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Science Over Scripture? The Implications of William Lane Craig's Approach to Adam's Historical and Theological Identity

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Introduction

In his book, *In Quest of the Historical Adam*, William Lane Craig acknowledges that the figure of Adam holds a central place in both the theological and historical narratives of the Christian faith. He acknowledges that according to Scripture, Adam is the first human, created by God, and the father of all humanity. Craig notes that this reading of Scripture undergirds key doctrines, such as original sin, the creation narrative, and the doctrine of atonement. However, for Craig, contemporary scientific findings present a different narrative which argues that humans evolved from a large population of early hominins, not from a single pair.[1] Thus, in *In Quest of the Historical Adam*, Craig challenges traditional exegetical approaches that interpret Paul's references to Adam strictly within the confines of Scripture. Instead, he proposes a reconciliation between the biblical narrative and modern scientific findings. A reconciliation which ultimately diminishes the authority of Scripture, and which elevates science over Scripture. Today, I will present a critique of Craig's work, focusing primarily on Craig's adoption of Denis Alexander's hermeneutical concordism, his discussion concerning mytho-history, and a brief discussion concerning the genre analysis of Genesis 1:1–2:3.

William Lane Craig's Proposal

William Lane Craig attempts to bridge the gap between the biblical narrative and modern scientific findings by making a crucial distinction between the literary Adam, as depicted in Scripture, and the historical Adam, who he associates with Homo heidelbergensis. Craig supports his argument with evidence from modern population genetics, which suggest a common ancestor for all humans, thus attempting to align the biblical narrative with scientific data.[2]

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[1] William Lane Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), 540–543. Craig argues, that Adam and Eve emerged from a large population of hominins who were biologically and spiritually renovated by God rather than specially created.

[2] Ibid., 511–512, Craig writes, "Adam and Eve may therefore be plausibly identified as members of Homo heidelbergensis and as the founding pair at the root of all human species. Challenges to this hypothesis from population genetics fail principally because we cannot rule out on the basis of the genetic divergence exhibited by

Craig's argument hinges on his ability to maintain the theological significance of Adam while reinterpreting the Adam in light of contemporary science. He draws upon a wealth of scientific data, including the fossil record and genetic evidence, to bolster his case. Craig's goal is to show that it is possible to hold a high view of Scripture while also accepting the findings of modern science. Craig's approach involves a careful examination of the biblical texts, particularly the early chapters of Genesis and Romans 5:12–21, and a detailed analysis of the scientific evidence.

For Craig, the literary Adam existed in history, time and space, and is therefore a historical figure. The distinctions between the literary and historical Adam rests in the fact that the literary Adam, as defined by Craig, is identical to the Adam of Scripture, whereas the historical Adam as Craig defines him aligns with the data from population genetics and suggests a plausible existence of a real, historical figure whose existence could be traced back earlier than 500,000 years ago who is not identical to the Adam found in Scripture. Craig's proposal has significant implications for how we understand the biblical narrative and its relationship to modern science. By identifying the historical Adam with Homo heidelbergensis, Craig situates the biblical account within the broader context of human evolution. This approach challenges traditional interpretations of Genesis, which views Adam as a unique, supernaturally created being, and instead presents a more nuanced understanding that incorporates both theological and scientific perspectives.

Craig's Use of Hermeneutical Concordism

Craig adopts Denis Alexander's hermeneutical concordism. Hermeneutical concordism is a method that seeks to harmonize scientific and biblical accounts. Denis Alexander distinguishes three different types of concordism: extracting modern scientific information from scriptural passages, interpreting Scripture in the light of modern science, and hermeneutical concordism.[3] Hermeneutical concordism is, "the attempt to integrate the independently discovered findings of contemporary science and biblical theology into a synoptic worldview."[4] Extracting scientific information from Scriptural passages or interpreting Scripture in the light of modern science for Craig is an illicit imposition of science onto the biblical text.[5] Each seeks to impose ideas onto the text or into the text that the biblical writers would not have known or considered.[6] Concordist hermeneutics, "represents an important and vital project for the systematic theologian, who seeks to formulate an integrative view of the world based on all our sources of knowledge."[7] Craig

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contemporary humans that our most recent common ancestors, situated more than 500 kya, are the sole genetic progenitors of the entire human race, whether past or present."

[3] Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam, 34–36*; Alexander, "The Various Meanings of Concordism - Article."

[4] Ibid., 36.

[5] Ibid., 36, Craig notes that in either case the concordist foists concepts onto the biblical writers that would have been unfamiliar to the biblical author like big bang cosmology or day-age and gap interpretations of Genesis 1.

[6] William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 346–47. See Craig's discussion on scientism. Craig is not specifically clear on what he means here. Of course, the biblical authors could not have known that water consists of H_2O or the age of rocks or trees, but this does not mean that their scientific views are incompatible with reality.

[7] Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam,* 36.

reasons, "when we've formulated an integrative view of the world based on all sources of knowledge, we may well find that Genesis 1–11 belongs to a literary genre that does not support a literal interpretation."[8] Craig and Alexander prefer an integrative approach that assumes, "that all truth is God's truth and that it is healthy and good for science and biblical theology to be in dialogue with each other."[9] Concord is not a foregone conclusion since both science and theology have their own integrity as methods of enquiry and construct their own models of reality without mutual interference.[10] Alexander reasons, since both disciplines differ in methods and construct their own models of reality, modern science plays no role in biblical hermeneutics since it did not emerge until the 19th century.[11]

Alexander's concordism, which is the view that Craig forwards, allows both science and Scripture to be authoritative in their own disciplines and only come together after they have completed their work for the purposes of dialogue. This dialogue recognizes that there will never be true overlap. Therefore, Alexander suggests interdisciplinary model building through thought experiments with theologians. These experiments play an important role in scientific advances and may lead to answering questions which can never be answered totally by science or Scripture alone.[12] Alexander's use of Rogerian argumentation seeks to disarm the thornier question, which is: Is Scripture or science sovereign?[13] Thus, Alexander suggests a middle ground approach which allows both disciplines to find their own answers to the major questions. On the surface, it is hard to disagree with a dialogue between the disciplines. The proposed dialogue seeks to ameliorate the difficult questions concerning the NT writer's beliefs and the authority of their writings.[14] For when theologians find their own answers, in opposition to the concordist approach, Alexander politely rejects their preferences. In Alexander's article, Scot McKnight asserts that the concord he prefers "is one that sees Genesis 1–3 more in conversation

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[8] Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam*, 37. Th. P. van Baaren, "The Flexibility of Myth," in Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 218. Citing van Baaren, Craig suggests that if Genesis 1–11 is myth, it is meant to be malleable and change with the times, but the process of exegesis stifled the flexibility.

[9] Denis Alexander, "The Various Meanings of Concordism," *BioLogos*, March 23, 2017, accessed January 12, 2024, https://biologos.org/articles/the-various-meanings-of-concordism/.

[10] Ibid., Alexander believes that once each discipline has completed that process, Christians ought to see what types of concord, if any, exist between these two forms of knowledge.

[11] Ibid., is an odd sentence given that it is traditionally assumed that the scientific revolution began with the Copernican Revolution in the 16th century.

[12] Ibid.,

[13] Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell, *Practical Argument: A Text and Anthology* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins, 2011), 146–47.

[14] "Rogerian Argument," Purdue University Online Writing Lab, accessed September 12, 2023, https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/historical_perspectives_on_argumentation/rogerian_argument.html. Rogerian argumentation does not work when, "your opponents are unwilling or unable to compromise, or if they are arguing in bad faith (e.g., they care only about winning). It may also lead to sub-optimal solutions if your opponent's position is demonstrably wrong, since in this case you may nevertheless be forced to sacrifice some of your (ostensibly superior) goals order to accommodate your opponent's (inferior) ones."

with the ancient Near East accounts of origins and purpose."[15] Alexander responds, "That's fine, but there's no need to choose between this and the (Type C) concordism —we need both.[16] He continues, "There are too many 'either-or' narratives in the world right now. Let's have more of the both-and."[17]

Alexander's utilization of dialogue is a form of Rogerian argumentation applied to promote compromise between science and religion.[18] In order for Rogerian argumentation to work, both sides must compromise on their essential claim.[19] The compromise that Alexander suggests denudes Scripture of its authority if scientists in their proposed partnership with religion will only allow "both-and" answers rather than purely theological answers in places where science and theology overlap. Henry encapsulates the problem saying, "The reality of divine revelation is related in the Bible to the fact that God truly speaks his word and that the representations of the Scriptural writers are not their own but rather a divine word that they report."[20] If it is true that authors of the Scriptures reported the very Word of God, and Christians have received it as such, should Christians compromise the authority of God's Word by yielding to the pronouncements of modern science in places where Scripture and modern science differ? If it is true as both Alexander suggests that his form of concordism can be carried out without any need to impose scientific meaning on to the biblical text, what does he do when theologians propose theological meaning rather than scientific pronouncements? Does he yield to the authorial intent of the Bible's dual authors? No. He deems Christians intellectually lazy for not seeking concord, or even discord between the two types of knowledge.[21] Thus, for Denis Alexander, Christians are considered intellectually lazy for not wishing to consider scientific answers to theological questions. Craig is in philosophical accord with Alexander.[22] The argument is that Christians should understand science and Christianity have differing presuppositions. Science is completely materialistic and denies the existence or activity of any supernatural entities and their purported activities in the world. While Christianity argues in exactly the opposite direction of this view. On Alexander's view, the Scriptures are insufficient for teaching Christians how they might understand the world. This leads him to conclude that Christians are intellectually indolent even after the Scriptures have been sought and properly understood. Craig reasons that Alexander's concordist view, "represents an important and vital project of the systematic theologian who seeks to formulate an integrative view of the world

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[15] Alexander, "The Various Meanings of Concordism."

[16] Ibid., "Type C concordism emphasizes that all truth is God's truth and that it's therefore healthy and good for science and Biblical theology to engage in active dialogue, seeking where possible to allow both disciplines to complement each other." This is in full light of the history of science and religion, marked as it is by complexity (Brooke, 1991), and the knowledge that concord is never a foregone conclusion.

[17] Ibid.,

[18] Kirszner and Mandell, 146–47.

[19] Ibid., 148.

[20] Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 6 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 116.

[21] Alexander, "The Various Meanings of Concordism."

[22] Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam,* 36–41.

based on all of our sources of knowledge."[23] Thus, both Craig and Alexander implicitly argue that even if the Scriptures are properly understood by the Christian, if that understanding conflicts with science, it is the Scriptures that must yield.

A Critique of Craig's Approach

Craig's aim for harmony, also raises several issues. By prioritizing Concordism, Craig's approach compromises the authenticity and authority of Genesis 1–11. For example, he argues, "Many traditional theologians would think the historicity of Adam crucial for hamartiology, or the doctrine of sin. For if Adam was not a historical person, clearly there was no historical fall into sin in the traditional sense."[24] But Craig argues, "The attempt to make the doctrine of original sin a necessary condition of the doctrine of the atonement is, however, an overreach. Nowhere in the New Testament (NT) is Christ said to have died for original sin."[25] For Craig, the doctrine of sin enjoys slim scriptural support owing its entire existence to Paul's teaching in Romans 5:12–21 which he believes is open to multiple interpretations.[26] Craig proposes alternative ways for how sin may imputed. He notes,

> Christopher Hays and Stephen Herring rightly point out, Even if one did not believe that Adam's fall was the source of human concupiscence, one could quite easily provide an alternative account of the doctrine, saying, for example, that humans have an evolutionary biological propensity to selfishness that is reinforced and quickened by our society, psychology and spiritual estate.[27]

The evolutionary biological propensity for sin that Craig supports avoids the transmission of sin through Adam.[28] But Schreiner rightly argues, the corruption of man's nature may not be inherited in a biological sense, it is the result of spiritual death and alienation from God which all men received as a consequence of Adam's sin.[29]

Craig's goal is to make the case for the historical Adam. His approach is pragmatic rather than principled and will allow either imputed or inherited sin insofar as either leads to his ultimate goal of demonstrating the existence of an historical Adam. When he turns to the doctrine of original sin. Craig holds, the attempt to explain the universality of human sin by postulating a corruption or wounding of human nature inherited from Adam is a theological add-

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[23] Craig, 36.

[24] Ibid, 23.

[25] Ibid., 24.

[26] Ibid., 24.

[27] Ibid., 336.

[28] Craig might argue that this is not his view. Yet, his advocacy gives this view the imprimatur of legitimacy, though it is decidedly unbiblical.

[29] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 279, 281.

on to which the Christian theologian need not be committed.[30] For Craig, Christians can affirm the sinfulness of all men and their inability to save themselves without embracing the concept of original sin.[31] But how does Craig overcome objections to his understanding of the biblical narrative? He proposes that Genesis 1–11 is of the genre of mytho-history, rather than historical narrative.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Craig And Mytho-History</h2>

Craig proposes that Genesis 1–11 should be classified as mytho-history, a genre that combines myth and history. However, he does not provide a technical definition of mytho-history and defers to descriptions by other scholars, leading to ambiguity and confusion. Scholars differ on how mytho-history is understood, and there is no uniform perspective on the term. Craig's criteria for identifying family resemblances among myths are broad and often inclusive of various narratives, including historical ones. For example, his criteria such as "myths are narratives" and "myths are traditional stories handed down from generation to generation" fail to differentiate between myth and historical narrative effectively.[32] This broad categorization leads to a blurring of lines between distinct genres.

The ambiguity in Craig's definition of mytho-history is a significant point of contention. Without a clear and precise definition, it becomes difficult to evaluate his claims and to understand the implications of reclassifying Genesis 1–11 in this way. This lack of clarity also makes it challenging to engage with Craig's argument on a scholarly level, as it leaves key concepts open to interpretation. Craig's classification of Genesis 1–11 as mytho-history draws on the work of scholars such as Thorkild Jacobsen, Gordon Wenham, John Walton, and Tremper Longman. [33] These scholars describe mytho-history as a genre that combines elements of myth and history, conveying significant theological messages through stories rooted in time and space. However, this classification is not universally accepted and remains a debated topic. One of the challenges in defining mytho-history is the inherent ambiguity of the term "myth."[34] Craig himself acknowledges that the lines between myth, folktale, and legend are often blurry, making it difficult to provide a strict definition. This ambiguity allows for a broad range of interpretations and raises questions about the validity of classifying Genesis 1–11 as mytho-history.

Moreover, the use of mytho-history to describe Genesis 1–11 has significant theological implications. By classifying these chapters as mytho-history, Craig suggests that they contain elements of myth, which may be seen as symbolic or allegorical, rather than literal historical

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[30] Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam,* 25.

[31] Ibid., 25. Craig notes that the Orthodox Church has rejected this view.

[32] Ibid., 76.

[33] Ibid., 156–157; John Walton and Tremper Longman, The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate, vol.5 (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 86; Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Eridu Genesis," Journal of Biblical Literature, vol. 100, no 4. (December 1981): 513–529.

[34] Ibid., 74. Craig states, "the lines between myth, folktale, and legend are apt to be blurry, so that it is probably impossible and unprofitable to lay down necessary and sufficient conditions for each of these narrative types. In that sense, the search for a strict definition of myth is a misguided and rather surprising pursuit." 74.

accounts. John Oswalt argues that Israel's self-understanding did not allow mythic elements in its worldview. Oswalt notes that the presence of mythic elements in a worldview, "presupposes much more than fantastic details. It is the reflection of a certain way of thinking about the world. To be sure, because of the way in which it thinks, the fantastic is often found in myth. But it is not the presence of the fantastic that makes a piece of literature myth; rather, it is the presence of the mythic worldview." [35] Oswalt's statement, though not a direct response to Craig, implies that if the biblical author of Genesis 1–11 wrote fantastic elements into his text, it would be demonstrative of the fact that biblical author possessed a mythic worldview. Yet, both Oswalt and Craig agree that concepts like theogony and theomachy, which are present in a mythic worldview are noticeably absent from Genesis 1–11.[36]

A Generic Overview of Genesis 1:1–2:3

Historiography is a specific literary genre relating to critical descriptions and evaluations of past reality and events, in contrast to more fictional varieties of prose. According to various scholars, the Pentateuch, including Genesis, can be described as historical writing, depicting past events in a context involving human beings and their interconnection with Yahweh, the covenant God.[37] Steven W. Boyd's statistical analysis of Genesis 1:1–2:3 demonstrates that it is historical narrative rather than poetry.[38] Boyd compared descriptions of biblical Hebrew poetry and narrative and concluded that a statistical approach was essential to determine the genre of the texts. His findings suggest that Genesis 1:1–2:3 is indeed historical narrative.

Boyd's analysis involved a rigorous examination of the linguistic and structural features of the text. By comparing these features with those found in other known examples of Hebrew poetry and narrative, Boyd was able to demonstrate that Genesis 1:1–2:3 fits the characteristics of historical narrative. This finding has significant implications for how we understand the text and its claims about human origins. Boyd's methodology is thorough and methodical. He began by identifying all narrative and poetic texts in the Hebrew Bible, generating a stratified random sample of these texts. He then calculated different ratios among finite verbs for each text and tested to see if the distribution was significantly different. This statistical approach allowed him

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[35] John Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 103.

[36] Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam*, 128; Oswalt, 103, notes that Genesis 1, 2, and 3 show a complete absence of the characteristics of myth. Oswalt posits, the Bible roots the events on earth, lacks continual action that determines the nature and condition of the human and natural world, and its human decisions over ethical questions take place in time or history.

[37] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), "The Bible must have an omnicompetent God and a privileged narrator to serve his cause. It must draw a qualitative line between their authorial perspectives and the human interpreters. Given God's relation to man, it must propel the characters toward enlightenment: to spread knowledge, influence choice, validate the election of learners, justify the fate of back-sliders, as well as to guarantee the foolproof composition whereby not even the slowest in the uptake among the audience will be left unenlightened at the end," 179.

[38] Stephen W. Boyd, "*Statistical Determination of Genre in Biblical Hebrew: Evidence for an Historical Reading of Genesis 1:1–2:3*," in *Radioisotopes and the Age of the Earth: Results of A Young-Earth Creation Initiative*, ed. Larry Vardiman, Andrew A. Snelling, and Eugene F. Chaffin (El Cajon, CA: Institute for Creation Research, 2005), 631–712.

to classify the texts accurately as either narrative or poetry. The results of Boyd's analysis are compelling. His model classified 95 of 97 texts correctly, and when applied to Genesis 1:1–2:3, it demonstrated with a high degree of confidence that the text is historical narrative.[39] This finding challenges Craig's classification of Genesis 1–11 as mytho-history and supports the traditional view that these chapters are historical accounts.

Differences Between Myth and Historical Narrative

Craig argues that the genre of Genesis 1–11 is mytho-history, while Boyd's findings suggest that it is historical narrative. Mytho-history might be described as a type of story that functions as a vehicle to deliver significant theological messages, whose content contains etiological motifs and events that are rooted in time and space. However, historical narrative is based on actual events, often supported by eyewitness accounts and documents. Myths serve various purposes, such as explaining natural phenomena, etiology, religious beliefs, and moral lessons. They are not concerned with accurate retelling of events but with symbolic meaning. Historical narrative, though selective and shaped, aims to inform and describe events that happened in the past, sometimes through analysis and other times through cause-and-effect relationships.

Craig's position is important as he acknowledges modern minds may find within the Scriptures fantastic elements, but also acknowledges the author and his audience may not find those elements fantastic.[40] This presents a fundamental difference in how the texts are interpreted and understood. The distinction between myth and historical narrative is crucial because it affects how we understand the authority and reliability of the biblical texts. If Genesis 1–11 is viewed as myth, it cannot be seen as authoritative. However, if it is viewed as historical narrative, it is authoritative and cannot change even if its pronouncements differ from contemporary scientific findings.

By classifying Genesis 1–11 as mytho-history, he suggests that these chapters contain elements of myth, which may be seen as symbolic or allegorical, rather than literal historical accounts. This characterization challenges the reliability and authority of the biblical texts and their interpretation. Boyd's findings, on the other hand, support the traditional view that Genesis 1:1–2:3 is historical narrative. This classification upholds the authority and reliability of the biblical texts and supports the traditional interpretation of these chapters as literal historical accounts.

Theological and Exegetical Implications

Maintaining a traditional understanding of Adam is crucial for Christian theology. Reinterpreting Adam as Homo heidelbergensis challenges key theological doctrines, such as original sin and the

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[39] Boyd, 631–712

[40] Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam*, 139. Craig's reading evinces the fallacy of presentism. David Hackett Fischer, Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1970), 135. Fischer describes the fallacy this way, "The fallacy of presentism is a complex anachronism, in which the antecedent in a narrative series is falsified by being defined or interpreted in terms of the consequent. Sometimes called the fallacy of nunc pro tunc, it is the mistaken idea that the proper way to do history is to prune away the dead branches of the past, and to preserve the green buds and twigs which have grown into the dark forest of our contemporary world," 135.

nature of humanity. Additionally, Craig's approach presents exegetical challenges, as it requires reinterpreting key biblical passages in ways that do not align with their original context and intent. The traditional understanding of Adam as the first human created by God is foundational for many aspects of Christian theology. This understanding undergirds doctrines such as original sin, human nature, and the need for salvation. Reinterpreting Adam in light of modern science requires a rethinking of these doctrines and destroys biblical authority and interpretation.

Craig's approach also presents significant exegetical challenges. By identifying the historical Adam with Homo heidelbergensis, Adam is understood as a member of an ancient hominin species and fragments the biblical narrative. By separating the literary Adam from the historical Adam, Craig creates a dualistic interpretation that undermines the unity and coherence of the biblical text. This approach leads to a compartmentalization of the biblical and scientific accounts, rather than a true synthesis.

Conclusion

In conclusion, William Lane Craig's proposal in "In Quest of the Historical Adam" aims to reconcile biblical exegesis with scientific findings, but it fundamentally compromises the authority and coherence of Scripture. By redefining Adam through the lens of contemporary science, Craig challenges the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1–11, risking the dilution of key Christian doctrines such as original sin and the nature of humanity. Craig's use of hermeneutical concordism and classification of Genesis as mytho-history not only blurs the lines between myth and historical narrative but also undermines the reliability of the biblical text. His pragmatic approach to the doctrine of sin further fragments the biblical narrative, creating a dualistic interpretation that weakens the unity and integrity of Scripture. As we explore the relationship between faith and science, it is imperative to uphold the authority of Scripture without yielding to contemporary scientific paradigms that conflict with biblical truths. Craig's approach, while attempting to harmonize these domains, ultimately raises more significant theological and exegetical challenges than it resolves. Thus, a critical reexamination of such proposals is necessary to preserve the foundational beliefs of the Christian faith and maintain the coherence of biblical interpretation.