'We Were Hoping': The Emmaus Road Encounter As a Novel Approach to Faith-Science Dialogue

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WE WERE HOPING:
THE EMMAUS ROAD ENCOUNTER AS A NOVEL APPROACH
TO FAITH-SCIENCE DIALOGUE

“We Were Hoping”

HAROLD A. LAURENCE V

SEATTLE PACIFIC SEMINARY
"WE WERE HOPING:" THE EMMAUS ROAD ENCOUNTER AS A NOVEL APPROACH TO FAITH-SCIENCE DIALOGUE

HAROLD A. LAURENCE V

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS (CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE) AT SEATTLE PACIFIC SEMINARY

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Abstract

This thesis proposes a novel paradigm for faith-science dialogue, drawing a Biblical analogy between two disciples’ Emmaus Road encounter with the risen Jesus (Luke 24:13-35) and contemporary faithful scientists wrestling with narrative conflict between the findings of science and the confession of faith. For science’s reading public, science serves as an alternative mythmaking discourse, whose narratives may indeed conflict with faith. This thesis proposes that theology ought to deploy Biblical preaching to resolve such narrative conflicts. To guide this process, this thesis proposes that Jesus’ two responses to the troubles of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) illustrate bridges between the new creation and the creation where the disciples live, bridges which are helpful to interpret troubling scientific findings faithfully in modern faith-science dialogue. The disciples on the road confront narrative conflict: was Jesus God’s successful Anointed, or a failed prophet? Jesus addresses this conflict in two ways: (1) re-interpretation of Scripture (preaching the Word) and (2) response to an offer of hospitality (breaking the bread). Based on Jesus’ responses to the disciples, hermeneutical guideposts for Scripture are proposed for faithful scientists (or science students) wrestling with narrative conflicts. Finally, this thesis proposes that a faithful scientist seeking Christ in narrative conflict, like the disciples in the text, is in fact making science an occasion of Christian service to God, as Jesus’ Word and Table responses set the frame of Christian worship. The thesis concludes with a case study applying its method to a possible narrative conflict. The key role that biological death plays in the Darwinian evolutionary mechanism of variation and selection sits uneasily with the Biblical witness to the ‘goodness’ of creation. The thesis proposes a Scriptural response to this narrative conflict, and witnesses how the narrative conflict leads to transforming encounter with Christ.
To all scientists and students of science (and engineers too!) who have wrestled with narrative conflict with their faith.

_Blessed are you who are hungry now,_
_for you will be filled._
_Blessed are you who weep now,_
_for you will laugh._

(Luke 6:21, NRSV)

Acknowledged here:

_Above and before all, my Savior_  
“of whom we speak” but equally “to whom we must give an account.” (Heb. 4:13, AT)

The land and water, which have welcomed my wife and I as migrants.

The Duwamish and the indigenous people on whose land sit our home and our school: to whom we must also give an account.

“called servant of the church … a benefactor of many and of myself also.” (Rom. 16:1-2, AT)

Dr. Harold A. Laurence IV and Karen Laurence, for all the years of patient instruction.  
“I worship God with a clear conscience, as my parents did.” (2 Tim. 1:3, paraphrase)

Dr. Rob Wall and Dr. Cara Wall-Scheffler, patient and wise readers.

Also Dr. Katherine Douglass and sections of the Autumn 2019 UFDN 3100 course on practical theology.

All SPS faculty who teach the works and words of God: “worthy of a double honor.” (1 Tim. 5:17 NRSV)
And our masterful librarian Steve Perisho, on whose account no discussion takes place in the dark.

Dr. Dana Wright, for insight into the work of Dr. James Loder.

The pastoral staff of The Hallows Church, Seattle, WA for their confidence in my calling when I had little of my own.

The pastoral staff of Our Redeemer’s Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA with special mention of Joshua Liljenstolpe.

Steven Zhang, who provided friendly lay criticism of the central argument from its inception in 2016.

Dan Hom, who invited me, in the words of Gregory I, to “consider…how great the virtue of hospitality is.”

Cody Nemmer, who, in summer 2016, hosted an event to watch a documentary on cooperative behaviors in Darwinian evolution, which pushed the first stone of this thesis down the mountain.

Holden Village

And for all faithful scientists and scholars who have labored in faith-science dialogue, particularly Sarah Coakley, Nancey Murphy, Martin Nowak, and John Polkinghorne.
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Exordium

Ray Bradbury, “—And the Moon Be Still as Bright”

The captain nodded. “Tell me about your civilization here,” he said, waving his hand at the mountain towns.

[Said Spender,] “They knew how to live with nature and get along with nature. They didn’t try too hard to be all men [sic] and no animal. That’s the mistake we made when Darwin showed up. We embraced him and Huxley and Freud, all smiles. And then we discovered that Darwin and our religions didn’t mix. Or at least we didn’t think they did. We were fools. We tried to budge Darwin and Huxley and Freud. They wouldn’t move very well. So, like idiots, we tried knocking down religion.

“We succeeded pretty well. We lost our faith and went around wondering what life was for. If art was no more than a frustrated outflinging of desire, if religion was no more than self-delusion, what good was life? Faith had always given us answers to all things. But it all went down the drain with Freud and Darwin. We were and still are a lost people.”

“And these Martians are a found people?” inquired the captain.¹

---

i thank You God for most this amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
day of life and love and wings and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any-lifted from the no
of all nothing-human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)²

² E. E. Cummings, XAIPE (New York, NY: Liveright, 1997), 70.
Introduction

When I was seven years old, my father and I read weekly readings of Virgil Hillyer’s *A Child’s History of the World*. We began from Chapter 6 – ancient Egypt. When purchased, the book did come with five previous chapters covering human prehistory. But my father, a committed Christian and military sciences professor, had physically cut the “prehistory” chapters out of the book with his pocketknife. He would tell me later that stories are like suitcases: some are heavier than others. In his view, a child needed to train on the lighter narratives before tackling the heavier ones. If I approached the heavier stories too soon, they put me in danger of being crushed. The creation story of the Biblical book of Genesis would train me to pick up what scientists and historians believed about human origins. Until then, he would not risk his child’s spiritual health. He knew that those two stories would not be easy to read alongside one another. Like Alexander the Great, cutting the Gordian Knot, he temporarily resolved the narrative tangle in the most straightforward way.

While my father’s approach may offend Enlightenment sensibilities, he acted from insight into a deep truth about the relationship of faith and science—a truth plain to laypersons, yet seldom spoken in the academy. Some of the findings of science have a propensity to shake the faith of the faithful. These findings come from a broad range of scientific inquiries: the development of life on Earth, cosmology, physics, psychology, and others. These troubles between faith and science are connected with the trend of membership

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decline in North American, Protestant churches. These troubles for a response, which still awaits full-throated proclamation in the theological and scientific academies.

Across Protestant Christianity in the United States, churches of all stripes are watching younger membership decrease.4,5 This trend has been strong since the new millennium.6 According to a 2011 study from David Kinnaman of the Barna Group, 59 percent of Americans between 18 and 29 years old with a Christian background—that is, about three in five—left their churches for at least some time.7 Kinnaman argues from polling data that church engagement peaks in the 13-17 age group, drops sharply (43%) between the 13-17 age group and the 18-29 age group, and makes only a partial retracement upward in the older groups.8 From his research, Kinnaman proposes that the reasons young folks give for ending church engagement are clustered in six categories:


6 Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades," Gallup, Apr 18, 2019, accessed Dec 22, 2019, https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx. Jones notes that “[t]he lower rate of church membership among religious millennials appears to be more a product of generational differences than of life-stage effects. In 1998-2000, 68% of Generation X respondents were church members when they were roughly the same age as today’s millennials.” Jones’ figure for millennials is 57%.


8 Ibid., 22.
1. Their churches seemed overprotective,
2. Their religious experiences lacked depth,
3. Their churches were antagonistic to science,
4. Their churches did not have a rigorous theology of sex and sexual expression,
5. They could not accept the exclusivity of the Gospel, and
6. Their churches were hostile to expressions of doubt.

A key feature of Kinnaman’s item 3 is that churches are perceived not merely as silent about science, but as antagonistic to science.9 About one or two in every five 18- to 29-year-old Christians in his survey agreed with each possible negative opinion of the church’s relationship with science.10 His interpretation of his results: “[W]hile [views on church antagonism toward science] are not majority views among young Christians, neither are they fringe perspectives that can be easily dismissed.”11

Of course, faith-science dialogue is not a recent undertaking. Faith and science have been talking at one another since “science” began.12 As far back as the 400s A.D., Augustine felt called to address tension between the Biblical stories and the ancient world’s secular

9 Kinnaman’s definition of “science” is incredibly loose, and fortunately so. In reporting his results, he is specifically interested in the “science” that “has come to dominate and define our collective culture,” 126. Of specific disciplines, he names physics, cosmology, genetics, neuroscience, medicine, computer science, and environmental science. He chooses these disciplines because of their shared effect on reshaping human life. That loose and thematic definition is perfectly fine for the purposes of the present study also.

10 Ibid., 136-37. Kinnaman’s survey results show 18-to-29-year-olds with Christian background reporting that: “Christians are too confident that they know all the answers” (35%), “churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in” (29%), “Christianity is anti-science” (25%), “I have been turned off by the creation-versus-evolution debate” (23%), “Christianity makes complex things too simple” (20%), and “Christianity is anti-intellectual” (18%).

11 Ibid.

12 In the present study, the term “science” is used in a sense similar to Kinnaman. Shortly it will be argued that “science” has a very different social function for the public than it does for most scientists. For this reason, this study is not too concerned with delineating what is or is not science. This study is more interested in how the public uses findings from all manner of scientific disciplines as a foundation for understanding oneself and one’s world.
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theories of cosmic origin. The last half century has seen a resurgence of Christian theological works about faith-science dialogue. The perception of antagonism to science is likely not the sole cause of the Millennial exodus from church since the 1990s. Still, it would be unwise to ignore what those leaving the church say about their reasons. They may not be wrong about seeing tension in being a scientifically minded disciple. They certainly mirror a general public sentiment that faith and science are in tension: about three in five members of the American public see tension between faith and science. In the United States, this tension is closely tied to resistance to the theory of evolution. Mirroring the public perception of tension, Christian faith leaders hesitate to address science-related issues,

14 Alister McGrath argues that the current rise in the genre began with T. F. Torrance and Charles Alfred Coulson: Alister E. McGrath, *Enriching our Vision of Reality: Theology and the Natural Sciences in Dialogue* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge [SPCK], 2016), 32. Coulson’s first work in this vein was *Christianity in an Age of Science* (1953).
16 Lee Raine and others, *Americans, Politics, and Science Issues* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2015), https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2015/07/2015-07-01_science-and-politics_FINAL-1.pdf. In this cited report, also from 2015, researchers present results on whether Americans believe humans evolved, or “existed in their present form since the beginning of time.” 31% of all Americans affirmed that humans “existed…since the beginning of time,” but only 12% of religiously unaffiliated Americans took that position. 86% of the religiously unaffiliated affirmed that humans “evolved,” while among Catholics the figure is 69%, among white mainline Protestants, 71%; black Protestant, 49%; and white Evangelical, 36%. Credence for the theory of evolution varies widely among religious groups in the United States. Age played a role as well: 73% of respondents aged 18-29 affirmed that human beings “evolved,” but only 54% of respondents aged 65 and older took that position.
17 Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 140. Kinnaman’s results show that the vast majority of youth pastors and church workers are uncomfortable addressing science-related theological questions. 52% of youth group teens surveyed “aspire to science-related careers,” while a staggeringly small 1% of youth pastors or workers “addressed issues of science in the past year.”
while scientific community leaders tend not to be people of religious faith.7, 18,19,20,21 Silence prevails over the pulpit and over the lectern.

If the perception is not addressed, the trend of young church ‘leavers’ could continue; as the trend continues, it could become self-reinforcing. As young people detect silence about science, they come to believe that their churches have little to offer toward their sense of vocation. They pass through formative years of life and career without strong witness from the church about what their career, theologically, means. This situation results in a vicious cycle. As young science-minded folks self-select out of the churches, the scientific literacy of each church is depleted with each passing generational cohort.

Given the above, a lay reader of Christian faith-science dialogue would be surprised to find that most scientists of Christian faith do not see much conflict at all. The public’s perception of conflict is at odds with the academic literature. The tension in faith-science dialogue affects “lay” communities; they apparently see something that scientists of faith are

19 Neil Gross and Solon Simmons, "The Religiosity of American College and University Professors," *Sociology of Religion* 70 (2009), 101-129. Among faculty surveyed at a broad range of American colleges and universities, one finds 34.9% believers in “God” and an additional 40.1% qualified “theists,” suggesting that the eight-in-ten figure is mirrored in college faculty in general.
21 Edward J. Larson and Larry Witham, "Leading Scientists Still Reject God," *Nature* 394, no. 6691 (1998), 313, https://doi.org/10.1038/28478. Their survey of members of the National Academy of Sciences found only 7% “theists” and the remainder atheists or agnostic. Comparing this study with Gross and Simmons and with Ecklund and Scheitle, De Cruz writes: “These latter findings indicate that academics are more religiously diverse than has been popularly assumed and that the majority are not opposed to religion. Even so, in the US the percentage of atheists and agnostics in academia is higher than in the general population, a discrepancy that requires an explanation.”
less likely to see. The physicist turned Anglican priest John Polkinghorne explains that for science’s reading public, science serves a different function than it does for scientists. For the public, science is a *discipline of mythmaking*. Myths are that class of stories that attain symbolic significance for people and their lives. Polkinghorne writes,

Tillich says of [myths] that ‘one can replace one myth by another, but one cannot remove the myth from man’s [sic] spiritual life’. Perhaps nothing makes that clearer than the way in which modern science has been used to provide replacement myths for those unable to use the traditional stories of religion. While scientific discourse itself does not employ the mythic mode, its accounts, particularly those dealing with the history and process of the cosmos, have furnished material that can be used in this way. … Much of the public interest in cosmology, and much of the popular writing ministering to it, carry overtones of the mythic concern. Even extreme reductionism can become the basis of a myth.22

To the public, science gives the impression of being a productive source of stories, by which humans can understand themselves and their world.23 In this role, science can serve as a release valve for young Christians questioning the Bible’s symbolic landscape. Science’s comprehensive nature and its technological ‘signs and wonders’ lend its secular interpreters a veneer of authority when they gainsay theological claims. In the United States today, science

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23 A couple of examples to flesh out the point: The current (December 24, 2019) Amazon bestseller in Behavioral Sciences is Noal Harari Yuval, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2018). This book bills itself as a meditation on such all-encompassing question as: “How did our species succeed in the battle for dominance? Why did our foraging ancestors come together to create cities and kingdoms? How did we come to believe in gods, nations, and human rights; to trust money, books, and laws; and to be enslaved by bureaucracy, timetables, and consumerism? And what will our world be like in the millennia to come?” (Back cover text) *Sapiens* stands alongside *The Great Gatsby*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Mueller Report*, and other cultural notables on Amazon’s overall top 100 bestsellers of 2019. The current biology bestseller is David Quammen, *The Tangled Tree: A Radical History of New Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), in which the author is purported to explain “how recent discoveries in molecular biology can change our understanding of evolution and life’s history, with powerful implications for human health and even our own human nature.”
holds the cultural mythmaking role that agriculture held in the Roman Empire of early Christianity. The unique trouble of science for faith is science’s fertility of myth.

Because science serves the public as a source of myth, clashes of myth arise between scientific findings and faith convictions. In the present study, these clashes of myth are called “narrative conflicts.” People who follow Jesus will sense these clashes and feel uncomfortable about them. People who follow Jesus read the Scriptures Jesus read. They proclaim Jesus’ message from them, and they order their lives according to stories of faith. Such people will sense tension in accepting certain scientific findings.

Darwin’s theory of evolution is a classic case in point. In Kinnaman’s polling of church ‘leavers,’ ‘evolution’ is the only theory with a dedicated question. But what is the exact source of the trouble with evolution? Is it that God gave the church the Book of Genesis, only for it later to be “proven false?” Is it the way that natural selection seems—on its face at least—to favor the strong against the weak? Is it that humanity appears to be a rather insignificant branch on a single tree of life, of no more value than many sparrows? Is it that the human body appears to be a slapdash design? All of these questions suggest that evolution has the power to color human views of fundamental aspects of humankind and its world, in a way that challenges Christian doctrine. Each question illustrates a narrative conflict between the implications of different myths. Faith—the living and active faith that undergirds each church’s practice, tradition, and Scriptural interpretation—is trust in God. Findings of science can shake that trust if they create a condition of narrative conflict.

But what is a narrative conflict? Why are they important, and how do they start?

James K. A. Smith, a Calvin College professor of philosophy with a Pentecostal background, explains that narratives encode knowledge, but they go a step further than statements and doctrines. Narratives also present relationships between the knowledge and the hearers. The relationship between knowledge and hearer suggests how the hearer should respond to the knowledge. This power makes narratives an essential tool for constructing personal identity. Smith also points out how Christian worship employs narratives to guide the community’s response to God’s work. Smith exegetes the Apostle Paul: the Holy Spirit has the ministry of convicting hearers of the right response to the Gospel.

Smith’s explanation of what narrative does for knowledge helps fill in the notion of “narrative conflict.” A conflict can happen if two narratives affirm different facts about the same world. A conflict could also happen if the same story is interpreted from different vantage points that emphasize different aspects. A protestor and a law enforcement officer might give very different accounts of events that both agree happened. A third path to conflict: two narratives agree on the facts, but they suggest two very different responses from the hearer. In the New Testament, Paul counters the maxim “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die” with the fact that at Ephesus he “fought wild animals” (1 Cor. 15:32). Paul agrees he is going to die, but he also believes in the Resurrection, so his response to his mortality is not quite as liberal. The epistle of James points out that Heaven and Hell agree 100% about God’s oneness. The difference? Hell labors in the grip of horrifying narrative conflict: “Even the demons believe—and shudder.” (James 2:19, NRSV)

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To clarify the notion of a narrative conflict further, two examples of what narrative conflict is not can be offered. First, narrative conflict is not a conflict of academic methods. One way of thinking about faith and science holds that studying the material world, using the scientific method, cannot conflict with theological beliefs from Scripture. Cambridge mathematician John Lennox uses the maxim that science provides the “how” and theology provides the “why.” But, a “how” and a “why” can be in narrative conflict. Polkinghorne uses the example of a person explaining why water in a tea kettle is warm. The person can say both “water is heated by the stove” and “water is heated because I want tea.” But if a friend says “I want tea,” when his kettle is discovered in the fridge, behold: narrative conflict.

Second, narrative conflict is not always the result of willful misinterpretation of science by opponents of faith. While some loud voices in the scientific community weaponize science as a counternarrative to faith, narrative conflict also crops up in science interpreted by the faithful. For instance, the German Lutheran astronomer Johannes Kepler described the orbit of Mars with an equation: Kepler’s Second Law. The equation can be roughly translated into a simple story. “When a planet goes around the Sun, it moves faster when it is closer and slower when it is further away.” Kepler’s equation is just math, but it

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26 Nancey C. Murphy, *Reconciling Theology and Science: A Radical Reformation Perspective* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1997), 7, reports that the two standard positions that scholars take about faith and science are conflict and isolation. Mikael Stenmark, “Ways of Relating Science and Religion,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. Peter Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 278-93, discusses and critiques Ian Barbour’s topography of (1) conflict, (2) overlap / reconciliation, (3) non-overlap / independence, and (4) total replacement of one by the other.


29 Names need hardly be named, but one thinks of Carl Sagan and Neil Degrasse Tyson, Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins, Stephen Pinker and Lawrence Krauss, and others.
takes for granted that the Earth is not the center, the planets can have orbits other than perfect circles, the Sun itself is not in the exact center, and other findings that churches of his day would find troubling. Kepler was no theological slowpoke. An outstanding astronomer, his academic life in fact began with a theological scholarship to the University of Tübingen. Later in life, he rejected the doctrine of the true and essential presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, and thus the Lutherans’ Formula of Concord (1577). The costly decision left him with no church affiliation, neither to Rome nor to the Reformers. Kepler cared deeply about truth, both theological and scientific. Yet his scientific conclusions generated narrative conflict for his day and age.

Contemporary theologians and faithful scientists have tried to resolve narrative conflicts by finding common ground between faith (or theology) and science. Finding common ground would suggest how to understand science theologically. What does science mean for faith? Is science a vocation for the faithful? On the scientific side, authors in the present and recent past include Ian Barbour (physics), Philip Clayton (neuroscience, philosophy of science), John Lennox (mathematics), Alister McGrath (biophysics), Arthur Peacocke (biochemistry), John Polkinghorne (physics), Allan Melvin Russell (physics), and many more. Clayton, McGrath, and Polkinghorne also have theological education in addition to their scientific background. From the terrain of theology come authors of equal prowess: James Loder, Nancey Murphy, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and, again, many others. One crucial point of method emerges in various ways in the writings of these contemporary scholars and others. The point can be summed up as:

31 Ibid.
In the relationship between science and faith, theology is an interpretive lens to understand the claims of science.

The present study gives this idea the tongue-in-cheek name of ‘the Standard Model.’ The scholars named above come from very different ideological and philosophical backgrounds, yet they tend to arrive at some conclusion close to this Standard Model. Arthur Peacocke was a panentheist; James Loder was a Presbyterian influenced by the Pentecostal movement; Nancey Murphy is a postmodern thinker and John Polkinghorne defends Critical Realism. If such a cluster of thinkers each arrived at the Standard Model, there is something unique and interesting about it.

The attached case study investigates certain authors’ use of the Standard Model in more detail. An example of the Standard Model might be to say that because God created Earth’s diversity of life using evolution, God must have wanted each kind of creature to have a relationship to all the others. In other words, a scientific finding can lead to a theological conclusion. Another example might be to say that there is a parallel between how evolution rewards families of creatures that behave self-sacrificially toward one another, and Jesus’ Golden Rule, “do to others as you would have them do to you,” (Matthew 7:12, NRSV). In this case, the science has a theological meaning that supports or emphasizes a Scriptural point. These are extremely simple and specific examples. Each of the named authors has developed much more intricate and general approaches to faith-science dialogue. The point is that in the Standard Model, the academic disciplines of theology and science can talk to each other using some mediating philosophical or theological framework.

Because the Standard Model has a dominant position in the theological academy, scholars of faith tend to regard faith-science dialogue as productive collaboration rather than
conflict. This perception, however justified, is at odds with the ongoing perception of faith-science tension in the public and among younger Christians. It seems that the Standard Model must not be as persuasive outside the academy doors. Clearly, for this model to be useful in practical contexts, it needs to give a fuller account of the narrative conflicts driving the continuing perception of conflict. The objective of the present study is to refine the Standard Model.

As it is, the Standard Model faces two challenges. First, theology and science operate by different methods. How is theology going to be used to interpret science? Theology was not designed for this task. A bridge is needed between theology and the knowledge produced by science. The spiritual gift of discernment is intended for use in the church, but it is unclear whether there is a spiritual gift for theologically interpreting scientific theories. Nor can a preacher preach a Christian sermon from, say, Big Bang cosmology. Some scholars try to bridge the gap by creating a new philosophical approach to knowledge, between science and theology, equally accessible to both. But that approach only pushes the knowledge problem back a step: where does this new philosophical approach for mediating theology and science get its tools and subjects? Bridges are not built in the air; one must start on the riverbanks.

Second, even if there were an obvious way to use theological tools to interpret science, what would make theology the right choice for the job? Theology is not the only option for interpreting science; it would have to compete against secular philosophical

\[\text{\footnotesize 32 Rather, as will become clear – it is possible to preach a sermon that uses cosmology as an illustration; but the theological authority of the sermon does not derive from how correct the science is.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 33 Polkinghorne and Murphy both attempt something of this kind, e.g., when Polkinghorne refers to faith-science dialogue as “second-order theology” in Reason and Reality, 61, or when Murphy tries to build a Quine-like relationship between faith knowledge and science knowledge in “Postmodern Apologetics: Or Why Theologians Must Pay Attention to Science,” in Religion and Science: History, Method, Dialogue, ed. W. Mark Richardson and Wesley J. Wildman (New York: Routledge, 1996), 110.}\]
options. For instance, in their introduction to *Evolution, Games, and God*, computational biologist Martin Nowak and theologian Sarah Coakley ask whether evolution’s favoring cooperative behavior has an implication for human ethics. Their book invites many scholars to answer this question, from a variety of competing theological and philosophical frameworks.\(^{34}\) How is one to judge whose interpretation is best? Who makes the decision: churches, theologians, or scientists? And on what grounds could a person choose between competing interpretations of science? The Standard Model rightly puts this problem into focus, but the problem itself is unsolved.

The present study answers this challenge by proposing a change to the Standard Model. The Standard Model states that \emph{In the relationship between science and faith, theology is an interpretive lens to understand the claims of science.} The Standard Model is pointing the lens of theology at the subject of science. The present study suggests that \emph{the lens is right, but it needs to be pointed back at the theological subject it was meant to look at.} The right way forward is not to try to use theology to interpret science, but rather just to do good theology, especially Scriptural preaching, with scientific findings as the occasion or backdrop.\(^{35}\)

Is doing good theology enough to handle narrative conflict with science? Yes—because the way to resolve a narrative conflict is to win. For Jesus’ followers, narrative conflicts are to be won with preaching, not simply made compatible with secular scientific myths. This study investigates a text of Scripture in which two disciples struggle with a


\(^{35}\) A good expression of this idea can be found in Francis Watson’s second and third hermeneutical principles in “Genesis Before Darwin: Why Scripture Needed Liberating from Science,” in *Reading Genesis After Darwin*, ed. Stephen C. Barton and David Wilkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 27-28. Watson uses Calvin’s meditations on Scripture and science for the basis of his framework.
narrative conflict—they believed Jesus was the Messiah, but they witnessed Jesus’ death.

The resurrected Jesus responds by preaching from Scripture. Preaching is narrative warfare, founded upon interpreting the Scriptures. Old Testament exegete Walter Brueggemann suggests that the heart of prophetic Gospel preaching is the ability to contest a dominant narrative with the alternative story of God’s saving and reconciling work.36 When a narrative based on science conflicts with faith, a faithful disciple does not deny the scientific facts—unless, of course, the facts are false.37 Instead, the disciple practices theology through preaching, not from the science, but about the science, from the Scriptures. If done well, this practice converts the secular narrative’s implications and perspective to a position of faith. Theological methods, particularly preaching methods, exist for the very purpose of equipping the churches for narrative conflict.

By contrast, the Standard Model’s goal is to provide a common picture of theology and science. This picture would be a knife brought to a gunfight. The right test of a Christian-theological approach to faith-science dialogue is not whether it supplies a solid “ground” for using theology to interpret science. The right test is whether the approach has “air superiority:” is faith’s story so of a piece with the Gospel that it can hold its own, when “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2, KJV) launches spiritual attack with a competing narrative? Whose myth is better; whose altar was lit on fire; whose people won

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37 If the reader is concerned about the actual truth of a particular scientific theory, the way forward is not in these pages. The way forward depends on whether the reader is a scientist or not. If a scientist, the reader could choose to adopt the particular theory as a subject of study. In that case, it might be worth going straight for where the narrative conflict seems worst. But if not a scientist (or not qualified for the subject), one must do lay legwork: either read the scientific literature and become a subject matter expert, or learn from those who have. When choosing scientific experts, a good rule is to look for scientists who are not intentionally antagonizing Christian faith, not trying to provoke anxiety about Christian faith by intensifying narrative conflict with faith. If a scientific finding does lead to narrative conflict with faith, the conflict will reveal itself in the facts.
the battle; whose God is real? As Walter Brueggemann asks in *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*: “Is Ba’al sleeping?”

Therefore, this study will sketch a theological framework for faith-science dialogue, following the outline of two disciples’ encounter with Jesus on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13-35), a Biblical example of narrative conflict. The proposed framework applies theological methods (interpretation of Scripture) to theological sources (the canon of Scripture) in order to resolve narrative conflicts between faith and troubling scientific findings. After all, no story could be worse for faith than the death of Jesus, and that story is already in the pages of Scripture. There is therefore no finding of science that faith cannot resurrect.

**Prolepsis of the Proposed Solution**

In the Resurrection story often called the “Emmaus Road” encounter (Luke 24:13-35), two disciples set out on foot from Jerusalem the Sunday after Jesus’ crucifixion. As they walk the road to a place called Emmaus, they meet a stranger—whom the narrator says is Jesus, raised from the dead. This stranger explains to the disciples how Jesus’ death was not only possible, but necessary for the Messiah to endure. As evening falls, Jesus “made as if” to go farther along the road, but the disciples press him into staying with them. This little detail, that Jesus made what certainly looks to be a false pretense, troubled commentators through the ages. John Calvin was at pains to explain why this pretense on Jesus’ part was

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38 Bruggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*, 3. “…prophetic proclamation is the staging and performance of a contest between two narrative accounts of the world and an effort to show that the YHWH account of reality is more adequate and finally more reliable than the dominant narrative account… This performed contestation between narratives is modeled in narrative simplicity and directness in Elijah’s contest at Mt. Carmel in which he defiantly requires a decision between narratives and so between gods…”
not the same as a lie. Strained, he decides that Jesus—who also concealed his identity from the disciples—is playing a certain part, cultivating a *dramatis persona*. Why? So that the disciples would temporarily put their attention on *what* he was doing and saying, before they recognized *who* he was. Calvin writes, “He did not deceive His disciples by this fiction, but held them for a little in suspense, till the time for His revelation was ripe.” Christ may withhold very important facts from even those closest to him, at least for a while. Why did the disciples not recognize Jesus at once? Was it their unbelief? Was his face physically different? Did the Holy Spirit prevent their recognition? Did the Devil do it? Commentators wonder. One point is clear: the disciples’ failure to recognize Jesus is the opportunity through which Jesus works.

When a modern myth of science creates narrative conflict with Christian faith, the trouble is greatest if the science is solid science. Whatever the Christian interpretation of scientific findings, it is best to begin by acknowledging them. If there is some manner of divine pretense in them, it will be revealed. As the disciples left Jerusalem that fateful Sunday, they were witnesses of a hard truth: their Messiah and teacher had been ruthlessly and horribly killed. For one day’s walk, they struggled. May all who struggle under troubling scientific findings be reassured by their story.

**Statement of Hypothesis and Method**

This study investigates the hypothesis:

*Jesus’ two responses to the troubles of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) illustrate bridges between the new creation and the creation where the disciples*

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40 Ibid.
live, bridges which are helpful to interpret troubling scientific findings faithfully in modern faith-science dialogue.

In the hypothesis, the phrase ‘troubling scientific findings’ means scientific findings that:

1. Imply narratives that cast doubt on a component of Christian faith, and
2. could be made into a secular myth over and against Christian faith.

What kinds of scientific findings could be troubling? Darwinian evolution has been mentioned, and this thesis includes a case study on Darwinian evolution. What others? Darwinian evolution presents a classical Problem of Evil, of the “God is good but the world is not” variety, because of the theory’s dependence on death. A scientific finding that suggests a Problem of Evil could be troubling for that reason. Some scientific findings also suggest that free will is an illusion, which could be troubling for a faith that implies moral responsibility. The possibility that free will is an illusion may be less obviously bad than the necessity of death in Darwinian evolution, but still troubling. Another source of possible tension is the Earth’s insignificant size and placement in the cosmos. Still another possible source of tension is that science holds great power to explain the world, studying only its material aspects. Is what humans call the “spiritual” real at all? In general, a scientific finding is troubling if it creates narrative conflict with divine goodness, the authority of Scripture, the coherence of truth, and other beliefs of faith.

The ‘Standard Model’ academic approach suggests trying to understand the science by using theological knowledge to give the science the right context. But theology rightly

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41 The Hard Problem of Consciousness, and the problem of human agency in a world of deterministic physical laws, both arise in physics.
interprets science as a consequence (even a byproduct) of doing good theology from proper sources of theological knowledge, such as interpretation of Christian Scripture. Interpreting Scripture, with scientific findings as occasions for interpretation, will equip churches to proclaim the Gospel of Christ in a world shaped (and scarred) by science.

In the Emmaus Road encounter (Luke 24:13-35), Christian Scripture presents a situation similar to contemporary faith-science dialogue. Two disciples of Jesus are leaving Jerusalem on foot, after witnessing Jesus’ arrest and horrific execution. They debate with one another, confronted with indisputable facts that unsettle their identity and perhaps put them in personal danger. Along the way, they encounter a man they do not recognize. The reader is told that this man is Jesus raised from the dead. The unrecognized Jesus pushes the disciples into a deeper understanding of their Scriptures. He shows them how the Scriptures reveal God’s chosen liberator figure as a suffering figure rather than a political power mover. The disciples, intrigued and moved by the stranger’s Scriptural interpretation, invite him to stay with them overnight. In response, Jesus reveals himself to the disciples, affirming their faith and preparing them to be his witnesses.

Today’s disciples of Jesus can conduct faith-science dialogue by analogy with the Emmaus Road encounter. Today’s disciples, confronted by some troubling scientific finding, can return to the Scriptures as their first resort. The science serves as an occasion for interpretation, but not the subject of interpretation. In the pages of Scripture, today’s disciples will find the interpretive resources to surmount any narrative conflict with science. No finding of science could ever be more in conflict with faith than the central story of

42 The Standard Model counsels that yes, the dreams of science are troubling, but a ‘Daniel’ theologian can set churches at ease by interpreting them. Remember: Daniel did not give the interpretation alone; the king demanded that he give both the dream and the interpretation; the facts and their explanation!
Christian Scripture, the crucifixion of Jesus. The first Christians already encountered this story and found it engulfed in God’s wisdom.

The proof of the hypothesis is primarily a close reading of the Emmaus Road text. Exegesis will include the following standard methods:

- Translation of the Greek critical text with a review of a key textual question;
- Close reading of the text to understand its words and structure;
- Study of how the Christian faithful have received the text, including
  - Ancient and medieval interpreters (Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Origen, and others),
  - Reformation commentators (Luther, Calvin, and others),
  - Modern scholarship (Joel B. Green, Luke Timothy Johnson, John Nolland, and others);
- Specific study of the text’s use as a guide to Christian worship; and
- Investigation of ‘intertexts’ between the set text and the Old Testament. An intertext is a way in which the Emmaus Road text parallels or points to another Biblical text, so that the two texts influence each other’s meanings.

The argument for the hypothesis follows four steps, or ‘movements,’ starting with direct exegesis of the Emmaus Road text and leading into the Biblical analogy with faith-science dialogue. The four movements proceed as follows:

1. The text portrays the Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit taking the initiative, moving two disciples from a position of troubled uncertainty to a position of faith.
2. The disciples’ troubled uncertainty comes from a narrative conflict between their hope and expectation for Jesus, and the cruel end they thought he had come to. Jesus’ response to the disciples’ troubles is twofold.

   a. When the disciples explain their troubles, Jesus interprets Scripture. Jesus pushes the disciples to see that Scripture allowed for and anticipated a Messiah who suffers unto death on the path to completing his mission.

   b. When the disciples respond to the stranger Jesus’ words by inviting him to stay, Jesus reveals his presence to them. This revelation—the Resurrection—snaps together Jesus’ preaching of a suffering Messiah with the reality of the Crucifixion. The realization opens the disciples’ hearts to renewed faith.

3. The Emmaus Road text’s position in the Bible (the canon of Scripture) and its intertexts with Genesis reveal that it is a text about God’s restoration of all things, the New Creation. The text’s position implies that this restoration begins with the resurrection of Jesus. When the disciples recognize Jesus, their eyes are opened to how the Resurrection, the beginning of the New Creation, resolved their narrative conflict between Jesus as “Messiah” and Jesus as murdered victim. Faithful scientists also sometimes encounter narrative conflict, in their study of the present creation. To address these narrative conflicts, a faithful scientist (or student of science) can apply the same twofold structure as Jesus’ responses to the disciples.

4. Addressing narrative conflict is a key vocation of faithful scientists. When faithful scientists present science as an occasion for Scriptural interpretation,
science becomes a unique opportunity to praise God. The desire to praise
God endows Christian faith with a unique, dependable motivation for science:
to praise God more rightly, for what God has truly brought to pass.

The first two movements of the study base claims on the church’s confession of
Scripture’s authority. Luke’s Gospel is what it claims to be: a faithful witness to Jesus’ life,
death and resurrection, authorized by the man himself (24:48) as well as the whole church.
The first movement investigates the text’s use of language, painting a picture of Jesus and the
Holy Spirit jointly leading the disciples on a journey of transformation of heart and mind.
The second movement explores how the transformation takes place. Jesus responds to what
the disciples put before him, twice. First, the disciples offer him an explanation of a narrative
conflict they face: they thought Jesus would set Israel free, but they saw him end up a
murdered prophet. Jesus directs them back to Scripture, preaching that what they perceived
as conflict was truly divine necessity. God’s chosen liberator of Israel had to die to fulfill his
calling. Then, as the day closes, the disciples offer Jesus hospitality. Jesus responds to their
offer, not only by entering their home, but by revealing that he was with them all along. This
revelation shows the disciples that Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture, the suffering Messiah, is
not only compelling, but also true.

The third movement proposes a Biblical analogy. The Christian faithful confronted
with troubling scientific findings are like the disciples on the Emmaus Road. The text is
targeted at the disciples’ experience of narrative conflict. This study proposes that scientific
narrative conflict can be similarly addressed. The Emmaus Road text’s canonical placement
and use of language mark it as a text of ‘new creation.’ In the world in which the disciples
live, Jesus was killed; yet Jesus is alive today, calling all believers into a new world of
discipleship. The disciples’ eyes are opened, and they know something new. By analogy,
science bears witness to God’s work in the ‘book of Nature,’ the first creation. A troubling scientific finding is only a partial witness to the way the world is, just as the Crucifixion was a partial story. Today, the New Creation—the making whole of all things—remains mostly unknown. But, in encounter with Jesus, in interpreting the Scriptures, glimpses of new creation shine through. A faithful scientist can seek them out, responding to a troubling scientific finding using the same twofold structure as Jesus’ responses to the disciples, as in the following framework:

- Like Cleopas, set out the science as it is, explaining which elements of faith are in narrative conflict with the science;
- Like the disciples, turn back to the Scriptures and look to what they say about those elements of faith—perhaps there is a deeper divine necessity at work;
- Like the disciples, invite Jesus to be one’s travel companion on the scientific road;
- Like the disciples, be a witness to having glimpsed the creator Christ, as he draws the world from this creation to the next.

The church has historically taken the Emmaus Road text as a framework for Christian worship. The fourth movement explores how science can prompt Scriptural interpretation and encounter with the creator Christ, both acts of worship. What kind of service does science render to God? While science does not take place at the altar, Christians perform science like all their endeavors as an act of ‘service’ to God’s glory. If the Emmaus Road text is any guide, then when a narrative conflict with faith is resolved, faith is strengthened in the hearts of the faithful. A scientist who has faithfully read the ‘book of Nature’—even its most puzzling parts—is readied to strengthen the faith of the faithful. In this way, the scientific calling is partly (for the church) a prophetic calling: exposing trouble and seeing to
resolve it. This calling also yields a uniquely Christian reason for doing science: *scientific inquiry brings the scientist into the presence of Christ, by opening human eyes to Christ’s word/work of creation.* Only the most accurate and explanatory science deserves to be an occasion for theological reflection.

**Close Reading of Luke 24:13-35**

This thesis starts at the very beginning—with a close reading of the Emmaus text.

**Greek Text and Translation**

This study uses the Greek critical text from the latest Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, as follows. The author’s translation follows the original text.

**Greek Text, NA28**

Kai idou duo ex auton en auti tē ἡμέρα ἦσαν πορευόμενοι εἰς κώμην ἀπέχουσαν σταδίους ἐξήκοντα ἀπὸ Ἰερουσαλήμ, ἣ ὄνομα Ἐμμαοῦς, καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡμίλουν πρὸς ἀλλήλους περὶ πάντων τῶν συμβεβηκότων τούτων. καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ὡμιλεῖν αὐτοὺς καὶ συζητεῖν καὶ αὐτὸς Ἰησοῦς ἐγγίσας συνεπορεύετο αὐτοῖς, οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτῶν ἐκρατοῦν τὸν μὴ ἐπιγνῶναι αὐτὸν. εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτοὺς· τίνες οἱ λόγοι οὓς ἀντιβάλλετε πρὸς ἀλλήλους περὶ πάντων τῶν συμβεβηκότων τούτων; καὶ ἐστάθησαν σκυθρωποί. ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ εἷς ὀνόματι Κλεοπᾶς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν· σὺ μόνος παροικεῖς Ἰερουσαλήμ καὶ οὐκ ἔγνως τὰ γενόμενα ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις; καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ποία; οἱ δὲ εἶπαν αὐτῷ· τὰ περὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζαρηνοῦ, δὲ ἐγένετο ἀνὴρ προφήτης δυνατός ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ ἐναντίον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ παντοτός τοῦ λαοῦ, ὅπως τε παρέδωκαν αὐτὸν οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες ἡμῶν εἰς κρίμα θανάτου καὶ ἐσταύρωσαν αὐτὸν. ἤμεις δὲ ἠλπίζομεν ὅτι αὐτὸς ἐστιν ὁ μέλλων λυτροῦσθαι τὸν Ἰσραήλ· ὁ Κλαύδιος γε καὶ σὺν πᾶσιν τούτοις τρίτην ταύτην ἡμέραν ἡμέραν ἀγεί ἀρ’ ὑμῖν ταύτα ἐγένετο. ἄλλα καὶ γυναῖκες τίνες εἶ ἡμῶν ἐξῆκοντο ἡμᾶς, γενόμεναι ὀρθριναὶ ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον, καὶ μὴ εὑροῦσαι τὸ σῶμα
Meanwhile that same day, two of [the disciples who had heard the women’s story] were making their way on foot toward a small town about 13.3 km from Jerusalem, known as Emmaus. They were conversing between themselves about all that had just happened.

Author’s Translation

Now as they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself came up and was walking with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.

And he said to them, “What is this discussion you’re having between you as you walk?” And they stopped, their faces cast down.

And one, named Kleopas, said in response, “Are you the only person who made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and doesn’t know about the things that happened there these [last few] days?”

And he said to them, “What [should I know about]?” And they said to him, “About what happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man and a prophet of powerful works and words, before God and everyone [in the city]. [What happened was] the chief priests and the city leaders handed him over for a death sentence and crucified him, though we were hoping that he was the one to secure Israel’s freedom. But all these things happened three days ago. But also, [this morning,] certain women from our group took us aback. They had gone to the tomb early, and not having found his body there, they came [back to us] declaring that they had seen a vision of angels, and that these angels claimed Jesus was alive. So, some of [the men] in our group set off for the tomb, and found it thus, exactly as the women said. But him, they did not see.”

And he said to them, “Oh, you lack understanding, and your hearts are slow to rely on all that the prophets have said! Wasn’t it necessary for God’s Anointed to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory?” And starting from Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted the things about himself in all the Scriptures.

Then they approached the village where they were headed, and he made as if to journey farther. And they persuaded him against it, saying, “stay with us, as it’s getting on toward evening, and the sun is low.” So he entered in to stay over with them.
And then it happened, as he was being seated with them, that he took the bread and
blessed it, and broke it and started giving it out to them. Then their eyes were completely
opened, and they recognized him. And he became invisible to them.

And they said to each other, “Weren’t our hearts on fire within us as he was talking to
us on the road; as he was opening the Scriptures to us?” And, that same hour, they got [back]
up and returned to Jerusalem. They found that the Eleven and those with them had gathered
together, and those with the Eleven were declaring that “The Lord has risen indeed, and
Simon saw him!” So the [two disciples] began unpacking what had happened to them on the
road, and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.

Text-Critical Note on καιομένη

Fortunately, the various early known Greek manuscripts of the Emmaus Road text
tend to agree about the exact words. The text does not present any major difficulty of textual
criticism—an interpreter need not make major decisions between manuscripts that present
different possible ‘readings.’ That said, one consideration—the Greek word καιομένη
(“burned”) in v. 32—is of interest for this study. The word is in no doubt of being correct.
However, there are two minority readings of interest.

Some manuscripts have the word, κεκαλυμμένη (“veiled”) in place of καιομένη. This
reading would have the disciples recognizing their own blindness to Jesus’ identity earlier.
This reading is consistent with their motive for speaking—recognizing that they had not been
fully aware of what was taking place on the road earlier. But the metaphor of fire is missing,
and the meaning is the disciples’ lack of full understanding rather than the partial
understanding their hearts had. This reading is not likely to be the original and is not the
majority among manuscripts.
The second minority reading is in the manuscript ‘versions,’ which are manuscripts in languages other than Greek, containing a translation of this Greek text. Versions of this text in the Syriac language have translated the metaphor as “heavy:” “weren’t our hearts heavy within us?” The Peshitta text has this reading, as do Arabic and Persian texts that contain ‘harmonies’ or consolidated interpretations of all four Gospels. The main point is that the “hearts on fire” expression is a metaphor that ancient translators sought to capture with an alternative term. The metaphor’s meaning will be explored more with a historical and cultural analysis to follow.

Canonical and Literary Contexts

The Emmaus Road text is located at the end of the book of Luke in the New Testament, a key place in the Scriptures for two reasons. First, the Emmaus Road text is the first story or ‘pericope’ after the Resurrection in Luke’s Gospel. It picks up immediately from a story of women who visit Jesus’ tomb and find it empty. The women report back to the gathered disciples, who disbelieve them. In Luke’s account, the women do not report seeing Jesus raised from the dead; the Emmaus Road text is the disciples’ first encounter with the risen Jesus. After the Emmaus Road encounter, the two disciples return to Jerusalem, where the disciples gather, meet Jesus, receive his commissioning, and witness Jesus’ ascension to Heaven—the moment that ends Luke’s Gospel. The Emmaus Road text is the story Luke’s Gospel chooses to use to connect the reader from Jesus’ resurrection to his ascension. Clearly the goal of this text is to communicate about the meaning of those events.

The Reformer Martin Luther pointed out that Cleopas framed Jesus’ earthly ministry as “mighty in word and deed,” which is precisely how Acts 1:1 looks back on the whole of Luke’s Gospel: “I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach.” Therefore, when the two disciples on the Emmaus Road debate Jesus’ works and words, they are debating the very heart of the whole book of Luke. And, of this transitional Luke 24 chapter, the Emmaus Road text is the only portion that is unique to Luke. The women’s account of the empty tomb appears in each other Gospel; the appearance of Jesus in the room with the disciples is mirrored in John 20:19-23. Several modern commentators have noted that the Emmaus Road episode is typical of Luke’s Gospel in its choice of words, its style, and its narrative structure. It is likely that the story was intended to be ‘researchable’ to its earliest recipients. Cleopas’ name is likely included for this reason. The Gospel presents the Emmaus Road encounter with Jesus as a real experience of two disciples, despite the story’s strangeness and its unflattering portrait of the two disciples. The author of Luke’s Gospel selected the Emmaus Road text as the closing perspective on the story of Jesus. The text sits at a chief place at the Gospel’s banquet of revelation.

50 Ibid.
Questions of Genre, Form, and Structure

The Emmaus Road text portrays the disciples’ encounter with the risen Jesus in a four-part sequence. Contemporary Biblical scholar Darrell S. Bock, citing Joseph Fitzmyer, another contemporary scholar, proposes this four-part structure: meeting (vv. 13-16), conversation (vv. 17-27), meal (vv. 28-32), and return (vv. 33-35). Later, the present study will look at the Emmaus Road text as a guide to worship. In this role, arguably, “meeting and conversation” are one section (vv. 13-24) and the second section (vv. 25-27) can be titled “word.” With that amendment of Bock’s fourfold partition, the four elements of the story map well onto the “Gather, Word, Table, Send” motif of liturgical worship.

Multiple Biblical scholars today propose that the Emmaus Road text has a more detailed kind of structure, called a ‘chiasm’ after the Greek letter chi, Χ. In this kind of structure, the text has a center point. The first part of the text resembles the last part, and the second part resembles the second-to-last, and so on, building up to the center point. Joel B. Green proposes this chiasm structure:

- Journey from Jerusalem
  - Appearance, Obstructed Eyes, Lack of Recognition
    - Interaction
  - Summary of “the things”
    - Empty Tomb and Vision
      - Jesus Is Alive
    - Empty Tomb, but No Vision
  - Interpretation of “the things”
    - Interaction
      - Opened Eyes, Recognition, Disappearance
- Journey to Jerusalem

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54 One strength of Bock’s schema is lost with the proposed schema: it does make sense to see a narrative break take place at the point where Jesus meets with the disciples.
Another scholar, John Nolland, proposes that the entirety of Luke 24 is a chiasm structure, with the Emmaus account in the center. The exact center is Cleopas’ repetition of the women’s claim, “who said that he is alive.”\footnote{Nolland, \textit{Luke 18:35-24:53}, 1198.} Both possibilities put the women’s report of the Resurrection in the center of the text. These constructions also highlight the importance of the disciples’ language about “what happened,” which will be examined more in this study.

Questions of History and Culture: Disciples on Fire

When the disciples recognize Jesus, and after Jesus vanishes, the disciples make this fascinating remark: “Weren’t our hearts on fire within us as he was talking to us on the road; as he was opening the Scriptures to us?” On its face, the sense of the remark is straightforward: the disciples’ “hearts” (that part of the personality that makes decisions and choices) were bearing witness to a truth they did not yet realize with their “eyes.” Can any more be made of this remark? Some ancient Syriac, Arabic and Persian versions of the text translated the remark using other metaphors rather than preserving the metaphor of “on fire.” Clearly some metaphor is in play, and early translators were trying to capture it.

If Luke and Acts are taken as one two-part work, the metaphor of fire here is only two chapters before the descent of the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire at Pentecost. Perhaps this fire anticipates the work of the Holy Spirit. The ancient theologian Ambrose, in “Isaac, or the Soul” (late 4th century), takes this to be Luke’s meaning. He writes: “Indeed, [Jesus Christ] explained the Scriptures, and the fire went forth and entered into the hearts of His hearers. And truly they were wings of fire, because “the words of the Lord are pure words,

as silver tried by the fire.” Ambrose sees the “fire” passed like a torch flame from Jesus to the disciples when Jesus interprets the Scriptures to them. Another ancient author, Origen of Alexandria, also explores how the Spirit is at work in the disciples’ hearts “on fire,” in at least three of his written works. In the *Homilies on Exodus*, Origen makes an argument similar to Ambrose’, that Jesus’ opening the Scriptures kindled the disciples’ hearts. “For it is [the Lord Jesus] who “opening the Scriptures” kindles the hearts of the disciples so that they say, “Was not our heart burning within us when he opened to us the Scriptures?”” In *Fragments on Luke* 256, Origen argues that love is the medium by which the fire was held out to the disciples. More boldly, in *Homilies on Luke* 26, Origen offers a long discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in baptism. Luke Gospel describes baptism in 3:16 as “with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” Looking at this text, Origen concludes that fire is supposed to be an image of destruction and change. To those God has converted, the baptism is of spirit; to those unconverted, it is of fire. With a bit of imagination, Origen’s thought can be extended to the Emmaus Road text. When the disciples’ eyes were opened to recognize Jesus, the recognition purified their understanding of Jesus’ words and transformed their hearts from uncertainty into renewed faith.

Alongside these New Testament commentators, the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint (or “LXX”) also uses the Greek verb “to burn” in connection with the presence of God. Overall, Origen and Ambrose agree that the Emmaus

text’s image of “fire” is a reference to the effect of Jesus’ Scriptural preaching, transmitted to the disciples in Jesus’ love, in the Holy Spirit, with a transforming effect.

Secular Greek literature of the ancient world offers another angle on the metaphor of fire. In secular ancient Greek literature, fire was an expression for the emotion of joy or affection. Some ancient sources suggest the metaphor is for affection. Luke Timothy Johnson cites Plato’s Laws (783A) as an example.61 John Nolland makes the same point from another ancient source.62 I. Howard Marshall has a slightly different take on the “on fire” metaphor. He argues that it refers to joy or elation, drawing on Cicero (Brutus 80), Old Testament references, and another ancient reference.63 Marshall could also have cited Augustine, in his Sermons, 236. Augustine points out that it was possible for Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture to fill the disciples with joy and to set their hearts on fire, without giving away that the speaker was Jesus.64 The Emmaus text’s image of fire suggests the two disciples’ affection for Jesus, their joy at hearing his words, or both.

A final remark from the ancient world on this metaphor: Cyril of Alexandria, in commentary on Luke, says that Jesus’ interpretation “stirs up [the disciples’] minds.”65,66 Cyril does not direct this comment at the “hearts on fire” metaphor, but this “stirring up” must be related to the experience the disciples describe with that metaphor. While the metaphor most clearly points to spiritual and emotional angles of life, Cyril’s interpretation

66 Ideally one would check the Greek text for the word choice rendered “minds,” but Cyril’s commentary appears to have survived only in Syriac versions and not in Greek.
of the metaphor points to the mental angle. The two meanings may be complementary. At Pentecost, after all, the mighty work of the Spirit is language translation. On the Emmaus road, the disciples’ hearts are on fire because of Jesus’ interpretation (translation) of Scripture. To describe an experience as spiritual or emotional is not to exclude a description of its effect on the rational mind.


Did early Christians use the Emmaus Road text as a guide for ordering their worship services—their liturgy of worship? Modern scholars debate whether the Emmaus Road text helped form Christian worship. Modern commentators mainly focus on whether the bread Jesus breaks is a model of the Lord’s Supper. This debate centers on the relationship between the Emmaus Road text and Luke’s account of the Lord’s Supper in chapter 22. Most scholars see some link between the broken bread at the Emmaus Road lodgings and the broken bread of the Last Supper. If there is, then it makes sense to look to the Emmaus Road text as a guide to faith-science dialogue, since faithful scientific work and dialogue is also an act of praise to God. The fourth movement of this thesis fleshes out this argument. However, some modern commentators are more skeptical that the Emmaus Road text is a guide to worship.

Fred Craddock (1990) strongly advocates for a historical relationship between the Emmaus Road text and Christian worship. His presents a fourfold argument:

1. All of the Resurrection appearances in Luke are in Jerusalem, and all take place on the single Sunday after the Resurrection. The stories and their

framing on Sunday strongly support the idea that these texts were used in
Easter worship.

2. Chapter 24 as a whole consists of four sections: Empty tomb; Emmaus Road;
re-gathering in Jerusalem; and blessing and sending; elements of worship are
present in each section.

3. The Emmaus Road text is unique to Luke, and much of Luke’s unique
contribution is worship material. For instance, much of the material unique to
Luke’s Gospel is in the birth narratives, which overflow with songs, prayers,
doxologies and benedictions. It is hard to ignore that Simeon’s *Nunc
dimmitis* prayer (Luke 2:29-32) and the *Magnificat* of Mary (1:46-55) are
both unique to Luke’s Gospel. Both of these texts have been used throughout
the history of Christian worship, up to the present day. Luke’s Gospel has
corporate worship as one of its particular interests among the fourfold Gospel
accounts.

4. Specific details of the Emmaus Road texts suggest that it was composed with
Christian worship in mind. These details include its Easter evening setting,
its focus on Word (preaching) and Sacrament (supper), the fact that Cleopas’
and Jesus’ words provide a summary of the Gospel, and the movement from
table to “sending” out to others.

Luke Timothy Johnson (1991) adds a fifth, pivotal argument that the Emmaus road
text is a guide for worship.\(^68\)


Nolland (1993) gives this fifth argument additional depth and nuance. He proposes that the Emmaus Road text is not recording an exact celebration of the Lord’s Supper, yet the text intended to inform the celebration. Nolland writes, “Luke wants to make the point that the Christians of his day were able to have the living Lord made known to them in the eucharist celebration in a manner that was at least analogous to the experience of the Emmaus disciples.”

Bock (1996) takes a more skeptical view. While Nolland and Johnson contend that the Emmaus story is a glass is half full of connections with the Last Supper, Bock argues that the glass is half empty. Two key elements of the Last Supper are missing: there is no wine, and there are no words of blessing. It does seem unfair of Bock to argue that the words of the blessing are missing, since Luke does narrate that Jesus “blessed” the bread. The missing wine is more troubling. In any case, for Bock, the Emmaus Road encounter is neither example nor paradigm of Eucharistic worship.

Ancient Christian interpreters of the text do not say much regarding how Jesus’ breaking of bread relates either to the Last Supper or to church worship. Augustine and Gregory the Great both do comment on the Emmaus Road text and the Lord’s Supper, assuming the real presence of Christ in the elements. However, they are more interested in hospitality in the home than worship in the church. Augustine emphasizes that hospitality is how the Lord is recognized:

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71 Ibid.
You too, then, if you want to live, do what they did in order to recognize the Lord. They showed him hospitality. ... What had been lost through infidelity was restored through hospitality...Learn where to look for the Lord, learn where to have him, learn where to recognize him. It's when you eat him. ... It's a greater thing to have Christ in your heart than in your house.  

Gregory the Great does not refer to the Lord’s Supper per se. He concludes that Christ is present in each stranger welcomed at a person’s table:

Consider, my friends, how great the virtue of hospitality is. Receive Christ at your tables so that you can be received by him at the eternal banquet. Offer hospitality now to Christ the stranger, that at the judgment you may not be a stranger, unknown to him, but may be received into his kingdom as one of his own.  

Augustine and Gregory do not comment on whether Jesus’ breaking bread with the two Emmaus Road disciples is an instance of the Lord’s Supper. They are more interested in what it means for home hospitality—though from this text, they both believe one can truly encounter Christ in hospitality.

To sum up, the Emmaus Road text’s account of Jesus breaking bread is likely related to the Last Supper. There are enough ‘intertexts’ or references from this text to the Last Supper, as well as intertexts pointing to the feeding of five thousand. Bock’s charge that the intertexts are not strong enough prompts the question, ‘not strong enough for what?’ The present study only argues that the Emmaus Road text is instructional for worship. The arguments from Nolland and Johnson make it clear that the Emmaus Road story is a story about how Christians worship. Augustine applied the text, not to corporate worship, but to the practice of hospitality. Likewise, this study applies the text, not to corporate worship, but to the specific angle of praise that the vocation of science has to offer. If Augustine can find

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72 Augustine, Works iii/7, 41
a worshipful vocation for hospitality in this story, it is no less appropriate to find a vocation for scientific practice in it.

Language of Events and Happenings

The Emmaus Road text is filled with language describing events and happenings. This study proposes that the text has four distinct clusters of “events” or “happenings” language:

1. Use of the Greek particle δεῖ / ἔδει, which names an event as a necessity;
2. Use of the verb ἐγένετο (“it happened that…”) to illustrate turning points in the narrative;
3. Sentence constructions that convey interruption, “while X, then Y;”
4. The disciples’ use of a certain kind of Greek phrase called an ‘articular nominative.’ These phrases turn verbs and phrases into nouns, like the English noun “happenings” from the verb “happen.” The disciples use this kind of phrase to give their observations of events they witnessed. An example: v. 18, τὰ γενόμενα ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις (“the things that happened there these [last few] days”).

These four clusters do not include all language of events and happenings in the text. For instance, the text also uses the word ἴδον twice (“behold,” or “meanwhile” in this study’s translation). This word is a scene change marker. It opens the Emmaus Road pericope in v. 13 and closes the scene with in Jesus’ commission in v. 49. However, the use of ἴδον will not come into the argument of this study. The four clusters identified above are the most important for this study.
The four clusters overlap to a degree. For example, in v. 30, it happened (ἐγένετο) that while Jesus was being seated with the disciples, he took the bread and blessed it (“while X, then Y”). In v. 18, Cleopas refers to Jesus’ trial and crucifixion as τὰ γενόμενα ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις (“the things that happened there these [last few] days”), using γενόμενα (“happenings”), the same verb as ἐγένετο (aorist middle indicative). The clusters are not distinct in use, but they each signify distinct angles on the events in the text.

The Divine δεῖ

The first cluster is the use of δεῖ / ἔδει to express divine necessity: Something absolutely had to take place. This cluster has meaning in the passage because it is only ever used to refer to events that God foreordains, to which Scripture is the witness. In the Emmaus Road text, δεῖ appears at v. 26; it also appears at v. 44, spoken by Jesus, referring to the Scriptures, and pointing to the necessity of events God foreordained. Luke Timothy Johnson notes that Luke’s use of δεῖ is shorthand for God’s plan, in 2:49, 4:43, 13:14, 13:33, 21:9, 22:37, and Luke uses δεῖ specifically of the Messiah’s suffering in 9:22 and 17:25, as well as Acts 17:3. A ‘cluster’ of two uses in Luke 24 would not necessarily be significant on its own, but it is significant in the presence of eight other uses in Luke.

Εγένετο

The second cluster is the verb ἐγένετο (“it happened that…”). In the Emmaus Road text, this verb is used to indicate when Jesus does something that advances the narrative. Contemporary scholar John Nolland notes that the use of ἐγένετο to advance the narrative is a

75 ἐγένετο is the aorist middle indicative form of γίνομαι, “to come into being, to take place.”
feature of Luke’s Gospel, not just the Emmaus Road text. Remarkably, the Emmaus Road text uses this verb almost exclusively for Jesus’ actions:

- Now as they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself came up
- He was a man and a prophet
- all these things happened three days ago
- And then it happened, as he was being seated with them, that he took the bread and blessed it
- And he became invisible to them
- it happened that while he blessed them he was taken away from them

(adjacent to the text, v. 51)

Conversely, when the disciples act—going to Emmaus, talking with one another, inviting Jesus to stay with them, and so on—a construction with ἐγένετο is never used. The text uses this verb as a technique to identify narrative moments in the text in which “it happened that Jesus” did X or Y. Two of these expressions are in the mouth of Cleopas, while four are part of the text’s main narration. Whether the narrator or a character is speaking, the association of ἐγένετο with Jesus’ actions is the same. This distinct association of ἐγένετο with Jesus calls attention to the actions of Jesus in the text.

**Interruption (“While X, Then Y”)**

The third language cluster is similar in meaning to ἐγένετο but is more broadly bounded and more widely used. The text frequently portrays the actions of the characters with sentence constructions following the pattern “while X, then Y.” The texts reserves the

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verb ἐγένετο for Jesus, but uses this broader “while X, than Y” patter for multiple characters.

A variety of specific constructions in the text fall into this cluster. Luke 24 uses a construction fitting this pattern ten times:

- Now as they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself came up (combined with ἐγένετο)
- They had gone to the tomb early, and not having found his body there, they came [back to us] declaring that they had seen a vision of angels
- And starting from Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted the things about himself in all the Scriptures
- And then it happened, as he was being seated with them, that he took the bread and blessed it (combined with ἐγένετο)
- Weren’t our hearts on fire within us as he was talking to us on the road; as he was opening the Scriptures to us?
- And, that same hour, they got [back] up and returned to Jerusalem.
- As they were saying all this, he himself stood among them (adjacent to the text, v. 36)
- Being startled and afraid at first, they came to believe they were seeing a spirit (v. 37)
- While they were still disbelieving for joy…, he said to them, “do you have any food?” (v. 41)
- It happened that while he blessed them he was taken away from them (v. 51, combined with ἐγένετο)
Unlike the ἐγένετο construction, the one who takes action in these instances is not always Jesus.\(^{77}\) The formula is used when the acting person is being a witness of God’s work: the death and resurrection of Jesus. In each instance, the narrative is advancing as the various characters bear witness to God’s work. Jesus points to this trend in v. 48 when he says to the gathered disciples: “You are witnesses of these things.” Jesus’ command makes this pattern the norm for Christian discipleship. Today’s disciples continue to be witnesses of Jesus.

On the other hand, there are examples in the text where the course of the story is changed, but the change is not clearly a witness of God’s work of the Resurrection. In the dialogue between Jesus and Cleopas (vv. 17-27), the story proceeds from one statement to the next without an interrupting action. In the moment when the disciples dissuade Jesus from going further down the road, the construction used is purely narration of one event, “he made as if to journey farther,” followed by another, “they persuaded him against it.” The absence of “while X, then Y” construction in these cases further suggests that the text meaningfully prefers “while X, then Y” when indicating that the narrative change is a witness to God’s work.

**Articular Nominative Phrases**

The text uses articular nominative phrases to slow down the narrative while characters recount what has happened to them. An articular nominative phrase uses the Greek article to frame a phrase as a noun, like τὰ περὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζαρηνοῦ, “what happened to Jesus the Nazarene.” These phrases contrast with the use of ἐγένετο and the

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\(^{77}\) In three instances the formula is combined with ἐγένετο when Jesus is the one who advances the narrative.
interruption constructions, which advance the narrative. John Nolland points out that Luke’s Gospel frequently uses articular nominative phrases. Cleopas and his companion use the articular nominative phrase to frame what they have seen in Jerusalem in vv. 14, 18, and 19. The articular nominative is also used in v. 35, when the disciples recount to the others in Jerusalem what they have just seen that day on the road. The common thread in each case is that Cleopas and his companion do not fully understand the event they narrate. In vv. 14, 18, and 19, as the disciples first speak to Jesus, the text sets up a dramatic irony. Because the stranger Jesus asks the disciples about what just happened in Jerusalem the disciples decide that the stranger is uninformed. Yet, Jesus is the only one who really knows the full story about what happened to him.

Table 1. The Four Clusters of Events or Happenings Language in Luke 24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Condition of Use in Luke 24</th>
<th>Instances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>δει (assertion)</td>
<td>Jesus proclaims the necessity of events foreordained by God in the Scriptures.</td>
<td>vv. 26, 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἐγένετο (action)</td>
<td>Jesus takes action to advance the narrative.</td>
<td>vv. 15, 19, 21, 30, 31, 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While X, Then Y</td>
<td>Jesus or his witnesses take an action that bears witness to his death and resurrection.</td>
<td>vv. 15, 23, 27, 30-31, 32, 33, 36, 37, 41, 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articular Nominative</td>
<td>The disciples describe events they witnessed prior to their understanding of the events.</td>
<td>vv. 14, 18, 19, 35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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79 It is important to note that this list is, somewhat arbitrarily, excluding instances where the article is used inside a prepositional phrase in the “X” part of a “While X, then Y” construction listed earlier.
80 With regard to what happened on the road, their understanding was accurate, if incomplete; its incompleteness is demonstrated by Jesus’ abrupt appearance with them as they give their account. Jesus’ appearance as they tell their story is parallel to his appearance to them on the road. In both instances the disciples start from observation, and find that Jesus is ahead of their observations.
First Movement: Father, Son and Spirit Have Initiative

The Emmaus Road text uses language of events and happenings to show that Jesus has the initiative at each step of the story. Each category of language points to a distinct aspect of this initiative. The use of δεῖ shows that Jesus understands God’s foreordained work; Jesus can explain what the disciples do not understand. The use of ἐγένετο shows that the character Jesus is the primary actor in the narrative; he has a unique ability to advance it. The broader “while X, then Y” interruptions of the narrative show that as the disciples bear witness to what they come to understand of God’s work, they interrupt the flow of events around them.

An imaginative reader may spot that these three aspects of God’s initiative resemble the Trinity: the divine ordinance of the Father; the Son as forerunner; the Spirit at work in the disciples. Was this resemblance intentional on the part of the Gospel author? It is hard to speculate. The text includes other clusters of language use beyond the three clusters above. But, these three features are interesting in a text as clearly Trinitarian as Luke 24.
Interpreters of this text, from Ambrose,81 to Origen,82 to Theophylact,83 to Calvin,84 agree that the Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit work in tandem in the Emmaus Road story. Several facts about the text support this finding. The “hearts on fire” metaphor likely points to the Spirit’s work. Ambrose places the “fire” of the Scriptures and the “fire” of Pentecost in parallel to one another.85 The mysterious blindness of the disciples to Jesus’ person, and his self-disclosure and disappearance at the end of the text, are also both works of the Spirit.86 Cleopas describes Jesus as a “prophet mighty in word and deed,” a phrase used often in the New Testament87,88 to imply that the Holy Spirit is with a person (cf. Acts 10:38). In Luke 24:49, Jesus concludes the chapter and Luke’s Gospel by commanding the disciples to await the coming of the Spirit. In context, the work of the Holy Spirit is also one of those concerns that Luke’s Gospel most highlights compared with the New Testament’s other three Gospels. Luke’s Gospel refers to the Holy Spirit 17 times, compared with Mark’s six and Matthew’s

81 Ambrose, Seven Exegetical Works, 65: “This fire the Lord Jesus sent upon earth, and faith shone bright, devotion was enkindled, love was illuminated, and justice was resplendent. With this fire He inflamed the heart of His Apostles, as Cleophas bears witness, saying, “Was not our heart burning within us, while he was explaining the scriptures?” Therefore the wings of fire are the flames of the divine Scripture. Indeed, He explained the Scriptures, and the fire went forth and entered into the hearts of His hearers. And truly they were wings of fire, because “the words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried by the fire.” … The Holy Spirit also came down “and filled the whole house, where very many were sitting, and there appeared parted tongues as of fire.””

82 Origen, Homilies on Genesis and Exodus, 372, offers exegesis of 2 Cor. 3:17, “the Lord is spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom”, in a larger discussion in “Exodus Homily XII:” “For it is he who “opening the Scriptures” kindles the hearts of the disciples so that they say, “Was not our heart burning within us when he opened to us the Scriptures?” May he, therefore, even now see fit to open to us what it is which he inspired his Apostle to say…”

83 Theophylactus, Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to St. Luke (House Springs, MO: Chrysostom Press, 1997), 323. “Their hearts burned within them with the fire of the Lord’s words, meaning, that as He spoke to them, the conviction burned within them that what He said was true. It may also mean that as He expounded the Scriptures to them, their hearts beat with excitement as the thought formed within them, ‘It is the Lord Who is teaching us.’”

85 Ambrose, Seven Exegetical Works, 65.
88 NT occurrences include Acts 7:22; Rom. 15:18; 2 Cor. 10:11; Col. 3:17; 2 Thess. 2:17; and 1 John 3:18.
All of this evidence suggests that Jesus collaborates with the Holy Spirit in his words and actions on the Emmaus Road.

So, the first movement of this study presents the Emmaus Road text as a story of the Son Jesus collaborating with the Holy Spirit. The Son and Spirit take the initiative to make two disciples into witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection.

The Narrative Structure in Detail

The first movement proposed that Jesus holds all the ‘cards’ of initiative in the Emmaus Road text. The Son Jesus works in tandem with the Holy Spirit to transform the disciples into witnesses of his resurrection. The second movement will seek to answer the question, “how does this transformation take place?” The language markers above, and a four-part division of the text (Gather/Word/Table/Send), are used to examine the narrative structure in detail. The Emmaus Road text is a story about stories, a narrative about narratives. The disciples have a narrative about Jesus; they also have heard the women’s story. This detailed examination shows that Jesus offers a twofold response to the disciples’ narrative troubles, leading them into a transformation of person and perspective. The first of the text’s four portions (vv. 13-24) sets up the disciples’ narrative conflict; the next two portions are Jesus’ two responses (vv. 25-27, 28-31); and the final portion is the disciples’ response to Jesus (vv. 32-35).

Gather (vv. 13-24)

In the first portion of the text, the disciples encounter Jesus in disguise. The reader discovers what kind of place the disciples are in, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. In summary, the disciples are in a troubled position of doubt and interest. They are not in total despair, but they are struggling with trusting the God of Israel.

Before they meet Jesus, the disciples are leaving Jerusalem on foot in the direction of Emmaus. They are engaged in a serious discussion of what just happened there—Jesus’ mighty works, and grievous Crucifixion (23:26-56). One might imagine low but excited tones, a hesitancy but a necessity to take the conversation in the direction it must go. The disciples are stuck. They are confronted with conflicting evidence. They just heard that some women of their group found Jesus’ tomb empty (24:1-12), but they know Jesus to be dead. They might have seen Jesus die with their own eyes, or they might have heard it from their trusted companions—the text does not say. In any case, the reader can already make an accurate guess at what the disciples are debating. They must have some sense that not all in the story of Jesus’ execution was as it seemed.

Commentators through the ages have discussed whether the two disciples still had faith, at this point, or not. Many commentators have painted the disciples as faithless, without hope, and grieving. However, the text makes a compelling case for troubled uncertainty rather than hopeless grief. The reformer John Calvin’s view is in line with the text: the disciples are troubled, yet open to further discussion—with each other, and

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90 E.G., Augustine, *Works*, iii/7, 25-28, from Sermon 232: if Cleopas can say “we had hoped,” their hopes must be over. The disciples grieved Jesus as if he were dead. Similarly, Sermon 236: to speak of Jesus as a “prophet” invokes the image of dead prophets gone before. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Luke*, 616: grief implies belief in Jesus’ death. Astonishment at the women’s testimony implies disbelief or discredit. Luther, “Sermon at the Funeral of the Elector, Duke John of Saxony” (1532), in *Luther’s Works* vol. 51, 234: the disciples thought that Jesus would remain dead.
eventually with the stranger they meet.\textsuperscript{91} Several arguments support this point of view. First, the text portrays the disciples trying to figure out what just happened in Jerusalem. If both disciples thought that Jesus’ death was an open-and-shut case, why have an extended discussion on the road? Yet, the text portrays the disciples discussing. Second, if the disciples had been disbelieving, the text could have said so. While the disciples describe their own disbelief as being “taken aback” or “astonished,” the narrator in v. 11 describes a larger group of them as disbelieving.\textsuperscript{92} Since the narrator does not hesitate to paint the larger group as disbelieving, the portrayal of the debating disciples clearly points to uncertainty rather than disbelief.

Two more arguments for the disciples being troubled and uncertain, rather than hopeless and grieving, can be made by jumping a bit ahead to their discourse with Jesus. Cleopas’ description of Jesus builds from the identity of a prophet to the identity of Messiah. As Calvin points out, public sentiment toward Jesus on this particular day was negative.\textsuperscript{93} For Cleopas to confess hope in Jesus as Messiah, even past hope, was a risk.\textsuperscript{94} Yet Cleopas confesses, not just past hope, but an ongoing condition.\textsuperscript{95,96} The best explanation is that Cleopas and the other disciple are still holding on to some kind of hope, no matter how contrary the facts seemed. Another indicator that the disciples have not given up on Jesus is that Cleopas includes the detail that “all these things happened three days ago.” This detail is important because Luke’s Gospel also shows Jesus making “third day” prophecies

\textsuperscript{92} Green, \textit{The Gospel of Luke}, 847.
\textsuperscript{93} The change from using “fraught” as a gerund with a prepositional phrase, “fraught with X,” to a mere adjective that scrupulously leaves the trouble unsaid, is an interesting shift of convention occurring within my lifetime, like the abrupt change of “to set foot” into “to step foot.”
\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Contra} Augustine, \textit{Works iii/7}, Sermon 232.
concerning himself (18:33). If Cleopas and the other disciple had forgotten or dismissed Jesus’ claims, the inclusion of this “third day” detail is hard to explain. For these reasons, Calvin is right to say: “Thus, this godly man, caught between faith and fear, nourished his faith and struggles, as a man, to overcome his fear.” Most contemporary commentators also affirm that the Emmaus Road text does not portray the two disciples as forsaking all faith and hope, but rather as troubled and uncertain followers who do not yet know what to do with what they’ve heard reported to them.

Jesus comes up and joins the disciples on the road at this point (interrupting their discussion!). The disciples utterly fail to recognize who is on the road with them. The phenomenon of meeting the resurrected Jesus without recognizing him is a common point across all four Gospels, and one of their more peculiar features. The text further intrigues the reader with the perplexing passive sentence, “their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.” Ancient and modern commentators both sense theological tension here. They see a need to explain why the disciples did not recognize their own teacher, and to name who or what prevented them. Would God really have blinded the disciples? Could Satan have done it? There are generally four positions:

1. The Lord changed how he appeared to the disciples in such a way as to prevent their recognizing him. Gregory the Great writes: “He did not show them an appearance which they could recognize, but the Lord behaved before the eyes of their bodies in accord with what was going on inwardly before the

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100 Polkinghorne, Serious Talk, 96-97.
Laurence 51

“We Were Hoping”

eyes of their hearts.” The 11th century Orthodox commentator Theophylactus of Ochrid seems to take this view also.

2. The Lord’s appearance was unchanged, but the Holy Spirit prevented the disciples from recognizing Jesus. John Calvin takes this view as do modern commentators Bock and Craddock (uncertain).

3. The disciples’ failure to recognize Jesus was a Satanic act of deception. The Lord’s appearance was unchanged, and the Spirit did not conceal his identity. Modern commentator John Nolland argues for this position. Nolland’s main argument is that in Luke 18:31-34, Jesus prophesies concerning his resurrection on the third day, and the disciples do not understand the prophecy. A Satanic act is needed to explain the disciples’ failures of recognition.

4. The disciples simply fail to recognize Jesus without any spiritual angle: they are in shock, or their preoccupation prevents immediate recognition. Some commentators are aware of this point of view, but none espouse it.

Of the four interpretations that commentators considered, the one most closely fitted to the evidence is (2), that the Spirit prevented the disciples from recognizing Jesus. First, the text says, it was “their eyes” that “were prevented from recognizing him,” which points away from the face of the Lord being different or transformed. Second, it is unclear if there is a real difference between (1) the Lord acting to conceal his appearance and (2) the Spirit

acting to prevent recognition. Regarding (3), the argument that Satan prevented the disciples from recognizing Jesus seems overcomplicated: Satan is not mentioned anywhere in the text, and while Satan is present in Luke’s Gospel, Nolland’s sole argument has a long way to go to show conclusively that Satan is involved. (And even if it was Satan, surely it was under the permission of God?) Finally, regarding (4), it seems hard to believe that the disciples would have failed to recognize their teacher of several years. Two different people, who have both spent months or years with a third person, fail to recognize the third person when he appears in front of them? Surely some glimmer of recognition or twinge of suspicion would break through in their manner. Yet, the disciples are clearly caught one hundred percent flat-footed in v. 31. Not only is this idea improbable, it is likely not what the text means. It would be strange for the Gospel narrator to use the passive verb “were prevented” (ἐκρατοῦντο) to describe a human’s unintended failure to recognize Jesus. The verb is aggressive: its 47 NT uses are almost always active voice, with a personal subject exerting force or will on another person or on an object.\footnote{Luke’s use here is one of three passive-voice uses of the verb, and the only such use about which there can be any doubt as to whether the object (“their eyes were prevented by what…?”) is a personal actor. The other two are John 20:23 and Acts 2:24. In John 20:23 the object is either Jesus’ Father in heaven or the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:24, contrary to some English translations, personifies death: “it was impossible for [Jesus] to be held back by Death.”} If the narrator meant that the disciples failed to recognize Jesus on their own, other verbs were available. The verb choice points to an outside actor preventing the disciples from recognizing Jesus. The verb strongly implies the effect was beyond their capability to resist. The question is not how they failed to recognize Jesus, but who prevented them. The best answer is “the Spirit, or the Spirit and the Son.” Again, it does not help to push the distinction.

Why would the Holy Spirit prevent the disciples from recognizing Jesus? The text makes the reason clear. The larger group of disciples already disbelieved the women’s story

107 Luke’s use here is one of three passive-voice uses of the verb, and the only such use about which there can be any doubt as to whether the object (“their eyes were prevented by what…?”) is a personal actor. The other two are John 20:23 and Acts 2:24. In John 20:23 the object is either Jesus’ Father in heaven or the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:24, contrary to some English translations, personifies death: “it was impossible for [Jesus] to be held back by Death.”
of the empty tomb in v. 11. The two disciples’ failure to recognize Jesus on the road in v. 16 extends this disbelief of the women. As the story progresses, an ironic parallel develops between the women running back to Jerusalem in v. 10 and the disciples running back to Jerusalem in v. 33. The Spirit prevents the disciples from recognizing Jesus because the disciples already disbelieved when the women told them.\textsuperscript{108} The Spirit’s purpose is to prepare the disciples, so Jesus can effectively address their disbelief (vv. 25-31). While the Spirit acted to restrain the disciples’ recognition of Jesus’ face, the Spirit caused them no more disbelief than they already had, in preparation for that disbelief to be taken away.\textsuperscript{109}

A final remark about the disciples as they walk: the choice of language, “conversing and debating” (ὁμιλεῖν αὐτοὺς καὶ συζητεῖν), is intellectually colored. “Conversing” emphasizes the disciples’ presence and association with one another. “Debating” points to a collective examination of the facts; a truth-seeking enterprise. The point of the disciples’ conversation is to get to the bottom of things.\textsuperscript{110} These words are the first of many in the Emmaus Road text that imply a mental, analytical dimension to the disciples’ encounter with Jesus, just as the disciples’ hearts “on fire” point to a spiritual and emotional experience.

When Jesus approaches the disciples, he asks them what they are talking over. The disciples react by breaking stride with downcast faces—one imagines a ‘moment of silence.’ Cleopas, speaking for both, returns Jesus’ question with a question. Cleopas has apparently learned something from following Jesus! He asks, “Are you the only person who made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and doesn’t know about the things that happened there these [last

\textsuperscript{108} The conclusion that the disciples experience disbelief about the women’s report does not preclude the prior conclusion that they had enough interest left to discuss what was going on.

\textsuperscript{109} Gregory I, \textit{Forty Gospel Homilies}, 176.

\textsuperscript{110} Johnson, \textit{Luke}, 393.
few] days?”

To this response, Jesus feigns ignorance: “What [should I know about]?”

Clearly, Cleopas takes the stranger Jesus’ ignorance at face value and offers him the facts.

The factual, reportage nature of Cleopas’ response should not be overlooked:

He was a man and a prophet of powerful works and words, before God and everyone [in the city]. [What happened was] the chief priests and the city leaders handed him over for a death sentence and crucified him, though we were hoping that he was the one to secure Israel’s freedom.

Cleopas concludes by sharing the hope he and his companion had for Jesus. He shares this hope with this stranger at some personal risk. Cleopas is not only affiliated with a convicted criminal; he hoped the criminal would succeed in liberating Israel! But when it comes to his beliefs, Cleopas is not taking any risks at all. He and his companion are confident in the facts they have. They may have witnessed the events personally; if not, they had heard the story from many in Jerusalem who were there. When the women reported the empty tomb, Cleopas and his companion had not been ready to believe them.

Cleopas’ estimation of the facts, combined with his hope in Jesus, leads him to a narrative conflict. Cleopas ends his summary by pointing out that he and his companion harbored hope in a Messiah figure who would defy the sad story arc of God-sent prophets (cf. Luke 20:9-19): beatings, shameful treatment, and murder. The world had never been kind to God’s prophets, and the story of a lost-cause prophet was all too familiar to Cleopas.

While he had hoped for a different outcome, he knew what he was getting when he got it. He

111 Σὐ μόνος παροικεῖς Ἰερουσαλήμ καὶ οὐκ ἔγνως τὰ γενόμενα ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις; the articular nominative is used, with the word choice of “γενόμενα.”

112 This translation is interpretive. Jesus’ response is a one-word prompt for more, Ποία (“what?”) that could be interpreted in at least two ways, “What things happened there in these days?” or “what things do I not know?” Since the disciples’ response in v. 20 begins, ὅπως, “that the chief priests and rulers then delivered him up…,” “what things do I not know?” is how the disciples understood the prompt. (Culy 2010)

might as well have said the experiment had been successfully repeated. Yet, Cleopas had
expected, not a prophet, but a Messiah, whose career would succeed with Israel’s liberation.
In Jesus, he was looking for that Messiah figure, not just a prophet. So, Cleopas had access
to two possible narratives (two theories?) for God’s work in Jesus’ ministry: victorious
Messiah, or defeated prophet. He was hoping for one, but he received the other. He thought
he would receive bread, but thought he had received a snake.

Or did he? Cleopas continues,

But all these things happened three days ago. But also, [this morning,] certain
women from our group took us aback. They had gone to the tomb early, and not
having found his body there, they came [back to us] declaring that they had seen a
vision of angels, and that these angels claimed Jesus was alive. So, some of [the
men] in our group set off for the tomb, and found it thus, exactly as the women said.
But him, they did not see.

Interestingly, while the women reported “men in radiant garments” (24:4) to the
disciples, Cleopas tells Jesu that those men were “angels.” He has upgraded the women’s
account a bit. Also, his use of “took us aback” does not dismiss the women’s account—
though that morning, the disciples had compared it to a fairy tale (v. 11). In Cleopas’ mind,
something in the women’s account has centered it enough to make it worth telling to a
stranger. The women’s account prompted the two disciples to converse, and it buttressed
them against total despair.

114 Martin M. Culy, Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press,
2010), 746-47.
115 The idiom (τρίτην ταύτην ἡμέραν ἄγει) is unclear. A wooden translation would be “X leads the
third day since…” The subject of ἄγει is unspecified. It could be impersonal (“it is the third day”), but
there is a shortage of evidence for this view. It could be about Jesus (“He is spending the third day”) but
evidence is not very good for this view either. The best approach is probably to add a subject assuming
what figure the idiom means, such as “This sunrise brings the third day.” Culy, Luke: A Handbook on the
Greek Text, 746-47.
Word (vv. 25-27)

At v. 25 Jesus begins to respond to the disciples’ doubts. Jesus’s first response to the disciples takes the form of an interpretation of Scripture.

The word “SERMON” printed in a worship bulletin takes up very little space, though the sermon takes up a healthy portion of the service. Likewise here. The text does not name any specific Scriptures in Jesus’ interpretation. Instead, the text gestures to the entire Old Testament, with the expression “Moses and all the prophets.” Nor does the text give too many details about how Jesus is interpreting the Old Testament—his methods. Instead it offers Jesus’ overall point: The Messiah’s suffering is not evidence against his Messianic calling; suffering is an essential step on the Messiah’s road to glory. Why make this point? Jesus is closing the disciples’ disconnect between two narratives: the narrative of suffering prophets and the narrative of a successful Messiah. He preaches that the Messiah must suffer, so the disciples can understand both the Scripture and the Crucifixion in a new light. That said, Jesus is interpreting the Scriptures, not directly interpreting the events of the Crucifixion. For instance, Jesus does not try to convince the disciples that the Crucifixion is not horrific. Nor does he argue that the Crucifixion reveals something about God they did not know before. The Crucifixion itself is not Jesus’ text. The Scriptures are. Whatever is revealed in the Crucifixion was first present, if not yet made manifest, in the words of Scripture. To misquote Eisenhower: what the God of the Bible has brought to pass in the world has first come to pass in the heart of the Bible.

117 Bock’s fourfold division of the Emmaus text would have ended the first section at v. 16 and started the second at v. 17, placing the disciples’ doubt into the “Word” portion of the text.
118 The narrator also gives the reader v. 44 with its even longer, more specific idiom “the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms”—parallels for Torah, Nevi’im, Ketuvim.
Jesus’ opening expression, “O, you lack understanding” (Ὦ ἀνόητοι), shows up in ancient Greek secular literature\(^{119}\) and the New Testament.\(^{120}\) The word is used to describe those who are not “wise” (σοφός, Rom. 1:14) and when a dialogue partner just doesn’t get it (Gal. 3:1). From Cleopas’ report of events, Jesus concludes that the disciples do not get it. What is the “it” that they do not understand? They miss that the Messiah’s death is not only possible, but divinely necessary (ἔδει, v. 26). That is, if Cleopas had two possible narratives for God’s plan for Jesus’ ministry, the “failed prophet” and “successful Messiah” narrative, then something about that “successful Messiah” narrative needs tweaking. Some deeper magic is not considered in it. Jesus proceeds to offer the tweak: “starting from Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted the things about himself in all the Scriptures” (v. 27). The word “interpreted” (διερμήνευσεν) can mean “to interpret” in the sense of making an obscure matter plain, but it can also have the English sense of “to translate” from an unknown language to a known one.\(^{121}\) Jesus is adding something to the disciples’ understanding that they would not have been able to find on their own. The disciples could not have been expected to see the Crucifixion in Moses, just as, on their own, they could not have proclaimed Jesus in every language of the Mediterranean world on Pentecost morning. The Son and Spirit lead them to both places.

Equally importantly, Jesus does not make any reference to a “resurrection” yet. Jesus’ interpretive point is not that he was a successful Messiah after all (though he was), with a brief off-ramp of death to a detour in Hades. Instead, Jesus proclaims that the “off-ramp” of suffering was truly en route. God in wisdom ordained that the Messiah should

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\(^{120}\) Gal: 3:1, 3; Rom. 1:14; 1 Tim. 6:9; Tit. 3:3.

\(^{121}\) Acts 9:36; 1 Cor. 12 and 14; 2 Macc. 1:36. Interestingly, Strong’s categorizes the 1 Corinthians uses as “to interpret” rather than “to translate,” a decision that is at best doubtful considering their juxtaposition with glossolalia.
suffer. Jesus’ interpretation moves the disciples’ mental boundary markers, revealing the 
divine necessity in what they could only accept as a disappointment.

Jesus remarkably appears to fault the disciples for not understanding what the 
Scriptures say about him. Why should Jesus hold them accountable for not believing in his 
defeat of suffering, when they have not witnessed it yet? There are at least two reasons why 
the disciples should have been expecting the unexpected.

First, Jesus had not hidden his Messianic interpretation of the Scriptures from his 
disciples. He told them the Scriptures’ “persecuted prophet” story, about himself, just four 
chapters earlier in the Parable of the Tenants (20:9-18). He added the distinctive twist that 
“the Master” (κυρίος) returns and “give[s] the vineyard to others.” He also taught the 
disciples about his resurrection in plain words: “on the third day he will rise again” (18:31-34. NRSV). When Cleopas says, “all these things happened three days ago,” it suggests that 
Jesus’ words are on his mind. Yet he and the other disciples still disbelieved the initial 
resurrection reports. Jesus reproaches the disciples because he expected them to take his 
earlier preaching to heart.

If Jesus’ earlier preaching were not enough reason to believe, the disciples who went 
to the tomb (vv. 22-24) and the two disciples’ earlier hopes within a now-frustrated narrative 
(v. 21) also bear witness to the incompleteness of their understanding. The two disciples had 
access to these critical ways of knowing, but they were less sensitive to them.

Of course, Jesus does not stop with rebuke; he responds pastorally to the disciples’ 
felt need: their lack of understanding. Earlier, when Jesus asked Cleopas why he looked 
downcast, Cleopas gave Jesus an account of the facts of the case. He followed this account 
with his expected interpretation (“But we were hoping…”), then some reasons for further 
inquiry. It is significant that Jesus responds in kind. By responding, “ἀνόητοι,” he calls out
their lack of understanding. The expression “your hearts are slow to rely…,” is language about how the disciples form their beliefs. Then, he responds decisively to their interpretation (“But we were hoping…”), correcting it by interpreting the Scriptures. All these responses have an interpretive, intellectual dimension.

So, Jesus’ first response is to explain to the disciples from Scripture that there is a divine necessity for the Messiah’s death. The Scriptures are as incomprehensible as a foreign language until they are read as texts about the Messiah. The disciples do not understand how what they saw in Jerusalem could be consistent with a divine necessity. Jesus’ response is an interpretive correction, therefore the disciples’ problem must have been a misunderstanding—not firstly or only a failure to trust, but firstly a failure to see.

Table (vv. 28-31)

As the day draws to a close, the disciples see that the stranger Jesus is making as if to keep travelling. Solo night travel not being the safest undertaking, the disciples had good reason to ask this stranger to stay with them. But the stranger is Jesus, so their request is freighted with theological significance.

This invitation is a deep parallel with the Christmas story, and one cannot help but notice the dramatic reversal. In the first pages of Luke’s Gospel, the holy family is unwelcome anywhere in Bethlehem, the city of Joseph’s family. On Christmas night, the newborn Jesus arrives in a stable because no guest rooms were available. The incarnate God of the whole universe is unwelcome. On Easter night, things are different. The God of the universe is once again incarnate in a human body. But this time, two people, not his relations, who do not even recognize him, offer him a guest room. The words of his preaching have awakened something—some fire—in the hearts of these two travelers, and
they respond. Beautifully, unwittingly, the disciples restart Jesus’ relationship with the world. They welcome him in instead of pushing him out.

As they sit down to eat (“while X, then Y”), Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives bread to them. At that moment, the disciples recognize Jesus by his breaking of bread, and at that moment he vanishes from before their eyes. At this point, the Emmaus Road text pulls together three threads of meaning. First, the text concludes describing the process of Spirit-led transformation taking place within the disciples, from when the two disciples failed to recognize Jesus to when they do recognize him. Second, when the disciples’ eyes are opened, the story echoes the Genesis creation story, when the first humans ate a certain fruit that opened their eyes. Third, when Jesus breaks the bread, the story echoes the Last Supper (as well as the feeding of five thousand), leading Christian readers to use the Emmaus Road text as a framework for worship. A deeper analysis of the relationships with Genesis with the Last Supper follow later in this study. Here, a deep dive into the transformative process in the disciples in the present text is worth taking.

When the disciples truly recognize Jesus, a dramatic tension of the narrative is resolved. The tension began when Jesus showed up, and the disciples did not recognize him. So, why does Jesus reveal himself at this moment in the story? The disciples’ miss of Jesus’ identity was not happenstance; it was the deliberate work of the Spirit (or Son and Spirit). Since it was an act of the Spirit to conceal Jesus’ identity, it was also an act of the Spirit that made it possible for the disciples to recognize him. Augustine suggests that Jesus revealed himself in the bread because the table of hospitality is where he wanted Christians of all generations to recognize his presence.122 Certainly this point is important, but it does not

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122 Augustine, Works iii/7, 41.
explain why the narrative’s key dramatic tension ought to be resolved just here. Why did Jesus see fit to allow himself to be recognized, at this point in the story?

One very plausible reason: Jesus has finished teaching the disciples through his role as a stranger. Calvin correctly interprets the Emmaus Road text as a teaching exercise on Jesus’ part. Jesus deliberately, temporarily holds back a relevant piece of information—his own identity—so he can teach the disciples what would be hard to learn if could see who was speaking. Jesus interpreted the Scriptures (vv. 25-27) to show that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer. By concealing his identity, Jesus allowed the disciples to believe their eyewitness of his death fully while he shared this reinterpretation. Speaking intellectually, Jesus forced them to confront the “steel man,” the “worst case” version of their doubts, the story of a suffering Messiah to which they would bear witness in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and beyond. On this dark narrative, Jesus shines the light of divine wisdom. Jesus offers an interpretation of the Word of God that is strong enough to resist the strongest doubts; a “knowledge of God” that has “divine power to destroy strongholds.” (2 Cor. 10:4)

C. S. Lewis says somewhere that when confronted by evil, one can take mental refuge in the Good, but when the Good shows up and proves to be awful and incalculable, there is no refuge to take. The disciples have just had the reverse experience. When they knew only the good of Jesus’ ministry, they could doubt his Messianic calling once evil had crushed him. But then Jesus taught them that in the Word of God, the Messiah subordinated even evil itself, using suffering. Then, the disciples could have no more reason to doubt. “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26, NRSV). The disciples could not have made even this discovery, had Jesus’ identity been evident to them. The temptation to skip over the suffering would have been there, as it has been for all Christians since.
But this discovery is not the only one the disciples make before Jesus reveals himself. The disciples also invite Jesus to stay with them. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus gives the disciples the parable of sheep in goats. In this parable, Jesus says to his followers, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me,” and ends with the words, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:35, 40) Luke’s Gospel (21:5-38) does not include this parable, but Luke does have the Emmaus Road text. Here, Jesus appears before the disciples in disguise, exactly as he suggested in Matthew. Luke does not name the disciples’ motivation to ask Jesus to stay with them. They could have been concerned for this stranger’s safety at night; they could have been intrigued by his words on the road; they could have been extending courtesy to a person who appears to need to travel farther to reach lodging with his connections. All the text says is that the disciples urged Jesus strongly, and that they mention the day drawing to a close. If the disciples had not invited Jesus to stay with them, perhaps their story would have ended differently. But, they do, and they have the opportunity to recognize the one with whom they have been walking. Because they do not know the stranger’s identity, they show him hospitality as a stranger, and Jesus can teach them the value of their action. Augustine and Gregory, both ancient interpreters, find this point to be the story’s central takeaway.

Finally, because Jesus is unrecognized, he can reveal himself in the breaking of bread.\textsuperscript{123} Jesus’ concealment of his identity allows him to convey to the disciples a valuable insight about his continuing presence with the church in the breaking of bread.

Jesus’ concealment of identity allows him to achieve specific teaching purposes: teaching about the Crucifixion, offering an opportunity for hospitality, and revelation in the

\textsuperscript{123} Augustine, \textit{Works iii/7}, 41, in Sermon 235.
breaking of bread. Jesus’ concealment makes it possible for him to guide the disciples through a process of transformation, from troubled uncertainty to renewed faith. The text holds the reader in suspense, and the disciples in ignorance, until this transformative process is complete.

**Send (vv. 32-35)**

Once the disciples’ eyes are opened to Jesus, a dramatic irony of the story comes into focus. That morning, some women had found Jesus’ tomb empty, and the disciples dismissed their report. But now, just a few verses later, the disciples are in the same position as the women they had disbelieved that morning: they too have seen the risen Jesus. They respond the same way the women did: they get up right away and run back to the group of disciples in Jerusalem.

After the disciples understand that Jesus was the stranger, they report that ‘their hearts were strangely warmed’ before they knew it was Jesus—when he was explaining the Scriptures to them anonymously. The “hearts on fire” metaphor has at least two senses: it describes deep affection, and the presence of the Spirit of God. The disciples’ expression is therefore a multilayered reflection on what it means to be in the presence of God. As Jesus’ words stirred up their affection for him, at some level they knew what they were experiencing, even before they knew they were speaking with Jesus. The process had an intellectual, interpretive dimension and a spiritual, emotional dimension.

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124 As argued above, “Text-Critical Note on κατοικήν.”
Jesus’ two responses to the disciples form a two-part process of revelation, of ‘opening of the eyes,’ that takes place within the disciples. The disciples’ eyes begin the narrative shut; they are opened when they recognize the presence of Jesus with them at table.

**Synthesis of Close Reading**

This close reading shines light on how the Son and the Spirit worked to transform the two disciples on the road. The disciples’ opening position is uncertainty in the face of two conflicting narratives: they were hoping for Jesus the Messiah, but felt they had received only a failed prophet. Their problem is like what contemporary theologians call a ‘Problem of Evil.’ They are asking why bad things happened to a good person—why God allowed such bad things to happen to God’s anointed liberator. Jesus’ response is twofold: first a response from the Word, illuminating the divine necessity of his suffering; then a response from the Table, opening the disciples’ eyes to divine presence.

On reflection, Jesus’ response to the disciples is not exactly the response one expects from a pastor! Instead of meeting the disciples where they are, grieved, uncertain and vulnerable, Jesus sets a high bar of expectation to listen to him and to invite him in. A pastoral approach to their grief would emphasize God’s presence before going into the Biblical weeds. Instead, Jesus *hides* his presence, and “reasons with them from the Scriptures,” emphasizing the necessity of his suffering—and, by extension, the necessity of

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125 Johnson, *Luke*, 399. “The resurrection shed new light on Jesus’ death, on his words, and on the Scriptures. The “opening of the eyes” to see the texts truly and the “opening of the eyes” to see Jesus truly are both part of the same complex process of seeking and finding meaning. Without “Moses and the prophets” they would not have had the symbols for appropriating their experience. Without their experience, “Moses and the prophets” would not have revealed those symbols. Luke shows us how the risen Lord taught the Church to read Torah as prophecy “about him.” ”

126 Ibid.
their grief! In this light, it is remarkable that the disciples do not hear Jesus’ Biblical interpretation as cold comfort.

Why treat the disciples this way? Why leap so quickly into “interpretation” instead of first consoling? Jesus is preparing the disciples to bear witness to his suffering, to suffer for his story, and to receive the reward of the Resurrection. If his disciples are to be witnesses of the truth, they must accept it, head-on, in its ugliest, most disappointing form. Only thus prepared will they be ready to receive their high and “holy calling” (2 Timothy 1:9, KJV) and its everlasting reward.

The Disciples Are Troubled

The disciples begin this text in a troubled position of doubt and interest. Their witness of Jesus’ death has crushed them, but they have not quite given up all hope. As they meet Jesus, they are seeking the truth by debate, but they are also downcast. It is important not to read only a description of the disciples’ intellectual discussion (though it is certainly that), nor only of the grief that rises up inside them (though it is certainly that as well!). The vocabulary of the text presents both angles.

The disciples’ struggles look like what contemporary theology calls a Problem of Evil. They face the intellectual challenge that “bad things happen to good people,” intensified as they began to identify Jesus as the Messiah: “the worst of things happened to the holiest of people.” They also have the emotional challenge that the bad things in question happened to someone they loved—and more bad things may perhaps happen to themselves soon, if they publicly identify with him. That is, the disciples are now part of a putatively decapitated Messianic movement. They would probably have done well not to run their mouths in public about their Messiah—as they will do just a few chapters into the book of Acts.
these challenges. They have strong hints, in Jesus’ former prophecies and in the witness of some of their female companions, that their story is incomplete. All of these facts, as Cleopas explains, are on their mind when the stranger Jesus meets them. They do not know how to tie up the loose ends in a satisfactory way, either intellectually or emotionally. They are in a position of deep narrative conflict.

Of course, the reader is in a different position. The reader already knows that the stranger with them is Jesus, and may know (or have guessed) the ending. Indeed, v. 15, “Jesus himself came up,” is the reader’s first confirmation in Luke’s Gospel that the Resurrection really happened. The women reported only angels.

So, the Emmaus Road text presents a double vision of the Resurrection: the reader’s perspective from the narrative future, contrasting with Cleopas’ perspective of the narrative present. Likely, both perspectives are those of the disciples, at different points in time. As the Emmaus disciples are the only characters other than Jesus present at the key moments of the story, the “narrator’s” perspective on the text is likely the perspective of the disciples looking back on the events. Luke’s Gospel presents the Emmaus Road story from the disciples’ point of view; their point of view has one eye in the narrative present and the other in the narrative future. But the thrust of the Emmaus Road narrative is a description of how the disciples themselves were changed in their encounter with Jesus. Therefore, these two points of view on the Emmaus Road story (during and afterward) are, in turn, two points of view on how the disciples were transformed in mind and heart: the “during” and “after” photos.

As Cleopas relates the disciples’ account of “the things that happened” regarding Jesus, he is sharing the “during” picture, the place where he was. Cleopas presents Jesus’ death as part of his “executed prophet” theory. Cleopas’ account starts with facts and reports,
and then seeks and finds a theory that fits them as a sound explanation, if a saddening and incomplete one. Both of these attributes deserve repetition.

First, Cleopas’ account consists purely of information accessible to all, deliberately hidden from no one. The facts about Jesus are all out there for everyone in Jerusalem to know, not just his death, but also his mighty works before God. Nor is the women’s report artificially concealed. Cleopas shares all that he knows and theorizes to this total stranger, without reserve, perhaps even at personal risk given Jesus’ recent execution. During his struggle with the facts, Cleopas’ clear conviction is that the facts matter.

But second, Jesus’ death did not reach the disciples as a mere fact free of interpretation. Rather, it confronted the disciples as a recurring event in Israel’s history. The disciples “stopped, their faces cast down,” because they thought they had a bead on what kind of story had taken place. The story, “The Empire brutally crushes a mighty prophet of God,” was hardly an unfamiliar one. The disciples are considering the possibility that Jesus was not the Messiah, God’s chosen liberator of Israel, but rather another persecuted prophet. That theory would make sense of their observations. Yet, because of their former hope and their current information, they are not 100% confident in the hypothesis. In light of the report of the women who were at the tomb, the two disciples are open to reconsidering their beliefs. The text did frame their pre-encounter discussion as a truth-seeking exercise. During their struggle, the disciples are in a state of narrative conflict.

Jesus Responds to the Disciples’ Troubles

Jesus offers the disciples a twofold response to their troubles. Jesus’ first response (vv. 25-27) is to interpret Scripture, showing the disciples that the Messiah’s death is a

necessity part of the Messianic vocation. Jesus’ second response (vv. 28-32) is to use his personal appearance to bring the disciples to belief in the Resurrection, and in his continued presence with them.

**First Response**

Jesus’ first response (vv. 25-27) begins by reprimanding the disciples: “you lack understanding, and your hearts are slow to rely on all that the prophets have said!” Cleopas displayed interest in the facts and their interpretation. Jesus responds by correcting interpretive faults. At this point he provides no new information about what happened in Jerusalem, but he does provide a new hermeneutical lens. Jesus’ interpretation explains the Scriptures, and Cleopas’ experience, as any good theory will explain or include the theories that preceded it.

The question, then, is how Jesus’ response moves the disciples from their position of troubled uncertainty into a new faith. From the evidence available in the text, three suggestions may be made.

First, Jesus reconciles the disciples’ understanding of the whole of Scripture (cf. also v. 45). Again, Luke does not name any specific text; Jesus’ response interprets the whole Canon. Cleopas (and eventually all the disciples) describes Jesus’ interpretation as an “opening [of] their minds” (again v. 45). Jesus’ interpretation concerning his Messianic role is decisive and holistic. It elegantly explains all of God’s words. In the scope of the Emmaus Road narrative, the disciples do not specifically say they accept Jesus’ interpretation, but the conclusion of Luke 24 suggests they eventually do (again v. 45).

Second, Jesus reconciles the disciples’ understanding of Scripture with their experience, and with their hope. Cleopas’ hope and experience are in conflict; Jesus’ sermon
reveals that they are not. If Jesus died, yet Jesus is the Messiah, then the Messiah can suffer and die: a deeper unity of belief can emerge from the chaos. If the disciples are to rise to this interpretive challenge, they will have to do something with the information that confuses them: the reports of the women; the prophecies Jesus made about himself. This willingness to play with possibility is an intellectual gamble. But it is the necessary risk to believe Jesus, to discover the truth that suffering is at the foundation of his Messianic calling.129

Finally, Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture engaged not only their interpretive faculties, but also their affection for him and their hope for liberty. When the disciples report at the end of the story that their hearts were on fire as Jesus interpreted the Scriptures, they are speaking about both their intellectual state and their spiritual and emotional response. Is Jesus exploiting cognitive bias, by stirring up hopeful emotion as a reason to fish for hypotheses? No, because the stranger Jesus is not trying to convince the disciples of the Resurrection in vv. 25-27. Jesus speaks words to awaken hope, not so that the disciples will forget the facts of his death, but precisely because they must now face those hard facts. Indeed, contemporary scientists guide their research on a similar kind of hope. For instance, many contemporary physicists hold out hope that the unreconciled theories of quantum mechanics and general relativity will one day be reconciled. This hope does not make any particular schema of reconciliation more probable than it would otherwise be. The hope springs from the primal intuition that if the world is one, various valid explanations of its behavior do not contradict one another. If the intuition is valid, then the hope is a valid motivator for continued research, even in spite of current knowledge. If the intuition is false, then the whole program of science has bigger problems. The disciples’ hope also motivates

129 Of course, from the women’s point of view, believing is somewhat less of a gamble after they went to the tomb and found it empty.
them to look for what they think might be true. Jesus awakens their hope, not to trick them into believing the resurrection against evidence, but rather as a guide to what Lakatos might call their “scientific programme.” Listening to Jesus, the disciples do not yet have any theory that explains how the Messiah could suffer, let alone die, and still be the Messiah. Still less do they have a theory about what the women saw, or how Jesus’ own prophecies will be fulfilled. Nevertheless, much hinges on what they hope for—their hope might open their eyes to Jesus’ true presence with them.

Jesus’ first response moves the disciples from having many facts, with a disappointing and incomplete explanation, to having the same facts, but equipped with a new hypothesis: the Messiah can suffer and die and still be victorious. The new idea opens the door to more exciting possible explanations that get in more facts than before. The idea prompts them to look for a new end to the story—Jesus is risen! This new intellectual equipment awakened the affection and hope that they had always held as they walked with Jesus.

Second Response

Jesus first responded to the disciples’ troubling and incomplete interpretation of his death, which was an intellectual and an affective problem. Jesus’ second response is to the disciples’ action, their offer of hospitality to him.

At the end of the day, the disciples take action by inviting Jesus to stay with them. The disciples’ invitation puts their lodging connections—family, friends, paid lodgings?—at Jesus’ disposal. Jesus accepts this offer of hospitality. He breaks bread with them and then reveals his identity. First, Jesus enters; second, Jesus takes, blesses, breaks and gives out bread; while the bread is given, the disciples recognize him; then finally he vanishes from
their sight. The disciples recognize Jesus while he is distributing the bread. Recall, the Spirit is responsible for the disciples’ blindness. Jesus is not recognized as a consequence of breaking the bread, but rather simultaneous to breaking the bread as a separate action of the Spirit. So, Jesus’ response to the disciples’ invitation of hospitality should be seen as both the giving of bread and the unveiling within it, followed by his mysterious disappearance.

In Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture, he provided the disciples with no new facts. He just set them looking for the right end of the story. When he reveals his identity, the disciples realize that He Is Risen! In response to a discussion, Jesus offers a new interpretation, but in response to action, Jesus offers reaction. The disciples now have new information:

1. Jesus is raised from the dead. The women’s report was accurate. Jesus’ prophecies concerning himself were accurate. The official story, that Jesus has been killed, lacked both truth and truthiness.
2. Jesus is with them even now, even when they are unaware of it.
3. Jesus is with them (and revealed) in the breaking of bread, as he was at the feeding of five thousand, and at the Last Supper.

Jesus’ twofold response moves the disciples from troubled uncertainty toward a mature witness of Jesus. Jesus has opened the disciples’ eyes so that they could see a story that they did not previously consider credible. He has made them eyewitnesses of this story. A foresight of a new world, however brief a blink, opened before them. Accordingly, the facts that they must now explain are different facts. 99% of those facts are—as they are for believers today—the same facts that everyone else has. But what a 1%! The disciples, like Archimedes in the bathwater, have just had their minds opened to a whole new way of understanding their world.
And, like Archimedes, they are the only ones who know about their particular slice of it. Forgetting all social convention and personal risk, they hightail it back to their community of practice in Jerusalem with their new understanding. “The Lord is risen indeed!” say the disciples in Jerusalem. Their words lay the foundation of new faith for uncounted billions of future hearers.

Second Movement: Transformative Work of Son / Spirit

The close reading synthesis examined Jesus’ teaching method in the Emmaus Road text. The second movement of this study can now respond to the question, “How does Jesus respond to the disciples?” The Son and Spirit have the initiative at each step of the text. They use this initiative, accommodating to the disciples’ words and actions. Where the disciples offer a narrative to account for the facts, Jesus offers a deeper narrative that accounts for more. Where the disciples offer him hospitality, Jesus offers them himself.

The disciples’ troubles stem from a narrative conflict near the center of their identity. Cleopas expresses this conflict to Jesus as, “we were expecting X, but we observe Y happened.” To move the disciples from troubled uncertainty to new faith, Jesus must resolve this narrative conflict.

At what point is the disciples’ narrative conflict fully resolved? Does the resolution actually change who the disciples are? James Loder’s interpretive gloss of the text sheds some light on these questions. Loder, a Princeton theologian and a key figure in 20th century faith-science dialogue, places the Emmaus Road text at the center of his account of transformative experience. Loder argues that the “transforming moment” for the disciples is when Jesus breaks the bread—not earlier, when he interprets the Scriptures. Why? The Scriptures merely suggest their story should have a glorious ending for Jesus. Once Jesus
breaks the bread, the disciples can put an image on that ending: He Is Risen. Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture was compelling: it elegantly explained Moses and all the prophets, and it spoke to what they expected in a Messiah. But was it true? Jesus’ preaching prompts them to begin looking. They finally discover Jesus’ interpretation to be true when they offered the stranger Jesus a guest room. The surprising recognition of Jesus made clear to them how the Messiah had suffered and defeated death. That discovery—the Resurrection, the true glorification of the Messiah—was enough to get them up from their table and headed back to Jerusalem. A good story can only transform a person, but only if there is a good reason to believe it.

Comparison with James Loder, The Transforming Moment

In his work The Transforming Moment, Loder argues for a five-step transformative process that leads to new understanding:

1. Initial conflict of understanding;
2. Interlude of searching (characterized by unconscious “turning the problem over and over”);
3. A transforming, constructive act of the imagination;
4. Release of cognitive energy, opening of the knower to recognize himself/herself in the situation again;
5. Integration of the solution into the past knowledge or into a new body of knowledge that persuades others.130

Loder’s framework, and his accompanying interpretation of the Emmaus Road text, shed light on why human hearts and minds are transformed when they resolve narrative conflict. Not all narrative conflicts have this power to restructure a human heart. A narrative conflict must have two key features in order to have this potential: it must have high stakes, and it must be difficult to express.

First, for solving a narrative conflict to transform a person, the conflict has to be worth solving.131 Some narrative conflicts do not question a person’s fundamental sense of self, but some can rock a person’s identity to the core. Cleopas and his companion had believed Jesus would liberate Israel. This story about Jesus had guided the whole course of their lives. If they cannot come to grips with the conflict between this belief and Jesus’ death on the Cross, then they lose their sense of self. Loder calls this thread “the Void,” or “the inevitability of the dissolution of the self.” One cannot dodge the reality of narrative conflict, but ultimately humans are finite creatures who cannot solve every narrative conflict in their lives before they die. A Christian, however, has a response to this problem. A Christian can (and must) accept that God can act to resolve narrative conflicts—the God who defeated death in Christ. God can right wrongs that defy human justice and solve problems that confound human capacity; God can bring all stories to their conclusions. Loder calls God’s power to transform narrative conflict “the Holy.”

Second, a narrative conflict only leads a person to transformation when the conflict cannot be solved with one’s known ways of thinking.132 No one is transformed by solving problems in familiar ways. Resolving a narrative conflict will only transform a person if the solution calls forth a new idea or way of thinking. Loder calls this new idea a “mediating

131 Ibid., 67-91.
132 Ibid., 40-51.
image.” The image may be an actual image, or an insight, intuition, analogy, or other connective idea. But whatever it is, it cannot be found using a method of thought. Instead, it springs up from the unconscious as one goes about life—a “shower thought.” Once the idea appears, the narrative conflict is resolved, and the idea cannot be unseen. It prompts the thinker to exclaim, “Eureka!” Since the “mediating image” is a new way of thinking, discovering the image results in transforming the person.

In the Emmaus Road story, Jesus guides the disciples through a high-stakes narrative conflict between their expectations of God and their observations of the world. This process transforms the disciples, because they realize a new way of understanding their Messiah, their Scriptures, and the world in which they live. Jesus guides them on this transformation with two responses to them. The first response takes their observations at face value, opens their minds to new ways of reading Scriptural and personal evidence, and awakens their hearts to scan for some other, more complete explanation of these facts than the one with which they began. Jesus’ second response then changes the game, opens their eyes with new facts, and places them in the very position of those of whom they were skeptical. The disciples rush back to Jerusalem with changed hearts and changed thoughts.

**Biblical Analogy to Troubling Scientific Findings**

Just as the Crucifixion troubled the two disciples walking to Emmaus, troubles in faith-science dialogue crop up when disciples are confronted with scientific findings that create narrative conflict with Christian faith. The intellect plumbs the depth of the troubles, a depth measured in affection and identity. To the extent that a scientific finding challenges the truth of the disciples’ baptismal identity, as the Crucifixion challenged the two on the road, the problem begs for a solution.
One too-easy way to avoid narrative conflict with faith is not to have faith at all. This solution is the origin of the secular science mythos. Taking the case study in this thesis: if a Darwinian account of human origins suggests that humans needed death to be formed, it seems hard to reconcile with the Scriptural idea that “God so loved the world.” At first glance, it seems much more intellectually honest to drop the idea that God so loved the world—just as, for the disciples on the road, at first glance, it seemed honest to drop the idea that Jesus was the Messiah. For a disciple of Jesus, that solution will not do. Disciples of Jesus have “seen some stuff.” They aver that Jesus has done great works of power; he is “a man and a prophet of powerful works and words.” What to do with that improbable hypothesis that God so loved the world? The disciple is sent searching.

The New Creation Intertext

Is there anything in or about the Emmaus Road text that suggests an analogy with the faith-science dialogue? Or is it a mere analogy of application, finding some clever way of making use of the text in a context unimaginable to earlier readers? True, the text was not aimed at modern epistemological problems, but it is canonically positioned as a bridge between the first creation and the New Creation. In this position, it is exactly where a modern disciple ought to go when the first creation seems most troubling.

The Emmaus Road text is a purely Lukan endeavor, a unique contribution of this Gospel account to the fourfold Gospel. Its selection and placement should therefore be given attention. Why is it placed here? Why would Luke’s Gospel spend 23 verses to narrate these disciples’ troubles and Jesus’ responses? And above all, why is this text given the narrative honor to be Luke’s lead-in to the Ascension, the conclusion of the whole book? And then, looking beyond Luke and Acts, Luke 24 and the book of Acts present a sustained relationship
of allusion to Genesis and Exodus. What does that relationship mean for the Emmaus Road text? Not only the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of Jesus’ revelation to the disciples are important—so is the canonical ‘when’ and ‘where.’

The present study argues that Luke 24 and the book of Acts contain a nuanced retelling of key Genesis and Exodus moments, retread by the early church. The Emmaus Road text begins this retelling, with a story of new creation. The Emmaus Road text is the point in Luke-Acts where humanity first encounters the New Creation, the ‘place’ where God re-creates the world on the basis of the Resurrection. It has already been seen that the encounter with Jesus on the Emmaus road is Luke’s first narrated account where the new creation crosses the path of the first one.133 On the road, Jesus’ glorified body interacts with the bodies of those yet to be glorified. The effect of this encounter on the disciples is, first, to elucidate the divine purpose in their creation, then to reveal a glimpse of the creation toward which they were really walking.

This first-and-new-creation dimension to the text points to how the contemporary disciple of Christ, troubled by what science purports to say about the first creation, might take up the Emmaus Road story as a guide to response:

- Like Cleopas, set out the science as it is, explaining which elements of faith are in narrative conflict with the science;
- Like the disciples, turn back to the Scriptures and look to what they say about those elements of faith—perhaps there is a deeper divine necessity at work;

133 To reiterate, while the two disciples discover that the Lord had appeared to others before appearing to them (v. 34), Luke’s Gospel does not narrate those appearances. Nor do the women (vv. 1-12) encounter Jesus himself at the tomb in Luke’s account; they only meet the men in white.
• Like the disciples, invite Jesus to be one’s travel companion on the scientific road;
• Like the disciples, be a witness to having glimpsed the creator Christ, as he draws the world from this creation to the next.


The OT-NT intertexts, between Luke 24/Acts and Genesis/Exodus, show that Luke is casting the Resurrection and following events as a rhyme of salvation history. In particular, the Emmaus encounter and the Jerusalem encounter in Luke 24 share key intertexts with Genesis 2 and 3, the creation and exile of humanity. The events are treading the first path of creation backward. Therefore, the central tension of the Emmaus narrative is not merely how the disciples are transformed within the text, but how those disciples—on whose testimony the text makes it way to the canon—have come to relate the first creation to the new one.

Before hunting for specific Genesis intertexts within Luke 24, it is important to validate the expectation that they will be there. The expectation is warranted because, at a high level from Luke 24 through Acts, Luke provides several allusions that pin key narrative moments intertextually to key narrative moments of Torah. These moments include the following:

134 So far, this study has made little mention of the fact that modern scholars are unclear about the exact location of the town or settlement Luke names “Emmaus.” However, the most commonly suggested locations all appear to be located to the west of Jerusalem: Emmaus Nicopolis, Al-Qubeiba, the neighborhood of Motza. If the reader will indulge some wide speculation: perhaps an important point about the name “Emmaus” is the direction the disciples were walking when they met Jesus: westward, out of Jerusalem, metaphorically back toward the flaming sword and the cherubim that had (until this day) prevented any human return to the Garden of Eden.
• In Luke ch. 24, the tomb is discovered empty “on the first day of the week at dawn,” linked with the creation of Light on the first day.

• The Emmaus encounter also takes place on that first day. When Jesus offers bread to the disciples, their “eyes are opened,” “knowing” it is Jesus, reversing the curse of the first man and woman in the Garden. (An aside: this positioning may be the best argument that Cleopas’ companion is female.) When Jesus appears to the group, he promises that they will be “clothed” with power from on high, reversing the loss of the animals killed to clothe Adam and Eve.

• In Acts ch. 2, the Holy Spirit descends on Pentecost and temporarily unites the languages of humanity, reversing the curse of the Tower of Babel.

• Also in Acts ch. 2, three thousand persons from around the known world were baptized, being given life in Jesus’ name, reversing the waters of the Flood. Granted—in Acts these are simultaneous, while in Genesis there is a narrative gap between the Flood and the Tower of Babel. On the other hand, in Acts 1:5, Jesus is said to have said that the coming of the Spirit would be a “baptism.”

• In Acts ch. 10, Peter has a vision of a sheet from Heaven carrying all kinds of unclean animals, specifying in what way he was to be a blessing to the nations. This vision loosely parallels the vision of Abraham in that it is from Heaven, anticipatory of a global blessing, and given to the key figure in bringing that blessing to pass (consider that this vision may build or open a connection between Simon Peter’s promise from Jesus, “on this rock I will build my church,” and Abraham’s promise, to be the beginning of God’s people).

• In Acts ch. 15, the council of the apostles gives a law for the non-Jewish believers to follow, which the text directly connects to Moses, noting that Torah is still read aloud in the synagogues everywhere. The decision not to “trouble” the Gentile believers with the Mosaic law is a reversal—though also a re-affirmation—of the first giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai.


More debatable, more marginal intertexts can also be found, though they are less direct or less clearly placed, and do not add independent weight to the argument. For example, Jesus “walked with God, and was not,” as Enoch did. Paul proclaims that God will save the lives of all 226 people on his boat in Acts ch. 27, in a moment not unlike Exodus 13 at the shore of the Red Sea. And when a snake bites him, Paul is unharmed, but instead cures the diseases of the islanders of Malta.
The point is not that Luke 24 and Acts are explainable as a retelling of Genesis or Exodus. This framework is insufficient to explain the whole of Luke’s narrative. Still, the Emmaus Road text’s use of creation language is far from an accident—all the more so, in light of the general literacy of Luke’s Gospel in OT concepts, and its literal first words presenting “an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us” (1:1, NRSV). The Emmaus Road text uses language and concepts from Genesis 1-3 to establish a narrative parallel with that creation story. Darrell Bock goes so far as to say that where Matthew’s Gospel emphasizes the fulfillment of Scripture in details of Christ’s life, Luke’s Gospel uses Scripture in defense of the divine necessity or purpose in Jesus the Messiah’s suffering. It is fitting that Luke’s final chapter makes a sustained Old Testament connection for exactly that purpose.


Given the Luke/Acts narrative parallels with Genesis/Exodus, it is worthwhile to look for meaningful intertexts within Luke 24. Turning to Luke 24, the following intertexts with Genesis chs. 1-3 shine out:

- It is dawn, the first day of the week, at the beginning, and then it is evening when the travelers stop on the road.
- It is implied, and later made clear, that a person, Jesus, has come alive from the dead. This re-appearance of the body of Jesus from the tomb is an echo of the man being made from the ground. (Luke works the word “ground” into v. 5.) It is also a clear reversal of the warning of God that in the “day” that the man eats of the Tree, he will “die.”
- The disciples do not believe the women—there is a strong undertone of gender-based scepticism here—but should have, in direct reverse to the going interpretation of

135 Where is the Exodus from Egypt? Possible options in early Acts all seem forced and to lack the centrality of the Exodus in Moses.
137 Ibid.
Genesis 3. In the New Creation, the testimony of women is trustworthy. (Or perhaps women have always been trustworthy?)

- The classic direct intertext is the portrayal of Jesus as the Tree of Life, the fruit (the bread) of which can open the disciples’ eyes. It is their Lord they recognize, not their own nakedness; it is as God says in Genesis: eating of the Tree of Life grants life everlasting.

- The breaking of bread, so close after Jesus’ last Passover meal, points to Jesus’ body being broken. Luke, in contrast with John and in addition to Mark, notes that when Jesus appears to the disciples in Jerusalem, he proves his identity by showing the disciples his feet. If the conjoining of “hands and feet” in Luke and “hands and side” in John shows anything, it is that Jesus’ wounds are meant, and one cannot help but notice Luke’s connection to the prophecy of Genesis 3: Jesus’ heel has been crushed.

- Jesus’ prophecy about the proclamation of forgiveness of sins in the whole world echoes the command of God to “be fruitful and multiply and subdue the Earth and rule over it,” especially in light of how early Christians viewed their role as co-heirs with Christ.

- Jesus’ final words in v. 49 are a direct reversal of the end of Genesis 3. The promise from God is a good promise and one to be imminently fulfilled, unlike those proclamations of God in Genesis 3. Jesus does not condemn the disciples, but instead tells them to stay (note the contrast with exile) and to be clothed with power. Clothing is now a sign of God’s strength, not human frailty, as it was in Genesis 3.

The Emmaus Road text alludes to the creation events for structure and context. The events in the Emmaus encounter are this Gospel’s entrée to the Ascension, casting a high-level parallel between the Resurrection and the start of the world. The Emmaus text is a bridge between two creations, between two birthdays of the Universe.

**Emmaus Road as New Creation**

The Gospel author understands the events of the Emmaus road encounter as being a ‘restart’ of the creation narrative. Jesus’ missing and rediscovered body is a bridge between the first creation story and the new story of creation. Jesus’ twofold response to the disciples may have been tailored to their personal experience of loss and doubt, but, in the Scriptural reasoning of Luke’s Gospel, Jesus’ response takes on a broader, creational significance. As in the first creation, the eyes of humanity were opened to “good and evil,” so here the eyes of the disciples are opened to the presence of Jesus in the midst of evil. And not only that—
they are opened to the absolute necessity “for God’s Anointed to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory” (v. 26). There is a divinely ordained relationship between Jesus’ life in this creation and his Resurrection, and Scripture is the place to search out what can be known about that relationship. The present study is not interested in the specific details of what that relationship is. Instead, the following section explores Jesus’ interpretive techniques and goals, so today’s faithful can deploy them when modern science prompts another look at the pages of Scripture.

Third Movement: The Biblical Analogy

The faithful modern scientist has the same problem as the two disciples on the road: how to “see” the necessity of God’s first creation leading to the new one. How does one trust God in the face of scientific findings that seem at odds with Christian belief? Studying the first creation—whether as a witness to the Crucifixion or in a modern laboratory setting—always gives rise to the question of how to understand one’s observations in the light of God’s faithfulness. The challenge is that the first creation is a partial witness.

The hypothesis statement proposed that Christians and churches today should follow this rubric for response to troubling scientific findings:

- Like Cleopas, set out the science as it is, explaining which elements of faith are in narrative conflict with the science;
- Like the disciples, turn back to the Scriptures and look to what they say about those elements of faith—perhaps there is a deeper divine necessity at work;
- Like the disciples, invite Jesus to be one’s travel companion on the scientific road;
Like the disciples, be a witness to having glimpsed the creator Christ, as he draws the world from this creation to the next.

The first two points of this rubric correspond to the disciples’ statement of uncertainty and Jesus’ response from Scripture. The second two points correspond to the disciples’ offer of hospitality and Jesus’ response of self-revelation.

It is now time to demonstrate this rubric, and to make an argument for it in the process. To show how it would work in practice, a “mini” application is proposed. For this demonstration, the scientific finding that the Earth is a tiny and non-centered planet in the Universe could be a troubling scientific finding. The central role of Earth, and land, and humanity, in the Scriptures make it troubling to think about Earth as a small place not specially located. On February 14, 1990, at the direction of physicist Carl Sagan, Voyager I took a famous picture of Earth from 4 billion miles away: a tiny crescent suspended in the vacuum of space. Sagan wrote that “Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.”

The following two sections explore a faithful disciple’s response to this troubling scientific finding.

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139 The attached case study features a more robust application of this rubric to the apparent Problem of Evil in Darwinian evolution. The main difference between this section and the case study is that the response to Earth’s apparent cosmic insignificance is easy to explain, and not particularly controversial. The case study’s proposed response to the troubles raised in Darwinian evolution is speculative, bound to provoke healthy disagreement.
First Response: In Search of the Divine δει

“Mary” is a high school freshman who enjoys learning about astrophysics and takes honors classes in science. She is assigned a passage from Sagan’s book in a segment on science history. Her class watches a couple of episodes of the 2014 FOX docuseries Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey, a reboot of Sagan’s original show. In confirmation class at church, she acquired the vague idea that her faith tradition is recovering from a period of scientific blindness, but Cosmos is the first time anyone vivified the idea that the church really burned people to death for mere disagreement. (As a freshman, she takes the TV show at face value. After Senior English, which has a unit on the techniques of propaganda, she will come to take the show’s historical dramatization less seriously.) Something bothers her, but she’s not sure exactly what. Is it that her pastors and faith leaders were ignorant of their history? Were they complicit or culpably ignorant? But more importantly, is Sagan right? If there is indeed “no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves,” then what is her church promising about God? And Sagan seemed to think that Earth’s cosmic isolation makes divine grace unlikely. Why should anyone on this tiny rock think of it as special in God’s mind? It feels prideful. In short, Mary faces Loder’s “Void:” this narrative conflict could inhibit her practice of life in Christ. Her ability to live from a baptismal identity is in jeopardy. What should Mary do? How should her faith leaders answer the questions she must ask? If Mary is fortunate enough to have a scientifically minded mentor, how should she direct Mary?

By the framework in this study, the Emmaus Road text suggests that the first thing to do is to consult Scripture. The particular narrative conflict with science is the prompt. To do this well, Mary and her faith and science mentors should construct the narrative conflict as clearly as possible, laying out each step. The disciples offered Jesus an unvarnished account
of the facts, along with their disquieting interpretation of those facts. Mary and her team should likewise offer to Jesus—by prayer, interaction with Christian astronomers, and so on—the exact portrait of the narrative clash. That means, first, naming what the scientific finding is, and why it is credible on purely scientific grounds. Second, it means developing an account of the clash: what is the belief of faith that the scientific finding calls into question? They might succinctly express the narrative conflict using the question, “How can God see anything significant about this out-of-the-way rock on the rim of the galaxy, of infinitesimal size?”

The next thing to do is open the Bible. Here, Mary has two advantages over the disciples on the Emmaus road: the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, and the retrospective knowledge of Jesus’ response to the disciples. In the text, Jesus has to drop his preaching on them cold, but today Mary’s team may expect to take a more active, conscious role in searching the Scriptures. Still, Mary and her team should expect Scripture’s response to be counterintuitive (or there would not have been a narrative clash in the first place). The process will resemble Loder’s vision of a protracted, unconscious search for the “mediating image” to express God’s response—a search that the Holy Spirit invisibly guides. They may need to spend a good long while turning over various texts, becoming familiar with texts they did not know, and so on.

That said, guided by the form of Jesus’ response, Mary’s support team should have a fairly clear idea of how to validate a proposed Scriptural interpretation. It should share certain characteristics of Jesus’ response to the disciples headed to Emmaus. These characteristics may include some or all of the following:

1. **Starting by Naming the Facts:** Christ’s response (vv. 25-27) will not avoid or disclaim the problem. After all, Jesus was really crucified and killed. A
denialistic rejection of the Cross—maybe Jesus was not truly dead!—would 
prove faith, not prove it. Mary would not be looking for the Bible to say 
that “yes, the Earth is in the physical center of the universe after all.” She 
might even find texts that literally sound like that! (Eccl. 1:5, Ps. 19:4-6) But 
unless the science itself admits of doubt, then that path is naturally a dead 
end. Jesus did not try to persuade the disciples that the Crucifixion was a 
hoax.

2. The Facts Occasion a Search for New Scriptural Understanding: The Lord’s 
response does not require new, extra science. Rather, it can take the science 
and use it as an occasion for an interpretation of Scripture. A holistically 
Biblical understanding of Mary’s problem should unlock a new theological 
understanding of what God was up to, making the Universe this way.

3. Theological Knowledge Comes from Interpreting Scripture, Not Scrutiny of 
the Facts: Jesus’ response to Cleopas is not presented as an interpretation of 
the facts (the Crucifixion) in light of Scripture, but rather an interpretation of 
Scripture in light of the facts. In doing faith-science dialogue, there is always 
a temptation to apply theological interpretive methods and canons to science. 
This way of thinking would go: “Ah, I thought God was thus, but if the 
Universe is thus, then clearly not!” Mary might say, “I thought God cared 
about us because we are important to God, but if Earth is such a small corner 
of the Universe, then God must care about us despite how insignificant we 
are!” This approach is consistent with the Standard Model of applying 
theological methods to scientific findings. This method could accidentally 
lead to helpful results, but the method itself is unreliable. There is no
constraint that a God known apart from Scripture is the God of Israel; that is what the Scriptures are for. Therefore, sound theological conclusions come from interpreting the Scriptures, not from peering ever more closely at anything else.

4. **Better Theological Understanding Unifies Hope with Unified Knowledge:**

Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture for the disciples works everywhere in the canon. Not only that, Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture allows the disciples to “get in” more about what they know from other sources: Jesus’ prophecies, the women’s testimony; their own hope. Mary and her team should be seeking a Scriptural “mediating image” or idea that puts together as many pieces of the puzzle as possible.

5. **A High Bar for Faith, Hope, and Love:** Jesus’ first response leans remarkably heavily on cognition, interpretation, and discussion, saving full knowledge of his presence for later. Jesus holds the disciples to a high bar of faith in Scripture, hope in his identity, and love for himself. It’s no secret that a theological response to a troubling scientific finding is hard to build. Mary and her team must be committed to sticking with truth, sticking with faith, and not making the problem easier by abandoning their principles and commitments. The temptation is always there to write faith off as a delusion. Doing so likely leads to blame and broken relationship, but worse, it makes for lazy thinking and a broken sense of self. In this example, Mary (like many young church ‘leavers’) is entering an age of identity formation. Perhaps now, at age 15, she coming to realize how much her faith depended on her parents’ or community’s beliefs. If she still has any faith at age 25, it
will have survived a cascade of narrative conflicts. Narrative is a crucial identity-building tool. A person who can handle narrative conflict will build a solid identity. A person who handles narrative conflict by giving up easily will lose both the skill of handling conflict and the hope that solution is possible. That double loss leads to flimsy identity formation within and outside faith commitment. The goal for Mary and her team is to commit themselves to solving the problem, in proportion to the measure of their commitment to Christ and the Church, regardless of whatever downcast feelings the struggle brings them.

6. **A High Bar for Interpretation: Radical Reversal:** The crux of Jesus’ response to the disciples is that his suffering, which they thought was incompatible with Messianic vocation, is truly the very heart of that vocation. The thesis that it was “necessary” for the Messiah to suffer is both (A) the crux of Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture here and (B) a radical challenge to the disciples’ prior interpretation. Likewise, to win a narrative conflict between a scientific finding and a conviction of faith, usually a “twist” in perspective is necessary. Mary and her team should be on the lookout for a Scriptural ‘take’ that reveals how the two incongruent narratives (God loves us, the Earth is cosmically insignificant) were actually congruent the whole time.

7. **The Goal Is Personal Transformation:** Jesus intended to transform the disciples by opening their eyes and awakening their affections. Jesus did not merely want them to know what happened; he wanted to change their perspective on what happened. Mary (and perhaps her team members and supporters) should expect to come away transformed. The scientific finding
would not have troubled Mary if it didn’t jeopardize some core conviction of her faith. If it’s possible to resolve the trouble, the resolution will certainly transform her convictions of faith in a deep way. A transition from naïve certainty to deeper understanding will take place. One might say it is how Mary “makes her faith her own,” but it’s just as true to say that Mary’s identity is made by faith as the narrative conflict resolves.

Taken together, these seven elements—truth-telling, searching the Scriptures, theological interpretation of Scripture, resultant unity of knowledge, a high bar for faith, radical interpretive reversal, and personal transformation—characterize the scientist disciple’s journey from a place of troubled uncertainty to a place of heart-kindling truth. The disciple who responds to troubling science by following this course will not be disappointed.

As Mary’s first high school semester wraps up, she attends a Christmas Eve service. The service reminds everyone that in the metaphorical dark of human history, a light shone forth, beginning in a stable at Bethlehem, from a family that could not find lodging in a town full of family. The light shone, not on her great modern nation, but on an ancient nowhere-town; not on the seven hills of Rome, but on Israel; not on the holy hill of Jerusalem, but on Bethlehem; not on any of the main houses, nor even the guest rooms, but on an outbuilding where beasts of burden were housed. It strikes Mary that Earth is God’s stable. Of course, God has always been working from behind the scenes this whole time. Earth is just the kind of insignificant corner of the Universe from which God planned to turn the whole Universe upside down. Her heart awakes. Becoming an adult gives one a detailed knowledge of being in an insignificant corner of things. When the choir begins to sing the Magnificat, she is writing furiously in the bulletin margins. Mary can see the allure of Sagan’s point of view: why try to fight over little corners of such a little place as planet Earth? But now she knows a
deeper truth. Earth is God’s stable; it is the proof that God does not abandon the little corners. From this conviction, she is prepared, not only to ignore Sagan’s belittling remarks about religion, but also to fight for the Earth as it is. For Mary understands what Sagan does not: Christ was born in a manger. As a young scientist, she is prepared to worship God through her science—to offer up science as an act of worship.

**Second Response: Witness**

If the goal were to find intellectual coherence between faith and science, Mary’s response discovered in the Christmas story would be sufficient. But the goal is deeper. The whole motive for faith-science dialogue is to win a narrative conflict. As Loder suggested, solving such a problem is certainly going to transform the person who finds the solution. Core beliefs and narratives will look completely different after the solution is found. Mary has not found the answer; she has just made contact with a compelling possible solution that she must now investigate, verify, and crucially, communicate. Like all Gospel preaching, her insight begs to be communicated.

Here, it becomes less possible to invent Mary’s example. The Emmaus Road disciples responded to Jesus’ preaching by inviting him to stay with them. In return, Jesus reveals his identity, showing the disciples that he was with them the whole time, and that his sermonizing from Scripture was indeed fulfilled in his own Resurrection from the dead. The disciples return to Jerusalem posthaste to communicate this deeply personal encounter with the risen Jesus. They may have realized that if they did not speak out, no one would know the story of that encounter. Likewise for Mary here. Perhaps her insight will lead her into an encounter with Jesus. For instance, her insight might be of use when counseling a lonely friend. But, if Mary does have some encounter with Jesus, only she can tell the church what
it was like. Interpreting Scripture is a theological discipline, but encountering Jesus is the opposite. One cannot systematize that relationship. More generally, if troubling scientific findings drive scientists to personal encounters with Jesus, only a robust faithful community of scientists can tell the greater church what those encounters are like.

**Emmaus Road as a Guide to Worship**

Like the disciples running back to Jerusalem, a scientist who has seen through a narrative conflict will have some real news to report to the church at large! When the assembled disciples follow the risen Jesus out to Bethany, they respond with praise and worship. Indeed, worship of God is the right, joyful response to rediscovering the Gospel. When a scientist reports on rediscovering the Gospel in the face some bleak scientific reality, the new understanding of God is occasion for worship.

For this reason, science—like all other human occupations—has a unique contribution to the worship life of the church. It so happens that the Emmaus Road text is not only a guide to navigating narrative conflict; this text is also a guide to orchestrating Christian worship. In this function, the text can guide churches in worship occasioned by science.  

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140 The main ideas of this fourth movement were refined through personal communications with Katlin Dickinson-Laurence between April and December 2019.
a grouping of the four major movements of a Christian Sunday worship service. “At first glance,” she writes,

this passage appears to have little to do with Christian worship. Yet the text is rich with meaning for the understanding of worship. The events provide a striking parallel with what is to occur in worship, for the episodic movements are not unlike the movements expected in corporate worship. Indeed, Luke 24 gives us a profound picture of what Christian worship is to be and do.

Cherry then breaks the Emmaus text into the same fourfold division as the present study. She shows that this fourfold division of worship comes into being early in documents recording church worship. Word and Table were recognized as necessary elements of worship, and gathering and sending developed as transitions into and out of the Word and Table service. Therefore, no interpretation of the Emmaus road encounter would be complete without considering that the church has from earliest times regarded this text as a guidepost for worship.

Worship the Lord and Serve Him Only

The use of the term “worship” in Christian theology carries several meanings. These meanings can be broadly broken into three categories for the purposes of this investigation. In the first sense, worship is the ascription of worth to God, relationally. Cherry points out that this worth is ascribed in an actual, living dialogue with God. In the second sense, worship refers to carrying out this dialogue, responding to God in the specific ways appropriate to the Gospel, including the Sacraments and the Sunday order of worship. In the third sense, Christians often colloquially use the word “worship” to refer to dialogue with

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142 Ibid., 47.
God that permeates all facets of life, not just those that take place in a Sunday service among the gathered saints, or those that Scripture expressly prescribes. This third sense is the one entailed in Colossians 3:23, “whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ.” (NRSV) It can also be seen in the cross-pollination of senses of the Hebrew abad in the Old Testament, which means “to work” (as in Genesis 2-3), but also “to serve” in labor or slavery, and thus to serve either God or false idols; “to worship.” A similar cross-pollination between “work” and “worship” appears in Greek (λειτουργός, Heb. 1:7, 8:2), Latin (liturgia), and English (“liturgy”).

In the history of the church, there have been disputes over the boundaries between these senses. Here it is only important to recognize the parallel between worship in the second, ‘religious service’ sense and worship in the third, ‘secular service’ sense. If worship is the axis of the wheel of Christian life, secular service done in a worshipful way is the rim. As Luke recalls elsewhere: “Jesus answered [Satan], ‘Worship the Lord your God’ / ‘And serve only him.’ ” (Luke 4:8 / Deut. 6:13) The Emmaus Road text is a guide to worship, and worship in turn guides how disciples order their secular pursuits—their service to God and others.

**Fourth Movement: Uniquely Christian Reason for Science**

If Christians conduct secular pursuits in order to ascribe worth to God, then the question, “how should Christians conduct faith-science dialogue?” means, “what kind of service does science render to God?” The scientific community has offered several surface-level secular reasons for “why science,” and Christian faith can adopt and adapt some of these reasons. For example, science serves God by adding to the good of human society. Medical science saves lives, so pursuing medicine is pursuing the good of other people.
Scientific endeavors also inform humanity’s task to subdue the Earth and to serve it. Such reasons are not unique to faith. A secular scientist can be motivated by altruism or by a desire to care for the Earth, without an explicit theological rationale. But is there a uniquely Christian reason for science? The present study suggests that when narrative conflict appears between faith and science, Christians can look to Scripture for some deeper truth by which to understand God’s work in the science. But the discovery of this deeper truth can only happen if solid science is available to create the challenge in the first place! Good narrative conflicts lead the whole church to deeper understanding of God’s purposes. Paradoxically, then, Christians should want to do the best science possible, precisely in order to raise the fullest, healthiest challenge to their theological beliefs, to lead to encounter with the creator Christ (Colossians 1:16) in as many ways and as many places as possible (Hebrews 1:1). There is, after all, a reason for doing science that only a Christian can have: scientific inquiry brings scientists (and their churches) into the presence of Christ, by opening human eyes to Christ’s word/work of creation.

Christians motivated to seek narrative conflict to grow their faith will be well-prepared for scientific endeavor. Again, paradoxically, they will be better prepared than their secular counterparts. One might think that if narrative conflict is possible between faith and science, faithful scientists would be a disadvantage to science. Scientists seek the truth: perhaps faithful scientists would avoid pursuing theories that conflict with their theological beliefs? This concern is misplaced. Because of their confidence in the God who raised Jesus from the dead, Christians have the least to lose in any narrative conflict. As Loder said, “Holy” faith leads the faithful not to sweat whether some narrative conflict will ruin their identity.
And—to raise a specter that cannot be fully explored here—the shoe is really on the other foot. The scientific community is routinely responsible for creating narrative conflict with the common human experience of life, sometimes benign and sometimes troubling. Are secular scientists ready to face them? Frankly, they are not. As a relatively benign example, Einstein felt compelled to doubt his own theory of relativity, because it denied the reality of the experience of a “Now” that all humans have.143 But there are deeper troubles. Modern physicists have proposed some interesting speculations on how conscious life will adapt toward the end of the Universe. Science writer Jim Holt’s essay “How Will the Universe End” catalogues some exotic viewpoints.144 Physicist Freeman Dyson proposes conscious life will persist into the universe’s dark future as “sentient dust clouds,” though he admits the speculation is “faintly disreputable.”145 According to fellow physicist Frank Tipler, quantum mechanics dictates that an intelligent life must survive all the way to the end of the universe, at which point it creates a Heaven-like paradise.146 And so on. Scientific findings, like investigation of the end of the universe, can raise dark problems of mortality and purpose. These investigations challenge the fundamental human experience of the goodness of life. To study such questions, one needs to have another narrative available to fight with. The scientific community could do with a brave company of scientist Christians, armed to the teeth with “shields of faith” and “sword[s] of the Spirit, which is the word of God,” to stand “against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual

145 Ibid., 244.
146 Ibid., 249. Tipler makes the telling comment, “If the laws of physics are with us, who can be against us?”
forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Eph. 6:12, 16-17, NRSV) Such a company is prepared for any truth, which is the first step to discovering it.

Not only are Christians better prepared for narrative conflict, they are also well-motivated to seek truth. All science is motivated. Impartial searches for truth take place in a community of specific people, with limited resources—as scientists writing grant applications know all too well. Recent developments in philosophy of science try to describe science’s economic, motivated nature. The contemporary philosopher Imre Lakatos, for example, describes science as comprised of “programs.” Each program contains a “hard core” of axioms that the particular program considers unfalsifiable. Ideally, researchers subscribe to some program to see how much they can explain from its axioms. Their motive is truth-seeking, and they will change programs when a better option is available. For instance, if the sun-centered view of the solar system explains planets’ motion in the sky better than the earth-centered view, ideally scientists would quickly stop work on the earth-centered view and switch to the sun-centric program. Scientific work can only proceed when those who guide the work take action based on desire for truth.

The Christian desire to see God’s work in all things offers a pure motivation for science. Christian faith is not motivated by the need for personal or human betterment. Nor is it motivated by the desire for a tidy worldview that resists outside critique. Nor, as this present study demonstrates, can one or another scientific discovery unsettle its trust in God. Faith in Christ is motivated by a need to seek Christ’s presence in all of life. The truly faithful person seeks Christ in all things, and a faithful scientist will seek Christ when practicing science. The discovery of elegant explanations for scientific phenomena is, for the

147 That is, post-Kuhnian developments.
Christian, the tiniest opening of the eyes to the wisdom of God in creation. For this discovery to be valid, only actual discovery of actual wisdom will do. Science that appears troubling for faith should be a relished opportunity to draw closer to Christ’s wisdom and majesty. To avoid faith-science narrative conflict is to keep one’s eyes closed as Christ stands by. So, Christian faith should be the enemy of science driven by a need to defend/protect God’s integrity, but should be the friend of science driven by a thirst to be in the presence of Christ. The motivations of faith and science thus become mutually reinforcing. It turns out that in science, as in much else, purity of heart is to will one thing.

Concluding Remarks: A Challenge and an Invitation

The theological calling of the scientist is to seek out as much about the Universe as possible, to prompt new occasions and reasons to look for Christ in Scripture or in the church itself. “Opening eyes” is the scientist’s stock-in-trade, at least in the first creation, where all science takes place. Science is almost by definition the search for better explanations. Scientists report that discovery is colored with the experience, “How could I not have seen it this way before?”149,150 Scientists prefer theories with “elegance” or “syntactical simplicity,” theories that illuminate with their “explanatory power.”151 The calling of a scientist in the church is to bring these findings to the church at large, even, perhaps especially, when the findings are initially troubling to theological belief. Like the prophets of old, faithful scientists are tasked with challenging and refining faith’s Gospel narrative, while remaining subject to it. The faithful scientist is a prophet of facts.

149 Gijsbert van den Brink, Philosophy of Science for Theologians: An Introduction (Frankfurt am Main; New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009), 119-20.
This vocation of prompting and plumbing narrative conflict is a challenge to the scientist in two ways. First, faithful science is a challenge because it presents the temptation of treating scientific findings as theology, as a direct source of knowledge about God, in lieu of the only Word made Flesh. The disciples in the Emmaus Road text allowed their direct observations of the Crucifixion to be the only evidence under consideration when evaluating God’s character. They had not yet considered their observations as Israelites, as readers of Scripture, or as followers of Jesus. As the Emmaus Road story begins, they hold all of these other modes of knowing as secondary to the “hard fact” of Jesus’ death. Likewise, it is possible for a scientist to be carried away by the explanatory power of science, forgetting what faith best explains. The challenge of faith to the scientist is to avoid a mono-focus on science, and instead to receive the findings of science as a cascade of opportunities to return to Scripture, prayer, and the life of faith.

The second challenge to faithful scientists is to be honest to their calling to science in the face of hostility from their communities of faith. If scientists are ersatz prophets of facts, well: the people of God have never been too kind to their prophets. The vocation of the scientist within the people of God is to bring the people to face facts with honesty, faith, and worship.

Faithful scientists are at once required to swim against the professional stream, by treating their work as an occasion for worship, and to swim against the religious stream, by holding their communities’ feet to the fires of encountering Christ in the world Christ made. Yet, if the scientist disciple truly accepts the vocation of opening eyes, he or she will be prepared to address perceived narrative conflicts between science and faith. Empowered by the Holy Spirit to see beyond the four walls of their disciplines, faithful scientists are prepared to preach the Gospel from wherever their investigations lead them.
Case Study: Evolution

O CHRIST, THERE IS NO PLANT IN THE GROUND
BUT IS FULL OF YOUR VIRTUE.
THERE IS NO FORM IN THE STRAND
BUT IT IS FULL OF YOUR BLESSING.
THERE IS NO LIFE IN THE SEA,
THERE IS NO CREATURE IN THE OCEAN,
THERE IS NOTHING IN THE HEAVENS,
BUT PROCLAIMS YOUR GOODNESS.
THERE IS NO BIRD ON THE WING,
THERE IS NO STAR IN THE SKY,
THERE IS NOTHING BENEATH THE SUN
BUT PROCLAIMS YOUR GOODNESS.
AMEN.152

A good number of theologians seem to hold the view that reading Genesis after Darwin involves little more than adopting a more sophisticated view of the book of Genesis, treating it as a religious text that neither intends nor implies any particular biological claim. ...But there is no room for theological complacency. Darwinism remains a dangerous idea for any religious perspective that is expressed in or has developed from accounts of a divine origin of the multiplicity of living things, which are assessed by God as wholly good: accounts in which the Creator intends that our human species should dwell within this plant and animal creation as its natural and spiritual home.\footnote{Durham theologian Jeff Astley, “Evolution and Evil” (2009)}

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Summary

The third movement of this study presented an example of conducting faith-science dialogue and resolving narrative conflict. This example illustrated an Emmaus Road framework for the dialogue, with a straightforward faith-science narrative conflict between Earth’s cosmic insignificance and Earth’s theological centrality. However, a real test of the proposed dialogue method would apply it to a more difficult problem. Darwinian evolution, the mainstream scientific theory about the diversity of life, depends on death to operate. This scientific finding suggests a narrative conflict with Genesis 1-2 and other Biblical creation texts, which image God’s creation is “good” and “very good,” founded on the divine wisdom of a good Creator.\footnote{To reiterate, the goal of this study is to develop a method for resolving narrative conflict. The goal is not to discover whether current evolutionary theory, or any particular aspect of it, is true.}

Darwinian evolution is the mainstream scientific explanation for Earth’s diversity of life. Since Darwin published \textit{On the Origin of Species} in 1859, the theory seemed charged with theological meanings, both positive and negative. At the time, English-speaking clergy

\footnote{Jeff Astley, “Evolution and Evil: The Difference Darwinism Makes in Theology and Spirituality,” in \textit{Reading Genesis After Darwin}, 163.}
and scholars took the Biblical creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 literally. Before Darwin’s theory entered the public sphere, studies of Earth’s age and the discovery of Babylonian creation myths had raised a narrative challenge to this literal interpretation. Today, the academic consensus is no longer to read Genesis literally, but theological interpretations of Genesis have not yet cleanly come to grips with Darwin’s theory. The theory raises narrative conflicts with doctrines that have some theological roots in Genesis 1-2, including the goodness of creation and the role of humanity within it. Likely, one reason for the unsettled landscape is that evolutionary theory poses many distinct theological challenges rather than one clear single challenge. In this case study, one specific class of problem is selected:

Evolution requires pain, suffering, and death to generate biodiversity, creating narrative conflict with the idea of a good creator.

This case study takes aim at this apparent conflict. The idea is to resolve the conflict using Jesus’ twofold response to the Emmaus Road disciples as a model. The responses to this conflict are (1) using a Scriptural hermeneutic to identify a divine wisdom in creation and (2) poetically bearing witness to an encounter with Jesus in the things that have been made. In fear and trembling, the study proposes a possible response to the conflict, in this insight:

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155 To reiterate, taking Genesis 1 and 2 literally was hardly a universal view from early Christianity to the 1800s. Augustine has already been cited as seeing some tension between this account and ancient secular accounts of the universe. Origen, another ancient commentator, could clearly see that “days” without a Sun and Moon would not be what he thought of as a “day.” Calvin recognized that Genesis gives pride of size to the Moon, even though Saturn is a much bigger celestial object, because the Moon appears bigger to the naked eye. For a review, see Walter Moberly, “How Should One Read the Early Chapters of Genesis?,” 6-17, and Francis Watson, “Genesis Before Darwin: Why Scripture Need Liberating from Science,” 23-35, in Reading Genesis After Darwin.
Mortality is the deepest boundary that each creature has toward other creatures. By this boundary, creatures (including humans) come to learn their local vocations within the larger mesh of creation. This vocation forms and gives reality to their bodies and senses. These bodies and senses are being prepared for a new creation, in which these real attributes become free of the constraints within which they were formed.

What Is Evolution?

A working definition for “evolution” is taken from the Christian scientific advocacy group BioLogos: “evolution” is the theory that “all the lifeforms on earth share a common ancestor as a result of variation and selection over a very long time.” BioLogos proposes this definition because there is no mainstream scientific dissent from this definition.

Two clarifications: (1) The terms “variation and selection” have a specific scientific sense. “Variation” means that individual creatures vary from one to the next, even when they have the same parents or reproductive origin. Genetic mutation is a source of variation. “Selection” means that when a certain “variation” enables a creature to reproduce more effectively, the variation is passed on to its offspring. Variations that improve a creature’s chance or success of mating will be replicated more often; those that do not will eventually disappear.

A second clarification: when evolution is used to explain the diversity of life on earth, it implies a long history of this process of mutation and selection. The theory also works for explaining shorter-term processes, like how species adapt to environmental stresses.

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158 Ibid. While it could be argued that movements in creation science should be dismissed on the basis of their claims and not their numbers, this study is concerned with evolution as mainstream science.
159 This mechanism is often referred to as “Darwinian evolution,” distinguishing it from pre-Darwinian theories of evolution that did not correctly establish how changes in organisms would occur and persist. The scientific consensus points to the Darwinian mechanism in particular, not just evolution in general, so in this study “evolution” means Darwinian evolution.
and changes—even the theory’s staunch opponents admit as much. But if all of Earth’s past and present life arose through this process, then evolution requires a long geologic timescale. In ordinary English use, “evolution” means not just “variation and selection,” but the whole history of life on Earth. Indeed, Earth’s fossil record is a key field of evidence to test the theory. Some of the troubles the theory raises for Christian faith have to do with this timescale, the relatively short history of humanity within it, and the comparatively long timeline of animal life preceding humanity, replete with pains, sufferings, and deaths all its own.

This thesis posited that a scientific finding is “troubling” if it implies a narrative that casts doubt on a component of Christian faith, and could be made into a secular myth over and against Christian faith. For at least a contingent of believers, evolution is troubling. This study explores what implications of the theory cast doubt on faith components. If the theory troubles some disciples at some times in some ways, then a response must describe the specific narrative conflict. Indeed, that is Jesus’ opening question to Cleopas on the road: “What [should I know about]?!” (Luke 24:19, AT)

It would be unfair to say that evolution creates narrative conflict for Christian faith in only one way, or that the theory troubles all Christians equally. Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* went to print in November of 1859, 160 years ago. Despite some attempts then and

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161 Cited above, Pew Research Center, *Americans, Politics, and Science Issues* (2015). Religious belief is correlated with skepticism that evolution explains human origins in particular. 86% of the religiously unaffiliated affirmed that humans “evolved,” while among Catholics the figure is 69%, among white mainline Protestants, 71%; black Protestant, 49%; and white Evangelical, 36%. Credence for the theory of evolution varies widely among religious groups in the United States. Age played a role as well: 73% of respondents aged 18-29 affirmed that human beings “evolved,” but only 54% of respondents aged 65 and older took that position.
now to suggest otherwise, Darwin’s theory received a mixed reception from clergy, Christian laypersons, and the secular academy. Asa Grey, Charles Kingsley, and many other Christian contemporaries of Darwin saw the theory positively, but others took issue with its theological implications.\textsuperscript{162} B. B. Warfield saw a challenge to the notion that God’s creation of humanity was special,\textsuperscript{163} but abolitionists celebrated the idea of a common human ancestor, only thirty years after slavery was abolished in Britain and just before its abolition in the United States.\textsuperscript{164} Since the theory’s debut, there has been a broad consensus that the theory means \textit{something} theologically, but a wide diversity of opinion about what it might mean in particular.

Contemporary scientists and theologians writing about evolution see a variety of possible troubles. One common feature is that the narrative conflict with faith involves interpreting Scripture about God’s creation. Christian Scripture speaks about creation often, not only in the first two chapters of Genesis, but also in a host of other texts (Proverbs 8, Job 38ff, etc.). Darwin’s theory arrived at a point in history when Christians were challenged to rethink these texts. In the 30 years prior to Darwin’s reveal, questions about the Bible’s creation texts had been launched on the waters of “flood geology,” the age of the planet, and the discovery of other Middle Eastern creation stories with certain parallels to Genesis 1-2.\textsuperscript{165} Darwin’s theory of evolution raised the specter of narrative conflict with Scriptural conclusions like the following:

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\textsuperscript{162} John Hedley Brooke, “Genesis and the Scientists: Dissonance Among the Harmonizers,” in \textit{Reading Genesis After Darwin}, 100-02.  \\
\textsuperscript{163} Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, \textit{Evolution, Scripture, and Science: Selected Writings} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 29.  \\
\textsuperscript{164} John Hedley Brooke, “Genesis and the Scientists: Dissonance Among the Harmonizers,” 102.  \\
\textsuperscript{165} John Rogerson, “What Difference Did Darwin Make? The Interpretation of Genesis in the Nineteenth Century,” in \textit{Reading Genesis After Darwin}, 75.
\end{flushright}
• Whether the intricate designs of the natural world were really evidence of divine handiwork, or explainable without God;
• Whether human creation was in any way ‘special’ or a miracle;
• Whether humans had souls or any special commission from God in the care of the planet;
• When in human history sin was introduced;
• Whether Christ could be a “second Adam” if there was no historical first Adam.

Each of these theological claims had at least some Scriptural roots in Genesis ch. 1-2. These narrative conflicts call the theological reliability of the Scriptures into question.

After the theory of evolution was published, debate about interpreting Genesis led to three mainstream conclusions. First, the creation story of Genesis 1-2 should not be read as a book of literal history. Second, it is not wise to try to jam the Genesis story into the ever-expanding body of scientific literature. Third, if Darwin is right, God’s creative process could (and must) have been ‘hands-off,’ setting up a mechanism, maybe guiding it, but not intervening. These perspectives may not seem especially risky to faith, in themselves. But, they are all negative guidelines. Do Scripture’s creation texts have anything affirmative to say in a post-evolution world? If not a literal creation story—then what? If the Emmaus Road text is any guide, Scripture may have foreshadowed evolution’s apparent faith conflicts as God’s wisdom, just as Scripture had the resources for Jesus to preach a suffering Messiah. Perhaps, today, those with hearts set on fire by the Scriptures should go looking for something new in their pages.

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167 Ibid., 104-06.
Academy Responses: A Review

The introduction to this study mentioned that the theological academy is much more comfortable in faith-science dialogue than the American public. Even so, it will be helpful to review some contemporary scholarship about theology and evolution. The introduction also mentioned that the academic Standard Model of faith-science dialogue is to try to make theological and scientific narratives compatible by creatively interpreting the science using theology. Three scholarly works are reviewed: Martin Nowak and Sarah Coakley, eds., *Evolution, Games, and God* (2013); Nancey Murphy, *Reconciling Theology with Science* (1997), and John Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality* (1995). Each work identifies one or more possible narrative conflicts between science and faith, and each work applies some interpretive method to the science of evolution to try to resolve the conflict. By contrast, the unique contribution of this case study is to refocus the task on *interpreting the Scriptures*, by analogy with Jesus’ response to the disciples, rather than seeking to use theology to interpret the science *per se*.

**Nowak and Coakley, eds., Evolution, Games, and God**

The volume *Evolution, Games, and God*, edited by Martin Nowak and Sarah Coakley, brings together several contemporary scientists, theologians, and philosophers to search for a suitable interpretive framework for the role of cooperative behavior in evolutionary theory. In certain natural contexts, as well as in computer-based population modeling under certain conditions, evolution seems to favor cooperative behavior. Nowak and Coakley remark in their introduction that if evolution can favor cooperative behaviors, it seems to change what the theory might mean. This remark shows that they see a possible

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168 Nowak and Coakley’s introduction frames this challenge as “metaethics.”
narrative conflict in how evolution could favor selfishness, while many ethical frameworks favor altruism. The book ends inconclusively with many interesting proposals. The theologically driven proposals each propose an interpretive framework for the scientific findings. Remarkably, however, none of these proposals are primarily focused on Christian Scripture. Contributors are locked in a narrative wrestling match over the right interpretation (if one exists) for the science, without a decisive method of judging the contest.

Nancey Murphy, *Reconciling Theology and Science*

Nancey Murphy, in *Reconciling Theology and Science* (1997), identifies four possible narrative conflicts that evolution raises with Christian faith:169

1. The theory defeats classical arguments from design in the sphere of biology;
2. It relativizes humanity’s place in the order of creation;
3. Its ethical implications can lead to social Darwinism;
4. It renders God’s role (if any) in creation unclear.

Murphy proposes to use theology to interpret the science. She views (4), the concern with God’s role in creation, as the root of other conflicts.170 But, she argues, if evolution is a God-free explanation of the diversity of life, it does not mean that God is not part of the explanation. Theological and scientific explanations can coexist. Chemistry can explain chemical reactions, but biology can explain what purpose the reactions serve. Likewise, maybe evolution has no need of a “God hypothesis,” but theology can explain what purpose biological evolution serves.171

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169 Murphy, *Reconciling Theology and Science: A Radical Reformation Perspective*, 63-64.
170 Ibid., 65.
171 Ibid.
Murphy’s argument here is that as long as science cannot positively exclude God (and it cannot), theology may continue offering its own views on God’s purposes in the science. Unfortunately, Murphy’s approach gives short shrift to the complexity of narrative conflict. If science could positively exclude a “God hypothesis,” there would indeed be a narrative conflict. But even though science does not exclude all theology, that is no guarantee that the two are comfortable with one another. In fact, their accounts of life on Earth can only conflict because they are two different narratives. Murphy does not address specific narrative conflict between an evolutionary account of biodiversity and a Biblical account. Murphy acknowledges that theology must make something affirmative out of evolution, to defeat its clash with faith. However, she does not propose details. Nor does Murphy engage with specific texts of Scripture on this point, either. The present case study is proposing that a re-engagement with Scripture will help flesh out these details.

John Polkinghorne

In chs. 6 and 8 of *Reason and Reality* (1991), Anglican priest and former physicist John Polkinghorne explores the relationship of theology to scientific accounts of “origins.” Polkinghorne identifies a narrative conflict between evolution and Genesis 3, the story often known as “the Fall:” if human sin introduced death to the Earth, how could evolution have proceeded beforehand? In ch. 6, Polkinghorne contends that God must care very deeply about letting all of nature, including its human caretakers, be what they are. For Polkinghorne, God’s desire for creation to have a role in its own future explains why God

172 That said, her engagement with Holmes Rolston shows that she is aware there is more work to do here. Ibid., 69-72.
173 Ibid., 72-74.
created with a process like evolution, which does call for death and suffering as an integral factor. In ch. 8, he sharpens his perceived narrative conflict. He confides that the hardest Christian doctrine for him to accept as a scientist is the doctrine of the Fall. He wrestles with Genesis’ portrayal of cosmic consequences to human sin. Not only is death integral to evolution (creation), evolution would have needed death throughout the creative process, which Genesis portrays (alongside other texts) as “good” and as before the Fall. Science does not report any change in the process of evolution at some specific historical point, due purely to human sin. Faced with this narrative conflict, Polkinghorne admirably faces down the problem with Scripture. He attempts to see what light scientific study of “origins” sheds on Genesis and vice versa. He arrives at the following hermeneutical guideposts:

- If Earth and the creatures on it are to be fertile and creative without intervention, then God must permit circumstances that are unfavorable from the perspective of specific creatures. For God to call such a creation “good” is not an obvious value judgment; what God names “good” is not the present bad, but the fruitful potentiality of creation it enables.

- The notion of a moral “fall” only makes sense among creatures such as humans, who use moral terms to give structure to their relationships. The “fall” really is a uniquely human dimension of the universe’s history. Furthermore, its causes and effects could easily be transmissible from a generation to the next, though the mechanism may or may not be uniquely biological, social, or cultural.

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175 Ibid., 99.
176 Ibid., 100.
177 Ibid.
The “serpent” of Genesis 3 is already in the world alongside Adam and Eve; a “very good” creation contains a voice of evil.\(^{178}\)

Polkinghorne acknowledges that these guideposts are a loose gloss rather than a rigorous exegesis of Genesis 1-3. But, he feels compelled to undertake this kind of gloss, or else admit that his theological and scientific understandings of the world are divorced.\(^{179}\)

Polkinghorne’s reflections almost follow this study’s proposed Emmaus framework:

1. He fully acknowledges the sense of conflict or tension and ascribes persuasive power to it.
2. He acknowledges that his sense of identity (he will later term himself a “scientist-theologian”) is radically undermined if the conflict goes unresolved.
3. His response is to turn to Scripture.
4. He proposes that the presence of death is the result of God’s gift of fertility and creativity, suggesting a divine δεί that (like the suffering Messiah) would not have occurred from the text itself, but which scientific findings suggest.
5. He then proposes that God calling the creation “good” expresses its potentiality rather than how it appears to humans living in it. This claim radically affirms the humans who “were hoping” that creation was “good,” but also accepts the truth about the darkness through which hope must pass.
6. He concludes that all of creation is on a journey, along a dark road, toward a much more intimate relationship with God than it now has: “a sacramental

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\(^{178}\) Ibid.
\(^{179}\) Ibid., 101.
destiny awaits the universe.” The presence of God in creation, in its travails, leads to a Resurrection hope that does not disappoint.

Unfortunately, Polkinghorne jeopardizes his response by relativizing it. A few chapters earlier (ch. 5), Polkinghorne explains that generating scientifically-informed Biblical glosses like this one is a “second-order” theological task, distinct from the “first-order” tasks such as formulating doctrine. Polkinghorne’s explanation is worth quoting at length:

At the outset, let me say that one of the reasons why detailed attention to the Bible may play only a subsidiary role in much writing about science and theology is that such writing itself plays only an auxiliary role in relation to the great endeavour of intellectual exploration of Christian faith. …The discussion of science-and-religion is a valuable but second-order task, in which one seeks an harmonious integration of one’s basic experiences as a believer and as a scientist. In a sense it is a fringe activity, selecting from each area those elements which lie closest to the other, and not necessarily reflecting more than a part of the subject’s central preoccupations. One no more expects to get from such writing a balanced account of theology than one supposes its discussion of science to represent an even-handed survey of the physical world. In each case, the material selected is chosen with the other discipline in mind.

Contra Polkinghorne at this point, it is not true that faith-science interpretive dialogue will only expose that slice of theology that is pertinent to the science at hand. This thesis has argued that faith-science dialogue is catalyzed by narrative conflicts, and specifically those conflicts that most jeopardize Christian identity. The loudest conversations center the most central theological beliefs. Just above, Polkinghorne’s narrative conflict with evolution touched on the doctrine of sin, the origins of evil, and the goodness of God’s creation. In addition to these faith tenets, the reliability of Scripture is also implicitly called into question.

Defending the integrity of Scripture’s witness to God’s good work is a first-order theological

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180 Ibid., 103.
181 Polkinghorne, Reason and Reality, 60-61.
task, not a second-order task. Polkinghorne correctly diagnosed that troubling findings of science open the door to irreligious myth. The task of rebutting such myth with the Gospel is hardly a second-order task. To respond to myth with Gospel is the true calling of faith-science dialogue. It is part of the uniquely scientific contribution to Christian worship.

Mortality As Driver of Biodiversity: A Troubling Scientific Finding

The literature reviewed above illustrates how Darwinian evolution can be a troubling scientific finding for different scholars in different ways. The conflict resolution rubric proposed in this study begins by naming the conflict as clearly as possible. A specific narrative conflict has to be addressed. Not knowing which problem churches would see as most worthwhile, this case study chooses to work with a problem similar to that raised by Polkinghorne, a problem similar to Cleopas’ challenge on the Emmaus road:

*Evolution requires pain, suffering, and death to generate biodiversity, creating narrative conflict with the idea of a good creator.*

Polkinghorne expresses the problem a bit differently than the present study. Polkinghorne wants to know how to reconcile the Genesis story of the Fall with the history of life on Earth. He calls the death necessary to drive Darwinian evolution a “physical evil”—that is, it seems bad, but no one—except possibly the Creator—is responsible for it. This study takes this question one step deeper: how can a good God create life on Earth using an evolutionary process in the first place?

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182 Years later, in his introduction to *Theology in the Context of Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), xi, Polkinghorne laments the fact that faith-science dialogue seems to have little voice in the broader theological academic discourse, compared with identity-based or liberation-based theologies. Perhaps the reason is that faith-science voices like Polkinghorne have cast their own work as “second-order” when it was truly a first-order task.
Evolution by natural selection cannot proceed without loss of life in conditions of pain and suffering. It is hard to understand how Genesis could pronounce the words “good” and “very good” over this pain and suffering. As Polkinghorne pointed out, the Biblical expression “very good” sounds hollow when spoken over a process of Darwinian evolution. Colorado State professor of philosophy Holmes Rolston III has worked a great deal with this problem; his touchstone 1994 paper “Does Nature Need to Be Redeemed?” begins: “In the light of evolutionary biology, the biblical idea that nature fell with the coming of human sin is incredible.”

Durham theologian Jeff Astley’s explanation of the problem is well worth citing at length:

A good number of theologians seem to hold the view that reading Genesis after Darwin involves little more than adopting a more sophisticated view of the book of Genesis, treating it as a religious text that neither intends nor implies any particular biological claim. …But there is no room for theological complacency. Darwinism remains a dangerous idea for any religious perspective that is expressed in or has developed from accounts of a divine origin of the multiplicity of living things, which are assessed by God as wholly good: accounts in which the Creator intends that our human species should dwell within this plant and animal creation as its natural and spiritual home.

Astley contends that evolution is an amoral process, causing unnecessary pain and suffering. Creatures compete to survive in environments with predators and rival organisms; they produce an excess of offspring to ensure that some survive. Astley notes that not all scientists view competition between organisms as the main driving force in evolution. However, regardless of how competitive natural selection is or is not, Astley’s question remains. Some creatures have to die to keep the system moving.

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185 Ibid., 165.
In the statement of method, this study proposed a four-step, two-part response to narrative conflict. The first step: "Like Cleopas, set out the science as it is, explaining which elements of faith are in narrative conflict with the science." Following Cleopas’ example, the exact theological trouble can be spread out into three steps:

1. Earth’s diverse creatures acquired their traits because of pressure to survive or die.
2. Nature offers few examples of creatures for whom death is pleasant. Creatures resist death. Death’s unpleasant attendants, such as pain, hunger, and thirst, drive creatures to avoid death. For humans, death means being torn out of the presence of one’s family, friends, and life into bodily non-existence. This prospect brings additional psychosocial anguish.
3. The evolutionary process deals out death, pain, and suffering, not with blinding efficiency, but instead with blind sloth. Any creature’s death contributes at most very little to the larger process—usually absolutely nothing.

Just as Cleopas reported facts known to many, the overwhelming majority of scientific witnesses affirm that evolution proceeds by such unpleasantness. They do so despite the apparent challenges to God’s goodness and the truth of Scriptural revelation. If Darwin’s theory is true, the world seems other than Christian belief would expect it ‘ought’ to be. ("We were hoping...") What comes next?

First Response, Qui Confidunt

The next step of this study’s proposed method is: “Like the disciples, turn back to the Scriptures and look to what they say about those elements of faith—perhaps there is a deeper
divine necessity at work.” The third movement of this study outlined seven features of Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture for the disciples. These seven features can help identify what kind of Scriptural interpretation might respond to the evolution-and-Scripture narrative conflict.

**Starting by Naming the Facts:** This case study started by highlighting the relevant details of evolutionary theory and the perceived narrative conflict with faith. That is because Jesus’ first response (Luke 24:25-27) is to the disciples’ commitment to the facts. Cleopas provides Jesus with the facts of Jesus’ death. Then he provides a story or theory: “the rulers crushed a prophet of God.” Cleopas already suspects this theory is incomplete. It fits some of the facts, but not all. It ran counter to his theologically formed expectations. Jesus’ Scriptural interpretation does not try to convince the disciples that he had not really been crucified. If the facts of evolution lead to narrative conflict, the first thing to do is to name the facts as clearly as possible. The description of the narrative conflict just given above serves this purpose.

**The Facts Occasion a Search for New Scriptural Understanding:** Jesus’ first response his interpretation of Scripture to the disciples, does not directly provide the disciples with new information about their world. He does not reveal his Resurrection plainly until later. Instead, Jesus’ first response uses what they have seen as an *occasion* for interpreting Scripture. From there, Jesus shows them how a holistically Biblical understanding of what happened unlocks a new theological understanding of what God was up to. Jesus’ first response is intended to correct an interpretive failure, a lack of understanding.

Similarly, it is tempting to respond to evolution’s theological trouble by minimizing the troubling parts. These paths are not the way forward. For example, one could say that the pain, suffering and groaning of the current creation are a necessary part of God’s goal of a
new creation.\textsuperscript{186} Perhaps this claim is true, but it only pushes the problem back a step. Why did God have to take life on Earth through this vale of tears? What is God up to? Following Jesus’ example, scientist disciples should be energized to look for an answer by sharpening their interpretation of Scripture. Could God have purposed Earth’s mortal manner of life?

**Theological Knowledge Comes from Interpreting Scripture, Not Scrutiny of the Facts:** Jesus’ response to Cleopas is \textit{not} presented as an interpretation of the \textit{facts} in light of Scripture, but rather an interpretation of Scripture in light of the \textit{facts}. The theological conclusions come from interpreting the Scriptures, not from peering ever more closely at Cleopas’ account. Similarly, a scientist who learns about evolution is not directly learning anything about God. That knowledge has to come from theological sources, like Scripture, and it has to be validated with theological methods, like Scriptural exegesis. Then, perhaps, the new theological understanding will lead to a new understanding of the science. When Cleopas and his companion heard Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture, it opened their minds to the possibility that the Crucifixion meant something different than they had thought.

**Better Theological Understanding Unifies Hope with Unified Knowledge:** Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture made sense of the all the Scriptures. Also, the disciples saw that it accounted for more facts and experiences they already had. Perhaps the women’s report of an empty tomb was accurate. Jesus’ prophecies about the “third day” had a chance of being true, if God had foreordained his death. Perhaps hoping for a Messiah was not a mistake, after all. Jesus’ interpretation moves the disciples toward a deeper unity of understanding and identity.\textsuperscript{187} Similarly, seeking an interpretation of Scripture that sheds new light on

\textsuperscript{186} The literature reviewed in this thesis did not find any theologian making exactly this claim.

\textsuperscript{187} As argued above, the point of awakening hope is not to incept cognitive bias into vulnerable minds, but rather as a guide for the disciples’ Lakatosian “scientific programme.” Just as scientific investigators hope to find a more unified understanding of reality, Jesus stirs up the disciples’ hope of an
evolutionary theory, the disciple is hoping to snatch back a cohesive identity from the pit of narrative conflict. This case study is seeking a Scriptural “mediating image” or idea that puts together as many pieces of the evolutionary puzzle as possible.

**A High Bar for Faith, Hope, and Love:** Jesus holds the disciples to a high bar of faith in the Scriptures, hope in his identity, and love for himself, before revealing the Resurrection to them. An interpretive problem about faith and science, particularly a problem of evil, is highly charged. A high bar of faith, hope, and love is required in order to seek an interpretation. Succumbing to frustration, staying silent, or giving up one’s identity as a disciple are all, frankly, much easier paths. Nevertheless, the real challenge awaits those who wait for God.

**A High Bar for Interpretation: Radical Reversal:** The fulcrum point of Jesus’ Scriptural interpretation is that his suffering was not only compatible with his role as the Messiah, but foundational to it. This idea radically challenges the disciples’ prior beliefs. Jesus’ response to the disciples is not mere narrative appeasement. He does not say “the Messiah can suffer X amount without it being a problem.” His response turns their whole point of view of Messianic vocation upside-down, placing what seemed unacceptable at the center. If Darwinian evolution requires death and attendant ills, then a Scriptural interpretation ought to show that the death and ills are not only compatible with the doctrine of creation but in fact are a key part of creation, illuminating the doctrine. Nothing less is acceptable.

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even deeper unity of understanding between their observations and their theological confessions. As Polkinghorne points out in *Reason and Reality*, 11, a scientist of faith has a hope that that kind of deeper understanding is out there. Conversely, Loder points to the ‘Void’ of identity loss as the consequence if that hope is not available. If one’s identity of faith has zero explanatory power in the face of troubling scientific findings, then that identity begins to crumble into the rubble of atheism, or to sour into denial.
The Goal Is Personal Transformation: Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture prepares the disciples to receive the knowledge (later) that He Is Risen. Jesus was transforming them into the kind of faithful people who could face down the Crucifixion with confidence, in heart and in public voice. They would need to receive the “mediating image” that the Messiah would be crucified and raised from the dead, defeating Death for all. This notion ran so counter to their mindset that he had to preach them a whole sermon in disguise to prepare them to realize it. Their mad dash back to Jerusalem when they recognized Jesus shows how much this discovery meant to who they were. Resurrection witnesses are changed people. Jesus’ Scriptural interpretation awakens the disciples’ minds and hearts, preparing them for this transformation.

Likewise, if the evolution-and-faith narrative conflict is real and deep, if its solution really is difficult to see, then the discovery of that solution should transform faithful scientists who looked for it. It should reaffirm and shape who they are as disciples of Jesus, and also as scientists.

Examining Cleopas’ Evolutionary Troubles

The seven points above do not exactly say how the narrative conflict can be resolved. They merely suggest what a solution ought to look like, or what it should be able to do. Now, this study presents an idea for what that solution might be. This solution starts by breaking down the narrative conflict to try to identify what is really at stake in it. Then several Biblical creation texts are examined, and a response to the narrative conflict emerges.

To reiterate, evolution seems to have a particular narrative conflict with faith because:

1. Each kind of animal acquired its traits because of the pressure to die;
2. Death is never a pleasant experience, and is usually attended with pain and suffering;

3. These costs move the process forward with blind sloth. Any creature’s death contributes at most very little and often absolutely nothing to the larger process.

But, these objections take for granted that there is an alternative possibility of creation, which is unpressured, pleasant, and efficient. Is there such a process? It turns out that it is very difficult to imagine a world that does not contain death in some way. And, even if humanity had the ability to imagine that world, humans would need Godlike powers to bring it about. The root of the narrative conflict is human inability to come to grips with healthy limits to life. Perhaps the Genesis story of Creation and Fall points to this inability.

Imagine a world in which creatures did not have to die. Is this imaginary world workable? Creatures would need to eat and to make homes on Earth indefinitely. In this world, animals do not eat by preying on one another. If plant life is morally palatable as a source of food, the strain on plants would be much greater in such a world. How to ensure that plant species continue? More plant growth would be needed, and that requires more food and energy for the plants. That in turn means changing the composition of the atmosphere to add more CO$_2$—but CO$_2$ is a poison for humans and animals. And so on. A real, physical world in which people and animals do not die is not simply a modification of the Earth there is—it would require untold complex changes to every system of life. The imagined changes would be guided, not by God’s creative process, but by human moral sentiment, a limited faculty hardly adequate to the task of recreating an entire ecosystem.

Again—imagine a world in which death took place, but without negative psychological consequences. Humans presumably must go on living and dying in such a
world, but dying is not painful and is not a source of grief. The fact is that dying (whatever else it may be) is a separation, at least from all that one knows, one’s flesh and blood family, and one’s friends. If psychological pain is not the right response to this fact, what is? A person who felt no sense of loss at all toward death would be emotionally deceived. But if humans are to feel real sadness at separation from friends or family, and joy at being reunited, then death will not be without fangs.

These thought experiments show what is at stake when one tries to alter creation by taking death out of the scientific tapestry. The whole tapestry quickly reveals how tightly woven it is. One finds oneself pulling apart a grand network composed of all the varied elements of life, and trying to put the whole thing together again guided only by one’s personal sense of rightness and wrongness. In theological terms: *One is trying to make a new creation out of the pieces of this one.* It is not easy to conceive of a world free of the death on which evolution depends. Perhaps the problem is not that evolution requires death, but that death has been lurking out there all along.

So if death has been part of this creation, why God couldn’t have bothered to create a better world out of whole cloth? Why couldn’t God’s creation start out as a world without death? Surely, even if humans can’t imagine that world, God could have built it and placed humanity there. Humanity would not have had to know death. A child could really play near an adder’s den (Isaiah 11:8). But again, this question borrows greatly from Earth as it is. What makes a snake a snake in the first place? The very features that make snakes “snakes” arise because of fit with their environment, their food, their shelter. Likewise, human attributes derive from the ways that humans sustain themselves: eye placement, senses of sight and hearing, speed, ability to climb, cleverness, language, the social desire to work and live with neighbors… Creatures arrive at their identities by way of their relationships within
creation. Their bodies, minds, and senses are developed to live with those relationships. And all of those relationships have a complex history in their ecosystems. If God will re-create and restore creation, God is apparently using the relationships of this creation as part of that process. Is there anything “good” about the pains of the process? It is hard to see the good, and hard to see the alternative. One point is clear: whatever God’s idea of “good” is, it is sophisticated enough to facilitate the development of life on Earth. Human ideas of “good” are not.

The presence of death in the evolutionary schema is as necessary as it gets, but still difficult to accept. The root of the narrative conflict is unwillingness to accept death as a legitimate creative tool for God. Similarly, Cleopas believed that suffering was out of bounds for God’s Anointed One, yet he witnessed the Crucifixion. Like Cleopas and his companion, today’s Christians may have hope that the world might be made free of death and all of his friends. But, it seems impossible to express that hope in real terms. Today’s Christians stand in Cleopas’ shoes.

Wasn’t It Necessary…?

By analogy with the Emmaus Road text, it is time to head back to the Scriptures, starting with Genesis ch. 1 and 2, and looking at some other Biblical texts on creation as well. To keep this study brief, only a brief review of some key findings are presented here.

Division and Separation: In Genesis 1, as God calls each element of creation “good,” God divides it and places it in relationship with something else. Light and darkness; land and sea; the greater and lesser lights; every kind of fish and bird; every kind of animal.

All Together “Very Good:” The exact use of “very good” in Genesis 1 is that God “saw everything God had made” and called that everything “very good.” The “very
goodness” is not any element of creation in particular, not even humanity, but rather the completeness of the whole creation.

Chaos to Order: The Genesis 1 journey is from initial disorder to intricate relationship. If God did not separate light from darkness, there would be chaos. The Earth benefits from the energy it receives by day and the heat it radiates at night. If God did not separate the waters from the waters, there would be no atmosphere, to provide CO₂ or (later) oxygen to the life Earth would sustain. If God did not separate the sea from the land, there would be no land, and more importantly there would be no shore, no river deltas, no swamps or marshes, no boundary spaces where innumerable lives take root or seed. By separating different kinds of birds and fishes and beasts from one another, God placed each kind in such a way that it can preserve the elements they all need. Fireweed grows up among dead trees to preserve soil elements after a forest fire. Whales feed on plankton, but plankton feed on whale excrement. The diversity of life involves mutual service; each creature serves and limits the others.

Food Is Received from God: In God’s blessing to humanity, God gives humanity and the animals permission to eat plants (Genesis 1:29). The permission to eat animals is another blessing from God, to Noah, several chapters down the road (9:2-3). The exact narrative logic as to why the rules change after the Flood is not clear, but the omnivorous human diet is a blessing of God.

God Is Glorified in Creaturely Characteristics: In canonical context, Job 38-42 suggest that the features God considers “good” about a creature may or may not overlap with the features that humans consider good (or useful, or attractive). The fierceness of a horse in

188 In scientific terms, without day and night, entropy would increase upon the Earth.
battle is a joy to God, but it is still threatening up close (Job 39:19-25). Lions feed their young with the wisdom God gives to them (Job 39:39, Ps. 104:21). Wild donkeys and oxen please God as much as tame ones (Job 39:5, 9). God found joy in coming up with heavier-than-air flight for the hawk (Job 39:26-30). Behemoth is for God alone to tame; Leviathan is God’s underwater terror (Job 40:15-41:34). Science identifies these fearsome and exotic features as survival adaptations; Scripture treats them as God’s unique gifts to each creature, beyond human understanding or control.

Wisdom Reacts to Life, Not Just Shapes It: In Proverbs 8:22-36, Wisdom is imagined as a woman alongside God at creation. Indeed, Wisdom herself is the first of God’s creations. Wisdom makes two interesting remarks about life on Earth. First, she says that “I was daily [God’s] delight, / rejoicing before him always, / rejoicing in his inhabited world / and delighting in the human race.” (vv. 30-31, NRSV) If Wisdom can rejoice in Earth’s life, then there is something in life that is capable of surprising Wisdom. When a person experience joy at reuniting with a friend, the joy is partly there because of the work and expectation. But, the joy is also there because the outcome was uncertain. Joy is a reaction, a response. This passage imagines Wisdom rejoicing in the surprising interpretation of her theme in the majesty of life. The mystery of life evades Wisdom, until she learns what life has become.

Those Who Hate Wisdom Love Death: Wisdom’s second interesting remark is that life needs her to preserve itself against death. Wisdom ends her speech with these words (vv. 35-36, NRSV): “For whoever finds me finds life / and obtains favor from the Lord; / but those who miss me injure themselves; / all who hate me love death.” Sure, life can surprise and transcend Wisdom, but life had better beware of ignoring her! Of particular interest is
her last remark: “All who hate me love death.” It is wise not to love death. No matter how essential death may be to human origins, humanity had better not take death on as a tutor.

These creation passages each bear witness to God’s work in creation. Do they suggest any divine necessity (δή) for death in God’s creative process? Is there any way in which death and attendant suffering of creation are secretly incorporated and redeemed in God’s wise work?

This study makes a suggestion, in fear and trembling, via a quasi-scientific but primarily Biblical imagination:

_Mortality is the deepest boundary that each creature has toward other creatures. By this boundary, creatures (including humans) come to learn their local vocations within the larger mesh of creation. This vocation forms and gives reality to their bodies and senses. These bodies and senses are being prepared for a new creation, in which these real attributes become free of the constraints within which they were formed._

In the Genesis story, God moves creation from a state of chaos to a state of intricate order: light and darkness bound one another; land and sea bound one another; creatures are created that hunt and chase one another. So, if God sets up these separations, _how are they to be maintained?_ As the Bible suggests, Earth was once void and chaos; perhaps it is possible for Earth to become void again. God must rebuke the waters to hold them back (Ps. 104:6-7). Creatures must mate, eat, and drink. The Earth does not revert to chaos because “These [creatures] all look to [God] to give them their food in due season.” (Ps. 104:27, NRSV) As the Psalmist explains, God feeds the trees _with water_, God feeds the cattle _with grass_, God feeds the lions _with prey_, God feeds humanity _with labor_. As the book of Job suggests, God gives each creature its special attributes so that it can play its role, looking after itself and its kind. God has given each kind of creature the attributes that it has, so that each kind can be the boundary of others—the scarce food, the mysterious companion, the nightly danger.
And as each creature lives its life as a boundary to the others, it is given an extra, overflow gift: its most successful ways of doing this work are passed down to its offspring. The Darwinian process of mutation and selection is God’s way of allowing creatures’ lives to influence the whole work. Each kind of creature not only passes on its calling to its descendants, but also its God-given equipment.

This whole picture stands in contrast to another, sharply different vision of the world as a static paradise, free of death, where God meets all creatures’ needs directly. Humanity might prefer that God does not feed the cattle with grass, and the lions with prey. Frankly, humans might prefer less labor for themselves, too. But this alternative places God’s throne atop a planned ecology, as the Soviets tried to sit atop a planned economy. Instead, God sustains each creature using all of its relationships with the whole of creation, providing food, water, and shelter. Some creatures survive by eating other creatures, but the whole of nature survives because each kind of creature safeguards its relations with the other kinds. It is clear why this Biblical vision is superior. By placing each creature as the boundary of all the others, God gives real meaning, real calling and vocation, to each creature’s life.

God gives real vocation to each creature’s exercise of its faculties. God simultaneously calls forth within each creature a desire to live, to carry out the calling it has, and an awareness that it must give space, that it is not the be-all and end-all of creation. Each sparrow is so infinitely special that God has chosen to gift it (and its parents and children) with a calling that only a sparrow can live out. Every facet of its sparrowiness, God holds up, and gives to the whole of creation as an elevation offering, in its life and in its death. So it is, even more so, for humans. For humans are called to be stewards. Humans are not just to live out their creaturely vocations by instinct and sense, but by cognition, by social cooperation, by empathic connection, and as worship. And so God blesses all human faculties, including
pain at loss, including hunt and trap, including the survival instinct. The Christian life does not dismiss fleshly faculties in favor of a no-of-all-nothing existence. Instead, Christians give all of these faculties over to the Rabbi Jesus, so that he may lead humanity into a new creation, where bodies and senses will be raised up again. Then, those bodies and senses will not be constraints, but glory. Mortal life will be taken up into the New Creation, not as abolished mortality, but as fulness of life. For what is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable.

To build this creation, God gives vocation to human life from ‘inside’ life, and does the same for each creature. This is a mystery. Because of the disciples’ witness of the Resurrection, Christians believe that it is possible for God to re-create a world in which human bodies and senses are no longer mortal. But human bodies and senses must be real, or else there is nothing for God to transform. If, one day, the Church shall eat and drink to the glory of God, clothed in immortal bodies in the Resurrection, that is because today the Church eats and drinks in precariously mortal bodies, just to make it to tomorrow. Life is how humans learn what eating and drinking are; eating and drinking become real parts of human existence—real senses and sensations. They will still have meaning even when the Lord does away with the stomach and with food. If, instead, God had created humanity in a lab, in a false paradise where eating and drinking had no consequences, if no one made any sacrifice for food and drink, then how could eating and drinking have any part of who people really were? They would be an unnecessary pantomime. A world without consequences is a world in which creatures have nothing to their natures.

A final point. This whole process of life, whether it be eating and drinking, finding a mate, raising children, traveling, the whole thing—by God’s blessing, these processes shape and define a real, concrete thing called human nature. These processes give color and form
to each human on the inside. *If God is to make people into real creatures, people must become real from the inside as well as the outside.* God forms people from the outside through the Holy Spirit, through trials, through joys, through God’s word and from senses of fairness and cooperation. But God also forms people from the inside, by equipping them with bodies and senses that are made for the world they inhabit. From the inside, humans learn eating and drinking, speech and music, strength and trust, love and loneliness, fear and awe, grief and joy. God plants these seeds of human nature within each person. These seeds are intended to die, that they may multiply.

Overall then, the secret of Darwinian evolution may well be that God’s idea of a Garden has fewer walls and sharper teeth than humanity would selfishly prefer. But God dares call this garden “good,” showing that human good is tied up in hard ways with the good of the whole creation. And the point of the original Genesis story, wasn’t it that “knowledge of good and evil” is a temptation?
Second Response, Laudate Dominum de Caelis
Evolution needs death to proceed, which suggests a narrative conflict with faith in a good creator God. This study has suggested that this notion of “good” is too limited— that Scripture presents a very different view of God’s good purposes for humanity. Humans might prefer not to live in a world shaped by death now, but they cannot imagine how that world would look. God, on the other hand, is not so limited. In this world, God is using every creature to create all the others, through their mutual relationships.

This reading of Scripture is compelling—at least, this study thinks so! But is it true? The final steps of this study’s proposed narrative conflict rubric are:

- Like the disciples, invite Jesus to be one’s travel companion on the scientific road;
- Like the disciples, be a witness to having glimpsed the creator Christ, as he draws the world from this creation to the next.

To discover if the proposed interpretation of Scripture is true—and in what way it is true—the only way forward is to experiment. It is time to go out into the world and to see if Christ is there. Is the world truly a place where people are formed by their relationship with every other kind of creature? Is it true that through death, human creatures make space for others and share the best of their lives with their offspring? Maybe, but there is no way to find out without looking. There is no more thinking to be done behind a desk. This page is the last step that this study can take by reason alone. It is time to taste and to see.

These final words were written and edited in the San Juan Islands National Monument – a place of unrivaled natural beauty and complexity, whose lands make up part of the ancestral home of the Lummi Nation. The 450 islands and points mark the intersection of deep forces. Glaciers carved the shapes of the islands and straits, and humans named them, not just once, but over and over—indigenous peoples, Spanish and British explorers,
and British and American settlers. Dozens of waterways meet in the sea around the islands, from Bute Inlet in the Canadian coastal mountains, to Budd Inlet at the Washington state capitol building. The creatures that inhabit these lands and waters have filled them with natural wealth. The rich web of sun, sea, bird, fish and beast sustains—at least, for a while—the humans who live on the land.

The glacier-carved islands inspire awe, but there is nothing permanent about their richness of life. Human society in this land must continue and strengthen its effort to live in a relation of peace with its nonhuman neighbors. The story of British and American settlement here is comically short, next to the age of the rocks, the trees, and the migratory paths of the salmon. Yet, in this short time, humans have left indelible marks on the land and its creatures. The question, “is God’s creation good?” is not a dead academic exercise in this place. The answer is re-discovered each day, in each human action. Indeed, God has seen fit to let the answer be shaped by human hands. As humans make arrangements to safeguard their livelihoods, they have the ability to safeguard their relationships with their land and with its inhabitants. They treat their wastewater; they produce goods efficiently; they learn as much as they can about their nonhuman neighbors. God has made this effort possible and necessary; the future health of their land depends on this challenging and uncertain enterprise. So, it is time to look up from Scripture; it is time to get hands and arms dirty; it is a time to do good work and to make space for others; a time for heart change and a time for land faithfulness; a time for awakened ears and opened eyes. It is the best of times.
Bread of Heaven

You are the bread of life;
I give thanks for the bread, the new loaves of bread.

You are the water of life;
I give thanks for the bread, the soft bread of my heart.

You are the grain, the mighty seed;
I give thanks for the bread, the smooth bread of milled grains.

You are the oil, the oil of gladness;
I give thanks for the bread, the rich bread of pressed grains.

You are the egg, the binder of souls;
I give thanks for the bread, the thick bread of the barren womb.

You are the heat, the consuming fire;
I give thanks for the bread, the crusty bread of the oven.

You are the breath, the rising voices of the dying;
I give thanks for the bread, the risen and leavened.

For you have appointed to me

Pumps
Millstones
Presses
Beaters
Ovens
Fires

And the new loaves of bread.
Psalm Psoliliquy

Do we dare read the Book of Life, and laugh?  
I wish I knew, but there are many pages.  
I live between its covers, Earth and Heaven,  
Yet read so little as it unfurls ages.

For Christ makes light itself his bookkeeper,  
And elements of Earth his currency:  
His ephahs hydrogen and nitrogen  
He weighs out of the sea upon the land.  
Well it is said, the sea once dressed the Earth,  
For in the dark of sea such things are found  
As give God sport, and nourish human ground.  
And thus God’s books are balanced in a round.

And at the end of every day, the books  
Are opened, and another book, which is  
The Book of Life.  And all that happened is  
Within recorded:  Living memory  
In trunk or body written, births and ends,  
So that one day they may be read again.  
And for each phrase I hear as written down,  
A hundred more pass by unseen, unheard,  
But light itself sees all, fish, beast, and bird.

And in the Book of Life, I read one page,  
On it the words:  “SALMON:  ANADROMOUS.”  
Anadromous?--I had to look it up;  
It means, to run uphill.  Water running down  
Laughs and cavorts and roars with mirthful sound,  
But salmon run uphill in urgency.  
Forsaking the sea, freed of ocean charms,  
They rush to die in water’s open arms,  
And thus arrive on land, on forest ground.  
They are the temple shekel, meting out  
Our blessings and depositing the sum:  
The elements at sea in them come home.

A scarred Mideastern man once came to Greece  
Proclaiming Christ almost anadromous,  
And people thought he spoke for foreign gods  
But he proclaimed the unknown God they knew  
In rains and seasons, God they’d tried to prison  
with their hands and call it “Temple;” in  
Whose hands, fish multiply five thousand-fold!  
God reads their bodies like an open book.  
So thou shalt leave some river for the salmon,  
And thou shalt leave some salmon for the salmon,
And thou shalt leave some salmon for the river,
And thou shalt leave some salmon for the orca,
For you no longer wander in their land
But make your home there. Laugh, and learn to live
There. With your sister salmon sober be:
The Devil as a cougar walks about,
But if you make a loud and cheery noise,
He might well leave you be. As Luther said,
The one thing he can’t stand is to be laughed at.
Bibliography


Laurence 137
“We Were Hoping”


