

Natural science at “Wort und Wissen” – a second account

W+W-Discussion paper 1/12

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Scientific work at “Wort und Wissen” (an association of German scientists from different areas of science) is based on the certainty that God’s word is eternally valid while human knowledge is only preliminary and fallible. We are aware of the fact that creation is not comprehensible or explainable in a scientific way alone, neither in its coming into existence nor in its continuing existence. The research association “Wort und Wissen” wishes to combine – as can be seen in the name – two fields of human understanding. The belief in Jesus Christ and biblical tradition (“Wort”) are the basis for the interpretation of knowledge gained through scientific methods. We conduct scientific activities and are convinced that, firstly, this world was created and, secondly, that this took place within the framework presented by the Biblical record.

At the beginning of the work in the German speaking world we hoped to overcome the evolutionary approach by scientific argumentation and to document a biblical short-term creation scenario due to numerous criticisms concerning evolutionary theories. Many of us regarded the millions of years stipulated by geology and cosmology as poorly founded or even an arbitrary assumption. Often it appeared that the battle had already been won.

Eventually and while going deeper into the matter difficulties occurred and as it appears mainly with respect to the second aspect, the documentation of a biblical short term scenario. The progress of research produced apart from confirming results also some tough nuts to crack for the scientific approaches conducted by “Wort und Wissen”. Simple answers to scientific questions turned out to be not sustainable. We do not have answers for many questions, especially when the time periods since the creation of the earth are concerned. In 1996 already we, therefore, published a first statement discussing not only good arguments but also hinting at the enormous difficulties our fellow scientists have to face and argue with.

Meanwhile another sixteen years have passed during which some developments have gone further but also new approaches to scientific research results have been pursued. With this revision we want to present an up to date insight on how we assess the situation of our work in which we are primarily obliged to the biblical word but also take scientific results seriously. A realistic statement is required to continue placing the right focus and priorities in our work.

The following statements only cover the scientific sector of the debate about “Bible and Science” as well as theological questions arising from these topics. Different branches of our research, such as biblical archaeology and economy will not be discussed.

Where we find good arguments

It is by way of comparison simple to collect many phenomena making clear that the world was created. Creation as it is presented in the Old and New Testament can clearly be seen in nature (respectively in creation) – according to Romans 1, 19 f. In many fields it is possible to criticize evolution substantially. Intensive efforts for more than 60 years to explain life as being derived from inanimate matter (models of primordial soup) so far went wrong. Even a natural mechanism that can be experimentally demonstrated and by which living organisms can be converted to differently constructed elementary types with new elements (macroevolution) is not known so far. Traceable changes can only be seen in the area of microevolution but cannot

simply be extended towards macroevolution. Today there are even more arguments against the “proof of similarity” of evolution than 20 years ago. The statement that there are flaws in construction of creatures that are opposed to creation could be refuted in many cases though we cannot claim this to be our merit. It is a result of general progress in research. In paleontology (the science dealing with life of past geological periods) it is shown that new groups of living creatures occurred relatively abrupt and manifold in the succession of geological systems, and not by gradually rising varieties as Darwin had claimed. However, the argument of the missing links has to be treated with attention to more specific details. Since new findings which may at least be considered as missing links are being made repeatedly. On the other hand the great diversity occurring in parallel increasingly inhibits the *consolidation* into a tree structure which could be interpreted in evolutionary terms. In addition there are hints to the fact that the laws of physics and the framework of cosmology are finely tuned and that life, as we know it, would not be possible under slightly changed natural laws and frameworks.

Approaches to alternative models based on creation could be developed such as e.g. those in the biology of basic types. Biology permits to make borders between basic types biologically plausible and then (trying to) match basic types to created types within the creation theory. In certain areas of geoscience rapid catastrophic short-term processes can be established which are in considerable contrast to common concepts of long-term development. In the field of human prehistory strong results also call for a rather short period of human existence.

New interesting aspects of criticism *of* evolutionary concepts and established time concepts arise from results proving that even long geological periods are insufficient to explain the high development of organisms or apparatuses (e.g. origin of life, origin of the eyes) within geological horizons. Moreover there are clear proofs of unexpected and from the evolutionary point of view too “early” appearances of life forms (e.g. of groups of plants and mammals) or of human remnants (tools in the early Tertiary).

In our research it is also important for us to document and emphasize the ideological-religious interdependence of origin concepts. Not only by subject specific but also by epistemological arguments it has been shown that based on different guiding principles (e.g. creation or evolution) diverse explanations are possible. A sole naturalistic explanation of the world is therefore not plausible due to various philosophical reasons.

Many themes are not known to the public and it is our concern to provide information and education.

Open questions

The positive aspects of our research mentioned *before are contrasted by* difficult unsolved questions. According to the state of art in the areas of natural science it is not possible to present a convincing model in the framework of biblical creationism in many fields at all or at best in tentative ways. The open questions mainly refer to the time period that passed since the creation of the world and to the circumstances of the Great Flood. To state some examples: we cannot *identify* the beginning and end of the Flood within geological periods. We also cannot explain the pattern of the entire sequence of geological formations and their fossil groups. Ecological reasons instead of evolutionary can only partially be *held* responsible (in this case the sound criticism towards the evolutionary explanation of the sequence of fossils is possible). It is not yet clear how to explain the huge geological processes of plate tectonics (continental drift) or the cooling down of huge masses of magma within the biblical short-term frame. Still many questions are open concerning the origin of human varieties, the post-flood cultural development

of humankind and their spreading within the time of biblical tradition. We still have no answers when we have to explain in natural scientific terms how radiometric and non-radiometric age data which seem to be concordant in the long-term assumptions can be understood in a narrow short-term period (although long-term explanations are not absolute in the strict sense). Likewise there is no short-term cosmology while many astronomical findings can be consistently integrated into the current standard model of cosmology (“big bang model”). In biology we are also facing problems referring to questions of time: according to previous understanding the molecular differences between types of the same basic types (i.e. the created types as postulated by us) are too big as to have *been* established within some thousands of years. Here, like in many other questions we do not have a persuading key to understanding. Summing up we have to state that scientifically plausible overall scenarios are missing in the biblical short time theory of creation especially in the areas of cosmology, geosciences and paleontology. Great difficulties occur when the early history as presented in Genesis, chapters 1 to 11, of the Fall of Man, the Great Flood and the scattering of men after the construction of the Tower of Babel have to be correlated to scientific data. It seems we have to be content *with* rejecting a general naturalistic world concept due to academic and empiric criticism and the claim of the evolutionary theory to supremacy. There are few alternatives in only a few fields.

To get to the heart of the matter: While arguments against a (naturalistic) hypothesis of evolution are quite strong it would be easier to argue against than for a short-term scenario as we take it from the Bible than for it. This is something our colleagues experience painfully during lectures and in discussions with specialists. We then have to admit what we have not yet understood more often than we would like to and not only with regard to marginal questions but often in connection with those mentioned above in which we as Christians are especially interested.

Possible misunderstandings and necessary clarifications

The open criticism just presented toward our own model concept must not be misunderstood. Neither belief nor conviction of the truth of the Holy Bible is being criticised or questioned. In addition no change of course will be introduced at “Wort und Wissen”. Regardless of the plausibility of biblically oriented scientific models one has to distinguish implicitly between biblical tradition itself and scientific models based upon it or historical reconstructions. If it appears that in some scientific fields the data and arguments of a long-term scenario seem to overrule biblical creationism then this points to a difficulty that will arise in combining biblical statements about creation and data of empirical sciences. This does not affect our conviction that the biblical testimony about God as creator and sustainer, as it can be found in the creation account, is reliable. We do not wish to depart from the sequence “Wort und Wissen” in the sense of God’s word preceding the knowledge of man just because there are unsolved questions. We will not adjust God’s history of salvation for man as it is revealed in the Holy Bible to scientific theories. Another aspect has to be mentioned. Scientific work invested into creation research is conducted on a small scale in comparison to the endeavour of scientists with evolutionary opinions. Therefore it cannot be expected that, within a couple of years, a small group of mainly voluntary research associates can counter government funded evolutionary theories that have been moved forward by thousands of scientists and present model concepts that are at least roughly on par with them. It must remain open to what extent significantly more associates in all areas of research would contribute to substantial progress in creation research.

From a biblical point of view we know that scientific research will remain a patchwork (cf. e.g. Ecc. 8, 16-17; 11, 15; Isaiah 55, 8-9; Jeremiah 31, 37, 1. Corinthians 13, 10). Our scientific

research at “Wort und Wissen” often will bring forth no more than knowledge of details. By all means it is questionable whether a fallen creation allows for a consistent understanding (2. Thessalonians 2, 11). On the other hand we have the research assignment (as we read in Genesis 1, 28 “and God said unto them: Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it” and in Psalm 111, 2 “The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein”) and we regard it as an enduring task of biblical tradition to question theories of nature and its history where they are not in accordance to the Bible (cf. 1. Peter 3, 15). Moreover a short-term concept of earth history and history of the cosmos based on the Holy Bible principally cannot gain plausibility by purely scientific reasoning. For according to the biblical report we have to deal with God’s supernatural acting in creation and its history, which cannot be explained by scientific laws. This combination means secret and challenge at the same time. It has to be considered and discussed separately how this point of view can be applied to models based on creation without getting into a discussion that concentrates merely on gaps in other explanations.

What does the Bible actually say?

Sometimes people ask us whether we regard it as possible that we might have misunderstood some aspects of the Bible. Does the Bible not allow for evolution or at least long periods of the history of earth, life and humankind? When we emphasize that science may be wrong isn’t there a chance that our interpretation (exegesis) and approach to the texts (hermeneutics) is also wrong? Yes, there is a chance! Yet, we have checked and established our understanding of relevant biblical texts with many arguments. We are willing to face criticism regarding exegetic and hermeneutical questions. Still, this criticism has to be precise, otherwise it will not be helpful for further discussion. We cannot accept to adjust bible explanation and understanding according to contemporary concepts of evolution and natural history. The word of the Holy Bible is to speak for itself in the first place, before we begin to ask how it can be connected to our science based knowledge. We find no reason in the Holy Bible to change our course.

One must bear in mind that an evolutionary origin of man also includes a decoupling of the fall of man and death. Then man would have been created as a mortal being and a sinner by reason of his very nature, just as he is a creation. However, the Holy Bible makes a clear distinction between both features. It would be difficult to talk about a first human being and a first human couple, Paul and Jesus refer to these, should they be wrong? In addition, Paul mentions Adam as the first person by whom sin and death entered the world and Jesus in contrast as son of God who became man and who took upon him the sin of man and conquered death (Romans 5, 12-21). In contrast death is the indispensable prerequisite for an evolutionary process and under such assumptions cannot be regarded as God’s judgement over human sin. Further connections could be added to those briefly indicated. They are also connected to the questions about time periods, since according to the Holy Bible death entered the world as a result of sin. For further in-depth study refer to the articles mentioned in the annex.

Consequences and outlook

What are the consequences resulting from this review for the fellowship “Wort und Wissen”? Our mission and our goal will remain the same. The challenge based on Paul’s attitude (1. Corinthians 9, 19 ff.) continues its demands voicing the Gospel in the realm of thought. Herein

we want to serve with the gifts entrusted upon us, for some this gift is research. If we do not face the challenge with our moderate potential others will offer their solutions unquestioned, no matter whether they are atheistic, theistic or pantheistic evolution or answers of experts which are well-intentioned but falling too short.

Research with the perspective that creation indeed took place does not have the task to justify faith (science is not the appropriate means for this purpose). It should rather be a servant to bear testimony to the unity of faith and thinking as it is postulated in the bible and help to remove obstacles in the steps towards discipleship of Jesus Christ. Again and again we learn that evolution theory and natural history scenarios which are contrary to the wording of the bible may be such obstacles. The discussion of ideas contradicting the biblical testimony is not justified by itself with the goal to win debates. It is rather meant to serve a higher purpose that is to make the biblical message heard. Therefore qualified scientific work is needed even more now, its dialectic application and presentation as well as objectivity and intellectual honesty. While attempting to build a synopsis of biblical theory and present empirically gained knowledge it is most likely that many – even basic – questions will remain unanswered. In our future work we wish to make sure not to raise higher expectations than the promises of God's word. Since research is complex and time consuming and needs patience more scientific staff and volunteers are required. Normally it is impossible to achieve a great breakthrough at a brisk pace. We want to be grateful for small steps God enables us to take and we also take from his hands that many things have to be set aside.

We would like to include you – being interested in science – into our discussion, our struggle and our prayers between the poles of biblical faith and the findings of science.

*The leadership committee and some of the scientific staff
of the research association "Wort und Wissen"*