

# New textbook teaches non-Christian religion of theistic evolutionism

## *Understanding Scientific Theories of Origins: Cosmology, geology, and biology in Christian perspective*

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It is common for Bible colleges and seminaries to have special science classes for religion majors with names like “Christianity and science”. They cover scientific topics (e.g. origins) that are of interest to students who plan on specializing in theological study or pastoral ministry. Five Wheaton College faculty have teamed up to produce their own textbook geared toward this type of class. Out of the five, readers are most likely to be familiar with John Walton, Professor of Old Testament, and the author of many books that *Journal of Creation* has reviewed previously.<sup>1</sup>

The back leaf of the textbook promotes “BioLogos books on science and Christianity”. Anyone familiar with our previous refutations of BioLogos, and the various authors associated with them, will be familiar with our claim that their particular brand of theistic evolutionism amounts to evolutionary syncretism.<sup>2</sup> We’ve even made the blunt statement that “It’s not Christianity”.<sup>3</sup>

Expectedly, *Understanding Scientific Theories of Origins* promotes billions of years and evolutionary views of the origin of the earth and

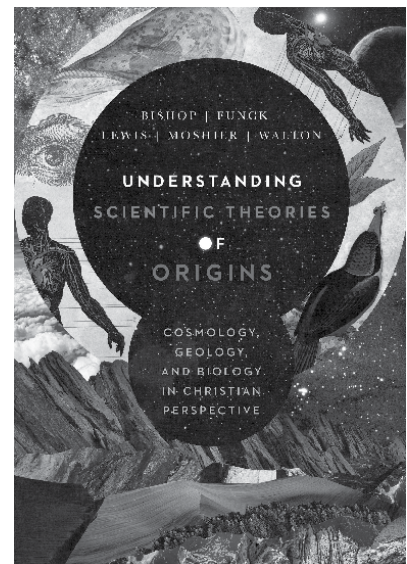
universe, the ancestry of humans, and the origin of death and evil. It is nothing short of theistic evolutionary propaganda, and where it isn’t in error, it’s misleadingly simplistic. One might forgive an introductory survey textbook for being simplistic, but in this case, it’s all leaning in one direction—toward evolution and away from any view which respects a plain reading of the biblical text. They do not even acknowledge that such a reading is possible.

## The problem of interpretation

The authors assert: “Even as we recognize the Bible as an authoritative document, the Bible’s claims can be understood only through interpretation” (p. 9). They present this as if it is a problem, but we can only understand *any* communication through interpretation. This is a central tenet of all scholarship. The authors presumably expect the reader of their textbook to interpret their writing, so clearly interpreting the Bible is not a shocking or difficult idea.

The authors also ignore the fact that nature does not speak in propositional statements. Instead, nature must *also* be interpreted. And scientific data are notoriously difficult to interpret. Across multiple areas of science, multiple studies are showing an inability to replicate scientific results.<sup>4</sup> In some cases, flipping a coin would be a more reliable way to determine scientific ‘truth’.

Sadly, Walton *et al.* have no confidence in our ability to interpret Scripture without their ‘enlightened’ guidance. They say that ancient people



had a very different way of thinking from modern people. For instance, regarding the differentiation between natural and miracle, they say:

“This distinction is found nowhere in Scripture. In the ANE no one thought in such categories. Moreover, the biblical authors think that God is involved in everything (e.g. Ps 104; Col 1:15–17). The natural/supernatural distinction developed much later, and people have imposed it on the Bible as they have tried to make sense of the events described in its pages and human experience” (p. 36).

Yet when one reads the Bible, we see that Mary and Joseph knew very well how children are conceived (Luke 1:34; Matthew 1:19), and Hezekiah knew the way a shadow normally proceeded across the steps (Isaiah 38:1–8), and even the widow in Elijah’s day knew that liquid normally has a constant volume while taking the shape of its container (1 Kings 17:7–16). The men of Malta knew that when a snake bites someone, he normally swells up and dies (Acts 28:1–6). Peter knew that men normally cannot walk on top of the water (Matthew 14:22–33). Moses knew that burning bushes are normally consumed (Exodus 3:3). Gideon knew that if there’s dew on the grass, there

would normally be dew on the fleece as well (Judges 6:36–40). Yet these poor benighted souls allegedly had no distinction between natural and supernatural!

The authors make much of this alleged inability of ancient people to understand concepts that, on face value, seem very scientific. They even make the ridiculous claim that “Biological and genetic ancestry are not concepts that exist for the biblical authors, so OT and NT claims about ancestry cannot be claims about biological or genetic ancestry” (p. 597). One wonders why Abraham minded that Eleazar was going to inherit his riches (Genesis 15:1–6) if he had no concept of biological ancestry, or why Sarah minded whether Ishmael was going to inherit alongside Isaac (Genesis 21:10)? Why did David have Uriah killed (2 Samuel 11), if Uriah would have had no concept about biological ancestry to object that his wife was carrying David’s child? Why did specifically Saul’s descendants have to die for his sin against the Gibeonites (2 Samuel 21)? The fact that five authors who are seeking to teach Bible interpretation to college students, and presumably editors and proofreaders, could not see the patent absurdity of this statement is downright concerning.

### Exegetical sleight of hand

One very common tactic of theistic evolutionists is to explain an interpretation using some long-age assumptions, and then *using those assumptions* rule out biblical creation. This is nothing short of eisegesis (reading into text something that is not there). For instance, the authors present the idea that God created the universe to have continuity, and then argue *based on this*, the idea of discontinuity introduced by the Fall is “biblically implausible”, despite the fact that the discontinuity imposed by the Fall is one of the central themes of Scripture (p. 56)!

Their strategic understatement of anything that would be inconvenient for their reinterpretation of Scripture gives a misleading impression of what the Bible teaches. Their statement about “The New Testament and the Flood” is worth quoting at length as an example:

“Only a few passages in the NT refer to the Flood, but none make a statement about its geographical scope. Luke 17:27 talks about how people were living their lives day by day and were caught by surprise when judgment came (compare with Mt 24:38–39). He notes that future judgment will likewise catch people unaware. Second Peter 2:5 references God sparing Noah, and 2 Peter 3:5–6 indicates that the world (*kosmos*, in its broadest sense, rather than a specific claim about the extent of the Flood) was deluged and destroyed. In light of this small number of references, we find that the NT offers little information to help us answer the scientific questions about the extent of the Flood. Furthermore, it should be noted that what the NT authors do with the Flood story is not

necessarily what Genesis does with the Flood story. Both interpretations are valid, but they need not take the same interpretive path. The account could have multiple significances” (p. 243).

This paragraph is an outrageous example of serpentine eisegesis. They omit important elements to cast the very point of these references into doubt. First, 1 Peter 3:20 clearly gives the *anthropological* scope of the Flood: “*eight persons*” were saved on the Ark. Peter thought the exact number of the survivors of the Flood was an important detail. If Peter accepted all the details he ever mentions, precisely which details do Walton and company think the apostle would have doubted? And in 2 Peter, when he uses the word *kosmos*, which suggests a worldwide extent, they intentionally obscure that. If Peter wanted to say that only the ‘inhabited world’ was wiped out, he could have used the perfectly good word *oikoumenē*, which Luke uses in 2:1 when he speaks of “all the world” being registered in the census.<sup>5</sup> Instead, if Peter wanted to indicate a *worldwide* flood, *kosmos* is exactly the word he should be using.



Figure 1. The textbook distorts the New Testament’s teaching about Noah’s Flood.



### Ignorant critique of creation

The authors also tend to describe young-earth creationists as one might expect an 18<sup>th</sup> century naturalist to describe the inhabitants of some far-off jungle. They certainly do not ever cite their works. The closest one ever gets to a fair treatment is when they describe a creationist belief from 40 years ago that every reputable biblical creationist ministry has since moved away from: they cite the second law of thermodynamics as ‘an effect of the Fall’ (p. 56), despite the fact that every mainstream biblical creationist ministry has rejected this nonsense and teaches that the second law operated before the Fall. They have a chart of the so-called conflicting details between Genesis 1 and 2 (p. 89), as if no one ever noticed this until the rise of uniformitarian geology. These can be easily answered.

### Papering over scientific difficulties inherent in evolution and the big bang

From experience, the textbook is utterly predictable. It espouses the latest theistic evolutionary philosophical and scientific explanations while ignoring the significant problems regarding the origin of life, historical Adam, the big bang, and other issues theistic evolutionists have to grapple with.

This book is especially regrettable in light of the fact that there is less reason today for compromise on these subjects. We have better arguments for creation and intelligent design (by the God of the Bible) than we ever had before. We have candid admissions by evolutionists that they don’t know how the complex code of DNA arose, or how life could come from non-life. As mentioned above, there is a reproducibility problem in science serious enough to call *most* scientific findings into question, let alone the shakiest studies with the

most questionable claims of being real science.

### Scary consequences of compromise

There are places where the mask slips off, so to speak, and we are faced with the grim consequences of the compromise suggested by Walton *et al.* For instance:

“If there is no significant prefall/postfall rupture, then it is hard to escape the conclusion that death and disease are part of the normal functioning of the creation in Genesis 1, which, according to the doctrine of creation was incomplete, not yet the new creation it is intended to be. Of course, many Christians believe that the Bible teaches there was no biological death or disease in the prefall creation because prefall everything was ‘perfect.’ Here Greek philosophical notions of perfection are strongly at work” (p. 57).

This *destroys* the entire Creation/Fall/Redemption narrative of Scripture. If the God of Genesis 1 considered death and disease ‘very good’, then what was Jesus coming to redeem us from, and what exactly were the effects of Adam’s sin?

### The Bible is true, but says nothing about the real world

Walton *et al.* appeal to the fallacious ‘two books’ argument, that natural revelation (i.e. science) and special revelation (i.e. the Bible) tell us about fundamentally different elements of reality. For instance, they say that science focuses on physical questions like the mass and temperature of the sun. They say theology addresses questions of value, such as “what is the meaning of the Sun?” (p. 92). However, this is just another version of the failed ‘non-overlapping magisteria’ argument. When we realize that Scripture addresses *historical* questions, such as the formative history

of the sun (Genesis 1:14–19), it is clear that the ‘two books’ argument does not resolve the problems with theistic evolution.

### Theistic evolutionism is a non-Christian religion

Both Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses claim to believe in a Christ, claim to believe in a God or gods, and use the Christian Scriptures. Yet we reject their claim to Christianity because they deny doctrines such as the Trinity and the deity of Christ which are central to Christianity. Non-trinitarian Christianity ceases to be Christianity at all. Yet from the first verse of the Bible, God’s most consistent self-identification, that which differentiates Himself from every other being, is that He alone is the uncreated Creator of all that exists. Theistic evolutionism pretends to retain this belief while interpreting this creative act so differently as to deny what God explicitly claims for Himself in His word.

Wheaton is a respected Christian seminary, and among the five authors Walton is a well-known and respected professor. Yet, this textbook is simply dangerous. It will likely be used in many ‘Christianity and science’ college courses specifically tailored for future pastors, to their detriment. Parents of students at Wheaton, as well as alumni from a time when Wheaton may have actually been Christian, should note this with interest and concern.

### References

1. For instance, Halley, K., John Walton reimagines Adam and Eve, *J. Creation* 29(2):47–51, 2015.
2. Cosner, L., Evolutionary syncretism: a critique of *BioLogos*, 7 September 2010; [creation.com/biologos](http://creation.com/biologos).
3. Bates, G. and Cosner, L., It’s not Christianity!, 2 October 2012; [creation.com/its-not-christianity](http://creation.com/its-not-christianity).
4. Baker, M., 1,500 scientists lift the lid on reproducibility, *Nature* 533:452–454, 26 May 2016.
5. See Cosner, L., The global Flood according to the New Testament, 24 May 2012, [creation.com/nt-global-flood](http://creation.com/nt-global-flood).