

JOHN WALTON'S *LOST WORLDS* AND GOD'S LOOSED WORD: IMPLICATIONS FOR INERRANCY, CANON, AND CREATION

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For some time now, John Walton has been challenging fellow evangelicals to interpret the Bible's trustworthy message in light of its ancient context. His 2013 book *The Lost World of Scripture*, co-authored with colleague Brent Sandy,¹ applies insights from speech-act theory and oral cultural studies to the question of biblical authority. Walton and Sandy's conclusions have significant ecumenical implications. This essay first summarizes some of Walton and Sandy's key conclusions and then looks at the implications for bridging two divides in the church: the debate over biblical inerrancy and the debate over the contents of the biblical canon. I will relate my findings to the doctrine of creation in dialogue with Walton's newest release, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*.

At the end of their book, Walton and Sandy voice their concern: "For many evangelicals, inerrancy may be tied too closely to exact words in written forms of revelation, to original autographs and to standards of accuracy based on modern historiography" (p. 306). By contrast, *The Lost World of Scripture* offers us the *loosed* Word of God: biblical authority that is loosed from being "tied too closely" to autographs or strict wording or modern standards of science and historiography. The authors also invite further exploration based on their proposals (pp. 307, 309). This essay takes them up on their offer. First, however, we must survey the proposals themselves.

I. A TOUR OF *THE LOST WORLD OF SCRIPTURE*

Walton and Sandy grant that divine revelation in Scripture is accommodated to ancient assumptions about the physical world and premodern practices of historiography, both of which may fall short of modern standards of scientific and historical accuracy. The authors, though, deny that it is appropriate to measure Scripture by modern standards. Here speech-act theory comes into play: the Bible's inerrancy is properly located not in its locutions (the words used) but in its illocutions (the truths that the human and divine communicators intended to convey by means of the words used). For instance, the Israelites who produced the OT likely believed in geocentrism and the presence of celestial waters behind the solid vault of

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¹ John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013). All subsequent citations from this source are embedded in the text.

the sky. But so long as they and God did not intend to teach cosmographical lessons, the features of biblical discourse which betray these beliefs function merely as idioms for communicating what God and his servants intended to convey. *The Lost World of Scripture* specifically rejects the claim that Scripture reveals new scientific information (pp. 39–59, 199–215, 293–94, 300–8).

God also accommodated his revelation to the compositional practices of ancient oral culture. The communication of revelation began with divinely inspired authority figures (e.g. prophets and sages) whose utterances were recorded by scribes. Generations of scribes copied these records, expanded and revised them, and eventually compiled them. These scribal activities advanced the tradition begun by the authority figures and so were considered to share in divine inspiration. Furthermore, in an oral culture, diversity in wording and in minor narrative details did not count as errors; variants among manuscripts and accounts were permissible and did not undermine the trustworthiness of the material so long as its major points remained unaltered. Once the faith community canonized these compilations, their texts became more stabilized, although some variation has continued to occur over the course of their transmission. Given Scripture's origins in oral culture, Walton and Sandy suggest that textual variants may go back to the autographs themselves, such as in the cases of the shorter and longer versions of Jeremiah's prophecy² and Paul's epistle to the Romans. Since OT books in general may have had a long compositional history, in such cases the very notion of an autograph may prove to be a will-o'-the-wisp leading its pursuer into a trackless marsh. *The Lost World of Scripture* recommends refocusing on the final canonical form of the text as the goal of textual criticism and the standard for biblical authority (pp. 17–38, 60–74, 143–51, 167–96, 280–81, 298–300, 307–8).

II. THE INERRANCY DEBATE: SOLVED BY PULLING OUT A LOOSE TRUTH?

Walton and Sandy specify that they have written *The Lost World of Scripture* to demonstrate how belief in the inerrancy of the Bible is compatible with what we know about its origins, transmission, and relation to modern standards of accuracy (p. 9). Their proposals offer a constructive response to recent evangelical concerns about inerrancy. For instance, at the 2001 Wheaton Theology Conference on Scripture, John Brogan critiqued belief in inerrancy on the following fronts:

1. The notion of a single autograph with a fixed form of inerrant wording written by a single author does not do justice to texts' histories as reconstructed by source, form, redaction, and text criticism. Furthermore, premodern Christians were not bothered by textual variants and expansions as moderns are.

² For an earlier statement of this view, see J. Daniel Hays, "Jeremiah, the Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Inerrancy: Just What Exactly Do We Mean by the 'Original Autographs?'," in *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics* (ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, and Dennis L. Okholm; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004) 133–49.

2. The notion of inerrant autographs is irrelevant. Christ's and the apostles' affirmations of biblical authority refer to the copies and translations extant in their day, not merely or primarily to the autographs; likewise, God's people in all succeeding generations have had access to truly authoritative Scriptures, even though none of them have had access to the autographs.

3. The denial of real discrepancies among scriptural texts and between them and modern scientific and historical standards leads to forced harmonization: "Inerrantists force the biblical authors to comply with modern standards of history and science concerning 'truth' and 'error,' although these categories are completely foreign to the cultural and contextual worlds of the biblical authors."³

Brogan concluded with a "plea that we develop a more positive doctrine of Scripture." Such a doctrine

must address not only the historical nature of the writing of Scripture, but also the editing, transmission, canonization and translation of Scripture. Our doctrine of Scripture must allow the Bible to speak truth as ancient (not modern) people might communicate truth. Our doctrine of Scripture must allow for the editorial development of certain biblical texts, affirming that the writing was "God's Word" at every stage of the process.⁴

Walton and Sandy successfully answer Brogan's plea: first, they shift the standard of authority from the *autographs* to the *canonicographs* (the writings as canonized rather than as originally written).⁵ This canonical form of Scripture remains authoritative and accessible throughout the generations despite variations in wording and narrative detail. In keeping with ancient expectations for veracity, such variants should not be considered errors unless they undermine the texts' illocutions; consequently, there is no need to harmonize variants with one another or with modern scientific and historical findings unless these impinge on a particular text's illocution.

More recently, lapsed inerrantist Lee McDonald has raised the same three objections to inerrancy in the postscript to one of his works on the canonization of Scripture.⁶ World Reformed Fellowship vice president Andrew McGowan has presented the latter two objections as part of his argument to drop the language of "inerrancy" in favor of biblical "infallibility" or "authenticity."⁷ To the extent that inerrantist evangelicals accept and promote Walton and Sandy's proposals, these objections will lose their force. The ancients' "looser" conception of truth as compatible with peripheral variations widens the common ground between those who

³ John J. Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph? Uses and Abuses of Textual Criticism in Formulating an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture," in *Evangelicals and Scripture* 108.

⁴ Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph?" 109.

⁵ Cf. Hays, "Jeremiah, the Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Inerrancy" 138–49; Peter J. Gentry, "The Text of the OT," *JETS* 52 (2009) 19, esp. n. 2.

⁶ Lee Martin McDonald, *Forgotten Scriptures: The Selection and Rejection of Early Religious Writings* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009) 201–21; on McDonald's repudiation of inerrancy, see p. 9.

⁷ A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007) 109–13, 213.

embrace the term “inerrancy” and those with scruples about it. Lingering differences between the two sides will lie not at the conceptual level but at the level of terminology and extent of application.

In the case of terminology, it remains disputable whether one should speak of “error” in the modern sense in Scripture. Walton and Sandy grant that the Bible has what would be errors when measured by modern standards; they simply deny that it is appropriate to impose such standards on Scripture or any other ancient document, such as Greco-Roman historical accounts. To do so is as anachronistic as accusing ancient authors of the modern crime of plagiarism (pp. 101, 151, 307–8). Thus one may speak of “discontinuities” (pp. 307–8), just not “errors.” One wonders whether professional historians would be willing to abide by Walton and Sandy’s strictures and refrain from reference to “error” when evaluating ancient sources in general. Nevertheless, with regard specifically to Scripture, even McDonald cautions that “it is probably best not to use the term ‘error’ at all since it indicates to some a general distrust of the Bible.”⁸

In the case of the extent of application, Walton and Sandy particularly distance themselves from Kenton Sparks and Peter Enns,⁹ who so extend the category of peripheral variation that it undercuts the essential historicity and harmony of huge swaths of Scripture. While these latter two scholars limit the illocution of these biblical texts to theological affirmations, *The Lost World of Scripture* insists that their illocution includes the historical affirmation that God has interacted with real people in real events (e.g. the exodus). If these historical affirmations prove false, then the accompanying theological affirmations are left unrooted and unreliable (pp. 40, 42–43, 304–5). On this point, I cannot but agree with Walton and Sandy. Passing remarks in Scripture about the workings of the heavens, minor divergences in detail between Synoptic accounts, and even the genre to which a book like Jonah belongs¹⁰ are incidental compared to the illocutionary indicators that the central events which defined Israel’s identity and theology are meant to record real happenings in time and space. To deny these is to barter our biblical birthright for the crumbs that fall from the critics’ table.

III. THE CANON DEBATE: SOLVED BY ROLLING OUT A LOOSE CANON?

Walton and Sandy specifically and extensively discuss the inerrancy debate. They do not reflect at much length on the debate concerning the limits of the canon; they mainly affirm that the locus of biblical authority and the focus of textual

⁸ McDonald, *Forgotten Scriptures* 212. McGowan, too, eschews the language of biblical errancy as much as biblical inerrancy: see *Divine Authenticity* 118–26, 210–11.

⁹ Kent Sparks, “The Sun Also Rises: Accommodation in Inscripturation and Interpretation,” *Evangelicals and Scripture* 112–32; Kenton L. Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the OT* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

¹⁰ For a brief discussion of Jonah, genre, and inerrancy, see Craig L. Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible? An Evangelical Engagement with Contemporary Questions* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2014) 157–60.

criticism should be what I have called the canonicographs: the canonical form of Scripture. This claim raises further questions, though, since there is in fact more than one canonical form. For instance, the Septuagint contains a book of Jeremiah which is one-eighth shorter and organized differently than the Hebrew text later standardized by the Masoretes.¹¹ Walton and Sandy affirm that both versions are fully inspired: "God is the source of all of Scripture. Because God breathed it in its entirety, he is the source even for variant wordings—whether those between Psalm 18 and 2 Samuel 22, between the long and short forms of Jeremiah, or among the Gospels" (p. 295).¹²

This perspective on Jeremiah opens the door to accepting biblical material later classified as apocryphal or deuterocanonical. The Septuagint contains additions to the books of Jeremiah (the Letter of Jeremiah; Baruch), Daniel (the Prayer of Azariah; the Song of the Three Jews; Susanna; Bel and the Dragon), and Esther (various expansions, such as a dream of Mordecai's and a prayer of Esther's). As well as expansions to individual books, there are expansions to entire genres, such as the inclusion of Tobit, Judith, and the books of Maccabees among the OT's narrative literature and the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach among its sapiential literature. The NT writers themselves used the Septuagint as well as Hebrew versions of Scripture without distinguishing inspired from uninspired variants in wording or books.¹³ The Gentile Christians of the apostolic and immediately subsequent generations also treated the Septuagint as Scripture, even its deuterocanonical books.¹⁴ If the apostles ever disbelieved in those books' inspiration, they never effectively communicated such a view to their converts.¹⁵

The history of the canon shows variation not only with regard to the OT but also the NT. Over the first several Christian centuries, various Church Fathers, codices, and councils sometimes limited the OT canon to the proto-Masoretic version but usually sided with the more expansive Septuagintal version, occasionally even going further and accepting pseudepigraphical works like *1 Enoch*. They also affirmed a NT that sometimes excluded books such as Hebrews, 2 Peter, and Revelation and sometimes included books such as the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and the *Apocalypse of Peter*.¹⁶ In the modern era, at least four canons of the Christian Bible exist: the Eastern Orthodox, the Roman Catholic, the Protestant,

¹¹ Hays, "Jeremiah, the Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Inerrancy" 136–38.

¹² Hays (*ibid.* 146–49) is open to this option.

¹³ *Ibid.* 141–42; cf. Michael Graves, *The Inspiration and Interpretation of Scripture: What the Early Church Can Teach Us* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) 100–101.

¹⁴ *1 Clem.* 3:4 (Wis 2:24); 27:5 (Wis 12:12); 55:4–5 (Judith 8–13); 59:3–4 (Judith 9; Sirach 16); *Pol. Phil.* 10:2 (Tob 4:10), as identified in Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (3d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 793. See also Craig D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the NT Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 177–85.

¹⁵ For a survey of current debate over whether or not the apostles inherited a closed OT canon from Judaism, see Stephen Dempster, "Canons on the Right and Canons on the Left: Finding a Resolution in the Canon Debate," *JETS* 52/1 (2009) 47–77.

¹⁶ Allert, *High View* 57–66, 87–145; McDonald, *Forgotten Scriptures*; F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988).

and the Ethiopian Orthodox. The first three groups concur on the NT canon but not on the OT; the Ethiopians have a more expansive Bible in both Testaments than any of the other three groups.¹⁷

Walton and Sandy's proposals suggest a constructive approach toward the ongoing diversity of Christian biblical canons, one which treats variant canons like variant readings, all of which are divinely inspired. Different canons represent different trajectories and terminal points in the providential process of textual formation, yet the resultant Scriptures are as one in their usefulness "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16).¹⁸ Just as the ancients tolerated peripheral variations in wording and detail within individual narratives so long as the core remained unaffected, so also we may tolerate peripheral variations in canonical content within the overarching biblical narrative so long as the core stays intact. That core consists of orthodox dogma and the storyline which supports it,¹⁹ as found in the books of both Testaments whose inspiration was early and universally recognized: the Torah, most of the Prophets (both Former and Latter), some of the Writings (especially the Psalms and Daniel), the four Gospels, Acts, most of the Pauline corpus, 1 Peter, and 1 John.

Such a "loose canon" approach has a strong attraction in a culture of tolerance and eager ecumenism. One may even appeal for precedent to St. Augustine, who affirmed the divine inspiration of both the Masoretic text, which excluded the deuterocanonical books, and the Septuagint, which included them.²⁰ One may also note that this position appears to be fully compatible with the ETS doctrinal statement and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, neither of which lists the contents of the biblical canon! The question, however, is whether the addition to or subtraction from the canon of whole books constitutes a merely peripheral matter. It may be that the teaching of some books contradicts or unnecessarily complicates the biblical core. This seems to be the reason that, around AD 90, the rabbinical assembly at Jamnia debated the merits of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Ezekiel.²¹ This is also one reason that Protestants have disputed the canonicity of the deuterocanonical books²² and, for Luther and some early followers, the in-

¹⁷ McDonald, *Forgotten Scriptures* 224 nn. 6–9.

¹⁸ All biblical quotes are from the NRSV.

¹⁹ It bears noting that the early church's rule of faith and later creeds typically follow the narrative arc of Scripture.

²⁰ Graves, *Inspiration* 89, sums up Augustine's logic: "Just as the Holy Spirit inspired different messages through Isaiah and Jeremiah, so also the Hebrew and Greek texts of a single passage of Scripture are both inspired, even though they say different things."

²¹ Robert C. Newman, "The Council of Jamnia and the OT Canon," *WTJ* 38 (1976) 336–41; cf. Albert C. Sundberg Jr., "The OT of the Early Church," in *Festschrift in Honor of Charles Speel* (ed. Thomas J. Sienkewicz and James E. Betts; Monmouth, IL: Monmouth College, 1997), online at http://department.monm.edu/classics/Speel_Festschrift/sundbergjr.htm (note: Sundberg incorrectly translates "Kohemoth" as "Chronicles" rather than "Ecclesiastes").

²² Bruce, *Canon* 101–8; Charles E. Hill, "The Canon of the New Testament," in *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008) 2582–83.

spiration of Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation.²³ In the following section, I explore how the variations among canons may affect aspects of the doctrine of creation.

IV. VARIATIONS ON CREATION: SOME "LOOSE" THOUGHTS

Canons which differ from the Protestant Bible contain a wealth of additional material concerning the doctrine of creation. The Ethiopian Orthodox canon includes *1 Enoch*, which echoes Isaiah's theme of a new creation (*1 Enoch* 72:1; 91:16).²⁴ But *1 Enoch* also narrates at length the fallen angels' fathering of giants by mortal women (chaps. 1–36) and Enoch's tour of the heavens (chaps. 72–82). The intent seems to be to recount history in the former chapters and, in the latter ones, to make just the sort of scientific claims about "meteorology, astronomy, cosmic geography" and such that Walton and Sandy want to avoid attributing to Scripture (p. 55). Speaking for myself, I would not relish having to defend *1 Enoch's* illocutionary inerrancy. Other biblical books may quote *1 Enoch* (Jude 14–15) or refer in passing to Enochic themes of fallen angels and giants (Wis 14:6; Sir 16:7; Bar 3:26; 3 Macc 2:4; 1 Pet 3:19–20; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6), but without *1 Enoch* in the canon, we are free to interpret these as references to popular folklore, not to inspired historiography. We also avoid an unnecessary skirmish with contemporary science over the accuracy of *1 Enoch's* astronomical chapters. *1 Enoch* may not contradict the canonical core,²⁵ but it needlessly complicates it and we may be grateful that Protestants, Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox alike have rejected this particular variant to the canon.

By contrast, Walton and Sandy's "loose truth" approach may help us not to disqualify the Wisdom of Solomon from the canon over a single controversial passage. A hint of belief in the pre-existence of the soul appears in Wis 8:19–20's remark, "As a child I was naturally gifted, and a good soul fell to my lot; or rather, being good, I entered an undefiled body." In context, this statement is not made the basis for any teaching on the soul's origin; rather, the speaker goes on to describe how he did not rely on his natural endowments but begged God to grant him heavenly wisdom, without which he confesses that his works will be unacceptable to God and his reasoning futile (8:21–9:18).²⁶ Nor does he view himself as impeccable but identifies with the rest of Israel, whom God disciplines to inspire

²³ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (ed. E. Theodore Bachmann; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960) 35:337–411; Karl Barth, *CD 1/2.476–78*.

²⁴ Matthew Black, "The New Creation in 1 Enoch," in Richard W. A. McKinney, ed., *Creation, Christ and Culture: Studies in Honour of T. F. Torrance* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976) 13–21.

²⁵ Matt 22:30 par. do not clearly teach that angels *cannot* marry, only that resurrected humans *do not* marry but are like angels. Matt 22:30 and Mark 12:25 specify that the angels in view are those in heaven, not fallen angels (who, according to *1 Enoch*, married once they fell), while Luke 20:35–36 makes the likeness between angels and the resurrected to consist particularly in immortality, with lack of human nuptials as a consequence.

²⁶ Michael Kolarcik, "The Book of Wisdom," *NIB* 5:511–12.

repentance (12:18–22).²⁷ The speaker simply takes for granted the view of the soul's origin common to his setting,²⁸ just as other OT wisdom literature assumes that the sky is solid (Job 22:14; Prov 8:28). Inerrancy lies not in his locution but in his illocution, which affirms divine wisdom's surpassing value and the necessity of receiving it in order to please God. On this point he concurs with the whole tenor of Scripture (e.g. Job 28; Proverbs 1; Jas 3:13–18).

A “loose canon” would partially clash with Walton's recent application of his hermeneutic to Genesis 2–3. In *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, he argues that Scripture (by which he means the Protestant canon) makes no claims about Adam's being the first man or the ancestor of all humankind.²⁹ But according to the Deutero-canonical books of non-Protestant canons, Adam is the “first-formed” human and the progenitor of all others (Wis 7:1; 10:1; Tob 8:6).³⁰ On these points I believe that the Deutero-canonicals interpret Genesis rightly. Walton sees Gen 1:26–28 as describing a creation of humans chronologically prior to the creation of Adam and Eve in Gen 2:4–25. These pre-Adamites' presence explains Gen 4:14–17's references to Cain's wife, potential avengers from whom he needs protection, and his building of a city (which assumes a population large enough to inhabit it).³¹ To the contrary, Gen 2:4–25 may simply recapitulate and extend Gen 1:26–28 just as Gen 6:9–9:28 does with Gen 5:1–6:8 in the Noah story.³² As for Gen 4:14–17, given that Adam's family included other children (Gen 5:4) and that even in Abram's time, marriage to one's (half) sister was practiced (Gen 20:12), Cain's wife and other contemporaries are easily explained as Adam's progeny. Just as Genesis portrays all humans after the Flood as descending from Noah's family (Genesis 10), so all humans before the Flood are seen as descending from Adam's family.

Walton also finds pre-Adamites in Rom 5:12–14. He takes “sin was indeed in the world before the law” and “those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam” to mean that pre-Adamites sinned apart from any law but that Adam transgressed the law against eating the forbidden fruit.³³ *Pace* Walton, the era “before the

²⁷ Cf. how we who believe in total depravity still speak of some people as “naturally gifted” or “good-natured.” Hence *The ESV Study Bible's* critique is misleading: “In *Wisdom* 8:19–20 and *Sirach* 1:14 the reader is told that the righteous are those who were given good souls at birth” (p. 2583). Merely having a good natural endowment is insufficient: one must pursue and persevere in wisdom (cf. Sir 4:11–19). Even well-endowed Adam fell into sin (Wis 10:1), and the Canaanites with their wicked heritage were given *bona fide* opportunities to repent (Wis 11:23–12:20). One must not blame God for one's unrighteousness (Sir 15:11–20; cf. Jas 1:12–17).

²⁸ On Wisdom's Hellenistic provenance and influences, see Kolarcik, “Book of Wisdom” 439–41, 511 n. 68.

²⁹ John H. Walton with a contribution by N.T. Wright, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015) 63–95, 169–89.

³⁰ Quote appears in both passages of Wisdom of Solomon. Walton, *Lost World of Adam and Eve* 181, 238 n. 2, acknowledges the passage from Tobit as a challenger of his interpretation.

³¹ *Lost World of Adam and Eve* 64–66.

³² *Pace* Walton, *Lost World of Adam and Eve* 66, who claims that the *toledoth* formula used throughout Genesis never “bring[s] the reader back into the middle of the previous account to give a more detailed description of a part of the story that was previously told.” *Toledoth* formulas appear in both Gen 2:4 and 6:9.

³³ *Lost World of Adam and Eve* 154–55.

law" refers to the era "from Adam to Moses" (Rom 5:14) and "those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam" are those who sinned during that era.³⁴ Paul says that "death exercised dominion" over those sinners, and there is no biblical record of people sinning or dying prior to Adam; Paul is summarizing Gen 4–50, which amply records the sinning and dying of people between the advents of Adam's transgression and Moses' law. Rom 5:13b echoes Rom 4:15, which in context refers to Abraham's living prior to "the law" (i.e. the Mosaic Law; cf. Gal 3:16–17). Abraham certainly was no pre-Adamite!

Finally, I am not convinced by Walton's argument that Acts 17:26's "From one ancestor he made all nations" refers to Noah, not Adam. Walton hears in this verse an echo of Gen 10:32.³⁵ Perhaps so, but it may equally well echo Deuteronomy 4 and 32, which, like Acts 17:16–31, contrast the one true God with idols (4:15–31; 16–17, 37–39) and speak of God's determining the portions and boundaries of the nations (Deut 4:19; 32:8–9; cf. Acts 17:26b).³⁶ In this case, Acts 17:26a's "one ancestor" may link to Deut 4:32's "the day that God created human beings" and so refer to Adam, not Noah. Even if Paul has Genesis 10 in mind, he may be tracing the ancestry of the nations listed there all the way back to Adam. Since Paul concludes by speaking of all people's judgment by one man, Christ (Acts 17:31), taking "one ancestor" as referring to Adam fits Paul's usual Adam-Christ correlation. Nowhere else does Paul mention Noah. None of the above is necessarily to deny that pre-Adamite hominids existed or that polygenism may be fact. It is simply to say that Scripture does not envision such things any more than it does heliocentrism or the existence of Australia.

On the other hand, Sir 16:26–18:12 supports Walton's views that God's creative activity as described in the OT is a matter of ordering, not of *ex nihilo* material production; that the *imago Dei* involves special authority over the world and a special relationship with God; and that humans were not created inherently immortal.³⁷ Wisdom of Solomon deepens these themes, teaching that God "created the world out of formless matter" (11:17) but did not create death or destructive natural processes (1:13–14; cf. 11:24–12:1); rather, "through the devil's envy death entered the world" (2:24). God intended for humanity to image him by inheriting immortality as a reward for righteousness (1–5, esp. 2:21–24; 15:3). This intention is fulfilled by those who embrace Wisdom (8:13), who is personified as God's agent of creation (7:22–8:6; 9:9) and described as the ideal *imago Dei* (7:26). Taken together, these teachings gesture towards Walton's reading of the biblical metanarrative: God cre-

³⁴ Even N. T. Wright, who contributed a chapter to *Lost World of Adam and Eve*, does not see pre-Adamites on Paul's mind in Rom 5:12–14: "The context of [Paul's] thinking is the fairly widespread Second Temple Jewish belief ... about Adam as the progenitor of the human race, and indeed the fountainhead of human sin"; "Paul clearly believed that there had been a single first pair"; the "law" in these verses is specifically the Torah; and Paul is describing the reign of sin over "the generations between Adam and Moses" (N. Thomas Wright, "Romans," *NIB* 10:524, 526–27).

³⁵ *Lost World of Adam and Eve* 186–87.

³⁶ F. F. Bruce, *Acts* (NICNT; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 337–38, links Acts 17:26 with Deut 32:8.

³⁷ Walton, *Lost World of Adam and Eve* 24–57, 72–77, 153–60, 194–96.

ates by progressively ordering the material world; death and decay are endemic to the non-ordered (or not-yet-ordered) parts of the world; God intended his image-bearers to likewise order the world and to gain immortality, but at the instigation of the serpentine “chaos creature,” they instead brought in disorder and the loss of access to immortality; and Jesus Christ is the incarnation of all-ordering Wisdom who remedies both the amoral non-order and the sinful disorder in the world, thus completing God’s creative project.³⁸

Yet the reference to “the devil’s envy” challenges Walton’s distinction between sinful disorder as a strictly human contribution versus a natural non-order which includes “amoral and non-volitional spiritual forces” involved in “demon activity.”³⁹ Here Wisdom of Solomon agrees with the NT in seeing the devil and demons as moral and volitional entities who sin (Matt 8:28–31; 12:43–45; John 8:44; 1 John 3:8). The Gospels’ Jesus engages in exorcisms not to domesticate non-order but to vanquish demonic disorder (Matt 12:22–29), culminating in his death and resurrection (John 12:31–33; Col 2:14–15).⁴⁰ On this point Walton may find a sympathetic corrector in Karl Barth. Like Walton, Barth acknowledges pain, predation, and mortality as parts of the nonetheless-good created order, and he distinguishes these natural ills from the disorder associated with sin. Barth, though, perceives that this disorder transcends humanity; it is cosmic in scope and includes both Satan and demons.⁴¹ To place these beings under the heading of the natural and morally neutral is to commit a grave category mistake akin to classifying Kim Jong-Un alongside uranium on the periodic table of elements. Such categorical confusion not only may lead to underestimating a hostile power, it may also justify occult practices. For if demonic forces are simply destructive natural forces, then they may be used for humanity’s benefit, just as we repurpose viruses for vaccines and fire for cooking food. This is the logic behind much folk magic, but from a biblical viewpoint such practices are nothing less than fraternizing with the enemy.

Although Walton denies that the OT teaches creation *ex nihilo*, he still affirms the doctrine as “essential.”⁴² In fact, it is the only possible exception that he and Sandy grant to the Bible’s general lack of truth-claims regarding scientific matters: “We do not accept a scientific suggestion about the eternity of matter because of a theological belief that the material world is contingent on God” (p. 54 n. 4). To ground this doctrine in Scripture, Walton appeals to two NT verses, John 1:3 and

³⁸ Ibid. 104–68.

³⁹ Ibid. 151 (quotes from this page), 154, 158 (here Walton describes demon possession as a natural, non-orderly occurrence like storms and sickness).

⁴⁰ *Pace* *ibid.* 158, who bifurcates Christ’s ministry of taming amoral nature and demons from his death and resurrection, which address human sin. For a far more integrated account of Christ’s work, see Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert T. Walker; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008) chaps. 4, 7.

⁴¹ CD III/1.366–414; III/3.519–31. This is not to endorse Barth’s speculations on *das Nichtige* (see esp. CD III/3.289–368). For sober, non-reductive explorations of demonology (including Barth’s and Walter Wink’s contributions), see Anthony N. S. Lane, ed., *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons, and the Heavenly Realm* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) chaps. 1, 2, 5–10.

⁴² Walton, *Lost World of Adam and Eve* 13–14, 34 (quote from latter page).

Col 1:16, both of which state that through Christ everything has received its existence.⁴³ To these we may add other similar NT passages (e.g. Rom 4:17; 1 Cor 8:6; Heb 11:3; Rev 4:11). The early Church fathers who first defended creation *ex nihilo* found passages which explicitly state that God made the world “from what does not exist” in the OT (2 Macc 7:23) and in the NT (Herm. Vis. 1.1.6; Herm. Man. 1.1).⁴⁴ Yet all four current Christian canons omit Hermas, and the Protestant canon lacks 2 Maccabees, too, leaving the Reformation’s children without the clearest-cut of proof-texts for an “essential” doctrine. Even worse, all the verses cited above, including Walton’s, may be interpreted just as Walton interprets Genesis: perhaps “existence” is a functional, not an ontological, category, and God’s making of all things refers to his giving them order and purpose, nothing more.⁴⁵ Perhaps when we say that God created everything, we are somewhat speaking loosely.

Such a conclusion is exegetically permissible but theologically unsavory, for it suggests an eternal check to God’s sovereignty and a blurring of the boundary between the divine and the creaturely.⁴⁶ The Fathers did not create *ex nihilo* the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. As with the doctrine of the Trinity, they listened to the Scriptures’ overarching illocution and teased out the ontological implications. While Gen 1:2–3 portrays God as creating light in the midst of already-present darkness, Isa 45:6–7 ascribes to God the creation of darkness as well as light, thereby suggesting an “absolute beginning.”⁴⁷ Genesis 1:2 may depict a primal chaos of watery deep (Heb *tehom*), but in Prov 8:24, personified Wisdom recalls when no depths (*tehom*) or springs of water yet were. If the watery depths themselves represent a functional nonexistence, then the absence of those depths certainly suggests ontological nonexistence. Likewise, the Septuagint’s rendering of Gen 1:2 describes the earth’s primal condition as “invisible” (Gk *aoratos*),⁴⁸ yet Paul says that in Christ all things, even invisible (*aoratos*) things, were created. Putting these two passages together yields the following argument: if the invisible earth of Gen 1:2 (LXX) is the earth in a functionally nonexistent state, then for Christ to bring it into even that state means that he brought it into functional nonexistence from absolute nonexistence. In addition, it seems anachronistic to posit that the authors of 2 Maccabees, the NT, and contemporaneous Second Temple Jewish literature were unfamiliar or unconcerned with the questions about creational ontology raised by Hellenistic

⁴³ Ibid. 34.

⁴⁴ Andrew Louth, “The Six Days of Creation According to the Greek Fathers,” in Stephen C. Barton and David Wilkinson, eds., *Reading Genesis after Darwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 42 (ET mine); curiously, Louth omits Herm. Vis. 1.1.6. Irenaeus quotes Herm. Mand. 1.1 as Scripture in *Adv. Haer.* 4.20.2.

⁴⁵ David Fergusson, “Creation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; repr. 2010) 79. Cf. Walton, *Lost World of Adam and Eve* 26–33.

⁴⁶ Louth, “Six Days” 42–43; Fergusson, “Creation” 80.

⁴⁷ William P. Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 206.

⁴⁸ For calling my attention to this point, credit goes to Paul Copan, “Is *Creatio Ex Nihilo* a Post-Biblical Invention? An Examination of Gerhard May’s Proposal,” *Trinity Journal* 17/1 (1996) 83; online at http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/article_exnihilo_copan.html.

culture. The ancient Near East may once have been content to think of existence in simply functional terms, but the influx of Greek philosophy brought an end to such undogmatic slumbers. Within this metaphysically-minded milieu, if Wis 11:17 reflects Plato as well as Gen 1:2 in speaking of God's making the cosmos "out of formless matter," then 2 Macc 7:28, Rom 4:17, and the like should be taken as teaching the ontological origin even of formless matter when they speak of God's bringing things out of non-existence.⁴⁹

Throughout this section, our cursory survey has revealed that a "loose canon" and "loose truth" approach tends not to have a destabilizing effect on the doctrine of creation. Rather than different canons resulting in widely divergent understandings of this doctrine, canonical variants tend to harmonize with and supplement the common canonical core. Our misgiving with *1 Enoch* was not because it failed to harmonize with the rest of Scripture but because, taken as a supplement, it would overcommit us historically and scientifically. The consensus against it on the part of most canonizing communities overrules its own compatibility with their canons' content. In these ways, the case of *1 Enoch* is similar to that of the addition to John 8:8 in some manuscripts: when Jesus, surrounded by scribes and Pharisees, writes on the ground, these manuscripts add that he wrote down "the sins of each of them." This addition is compatible with the rest of Scripture but was never incorporated into most manuscripts, leaving us free to speculate about what exactly Jesus wrote.⁵⁰

V. LAST WORDS ON THE LOOSED WORD

In conclusion, Walton and Sandy's approach to biblical authority has much to commend it. The implications for the debates over inerrancy and the canon deserve further exploration. We have looked at some of the implications for the doctrine of creation. Even more significant, though, are the implications for the doctrine of salvation. After all, the Reformers did not reject 2 Maccabees for its support of creation *ex nihilo* but for its apparent promotion of prayers for the dead.⁵¹ It is on the rock of soteriology that my "loose canon" proposal will either wreck or rise.

While I freely acknowledge how important the inerrancy and canon debates are, I am yet more sensible of how the power of God's Word transcends them. Even when Christians have disagreed on the precise contours of biblical authority in terms of subject matter and canonical content, still they have experienced the life-changing power of the divine address. Karl Barth and Carl Henry both heard it despite their differences on inerrancy. St. Augustine and Martin Luther both heard it regardless of their opposite estimates of the Apocrypha. Through copies and

⁴⁹ Copan, "Creatio Ex Nihilo" 83–92, surveys biblical, patristic, and Second Temple Jewish evidence for belief in *ex nihilo* creation. Not all of his evidence is equally convincing.

⁵⁰ That is, if we accept the *pericope adulterae* at all. See Armin D. Baum, "Does the Pericope Adulterae (John 7:53–8:11) Have Canonical Authority? An Interconfessional Approach," *BBR* 24/2 (2014) 163–78. Regarding the addition to John 8:8, see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the NT: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (2d ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) 224.

⁵¹ Bruce, *Canon* 101.

translations and versions of Scripture to people across times and places, cultures and languages, nations and denominations, God's Word is on the loose.