

Guest Editorial: The Pope and his ‘magic wand’; Is he half-right?

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Pope Francis has spoken.



Hal Ostrander Considering his stature, to have affirmed so openly the Big Bang theory and evolution are scientifically correct was quite a declaration—one unmistakably global in scope and clearly conciliatory in nature.

However, many Catholics and non-Catholics alike disagree with the pope and how these matters now are being positioned. But what if he’s actually half-right?

The Big Bang

Regarding his endorsement of the Big Bang model, the pontiff’s statement that God isn’t “a magician with a magic wand” is essentially right. But if Christians should wish to conjure up a picture of God himself gliding about while waving a wand in order to materialize the stuff of the universe from, say, one quadrant to the next, then, yes, this is just plain wrong. But we know the pope used the word “wand” metaphorically, and he certainly

knows that we know.

If Francis had been more biblical, however, focusing on God speaking created reality into existence *ex nihilo*—out of nothing—or perhaps in *nihilo*—into nothing—his point would have been pressed harder. That way, the whole idea of an infinitesimal “singularity” as the beginning point for God to create, to explode space-time into being via the Big Bang, wouldn’t have been sidetracked in people’s thinking by the “magic wand” phrase.

Instead, he communicated what a Big Bang creation is not over against what it is and, in the interim, seemingly demeaned those who hold to some form of immediate full-blown creation. In other words, he might have done better. But, yes, as he stated, the Big Bang does require God. On this point he is right.

Enter the physical evidence. Here are five items in support of Big Bang cosmology:

- **The expansion of the cosmos.** All galaxies, including our own, are moving away from each other at great speeds as if blown apart like the remnants of a gigantic explosion. In fact, the expansion is now continually increasing in speed.
- **The cosmic microwave background radiation.** A relic of the Big Bang explosion; it has been detected everywhere and is still cooling.
- **COBE.** NASA’s Cosmic Background Explorer, a satellite able to measure the tiny temperature changes within the body of microwave radiation itself, verifying that the universe hasn’t been always expanding.
- **Gravitational waves.** Once only theorized, these were discovered and measured recently; another remnant of the Big Bang’s inflationary aftermath.

- **ACP.** The anthropic cosmological principle, whereby dozens of mathematical constants and parameters have been at work from the creation singularity to the present time and must be precisely as they are or we couldn't exist. The previous four items are tied directly to the ACP and its requirement for vast amounts of time to operate.

These will be very difficult, if not impossible, for detractors to overturn with convincing authority. For some, driven by another ideology, there's the hope of a "magic bullet" that will reverse these findings.

In other words, the basic reliability of our senses and the data from our instruments will have to be discarded because something scientific (a paradigm shift?) is still on the way to establish the fact the universe must have been created in toto within the short span of 144 hours.

All the while, many evangelicals say the Bible does not reveal directly or formulate indirectly a measurable age for the earth and universe, whereas God's general revelation does. There's no unequivocal debunking of this fact, it is said.

Evolution—naturalistic and theistic

Regarding the endorsement of evolution, the pope is essentially wrong. Enter the physical evidence again. Several items highlight the scientific superiority of special creation over against evolution:

- **The origin of life itself.** How did livingness arise from non-livingness? Or consciousness from non-consciousness? Comb the peer-reviewed science journals, and no answer is forthcoming.
- **The origin of DNA.** How did chance processes construct DNA's double-helix as intricate and elegant as it is?
- **The origin of the cell.** How did those same chance processes

construct a cell with its many fine-tuned parts? Even non-Christians have gone on record to say you can't arrive at a cell via random processes.

- **The origin of sex.** Who told whom that maleness and femaleness will probably be needed someday?

- **The origin of the plant/animal separation.** From whence came the information that it's time to become a plant, time to become an animal if everything came from that original single cell?

- **The Cambrian explosion.** Why do most major animal phyla appear abruptly in the Cambrian strata with no fossil predecessors in the pre-Cambrian?

- **Lack of transitional fossils.** Why are there missing links among all animal groups, not just ape-to-man? A puzzling one: Did those finally evolved mammals see fit to jump back into the ocean to become dolphins, maybe whales?

- **Irreducible complexity.** Back to the cell—each part of the cell functions properly if and only if all the other parts are present and functioning correctly. So, getting everything needed to evolve and come together simultaneously proves impossible.

- **Specified complexity.** Put 50 entire alphabets in a paper bag. Could random chance pull out the letters B-L-U-E in the right order? Yes, but it's specified only and not complex. Could it pull out Psalm 100 in the King James Version? Never, because that's both specified and complex, which requires intelligence. The cosmos and humankind are more specified and complex to the nth order of magnitude. Chance has no chance.

Without doubt Pope Francis was referring to theistic evolution and not its

naturalistic counterpart. But does theistic evolution save the day? Considering only the lack of transitional fossils, does invoking God somehow place the needed transitions in the strata where they ought to be? No, because if they aren't there, they aren't there, no matter how much you wish God utilized theistic evolution as the means to create us.

If the lack of fossil evidence doesn't work for naturalistic evolution, it doesn't for theistic either. In short, no matter the form, evolution is unproven empirically, thus it's as faith-based as the next worldview.

The better alternative is that God specially created the "kinds" of Genesis 1, Adam and Eve to boot! He didn't use a wand, but it was certainly extraordinary—decreed by fiat and specially recorded for our posterity.

The way forward

The way to move forward beyond the impasse is to interpret the evidence aright, both biblically and scientifically. This is what thinking about creation comes down to. Whether plucked from God's word or God's world, all true knowledge is revelatory; all true knowledge is sacred.

The mutual concern of Christians who differ on creation matters should be to own up to a consistency of Christian faith, one that attempts to join together special revelation's partner (biblical hermeneutics) with general revelation's partner (the scientific method, a.k.a., the hermeneutics of nature). Not for every spiritual matter, but only when called upon.

I'm not entirely convinced the pope is thinking it through to this degree, if only because he's told the world what's right but he's only half-way there!

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