How do Christians interpret Genesis 1 and 2?

Let's briefly step aside from exploring arguments for the existence of God and look in more detail at the relationship of religion and science, and specifically the apparent conflict between creation and evolution.

To many Christians the Big Bang and evolution seem plausible explanations for the origins of the universe and of life on Earth. Yet they differ in many details from the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2.

How does this affect the way Christians read the Creation stories at the beginning of the Bible?

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‘Creation’ according to Darwin

In past centuries many people believed the Bible’s account of Creation to be literally true. In the 17th century Archbishop Ussher even calculated the exact time when God finally finished Creation (9 a.m. on Friday 23 October, 4004 BCE).

With the development of scientific thinking in the 19th century, and particularly the theory of evolution, three aspects of the Bible Creation story were questioned.
What kind of truth is Genesis 1 and 2?

Some Christians found Darwin’s theory a threat to their faith, because it appeared to challenge the authority of the Bible. If the Bible was wrong on this, might it be wrong on other things too? They preferred to maintain a ‘literalist’ reading of Genesis 1 and 2 (see Source G). This viewpoint is known as Creationism. Creationists have succeeded in banning the teaching of the theory of evolution in some states in the USA.

However, other Christians see no contradiction between Genesis 1 and 2 and scientific theories such as evolution. They see no conflict generally between science and religion. Many scientists are Christian believers. These Christians say that science and religion are asking different questions.

When they consider the Bible, these Christians do not look for scientific truth. What they expect the Bible to give them is the truth about God and God’s relationship with human beings. They see natural selection as a plausible, if unproved, explanation for life on Earth. They take a ‘relativist’ attitude to the Bible. They don’t read Genesis 1 and 2 as literally true but they still see it as an authoritative account of God’s relationship with human beings and other living creatures. It tells them that all life on Earth is part of God’s plan and that humans are special with special rights and responsibilities.

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**ACTIVITY**

1. Look at Source G. Create a design for a tee-shirt that sums up what you believe about creation and evolution.

**DISCUSS**

2. Is it possible for Christians to believe in the Bible creation story and the theory of evolution? Discuss your response with a partner and list the problems each view raises for Christians.