 and 2. The accounts overlap but have distinctly differ-

ent emphases – one implies a species, whereas the other clearly identifies a specific individual. Many (e.g. Hooke<sup>4</sup>) have argued on a textual basis, that separate authors were responsible for the Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 accounts. On similar

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entifically, a common viewpoint is that Homo sapiens diverged from a pre-existent species about 100,000 years ago. Some hold that this pre-existent species was homo erectus (though some recent datings in Java dispute this, claiming that homo erectus existed until as recently as 30,000 years ago – much later than the earliest known dating for homo sapiens). It seems likely that the homo neanderthalensis co-existed with homo sapiens until about 35,000 years ago, and were not in fact the direct ancestors of homo sapiens. Biblically, at least one “creation event” related to humankind is clearly indicated.

On this issue, we start to see some apparent divergence between the biblical account and the fossil record: The Bible account refers in considerable detail to “Adam”,

grounds it has been proposed by authors such as Von Rad,<sup>5</sup> that the (separate) authors targeted specific key issues in the history of Israel when they emphasised particular aspects of creation. These scholars’ conclusions serve, as much as anything, to emphasise the true delicacy and subtlety of the process by which the divine and the human authors of scripture interact – regardless of the numbers, the individual(s) who penned Genesis 1 and 2 undoubtedly had a clear view of the needs and issues of God’s people at the times of writing, yet the divine supervision left in the text words which, millennia later, were (re)discovered to be true at a level unimagined by the author(s).

The latter portions of Genesis 3 appear to record an intermingling

of physical and spiritual worlds (e.g. the “tree of knowledge of good and evil”, and the angelic beings with flaming swords). These observations might be taken to indicate that the whole account is allegorical, however passages such as 2 Kings 6:17 (and many recorded incidents in Christ’s life) remind us vividly that the physical and spiritual worlds are intertwined and normally co-existent. In all of the New Testament, and in all but a couple of ambiguous Old Testament references, “man” is clearly assumed to have a spiritual component that interacts with the physical world but is distinct and separable from it.

God is always identified (biblically) as being spiritual in nature – therefore when God says “let us make man in our image”, it would be banal to deduce that God had a torso, head, arms and legs etc. By contrast it is completely logical to assume that God said (in paraphrase) “let us make man into a spiritual being bearing some degree of likeness to us”.

Today there are significantly different opinions on the nature of man. The Christian worldview has asserted a qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) difference between humanity and the rest of creation. This worldview has been severely attacked by authors such as Dawkins,<sup>6</sup> who asserts that human-kind has absolutely no attribute other than the particular combination of physical and intellectual abilities that evolution have discovered for us. The nature of man is therefore a topic that causes tension between the Christian and the secular worldviews. Despite the prevalence of a generally secular worldview, one can readily observe that while human legal and political systems normally recognise some duty of care to other species and the environment, they invariably make a clear distinction between humanity and the rest of creation. Only at the most radical end of the spectrum will one find for example discussion of a “bill of rights for animals.”

**The history of mankind** – The Bible contains several genealogies

– that lead in unbroken line from Jesus back to “Adam”. Bishop Usher summed the ages of each person identified in these genealogies to estimate the dating of “Adam”, at 4004 BC.<sup>7</sup> The good Bishop’s calculations, though given limited credibility today, are quoted in many old bibles (the Scofield reference KJV that was given me by my parents, quotes dates based on Bishop Usher’s calculations at the top of each page). Many issues have been raised regarding the biblical genealogies – the sequence of names is not completely consistent between the genealogies, there are apparent inconsistencies between inheritance via male and female lines, longevities that tax credulity are quoted, and there is the significant possibility that proper names refer to people-groupings rather than individual progenitors. Nevertheless, it is hard to avoid the interpretive conclusion that the authors (divine and human) intended to firmly identify an individual homo sapiens, identified as “Adam”. Scholars have also noted that the proper name given this individual “Adam” has a descriptive meaning – but this is a common phenomenon even today, and gives no strong grounds for avoiding the conclusion that the authors intended to identify an individual. The biblical records of individual conversations between Adam and God, and the physical actions that are linked to these conversations, add strength to the conclusion that scriptural authors intended to identify an individual.

The date of Jesus’ birth is known with reasonable accuracy, and from this well-established point the biblical genealogies lead (allowing generous margins of uncertainty) to a dating a few thousand years BCE for “Adam”. At the risk of drawing a fine distinction, the biblical accounts always link their genealogical record to “Adam”, but not to the creation of “man”.

The estimated biblical datings present a major “problem”: if the estimated biblical dating for “Adam” were presumed to reference the emergence of “mankind”, it would be very difficult to reconcile this

dating with the archaeological/fossil records or the emergence of homo sapiens.

### **Bridging the gaps – hypotheses**

This review of the creation “issues” has shown, I believe, that a significant issue is presented by the apparent time gap between dates obtained when working backward from the present to “Adam”, and working forwards from the geological record towards historically-established events (e.g., Christ’s birth).

It would seem that there are a few possible conclusions:

- a) The first option is to assume that the Biblical genealogies are vastly incomplete, the account of “Adam” actually dates to about 100,000 years ago (at the time when homo sapiens emerged as a species), and that “Adam” represented an individual who (rather in the same manner as the one-millionth person to walk into a supermarket) marks the point at which humanity can be said to have come into existence.
- b) The universe was brought into being in the course of six 24-hour periods, at a date defined by some agreed reconciliation of the biblical genealogies – complete with fossil record, cosmic microwave background, red-shifted star spectra etc etc.
- c) The account of Genesis 2 is completely allegorical, and that “Adam” did not in fact represent any specific individual but rather was a personalization of mankind’s early relationship with God.

### **Reconciliation – “homo spiritualis”**

I wish to develop a somewhat different conclusion, and suggest that the two accounts of “human” creation recorded in Genesis are both factual, but are in fact distinct. I would propose that:

- a) The creation events of Genesis 1 (which are very briefly recovered in Genesis 2:1-6) – linked to the creation events of plants, animals etc – refer to that combination of evolution and divine

influence that brought the homo sapiens into existence – probably over several thousand years, somewhere about 100,000 BCE.

- b) The statement in Genesis 2:7 “And the LORD God .... breathed into his nostrils the breath (nishma) of life; and man became a living soul (nephesh)” describes a separate creative event (which the scriptures later link to a genealogy descending from Christ), characterised by God breathing the “breath of life” (nishma is normally translated “breath”, and ruach = wind/spirit, but the distinction is not precise, and the terms are used together, e.g. in Gen 7:22) into an individual of the species homo sapiens, and thus created an individual “spiritual man”, distinct from all others of the same biological species.
- c) Genesis 2 (after vs.7) then goes on to describe the spiritual “framework” created for that individual man and his interactions with it.
- d) This spiritual nature of man is always heritable (and also eternal) and hence within a relatively small number of generations after “Adam” came to be the common attribute of all of humanity.

### Evidence

Now it is necessary to review the evidence, and evaluate the hypothesis. It is significant that the Bible presents two accounts of creation: The first in Genesis 1, and the second in Genesis 2. The second account deals very quickly with the physical aspects of creation that occupy most of Genesis 1, but clearly records the creation of “Adam” and his subsequent doings. Whatever the reasons, those who compiled the book of Genesis recognised the contribution of both accounts as separately necessary, and divinely inspired.

Both the Bible and most human thought recognise a qualitative difference between mankind and the rest of creation: the Bible describes this qualitative difference in terms of mankind’s creation “in God’s

image”, and so begs the question of the point at which this god-like image was imprinted.

Accepting an early date for the emergence of homo sapiens and a separate, later date for the creation of “spiritual man” reconciles the “scientific” datings, and the Bible’s genealogical datings. Genesis 1 records the creation and emergence of homo sapiens, as discovered in the fossil record, whereas Genesis 2:7 records the creation (from among a population of homo sapiens) of a single individual representative of homo spiritualis, who became the common spiritual ancestor of modern man. This later date could therefore be linked to the biblical genealogies, and at least approximately established at a few thousand years BC.

The hypothesis also allows a workable explanation for such thorny questions as “where did Cain’s wife come from?” – if the hypothesis in this paper were accepted, then it would be logical to assume that she was simply a female (of which many existed) homo sapiens.

Mankind’s spiritual aspect is clearly heritable (and probably also transmissible apart from inheritance) – and permanent: if we accept that the spiritual nature was created in a single individual a few thousand years BC, then even some basic mathematics will show that within a few hundred years a fairly safe assumption could be made that the whole of homo sapiens was “spiritual” in nature: such a conclusion is certainly assumed in the New Testament.

### So what? Conclusions and consequences

I do not have any way of proving the hypothesis presented – however I present it for consideration. I believe that this explanation fits the accounts of general and special revelation, and fulfils the main aims of an apologetic text: to validate scripture, and to add to the confidence that Christians may have in scripture.

An outworking of the current tide of secularism is a strong ten-

dency to downgrade mankind’s position in the universe. Within the fields of politics particularly, this can lead to some real tensions (when it is not clear whether mankind is qualitatively or quantitatively different from the remainder of the universe). I believe that a clarification of our roots (the processes and steps by which we came into being) may allow some current issues to be placed in a better perspective.<sup>8</sup>

### Endnotes

1. C. Price, “In the beginning was the bang”, *New Scientist* (7 May 1994): 46ff.
2. R.M. Yule, Sermon series “Beginnings”, comprising works “The Discovery Of The Beginning”, “Forming The Universe”, “Lighten Our Darkness”, “The Origin Of Life”, “Life To Order”, “In God’s Image”, “In God’s Time”, “Evidence For Design”, “Christ And Creation”, “Faith And Science” (2000). <http://www.stalbanz.org>. [Accessed 6 May 2004]
3. Ibid.
4. S.H. Hooke, “Genesis”, in Peake’s Commentary on the Bible, eds. M. Black, H.H. Rowley (Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1962).
5. G. Von Rad G, *Old Testament theology Vol 1* (SCM Press Ltd, 1975).
6. R. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1990).
7. Archbishop James Usher (1580-1656). <http://www.go-newfocus.co.uk/articles/archbishopjamesusher.htm>. [Accessed 6 May 2004]
8. The Rev A. Smith’s assistance, and valuable critique of this text, is gratefully acknowledged. The Rt Rev. R.M. Yule’s pastoral care, and (perhaps inadvertent) stimulation of my interest in this topic, is also gratefully acknowledged.

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