

# Surveying views on how God acted in Creation

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When God created the heavens and the earth, and populated that with life, what do you think that looked like? Did He use evolution? I asked a diverse group of Christians...

**What ideas or beliefs are fundamental to being a Christian?** In a previous post, I wrote of two basic concepts: **1. God is the creator; 2. Jesus is God.** It is interesting that though, Christians are united by fundamental beliefs such as these, there is an amazing variety once we get into more detail. A few weeks ago, I decided to investigate the range of views. I created a survey in a Facebook group where I knew there were Christians with a variety of views. The group is named "*Answers to Answers in Genesis*"

AnswersinGenesis.org (<https://answersingenesis.org/>) (AIG) is probably the most prominent young earth creationist website today. The "*Answers to Answers in Genesis*" group is made up of a diverse group of people, Christian and non-Christian who want to discuss origins topics. As the name suggests, it includes much discussion and information that counters arguments by AIG. The "About" text for the group gives the picture of the goals for this group:

*"THIS IS NOT A DEBATE GROUP. This is a clearinghouse for people who want information about the pseudoscience in Answers in Genesis articles. This group will be pro-faith, pro-Christian, and be aimed at helping people understand the pseudoscience of Answers in Genesis while retaining respect for the Bible and for belief in God. We like groups like Biologos, Celebrating Creation through Natural Selection, etc. Atheists and nonbelievers are also welcome as long as they are willing to operate within our pro-faith environment here. For a full set of our rules and some suggested guidelines, please*

see <https://www.facebook.com/notes/answers-to-answers-in-genesis/group-rules/879983772070901>"

The discussion is diverse and the views expressed are as well. I really enjoy the discussions and the range in views from Young Earth Creationism to atheism. I wanted to probe a wide range of Christian views about creation and the degrees and ways that God actively worked in creating earth. Creation options are commonly described as perhaps three: 1. Young Earth Creationism; 2. Old Earth Creationism; 3. Theistic Evolution. I chose not to include option 1. This group has few that would accept any form of the young earth view. Also, I find this young earth view impossible to reconcile with either scripture or nature. I wanted to investigate beliefs about some of the expressions of various options that recognize the antiquity of the earth. I asked for just Christians to respond, as atheistic views would also be a different investigation.

### **Survey Design:**

Here are the options I provided:

- 1. God started the universe and gave the universe everything it needed, including the self-organizational capacities to develop life and man (fully gifted creation from Van Till). Minimal direct interference, except for Christ.*
- 2. God created the universe and maintains it, but can set aside His natural laws to interact at times. Specifically, He did, as recorded in the Old and New Testaments. He chose to work through the mechanisms of natural selection and mutation to bring life to its current state, including mankind.*
- 3. God created the universe miraculously, as recognized in the "Big Bang". He commonly worked through what we recognize as natural selection and mutation, but guided it by arranging circumstances such that creatures that He wanted arose. This includes man. Perhaps this level is reflected by the design evident at the taxonomic level of approximately "family" (Behe – "Darwin Devolves")*
- 4. God created the universe miraculously, as recognized in the "Big Bang". God interacted more directly at a few distinct times to cause events to happen that would not have occurred otherwise. Examples would include the beginning of life, the origination of complex animal life (Cambrian Explosion), and in particular the origin of humans, meaning those who had the capacity to have a spiritual relationship with God. It is uncertain what form this interaction took. Perhaps we would not recognize it as a miracle if we witnessed it. It might have been by influencing circumstances or divinely guided mutations, but a designer was required.*
- 5. As above, but a specific creation of Adam and Eve, perhaps in the last 6-10,000 years. Adam & Eve's children would have interbred with other humans alive at the time, outside of the Garden of Eden.*

6. *As #2 above, but with a specific creation of Adam and Eve, perhaps in the last 6-10,000 years. Again, Adam & Eve's children would have interbred with other humans alive at the time, outside of the Garden of Eden.*

Options 1 & 2 are different degrees of how God engaged under theistic evolution.

- Does God work "miraculously"- outside of our laws of science?

Option 3 is sort of theistic evolution with a bit of intelligent design.

Option 4 is an old earth creation view, a mixture of evolution with God acting at discrete times more directly.

Options 5 & 6 are views where Adam and Eve were created miraculously, but there were already humans outside of the Garden of Eden. Option 5 is with an Old Earth Creation view vs. Option 6 with a Theistic Evolution view.

### **Results:**

I was very pleased to see good participation. 82 members responded by selecting an option and several others presented their choices in the comments. In creating the survey, I allowed people to add options and two people created additional options that were selected by some of the people.

In the form on Facebook, the initial descriptions had to be shortened and they were presented in a simpler form for actual votes. Here are the results, in order of decreasing votes.

**34 votes:** 2. God can set aside His natural laws to interact at times. Specifically, He did, as recorded in the Old and New Testaments

**17 votes:** \_ Covenant Creation – Genesis 1 is a temple text used in the dedication to God and the ordination of the first covenant man.

**10 votes:** 3. God commonly worked through what we recognize as natural selection and mutation but guided it by arranging circumstances.

**9 votes:** \_ God is everything & is in everything. He is always working out his purposes in the midst of a creation that is also free to work out its own.

**5 votes:** 1. God started the universe and gave the universe all it needed.

**4 votes:** 6. As 2 above, but with a specific creation of Adam and Eve, perhaps in the last 6-10,000 years.

**3 votes:** 4. God interacted more directly at a few distinct times to cause events to happen that would not have occurred otherwise.

**0 votes:** 5. As above, but a specific creation of Adam and Eve, perhaps in the last 6-10,000 years

You can find a pdf of the post and comments here: [Survey & Comments](#)

### **Observations:**

- Remember that there are no claims that this is representative of Christians overall today or even of those who are most interested in origins.
- 41 of the 82 (Options 2, 4, and 6) are explicitly open to God having acted in our world at times in ways that we would recognize as miraculous. It is quite possible that other respondents also believe this, but the choices that they chose don't tell us that.
- The option for Covenant Creation was added by one of the members. It is interesting that it drew 17 votes. Clearly this idea is attractive to a number of Christians. This option is an interpretation of why the Genesis creation account was structured the way it was. It is very interesting to see how we interpret Genesis. Unfortunately, this does not address the question at hand regarding how God chose to act in creating the world and ultimately mankind.
- We are all grappling with the degree to which God acted and the ways He chose to use in creating life and ultimately man. What did that look like in human terms? Those who see God as using evolution are also saying intelligent design, but limiting the mechanisms to natural selection and mutation and historical contingency. The ID proponents say that the designer is essential but to not specify a "miraculous" origin. OEC recognize more direct actions by God, but even this could simply consist of arranging the historical contingencies such that modifications developed that would not otherwise have occurred.
- Joshua Swamidass in the book, "*Genealogical Adam and Eve*", demonstrated that had man been created by whatever means earlier, and then, as recently as 6,000 years ago, God created Adam and Eve, it is highly probable that by the time of Christ, they would be actual ancestors of all people then living. He presents this as an option to be considered, as it potentially could accept all of the scientific data and

also a literal view of scripture. In this survey, a few people hold views that might align with this. Others also might see it as possible though not preferred.

- There is in this group, as in any sizable group, differences in what the definition of Christian is. In this case, for instance, one individual espouses "Christian Deism". In this view, a person would accept the moral teachings of Jesus, but not His divinity. Thomas Jefferson was a prime example. The word "Christian" does carry many meanings today. Unfortunately, as we broaden the meanings, we lose the ability to have a word for one who fits the original definition. I use the word "Christian" to describe a Christ-follower. As I said at the beginning, they must believe two basic concepts: 1. God is the creator; 2. Jesus is God. Romans 10:9 lists the criteria this way: *"because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* A "Christian Deist" may have a lot to contribute to a discussion of origins, but not as a Christian by the original usage of the word.
- Another individual added the option: *"God is everything & is in everything. He is always working out his purposes in the midst of a creation that is also free to work out its own"*. At least at face value, this again would be a different definition of Christian. This makes God to be a part of creation, not a separate creator. This is pantheism. Again, there may be a lot to be gained from discussing origins with these individuals, but Christianity, in the original meanings, certainly holds God to be completely separate from his creation. Christians do believe that God is omnipresent and in Christ *"all things hold together"* (Colossians 1:17). It is worth investigating what different people mean by what they say.
- If God worked through evolution, what mechanisms were involved besides natural selection and mutation? One comment area delved into the idea that viruses were used to spread DNA between organisms. Did life originate multiple times, and then viruses worked such that the DNA was homogenized over time? Personally, I am skeptical that God created life by using "normal natural" causes, processes and rates. Over the last 20 years, it is my view that our understanding of the difficulty in making this happen has increased. It has not been a case of science gradually overcoming the hurdles. While some may have been removed, others have appeared and abiogenesis by "normal means" seems less likely than before. Many will disagree, and I recognize that I am not trained in genetics or biochemistry. Theologically, I think a designer is still clearly implied so it would change little, but the scientific case just is not there for me.

In my book, "*A Texas-Sized Challenge to Young Earth Creation and Flood Geology*", I proposed the use of multiple working hypothesis to analyze how to interpret Adam and Eve. I listed these in one of the comments:

Hypothesis 1: Adam and Eve Are a Metaphor or Allegory

Hypothesis 2: Adam and Eve Are First of Abraham's ancestors

Hypothesis 3: Adam and Eve Are First "Anatomically Modern Humans"

Hypothesis 4: Adam and Eve Represent a Dramatic Population Bottleneck Fifty to Seventy-Five Thousand Years Ago

Each hypothesis carries various strengths and concerns. We do not have the data to confidently eliminate any of them in my opinion. However, some are much less attractive to me. As I wrote in the book, currently Hypothesis 4 fits best for me, though it also has issues and no solid proof to support it. I am sure that Christians will understand it better in heaven, but it probably won't be high on our priority list then. In the meantime, I think Christians can lovingly and at times passionately discuss the evidence. We can learn more about nature and about God from such discussions.

Link to a printable pdf of this post is here: *Surveying views on how God acted in Creation*