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## "SOLA SCRIPTURA": OUR STANDARD FOR THEOLOGY

BY HENRY W. MIDDLETON, PH.D.

"To believe in *sola scriptura* ['Scripture alone'] is to allow God to speak without interruption. It is to trust His self-revelation, refusing to mix man's words with God's, man's thoughts with His thoughts. It is to be quiet and to let God speak."<sup>1</sup>

As a monk Martin Luther was tormented by guilt and fear of judgment for his sins. A breakthrough came, however, when he read Romans 1:17: "The righteous shall live by faith." He realized that a man cannot justify himself but instead is justified by God through faith.

Luther later wrote his Ninety-Five Theses to protest the sale of indulgences. This led to great controversy. In 1519 during a debate at Leipzig with John Eck (a professor at the University of Ingolstadt) Luther presented Scripture as more authoritative than a church council. On April 18, 1521 at the Diet of Worms, when asked to recant, Luther gave his famous response:

Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.<sup>2,3</sup>

Christians still face the question of the role of tradition in theology. They also face another question. What is the relationship between science and scripture in determin-



Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms

ing theology? The doctrine of *sola scriptura* affirms "Scripture alone as the sole infallible rule of faith for the church."<sup>4</sup> Everything that a person must believe in order to be a genuine Christian is found in the Bible. Confessions and creeds are useful, but they are always subordinate to Scripture. As James White explains, "the Bible, being God-breathed, partakes of the very authority of God Himself. As such, it cannot possibly embrace a *non-divine* authority alongside itself."<sup>5</sup>

God does reveal Himself through the creation, which can be investigated through science,<sup>6</sup> but this is insufficient without His written revelation. Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible guide for Christian faith and practice. It is not an exhaustive repository of knowledge, but it is sufficient for its intended purpose, which is to provide what we must know regarding salvation, godly living, and God's glory.<sup>7</sup>

The BioLogos Foundation affirms theistic evolution and seeks to convince Christians that Christianity and Darwinian evolution are compatible.<sup>8</sup> It was founded by

<sup>1</sup> White JR (2004) *Scripture Alone*, BethanyHouse, Minneapolis, MN, 25

<sup>2</sup> Bainton RH (1978) *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 144

<sup>3</sup> For the history of Luther, see also Gonzalez JL (1985) *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 2, The Reformation to the Present Day*, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, CA, 14–37 and Gonzalez JL (1975) *A History of Christian Thought, Vol. 3, From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century*, rev. ed., Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN 29–69

<sup>4</sup> White JR (2004) 27–28

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 37; Emphasis original

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 19; Romans 1–2

<sup>7</sup> White JR (2004) 30–32

<sup>8</sup> They also claim compatibility with other religions. See BioLogos Foundation (n.d.) On what grounds can one claim that the

Francis Collins of the Human Genome Project and is funded by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.<sup>9,10</sup> On August 16, 2010 R. Albert Mohler (president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) posted an article addressing BioLogos' rejection of biblical inerrancy.<sup>11</sup> A series of articles followed at both websites.

Although BioLogos affirms that "the Bible is the inspired Word of God,"<sup>9</sup> much of the material at the BioLogos website contains statements which do not fit with this claim. For example, Karl Giberson cites Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* and attacks the Old Testament description of God as a "tyrannical anthropomorphic deity" who commanded "genocidal rampages." He concludes: "But who believes in this deity any more, besides those same fundamentalists who think the earth is 10,000 years old? Modern theology has moved past this view of God."<sup>12</sup> When science and the Bible conflict, he concludes the following:

I am happy to concede that science does indeed trump religious truth about the natural world. Galileo and Darwin showed this only too clearly, even if it is completely lost on Ken Ham and Al Mohler. If it were not for science we would still be living on a globe we thought was flat, stationary, and 6000 years old. Kudos to science for trumping religion on those claims.<sup>13</sup>

Kenton Sparks argues that Jesus and the human authors of the Bible were finite beings and therefore made mistakes.<sup>14</sup> Just as creation is tainted by human sin, so is the Bible, and both need redemption.<sup>15</sup> Sparks argues that Christian theology "must be ready to move beyond Scripture in some cases."<sup>16</sup> Sparks also says that in the

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Christian God is the creator? <<http://www.biologos.org/questions/biologos-and-christianity>> Accessed 2011 Mar 5

<sup>9</sup> BioLogos Foundation (n.d.) About the BioLogos Foundation <<http://www.biologos.org/about>> Accessed 2011 Mar 5

<sup>10</sup> Cosner L (2010 Sep 7) Biologos evolutionary syncretism: a critique of Biologos <<http://creation.com/biologos-evolutionary-syncretism>> Accessed 2011 Mar 5

<sup>11</sup> Mohler RA (2010 Aug 16) The Inerrancy of Scripture: The Fifty Years War . . . and Counting <<http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/08/16/the-inerrancy-of-scripture-the-fifty-years-war-and-counting>> Accessed 2011 Mar 5

<sup>12</sup> Giberson K (2010 Oct 25) Exposing the Straw Men of New Atheism: Part Five <<http://www.biologos.org/blog/exposing-the-straw-men-of-new-atheism-part-five>> Accessed 2011 Mar 5

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1. Giberson also says that Ham and Mohler paddle in an "intellectual backwater."

<sup>14</sup> Sparks K (n.d.) After Inerrancy: Evangelicals and the Bible in a Postmodern Age, <[http://www.biologos.org/uploads/static-content/sparks\\_scholarly\\_essay.pdf](http://www.biologos.org/uploads/static-content/sparks_scholarly_essay.pdf)>, 7-10, Accessed 2011 Mar 5

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 11-13

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 16

past evangelicals could deny "new theories" (evolution) because the evidence was thin, but "we've now crossed an evidential threshold that makes it intellectually unsuitable to defend some of the standard dogmas of the conservative Evangelical tradition."<sup>17</sup> He argues that we should "never pit 'God's word in Scripture' against 'human science'" but instead should listen to what God is saying through both the "sacred but broken Bible" and "his beautiful but broken world."<sup>16</sup> He concludes by saying, "So this is our situation: we derive our theology from the broken voices of Scripture, tradition and cosmos, and with the mysterious help of the Spirit. Good theology pursues the truth by listening to and coherently ordering all of these important voices."<sup>18</sup>

Which "standard dogmas" must allegedly be abandoned? BioLogos argues that the flood in Genesis was merely a local flood.<sup>19</sup> They question the historicity of a literal Adam and Eve<sup>20,21,22</sup> and the existence of a literal tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>23</sup> Those at BioLogos who do affirm a historical Adam and Eve argue that human physical death existed before the Fall and that the Fall only brought spiritual death.<sup>24,25</sup>

The most significant of these is to question the historicity of Adam and Eve and/or a literal Fall that resulted in both physical and spiritual death. What does the Bible teach? First, Genesis 3:19 indicates that physical death was a consequence of the Fall: "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." In 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 Paul explains that just as death came into the world through Adam, so in Christ

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 1

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 18

<sup>19</sup> BioLogos Foundation (n.d.) How should we interpret the Genesis flood account? <<http://www.biologos.org/questions/genesis-flood>> Accessed 2011 Mar 5

<sup>20</sup> BioLogos Foundation (n.d.) How does the Fall fit into evolutionary history? Were Adam and Eve historical figures? <<http://www.biologos.org/questions/evolution-and-the-fall>> Accessed 2011 Mar 5

<sup>21</sup> Enns P (2010 Apr 6) Creating Adam <<http://www.biologos.org/blog/creating-adam>> Accessed 2011 Mar 6

<sup>22</sup> Tremper L (2010 Aug 14) Is There a Historical Adam? <<http://www.biologos.org/blog/is-there-a-historical-adam>> Accessed 2011 Mar 5

<sup>23</sup> BioLogos Foundation (n.d.) At what point in the evolutionary process did humans attain the "Image of God"? <<http://www.biologos.org/questions/image-of-god>> Accessed 2011 Mar 5

<sup>24</sup> BioLogos Foundation (n.d.) Was there death before the Fall? <<http://www.biologos.org/questions/death-before-the-fall>> Accessed 2011 Mar 5

<sup>25</sup> Tim Keller (2009 Nov) Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople, 10-12 <[http://www.biologos.org/uploads/projects/Keller\\_white\\_paper.pdf](http://www.biologos.org/uploads/projects/Keller_white_paper.pdf)> Accessed 2011 Mar 6

we can receive life. In verses 12-19 he makes clear that this includes physical death and resurrection by adding that if the dead, and Christ, are not raised from the dead then we are still in our sins, and our faith is futile. Second, in Romans 5:12-21 Paul draws another comparison between Adam and Christ. Just as death and condemnation entered the world through one man (Adam), so through one man (Christ) came life and justification.

Daniel Kirk argues that Paul's argument does not depend on a historical Adam who introduced corruption into the human heart,<sup>26</sup> but that does not match a plain reading of Romans 5:12. In Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 Paul presents Adam's action as the basis for Christ's atoning work. If there was no literal Adam and no literal Fall, then Paul's argument collapses, and the atoning work of Christ loses its foundation. As Mohler notes, "Evolution presents a direct challenge to the entire story-line of the Bible."<sup>27,28</sup>

The attempt to reconcile evolution and the Bible requires that a person not read the Bible on its own terms but instead filter it through modern theories.<sup>29</sup> Jamin Hubner explains it well:

Beginning with the assumption that man came from animals, we interpret Genesis. Beginning with the assumption that Darwin's theory of common ancestry is true, we interpret Paul's letter and the gospels. Beginning with the assumption that the first human being could not have possibly been made directly by God's creative act, we interpret...all of Scripture, all of Christian theology, and consequently, we shake the very fabric of the Christian worldview.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Kirk D (2010 Apr 22) The Historical Adam and the Saving Christ, Part 2: Jesus as the One Man <<http://www.biologos.org/blog/the-historical-adam-and-the-saving-christ-part-2-jesus-as-the-one-man>> Accessed 2011 Mar 12

<sup>27</sup> Mohler RA (2009 Feb 16) Christianity and Evolution – Seeing the Problem <http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/02/16/christianity-and-evolution-seeing-the-problem>> Accessed 2011 Mar 8

<sup>28</sup> Mohler RA (2011 Feb 1) Creation vs. Evolution – The New Shape of the Debate <<http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/02/01/creation-vs-evolution-the-new-shape-of-the-debate>> Accessed 2011 Mar 9

<sup>29</sup> Sprinkle M (2010 Nov 8) Come and See <<http://www.biologos.org/blog/come-and-see>> Accessed 2011 Mar 8; Mohler's response: Mohler RA (2010 Nov 8) No Pass from Theological Responsibility—The BioLogos Conundrum <<http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/11/09/no-pass-from-theological-responsibility-the-biologos-conundrum>> Accessed 2011 Mar 9; James White's response: White JR (2010 Mar 9) Biologos and Doug Pagitt: an Interesting Comparison <<http://www.aomin.org/aoblog/index.php?itemid=4272>> Accessed 2011 Mar 9

<sup>30</sup> Hubner J (2010 Apr 28) A Critique of BioLogos' "Paul's Adam -1" <<http://www.realapologetics.org/blog/2010/>

As White explains, "How one views Scripture will determine the rest of one's theology. There is no more basic issue."<sup>31</sup> Questioning the accuracy of the Bible on matters of origins has serious consequences. Sparks warns that evangelicalism is being intellectually marginalized by its commitment to inerrancy,<sup>Error! Bookmark not defined.</sup> but it is "an absurdity to say you trust Christ to raise you from the dead but do not trust His own view of the Scriptures."<sup>32</sup> White also notes that "the certainty of the revelation is *foundational* to the proclamation of the gospel. Without inspiration and inerrancy, the gospel of power becomes a suggestion of weakness."<sup>33</sup>

Christians must remember that the Bible is the only "God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16) revelation from God. The attempt to join evolution and the Bible creates serious problems that cannot be eliminated, including issues essential to the nature of salvation. These results demonstrate what can happen when the current opinions of men, whether they are church tradition or currently popular scientific theory, are allowed to trump the written words of God. They will not always produce an outright rejection of the Bible, but they can easily produce attempts to force the Bible into the mold of currently popular views with elements of the biblical worldview being modified or tossed out in the process. ❧

## COMING EVENTS

**Thursday, April 14, 7:00 P.M., Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 631**  
Henry Middleton, PhD will give an overview of the doctrine of Scripture, including authority, inerrancy, infallibility, sufficiency, inspiration, and canonicity. Dr. Middleton will talk about the Reformation doctrine of "scripture alone" and show some key clips from the Luther movie (the 2003 version). He will also comment on how BioLogos gives Scripture second place in importance.

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04/28/a-critique-of-biologos-pauls-adam-1> Accessed 2011 Mar 7. Ellipses original. This is part one of a seven part response to BioLogos.

<sup>31</sup> White JR (2004) 41

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 76

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 77. Emphasis original

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