

CHRISTIAN ANSWERS TO HARD QUESTIONS

**CREATION,
EVOLUTION, AND
INTELLIGENT DESIGN**

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& JAY W. RICHARDS**

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ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS, a college biology professor says to his students, “Evolution is a fact, fact, fact. Get over it!” as he pounds his fist on his podium. Sadly, this is not a scene from a bad play. It is a reality repeated in classrooms around the world—and not only in biology departments. A bright student will understand that the professor is saying a lot more than his words alone suggest. He probably means something like this: “You need to accept that modern science has disproved your outdated beliefs about God creating the world. If you’re going to get ahead—or pass this class—you must either abandon your faith or make it fit with science.”

If you were a student in this situation, what would you do? You might worry that your faith and good science are at odds. That’s not true, but the truth is complicated. We’ll try to simplify it in this booklet, and give you what you need if you ever find yourself dealing with this podium-pounding professor.

CREATION AND CREATIONISM

In some form, creation-evolution debates have been going on since before Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in 1859. Recently, an old idea with a new label called *intelligent design* has joined the fracas. If you ask twenty people to define the three terms in the title of this booklet, you might get twenty different answers. Unfortunately, debates on all three topics can generate more heat than light, especially when the combatants argue past each other. If we want more light and less heat, the first order of business is to make some distinctions and define the words carefully. When we do that, we discover that while Christian faith conflicts with an idea often confused with science, it

does not conflict with the real evidence of science. That idea, called *naturalism* or *materialism*, treats the material universe rather than God as the fundamental reality. We should always distinguish natural science from *naturalism*.

Let's also define *creation*, *evolution*, and *intelligent design*. Unfortunately, debates on these subjects rarely deal with *creation* per se, but with *creationism*, which usually is a term of abuse. According to popular understanding, creationists believe—based on their interpretation of Genesis 1—that God created the universe and everything in it in six twenty-four-hour days, no longer than ten thousand years ago. They also believe that God directly created living things more or less in the current forms. This is often called *young-earth creationism*.

But many Christians who call themselves creationists believe that a faithful reading of Genesis allows for a much older universe and that God's "days" in Genesis 1 aren't plain old twenty-four-hour earth days. After all, the text doesn't say just what kinds of days are being referred to, or how long they lasted. In fact, since the sun and moon don't show up until day 4, and day 7 doesn't end, the text suggests that these are not the days we experience, well, every day.

Most of these old-earth creationists believe the evidence points to an ancient Earth and universe, and suspect that Adam and Eve were created more than ten thousand years ago. Although Genesis 1 is simple enough for a child to grasp some of its meaning, its subtlety is boundless. So it's no surprise that there are a dozen ways to interpret the text—without explaining it away. These include the gap theory, the day-age theory, analogical days, literary framework, days of proclamation, calendar days, and so on. We don't have the space to explore all these options here. We mention them only because popular accounts of "creationism" rarely mention

this variety of views among Christians, who all agree that God created the world.

Christians affirm the doctrine of creation every time we say the Apostles' Creed. Its opening line is: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." That simple twelve-word sentence packs quite a punch. In the Bible, *heaven and earth* is an expression that means "everything other than God." So when we say that God is the Creator, we're saying that everything other than God exists because God freely chose to create it. He could have created a different world or even no world at all. Since God created everything, that means he didn't need to use anything to create the world. He didn't find some cosmic Lego pieces lying around. He created without using anything else. Theologians call this idea creation *ex nihilo*—creation from nothing.

If God created everything without using anything outside himself, then that means that God doesn't depend on the universe (or anything else) in order to exist. He is *transcendent*.

At the same time, according to the Bible and the Christian tradition, God didn't just get things started and then leave the creation to run on its own, like a watchmaker who can fashion a self-winding watch. He's more like a master gardener who creates his own soil, seeds, sun, and rain, or a violin player who creates his own violin. God freely and lovingly conserves and interacts in and with the world he has made. Sometimes he does so directly. He calls Abraham and Moses. He protects the Hebrews from the Egyptians, and sends manna from heaven. He even enters directly into history, causing Mary to conceive and bear the child Jesus—who is God himself.

But God is not stingy with his gifts. He gives his creation certain powers. As Thomas Aquinas once said, God "grants even to creatures the dignity of causality." Even when creatures act, they aren't acting on their own. God is acting indirectly through

these so-called secondary causes, such as physical laws like gravity or the choices of human beings.

At every moment of every day, God oversees his entire creation, even as he allows his creatures the freedom appropriate to their stations. The Bible says that not one sparrow falls to the ground without our Father in heaven knowing it. And even the hairs on our heads are numbered.

The world is fallen because of sin. As a result, many bad things happen. And yet everything still happens for a reason—even if we don't know what that reason is. *Nothing* that happens is purposeless.

BEFORE WE MOVE ON

- + What is the difference between natural science and naturalism?
- + What beliefs do all creationists hold in common? Where might they reasonably differ?
- + How does creation *ex nihilo* show God to be transcendent? How does God interact with his creation?

EVOLUTION

Now we have some handle on both creationism and the doctrine of creation. What about *evolution*? This term is even more slippery. There are at least half a dozen meanings of *evolution* floating around. Sometimes without warning a speaker will switch meanings in midsentence! Such sleight-of-hand can lure the unwary listener into accepting a conclusion that he might otherwise reject.

If someone asks whether you “believe in evolution,” the best answer is usually: “What do you mean by *evolution*?”

In its most general use, *evolution* just means “change over time.” Thus, astronomers can talk about stellar evolution, anthro-

What are creationism, evolution, and intelligent design really about? Do they have similar levels of credibility, or has materialism displaced God as the best explanation for our existence? Gonzalez and Richards serve up a guide for the perplexed that shows us the real issues at stake.

"Gonzales and Richards do an excellent job of explaining the major issues at stake. This book is a valuable resource for anyone who wants to understand what's really going on, especially Christians who are told that 'science' conflicts with their faith."

—Jonathan Wells, Senior Fellow, Center for Science and Culture, Seattle

"A useful survey of the various terms and concepts invoked in this very controversial topic. Those who are just starting to look into these issues would do well to read this essay at the outset."

—David Snokes, Professor of Physics and Astronomy, University of Pittsburgh

Written to equip and strengthen laypeople in their defense of the faith, *Christian Answers to Hard Questions* challenges contemporary opposition to Christianity with concise, practical answers.

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