

**ANDREW LOKE**

## **A response to Lamoureux's reply**

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Lamoureux's reply<sup>1</sup> misrepresents and ignores many points I made in my article and thus may appear convincing to those who have not read my article carefully.

For example, while Lamoureux appeals to divine accommodation, he ignores my citation of Woodbridge that 'accommodation carries with it no logical concomitant to an errant biblical text ... A father, particularly an omnipotent and omniscient One, can speak true thoughts simply.'<sup>2</sup> One must be careful not to beg the question against this view by assuming that the Bible would affirm erroneous science simply because it is an ancient text.

It is strange that Lamoureux claims 'Loke could be charged with...judging an ancient text in the light of modern standards' and accuses me of 'failing to appreciate the progressive and historically-conditioned nature of science',<sup>3</sup> when he is the one trying to prove that the Bible affirms erroneous science according to his modern standard which is historically conditioned! Additionally, if he thinks that, despite this historical conditioning some truths concerning the natural world can be known scientifically,<sup>4</sup> why does he claim that Garte 'astutely' observes that 'actual scientific inerrancy is impossible for anyone at any time'?<sup>5</sup> In one footnote Lamoureux has contradicted himself twice.

Lamoureux's attempt to show that biblical texts affirm a similar cosmology to other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) texts ignores Wenham's observation that Genesis is often highly critical of ideas current in the ancient world about the natural world.<sup>6</sup>

Lamoureux's claim concerning a three-tier universe<sup>7</sup> ignores Collins's argument that Philippians 2:10 is referring to three groups of beings rather than talking about cosmos topology.<sup>8</sup> Concerning *rāqīa'*, Lamoureux's cita-

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1 Lamoureux, D.O. 'The Bible and ancient science: a reply to Andrew Loke', *Science & Christian Belief* (2019) 31 (2), 110-135.

2 Woodbridge, J. *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan (1982), p.34.

3 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 111-112, n.6.

4 Indeed, he writes "Thanks to modern scientific instruments, when we see the sun 'rising' and 'setting', we know that it is only an appearance or visual effect caused by the rotation of the earth." Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 112.

5 *ibid.*, 111-112, n.6.

6 Loke, A. 'Does the Bible affirm scientific errors? A reply to Denis Lamoureux', *Science & Christian Belief* (2018) 30 (2), 119.

7 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 119.

8 Loke *op. cit.*, (6), 123-124.

tion of *rāqa'* and *riqqûa'*<sup>9</sup> ignores Walton's warning that nouns and verbs of the same root do not necessarily contain the same semantic range or character.<sup>10</sup> Lamoureux's citation of Job 37:18 ignores Walton's point that the word translated 'skies' is not *rāqîa'* – it is *šehaqim*.<sup>11</sup> Lamoureux's point concerning ancient translations<sup>12</sup> and lexicon<sup>13</sup> ignores the argument that 'translations and commentaries during the intertestamental period were affected by Hellenistic ontological views and their erroneous cosmology,'<sup>14</sup> and thus subsequent translations, interpretations and lexicons which followed them went wrong. Just as it is unscholarly for philosophers to rely on dictionaries while ignoring the philosophical difficulties of defining certain words, it is unscholarly of Lamoureux to rely on lexicons while ignoring Walton's warning and other difficulties that I explained.<sup>15</sup> Lamoureux's discussion of 'waters above the firmament'<sup>16</sup> and his objection that 'Beale does not offer any evidence, whether biblical or non-biblical, for the *rāqîa'* being made up of "various layers" of the atmosphere'<sup>17</sup> fails to note that Beale's conclusion is a reasonable inference based on the data he cited (e.g. concerning ancient peoples' understanding of the hydraulic cycle).<sup>18</sup> Lamoureux's claims that 'Beale knows that there is serious inconsistency', quoting Beale's 'it is difficult to locate exactly how the expanse of Genesis 1:6-8 fits into a temple depiction',<sup>19</sup> misrepresent Beale, who explains that the difficulty is due to the fact that there are only snapshots of depictions in various parts of Scripture. Not knowing the exact location does not imply inconsistency.

Given that Lamoureux's point about the *rāqîa'* is not proven, he has failed to demonstrate that his citation concerning the 'end' at the horizon is anything more than a phenomenological expression.

Contrary to Lamoureux's understanding of Psalm 104,<sup>20</sup> 'stretched out heaven like a curtain' (v.2) does not claim to be describing the structure of the cosmos. Rather, 'like' indicates that it is a phenomenological expression. Instead of interpreting descriptions by giving priority to foreign Mesopotamian astronomy, one should interpret them in light of the Jewish theological under-

9 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 120

10 Loke *op. cit.*, (6), 128.

11 *ibid.*, 129.

12 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 119, n.25.

13 *ibid.*, 131

14 Loke *op. cit.*, (6), 129.

15 See *ibid.*

16 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 120.

17 *ibid.*, 131

18 Beale, G. *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway (2008), p. 204; Loke *op. cit.*, (6), p.127.

19 Beale *op. cit.*, (18), p.23.

20 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 120.

standing of the 'heaven' as a cosmic temple. Lamoureux's discussion of 'The world...cannot be moved' and 'foundations'<sup>21</sup> ignores my response that such expressions 'can be understood as figurative expressions to convey the usual stability of natural order, based on the theological understanding of the heavens and earth as a temple and the earth as an imitation of the four-cornered tabernacle.'<sup>22</sup> Lamoureux's claim that the cosmic temple interpretation is un-biblical<sup>23</sup> ignores my response that in Psalm 104 God is said to have 'stretched out heaven like a curtain' (v.2) and laid 'the beams of his upper chambers' (v.3), using words and phrases often associated with the temple and having similarities with other temple scenes (e.g. 2 Samuel 22:7-15).<sup>24</sup>

With regard to Lamoureux's claim concerning earth set on water,<sup>25</sup> *tehōm* appears in Genesis 1:2 which portrays the dry land that has emerged from the water (v.9) but is not said to be founded on it.<sup>26</sup> Kidner notes that "'upon" could be translated "above"' and that 'the poetic image is of the solid earth rising out of the waters, and the allusion is to Genesis 1:9f; cf. 2 Peter 3:5.'<sup>27</sup> Passages portraying 'water under the earth' (Exod. 20:4 etc.) do not say that the earth is set on water but merely that there is water under the earth, which is not surprising given that ancient people dug wells.

Lamoureux's discussion of Proverbs 8:27-28 (God 'inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above')<sup>28</sup> ignores the fact that Hebrew *amets* ('made firm') can mean 'establish', conveying the idea that God determined the sky to be the way it is without implying that God created a solid dome. 'Circle' may refer to the horizon of the ocean which was already understood to be circular by ancient people (e.g. Greeks) whom the biblical authors may have known. There is therefore no basis for Lamoureux's claim that the gathering of the waters 'to one place' (Gen. 1:9) refers to God making a circular trench.

Lamoureux's discussion of 'ends of the earth'<sup>29</sup> ignores my point that these can be understood on the basis of theological understanding of the earth as a four-cornered tabernacle, and that the Hebrew '*erets*' ('earth') can refer to specific territories.<sup>30</sup>

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21 *ibid.*, 121.

22 Beale *op. cit.*, (18), p.213.

23 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 130.

24 Loke *op. cit.*, (6), 127. The temple that David referred to in verse 7 cannot be an earthly temple because that was only built later during Solomon's era.

25 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 121-122.

26 See Ellicot's commentary at <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/psalms/24-2.htm>

27 Kidner, D. *Psalms 1 1*, London: InterVarsity Press (1973), p.119.

28 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 122

29 *ibid.*, 123.

30 Beale *op. cit.*, (18), p.213; Holding, J. 'The legendary flat-earth Bible', *Christian Research*

Lamoureux's discussion of 'underworld' fails to note that in many OT passages *she'ol* means grave and Isaiah 14:9 can be understood as a poetic personification of the grave. Lamoureux's claim that 'Jesus identifies the location of the underworld to be in the middle of the earth'<sup>31</sup> fails to note the context of Matthew 12:40 which draws parallels between Jesus and Jonah whose body was in 'the heart of the sea' (Jonah 2:3). Thus '*heart of the earth*' should be understood as a coined expression modelled on Jonah 2:3<sup>32</sup> and referring to Jesus's body in the tomb. Once again, Lamoureux does bad hermeneutics by his 'proof-texting' which ignores genre and contexts.<sup>33</sup>

Lamoureux's discussion of Concordism confuses different definitions of Concordism. Because this correspondence is restricted to 2500 words I can only refer the reader to Alexander's article concerning the distinctions between Concordism Types A, B and C, and the distinctions between Task (A) 'interpreting the Bible', (B) 'showing that the biblical account is true', and Task (C) 'showing that there is no incompatibility between evolution and the Bible'<sup>34</sup> explained in the opening paragraphs of my other article 'Reconciling evolution and biblical literalism'<sup>35</sup> Lamoureux criticises it while ignoring those opening paragraphs. For example, he states that I claimed that the state of the earth in Genesis 1:2 was the result of destruction caused by fallen angels.<sup>36</sup> However, the context indicates that I am suggesting a possible scenario in line with Task C.

Lamoureux claims that 'Loke not only accepts God-of-the-gaps divine interventions in nature with his reorganisation of the creation theory, but he also embraces fallen angels-of-the-gaps in his distortion/destruction of an original creation.'<sup>37</sup>

Lamoureux has either misunderstood the God-of-the-gaps fallacy or misunderstood the task I am undertaking. The former *claims that* a particular phenomenon is evidence that God exists because we do not know how else to explain it. I have argued in another book that the case for the existence of God can be made without committing such a fallacy, by offering a Cosmological

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*Journal* (2013) 36 (3).

31 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 123-124

32 Landes, G.M. 'Matthew 12:40 as an interpretation of "The Sign of Jonah" against its biblical background', in Meyers, C.L. & O'Connor, M. (eds.) *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, Winona Lake, Ind.: Published for the American Schools of Oriental Research by Eisenbrauns (1983), pp. 666-667.

33 For other e.g.s see Loke *op. cit.*, (6), 124.

34 Alexander, D. 'The various meanings of Concordism' (2017) <http://biologos.org/blogs/guest/the-various-meanings-of-concordism> Accessed 17/8/2017.

35 Loke, A. 'Reconciling evolution and biblical literalism: a proposed research program', *Theology and Science* (2016) 14 (2), 160-174.

36 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 127.

37 *ibid.*

Argument that is based on reasons rather than ignorance.<sup>38</sup> However, that is not the task I am undertaking here. I am not offering the reorganisation theory, nor am I presenting the fallen-angel view as the *actual* explanations of a phenomenon and claiming that these phenomena are evidence for the intervention of God and angels. Rather, I am arguing that these are *possible* explanations which need to be excluded by those who claim that the Bible is incompatible with science. Lamoureux objects that these are excluded by the lack of sharp discontinuity between the original, distorted and reorganised worlds in the cosmological, geological and biological records.<sup>39</sup> However, he fails to consider the possibility that the interventions could have happened in a scientifically undetectable manner (e.g. intervention at quantum level), or very early in the history of biological life, or (in the case of the reorganisation forming Eden) at a very local level not sufficiently large enough to have left traces in records which are vastly incomplete.<sup>40</sup>

Lamoureux's objection that 'there is no biblical evidence that there existed anatomical *Homo sapiens* before Adam'<sup>41</sup> ignores the context which indicates that I am suggesting a possible scenario in line with Task C (not Task A). As explained in my article, for Task (C) it is legitimate to suggest a possible scenario that includes details that the biblical authors may not have thought of, as long as it is not contradictory to what they expressed.

Lamoureux claims 'Loke...rejects the literal reading of Adam being formed from the dust of the ground...it is doubtful the apostle Paul wrote Romans 5:12-21 within the context of Loke's belief that Adam came from a dead anatomical *Homo sapiens*.'

Lamoureux misrepresented me: nowhere do I reject Adam being formed from the dust of the ground. In line with Task A, I noted that the Hebrew word *yatsar* (formed) can literally mean that God's forming of humankind was a process.<sup>42</sup> In line with Task C, I then suggested a possible scenario that 'the already "existing body" could be that of an "anatomically *Homo sapiens*" which had just died, and which after God breathed into it became a "living creature"'. I did not claim that this scenario is affirmed by any biblical author, rather I argued it is not inconsistent with a literal reading of Genesis 2:7. Lamoureux seems to have difficulty grasping simple logical distinctions such as the distinction between 'x

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38 See Loke, A. *God and Ultimate Origins*, Cham: Springer Nature (2017). A review by Gavin Merrifield of this book was published in *Science & Christian Belief* 31 (2019), 103. However, the review is based on a careless reading of my book and a series of vacuous claims; see my reply here: [https://www.academia.edu/36933170/Reply\\_to\\_reviews\\_of\\_God\\_and\\_Ultimate\\_Origins](https://www.academia.edu/36933170/Reply_to_reviews_of_God_and_Ultimate_Origins)

39 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 127.

40 I explain these issues in greater detail in a forthcoming book.

41 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 133.

42 Loke *op. cit.*, (35), 169.

affirms *y*' and '*x* affirms something that is not inconsistent with *y*'.

Lamoureux objects that my 'understanding of the origin of Eve requires that every male Y-chromosome in Adam's rib be replaced by a female X-chromosome, and Scripture never mentions such a genetic transformation'. This objection is based on the fallacious assumption that Scripture would be expected to tell us the required scientific mechanisms of God's act, which demonstrates Lamoureux's failure to understand that the Bible is not intended to be an encyclopaedia of science. Lamoureux's objection concerning genetic variability in humans and descent from two people is based on multiple misunderstandings.<sup>43</sup>

Lamoureux claims that I said that the universe 'could have been in existence for millions of years.'<sup>44</sup> What I wrote was 'It could have been millions or *billions* of years', and in context what I meant was that the Bible does not exclude these possibilities; I was well aware that scientific evidence indicates that the universe is around 14 billion years old.

Lamoureux's remark 'Loke's fundamentalist anti-evolutionism is evident in that mutations are always perceived in a negative light'<sup>45</sup> is a misrepresentation: my suggestion of the possibility (in line with Task C) that Satan could have caused harmful mutations in no way implies that mutations are always negative. On the contrary, I suggested that God could have used evolution to create biological species by controlling some mutations of genes which appear to be random, as well as creating the natural forces such that certain biological traits are selected.<sup>46</sup>

Lamoureux objects that the distinction between (1) phenomenological observations of scriptural writers and (2) their erroneous scientific beliefs tears the expression 'the sun traversed the horizon' out of its ancient context.<sup>47</sup> This ignores my illustration that authors use statements for a variety of purposes. For example, if we were to read a nineteenth century text which says 'the stone falls to the ground as a result of gravity', we would say that the text correctly affirmed the phenomenological effects of gravity, even though the author probably had erroneous beliefs that gravity worked in a Newtonian way which has been shown to be flawed by Einstein.<sup>48</sup> Lamoureux objects 'If the biblical writer intended to convey merely the "appearance" of the sun moving, then it indicates this author, like us today, understood this visual effect was caused by the

43 See Swamidass, S. J. *The Genealogical Adam and Eve: The Surprising Science of Universal Ancestry*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity (2019).

44 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 127, n.42.

45 *ibid.*, 127, n.44.

46 Loke *op. cit.*, (35), 161.

47 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 128.

48 Loke *op. cit.*, (6), 122-123.

rotation of the earth.<sup>49</sup> Lamoureux's inference is false; just as the author of the nineteenth century text intended to convey merely the phenomenological effects of gravity without understanding that this effect was not caused in a Newtonian way, likewise the biblical writer could have intended to convey merely the appearance of the sun's movement without understanding that this visual effect was caused by the rotation of the earth. Lamoureux ignores my argument that 'the ancient Jews were more concerned about function than ontology' and that 'what matters for function in this case is phenomenology.'<sup>50</sup>

Lamoureux questions whether we would consider the distinction when reading statements in other ancient literature.<sup>51</sup> I would be willing to do so if it could be similarly justified, but there are cases where it cannot. Lamoureux ignores my citation of Collins's discussion of the *Letter of Aristeas* as an example of what affirming scientific errors (rather than merely using ancient common modes of expression) looks like.<sup>52</sup>

Concerning passages that describe the phenomenological movement of the sun (Psalm 19:4-6, etc.), Lamoureux objects 'As noted previously, it is a common practice in both ancient and modern science to employ familiar objects and processes as models and metaphors to describe and to explain the natural world.'<sup>53</sup> But where did Lamoureux 'note previously'? He cites as evidence the same passage, Psalm 19:4-6, claiming that the psalmist is 'comparing the dome of the sky to the canopy of a tent, and the daily motion of the sun across the sky to the joyful stride of a bridegroom or champion.'<sup>54</sup> However, as noted earlier, Lamoureux's interpretation of the firmament as a solid dome is unwarranted, and using the same passage as evidence begs the question. Lamoureux states 'the use of models and metaphors is a common practice in science today. Therefore, I believe it is reasonable to suggest that ancient people, like the inspired biblical authors, had some form of science.'<sup>55</sup> Lamoureux commits the fallacy of Concordism Type B by reading modern scientific practice into the ancient text. He cites other passages involving the tent metaphor (e.g. Psalm 104:2),<sup>56</sup> but, as explained earlier, these can be understood as phenomenological expressions and be interpreted in light of a cosmic temple.

Lamoureux claims that I assumed that 'Scripture features a spherical earth, because as modern people we know this air bubble envelops the earth', and

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49 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 129, n.53.

50 Loke *op. cit.*, (6), 125.

51 *ibid.*, 128.

52 Loke *op. cit.*, (6), 133, n.80, citing Collins, C.J. *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating history, science, poetry, and truth in Genesis 1-11*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2018), Section 9.E.

53 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 129.

54 *ibid.*, 111

55 *ibid.*

56 *ibid.*, 120.

that I supported my interpretation by appealing to Beale.<sup>57</sup> This is a misrepresentation. I cited Walton who did not argue his case based on assuming a spherical earth but on detailed word studies.<sup>58</sup>

Lamoureux concludes 'Loke begins by submitting himself to an American fundamentalist view of biblical inerrancy.'<sup>59</sup> This is a misrepresentation which ignores my detailed explanation that many theologians throughout history would have refrained from attributing any error to Scripture.<sup>60</sup> Lamoureux claims that his view is based on his central hermeneutical dictum: 'I shall submit to the very words in the Word of God.'<sup>61</sup> However, he seems not to have submitted to Psalm 119:160, 'All Your words are true.'

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57 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 131

58 Loke *op. cit.*, (6), 129, n.58, citing Excursus on Job 37 in Walton, J. *Job*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2012).

59 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 133. Lamoureux also claims that 'Loke started his training in apologetics at a fundamentalist Bible school' (*ibid.*, n.73). This is a misrepresentation. My first degree is Medicine (National University of Singapore), my second in Masters in Philosophy at Biola University; I did my PhD at King's College London.

60 Loke *op. cit.*, (6), 118-119.

61 Lamoureux *op. cit.*, (1), 133.



**DENIS O. LAMOUREUX**

## **A Reply to Dr Andrew Loke's Letter**

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I am thankful to the editor of *Science and Christian Belief* for allowing Dr Andrew Loke and me to continue our conversation regarding whether the Bible includes an ancient understanding of nature, which I term an 'ancient science'.

The opening sentence of Loke's letter is rather revealing. 'Lamoureux's reply misrepresents and ignores many points I made in my article and thus may appear convincing to those who have not read my article carefully.' Unwittingly, Loke is affirming the strength of my arguments and the biblical evidence that I presented in my paper for an ancient science in the Word of God. If this were not the case, he would not have bothered writing a letter. But disturbingly, he also insults the readership of this journal. I am quite certain that *S&CB* subscribers are well equipped to determine whether Loke has offered a convincing argument in his paper and whether my paper replying to him is compelling.

Sadly, it seems if anyone disagrees with Loke, he responds by claiming they lack reading skills. This ad hominem response even appears in a footnote of his letter (#38). A book review of Loke's *God and Ultimate Origins* in *S&CB* by Gavin Merrifield concludes, 'Overall, I struggled to read this book. Not only was I unconvinced by the arguments as presented, but the writing style was frustratingly difficult to read. Analogies and metaphors that don't quite work and the certainty in conclusions grate.'<sup>1</sup> Loke's response is that 'the review is based on a careless reading of my book and a series of vacuous claims'. I think we are seeing a pattern here in the way Loke replies to critics of his work. Maybe we should evaluate his ability to read.

At the beginning of his letter, Loke complains, 'It is strange that Lamoureux claims "Loke could be charged with . . . judging [*sic*] an ancient text in the light of modern standards" and accuses me of "failing [*sic*] to appreciate the progressive and historically-conditioned nature of science", when he is the one trying to prove the Bible affirms *erroneous* science according to his modern standard which is historically conditioned!' (my italics).

But is this what I wrote and argued? Here is the complete passage. 'Loke could be charged with presentism or Whiggish historiography in that he judges an ancient text in the light of modern standards. Moreover, he fails to appreciate the progressive and historically-conditioned nature of science. *The science in Scripture is not 'erroneous' to the biblical writers and their readers. It was the best science-of-the-day*' (italics added). Quite conveniently, Loke does not report my qualification put here in italics about the science in the ancient

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1 Merrifield, G. 'Review of Andrew Ter Ern Loke's *God and Ultimate Origins*', *Science and Christian Belief* (2019) 31:1, 104.

world of biblical peoples. In fact, Loke injudiciously 'puts words in my mouth' by claiming that I am 'the one trying to prove the Bible affirms *erroneous* science.' Point blank I state that the 'science in Scripture is not "erroneous"' within its ancient context. A proof-text manner of reading characterises Loke's use of my argument.

Loke also protests, 'One must be careful not to beg the question against this view [i.e., God accommodated by using simple but true ideas of nature] by assuming the Bible would affirm erroneous science simply because it is an ancient text.' But is this an assumption of my paper? No. Half of the paper deals with presenting evidence from Scripture that demonstrates the understanding of nature is basically the same as that found in ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt. I included four diagrams from these ancient civilisations clearly showing the ancient geography and ancient astronomy that they accepted. Then I presented dozens of biblical verses to prove that this same ancient science appears in Scripture.

For example, Loke should have noted that I dealt directly with the classic fundamentalist proof-text of the 'circle of the earth' in Isaiah 40:22. This verse does not refer to the outline of a spherical earth from outer space as claimed by concordists. Instead, this expression signifies the shoreline of a circular flat earth surrounded by a circumferential sea as shown in the Mesopotamian and Egyptian maps of the world. To claim that I 'beg the question . . . by assuming the Bible would affirm erroneous science simply because it is an ancient text' is an astonishing claim considering the biblical and ancient Near Eastern evidence I present in one half of my paper. Is the deeply embedded fundamentalist assumption of concordism clouding Loke's ability to read?

Loke's use of Gordon Wenham's *Genesis 1 - 15* commentary offers more evidence of his reading skills. He writes, 'Lamoureux's attempt to show that biblical texts affirm a similar cosmology as other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) texts ignores Wenham's observation that Genesis is highly critical of ideas current in the ancient world about the natural world.' Stated in this manner, Loke gives the impression that Wenham is referring to a criticism of ANE cosmology. But this is not the case. On the very page that Loke cites from this commentary, Wenham asserts that Genesis 1 - 11 is 'a polemic against many of the commonly received notions about the *gods and man*' (my italics).<sup>2</sup> In other words, these biblical chapters are criticising ANE theology and anthropology, not cosmology. In fact, Wenham in the very next sentence states, 'But the clear polemical thrust of Genesis 1 - 11 must not obscure the fact that at certain points biblical and extrabiblical thought are in *clear agreement*' (my italics). Wenham then adds, 'Genesis 1 - 9 records a bare outline of world history from its creation to the flood that finds a *parallel* in the Atrahasis epic and even more striking in the Sumerian flood story' (my italics). These prominent similarities

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2 Wenham, G. J. *Genesis 1 - 15*, Waco, TX: Word Books (1987), p. xlvi

include the cosmology. Indeed, most would argue that Loke's reading of *Genesis 1 – 15* misrepresents Wenham's views.

In dealing with the relationship between Scripture and science throughout my career, I have found that the ancient notion of the firmament (Hebrew: *rāqîa'*) provides an excellent opportunity to explore biblical hermeneutics. Loke's treatment of this ancient astronomical concept further reveals his entrenchment in a fundamentalist hermeneutic. He begins by appealing to Old Testament scholar John Walton. 'Concerning *rāqîa'*, Lamoureux's citation of *rāqa* and *riqqûa'* ignores Walton's warning that nouns and verbs of the same root do not necessarily contain the same semantic range or character.' Now it must be pointed out that Walton's caution is judicious, but this is not generally the rule. The study of etymology and cognate terms is a well-respected discipline in linguistics and it often assists in determining the meaning of words. For example, the Hebrew noun *zera'* refers to 'seed' and the verb *zāra'* means 'to seed' or 'to sow' (e.g. Gen. 47:23). Clearly, this noun and verb 'contain the same semantic range or character.' Similarly, *rāqîa'*, *rāqa*, and *riqqûa'* together provide a context of pounding a hard material like a metal into a flat surface that is consistent with a solid heavenly firmament.

But more importantly, Loke's proof-text reading of Walton's caution is misleading. He fails to report Walton's observation: 'Everyone in the ancient world believed in a solid sky, though there were varying opinions about its composition. The *Israelites undoubtedly believed in a solid sky*, though it is open to question whether *rāqîa'* is the word for that solid sky. For many years, I believed that it was' (my italics).<sup>3</sup> Walton now contends that the Hebrew noun *shehāqîm* refers to the firmament (Job 37:18, 21), and that *rāqîa'* is the air space between this solid heavenly dome and the surface of the sea and dry land. In other words, Walton still acknowledges that Scripture includes the ancient astronomical idea of a firmament in heaven. Once again, Loke conveniently does not include this fact in his paper regarding Walton's position.

And of course, Loke completely disregards Walton's clear statement about the ancient science in Scripture that I quoted in my paper. According to Walton, 'Through the entire Bible, there is *not a single instance* in which God revealed to Israel a science beyond their own culture. No passage offers a scientific perspective that was not common to the Old World science of antiquity.'<sup>4</sup> 'Old World science' is ancient science.

In dealing with the waters above the firmament on the second day of creation, Loke in his paper claims that 'the writer of *Genesis 1* is focusing on the

3 Walton, J. H. *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic (2015), p. 37.

4 Walton, J. H. *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic (2009), p. 19.

setting up of the water cycle, thus he uses the word for water (which ancients knew composed the clouds) consistently'.<sup>5</sup> In his letter, Loke continues to argue that this biblical passage refers to an 'ancient peoples' understanding of the [sic] hydraulic cycle.' Because of the word limits in *S&CB*, I did not address this issue in my paper, but I will do so now.

The Old Testament has two well-known Hebrew words for rain, *geshem* (30 times) and *mātā* (38 times), and two common words for clouds, *'ānān* (82 times) and *'āb* (22 times). One would expect that if the second day of creation was dealing with the water cycle, at least one of these terms would appear. But none do. Moreover, the word *rāqī'a* is found 12 times in the Old Testament outside the second day of creation, and never once is it associated with the Hebrew words for rain or clouds, nor does the context of these passages have anything to do with the hydraulic cycle.

Finally, it has long been noted that God does not declare the second day of creation as 'good'. One would think that in a hot and arid region like ancient Israel, precipitation from the water cycle would be incredibly good! But the reason this divine declaration does not appear is that day two is not dealing with the hydraulic cycle. It refers to the first phase in the creation of the heavens – the making of the solid dome of the firmament and the sea of waters above it. During the second phase, the heavens are finished on the fourth day of creation with the placement of the sun, moon and stars in the firmament. It is only upon the completion of the heavens that 'God saw it was good' (Gen. 1:18).

Loke continues to defend the so-called 'Jewish theological understanding of the "heaven" as a cosmic temple'. He argues, 'Lamoureux's claim that the cosmic temple interpretation is unbiblical ignores my response that in Psalm 104 God is said to have 'stretched out heaven like a curtain' (v.2) and laid 'the beams of his upper chambers' (v. 3), using words and phrases often associated with the temple and having similarities with other temple scenes.' This is another example of Loke's proof-text hermeneutics. Instead of dealing with the entire passage, he cuts out portions to support his concordist agenda. The 2011 NIV version of the entire sentence in these two verses records: 'He [God] stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.' Loke conveniently omits from this passage where the beams of God's upper chambers are positioned – upon the waters of the heavenly sea. He also fails to note that the reference to 'a curtain' is the curtain of a tent (see ESV, NASB, NRSV). In other words, the heavens are like the domed canopy of a tent, reflecting a three-tier universe, and not a Jewish temple with a flat roof.

Loke complains, 'Lamoureux misrepresented me: nowhere do I reject Adam being formed from the dust of the ground,' and then he charges that I 'have

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5 Loke, A. 'Does the Bible affirm scientific errors? A reply to Denis Lamoureux', *Science and Christian Belief* (2018) 30:2 , 127.

difficulty grasping simple logical distinctions'. Here are two simple assertions made in Loke's paper on the creation of Adam:

- (1) God formed Adam from the dust of the ground as stated in Genesis 2:7.
- (2) God formed Adam by reviving a dead anatomical *Homo sapiens*.<sup>6</sup>

Most would say these are logically incommensurable statements. Only one can be true, but not both. Of course, for Loke to affirm these two statements, he needs to completely deconstruct one of them. And he does this to the Word of God. Loke explains that in Genesis 2:7 'the Hebrew word *yātsar* [*sic*] (formed) can literally mean that God's forming of a man was a process', implying an evolutionary process. But is this what the Holy Spirit-inspired author of this verse intended to communicate? Only a radical post-modern hermeneutic with no respect for authorial intentionality or the historical context of Genesis 2:7 can concoct such an understanding of this verse.

Loke closes his letter in mocking tone. He states my central hermeneutical dictum – 'I shall submit to the very words in the Word of God' – and then scorns that I have not 'submitted to Psalm 119:160 "All Your words are true."' Yet again, Loke's proof-text reading of Scripture is on display. Psalm 119 is an acrostic structured on the Hebrew alphabet. The final verse of each lettered section refers to the spiritual principles demanded by God – his 'decrees' (6 times), 'statutes' (5 times), 'commands/ments' (6 times), 'precepts' (4 times), and 'law/s' (3 times). Conveniently, Loke does not present the second half of verse 160. 'All your words are true; all your *righteous laws* are eternal' (my italics). Parallelism is common in Hebrew poetry. In this verse, the Lord's true words are his righteous laws. These are spiritual truths for holy living, not scientific truths about the natural world.

Loke's reading of my hermeneutical dictum reflects the proof-text literalism of a fundamentalist steeped in concordism. He completely misses the point. My method of biblical interpretation requires that we submit to every word in the Word of God, including words indicative of ancient science, like the word *rāqī'a*. Submission to such a word does not mean we need to believe that the firmament literally exists. Nor does this mean that the word should be ripped out of its ancient historical context to concoct a lexical fantasy. The Holy Spirit permitted ancient science in Scripture, and it is our task to identify it, and then to respect God's decision to do so.

In proposing an Incarnational approach to biblical inerrancy, I firmly uphold the spiritual truths in Scripture. I contend that in passages referring to the physical world, the Holy Spirit accommodated and allowed the inspired biblical writers to employ ancient science as an incidental vessel to deliver 'pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow in your salvation' (1 Pet. 2:2).

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<sup>6</sup> Loke, A. T. E. 'Reconciling evolution and biblical literalism: a proposed research program', *Theology and Science* (2016)14:2, 168-170.