



The six-day creation account in the first chapter of Genesis is brought to bear on the theological debate over evolution to the exclusion of other creation narratives in the Bible. This is not surprising because this account is related to us in the very first words of the Bible, and, at face value, the whole point of this narrative seems to be to spell out God's creative activity in a detailed record of six days: on the first day God created light; on the second day, the heavens; on the third day, the land and plants; on the fourth day, the sun, the moon, and the stars; on the fifth day, birds and fish; and on the sixth day, land animals, and a man and a woman.

For many, it is difficult to reconcile this picture of creation with the theory of evolution.

To interpret the Genesis 1 pericope correctly, we must read it in the context of the rest of the Bible, which contains other creation accounts that are often overlooked. For example, there is a second creation narrative in Genesis, which appears in chapter 2. This account presents a different order of creation: Eve is made from Adam's rib only after the animals have been created and are found to be unworthy partners for the man. In this reportage, God made the heavens and the earth, and then the first man, Adam. Whether this all occurred on the same day or on different days is not specified. God then planted a garden and placed the man in it. Next, God made the animals, which Adam named as each was brought to him. And finally, Eve was created.

Now, if the literal sense of these passages in Genesis 1 and 2 were to present the historical order of the production of creatures, then they would be in contradiction; and thus Scripture would not be inerrant. For in the first account, the man and woman were created after the animals while in the second account, only the man was

created before the animals: the woman was made last of all.

However, if the literal sense is rather to affirm that God alone creates something where before there was nothing, that there is a divinely intended order among all corporeal creatures with man at the top, that God made Adam and Eve for each other—and other such theological themes—then there is no contradiction since the author never intended to provide an astronomical or a zoological record for an event at which he was

## Interpreting the Creation Narratives in the Bible

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not present. Let us recall from the previous essay in this series that the literal sense includes symbols and figures of speech

when it is the author's intention to use them.

What about other creation accounts? We find important teachings on creation in the historical books (2 Maccabees), in the wisdom literature (*i.e.* Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Wisdom, and Sirach), in the prophets (*i.e.* Isaiah), and in the New Testament (*i.e.* John, Romans, Colossians, and 2 Peter). These are not texts whose sole purpose is to describe the beginning of the world as we find in Genesis, but they constitute definitive revelation about the divine act of creation.

We will now closely examine a passage from Proverbs with the help of selections from John and Colossians, and then simply draw together some other relevant texts to display a sample of Scripture's treatment of creation. By considering these sources that are often overlooked in the debate over evolution, we will benefit from a fuller perspective.

In Proverbs 3:19-20 we are treated to a more theological explanation of creation, namely that God created everything *by his wisdom*. The preceding verses (vv. 13-17) situate this passage in the context of the praise of wisdom: that is, the man who finds wisdom is "happy" for "she is more

precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.” Were that not enough, “long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor” and “her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” The next verse (v. 18) makes an allusion to the creation account in Genesis 2, calling wisdom “a *tree of life* to those who lay hold of her.”

Then in verses 19-20, we come to the profound theological assertion that “YHWH by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke forth, and the clouds drop down the dew.” This is clarified in John 1:1-3, which restates the classic creation account of Genesis 1 in terms of the uncreated Word of the Father, that is, the Father’s Wisdom or Knowledge, through whom all things were made: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” St. Paul advances the same teaching in the early part of his letter to the Colossians (1:16-17): “For in him [the most beloved Son, the image of the invisible Father] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (see also 2 Pet 3:5). But what does this mean?

St. Thomas Aquinas borrows an image from Aristotle in order to explain this doctrine of acting through wisdom (see essay no. 8 for more on *divine knowledge and love*). The carpenter who makes a bench does so not only with wood and saw and hammer. He also must have *the idea of the bench* he wants to make. So, the bench is made *through his knowledge of the bench*, that is, *through his wisdom*. If he is not wise about benches—for instance, if he has no idea what one should look like—then he cannot make it even if he has the best wood, saw, and hammer in the world. It is correct in the strictest and most theologically rigorous sense to say that the Father *creates all things through his Word*, the beloved Son, who proceeds in the divine intellect as begotten wisdom. The Father in knowing himself (the divine essence) produces a concept of himself, which is a perfect reflection of himself, namely the Word,



who is his begotten but uncreated Son. And since the act of creation proceeds from God’s knowledge of what he wishes to create, *all things were made through the Word*.

So, while the central point of Proverbs 3:13-20, John 1:1-3, and Colossians 1:16-17 may not be to explain the production of creatures, these passages do articulate correctly and profoundly how all things came to be.

In conclusion, it is important to note that there is not just one creation account in the Bible that describes a six-day process. There is a second narrative in Genesis, and there is a more theological explanation in the historical books, the wisdom literature, and the New Testament. Conflicting assertions between the first and second creation stories in Genesis with respect to the order of events manifest that the literal sense of those details cannot be a scientific reportage—if the Scriptures are the inerrant word of God. 

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