

ENGAGING SCIENCE IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

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As a child I was something of a nerd. Don't misunderstand me – as a boy raised in the rural American south, I started shooting and hunting at the age of seven. I played little league football and baseball. Even so, I was a nerd – I loved to read. I went to the local library every week to get new books. What did I read? Science, especially astronomy. I remember reading about Clyde Tombaugh's discovery of Pluto in *The Search for Planet X*.¹ I read books on Mars, the gas giants, and Haley's comet. And of course, I avidly followed the voyages of the USS Enterprise with its mission to “explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations... to boldly go where no man has gone before!”²

As an emerging adult, I became interested in other fields – geology and anthropology. When I became serious about Christian faith, it was natural for me to seek ways to integrate science and faith. So, I read books. Those with the greatest impact were Arthur Custance's *Noah's Three Sons*,³ *Science and Faith*,⁴ *Genesis and Early Man*,⁵ and *Evolution and Creation*.⁶ I also read books that reflected classic evolutionary themes, like *Lucy: The Beginnings of Humankind*⁷ and I avidly watched Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* (PBS, 1980). From 1980-2017, I pastored Church of God congregations in Georgia. Early on, I discovered that my love for science and the Faith was helpful in the pastoral task.

THE REVELATION OF GOD IN CREATION

Before the first pictographs were stenciled on cave walls, before the first words were pressed into clay tablets, God's “eternal power and divine nature” was revealed in creation

¹ Tony Simon, *The Search for Planet X* (Scholastic Books, 1969).

² William Shatner as Capt. James T. Kirk, Gene Roddenberry, EP. *Star Trek* (Desilu 1966-67; Paramount 1968-69).

³ Arthur Custance, *Noah's Three Sons* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).

⁴ Arthur Custance, *Science and Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

⁵ Arthur Custance, *Genesis and Early Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979).

⁶ Arthur Custance, *Evolution and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981).

⁷ Donald Johanson and Maitland Edey, *Lucy: The Beginnings of Humankind* (Simon and Schuster, 1981).

(Romans 1:20).⁸ Unlike other ancient origin myths in which the gods emerged from a primordial swamp, the God of the Bible eternally preexists space, time, and matter (Genesis 1:1). Nature as a source of revelation is a common theme among the biblical writers. The psalmist sang out, “The heavens tell of the glory of God; and their expanse declares the work of His hands” (19:1; cf. Psalm 50:6). The apostle Paul tells us that God’s “invisible attributes”- omnipotence, omniscience, and eternity - can be discerned by thoughtful reflection on the world around us. Paul insists that creation itself renders humanity “without excuse” in proper acknowledgement of God (Romans 1:20-21). Lactantius, a fourth century Christian apologist, declared, “There is no one so uncivilized and ignorant who, when he looks up to the heavens, ... does not understand ... that the things that exist in such wonderful order must have been created by some higher intelligence...”⁹

Lactantius’ ancient declaration continues to find voices of support in our own scientific age. Albert Einstein, the most celebrated physicist of the early twentieth century, did not believe in the notion of a personal god. Even so, he could not bring himself to deny the that the advances of science moved him to a “profound reverence for the relationality made manifest in existence... the grandeur of *reason incarnate in existence*” (emphasis added).¹⁰ He insisted that “Everyone who is seriously engaged in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that the laws of nature manifest the existence of *a spirit vastly superior* to that of men, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble” (emphasis added).¹¹ Anthony Flew, a noted British philosopher who espoused atheism for fifty years attributed his conversion to theism to the wonders of DNA. He said, “What I think the DNA material has done is that it has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce (life), that *intelligence* must have been involved in getting these extraordinarily diverse elements to work together” (emphasis added). Flew identifies the *intelligence* as the Mind of God.¹²

John Calvin affirmed that humans can come to know God, to encounter God, in the “beautiful theater” of creation. He wrote,

⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 2020).

⁹ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 1.2–1.3. Quoted in: Gerald L. Bray and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *We Believe in One God, vol. 1*, Ancient Christian Doctrine (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 112.

¹⁰ Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, trans. Sonja Bargmann (New York: Dell, 1973), 49.

¹¹ Quoted in Max Jammer, *Einstein and Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 93.

¹² Anthony Flew, *There is A God* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2007), 74, 88.

There are innumerable evidences both in heaven and in earth that declare his wonderful wisdom; not only those more recondite matters for the closer observation of which astronomy, medicine, and all natural science are intended, but also those which thrust themselves upon the sight of even the most untutored and ignorant persons, so that they cannot open their eyes without being compelled to witness them. Indeed, men who have either quaffed or even tasted the liberal arts penetrate with their aid for more deeply into the secrets of divine wisdom... To be sure, there is need of art and of more exacting toil in order to investigate the motion of the stars, to determine their assigned stations, to measure their intervals, to note their properties. As God's providence shows itself more explicitly when one observes these, so the mind must rise to a somewhat higher level to look upon his glory.

Calvin believed that we should “take pious delight in the works of God open and manifest in this most beautiful theater” because nature is the “first evidence” of God.¹³ The natural sciences are helpful tools in discerning the glory of God. This is remarkable in many ways, not the least of which is that Calvin wrote this during the Copernican revolution.

THE HERMENEUTICS OF SCIENCE AND FAITH

Copernicus' hypothesis of a heliocentric solar system, and Galileo's subsequent affirmation, shook the foundations of science and theology. Most scholars of science and theology held to the Aristotelian geocentric view. Galileo's telescope made more detailed observations possible and eventually convinced the scientific community and provoked theologians to consider new ways of reading inspired Scripture. This did not come easy. One would think John Calvin might lead the way. One would be wrong. Calvin adamantly denied Copernicus' hypothesis and suggested that those who embraced a heliocentric view of the solar system were deranged and likely demon possessed.¹⁴

Today, no serious person holds to a geocentric view of the cosmos. We have since learned that we live in a massive universe, with millions of stars, each with their own system of planets, comets, asteroids, planetoids, moons, and space dust – all moving, all rotating, at astounding speeds. And, we've learned something about the way we must interpret scripture. A phenomenological reading of scripture (literalism) has its limits. So, we must embrace a hermeneutic that is faithful to the inspired text and allows for new discovery, new ways of thinking.

¹³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 53, 179.

¹⁴ John Calvin, “Sermon on 1 Corinthians 10:19-24,” *Calvini Opera Selecta, Corpus Refomatorum*, 49, 677, trans. by Robert White in “Calvin and Copernicus: The Problem Reconsidered”, *Calvin Theological Journal* 15 (1980), 236-237.

The Wesleyan theological method does just that. Scripture is the foundation for all theological reflection and should be read through the received tradition. However, the ancient theologians were not always right. Most of them held to views of slavery, the role of women, and pre-scientific notions of the world that are widely rejected today for good reason. The interpretation of Scripture and the revisioning of tradition may be informed by reason and experience. Paul encouraged us: “Do not quench the Spirit, do not utterly reject prophecies, but examine everything; hold firmly to that which is good, abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22). The mind, renewed and transformed by the Holy Spirit, can gain sound judgement in everything (2 Timothy 1:7; cf. Proverbs 1:5; Hebrews 11:3). When theological tradition and scientific discovery are properly discerned by the Holy Spirit there will be no contradiction for all truth is God’s truth. The Spirit will reveal truth and expose error.

The Church of God practical commitments state that “it is our Christian responsibility to care for the earth and its resources”.¹⁵ Just as the believer is to be diligent in the study of sacred scripture, the believer should be diligent in the study of creation. John Wesley wrote,

How small a part of this great work of God is man able to understand! But *it is our duty to contemplate what he has wrought, and to understand as much of it as we are able...* Let us, then, *by the assistance of that Spirit who giveth unto man understanding,* endeavor to take a general survey of *the works which God made in this lower world...* (emphasis added)¹⁶

The American scientist, George Washington Carver, believed that “science is simply the truth about anything.” He often said that his scientific insight was divinely inspired. He wrote, “More and more as we come closer and closer in touch with nature and its teachings are we able to see the Divine and are therefore fitted *to interpret correctly the various languages spoken by all forms of nature about us*” (emphasis added).¹⁷ Humans are charged to care for the animals and cultivate the earth (Genesis 1:26, 29-30; 2:15, 20). Adam and Eve were the first zoologists and botanists. God’s charge to rule the earth necessitates understanding the environment which a requires a quality of discernment.¹⁸ Just as the student of sacred scripture must employ the proper hermeneutic, the student of the natural sciences must employ an adequate hermeneutic that

¹⁵ Daniel L. Black, ed., *Minutes 2018: Church of God Book of Discipline, Church Order, and Governance* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2018), 31. See also the resolution “Care of Creation” (2018). Internet: [https://churchofgod.org/resolutions/#:~:text=CARE%20OF%20THE-,CREATION,-\(2008\)](https://churchofgod.org/resolutions/#:~:text=CARE%20OF%20THE-,CREATION,-(2008))

¹⁶ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd Ed., vol. 6 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 206.

¹⁷ Gary R. Kremer. *George Washington Carver: In His Own Words, 2nd Ed.* (Univ. of Missouri, 2017), 145-148.

¹⁸ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 177.

recognizes God as creator and correctly interprets the languages of nature. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of truth” who will guide us “into all the truth” (John 16:13). Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit gives the church “the word of wisdom” and “the word of knowledge” (1 Corinthians 12:8). These charisms are not limited to theological insight, but may also offer insight into technology and the natural sciences (Exodus 31:3; 35:31; 36:1; 1 Kings 7:14; Job 28:1-11; Proverbs 6:6; 30:24-33; Matthew 16:2-3). The ancient sage declared, “the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding” (Job 32:8). Pentecostals should embrace the role of the Holy Spirit who gifts us with the charism to interpret the various languages of nature and reveal to us the mysteries of creation (1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:5, 13).

During the Spring 2022 semester, I conducted a brief survey of ten questions addressing issues of science and faith among the students of Pentecostal Theological Seminary. I suspect that the views of our students reflect the views of our constituency. The survey was emailed to 278 students and received 113 responses which represents a response rate of 40.65%. Students were asked to score questions on a Likert scale of 1 to 10, with 1 signifying “strongly disagree” and 10 signifying “strongly agree”.

	Question	PTS SCIENCE SURVEY	Mean Score
1	I am familiar with contemporary theological trends regarding the integration between Christian Faith and Science.		6.56
2	I believe that the cosmos was created <i>ex nihilo</i> (out of nothing) by the decree of God.		9.67
3	I believe that the creation narrative of Genesis 1 & 2 should be understood literally as science and history.		7.32
4	I believe that evolution is compatible with the Christian faith.		3.51
5	I believe that scientific inquiry and Biblical revelation can mutually benefit the flourishing of humanity.		8.8
6	I believe that Biblical revelation has priority over scientific discovery.		9.31
7	I believe that God used evolution over millions of years to create all life on the Earth.		3.42
8	I believe in the possibility of extraterrestrial intelligent life.		4.37
9	I am inclined to "trust the science" as it relates to the present Covid-19 pandemic.		6.06
10	I believe in Divine Healing and that Christians should abstain from seeking care and treatment from medical professionals.		2.45

Overall, the respondents signified they are somewhat aware of trends regarding the integration of faith and science. They were almost unanimous in their affirmation that God created the cosmos *ex nihilo*. They strongly affirmed that the integration of science and faith can benefit the flourishing of humanity, with a strong priority given to biblical revelation. Therefore,

most respondents indicated a preference for a literal reading of the creation narrative of Genesis 1-2. Furthermore, they indicated that they do not believe in evolution and that it is incompatible with Christian faith. Responses indicate that there is significant tension in their integration of faith and science. The exception being in healthcare. When faced with a clear either/or decision between faith healing and medical science, there is a strong preference in favor of science.¹⁹

Students at PTS are skeptical of science that challenges the priority of sacred scripture. It's somewhat ironic that we are talking about the integration of science and faith just a few miles from Dayton, Tennessee – the site of the infamous Scopes Monkey Trial (1925). It appears that Pentecostals haven't moved much on the issue since.²⁰ A study of Lee University students indicates that “those who affirmed evolutionary theory were a small minority” who are science majors, and less devoted to the biblical text.²¹ (I can't help but wonder if “less devoted to the biblical text” actually means less devoted to a literal hermeneutic.) Skepticism is healthy because scientific paradigms change and scientific interpretations are rarely objective. In an episode of *Star Trek Discovery*, President T'Rina of Ni'var said, “Even science cannot be separated from cultural and political contexts. There are always implications.”²² This is a postmodern confession that scientific discovery and interpretation are not always strictly objective. In fact, when scientific research becomes subordinate to political ends, facts are weaponized.²³ The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that the public is not always well served.²⁴ Science has limitations. The natural sciences may give insight into the attributes of a Creator, but they cannot reveal the Creator to be Holy Trinity. Nor can a detailed examination of the human body reveal the soul. Science can offer answers to questions of *how* or *what*, but cannot speak to the divine *Who*. Without the divine *Who* the cosmic big bang will eventually collapse into a black hole. Science cannot answer Job's question of ultimate meaning: “What is man that You exalt him, and that You are concerned about him” (Job 7:17).

¹⁹ Several respondents emailed me in protest of question 10. I explained that the question was phrased with the intent of provoking conflict between faith and science.

²⁰ See Church of God resolution on “Creationism” (1980). Internet:

[https://churchofgod.org/resolutions/#:~:text=SEXUAL%20ABUSE%20\(2002\)-,CREATIONISM,-\(1980](https://churchofgod.org/resolutions/#:~:text=SEXUAL%20ABUSE%20(2002)-,CREATIONISM,-(1980)

²¹ Jed T. Foster (2017) “The Young and the Religious: Acceptance of Evolution Among Millennials at an Evangelical Christian University,” *Papers & Publications: Interdisciplinary Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 6, Article 17. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/papersandpubs/vol6/iss1/17>

²² Jon Dudkowski, director. “Unification III”, *Star Trek Discovery*, Season 3, Episode 7 (November 25, 2020).

²³ Emma Green, “Science is Giving the Pro-life Movement a Boost.” *The Atlantic* (January 18, 2018). Internet: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/01/pro-life-pro-science/549308/>

²⁴ The responses to question 9 indicated ambivalence towards the science of the Covid-19 pandemic.

SCIENCE AND FAITH IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

The conflict between science and faith is an ongoing concern, especially among teenagers and young adults. Questions about science, creation, evolution, and human sexuality dominate their concerns. Many students are seeking careers in the medical sciences and their education brings them into direct conflict with their faith. The most common intersection of science and faith has been in the area of healthcare. It is very common for believers to request prayer on the way to the hospital.

Creation and evolution. Centuries before Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Christian theologians have interpreted the creation narrative with a variety of hermeneutical methods including literal, spiritual, and allegorical. Augustine (AD 354-430) believed the creation narrative referred to a historical event that must be understood as allegorical and spiritual. He allowed for many interpretations of Genesis 1-3.²⁵ He did not believe the six days of creation to be literal twenty-four-hour days, but a literary device. He believed that God created everything at the same time and that the seeds of creation produced life over a period of time.²⁶ His interpretations had precedent in earlier theologians. Origen wrote, “Who would think that the first, second and third days of creation, which include an evening and a morning, could have existed without sun, moon and stars? Who would think that the first day was without a sky? ... No one doubts that these things are figures that speak of certain mysteries, the history having occurred *symbolically and not literally*” (emphasis added).²⁷

With Augustine, I do not hold to a literal reading of the biblical creation narrative. In my judgement, those who insist on a literal scientific reading of the early chapters of Genesis are practicing *eisegesis* – reading meaning *into the text*. They are imposing a modern scientific reading upon an ancient, pre-scientific text. Ancient interpreters lived in a pre-scientific age, so none offered a *literal scientific* reading of Genesis. Even as the early theologians expressed divergent interpretations, they unanimously attributed creation to the Holy Trinity. This could serve as a model for dialogue among Pentecostals. We can affirm the *Who* as we dialogue about the *how*.

²⁵ *Confessions* 12.17

²⁶ *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 5.23.45

²⁷ *On First Principles* 4.1.16

A proper *exegesis* of the Genesis creation narrative discerns meaning *out of the text*. Instead of reading science into the text, we allow the text to bring meaning to science. For example, scientific theory may tell us that humans have evolved from an archaic apelike ancestor millions of years ago. The inspired creation narrative brings meaning to human beings by insisting that humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). I remain skeptical about the theory of evolution. I have no issue with an old earth, or with evolution within species. I remain fascinated by the subject. But humans are more, much more, than an evolved hominid. Even as I resist a scientific reading of the creation narrative, I insist that it is historical. I believe in a historical Adam and Eve, that is, two sole genetic progenitors of all humans (Acts 17:26). Reading the creation narrative as theology, rather than history or science, is a satisfying way forward. Genesis 1 is a polemic against the polytheism of the Ancient Near East. The ancient creation myths describe chaos; the Genesis story depicts order. Then God said, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3) and “Let there be lights...” (Genesis 1:14). The ancient Hebrew theologian was proclaiming that the sun was not the divine Atum-Ra of the Egyptians, or Apollo of the Greeks, but merely a physical object created by God. The “great sea creatures” (Genesis 1:21) and “animals of the earth” (Genesis 1:24) are not divine beings, but mere creatures. Genesis 1 is anti-myth that proclaims there is one God who is Creator of all things.

How does this ancient theological narrative apply to our scientific world? A few years ago, I received a text message from an anxious student. She explained that her biology professor was challenging the biblical creation narrative. According to him, life didn’t begin in a primordial garden, but evolved throughout the world. She asked, “What can I say?” I responded, “The Bible says that the Spirit of God moved over the entire surface of the earth, creating life everywhere.” That’s my theological reading of the text. It makes sense to me, and it made sense to her. Just as the Copernican revolution forged a new hermeneutic, we must seek enlightenment from the Spirit of truth for new ways, faithful ways, of reading the ancient text in light of new discoveries. In pursuit of a new hermeneutic, pastors will need to become familiar with the issues and available resources.²⁸ Pentecostal preaching often employs allegorical, or symbolic,

²⁸ See: Robert C. Bishop, Larry L. Funck, Raymond J. Lewis, Stephen O. Mosher, and John H. Walton. *Understanding Scientific Theories of Origins: Cosmology, Geology, and Biology in Christian Perspective* (IVP Academic, 2018). Also, BioLogos.org is a website that is dedicated to explore “God’s Word and God’s world to inspire authentic faith for today.”

methodology. It seems counter intuitive for Pentecostals to insist upon a literal scientific reading of the creation narrative when a theological reading better serves the nature of the text.

Human sexuality. The first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-1), published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), classified homosexuality as “a sociopathic personality disturbance.”²⁹ In 1973, the APA reversed itself by stating that homosexuality was not a mental illness. In 1987, homosexuality was removed from the *DSM*.³⁰ Since the United States Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015), the church’s traditional teaching about human sexuality has faced increasing scrutiny.³¹ According to a Pew Research Study, 45% of millennial Evangelical Protestants favor same-sex marriage and 51% say that homosexuality should be accepted by society.³²

A few years ago, a young man in our church announced to his family, “I’m gay, I’m not broke, so don’t try to fix me.” When the family came to see me, I responded to him, “Son, we’re all broke, and we all need to be fixed.” The church’s primary issue in the fourth century was Christological – “What is God?” The primary issue of the 16th century was soteriological – “How does God save humanity?” The primary issue in the 21st century is anthropological – “What does it mean to be human?” This involves reflection on creation, original sin, sanctification, and new creation. Most of the questions I field from pastors are about homosexuality and transgenderism. Pastors need theological and scientific resources which are helpful in constructing a faithful Gospel response.³³

Presently, homosexuality and transgenderism are considered psychological orientations that are most likely caused by genetics or environment. The causes are still somewhat uncertain. The most popular explanation is that homosexuality is a normal variation, like left-handedness,

²⁹ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1952).

³⁰ Neil Burton, “When Homosexuality stopped being a Mental Disorder.” *Psychology Today* (Sept 18, 2015). Internet: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-peek/201509/when-homosexuality-stopped-being-mental-disorder>

³¹ For the teaching of the Church of God, see Doctrine and Polity Papers: “Same Sex Marriage”. Internet: <https://churchofgod.org/doctrine-and-polity-papers/#:~:text=SABBATH-,SAME,-SEX%20MARRIAGE>

³² Jeff Diamant. “Though still conservative, young evangelicals are more liberal than their elders on some issues”, *Pew Research Center* (May 4, 2017). Internet: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/04/though-still-conservative-young-evangelicals-are-more-liberal-than-their-elders-on-some-issues>

³³ Recommended resources include: John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Pauline Books and Media, 2006); Timothy Tennent, *For the Body: Recovering a Theology of Gender, Sexuality, and the Human Body* (Zondervan, 2020); Brian Neil Peterson, *The Bible, Sexuality, and Culture* (Wipf and Stock, 2021); and Wonsuk Ma and Kathaleen Reid-Martinez, editors. *Human Sexuality and the Holy Spirit: Spirit-Empowered Perspectives* (ORU Press, 2019).

and is therefore a normal, or neutral, variation.³⁴ Science alone cannot address issues of morality. That is the role of inspired scripture, which requires Christians to mediate grace, pursue justice and practice hospitality for all people. However, science can offer insight that will promote pastoral sensitivity. Homosexuality and transgenderism are not simply matters of choice. Here we need to make a clear distinction. When the Bible prohibits homosexuality and transgenderism, it is speaking to behavior, not orientation. According to the doctrine of original sin, all humans have sinful proclivities and are oriented towards sinful behavior. All unregenerate humans – heterosexual and homosexual – are enslaved by the power of sin.

The church should maintain its public witness and promote the heterosexual ethic of the Christian faith. So, what should be the church's posture towards homosexuals and transgendered persons? We should be reminded that Abraham fervently interceded in behalf of Sodom – a city whose men attempted to gang rape two messengers of God (Gen 18). We must never forget the mission of God – “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). We are all broken and we all need to be fixed.

The Sanctity of Life. Since the United States Supreme Court decided that a woman's right to an abortion is protected by the United States Constitution (*Roe v Wade*, 1973), the issue of reproductive health has become a political third rail. Hillary Clinton, past Democrat nominee for President of United States, has said, “The unborn person doesn't have constitutional rights.”³⁵ Medical ethicists Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva have suggested:

Abortion is largely accepted even for reasons that do not have anything to do with the fetus' health. By showing that (1) both fetuses and newborns do not have the same moral status as actual persons, (2) the fact that both are potential persons is morally irrelevant and (3) adoption is not always in the best interest of actual people, the authors argue that what we call ‘after-birth abortion’ (killing a newborn) should be permissible in all the cases where abortion is, including cases where the newborn is not disabled.³⁶

The scriptures teach us that all humans, male and female, are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). The human body was created to be a temple of the Holy Spirit, a sacred place (1

³⁴ Jack Drescher, “Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality”, *Behavioral Sciences* (2015). Internet: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-328X/5/4/565/htm>.

³⁵ Jesse Hellman, “Clinton: 'Unborn person' doesn't have constitutional rights.” *The Hill*, April 3, 2016). Internet: <https://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/presidential-races/275031-clinton-unborn-person-doesnt-have-constitutional-rights>

³⁶ Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva, “After-birth abortion: why should the baby live?” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 39.5 (2012). Internet: <https://jme.bmj.com/content/39/5/261>

Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). Paul insists that child bearing is a sacred act (1 Timothy 2:15). Neither male nor female have absolute autonomy over their bodies. Our bodies belong to the Lord; and in the case of a woman carrying the human fetus, the body she carries also belongs to the Lord.

The Church of God Practical Commitments state:

Because a human fetus is sacred and blessed of God, we believe that we have the responsibility to protect the life of the unborn (Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:41). It is our firm conviction that abortion and euthanasia of aged, mentally incompetent, terminally ill and otherwise handicapped, for reasons of personal convenience, social adjustment or economic advantage, are morally wrong.³⁷

When it comes to the issue of the sanctity of the human fetus, the science is on our side. Scientific advances in embryology and neonatology have fundamentally shifted “the moral intuition around abortion. New technology makes it easier to apprehend the humanity of a growing child and imagine a fetus as a creature with moral status.”³⁸

Several years ago, I was visited by a young single woman and her mother. The young woman was pregnant. With tears they began to explain to me that their doctor had informed the young mother that the child she was carrying was severely disabled and he recommended an abortion. After a long conversation, I informed them, “If you are waiting on me to give you moral justification to abort this child, I just can’t do that.” I assured them that I would pray that God would give the family wisdom to make the right choice. A few days later, the young mother informed me of her choice to “give my baby a chance.” Several months later, a little girl was born. She suffered from a severe dwarfism and other issues which involved multiple surgeries and weeks in the hospital. She lived for two years. On the day of her funeral, the mother told me that she had no regrets. As we gathered at her graveside, many family members told stories of how this child had enriched their lives. The suffering was real, the tears were real, but so was the joy.

Faith and healthcare. Healthcare is the most common intersection of faith and science in pastoral practice. It is here that Pentecostals have made their greatest accommodation to the sciences. Early Pentecostals insisted, “Every spiritually saved person mentioned in the Scriptures believed in the Lord for healing instead of doctors and drugs.”³⁹ As the PTS science survey

³⁷ *Minutes 2018: Church of God Book of Discipline, Church Order, and Governance*, 31.

³⁸ Emma Green, “Science is Giving the Pro-life Movement a Boost.” *The Atlantic* (January 18, 2018). Internet: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/01/pro-life-pro-science/549308/>

³⁹ A. J. Tomlinson, editor. *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel* (November 15, 1910), 6.

indicates, that sentiment has changed – 80% of the respondents disagreed that belief in divine healing requires a sick person to abstain from medical care (question 10).

Jesus commanded, “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, cast out demons” (Matthew 10:8). Pastors are often called to visit and pray for the sick, counsel with those in mental distress, and sometimes exorcise demons. I’ve witnessed wonderful healings. I’ve also witnessed many people die from horrible diseases. I’ve seen believers find peace of mind in the altar. I’ve also referred many to professional counseling. I’ve prayed for many people struggling from a variety of addictions. I’ve also sought long term treatment for addicts. In caring for the sick, the pastor must be very careful of bad theology which leaves the suffering in despair, such as blaming the sick for a lack of faith; or making a bogus diagnosis like claiming that children with autism are demonized.⁴⁰ Pastors should be cautious when speaking words of knowledge that call out, or diagnose, illness or demonization, or declare healing. The rite of anointing with oil may offer insight. In Jewish practice, oil was often used for medicinal purposes and served as a sacramental sign of healing (cf. Isaiah 1:6; Mark 6:13; Luke 10:34; James 5:14-16). The oil signifies complementary practices of prayer and medical treatment. This finds support in the deuterocanonical book of Jesus ben Sirach (aka, Ecclesiasticus):

Hold the physician in honor, for he is essential to you, and God it was who established his profession. From God the doctor has his wisdom... He endows men with the knowledge to glory in his mighty works, through which the doctor eases pain and the druggist prepares his medicines; Thus, God’s creative work continues without cease in its efficacy on the surface of the earth. My son, *when you are ill, delay not, but pray to God, who will heal you... Then give the doctor his place lest he leave; for you need him too.* There are times that give him an advantage, and he too beseeches God that his diagnosis may be correct and his treatment bring about a cure. He who is a sinner toward his Maker will be defiant toward the doctor (emphasis added).⁴¹

The wise pastor will nurture the charism of discernment in order to determine the best way to serve the suffering. Medical and mental health professionals are God’s gifts to suffering people. They are the pastor’s partners in ministering to the people of God.

⁴⁰ Jesse T. Jackson, “Greg Locke says Autistic Children are Demonized: Ain’t No Such Diagnosis in the Bible.” *Church Leaders* (Jan 24, 2022). Internet: <https://churchleaders.com/news/415680-greg-locke-autism-demonized.html/2>

⁴¹ Sirach 38:1-15. *The New American Bible* (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 1996). Sirach was widely influential among ancient Jews and Christians. Augustine counted Sirach as having “attained recognition as being authoritative” (*On Christian Doctrine*, 2.13). A casual reading of this passage indicates that James was familiar with it (cf. James 5:13-15).

Each of these issues require a serious-minded pastor committed to understanding the challenges and offering an informed response. Wisdom rebukes a simplistic rant against the evils of evolution and the dangers of the LGBTQ agenda as naïve and foolish.

Simpletons! How long will you wallow in ignorance? Cynics! How long will you feed your cynicism? Idiots! How long will you refuse to learn? About face! I can revise your life. Look, I'm ready to pour out my spirit on you; I'm ready to tell you all I know. As it is, I've called, but you've turned a deaf ear; I've reached out to you, but you've ignored me (Proverbs 1:22-24).⁴²

Pastors must be willing to invest money, time, and energy in a proper education. Churches should invest in the education of pastors. An ancient sage implored, "Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23; cf. 16:16).⁴³ We must be prepared to preach the Gospel "to the wise and to the foolish" (Romans 1:14), "to the educated and uneducated alike".⁴⁴ Like Paul at Mars Hill, Christians who engage the public square must be informed, reasonable, and committed to the gospel (Acts 17:16ff).

TO BOLDLY GO...

In the title sequence of *Star Trek*, Captain Kirk declares the mission of the USS Enterprise: "to boldly go where no man has gone before."⁴⁵ Long before the launch of the Enterprise, Jesus commissioned the church: "Go therefore... to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). It is likely the future will present us with many challenges in the intersection of science and faith. We journey towards an undiscovered country. We must carefully navigate the ship of Zion lest we become lost in space, or crash upon a planet of apes. We must be willing to ask new questions: "How might we formulate a doctrine of the Incarnation in light of the multiverse?"⁴⁶ Today, the radio telescopes of SETI are listening for sounds of extraterrestrial life in the cosmos. The majority of PTS students are skeptical of that possibility, as am I. However, as Mr. Spock is fond of saying, "There always are... possibilities."⁴⁷ If the day comes when humans make first

⁴² Proverbs 1:22-24. Eugene Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005).

⁴³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

⁴⁴ Tyndale House Publishers, *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), Ro 1:14.

⁴⁵ William Shatner as Capt. James T. Kirk, *Star Trek* (Desilu 1966-67; Paramount 1968-69).

⁴⁶ Treavor Persaud, "Christ of the Klingons" in *Christianity Today* (December 29, 2010). Internet: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/december/31.46.html>

⁴⁷ Nicholas Meyer, director. *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (Paramount, 1982). When Captain Kirk and crew are trapped in the Genesis cave, Kirk responds to Lt. Saavik by quoting Spock: "As your teacher, Mr. Spock, is fond of saying, 'I like to think there always are... possibilities.'"

contact with an extraterrestrial species – be it the Vulcans, Romulans, Klingons, or even a Wookiee – I plan to greet them with a Vulcan salute and say, “Live long and prosper... let me tell you about Jesus.”

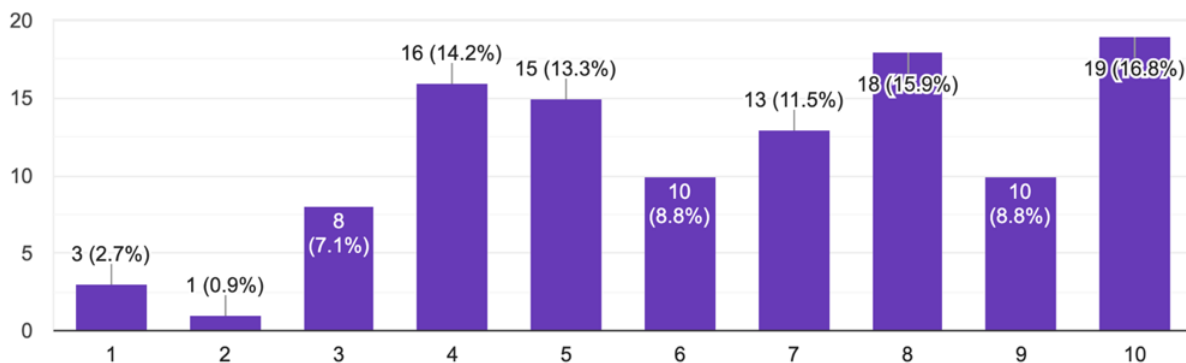
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PTS SCIENCE SURVEY RESULTS

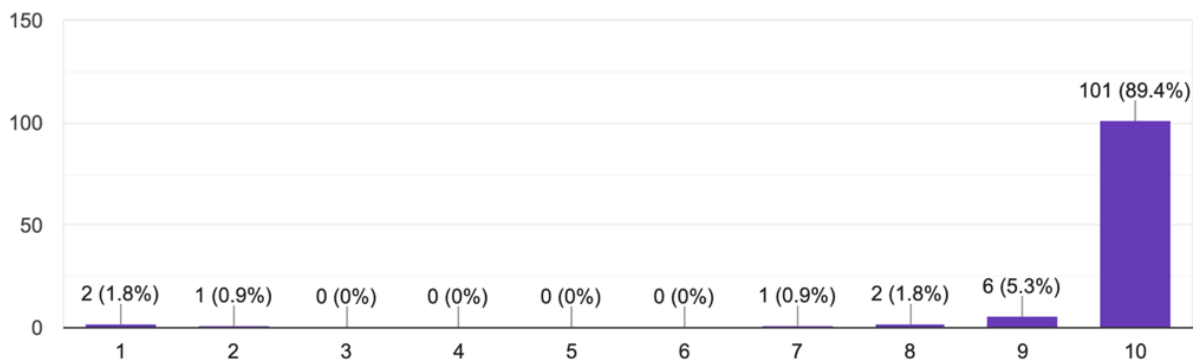
I am familiar with contemporary theological trends regarding the integration between Christian Faith and Science.

113 responses



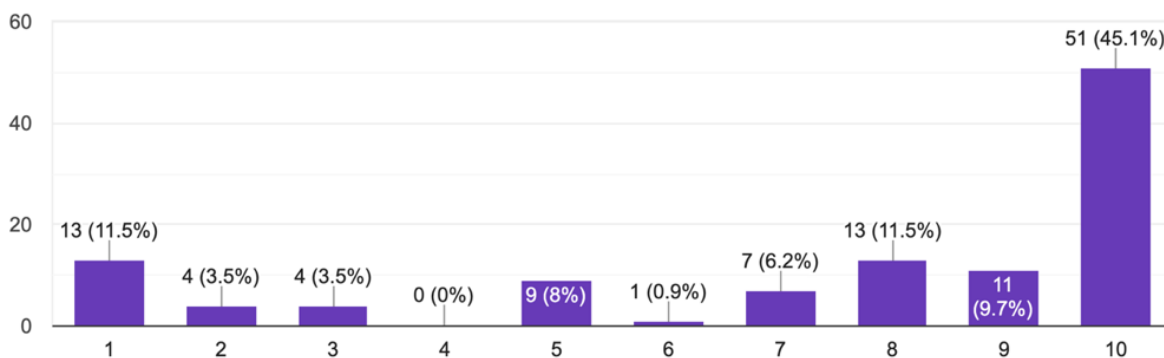
I believe that the cosmos was created ex nihilo (out of nothing) by the decree of God.

113 responses



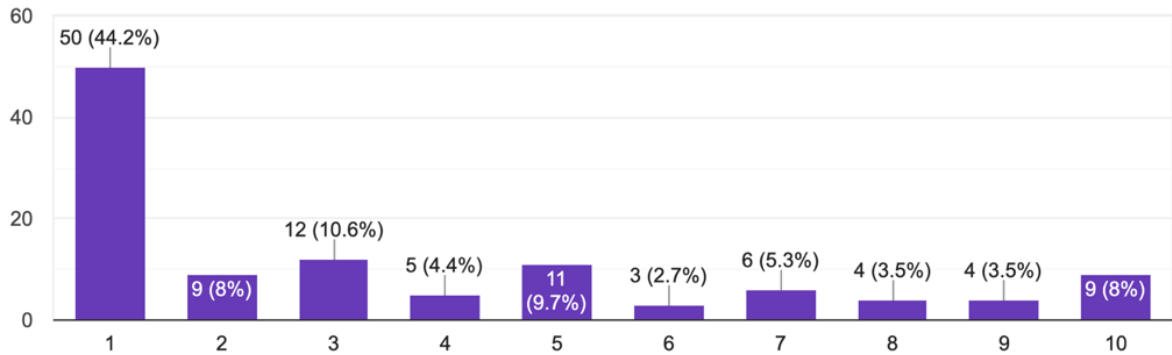
I believe that the creation narrative of Genesis 1 & 2 should be understood literally as science and history.

113 responses



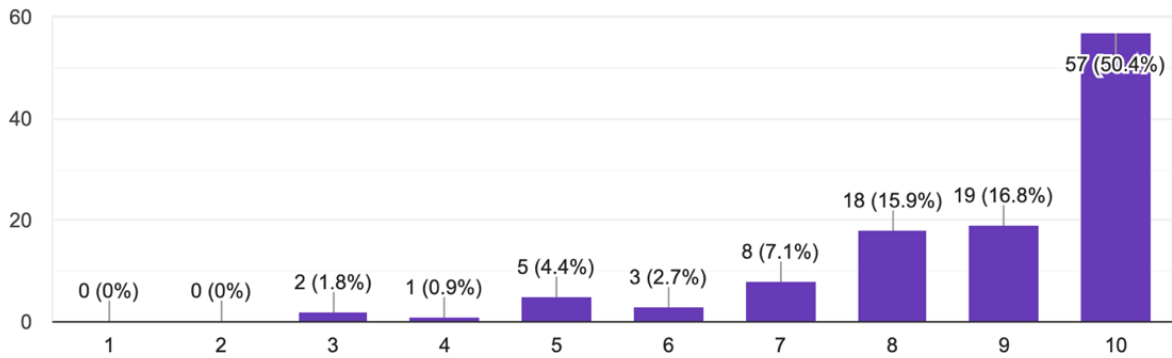
I believe that evolution is compatible with the Christian faith.

113 responses



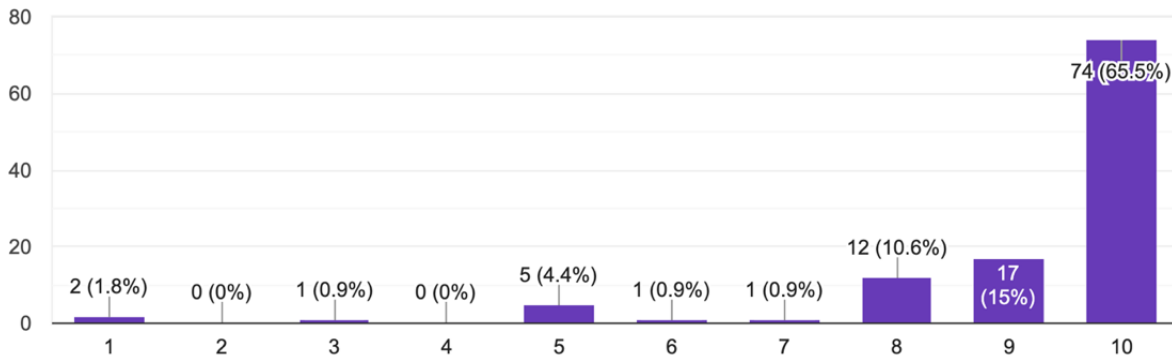
I believe that scientific inquiry and Biblical revelation can mutually benefit the flourishing of humanity.

113 responses



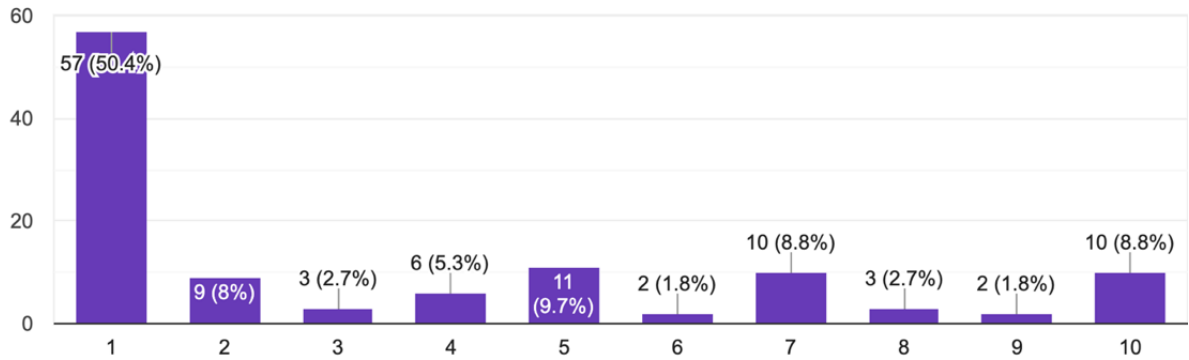
I believe that Biblical revelation has priority over scientific discovery.

113 responses



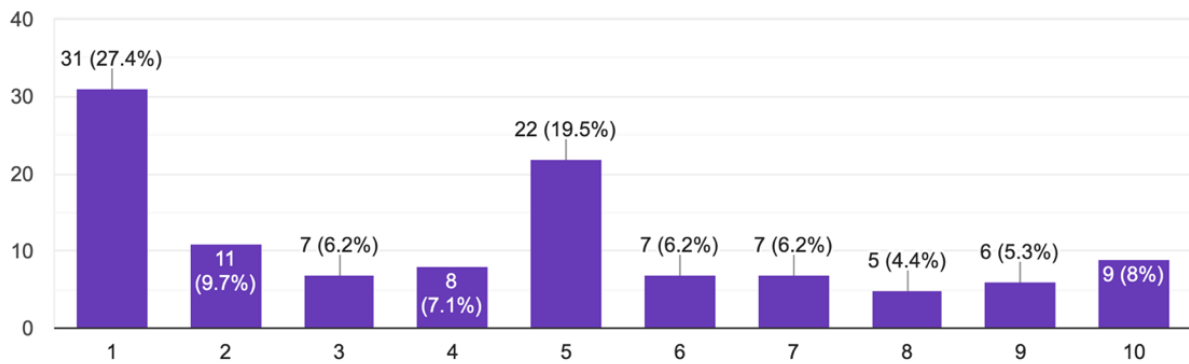
I believe that God used evolution over millions of years to create all life on the Earth.

113 responses



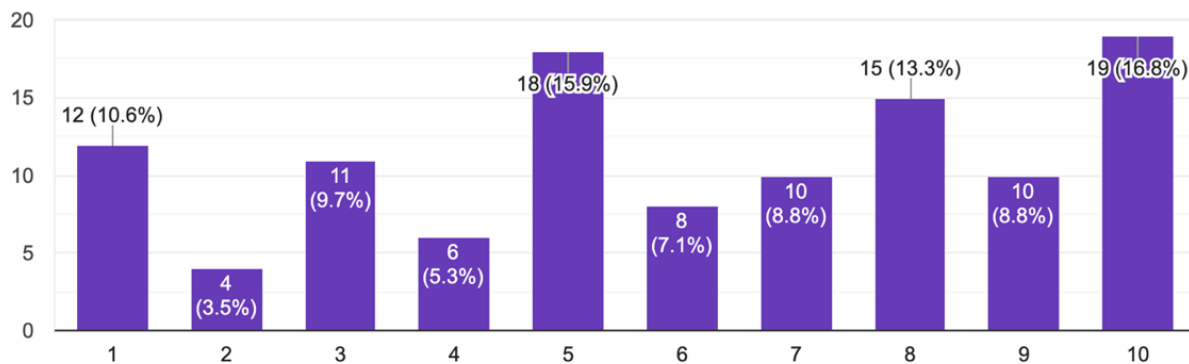
I believe in the possibility of extraterrestrial intelligent life.

113 responses



I am inclined to "trust the science" as it relates to the present Covid-19 pandemic.

113 responses



I believe in Divine Healing and that Christians should abstain from seeking care and treatment from medical professionals.

113 responses

