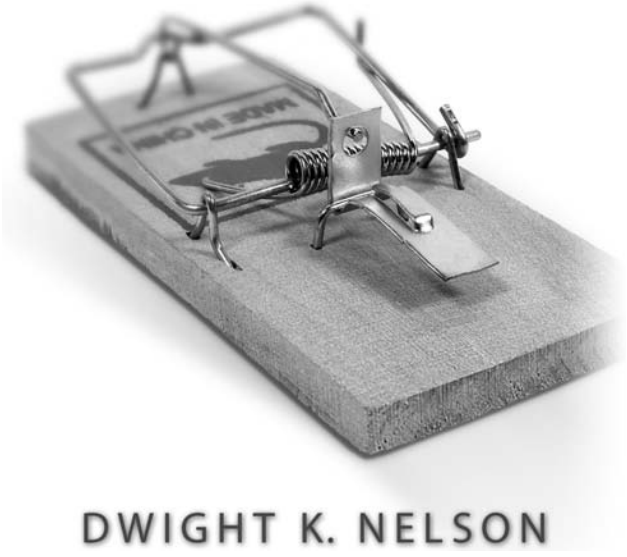
CREATION *and* EVOLUTION



DWIGHT K. NELSON

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To my colleagues in the pastorate
And my friends in the journey

Oliver Archer
Esther Knott
Kenneth Logan
Skip MacCarty
Timothy Nixon
Arne Swanson
Sharon Terrell
Keren Toms

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"In the beginning" again . . .

Fingerprints of God: The Search for the Science of Spirituality—the newly published book by Barbara Bradley Hagerty, religion reporter for National Public Radio—is evidence enough the public continues to be fascinated by the notion of the divine. Not just because multiple global surveys reveal nearly 90 percent of us believe in the existence of God. But also because of the escalating and crescendoing public clash between the two worldviews that drive and define society—supernaturalism vs. naturalism, creation vs. evolution. Where does Hagerty come down in this noisy debate? "I came to define God by his handiwork. A craftsman who builds the hope of eternity into our genes, a master electrician and chemist who outfits our brains to access another dimension, a guru who rewards our spiritual efforts by allowing us to feel united with all things, an intelligence that pervades every atom and every nanosecond, all time and space, in the throes of death or the ecstasy of life." That's quite a confession, given her conclusion the Divine does not intervene in human affairs.

I believe that He does. Over a decade ago, I wrote this book to examine the compelling evidence from science and nature that a loving Creator has in fact intervened in human affairs from the very beginning. But hasn't science amassed added realms of information and knowledge in the intervening years? It has. Nevertheless, the core logic and apologetic of the two worldviews critiqued in this book remain essentially unchanged. And so I am grateful for the publisher's request to reprint and re-release this volume.

And I pray that beyond the fingerprints of God, it will be the heart of your Creator you discover in these pages.

Dwight K. Nelson
Pioneer Memorial Church, Andrews University

Preface

Must science and religion be at war?

Are science and religion at war?

About a year after Charles Darwin published his seminal work, *The Origin of Species,* a debate was arranged between a minister and a scientist. Espousing the creationist point of view was Anglican Bishop Samuel Wilberforce. On the other side of the debate was Thomas Henry Huxley, a scientist and strong advocate of Darwin's evolutionary theory.

It was reported that the bishop—a good theologian but poor biologist (as related by Michael Behe in his book, *Darwin's Black Box*)—ended his speech by asking, "I beg to know, is it through his grandfather or grandmother that Huxley claims his descent from a monkey?"

Now, you don't have to be a seasoned debater to instantly assess that query as a very obvious low-blow kind of question! What opponent wouldn't become riled up with such a jab? The natural rejoinder would surely be a vehement, "How dare you speak of my grandparents that way!"

But that wasn't Huxley's retort. According to the story, he was overheard muttering with glee as he arose to the debate podium, "The Lord has delivered him into my hands!" (And that from an atheist scientist!)

Huxley then launched into a most erudite biology lesson for both the audience and the bishop. And at the end of his rebuttal, he declared that he did not know "whether it was through his grandmother or grandfather that he was related to an ape but that he would rather

be descended from simians than be a man possessed of the gift of reason and see it used as the bishop had used it that day." Behe ends his telling of this story, "Ladies fainted, scientists cheered, and reporters ran to print the headline: 'War Between Science and Theology.' "[1]

But were they right? Are science and religion really at war? They don't need to be, do they? For are not science and religion both ever in quest of truth? Truth cannot contradict truth, can it? In fact, hasn't truth always borne up well under intense scrutiny? Of course.

It was Einstein who once said, "Religion without science is blind. Science without religion is lame." And years later John Polkinghorne came along—himself both an Anglican priest and physicist—and offered this refinement to Einstein: "I would say, 'Religion without science is confined; it fails to be completely open to reality. Science without religion is incomplete; it fails to attain the deepest possible understanding.' "[2] They must go together.

After all, both realms of knowledge are faced with the identical question of origins: Where did we come from; how did we get here? While the answers and the methodologies for finding them are not always the same, the quest and question are. Where did we come from; how did we get here? Stephen Hawking, the great English astrophysicist, framed that most basic of all questions with this bit of musing: "Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing?"[3]

This book is being written in quest of that answer. And in searching for the answer, we will not be looking merely for information to settle a debate. The issue at hand is, Where did we come from, and where are we going? Are we as humans just the product of some evolutionary accident, and will our final end be just as acci-

dental? Or were we designed by a Creator, who has an eternal plan for us? Were we built just for one lifetime, or were we built to last for eternity?

Right here "in the beginning," here at the outset, I feel compelled to declare a list of caveats before this journey has even begun! Call them apologies or disclaimers, if you will. I don't mind. They must be expressed here.

Caveat number one: It almost goes without saying (but I must declare it anyway) that there are much brighter minds than mine that are wrestling over the great issues and questions that science and religion interface. By taking on the debate between creation and evolution, I am in no way suggesting that I have become an authority in either realm!

I have the privilege of pastoring at Andrews University, and in this parish, I am surrounded by bright and intelligent minds, both scientific and theological, that are steeped in the disciplines that inform the journey this book is undertaking. I am grateful for these men and women who are highly respected within and outside my community of faith. Once a quarter I have the privilege of joining a group of them for a luncheon discussion of yet another issue over which science and religion wrestle. I enjoy sharing their dialogue and probing their thinking. I thank God for gifted specialists in all disciplines. We need them all.

My point? While I have endeavored to read widely and carefully in preparation for this journey, that in no way confers the status of specialist or authority upon me. Greater minds than mine (and perhaps even yours) are wrestling with the great issues of origin.

Caveat number two: In the matter of human origins, there are some significant conundrums and puzzles and questions and discoveries that are very difficult to answer.

Proponents of both sides of the creation versus evolution debate recognize that there simply is not an airtight case in favor of one over the other. It would be foolish to undertake a book like this and not candidly note at the outset that all the questions have *not* been answered and all the riddles have *not* been solved. If this were an airtight case, we would all be singing off the same page of the hymnal. And yes, it would be a hymnal! But it is not, and we are not.

Caveat number three: There are obvious limitations to any treatment of the creation versus evolution debate. Dusty tomes, ponderous books, and scholarly journals dealing with the subject of our concern fill shelves upon shelves in libraries. I am fully aware that the eight chapters that follow in this volume cannot possibly treat the issues comprehensively.

Why then do I undertake to write this book? Actually, I did not set out to write one. During the winter of 1997, I preached a series of sermons in the Pioneer Memorial Church, on the campus of Andrews University, addressing the faith challenge that the contemporary Christian faces in a secular society seemingly bent on expunging God from its philosophy of life. How can Christians, like the three thousand students and the two hundred faculty on this campus, be both intellectual and faithful in the face of the mounting Darwinian challenge? How can we fulfill the biblical admonition: "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you"? (1 Peter 3:15).[4] In response to those questions, I wrote and preached a series of sermons. These have been modified and appear as the eight chapters that follow.

I must also testify that the further I delved into the creation/evolution debate and the further the congrega-

tion and I went through the series, the firmer grew my pastoral conviction that a contemporary faith in the biblical accounts of the Creator and Creation can indeed intelligently withstand the frontal assault of Darwin's theory. In fact, I was astounded to learn along the way that there is fresh, new information being discovered by science, stunning knowledge that powerfully defends and supports the biblical teaching of creation "in the beginning." The believer, young or aged, educated or illiterate, can offer an articulate, logical, and informed "reason for the hope that is within." And all of it without apology. It was that conclusion at the end of the sermon series that led me to write this pastoral perspective in the debate over human origins.

The fourth and final caveat: No matter what conclusions you and I may come to, whether in agreement or disagreement, there is no place in the community of Christ for the spirit of arrogance or intolerance. Yes, there is truth. And we must defend that truth! But none of us can garner a monopoly of truth and knowledge over all others. We need each other, and we must keep talking and listening to one another.

Yes, there is a risk, but legal scholar Phillip Johnson absolutely is right in his book, *Reason in the Balance:*

> To enter the field of intellectual argument is to accept the risk that we may lose by being proved wrong. But accepting the risk of being wrong is the inescapable price for making any meaningful statements about the world. The best scientists have never feared to accept the risk—which is why they have learned so much and also why they have placed themselves at risk by overextending their territory. Those who will not take a risk end up

> saying nothing at all, like a violinist who stops playing for fear of hitting a wrong note.[5]

It is risky dealing with this subject from the pulpit or in a book. At the beginning of our congregational journey, people came to me, whistled through their teeth, and wished me good luck (with the implication that fools rush in where angels fear to tread!). But actually, we are not in need of good luck. We need God's light.

His truth can bear examination—prayerful, careful examination. So with a prayer for one another, I invite you to join me in the journey; a journey that won't end with the last page of this book; a journey whose ending is promised "in the beginning" with God.

Dwight K. Nelson
Pioneer Memorial Church
Andrews University

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1. Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 236.

2. John Polkinghorne, *Serious Talk: Science and Religion in Dialogue* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), 75.

3. Kitty Ferguson, *The Fire in the Equations: Science, Religion, and the Search for God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 6.

4. Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture references in this book are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

5. Phillip E. Johnson, *Reason in the Balance: The Case Against Naturalism in Science, Law and Education* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 109, 110.

CHAPTER ONE

Fatal Attraction

Writing at the end of the year in the *London Times* Literary Supplement, Galen Strawson bemoaned how hard this millennium has been on "human hubris," our pride as a species. After all, look what the last few centuries have brought us:

> Copernicus displaced us from the centre of the universe, Darwin closed Eden, showing that we are apes with shrews for ancestors and cabbages for cousins. Freud pointed out that we are not our own masters even in our own heads. . . . [And] modern genetics showed that we share over 98 per cent of our genes with chimpanzees.[1]

Strawson's unsubtle point? Thanks to Copernicus, Darwin, Freud, and modern genetics, we as humans have been whittled down to size. And way down, at that! We may have thought once upon a time we were a race of special somebodies. But not any longer. Because when "Darwin closed Eden," Strawson pines, we learned the

truth that "we are apes with shrews for ancestors and cabbages for cousins." With a family tree like that, who could blame us for feeling blue!

But I'd like to ask Strawson some questions of my own: Are we humans then condemned to live out our days in that blue funk haze of accidental insignificance? Must we allow Darwin and Freud and Copernicus to convince us that we have no destiny or design? Are mere humans able to destroy our belief in Creation?

In search of the answers, we must begin "in the beginning" with an *a priori*. In case you're not familiar with it, *a priori* is an old Latin phrase meaning "from what is before," and when it's used today, it refers to the presuppositions we all use every day. In fact, it's impossible not to have *a prioris*.

For example, when you study the American Declaration of Independence, you presuppose that its principal author, Thomas Jefferson, really did exist. You never met him in your lifetime, nor have you met anybody who has met him. But you've read about him, and you've read documents that have been passed down through the generations that claim to prove that he was the author of the Declaration of Independence. You have even read the testimony of people who knew him centuries ago. And so you accept, as an *a priori,* that Thomas Jefferson really did exist and in fact did write the document you're about to study.

You have to accept this *a priori* by faith, because you have no way to personally prove that Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence or even that he existed.

You make another *a priori* assumption every time you deposit money in a bank. You accept, by faith, that the bank will actually deposit your money and that it will be

there when you need to withdraw it. You ask for no proof, except your deposit slip. You simply accept the *a priori* "truth" that banks are reliable institutions.

We live in a world where *a prioris* reign in abundance.

Not surprisingly then, our journey into the heart of the debate between creation and evolution is laden with *a prioris* too. In the chapters that follow, we will carefully examine the *a priori* premises that undergird Darwin's evolutionary theory. But first consider the fact that the Holy Scriptures operate with a very critical *a priori* too. In fact, there are three of them in Hebrews 11.

A priori *one:* "Whoever would approach him [God] must believe that he exists" (Hebrews 11:6). Clearly the Scriptures are predicated upon the premise or presupposition that there is a God. God exists!

The great philosopher Pascal masterfully dealt with this *a priori* in his famed analogy of "The Wager":

> This much is certain, either God is, or He is not; there is no middle ground. But to which view shall we be inclined? Think of a coin being spun which will come down either heads or tails. How will you wager? Reason can't make you choose either, reason can't prove either wrong in advance. . . . But you *must* wager, for you are already committed to life, and not to wager that God is, is to wager that He is not. Which side, then, do you take?
>
> Let's weigh the gain or loss involved in calling heads that God exists: If you win, you win everything, if you lose, you lose nothing. Don't hesitate then; wager that He does exist. For there is an infinity of infinitely happy life to be won, and what you're staking is finite. That leaves no choice. Since you are obliged to play, you must

> be renouncing reason if you hoard your life rather than risk it for an infinite gain which is just as likely to occur as a loss amounting to nothing.[2]

Of course, the Bible is a passionate appeal to the reader to "make the wager" of faith that indeed God exists. That He does is the first of three critical *a prioris* in the Bible.

A priori *two:* "Whoever would approach him [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). The Scriptures call us to add to the fact of God's existence the *a priori* premise that He is a personal Being who invites us to seek Him and who will reward us when we do. He is not some distant landlord. He is Someone who longs for personal companionship with us. And when we seek Him, this *a priori* declares, He rewards our quest. And that reward is His reciprocal revealing of Himself to our seeking minds. What a God! But there is a third *a priori* the Bible invites us to embrace.

A priori *three:* "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible" (Hebrews 11:3). The Scriptures include a third premise for us as we start our faith journey; namely, "we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God." This personal Being who exists as God and who rewards all those who seek Him is the same One who created the worlds! The Greek literally reads that "the ages" were created by God's word. The New International Version translates this line, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command." By His word He created the entire universe! That *a priori* is presupposed from Genesis through to Revelation.

So there they are—plain and simple, yet profound and

deep—three faith *a prioris* critical for any quest for truth within the covers of the Holy Scriptures. All three premises are introduced by the opening verse of Hebrews 11: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." The Greek word for "conviction" or "evidence" in this verse can also be translated as "proof." Which means that faith is "the proof of things not seen."

But how can faith "prove" anything? It does all the time, actually. Most of us have never seen the generator that produces the electricity that fires up the light bulbs, televisions, hair dryers, and iPods in our homes. And yet every time we switch on one of our appliances, we surround ourselves with 120 volts of shocking proof that somewhere there is an unseen generator that in fact does exist. I'd feel rather foolish trying to argue against the existence of that unseen generator, surrounded as I am by proofs of its reality!

Even so, Hebrews 11, the great Hall of Faith and Fame chapter of the Bible, opens with the resounding declaration that human faith believes that what it observes all around it is ample evidence (evidentiary proof, if you please) for the truth of the three great *a prioris*—God exists, He is a personal Being who rewards those who seek Him, and He is the One who created the universe. You can't prove those *a prioris* true any more than you can prove the existence of Thomas Jefferson. But faith accepts their veracity, just as it accepts Jefferson's historicity.

But some people don't want to have to take any *a prioris* by faith—they choose to believe it when they see it. This, of course, is a ridiculous position to maintain and defend! There isn't a credible scientist around who won't admit that science itself is dependent on *a priori*

faith. Only they don't call it faith—they refer to it as "spectacles behind the eyes" or "filters through which they view the world"—these premises and presuppositions that scientists accept without any proof at all. Listen to Kitty Ferguson, graduate of Julliard School of Music, turned science writer from Cambridge University, in her book *The Fire in the Equations:*

> The assum[p]tions underlying the scientific method are not capable of being proved of [or] disproved by the scientific method. If [Kurt] Godel was right [a German mathematician who came up with the theorem now known as Godel's Incompleteness Theorem, which proved that there are propositions that can be stated in mathematical whole number systems but cannot be proved], belief in mathematics also requires a leap of faith. . . . Even in mathematics, truth goes beyond our ability to prove that it is true. One definition of religion has it that a religion is a system of thought which requires one to believe in "truths" which can't be proved. If that's what a religion is, then according to Godel's Theorem, mathematics is a religion. In fact, mathematician F. De Sua has remarked that it seems to be the only religion that has proved it *is* a religion.[3]

Mark it down, and mark it well—both science and religion are dependent upon faith *a prioris*. Beware of the one who criticizes your faith by claiming that such "leaps" belong only to religion! He doesn't know what he is talking about! So, if "seeing is believing" is your methodology for life, then you are operating on an impossible fantasy. Because we are irrevocably finite (as hu-

mans we have a beginning and we will have an end) and we cannot go everywhere and see everything ourselves, we have no choice but to accept in science and religion some things by faith. Life is too short to prove everything.

What, then, shall we conclude from all this? We all have to start somewhere—scientists, religionists, atheists, agnostics, and believers alike—none of us comes to this journey with what the Latins called a *tabula rasa*—a clean slate. It is ludicrous to believe otherwise. Already there is writing on the slates of our minds as we begin to consider the issue of creation versus evolution. For Christians the writing on the slate is the *a priori* of the Holy Scriptures. Christian faith in its simplest and in its most complex forms embraces the existence of an eternal Creator God through whom all life exists. And, Christian faith in its most fundamental expression—and I use that term advisedly—also embraces the *validity* of the biblical accounts of Creation and the *veracity* of the Creation story. We begin with the understanding that the Bible is true.

The old farmer testified, "If God said it, I believe it." Does such a confession belong only on a bumper sticker?

I realize that many people believe that there is no such thing as objective truth—but I am indebted to Philip Johnson who retorts, "To insist that there is no such thing as objective truth is to state a purportedly objective truth, and this is self-contradictory."[4]

We are all in search of truth. But we ought not to be too quick in dismissing the old farmer's confession—"If God said it, I believe it."

What did God say about Creation and origins?

"Oh, but come on, Pastor," you might respond. "God didn't say that. The words of Scripture were certainly not dictated by God—we all know that. Moses (or whoever

wrote Genesis) was the one who told the story of Creation. God may have inspired some thoughts, but the man came up with the story. You can't take it literally!"

If that is your thinking I respond, "Oh, he did? Did he come up with the story himself to illustrate some great idea or thought—is that it?" What did the farmer confess? "If God said it, I believe it." OK, then, let's take your hypothesis and let the Creation story be one man's reflections on some inspired thoughts. But what shall we do with the fourth commandment? "Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. . . . For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (Exodus 20:8, 11). What shall we do with the fourth commandment? After all, was it not written by the finger of God on a table of stone? "Oh, but come now, Pastor—you don't really believe that one, do you? Come on! You can't take it literally!"

You see what is happening, my friend? Can you see? As soon as you abandon the old farmer's adage, "If God said it, I believe it," you are headed down a dangerous road. Watch where it leads:

"He didn't create the world in the way the first chapters of Genesis purports"—that was a symbolic myth given merely to illustrate God's power. You can't take it literally!

Once you accept that idea, it's not far to the next, and each step leads to another:

"He didn't write the six-day Creation account with His own finger on stone"—that was literary hyperbole to elevate those ten laws for the sake of the generations that would follow. You can't take it literally!

"He didn't create male and female in one day from the dust of the ground and from Adam's rib"—that was only a simplified version of evolutionary development

and reflected the male chauvinism of the times. You can't take it literally!

"She didn't give birth as a virgin to her son"—that's impossible. That was merely an earnest and sincere attempt by the early Christian community to declare that her son was indeed a special person and a great leader. You can't take it literally!

"He didn't go through the villages giving miraculous healing to all who were sick"—those accounts were not written down until oral retelling through the years had brought in much corruption and exaggeration. You can't take it literally!

"And He didn't rise from the dead and the grave"—that simply cannot be done. The Resurrection story was carefully invented to symbolize that the life philosophy of the executed and dead Jesus of Nazareth could bring the rebirth of new hope and courage to the downtrodden and the despairing masses they were attempting to reach. You can't take it literally!

See what happens once you start out questioning the validity of any part of the Bible? Where do we stop? When does human reason yield to faith as the court of final appeal? And who decides? The scientists? The philosophers? The theologians? The pope?

In Pope John Paul II's message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on October 22, 1996, which was convened to discuss the origins of life, are a number of statements that accept evolution as a reasonable explanation for human origin. Note his words:

> In his encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950), my predecessor Pius XII had already stated that there was no opposition between evolution and the doctrine of the faith about man and his vocation,

> on condition that one did not lose sight of several indisputable points. . . .
>
> Today, almost half a century after the publication of the encyclical, new knowledge has led to the recognition of more than one hypothesis in the theory of evolution. It is indeed remarkable that this theory has been progressively accepted by researchers following a series of discoveries in various fields of knowledge. The convergence, neither sought nor fabricated, of the results of work that was conducted independently is in itself a significant argument in favor of this theory.[5]

Let the human organism evolve from preexisting living matter, the pope tells the academy—in fact, earlier in the text he stated that "there was no opposition between evolution and the doctrine of the faith about man"—just make sure you remember that God put the spiritual soul into that evolved body. He emphasizes a declaration made by a previous pope. "Pius XII stressed this essential point: If the human body takes its origin from pre-existent living matter, the spiritual soul is immediately created by God." And so Rome announces to the world of science that you can bring your theory and be at home here. Evolution gave us the physical body, but God supernaturally created the spiritual soul.

But wait a minute. How can you accept the idea that humans evolved from lower life forms without abandoning the Bible's account of Creation?

You can't logically defend such a position. Because if you abandon belief in Creation on the basis of logic and science, how can you continue to believe in the virgin birth and resurrection of the Son of God? From a logical standpoint, all miracles must stand or fall together.

You see, the quest for accommodation and acceptance has always been a fatal attraction. Attractive? Yes. We all sense the tug to accommodate in order to be accepted. But fatal. For severed from the Holy Scriptures, faith always dies.

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1. *Newsweek*, December 30, 1996; January 6, 1997, 136.

2. Blaise Pascal, *Pensees,* no. 418, in Howard A. Peth, *Seven Mysteries . . . Solved!* vol. 1 (La Puente, Calif.: Lessons From Heaven, Inc., 1988), 15.

3. Kitty Ferguson, *The Fire in the Equations: Science, Religion and the Search for God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1994), 6.

4. Philip Johnson, *Reason in the Balance: The Case Against Naturalism in Science, Law and Education* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 116.

5. John Paul II, "Message to Pontifical Academy of Sciences on Evolution" in *Origins,* 1996, 350–352.