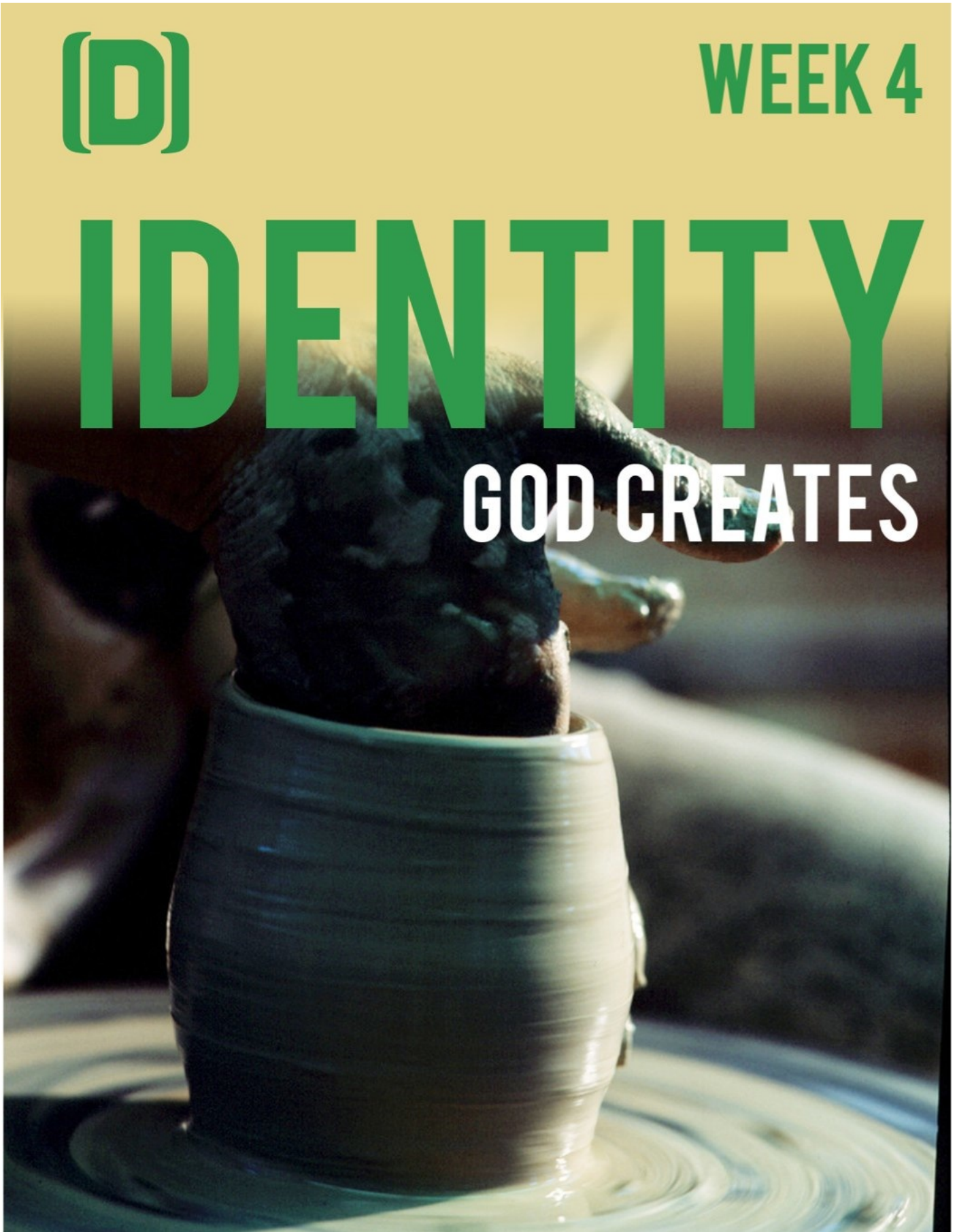


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WEEK 4

# IDENTITY

GOD CREATES



# LESSON 4 - GOD CREATES

## *The doctrines of Creation, Humanity, Angels and Demons*

*Man as scientist can be spoken of as the priest of creation, whose office it is to interpret the books of nature written by the finger of God, to unravel the universe in its marvelous patterns and symmetries, and to bring it all into orderly articulation in such a way that it fulfills its proper end as the vast theater of glory in which the Creator is worshipped and hymned and praised by his creation. - T.F. Torrance<sup>1</sup>*

Spring 2023

### What is humanity?

There is probably no subject full of more modern controversy, ever changing ideas and assertions, then that of the nature of the natural world, the universe, and most especially the essence of what it means to be human. Here we desire to grow in our understanding, to the proportion God has revealed, regarding the nature of creation - both on the earth below and the heavens above - and the nature of humanity as the other major focal point of Scripture (with God as the foremost focal point). Here is where we aim to discuss what the Bible says about the nature of the whole created universe, the spiritual world, the environment, nature in general, and most importantly humanity.

#### SCRIPTURE

Read and reflect on the following passages: Genesis 1-2

#### REFLECTIONS

How did God create everything (Gen 1)? How did He create Adam and Eve (Gen 2)?

What does God say about His creation after he makes it?

Why did God create anything at all?

For what purpose was humanity made?

What is the significance of the Sabbath (Gen. 2:1-3)?

What does Genesis 2 reveal about human relationships as they were intended to be (esp. Gen. 2:15ff)?

#### PRAYER

*“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”* (Psalm 8:1–9, ESV)

#### PRACTICE

The spiritual discipline for this week is *stewardship*.

Negatively, stewardship is about not *worshipping* creation as more important than the Creator. Thus, it entails a *denial* of consumerism, addiction to shopping, overeating, not giving, lack of exercise, treating others like goods to be used for your benefit, treating God and church like a store that supposed to give you what you want, family as a consumer product, etc. It includes a denial of pornography and all sexual immorality. It includes a denial of the love of money. It includes a denial of being controlling which is an addiction to power. These all reveal a lack of self-control and an improper view of creation.

Positively, stewardship includes *engaging* in God’s calling on your life, to care well for your body, your family, your friendships, your community, your money, and your church. Stewardship is about recognizing all you have as a gift from God to be used for his glory and others good. It is seeing all things as created good and intended to be used for good purposes in the right relationship to creation. It is about worshipping God with all your responsibilities.

How can you stop abusing creation for your own pleasure, whether sexually, financially, or in your diet?

How can you start stewarding creation for God’s glory, in a way that brings life to yourself and to others?

# Creation

DWELL CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Article III:H

*We believe that a believer should live for the glory of God and the well being of others. A believer should strive to be blameless in conduct before the world, a faithful steward of his possessions, and should seek to realize for himself and others the full stature of maturity in Christ (cf. Romans 12:1-2, 14:13; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 7:1).*

God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them (Gen 1:1; 2:1). He created everything that exists and all that he created was good (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 27), especially humanity (1:31). God created all things out of his own free will and love. He did this by his very word (1:3, 6, 9, 11). Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all contributed to the created order (Jn 1:1-5). The Father spoke through the Son and in the Spirit and continues to do so to bring creation to its completion. All created things were created from nothing; that is *ex nihilo* (Heb. 11:3). Meaning, he did not use any preexisting things... creation did not create itself or come from some other created thing. Creation was “without form and void” and the rest of Genesis describes God creating order and filling the emptiness. It is a denial of creation as emerging from chaos in other ancient religions.

What he creates in days one through three is then filled with the corresponding life in days four through six. When God had formed the earth, the oceans, and the sky, he created living things with respect to their proper place; that is fish for the sea, birds for the air, and beasts for the land. A careful reading will show that God *created* (Hebrew *bara*) that He *made* (Hebrew *asah*, also formed or fashioned) things within creation. God created the heavens and the earth, a literary device (like our “A to Z”) that means *all things* both the physical and the non-physical world. He created both the spiritual heavens and the heavens of the sky and the stars. Nothing that exists was not created or fashioned by God and *all* that he created was good. C.S. Lewis in *The Magicians Nephew* depicts Aslan (the God figure) as singing Narnia into existence with a voice that is so beautiful and powerful it simultaneously inspires great adoration and fear. The goodness of creation eventually paves the way for Jesus, God himself, to enter and dwell with us in his creation.

There is both tremendous beauty and order to God’s creation. This explains both the arts and the sciences. Everything has its proper place and complements other things. This explains that the earth and all its plant, animal, and human life contain much of the same physical material and chemistry. There is harmony in the goodness of creation and everything being in its proper place serving its natural function. There is again unity and diversity. Every created thing is made *according to its kind*. Ecosystems are incredibly fragile and hence

we ought to be careful in altering the harmony of God's creation. The goodness and order of creation as articulated in a biblical worldview undoubtedly contributed to rise of modern scientific advancements in the west. This is due in part to the influence of Reformed theology, especially John Calvin.<sup>2</sup>

It is necessary to briefly comment on the relationship of creation to God. This is important when thinking about how a Christian should view other worldviews. Consider that Genesis is primarily an attack against paganism that distorts the relationship of God to his creation. An option commonly taken by eastern religions is that of pantheism. Pantheism is the view that God and creation are the same thing. Pantheism takes two forms: either a denial of the physical world (e.g. Buddhism, Hinduism) or a denial of the spiritual world (Atheism in naturalistic sciences). Ultimately, there is no distinction between God and creation in Pantheism whether one is worshipping the impersonal and immaterial nothingness as a Buddhist monk or one is worshipping the physical universe through a microscope.

Another form is that God and creation are necessarily and intimately connected. This is the view of panentheism (*pan-en-theism* = all is in God). The implications are that God is dependent on creation and is in a symbiotic relationship to it. This is probably most commonly reflected in New Age ideas that have saturated all western media, music, movies, and culture. Consider the movie, *Avatar*. The relationship between the Navi and their god is an example of panentheism. Any talk of the "divine spark" within you or that God is inside your heart is actually panentheism. Being "in Christ" as a Christian and the "indwelling Holy Spirit" is of a relational and spiritual connection with God not a metaphysical union of our natures.<sup>3</sup> These are important distinctions for our doctrine of Christ's full deity and humanity as untied in the *one person* of the Son of God, the divine and human natures were not fused together in some mystical or metaphysical way.

The key point of confusion is between the essential goodness of creation and the nature of God as distinct from creation and yet active in it. God is not creation and creation is not God. Nor is God a part of creation or "in" creation in a spacial sense (remember what omnipresence means and what it does not mean). Everything in creation is good but does not contain a "spark" of the divine. It has his fingerprints as its maker but is not in itself "divine." God is intimately involved in creation but he is distinct from it (transcendence and immanence). You are not god or even a "little god." You are a human being and the pinnacle of God's creation.

In our day it is necessary to discuss the subject of evolution. Briefly, the stress in Genesis is theological which has scientific implications. It is not focused on describing the physical mechanisms God may or may not have used, but only that God did it by his word. One has to wrestle with how God's creation allows for the *adaptation of species* - "according to its kind"

- to their environment (referred to as *micro*-evolution). But that it may not allow for a species *becoming an entirely different species* by random and purely naturalistic processes (denying *macro*-evolution).<sup>4</sup> Regardless, the more concerning issue is how evolution is used as a powerful narrative to explain all kinds of other behaviors that are not strictly biological. This must be denied as a category mistake. Evolution may describe some micro biological processes but it does not necessarily explain social or technological processes. Related to this it is important to affirm that Adam and Eve were actual people regardless of the age of the earth (1 Cor 15:45).

## Humanity

All humanity is created in the image of God, both men and women (Gen 1:28; 1 Cor 11:7), who have been formed from the dust and given the breath of life (Gen 2:7). After this God says all of creation is very good. It is important to note the brevity in the whole of Scripture devoted to the nature of creation - one chapter. Compare this with humanity, where from Genesis 2 through Revelation the focus is on the relationship between God and humanity.

What is the image of God is a natural first question. The image of God or *imago dei* means we are his representatives on the earth. We are distinctively made to mirror and reflect who God is. Adam and Eve were commissioned to care for the earth and to fill it. Humanity is to rule over it in the manner he would, demonstrating his loving character (Gen 1:28; 2:15). We were commissioned to build cities and build culture in community. We were commissioned to care for creation and enjoy it; but not to abuse it, trash it, and force it to serve our selfish desires and insatiable appetites. The image was not lost with the fall (Jam 3:9) but was corrupted by human sinfulness.

It is important to comment on the nature of gender and ethnicity. Biblically, every ethnicity, both men and women, are fully human and reflect the image of God. Every tribe, nation, culture, and tongue is loved and cherished by God. All people regardless of age, race, class, gender, developmental stage (babies in the womb), etc. are worthy of respect dignity and honor. God does not discriminate or show favoritism. We are all equally valuable and worthy in God's sight. However, we are all not the same. We have different gifts, roles, and responsibilities. Men and women are different and complementary. Eve was taken from Adam's rib revealing she is not to be behind him and dominated by him, nor from the front to rule over him, but from his side to complement him. Their sexuality is a part of their humanity, but both are equally human. The complexities and ambiguities that are the source of much debate in our day are a product of the fall and we should be careful in assigning too much to biological or environmental factors. We are created to fulfill his purposes and to deny the inherent limitations of our body and soul is to not fully flourish as a human being (1 Cor. 6:20).

The Bible clearly sees the human person as a holistic being with the heart as the “center” of its being; its will, emotions, desires, motives, and thoughts. The whole of a person is defined not merely individualistically, something foreign to Scripture, but also in community. We are unique as individuals but we are also shaped by our families, backgrounds, and cultures. People are not intended to be alone but this not only applies to relationships and family but also culture (Gen 1:28; 2:18; Ps 8). We intrinsically desire relationship and to build culture. We are relational, physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual beings. All aspects of our being are inextricably related and affect one another. The human person is described to have a body and a soul (Dt 6:5; Mt 22:37) though the focus biblically is on the inner and outer being of the person, rather than a physical part and a non-physical part.<sup>5</sup> These represent various dimensions of the human person and no single dimension constitutes the whole person. Some argue for we are a combination of body, soul, and spirit (trichotomist), others just body and soul/spirit (dichotomist). The latter makes more sense biblically since soul and spirit are synonyms. This distinctions are helpful but we must not lose sight that ideally we are a unified whole of body and soul with thoughts, words, and deed operating in unison.

The question of the soul is getting renewed attention these days. Where does it originate from and what happens upon death? It seems best to argue that the soul comes at conception from the parents (traducianism, Gen 2:2; 5:3; Acts 17:26; Rom 5:12-14) and that it continues to exist after death when the breath of life leaves a person and the body returns to the dust (Gen 35:18; Mt 10:28; Lk 23:46; Acts 7:59; Jam 2:26). The separation of body and soul is due to sin. Eventually, the destiny of all is to be reunited with their body either in a new glorious body like Jesus or one in eternal torment in hell.

#### HUMANITY’S CREATIVE CALLING

All of life is lived *coram deo*, that is, before the face of God. Working for the church is not more holy than being a carpenter. Some are called by God to a ministerial office (Eph. 4:11) which is a very important work. But it is not intrinsically better than other work. All work is ministry in the sense that it is intended to glorify God and serve one’s neighbor. Work is either done in a way that reflects God’s goodness and manifests kingdom ethics or it is done in rebellion to him and builds the kingdom of men. The Bible begins in the garden but it ends in a city. The ideal is not the garden nor an industrialized city, but the city within the garden. So humanity is wired to create and to cultivate culture. We are wired to make new things or to improve and maintain existing things. This is what is meant by “have dominion” in Gen. 1:28. Thus, work is not a product of sin but God has gifted all people with gifts and abilities whose use are intended for his good purposes to love one’s neighbor. Adam himself had a job in the garden prior to the fall. He was to guard and keep the garden (Gen. 2:15).

Our work is a reflection of God and his work. This makes Christian view of work unique among all other worldviews. God himself fashioned Adam with his own hands. God himself got his hands *dirty* by forming Adam from the dust. In his incarnation, Jesus was a carpenter. He had a manual labor job. No other religion views manual labor as positively as Christianity. Most cultures consider manual labor a burden and more intellectual work like the arts, sciences, financial management, government, or religious work as intrinsically superior. This is a misunderstanding of the affect of sin on work and the inherent goodness of creation itself. Within Christianity, one worships God *with* their work (Col. 3:22-4:1). Christians need to recapture our creative calling to serve as ministers in every industry. People recognize that nature is good, but equally necessary to the Christian affirmation of the goodness of creation is the goodness of work itself.

One final note on creation is the Sabbath. God *finished* all his work and rested. Sabbath is uniquely a Judeo-Christian concept. It is parallel to nothing else in any other worldview. It was not borrowed or contextualized from another culture. It was revealed that *rest* is a part of creation. The trajectory of rest in scripture is the idea of peace and salvation. God is moving to finish creation and bring sabbath rest, or shalom, to all things. God himself gives rest and the culmination of this is salvation in Jesus Christ (Heb. 4). This means work is not to be worshipped. Humans should rest and remember they are not God and cannot save themselves nor become God-like through their work. Work is good and is a gift of God. Work is not a god and is not to be worshipped.

## Angels and Demons

The basic term for angels in scripture, both in Greek and Hebrew, is also the same word for messengers. Other terms used are hosts, assemblies, powers, principalities, and spirits. Angels are created beings (Ps 148:2, 5; Col 1:16). They are spiritual beings who cannot propagate like humans and whose primary role is to be God's messengers (Heb 1:14; Mt 22:30). There are a large number of them and they often appear looking like men with white clothes, seraphim and cherubim seem to have wings (Ps 68:17; Is 6:2; Mt 28:3; Rev 5:11). They have intelligence and will, with some being holy and some having fallen. They possess knowledge and wisdom and are involved in heavenly councils (Rev 14:10; 1 Pet 1:12). They are limited by God's power and are not omnipresent. Angels glorify God (Ps 148:2; Rev 5:11-12), they convey messages, comfort believers (Acts 8:26; 12:6-11), and execute judgment (2 Ki 19:35; Rev 8:6-9:21).

There are also evil angels, or demons (2 Pet 2:4) that have sinned. Satan, or the devil, is the chief of demons (Mt 12:22-32). He is the chief tempter, the liar, the serpent in the garden and the great dragon (Jn 8:44; Gen 3:1; Rev 6:15). He disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14-15). He opposes Christians and can cause physical ailment (1 Thess 2:18; 2 Cor 12:7; Job).



He can be resisted and will flee by the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit (Jam 4:7; Rom 8:26). Since demons are fallen angels, it means the primary thing they do is spread false messages. Lying is their chief work. Demons do the work of Satan and cause all sorts of physical problems (Mk 9:17, 20, 25; Mt 12:22; Acts 8:7). Demons do oppress people and can possess them and this occurs today as well (Mk 1:25). They are often the “gods” behind idols (1 Cor 10:20). Jesus cast out demons and gave authority to his disciples to do so as well (Mt 10:1). Satan and demons were cast out of heaven to earth following a war (Rev 12). There is ambiguity in the terms “rulers, principalities, and powers” (1 Pet 3:22; Col 2:15; Eph 6:12). Does it refer to spiritual forces of darkness like demons or injustice and oppressive cultural forces like racism? Biblically speaking it is best to see it as both with demonic forces those “pulling the strings” behind these “secular” forces. Both are ruled by sin. Christ has defeated them all through his life, death, and resurrection. Ultimately, they will be defeated forever and thrown into the lake of fire (1 Jn 3:8; Rev 20:10).

#### FURTHER RESOURCES

Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*

Andy Crouch, *Culture Making*

Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*

book to help Christians integrate their faith and work.

*For views arguing against evolution in a thoughtful way:*

A video arguing for intelligent design: *Unlocking the Mystery of Life* <http://www.discovery.org/a/2116>

Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth*

A book that argues for a Christian Worldview and against the pervasive use of evolution to explain everything.

*For views arguing for theistic evolution without neglecting essential components of the Christian faith:*

[www.biologos.com](http://www.biologos.com)

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<sup>1</sup> T.F. Torrance, *Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1980), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Alister McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 254-5, who notes that for centuries after Calvin's work 82% of those in the Paris Academy of Sciences and the infamous Royal Society of London were filled with Calvin Protestants and Puritans respectively.

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<sup>3</sup> The larger subject here is the doctrine of the “mystical union of Christ.” We will deal with this in week 7 when we discuss the gospel. Paul calls it a divine mystery in Eph. 5:32. It is important to recognize the emphasis on the union of Christ with his church more so than upon the individual. *We* are united to Christ. (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col. 1:26-27; Rom. 6:1-14, 8:1-17).

<sup>4</sup> If you desire more resources regarding evolution please see the resources at the end of the section.

<sup>5</sup> *Doctrine*, 127.