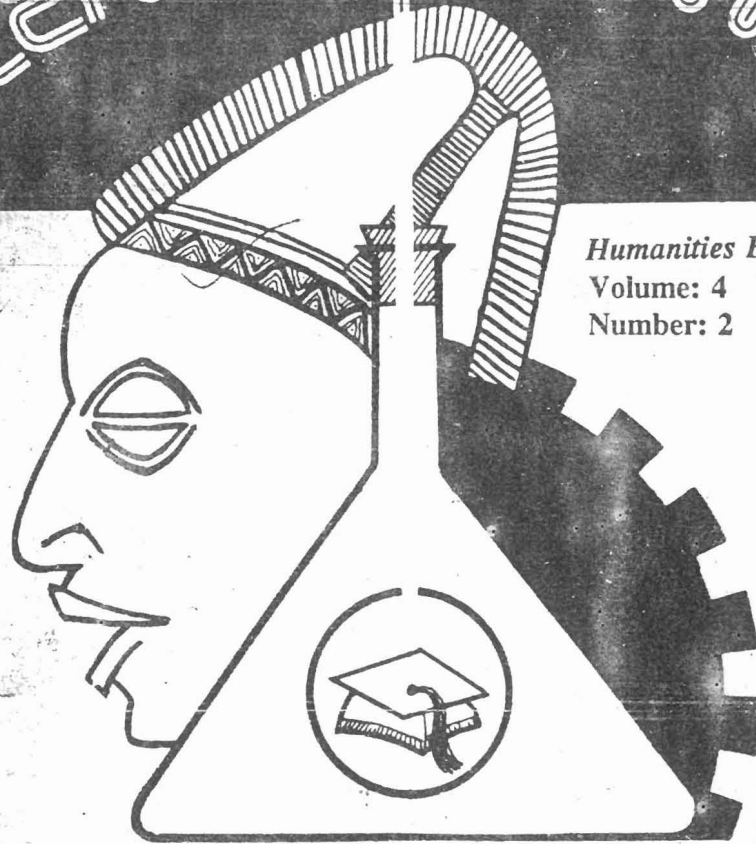


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## THE SCRIPTURAL ACCOUNTS OF CREATION AND THE CONCEPT OF THEISTIC EVOLUTION

by

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### Introduction

The scriptures considered in this study are the Bible and the Q'uran. The doctrine of creation as enshrined in the two books (of Christianity and Islam) maintain respectively that the universe was not self creating, neither is it self - existing as it owes its origin and continued sustenance to the omnipotent power and the unconditional will of the Almighty God. The two scriptures' views on creation uphold the theory of creation *ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing) through supernatural fiat. This theory runs counter to the theory of emanation, which believes that the universe was made out of the substance of deity as contained in the Brahmic Sacred Books, as well as the theory that the universe was made out of something independent that either existed eternally or came spontaneously into being as contained in the cosmologies of the Greeks.<sup>1</sup>

The theory of evolution, on the other hand, asserts that the universe came into existence through endless ages of time by purely natural processes from simple to complex, without any miracles so that things which are seen were made by previously existing, visible, simpler physical entites.<sup>2</sup> The evolutionists thus believe in extrapolation (natural processes operating over vast periods of time), and fail to recognize the divine role of creation. Here lies the conflict between the evolutionists and the creationists' view of the universe. Despite this conflict, the theistic evolutionists have attempted to reconcile evolution with the

scriptural accounts of creation. Particularly the Bible by arguing that the Genesis account occurs in the same order as that found by the evolutionists. It is against this background that we intend in this paper to examine the accounts of the creation as enshrined in the Bible, and the Qur'an, with a view to highlighting the problems involved in giving evolutionary interpretation to scriptural accounts of creation. This author takes cognizance of the scholarly works of E.N. Andrews and A. Monty on this subject in which they have painstakingly demonstrated the incompatibility between the evolutionary theory and the Biblical accounts of creation. The essence of our own study is to examine the extent to which the Qu'anic accounts are in accord with the Biblical accounts in their anti - evolutionary stance. This is considered necessary in view of the tendency of some Qur'anic exegetes, like Yusuf Ali,<sup>3</sup> to link evolutionary concept with the Qur'anic creation accounts

### The Theory of Evolution and the Scriptural View on the Origin of the Universe.

Different evolutionary theories have been propounded by the evolutionists to explain the origin of the universe and the things it contains. We shall be concerned in this study with the evolution of the universe as well as evolution of life and species (chemical and biological evolution). Charles Darwin is generally acknowledged to be the founder of the modern theory of evolution. Before him the Copernican revolution which took place in the 16th and 17th centuries ushered in the era of science, during which the traditional conceptions of the universe were overturned. Prior to the revolution, the workings of the universe were attributed to the ineffable will of the Creator, while the origin of living things was ascribed to the designs of the omnipotent God. However, with discoveries in modern science by Copernicus, Galileo and Newton, the workings of the universe came to be understood as aspects of natural processes. The significance of these discoveries lies in the fact that they led to a conception of the universe as a system of matter and motion governed by laws of nature.

The scientific climate probably influenced Darwin to publish in 1859 his *On the Origin of the Species By Means of Natural Selection*, a treatise which propagates the theory of evolution. He is of the view that the multiplicity of plants and animals, with their exquisite and varied adaptations, could be explained by a process of natural selection without recourse to a creator. He thus brought the living world into the realm of natural science, thereby completing the Copernican revolution.

However, subsequent to Darwin's time, the term evolution and the concept of change through time was no longer restricted to heredity variations in entities endowed with biological reproduction (i.e. living organisms), the concept was incorporated into other fields of science. Hence, astrophysicists speak of evolution of the universe of the solar system, geologists speak of evolution of the earth's mantle, anthropologists of evolution of culture, art historians of evolutions of architectural styles, and so on.

The "big bang" model is the most widely held theory of the universe's creation. The main points of the theory, as summarized by H. S. Shisher, are quoted by Money What<sup>8</sup> thus:

"The 'big bang' model starts with all the matter in universe contracted in a superdense core with a density of 1094 gm/cm<sup>3</sup> and a temperature in excess of 1039 degrees absolute. The initial superdense, not cosmic fluid, was a mix of the strongly interacting elementary particles composed of mesons, protons, neutrons, etc., and a smaller proportions of photons and the lighter weight muons, electrons, neutrons etc. Supposedly, there was anti-matter present also. At the near instantaneous origin of time by this scheme, there was the annihilation of heavier elementary particles into gamma radiation, resulting in a huge fire ball. Then, lightweight particles annihilated each other, continuing the tremendous fire ball. The fire ball stage ends as radiation decouples from matter. Quasars and crystals of galaxies condense. And, finally, galaxies and stars form and it is said they are still forming today".

What we can understand from this quotation is that the universe was formed from a primordial superdense nucleus of matter. The superdense is a mixture of interacting elementary particles composed of mesons, protons, etc. We are made to understand that anti-matter was also present. According to the theory, the annihilation of heavier elementary particles into gamma radiation resulted in a huge fire ball, referred to as the "big bang".

The theory of chemical evolution relates to the origin of life. It connotes that the chemical events which supposedly took place on primitive prebiotic earth finally led to the emergence of the first living cell. According to chemical evolutionists, the atmosphere of the prebiotic earth was composed of methane, ammonia, hydrogen, and water vapour. The occurrence of the sun's radiation, cosmic ray bombardment and thunderstorms caused the simple inorganic compounds in the atmosphere to react together to form simple organic compounds called amino acids that are themselves the basic building blocks of proteins, which are in turn the building blocks of living things.

The study of origin of species involves the study of biological evolution. This has been defined as the development of the first living cell into multicellular organisms into vertebrates into amphibians into reptiles not mammals, and finally into man. "Biological evolution is also defined as the development from the first living cell into all living and extinct plants and animals, including man. We are made to understand from this theory that man evolved from non-human animals, apes.

A thorough scientific criticism of the theories outlined above is beyond the competence of this writer, being a non-scientist (reader may wish to consult the works of the scholars referred to under our introduction for this). However, knowledge of science is not required to know that the evolutionists have no clue to the question of the origin of things. Their theory fails to account for the origin of the superdense of matter from which the universe is believed to have emerged. Neither is the origin of the first living cell from which other living things emerged explained. Worse still the evolutionists have difficulty in producing a unified theory, instead, there have emerged as many hypotheses as there are

investigators, which are based largely on speculations and conjectures.

The Bible and Qur'an, on the other hand, explain the origin of the universe as the handwork of the Omniscient God. This is a view diametrically opposed to the theory of evolution. The two Scriptures' teaching on God's relationship with the universe corroborates one another, as evident from the following assertions:

- (i) God is the Creator and Originator of Universe (Gen. 1:1, Surah 6:102, 56:58-74).
- (ii) He is the sustainer and preserver (Neh. 9:6, cf. Surah 13:16).
- (iii) He is its Controller (Col. 1:16-17, cf Surah 3: 189).

The two scriptures concept of the creation, as already noted, is based on the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. This is brought to light clearly in Hebrews 11:3, which reads: "By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear." The doctrine is also implied in the first verse of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heavens and earth. "The statement indicates that there was a beginning for the physical world, which was affected by one who had no beginning.

The Hebrew word used in this verse to infer that God created all this is *barah*. It is used in the Old Testament only, with the deity as the subject, hence, it indicates a work which is distinctively divine and which no agent less than God can accomplish.<sup>9</sup> The terms used for the creation with reference to God in the Qur'an, which connote creation *ex nihilo* are primarily *badi'* and *fatir*. Example of the former is found in Surah 2:17, where God is referred to as *badi'us Samawati wal ardi* while the example of the latter is contained in Surah 42:11, in which He is referred to as *fatiru s-samawati wal ardi*. The two expressions describe God as the Originator of the heavens and the earth.<sup>10</sup> The creative work of God as implied in these two terms, according to Yusuf Ali, falls back to the very primal beginning, as far back as it can be conceived.<sup>11</sup>

Despite Yusuf Ali's admission that God is the originator of creations as implied in his interpretation of the two terms, it is surprising that he accommodates the concept of evolution into his interpretation of the verb *Khalafa* another term used frequently for creation in the Qur'an. He opines That *Khalafa* involves the idea of measuring and fitting into a scheme of things.<sup>12</sup> While we agree with this interpretation of the verb, it does not however connote evolution. Measuring and fitting would be better understood in the sense of divine providential work, since providence is God's manipulation of natural processes and events to fulfill His purpose. The definition of *Khalafa* is well illustrated in Surah 87:1 - 5.

In like manner, we would not subscribe to an interpretation of the verb *Ja'ala*, which connotes evolution. The verb is used in Surah 23:14.<sup>13</sup> In describing the stages in the creation of man, here, God asserts that He created man from a quintessence of clay, then he was placed as a drop of sperm in a place of rest, then the sperm was made into congealed blood, which developed into a fetus lump, after which bones were made out of the lump and then clothed with flesh. It is amazing that Yusuf Ali gives evolutionary interpretation to this passage. It is also strange that in his interpretation of the passage, he opines that man evolved from animals.<sup>14</sup> His interpretation here no doubt reflects influence of the evolutionist on him. To my mind, the passage should be understood as describing the stage of man's physical growth from nothing during the formative period.

The interpretation given by Ali Yusuf on the above Qur'anic passages depicts him as a theistic evolutionist. A theistic evolutionist believes that God effected creation through the process of evolution. To him, evolution is a natural process through which God brought to be the universe and the things contained therein. This concept of theistic evolution is no less objectionable than materialistic evolution. The concept of theistic evolution has within it in-built contradictions, because evolution is no longer evolution once God is mentioned as its agent of operation otherwise the mentioning of God would be most inexact. Their interpretation of the sequence of creation as given in the scriptures would be discussed in the next section.

## The Sequence of Creation

As noted above, the Bible and the Qur'an assert that God created the universe in six days. A more striking point of similarity is the two Scripture's assertion that one day is equivalent to one thousand years in God's reckoning. As evident in Pet. 3:8 and Surah 70:4, where one day is to be equivalent to fifty thousand years. These two passages should not be seen to be contradictory as they both mean to indicate an indefinite period of time. This concept of day, which has been given wrong interpretation, as will be made clear, serves as premise for the theistic evolutionists to read evolutionary meaning into the Scriptures, particularly the Genesis accounts of creation. This is because they find it convenient with the geological periods which are used to reckon stages in evolution. According to them the six days of creation represent stages in evolution after God's creation of the first gem.

The sequence of creation (in the first account) according to the Bible is described in Genesis 1:1-2-3 as follows:

Genesis 1:1-2 A short introduction describing the primeval chaos.

Genesis 1:3-5 Creation of light and the separation of light from darkness (first work, first day)

Genesis 1:6-8 The firmament was called into existence to divide the primeval waters into upper and lower ocean, leaving a space between as a theatre of further creative development (second work, second day). The firmaments perceived to be a material structure supported by pillars.<sup>15</sup> The water above comes down in form of rain through the windows and doors of the heaven.

Genesis 1:9-10 The separation of land sea through the collecting of the lower water into one place. The shoreless lower ocean was thus replaced by land and sea in their present configuration (third work, third day).

Genesis 1:11-13 The clothing of the earth with its mantle of vegetation. The earth is conceived as endowed with productive powers. Thus plants were created (fourth work third day).

Genesis 1:14-19 The formation of the heavenly bodies, namely moon and stars. No mention is made of the sun, though it is implied (fifth work, fourth day).

Genesis 1:20-23 The peopling of the sea and air with aquatic and aerial animals. The creation of the birds and fishes marked the first appearance of life on earth, according to this account (sixth work, fifth day).

Genesis 1:24-25 The production of land animals. The terrestrial animals like plants are said to be produced by the earth, the body being part of the earth's substance (seventh work, sixth day).

Genesis 1:26-31 The creation of man (eight work, sixth day). God the Creator is presented as resting on the seventh day after finishing the work of creation. The seventh day rest is the basis for the Sabbath day in Judaism, both Old and New Testament periods.

There has been the tendency on the part of some scholars to view the Biblical account of creation as contradicting scientific laws. John Skinner,<sup>16</sup> for instance, is of the opinion that the creation of the sun and the moon after the earth, after the alternation of day and night and after the appearance of plant-life, are scientific impossibilities. He argues that the order in which they are grouped, are all opposed to geological evidence. Bucaille<sup>17</sup> in the same vein, highlights as absurdities the following facts contained in the first account of creation

- (i) The mention of the existence of water at the initial stage of the universe's formation;

- (ii) The mention of light on the first day when the cause of light is yet to be created;

- (iii) The placement of the existence of evening and morning on the first day when the earth and its rotation under the light of the sun had not been created;

- (iv) The notion of division of waters into upper and lower oceans;

- (v) The appearance of vegetation before the existence of the sun;

- (vi) The creation of the sun and the moon after the creation of the earth.

The purported scientific improbabilities need to be viewed with caution. The Biblical account of creation does not have to conform with scientific orientations; there is nothing sacrosanct about scientific law. As Andrews<sup>18</sup> has argued, scientific law is not an explanation of the law of nature, which is created by God. Natural law is therefore the will of God. Consequently, if there is any change in it, it should be considered to be His will. To my mind the non-conformity of the Genesis account of creation with natural law is not without purpose. To appreciate the importance of the account, it has to be seen as a cosmological view presented in a manner that could be comprehended by the people of Biblical age. Hence it contains semblances of the Mesopotamian cosmological views to which the Jews were very much familiar. The Mesopotamia creation myth is contained in the creation epic constituting the seven tablets known as Akkadian Enuma Elish (when on high).<sup>19</sup>

The second account of creation contained in Genesis 2:4-25 will not be discussed in detail because it is not cosmological. Hence no attempt is made to describe the formation of heaven and earth, as we have in Genesis one. The aim of creation story is to trace the the beginning of human life up to his fall. The Qur'anic accounts of creation, on the other hand, are not contained in one



particular passage of the scriptures, rather they are scattered. Five important characteristic features of the creation accounts as identified by Bucaille<sup>20</sup> are as follows:

- (i) Creation of the universe takes place in six days.
- (ii) Interlocking of stages in the creation of the heavens and the earth.
- (iii) Creation of the universe out of an initially unique mass, forming a block that was subsequently split up.
- (iv) Plurality of the heavens and earth.
- (v) Existence of an intermediary creation between the heaven and earth.

The passage of the Qur'an which some commentators interpret as describing the creation sequence is Surah 41:9-11, reads:

Say, is it that ye deny Him who created the earth in two days? And do ye join equals with Him? He is the Lord of the worlds. He set on the (earth) mountains standing firm high above it and bestowed blessing on the earth and measured therein all things to give nourishment in due proportion in accordance with (the needs of) those who seek (sustenance). Moreover, He comprehended in His design the sky, and it had been (as) smoke. He said to it and to the earth: come ye together, willingly or unwillingly. They said; we do come together, in willing obedience. So He completed them as seven firmaments in two days and He assigned to each heaven its duty and command. And we adorned the lower heaven with lights and (provided it) with guard, such is the decree of (Him), the exalted in might, full of knowledge.

If we count the number of days in this passage, we will get a total of 8 days, which contradicts the other Qur'anic passages which maintain that creation was completed in six days. Different explanations have been offered to resolve this problem. According to many commentators of the Qur'an, Ash - Shawkani<sup>21</sup>, Sayyid Qutb<sup>22</sup>, Yusuf Ali<sup>23</sup>, Al Muragh,<sup>24</sup> and ArRazi,<sup>25</sup> the four days in verse 10 include the two days in verse 9. It is equally possible, as Bucaille contends, that the days of creation of the heavens coincide with the two days of earth<sup>26</sup> on the plea that the process

of formation of the universe as presented in the Qur'an can be jointly applied to the heavens and the earth in keeping with modern ideas.

Apparently Surah 41:9-11, quoted above, gives the impression that the first thing to be created is the earth, then the mountains and means of sustenance for man, then the heavens and its luminaries. Al-Qurtubi's<sup>27</sup> interpretation of this passage is so literal that he assigns specific days for the works of creation. He contends that the first two days are Sunday and Monday, during which God created the earth; the next two days are Tuesday and Wednesday, during which the mountains, rivers, etc. are created; while the last two days are Thursday and Friday, during which the heaven and its luminaries are created. In our view the interpretation has been influenced by the erroneous understanding of the first account of creation in Genesis. Therefore it reveals an element of *Israiliyyah* in the commentary of the Qur'an.

It may be tempting to conclude that the sequence of creation as presented in the Bible and the Qur'an is conflicting. If Surah 4:9-11 is closely examined, it would be discovered that the Qur'an does not really give a definite order for the creation, as Al-Qurtubi proposed in his interpretation of the passage. What it does is simply the specification of the number of days spent on a number of things created within the particular days.

To show that no particular order is intended, the Qur'an when giving accounts of creation in other passages, first mentions creation of the heavens before the earth, as evident in Surah 79:27-30. Yet in Surah 21:30 we are informed that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation) before God clove them asunder. Thus, the impression is given that the creation of one does not precede the other. In light of this it would therefore be wrong to think that the Biblical sequence is contradicted by the Qur'anic sequence. The allocation of specific days to some particular works of creation as done by Al-Qurtubi is therefore based on mere conjecture.

The failure of the Qur'an to give detailed information on the sequence of creation on day-to-day basis conforms with the general style of its discourse. Rather than treat issues in detail it

merely gives basic information on its subjects of discussion, leaving the reader to search further details in its supplementary sources.

The question thus arises--Is it appropriate to give the Genesis or Qur'anic accounts evolutionary interpretation? This would have to be tackled by examining the contradictions in the scriptural teachings on creation and evolution theory. First and foremost, we have to settle with the interpretation of the concept of day in the Scriptures vis-a-vis the geological periods. There is a conflict here. The conflict is that the geological period is measured in terms of millions of years. It must be pointed out, however that misinterpretation of the passages of the scriptures, where one day is said to be equivalent to one thousand years by theistic evolutionists, has led them to erroneously draw comparisons between it and the geological period to justify their evolutionary interpretation of the scriptures. It must be made clear that the passages have been interpreted out of context.

With regard to II Peter 3:8, equation of one day with one thousand years is a response to the scoffers who shall during the last days scoff at the second coming of Jesus which, in their belief, would not come to pass because of the long expectation. The lesson which this passage means to teach, therefore, is divine patience. Reference to the two Qur'anic passages (Surah 22:47 and 70:4) is clearly to the last days (*ayamul akhirah*) whose day length is indefinite. In light of this, it would be wrong, to interpret the Biblical day (Hebrew *yom*) as it occurs in Genesis and the Qur'anic day (Arabic *yaom*) as it occurs in Surah 41:9-11 as normal days measured by the rising and setting of the sun.

Secondly, the scriptures maintain that the universe and everything therein came into existence upon successive divine commands, while theistic evolution appeals to natural law process. The phrase used in Genesis to effect every act of creation is "God said, let....." Similarly, the phrase *kun fa yakun*, repeated eight times in different passages of the Qur'an is the divine expression with which every act of creation is effected.<sup>29</sup>

Thirdly, the Scriptures maintain that perfection characterizes creation from the very onset, while evolution envisages

continuous improvement of the biosphere as a more complex and adapted forms of life arise with the passage of time. Evidence for this in the Bible is found in Genesis 1:31, which describes as good everything created by God. Similarly, the Qur'an dissociates imperfection from God's creation in Surah 67:3-4, when it asserts that no want of proportion or flaw could be found in the creation.

Fourthly, in contrast to the theistic evolutionist's belief that the evolution process is ongoing, the two Scriptures teach that the work of creation was completed in six days. Completion of creation in six days, as taught in the Scriptures, does not however, suggest that God is either idle or passive since He is ever engaged in the providential work of sustaining and preserving the creation.<sup>30</sup> In view of these conflicts, it becomes absurd to give evolutionary interpretation to either of the scriptural accounts.

#### **Inspiration of the Scriptures as a Basis for Evaluating Evolutionism.**

The assertions in the foregoing emanate from the belief that the scriptures contain inspired words of God. The concept of inspiration, with reference to the two Scriptures, however, differs. What G. P. Pardington<sup>31</sup> calls the dynamic theory of inspiration applies to the Bible while the mechanical theory applies to the Qur'an. The former maintains that the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, rendering the writers of the Scriptures infallible in their communication of the truth and thus making their writings inerrant, yet it leaves room for the freest and fullest play of personality and style. The latter is dictation theory which ignores the human element and gives scope for the free play of personality and style.

The belief in the Biblical inspiration derives from II Timothy 3:16 which asserts that "all Scriptures are God-breathed." This view is corroborated by II Peter 1:20-21 which declares "..... no prophecy of the scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation because no prophecy ever comes from the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."



The implications of these assertions for the contents of the Bible are clear: it implies accuracy of the divine words; it means the words of the Scripture are factual and the narratives are real. This is the position of the fundamentalists who believe that the Genesis accounts accurately describe how God created the universe. This view is not compatible with the belief that the creation account in Genesis is a myth. The protagonists of theistic view are Julius Wellhausen and J. Gunkel,<sup>33</sup> who contend that Genesis chapter 1-11 contain myths which are narrated as explanations of natural events. The theistic evolutionists' interpretation of the Genesis account of creation is in concord with the mythical interpretation both of which, as we have seen, are extraneous to the teachings of the Bible.

What is known as mechanical inspiration in Christian theology is called *wahyun matiwwun*, or recited revelation in Islamic version. The divine messages committed to Prophet Muhammed by means of *wahyun matiwwun* are believed to have been preserved in the Qur'an in the exact form they were revealed by God through angel Gabriel. This concept of inspiration is enshrined in Surah 42:51, which reads:

It is not fitting for a man that God should speak to him, except by inspiration or from behind a veil, or by the sending of a messenger to reveal with God's permission what God wills, for He is Most High, Most Wise.

It is on the basis of this passage (which parallels with II Peter 1: 20-21) that Muslims believe that the Qur'an contains the infallible words of God whose narratives are factual and its claims authentic. Consequently, any view contrary to the teachings on any of the issues it deals with, like the evolutionary view, is considered erroneous.

## Conclusion

The thesis of this paper is that the Bible and the Qur'an as divine scriptures are to a large extent complementary in their accounts of creation, in contradistinction to the theory of evolution, whether in its materialistic or theistic version. In the first part of the paper, attempt was made to distinguish between the evolutionist' view of the origin of the universe and the scriptural view. The former is unacceptable to us because the materialistic evolutionary concept denies completely God's role in creation, while the theistic evolutionists present the picture of a withdrawn God, who, after the initial creation, ceases to have any control over the workings of the universe. The second part deals with the problems inherent in the tendency to reconcile the scriptural accounts of creation and the evolutionary theory. The two are considered incompatible in view of the fundamental conflicts already identified. The theory of evolution is also not compatible with science in view of the fact that it contradicts scientific principle.<sup>35</sup> The scientific theory, can however be spiritualized by admitting that God created matter and energy, the two primary elements from which the universe was formed, as the scientists would claim. Science can therefore be made compatible with religion without contradictions. The third and last part examined the doctrine of inspiration as applicable to the two Scriptures. This is the doctrine that authenticates all the scriptural teachings regarding God and His creation.

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