

The Earth was Created Last Friday Night

by

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The Earth was created last Friday.

Last Friday night at midnight, to be precise. God waved his wand a single time, and did it all, instantly. All of the plants and animals were made simultaneously; all of the books and phonograph records and magnetic tapes and photo albums and diaries and newspapers and old letters and even memories. Nothing really existed before last Friday night.

Do you believe this hypothesis? It really doesn't matter a great deal, scientifically, whether you believe it or reject it: you cannot prove that it is wrong. God, in his ability to foresee and to counter every human approach to the problem, built into his creation whatever is necessary to make you believe that the Earth is much older than it really is. You only think that you have been here all of your life, because you were created that way. You only think that your grandparents told you about the "olden days" because you were created with built-in memories.

It is obvious that this hypothesis is correct, because God is an all-powerful God, and he can do anything we want him to do. In fact he created the world last Friday night.

Let me identify this hypothesis as the "Magic Wand" idea. God waved the magic wand a single time, and made it

all, instantly; and then he rested. Many people, including many Christians, accept the magic wand concept. The only quibble they raise is that the moment of creation must have pre-dated memories and books and carvings and scrolls and monuments, because we know that man made these, and that lets God out. So they shove the date of "magic wand" creation back to some earlier time - but not too much earlier. Perhaps 6000 years ago will do nicely, including a month (would you prefer October?) and a day of the week (why not Friday or Saturday?). As anthropologists and archeologists learn more and more about early man, we either push this date back, grudgingly, a tiny bit (would 8000 years ago be better?) or we attack the character and competence of the scientists who are doing the work.

The important thing is to have a "magic wand" creation, as close to the present as possible, but nevertheless maintaining a rigid wall between the important things which man has done (such as making history) and the lesser things which God did previously (such as creating the universe).

If we are going to adopt the "magic wand" model, we really should make it last Friday night, and be completely honest about who has carried on the important activity.

However, if you don't like the "magic wand" hypothesis, there are other possibilities. Let's name a few of them. No. 2 is the "Medieval Craftsman" model. In this theory, God made each item, one at a time, but each was made more-or-less independently of the others, much like the legendary

toy shop which is supposed to be operated by Santa Claus at the north pole. We may streamline this concept a bit, by assuming that he made all the horses at one time (mass production), and all the oak trees at some other time, or perhaps that he made only two horses initially, and let them finish that part of the task. But even if he made only two horses, and two cows, and two chickens, and two sharks, there are millions of plant and animal species, and the "Medieval Craftsman" idea requires that he was a very busy creator.

After we examine this hypothesis a little more, it becomes clear that it isn't really very much different from the "Magic Wand" suggestion. In fact, the "Magic Wand" idea is probably better, because it isn't cluttered with a lot of silly detail that we don't understand very well. After all, there are only 518,400 seconds in six days, counting nights, or 172,800 seconds in six working days of eight hours each. To make 10 million species, or more, in that interval, requires that scores be created each second. It is not necessary to doubt God's ability to make 40 or 60 or 80 each second; but if we are going to do it this way, we may as well admit: the Earth was created last Friday night.

No. 3 is the "Great Puppetmaster" model. With this hypothesis, God made the stage, and he made all of the

puppets and all of the props, and he now pulls the strings to keep the show moving. This differs from the "Magic Wand" hypothesis primarily in a recognition that God may have had something to do with history, and it relegates "The Beginning" to a less important role. But, after we look at it more closely, we can see that it really achieves two things: First, we may as well admit that God created the world last Friday night, and Second, he has been running it ever since (which is convenient, because you can blame him when things go wrong).

No. 4 is the "Creative Designer" model. In this version, God established the rules (both physical and non-physical), and he made the raw material, and the associated energy, all in conformity with a master design. For raw material, I mean that I may select the level at which I wish to be specific: perhaps we would choose to say "the elements," in the sense of oxygen and hydrogen and carbon and iron and gold and radium. Or if we wish to be a little more sophisticated, perhaps we would choose electrons and protons and neutrons and the like. In this hypothesis, the emphasis is on the design. Here the expression "to create" means that God drew the plans, and made the energy and the materials, and set the entire scheme in motion, following the rules which he had established as he worked out the details of the design. That is, he let it operate, and develop.

Now, at last, we have a version which differs from last Friday night. And also differs from the Medieval Craftsman, and the Great Puppetmaster. Therefore we have, really, two groups of hypotheses: Last Friday Night, and the Creative Designer. The second of these is a group, also, because we can develop several different versions of it. For example, we might choose to believe, as some people have, that -- once he had set the machinery in motion--he walked away from it, and left it to develop in whatever way it would and could. Or, we might choose to believe that, once the machinery was running properly, according to his design, he turned his attention to non-mechanical matters, and particularly to that spiritual entity which we call the human soul.

Which group of hypotheses do you prefer? Last Friday Night? Or the Creative Designer? I have a very clear choice, although I am quite unable to prove that either one of them is wrong. The orderly, systematic, rational and coherent account in the first chapter of Genesis leads me to prefer the Great Designer model, which is, as far as I know, the ultimate in orderly design, systematic design, rational design, and consistent design.

In this hypothesis, we recognize some small part of the exalted position of God, well above the Medieval Craftsman, well beyond the Great Puppetmaster, far from the capricious deity who made the earth last Friday night.

Do you prefer the Magic Wand? My conception of God certainly includes an ability to wave a magic wand. But as I consider his handiwork, I believe that I get a bit closer to his nature, when I admire his design capability, than I do by imagining his ability to carve puppets.

It is my purpose now to look at some of the things which I observe, which may have a bearing on the contrast between the Magic Wand model and the Creative Designer model.

Jesus said that the rain falls on the just and the unjust (Mt. 5:45). A necessary corollary of this is that drouth affects the just and the unjust. We can, therefore, broaden the statement to say that both the presence and the absence of rainfall is noted, regardless of the religious affiliations, activities, and achievements of the people affected. This must mean that the rain falls, or fails to fall, equally, on those who pray, and those who do not pray. This must even apply to people who are praying for rain, regardless of the fervor or length of their prayers. This is quite a chain of logic, but every bit of it is covered by the original statement.

There must be an opposite side to this remarkable bit of insight. If the rain falls on the just and the unjust, if the rain falls on the praying and the non-praying, if the drouth affects devout Christians and obvious hypocrits, all alike, then there must be some

other method for systematizing our observations of rainfall. We have been told, quite clearly, that we cannot correlate precipitation with righteousness, justice, sincerity, prayer depth, Christianity, or any of the other items in our list of what makes a "good" person.

If none of these factors control rainfall, then we might turn to an observation of physical processes in the atmosphere. In this case, we find a one-to-one correlation. We must not say, at this point, that we cannot predict the weather, and therefore that we do not know anything about it. The atmosphere is a very complicated machine, having an energy source and a rigorous set of rules by which it operates. Our difficulty in predicting the weather stems from the fact that the system is so fantastically complicated that we can't even study it, carefully, in adequate detail, over a large enough area. But we can study the various components of the system in great detail, and its various parts can be duplicated successfully in the laboratory.

The uncertainties that prevent highly precise weather forecasts must not be extrapolated to the suggestion that rainfall is non-mechanistic. "The rain falls on the just and the unjust." That is a perfectly good statement, and quite intelligible to anyone who cares to examine it. It can be reworded, however. We might try: "Rainfall is the product of the operation of a certain physico-chemical system, rigorously controlled by specific processes and



relationships." Does the second add any insight? Perhaps not. "The rain falls on the just and the unjust."

From this statement, alone, we may draw a doctrine of the mechanistic nature of our universe. This doctrine is not in agreement with the concept of the Great Puppetmaster in the sky, who pulls strings here and there to keep his puppets operational.

"The rain falls on the just and the unjust." Perhaps this is an exception, which must not be applied to the real world. However, Jesus also said that falling rocks and mortar, in a construction disaster, have nothing to do with the personalities or religious standings of the victims (Lk. 13:4). There is a necessary corollary here, also. It is as follows: Not being injured or killed in a construction disaster has nothing to do with one's faith or prayer life.

Construction disasters operate according to certain mechanical principles. The most fundamental principle, here, is the "law" of gravity. This law can be written in rigorous algebraic form. There are no known exceptions. A simple statement of the law is that a heavy object placed near a planet, without mechanical support, will fall toward the planet. When we fly in an airplane, we combine the law of gravity with certain other principles in such a way that we appear to be unsupported. However, we do not violate the law, in any way at all; the system still

continues to operate in a predictable and perfectly regular way; and we pay a tremendous price for the combination of principles which we have developed. Flying is not an exception to the law of gravity; without the law of gravity we would not be able to fly.

Levitation -- the ability to fly, as an individual, or to lift a physical body, without support or contact or expenditure of energy -- has never been demonstrated a single time. It would be a violation of the law of gravity, but nobody has succeeded in showing that we can actually do it.

Therefore we build scaffolding, of one kind or another, so that we can work with the law of gravity -- which continues to operate perfectly -- in the erection of a building. If the scaffolding collapses, we immediately have an investigation to see what mistake was made, such as using inadequate materials, or connecting them in an unsatisfactory manner, or overloading the structure. No government agency ever carries out an investigation to see if somebody forgot to pray. The reason for this is simple, and basically we understand it very well: God's mechanical system operates according to fixed principles, not in response to prayer or demonstrations of righteousness.

"The rain falls on the just and the unjust; and faulty scaffolding falls on the just and the unjust;....."

We live in a systematic, orderly, rational, principled

world. Therefore we can reason that it was created in a systematic, orderly, rational, principled way.

Paul wrote (Ro. 1:19-20) that we can learn about God by studying the world which he created. If that creation is a thing of whimsy, without rigorous physical (or mechanical) principles, then we can learn only that God is wrapped in whimsy and irrationality. If, on the other hand, the physical creation is like a very intricate piece of machinery, that always works properly, we learn that God has been very methodical and systematic in setting it up.

It then seems important to me to point out that God must have been ultimately systematic: completely systematic: systematic beyond our ability to comprehend. The conclusion is that the Great Puppetmaster in the Sky, the Green Elf with the Magic Wand, and other such theories, must be ruled out.

God created a marvellous, detailed, absolutely reliable mechanism, and placed us in it. His design capability extended from the largest to the smallest, and from the briefest to the most durable. The entire system functions in a perfect and consistent way. It never makes mistakes. It never goes wrong. Even when we have what we call a "natural disaster," this is not a breakdown of the equipment; it is merely an orderly part of its operation; but a part that we do not like.

The idea of replicability -- that is, repeatability, with the same result -- is essential to science. But it is also important in the Bible. In Proverbs 16:11, for example, we are told that "Honest scales and balances are from the Lord." This must mean that "honest scales and balances" always give the same result, and that God approves of this condition. In other words, God approves of replicability. The opposite point of view would be that God approves of a system in which a measurement procedure gives one set of results for one group of people, and another set of results for some other group. Those who pray, for example, would get a reading (e.g., a measurement) which differs in some important way from the reading obtained by those who do not pray. But the verse in Proverbs implicitly condemns this point of view.

The rain falls on the just and the unjust, construction disasters kill the just and the unjust, and reliable measurements are the same for the just and the unjust! There is, here, no room for spiritual capriciousness, for Santa Claus wish-lists, or for divine interference merely because a Christian prays.

The velocity of light in a vacuum has been measured to be 300,000 Km/sec. Light from the sun takes 8 minutes to reach the earth, and roughly 6 hours to reach the planet Pluto. Since we are neither on the sun nor on Pluto, how can we know that? We know it because we measure it in several different places and by several

different procedures. For example, light is an electromagnetic radiation, and has the same velocity as certain other forms of this radiation, such as radio signals. We have measured radio signals from the earth to the moon, and from the moon to the earth. The velocity is 300,000 Km/sec.

The light from the closest star takes 4 years to reach us. If that star has a habitable planet, with intelligent beings on it, "Hello, are you there?" followed immediately by "Yes, I am here," would take 8 years to complete. Light crossing the galaxy in which we live-- that is, light from the most distant star within our galaxy-- takes 120,000 years to get from the other side to our edge. As we reach out beyond our galaxy, we find that stars are farther and farther away. The distances are tremendous. At 300,000 Km/sec, light travels about  $9.5 \times 10^{12}$  Km in one year. Beyond our galaxy, stars have distances so great that it is no longer convenient to use kilometers. Instead, we speak in terms of the elapsed time for the travel of light: light years, with  $9.5 \times 10^{12}$  Km (approximately) in each light year.

Light from a very distant galaxy requires 11 billion years to get to us.

We do not see these objects now. Starlight arriving at an optical telescope, or radio signals arriving at a radio telescope, give us information about the distant star,

or galaxy, at the time when the light left its source. That is, star-light which took one million years to make its journey to us is giving us information about that star one million years ago. We have no information at all about that star, today. We may choose to reason that it continues to function, more or less as it did in the past, but we have no data to support that choice.

Therefore, when you look at the stars at night, you might well ask the question: "I wonder what it all looks like, now?" Because what you see now is only the set of images created millions or billions of years ago. Each day we continue to receive additional light from these stars: they are parts of the entire system, but we see them only through a window into the distant past.

If the silverware is stolen, do you deny that a thief got it? Do you believe that there is barking, without any dog to bark? How about sunshine, without a sun? Or, taxes, without a government of any kind? That is, a result, without its cause?

In a rational world, every result has a cause. Causes fit into two categories: those we can understand, and those we do not understand. With the passage of time, we are sometimes able to move from one category to the other: that is, we are able to understand a cause which previously we did not understand. But we must not make the mistake of saying that mysterious causes do not actually exist, or

that mysterious causes are really bits of magic, or that mysterious causes represent the working of God.

When you look at the stars at night, what do you see? Light that was created recently, but for which there are no stars? A giant fraud perpetrated on us in order to make the night sky look beautiful? But the Bible tells us to consider God's handiwork. We are to take it at face value, to admire it, to study it, to contemplate it, to measure it, to think about it. We cannot consider, or contemplate, handiwork that does not exist.

Do you believe that there are real stars behind the starlight? If we accept the observations, then the universe must be billions of years old. Or do you believe that it was all created last Friday night?

The geologist is accustomed to thinking in terms of very long intervals of time. He has hundreds of thousands of radiometric dates to use as the framework for a geological calendar. On that calendar, the solar system was made about 4.5 billion years ago. This date has been obtained repeatedly from various meteorites. No rock on earth is that old; weathering processes on earth have destroyed the oldest rocks. But on our planet the oldest rocks, almost 4.0 billion years old, show a long and complex history prior to that time. We therefore conclude that the planet is about 4.5 billion radiometric years old. There are no data to contradict this conclusion. If we

are wrong -- and we may well be -- then the earth is older still.

The universe, then, appears to be about five or six times as old as the solar system. All of this long history reveals the detailed functioning of a complicated machine that never falters, never goes wrong, never makes a mistake.

We do not like to recognize this fact, and so we invent expressions like "mistake of nature," and we like to extend this kind of thinking to include those events that we call natural disasters. They are not disasters within the machinery, but only disasters within our thinking. Some people reject the "natural mistake" idea, and call these events "interventions of God." The basic logic underneath this kind of phraseology must be the idea that the system always functions within limits tolerable to us. But this is not so. The machinery is so very complicated that the interactions change from time to time, and occasionally they build up to a mighty climax. We don't like the climax, because it interferes with our happiness, and so we blame "nature gone mad." Nature has not gone mad. The equipment continues to do what it was designed to do; and we don't like the results.

Or we refer to the disaster as an "act of God." This has given many people the quaint idea that if something good has happened, we did it ourselves, but if something bad happened, God is responsible for that.



A hurricane is a very natural manifestation of certain meteorological processes. There are five or ten of them in the Middle-Atlantic-and-Middle-America region every year. They arise at specific moments, in response to specific conditions at specific places, and are not interventions on the part of God. The phrase "act of God" should not be taken as referring to God at all; these are standard manifestations of the operation of the system. But man has moved into the hurricane path in increasing numbers, and therefore he perceives of the storm as a disaster, as a calamity, as nature gone mad, as an act of God. In fact, it is not an act of God any more than is the extensive calm of some other day; and neither one is an act of God in the sense of the Great Puppetmaster in the Sky.

Hurricane Donna did a great deal of damage in 1964 and many people learned a very hard lesson. Then in a few years the lesson was forgotten, and people moved back into the threatened area. But the machinery continues to function, and part of that functioning is the generation of more hurricanes. Therefore there will be another hurricane, and it will be called a disaster, or an act of God. However, we can paraphrase the words of Jesus: A hurricane strikes the just and the unjust, and those who are injured and killed will include both the just and the unjust.

A volcano erupts and pours out impressive volumes of lava, ash, and various gases. People who are caught in the path of this material may well be killed. In A.D. 79, Vesuvius erupted and destroyed the towns of Herculaneum and Pompeii, located near its base. In 1902 Mt. Pelee, on the Caribbean island of Martinique, erupted and sent a cloud of hot gas and ash rolling down the mountainside and over the city of St. Pierre, killing about 30,000 people. Only two residents survived. In 1883 Krakatoa, near Java, exploded. Waves created by the explosion drowned 36,500 persons in nearby coastal areas. Were these people being punished by God, or is it true that volcanoes injure and kill both the just and the unjust?

Each volcano erupts at a specific time, for a specific reason. It is part of the machinery. Floods, droughts, freezes, snow storms, earthquakes, and other major events of this general nature are not punitive devices, hurled like bolts of lightning by an angry God. Volcanoes were erupting, just like they do today, long before man walked the face of the earth. Floods, glacial advances, avalanches, mud flows and forest fires were all commonplace long long before human society appeared on the planet.

These events do not seek out people; rather, people seek out the disasters. Hurricane Donna did not strike London or New York or Mexico City or Shanghai, where large numbers of people live; but rather

people moved into the path of the hurricane, months or years before the disaster struck. It is not a matter of deliberately stepping in front of a lava flow or a landslide, and thereby committing suicide. Instead, people move into disaster areas for various reasons, two of them worth mentioning here: (1) They do not know how to recognize and evaluate disaster areas, and (2) there are not any places where disasters cannot strike.

All civilizations and cultures exist on the brink of disaster, of one kind or another, all of the time. Even the Garden of Eden was a target for disaster. Adam was a farmer by trade (Gen. 2:15). He clearly showed that he was capable of ruining a good opportunity. If he had lasted long enough to drop into the bad habit of laziness, he would have faced starvation.

The so-called natural disaster is a quite ordinary aspect of the operation of the machinery. It is we who convert it into a disaster. There are neither moral nor spiritual implications in the functioning of the equipment. Nobody is being punished, or rewarded. It is only we who feel that we are being punished ("Why did this have to happen to me?").

Paul was rescued from a subterranean dungeon by a minor earthquake (Acts 16:26). Was this a miracle? Many people like to think that the great men of old collected miracles like so many bottle tops or postage stamps; that is, Paul and other giants of the past operated in a world

controlled by the Great Puppetmaster in the Sky, who pulled the strings so that certain results would be obtained. That is, they have a world which is controlled by caprice.

But Greece is a violently seismic country, and seismic activity has been very high, there, for many thousands of years. A small earthquake would be a minor event for most of the residents, who knew them as a way of life. The jailer was not concerned with the earthquake, but with the possibility of the escape of his prisoners. Paul must have felt many earthquakes. In fact, the one that set him free may very well have done greater damage at some other place. The earthquake was a natural event, in a place where earthquakes were common; it was a miracle only to the extent that we perceive it to have been a miracle.

Let's extend the statement of Jesus one more time: Earthquakes strike both the just and the unjust.

We can summarize some of this by saying that God, the Creative Designer, established a system which is so complex that its various forms of activity peak, from time to time, in what we call natural disasters. He then placed us within that system. "The rain falls on the just and the unjust" means that the system functions mechanically and impersonally, not caring -- if I may be anthropomorphic -- whether we are there or not. Fundamentally, God is not concerned with getting us to escape the

disasters. It is his system, and surely he does not think that he did a poor job of designing it. Instead, he is very much interested in how we react to these disasters.

Some people blame God, and accuse him of being cruel. Others are drawn much closer to him, because they have felt that he sustains them (not guarantees their existence) in a time of crisis. But the mechanical system in which we live and move continues to operate according to the laws which he laid down long, long ago.

A few people not only complain about God, but state that they could design a better system. I must disagree. I have not ever met anybody who -- when the actual work has to be done -- could even design a worse system. By design, I mean lay down all the rules for all of the mechanical, chemical and biological operations, and show in detail that they will always work together properly, at every place and at every time, to produce the desired overall result.

Although various people may have started to try, nobody has ever come anywhere near close. Until somebody shows some persuasive evidence to the contrary, we must conclude that there is no alternative system, no matter how much it may seem logical that there ought to be.

I have placed man, a creature of God, in the framework of a vast machine with space and time and energy supplies which we are only beginning to fathom. This machine operates correctly, without maintenance personnel

and without repairs, according to certain rigorous principles. The scientist spends his career trying to figure out what some of the principles are, and now and then a very great scientist is able to state such a principle, or to approximate it very closely. But whether the scientist succeeds or not, and whether the Christian understands his role or not, the machinery continues to function.

God works with us -- not for us -- within the framework of the machinery. He does not manipulate the system in order to direct us (remember: "The rain falls on the just and the unjust"). There is plenty, within the system, to give us the proper direction, without any manipulation on his part (Ro. 1:19-20). The system merely provides the stage on which we play out the drama of our lives. The oscillatory functioning of the system, swinging between extremes of wet and dry, hot and cold, stormy and peaceful, is not a whim of God, not a parcel of punishment, and not an answer to prayer. Each disaster is the specific climax to a regular, orderly and systematic train of events, and is in turn the introduction to a new train of events.

But it would be a mistake to conclude from this that God is not the creator, and that we have been left to fight a hostile and inexorable machine. In the sense that God made the entire creation, he is behind everything that

it does. It is his world, and he has put each of us in a specific part of it, for a purpose. When we are faced with disaster he does not re-route the disaster, but rather he offers to help us re-route our thinking. He does not zapp us from heaven, with thunderbolts or flying saucers or witches in the night, or even with milk and honey. Do we have a choice in any of this? Yes, of course, but the only choice that really matters, in the long run, is the choice that we make when we get down to the serious business of thinking about God and his creation.

Do you believe the universe was created last Friday? Or do you believe in the Great Puppetmaster in the sky, who uses strands of gold and silver to control our movements? Or would you prefer that God has made you as a rational being, and has faced you with a system which is so complicated that at times it seems irrational, yet has offered to help you tune your thinking so that each disaster, and each near-disaster, can lead you closer to him?

William F. Tanner

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