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## In the Beginning ... Creation

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### ABSTRACT

The creative activities involved all members of the Godhead. A possible delineation of their roles was investigated. Further, a rationale for creation was sought given knowledge that the progenitors of the race would betray their trust.

The historical-grammatical approach was used in textual understanding. The Genesis account was compared with parallel passages and this was combined with variants in word meanings and was contrasted with the message conveyed by other passages. An understanding of God's character and the defining features of His government were used to answer the second research question.

Accounts given by the apostle John and those recorded at Jesus' baptism and at the pre-advent judgment described by Daniel suggests that at creation the Father spoke, the Son initiated the creative acts, and the Spirit performed an organizational and activating role. The cooperative activities of the members of the Godhead illustrate the reality of the operation of love (agape type) from the beginning. Further analysis showed that the creation of this world represented an expression and the triumph of love in the face of knowledge that humans would fail in the trust given them. Love also explains how the foundational elements of God's character and government fit together—concepts of righteousness, justice, truth, mercy and faithfulness—and hence illustrates how human salvation (recreation) is possible.

Creation is seen as a planned event dashing the claims of evolution that existence preceded essence. The existence of a widespread sense of right and wrong, of human sexuality, of the amazing analytical and creative capacity of the human mind speaks that essence preceded existence. This is confirmed by the day to day experiences of those who permit God to undertake the recreation of His character image in them. Further research on the questions raised is merited.

**Keywords:** Godhead Cooperation, Agape, Existence And Essence, Origin Of Morality, Image Of God

### INTRODUCTION

Genesis commences with the familiar words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1, NKJV). There is no indication in this verse when creation occurred, how

many individuals were involved in the event, whether there was an audience of onlookers, or how difficult the task was. It is true that some of these details are given elsewhere.

The introduction to the earth creation event is sudden and the words used are authoritative. The reader is left to wonder about many details, what happened before the event, and especially about the nature of God. Does the word “God” imply a force, a person or persons, or some unique phenomenon? Within the realms of Christianity there are contrary views and outside it a number of explanations have been offered.

Our primary aim is to tease out some answers to two questions. The first relates to the Genesis account and whether it is possible to identify the roles undertaken by all the members of the Godhead. The article also seeks to provide a rationale for the earth creation events when the adverse outcome of this act was known by God. The implications of these findings are discussed.

## **METHODS**

In this study the historical-grammatical approach was adopted. Comparative analysis of joint undertakings by the members of the Godhead, other than at creation, was undertaken. This was combined with word analysis and statements made by various Bible writers subsequent to creation that might improve our understanding regarding the first research question.

The second question was approached from the perspective that an understanding of God’s character and the features defining His government would point to possible answers to the question as to why God proceeded with creation knowing the adverse outcomes that would follow. In pursuing this objective, a basic assumption adopted was that God’s recreation offer to humanity regarding their moral nature would show some parallels with the creation event.

Understandings suggested as a consequence of these investigations are analysed with respect to a reasonable response to the theory of origins through evolutionary processes. The response given encompasses views from the recent literature held by atheistic and theistic proponents of the evolutionary theory

## **RESULTS**

### **Creation Activities**

The Genesis account leaves no doubt that God is to be viewed as a single entity but consisting of more than one individual. Verse 26 uses the Hebrew word Elohim that is correctly translated as “Us” to refer to God. And further God indicated that the aim was to

make humans in “Our image.” This verse also conveys the information that a certain similarity exists between humans and God encompassing mental, social, spiritual, and physical features. However, this cannot be pressed beyond the superficial level indicated.

A parallel account of creation, at the level we are considering, is found in John’s gospel. It too commences with the words “In the beginning” (John 1:1). There we find that the Word (Christ), full of grace and truth, was the instrument through which earth creation took place (John 1:3; cf. Heb. 1:2). Combining this with Genesis 1:2 that speaks of the Spirit, *rachaph*, or the One who has the power to “flutter, move, or shake” (Strong, 2007), gives us some indication of the assisting role of the Spirit in the transformation of the “unsightly and unfurnished” (verse 2, Septuagint) elements of the primeval deep. Certainly, an active role is indicated as the application of even the mildest form of the word *rachaph* is used to describe an eagle leaving its nest to hover or flutter protectively over its young (Deut. 32:11).

A highly coordinated operation appears to have taken place at creation involving the members of the Godhead. A glimpse of this is seen in Jesus’ words on the works He did on earth at His first coming. These were done, He said, “in My Father’s name” for the “Father has sent me” (John 5:36; 10:25). This allows the suggestion to be made that at creation the Father spoke, the Son actively participated in all aspects of the events (John 1:3; Heb. 1:2), and the Spirit assisted in an organizational and energizing manner. This type of beautiful cooperation and division of responsibility is reflected in the incarnation as well as the judgment. At Jesus’ baptism the Father spoke words of affirmation and the Spirit alighted upon Him (Matt. 3:16–17). In the judgment, the Father presides (Dan. 7:9), the Son decides (Matt. 10:32), and the Spirit guides (John 16:13; Hardinge, 1991, p. 542).

Going back to the creation account, it appears that the words “God said” (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24) can be attributed to the Father. The doing was through Christ with the Spirit involved. This is expressed in such terms as “there was light” and “it was so” (e.g., vs. 3, 9).

Considering the account of the creation of human beings, there are some distinct variations. The essence of human beings was in the Creator’s mind before he was brought into existence, as is clearly indicated in the words “Let Us make man in Our image” (Gen. 1:26). There was a joint plan. Following the pattern already outlined, the Father could be held responsible for the detailed planning, scheduling, and announcement. The Son would have formed the clay model, and the Spirit would no doubt have breathed into the well-formed nostrils (Gen. 2:7). All members of the Godhead were involved in creation allowing Job to say, “The Spirit of the

Lord has made me” (Job 33:4) and the psalmist added, “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created” (Ps. 104:30).

The very human way of compartmentalizing labour may be a little short of the mark. A fuller understanding of the cooperative aspects of God’s activities becomes evident when we look at the most fundamental characteristic associated with God—love.

### **Agape Was before Creation**

God is love (1 John 4:8). This is one of the most powerful statements in the Bible, for it represents unselfish love in its highest form as having its origin in God. It has the following characteristics: spontaneous, indifferent to value, creative, and the initiator of fellowship (Nygren, 1982, pp. 75–81).

It is a truism that the expression of unselfish love logically requires the participation of more than one individual. This does not pose a difficulty as the Godhead consists of three individuals who existed from eternity. Hence, agape is an eternal principle.

The concept of sharing associated with agape was seen at creation when God expanded His circle of intelligent agents with whom He wished to love, fellowship, and the splendours and joys of His creative works. The reason for creating of human beings was in the mind of God before they were made. This is doubly certain for Adam and Eve were given a brief of responsibilities on the day of their creation (Gen. 1:28; 2:15).

Agape can explain why God created both angels and human beings when He knew that some failures would be experienced. Moving ahead with the planned creation of the earth, bearing in mind Lucifer’s unrighteous acts, represented a triumph of love and, in fact, ultimately would call forth its greatest expression in the sufferings of Christ. Failure to proceed with the creation of the earth would have represented an act of weakness acknowledging the power of unrighteousness. It was a problem, a temptation in a sense, posed by Lucifer’s rebellion. Would threats and adverse possibilities prevent planned action? In the light of human experience, failure to proceed would have placed God at a lower level of performance than shown by Daniel, Peter and John (Dan. 6:10; Acts 4:18–21). God was determined to extend His circle of love. Hence, He created humans, as male and female, to enter into a loving relationship in marriage and for both to maintain and deepen their relationship with Him, as indicated by the institution of the Sabbath.

### **Foundational Aspects of God’s Character and Government**

Agape type love explains how the concepts of righteousness, justice, truth, mercy and faithfulness fit together, they being foundational elements of God’s character and

government. The creation of the human race in the image of God also explains why certain mental, social and spiritual aspects are held by humans.

Selected Old Testament prophets give us some leading ideas in this area that require a little teasing apart. The psalmist proclaimed: “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face” (Ps. 89:14). In a parallel statement, the prophet Hosea says: “I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness” (Hosea 2:19–20). What are we to make of these statements?

First, the concept of righteousness is vital to our understanding of God. There is built into the human mind a sense of right and wrong, a moral compass. The great theologian C. S. Lewis analysed the thoughts and maxims of various ethnic groups and cultures through ancient times (Table 1). He found a remarkable agreement concerning the approaches to public and private responsibilities that ensure the smooth running of a family or society (Lewis, 1965, pp. 97–121).

**Table 1. Examples of Moral Understandings from Ancient Cultures**

<b>Law of righteousness</b>
“He who is cruel and calumnious has the character of a cat” (Hindu).
“Speak kindness ... show goodwill” (Babylonian).
“What good man regards any misfortune as no concern of his?” (Roman).
“Love your neighbour” “You shall love him [the stranger] as yourself” (Ancient Hebrew; Lev. 19:18, 34).
<b>Law of justice</b>
“Has he drawn false boundaries?” (Babylonian list of sins).
“Choose loss rather than shameful gain” (Greek).
“I have not stolen” (Ancient Egyptian, confessions of a righteous soul).
“You shall not steal” (Ancient Jewish; Exod. 20:15).
<b>Law of mercy</b>
“They never desert the sick” (Related of the Australian aborigine–Dalebura tribe)
“You will see them take care of ... widows, orphans, and old men, never reproaching them” (Related of the Redskin)
“I have given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, a ferry boat to the boatless” (Ancient Egyptian).
“[When you] forget a sheaf in the field [during harvesting] you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow” (Ancient Jewish; Deut. 24:19).
<b>Law of truth</b>
“A sacrifice is obliterated by a lie and the merit of alms by an act of fraud” (Hindu).
“I have not spoken falsehood” (Ancient Egyptian, confessions of a righteous soul).
“I sought no trickery nor swore false oaths” (Anglo-Saxon).
“Anything is better than trickery” (Old Norse).
“Remove falsehood and lies far from me” (Ancient Jewish; Prov. 30:8).

The apostle Paul commented on his own observations and those conveyed through the gift of inspiration saying that the conscience excuses or accuses irrespective of whether we have given allegiance to God or not (Rom. 2:14–16). In other words, an understanding of moral principles is part and parcel of the human experience.

These moral sensitivities are God-placed. Our text in Psalm 89 places the first emphasis on the righteousness or moral goodness of God. Such goodness is expressed in thinking, saying, doing, and also is reflected in the principles enunciated in the Bible. It becomes evident when looking at some of these features that the Bible consistently uses the descriptive terms righteous, truth, abundant mercy, and righteous and true judgments to describe God’s ways (Table 2). Justice can be delivered only by a morally sound, law-abiding government or judiciary. We can be thankful that on account of God’s moral goodness, it follows that just judgments will be given and that we have the promise of salvation.

**Table 2. The fundamental Characteristics of God and How These Are Displayed in Various Activities**

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Details relating to the features</b>	<b>Text</b>
Righteousness/Truth		
Law/Commandments	Is the truth. Represent eternal righteousness	Ps. 119:142, 151
Testimonies	Are righteous and good for instruction in right doing. Represent truth.	Ps. 119:138; John 17:17; 2 Cor. 6:7; 2 Tim. 3:16
Truth	Abundant, endures to all generations, forever	Exod. 34:6; Ps. 86:15; 100:5; 117:2
Ways	Are righteous	Ps. 145:17
Works	Righteous and gracious. Perfect	Deut. 32:4; Ps. 145:17; Dan. 9:14
Mercy/Justice/Judgments		
Mercy/Forgiveness	God in His righteousness stands ready to forgive sins for all those who ask. He is longsuffering, full of compassion, gracious, and expressing abundant mercy.	Exod. 34:6; Ps. 86:15; Rom. 3:25–26
Judgments	Righteous and true	Ps. 96:13; Rom. 2:5; 2 Thess. 1:5; Rev. 16:7; 19:2

Truth and mercy cannot be separated from righteousness and justice. We well remember that Jesus said to His disciples some time before His crucifixion, “I am the way, the truth, and the

life” (John 14:6). The accuracy and meaning of this statement was soon to be demonstrated in His death, resurrection, and ascension. These events were predicted (Dan. 9:24–27), which, in the light of history, moves Jesus’ claim to the category of certainty. The promise first made in Eden by Christ (Gen. 3:15) was realized. He was shown to be both truthful and faithful.

Jesus is the way to life, our propitiation or mercy seat (Rom. 3:25). The sacrificial system associated with the earthly sanctuary was created around the concept of a Substitute dying for the repentant sinner’s misdeeds. The blood of the victim was sprinkled on the mercy seat on the judgment high day of the religious year, signifying that the just demands of heaven’s principles, expressed in the Ten Commandments held beneath it in the ark, were satisfied (shown to be righteous). In the antitypical act at the cross, justice was sent effectively to victory (Matt. 12:20, NKJV). These symbolic acts in the earthly sanctuary and their fulfilment in Christ’s life and death establish the faithfulness of God, as commented on by the prophet Hosea (2:19–20). They also show the reality and meaning of agape.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Existence Precedes Essence?**

Existential theory holds that existence preceded essence or intended purpose. This thesis was argued strongly by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), a self-proclaimed atheist. In this view there is no ultimate design set by a superior being that necessitates any particular nature displayed by humans. This means there is no purpose for human existence. Humans create value and meaning for themselves. Every individual will choose their own essence through their concept of what they are, what they purpose to be, and through their choices and actions. Humans fashion themselves, there are no external referents. Humans create “an image of man such as he believes he ought to be.” In this view we fashion “our own image” and our own morality (Sartre, 1960, pp. 222–311). Everything is relative.

The existential thoughts of Sartre intersect at some levels with those proposed by evolutionists. Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution indicates that humans descended from animal ancestors, there being no fundamental differences. Any differences noted were, in his opinion, simply differences in degree. The argument put forward was that where well-developed social instincts (pleasure, bonds of sympathy) were present then when the intellectual powers reached the level found in humans, the inevitable result would be the acquisition of moral sensitivities. The social consequences of decisions can be weighed by intelligent animals, so the course of action taken is guided by the desire to experience

pleasure or by a disinterest in momentary pain for some individual benefit. A moral sense arises when there is a desire to enhance the pleasure or good of others and relieve their discomfort. For Darwin, morality arose from animal instincts. This, he suggested, could result easily in the generation of the golden rule of biblical fame (Pennock, 1995).

Since the existence of human nature is considered to have arisen by accident, it has no long term existence in a particular form. The theory gives no solid grounds for an absolute morality, for a moral or immoral action can be judged only on the basis of the relevant pathway of descent. In support of this idea, Darwin believed that different human races possessed different moral codes; in fact, he thought that people were generally immoral (Pennock, 1995). Morality for modern Darwinians arose from the foundation of instinct and impulse when guided by conscious considerations about the survival advantages accruing to the group (Hodgson, 2013).

Aspects of Darwin's views are unacceptable to modern day evolutionists who regard his theory of moral development as somewhat naïve (Pennock, 1995). However, the fact remains that all who hold to the theory accept that humans were derived from lesser animals. The arguments for the emergence of morality have become more sophisticated and now these are based on considerations of cooperation and altruism (FitzPatrick, 2017). Richard Dawkins has summarized the best arguments available. The pathways by which morality arose are conceived to operate mainly through kin altruism (helping one's genetic kin) and reciprocal altruism, which involves doing a favour for those who favour you. In kin altruism, animals in a group tend to protect not only their own but those of their relatives. This means that the gene frequency regulating altruistic qualities is increased. Thus the building block of morality (altruism) is strengthened, or so the argument goes (Dawkins, 2007, pp. 247–248). In evolutionary theory it is also obvious that the argument is that existence precedes essence.

Atheists find no ultimate purpose for evolution, which constitutes a significant issue for believers in theistic evolution. One argument forwarded by the latter group is that the postulated increase in diversity and complexity over geological time indicates some type of purpose. These enthusiasts may point to the evolution of humans as the end result of a chaotic, brutal process as somehow revealing a generous, loving power behind the process. This power, it is explained, has an ultimate end in view, namely, a new creation where there is no pain, disease, or death (Bell, 2019). However, the search for a deeper purpose along these lines end up denying the substance of salvation from sin and its effects through the merits of Christ.



None of this is consistent with Christian thought. One of the first casualties in a theistic evolutionary worldview is the reliability of Scripture as a source of knowledge. Discounted are the statements that God's creative works "were finished" and "very good" (Gen. 1:31; 2:1). Christ's affirmation of the reliability of God's word and of the creation story is cast aside (Matt. 4:4; 19:4–6). Since the creation of Adam and Eve, male and female, is considered a myth, there is an immediate issue in attempting to explain why and how sexual reproduction evolved. Why would asexual reproduction be discontinued in favour of sexual reproduction where only half of the population could now give rise to progeny? A more substantial issue is the origin of morality and with it the concept of right and wrong. Some have sought to short circuit this problem by claiming God inserted an immortal, spiritual soul into evolving man sometime in the past (John Paul II, 1997). This idea is rejected as anti-evolutionary by atheists (Dawkins, 1986, pp. 398–399). Furthermore, for those not believing in a soul, such as Seventh-day Adventists, the issue remains.

The difficulties are multiplied for God is now logically responsible for evil, the Fall did not occur, sin was not committed, as there was no ultimate moral standard, hence making the need of a Saviour surely superfluous. Christ came, in the biblical view, to pay the just penalty for sin in order to satisfy the demands of justice. His sacrifice enabled Him to forgive our sins (justify) and to recreate the image of God in us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (sanctify).

The very foundations of the gospel message are destroyed by entertaining the idea of a God who created through the evolutionary process. The declaration made by the apostle Paul that "the invisible attributes [of God] are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom. 1:20), cannot be seen at all clearly if the creation record is dismissed. The foundations of God's throne, righteousness and justice, cannot be reconciled with truth and mercy or with faithfulness. Hence, the invitation to enter into God's rest and experience His love is imperfectly understood.

We can state with conviction from the biblical record that essence preceded existence as God is characterized by an emphasis on relationships (an outcome of agape) and He made humans in His image to display creativity and purposeful activity. This is abundantly confirmed in the writings of Ellen White (1899; 1971, p. 10).

### **Implications of a God of Love Creating in His Image**

Our philosophy of origins is, of necessity, influenced by our concept of agape and of being made in God's moral image. As noted already, the most definitive display of agape type love

was through Christ’s sacrifice. Four main characteristics of this love are noted in Table 3. The first column highlights the characteristics particularly applicable to that event, together with some associated characteristics. God’s promise to implement a rescue plan is seen in the Genesis account to be spontaneous. He offers salvation to all who will accept; His act gives value to humans. God is creative in that He has promised to restore the moral image in all who accept His plan to save. This is accomplished through fellowship with Him, with a highlighted emphasis on the Sabbath.

At creation features 1, 3, and 4 also were in full display. Making Adam from the lowly dust illustrates feature 2. God breathed into the nostrils of the clay model, hence giving the object value for the inanimate artistic creation was now a responding, thinking individual, Adam. We notice that on day 7 of creation the Sabbath was made for the benefit of humanity (Gen. 2:2–3; Mark 2:27). This was when God initiated extended fellowship with the progenitors of the race. After sin entered, this period of fellowship took on the deep meaning of resting in faith in the salvation Christ purchased for us (Heb. 4:4–7). The Sabbath is a time for special spiritual renewal.

Table 3. **The distinctive features of *agape* and associated qualities displayed at creation and available for re-creation**

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Re-creation</b>	<b>Creation</b>
1. Spontaneous	Gen. 3:15; 1 Pet. 1:20	Gen. 1:1
2. Indifferent to value	John 3:16; Rev. 22:17	Gen. 1:7
3. Creative (God)	Ps. 51:10; Phil. 1:6	Gen. 1:26; Ps. 148:5
Gift of procreation (humans)	Matt. 22:30	Gen. 1:28
Gift of creative thought (humans)	2 Chron. 2:13–14; Dan. 1:17	Gen. 2:19
4. Initiator of fellowship (God)	Exod. 25:8; Lev. 26:11–12; Matt. 1:23; Rev. 21:3	Gen. 2:19; 3:8–10
Moral image made/enabled	Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:23; 2 Thess. 2:13	Gen. 1:26–27
Fellowship of work	Matt. 28:19–20; Eph. 2:10	Gen. 2:15
Fellowship of rest	Heb. 4:1–7; Rev. 12:17	Gen. 2:2–3; cf. Mark 2:27; Heb. 4:3–4

The moral image of God given to humans at the beginning was marred by sin. In order to be given eternal life, our moral image needs to be recreated. This is a faith transaction whereby the sinner claims Christ’s righteousness to cover all deficiencies. The faith-fellowship experience is likened in the Bible to a walk with God and gives the participant a transformed way of thinking (Rom. 8:5, 14; 12:1–2; Col. 3:9–10).

God took the initiative in salvation, announcing to the despairing couple in Eden that He had a plan for their rescue. The promise of salvation is for all, but must be accepted. When the invitation is grasped with sincerity, the sinner is justified, declared free from sin (Isa. 55:7; 1 John 1:9). It is then that the walk with God commences and the life aims and habits are changed to accord more fully with God's ideal (Rom. 8:1–4).

Acceptance of the literal meaning of Genesis 1 to 3 highlights some critical issues as illustrated in Table 2. The gift of human sexuality and the instruction to procreate was from the beginning (Gen. 1:28; 2:21–24). The gift of higher level reasoning and creative thought and purposeful activity also came with the breath of life (Gen. 2:15–17, 19, 23).

Humans were set apart from all other created life forms by being made in God's moral image. This reality is clearly indicated by the moral restriction placed in the progenitors of the race to test their loyalty (Gen. 2:16–17; cf. Gen. 3:1–3, 6–8). A further consequence of being made in the image of God was that humans possess a spiritual dimension, something that no other creature has. The desire to worship, the acknowledgement of higher powers, of an unseen world is so pervasive across cultures and throughout history that this feature must be acknowledged. Indeed, the United Nations has incorporated a spiritual dimension in its statement on the contributors to health and well-being. Interestingly, the addition of the dimension of spirituality is for the purposes of "realization of one's full potential, meaning and purpose of life and fulfilment from within." This is put forward as a "self-evolution" process so as to develop love, compassion and equanimity as a substitute for their polar opposites (Dhar, Chaturvedi, & Nandan, 2013).

The second strand of this UN initiative runs counter to all of human knowledge. History shows that the religions of the ancients based on the worship of nature and of inanimate objects and celestial gods did not transform their thinking positively so that they became more loving or compassionate. In reality, the pretensions of nominal believers in God deliver no better results. In the beginning God placed in the human mind the principle of love, the desire to exercise compassion and treat all with equanimity. The mind-structures were shattered when sin entered, but God's salvation plan promises to re-establish them in abundant measure. At creation darkness disappeared at the voice of God. If we and others choose not to hear His voice today, is it possible that darkness of mind will be the result? This can occur through the gradual releasing of our confidence in the word of God. May this not happen to any of us.

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