SCRIPTURE, SCIENCE, AND EVOLUTION: TOWARDS A HERMENEUTICS OF INTEGRATION

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Abstract
Contemporary debates on Scripture, science, and evolution remain polarized, often framed as conflict rather than constructive dialogue. This study addresses the persistent hermeneutical gap between biblical interpretation and evolutionary science within Christian theology, where integrative approaches are limited. It is guided by three questions: How can Scripture be interpreted responsibly without undermining evolution? What hermeneutical model best supports theology–science dialogue? How can such integration benefit faith communities and theological education? Grounded in a critical integrative hermeneutical framework informed by theological hermeneutics and philosophy of science, the study develops an approach that affirms both biblical authority and scientific integrity. It focuses on Genesis 1–3 and Psalm 104 alongside key evolutionary theories in contemporary scholarship. Using qualitative methods, data are drawn from textual analysis and recent peer-reviewed literature and examined thematically and comparatively. Findings show that a non-literalist, genre-sensitive reading of Scripture enables constructive engagement with evolutionary science without theological compromise. The study argues that Scripture and science address complementary dimensions of reality. It concludes that an integrative hermeneutic promotes intellectual coherence, theological humility, and pastoral relevance, and recommends its inclusion in seminary training and church teaching.

Keywords: Scripture, Science, Evolution, Hermeneutics, Integration

Introduction

The relationship between Scripture, science, and evolution remains one of the most contested issues in contemporary theological discourse. Advances in evolutionary biology, cosmology, and genetics continue to shape modern scientific understanding of human origins and the development of life, while Scripture remains authoritative for many Christian communities as a source of divine revelation. Historically, the interaction between biblical interpretation and scientific explanation has been framed through models of conflict, independence, dialogue, or integration (Barbour, 2014). In many ecclesial and academic contexts, however, the conflict model still dominates, especially where literalist readings of biblical creation texts are emphasized. This situation creates tension between faith commitments and scientific knowledge, often leading to intellectual fragmentation among believers and theological educators. Recent scholarship increasingly argues that Scripture and science address different but complementary dimensions of reality. Scripture primarily communicates theological meaning, purpose, and divine intention,

while science explains empirical processes and natural mechanisms (McGrath, 2019). Evolutionary theory, in particular, raises hermeneutical questions about how biblical creation narratives should be interpreted without either dismissing scientific evidence or undermining theological convictions. Consequently, scholars call for hermeneutical approaches that move beyond rigid literalism and simplistic concord toward integrative interpretive models that respect both biblical genres and scientific methodologies (Haarsma & Haarsma, 2018).

Despite growing literature on theology and science, a significant hermeneutical gap remains. Many studies either prioritize scientific explanations while marginalizing Scripture or defend biblical authority by rejecting evolutionary science (Lennox, 2020). This polarized approach limits constructive engagement and often fails to address how Scripture can be interpreted faithfully within an evolutionary framework. Furthermore, some integrative models remain abstract and lack clear methodological grounding in biblical hermeneutics, making them difficult to apply in theological education and pastoral contexts (Van Huyssteen, 2017). This study employs a qualitative research design. Data are collected through textual analysis of selected biblical passages and critical review of peer-reviewed theological and scientific literature. Primary data consist of biblical texts examined using historical-critical and literary approaches, with attention to genre, ancient Near Eastern context, and theological intent.

Interpretation and Hermeneutical Principles

Responsible interpretation involves reading Scripture according to its communicative intent rather than modern scientific expectations. A genre-sensitive hermeneutic recognizes that ancient Near Eastern creation texts employ symbolic, liturgical, and theological language to articulate divine sovereignty, cosmic order, and human vocation (Walton, 2015). When Scripture is interpreted within this framework, evolutionary explanations of biological development no longer function as rivals but as complementary accounts operating at a different explanatory level. Furthermore, responsible interpretation resists concordism—the attempt to align specific biblical verses with modern scientific findings. While well-intentioned, concordism often undermines both theology and science by distorting the aims of each (Haarsma & Haarsma, 2018). A hermeneutic of integration instead adopts what Van Huyssteen (2017) calls postfoundational rationality, where theology and science engage in interdisciplinary dialogue without collapsing into one another. This approach allows Scripture to speak normatively about meaning, purpose, and divine action, while science explains mechanisms and processes such as evolution.

Avoiding the Undermining of Evolutionary Science

Interpreting Scripture responsibly also requires intellectual humility toward scientific knowledge. Evolutionary theory is supported by converging evidence from genetics, paleontology, and molecular biology and functions as a well-established scientific framework (Collins, 2018). Rejecting evolution solely on theological grounds risks portraying Christian faith as anti-intellectual and dismissive of empirical inquiry. Such rejection often stems not from biblical necessity but from particular theological traditions that conflate faithfulness with literalism. A hermeneutic of integration avoids undermining evolution by affirming the legitimacy of methodological naturalism in science while rejecting metaphysical naturalism as a philosophical overreach (McGrath, 2019). This distinction allows Christians to affirm evolution as a scientific explanation of biological diversity without conceding that the process is purposeless or unguided

by God. Thus, Scripture is interpreted theologically, not competitively, in relation to scientific claims.

The research title, Scripture, Science and Evolution: Toward a Hermeneutic of Integration, is apt because it accurately captures the methodological and conceptual focus of the study. The phrase "toward a hermeneutic" signals that the research is not merely descriptive or polemical but constructive, aiming to develop an interpretive framework. Integration, rather than conflict or separation, reflects the study's commitment to coherence without reductionism. The first research question aligns precisely with this title, as it addresses the initial and most foundational step toward integration: interpretation. Without a responsible hermeneutic, dialogue between Scripture and evolution remains either adversarial or superficial. The title and research question together demonstrate conceptual clarity and internal coherence, reinforcing the scholarly legitimacy of the study. The relevance of this issue in contemporary contexts cannot be overstated. Advances in evolutionary science, biotechnology, and genetics increasingly shape public discourse, education, and ethics. At the same time, many Christian communities continue to struggle with questions of biblical authority and human origins. Studies indicate that perceived conflict between faith and evolution contributes to religious disaffiliation, especially among younger Christians exposed to scientific education (Pew Research Center, 2020). In theological education and pastoral ministry, unresolved tensions between Scripture and evolution often lead to polarized teaching, silence, or doctrinal confusion. An integrative hermeneutic provides a way forward by equipping leaders to address scientific questions without theological defensiveness. As Haarsma and Haarsma (2018) argue, integration enables Christians to "embrace the discoveries of science as insights into God's creative work" (p. 24), rather than as threats to faith.

Globally, and particularly in contexts where Christianity encounters both modern science and traditional worldviews, the need for responsible interpretation is acute. A hermeneutic of integration promotes intellectual credibility, theological depth, and missional effectiveness in an age where simplistic answers no longer suffice. Critically, this research question avoids two extremes: scientific reductionism and theological isolationism. It does not ask how Scripture can be reshaped to fit science, nor how science can be dismissed to protect Scripture. Instead, it asks how Scripture can be interpreted responsibly, implying accountability to both the text and contemporary knowledge. This balanced framing reflects methodological maturity and aligns with current interdisciplinary scholarship. Nevertheless, the success of such integration depends on maintaining clear disciplinary boundaries. Over-integration risks theological dilution, while under-integration perpetuates conflict. The hermeneutic proposed must therefore remain dynamic, self-critical, and context-sensitive.

In conclusion, the research question "How can Scripture be interpreted responsibly without undermining scientific explanations of evolution?" is appropriate, timely, and foundational to the study. It addresses a genuine hermeneutical gap in contemporary theology–science discourse, aligns coherently with the research title, and responds to pressing intellectual and pastoral challenges. By emphasizing genre-sensitive interpretation, interdisciplinary dialogue, and epistemological humility, the question advances a constructive path toward integration that is both theologically faithful and scientifically informed.

Hermeneutical Model for Dialogue between Theology and Science

This subtopic directly addresses the interpretive core of the faith–science debate and responds to the enduring challenge of how biblical texts, particularly creation narratives, should be read in light of contemporary scientific knowledge. At the heart of current tensions between theology and evolutionary science lies not merely disagreement over data, but disagreement over interpretation. Consequently, hermeneutics emerges as the most critical mediating discipline. The appropriateness of this subtopic is evident in its focus on method rather than polemics. Much of the historical conflict between Scripture and science stems from unexamined hermeneutical assumptions—especially literalist or concordist readings of biblical texts that treat Scripture as a scientific manual (McGrath, 2019). By asking which hermeneutical model best facilitates dialogue, the study shifts attention away from ideological confrontation toward interpretive responsibility.

Recent scholarship consistently affirms that the dialogue between theology and science cannot progress without a coherent hermeneutical framework. Van Huyssteen (2017) argues that interdisciplinary engagement requires shared rationality grounded in interpretive humility. Similarly, Haarsma and Haarsma (2018) contend that theological engagement with evolution succeeds only when Scripture is interpreted according to its literary genres, historical contexts, and theological intentions. Thus, this subtopic is not ancillary but foundational, as it interrogates the very tools through which theology engages scientific knowledge. Among the various models proposed, an integrative, genre-sensitive, and dialogical hermeneutical model best facilitates meaningful dialogue between theology and science. This model recognizes Scripture and science as distinct yet complementary sources of knowledge that address different questions. Scripture addresses questions of meaning, purpose, and divine agency, while science addresses empirical mechanisms and natural processes (McGrath, 2019). This integrative model resists both strict literalism and reductionist naturalism. Literalism collapses theological meaning into scientific description, while naturalism dismisses theological claims as non-cognitive or obsolete. An integrative hermeneutic instead affirms the theological authority of Scripture while acknowledging the methodological autonomy of science. It interprets biblical creation texts as theological narratives shaped by ancient cosmologies, rather than as empirical explanations competing with evolutionary theory (Walton, 2015). The strength of this model lies in its commitment to *critical realism*, which affirms that both theology and science make truth claims about reality, though through different epistemic lenses (Van Huyssteen, 2017). Such an approach enables theology to learn from science without surrendering its doctrinal core, and allows science to be engaged without theological defensiveness.

Integration of Hermeneutics Informed Faith Communities and Theological Education Today

The question of how an integrative hermeneutic of Scripture, science, and evolution informs faith communities and theological education is both appropriate and necessary within the broader research topic. The subtopic directly operationalizes the theoretical concerns of the study by moving beyond abstract reconciliation toward lived ecclesial and pedagogical implications. Without such application, discussions on integration risk remaining confined to academic discourse, detached from the communities most affected by the perceived tension between biblical faith and scientific knowledge. This subtopic is appropriate because faith communities and theological institutions are primary sites where conflicts between Scripture and evolution are

experienced, negotiated, and transmitted. Churches often shape believers' interpretive habits, while seminaries and theological schools train clergy who mediate Scripture to congregations. When integration is absent, pastors and educators frequently default to either defensive literalism or silent avoidance of scientific issues, both of which undermine theological credibility and pastoral effectiveness (Haarsma & Haarsma, 2018).

An integrative hermeneutic offers faith communities the interpretive tools that distinguish between the theological intent of Scripture and the empirical focus of science. By emphasizing genre, context, and purpose, such a hermeneutic reframes biblical creation texts as theological narratives about God, order, and vocation rather than scientific descriptions of biological mechanisms (McGrath, 2019). This reframing enables congregations to affirm evolutionary science without perceiving it as a threat to biblical authority. In theological education, the subtopic is particularly apt because students increasingly encounter scientific perspectives before or during their theological training. Without structured integrative frameworks, students often experience cognitive dissonance that leads either to intellectual compartmentalization or loss of faith commitment (Southgate, 2018). Addressing integration within theological curricula therefore becomes an educational necessity rather than an optional interdisciplinary exercise.

The research title, Scripture, Science and Evolution: Toward a Hermeneutic of Integration, accurately captures the focus and trajectory of this subtopic. The phrase "toward a hermeneutic" signals an ongoing methodological task rather than a fixed doctrinal conclusion, which is appropriate given the evolving nature of scientific knowledge and biblical interpretation. The inclusion of "integration" highlights the study's constructive intent, distinguishing it from conflict-driven or apologetic approaches that dominate much popular discourse. This title is apt because it foregrounds hermeneutics as the mediating discipline. Integration does not occur automatically by asserting compatibility between faith and science; it requires interpretive strategies that respect the epistemological boundaries and contributions of each field (Van Huyssteen, 2017). By centering hermeneutics, the research acknowledges that misunderstandings often arise not from Scripture or science themselves, but from interpretive assumptions imposed upon them.

The title also resonates with contemporary theological priorities. Recent theology–science scholarship emphasizes dialogue, interdisciplinarity, and humility rather than triumphalist claims (McGrath, 2019). Thus, the research topic aligns well with current academic trajectories and ecclesial needs. In contemporary faith communities, particularly in contexts shaped by rapid scientific advancement and digital information flow, believers regularly encounter evolutionary explanations through education, media, and technology. When churches fail to address these issues constructively, they risk alienating scientifically literate members, especially younger generations, who perceive Christianity as intellectually obsolete (Perry & Whitehead, 2019).

An integrative hermeneutic informs faith communities by offering a theological posture of confidence rather than defensiveness. It reassures believers that affirming evolution does not negate belief in God as Creator but can deepen appreciation for divine providence and creativity. This perspective fosters theological maturity by encouraging believers to hold faith and reason together rather than in opposition. Moreover, integration promotes pastoral sensitivity. Congregants wrestling with questions of origins often seek guidance that honors both their faith commitments and intellectual integrity. An integrative approach equips pastors to address these concerns responsibly, reducing the likelihood of faith crises rooted in perceived incompatibility between Scripture and science (Southgate, 2018).

The relevance of this subtopic to theological education is equally significant. Seminaries increasingly operate within pluralistic and interdisciplinary academic environments. Students preparing for ministry must engage not only biblical texts but also contemporary cultural and scientific narratives. An integrative hermeneutic prepares future leaders to interpret Scripture faithfully while engaging scientific discourse critically and constructively.

Results and Findings

This section presents the results derived from qualitative textual analysis of selected biblical creation texts and thematic review of contemporary theology–science literature. The findings emerge from comparative and interpretive analysis consistent with an integrative hermeneutical methodology. The three variables—Scripture, science, and evolution—are treated as interrelated domains whose interaction yields constructive theological insight rather than epistemic conflict.

Scripture as a Theological Variable

Analysis of biblical texts, particularly Genesis 1–3 and Psalm 104, reveals that Scripture primarily functions as a theological and narrative witness to divine agency, purpose, and relational order rather than as a scientific account of material origins. The study finds that genre-sensitive and context-aware interpretation significantly reshapes how creation texts are understood. When interpreted within their ancient Near Eastern context, these texts emphasize God's sovereignty, intentionality, and covenantal relationship with creation rather than chronological or mechanistic detail (McGrath, 2019). The findings indicate that literalist readings often arise from modern assumptions imposed on ancient texts, rather than from the texts themselves. By contrast, a hermeneutic of integration affirms scriptural authority while allowing interpretive flexibility regarding scientific explanations. This result confirms that Scripture retains normative theological authority without requiring opposition to evolutionary science. The study thus demonstrates that Scripture, when interpreted hermeneutically rather than concordistically, supports theological coherence in a scientifically informed worldview (Walton, 2015).

Science as an Empirical Variable

The analysis of scientific literature reveals that evolutionary theory, as currently articulated, operates within methodological naturalism and does not make metaphysical claims about divine non-existence. The findings show that much of the perceived conflict between Scripture and science stems from epistemological misunderstanding rather than empirical evidence. Scientific explanations address "how" processes occur, while Scripture addresses "why" creation exists (Haarsma & Haarsma, 2018). The study finds that when science is properly understood within its methodological limits, it does not negate theological claims about creation, providence, or purpose. Instead, evolutionary science can function as a descriptive account of the mechanisms through which divine creativity unfolds over time. This finding supports integrative models such as evolutionary creation, which affirm both scientific consensus and theological doctrine without reductionism (Southgate, 2018). Importantly, the research reveals that theological resistance to evolution often correlates with inadequate scientific literacy rather than substantive theological objection. This result underscores the need for integrative education that equips faith communities and theological institutions to engage scientific knowledge critically and constructively.

Evolution as a Mediating Variable

Evolution emerges in the findings as the primary mediating variable that necessitates hermeneutical integration. The study finds that evolutionary theory challenges static, decontextualized readings of Scripture but does not undermine core Christian doctrines such as creation, imago Dei, or divine providence when these doctrines are articulated theologically rather than biologically. The findings indicate that evolutionary perspectives prompt a re-examination of theological anthropology, particularly regarding human uniqueness and vocation. Rather than grounding human distinctiveness in biological discontinuity, integrative hermeneutics locate it in relational, moral, and theological categories (Van Huyssteen, 2017). This shift allows theology to engage evolution without doctrinal erosion. Furthermore, the research shows that evolution, when integrated hermeneutically, enriches theological reflection by highlighting creation as dynamic, open-ended, and sustained by divine faithfulness. These finding challenges static cosmologies and encourages a theology of ongoing creation (*creatio continua*), which resonates strongly with contemporary ecological and ethical concerns (Conradie, 2018).

Cross-Variable Integrative Findings

When Scripture, science, and evolution are analyzed together through thematic synthesis, the study finds that integration is most successful when hermeneutics functions as the mediating discipline. The data reveal that neither theological assertions nor scientific explanations alone can resolve tensions; rather, interpretive frameworks determine whether conflict or coherence emerges.

The research identifies three dominant integrative themes:

1. Complementarity of domains – Scripture and science address different dimensions of reality without competition.
2. Epistemic humility – Both theology and science acknowledge their methodological limits.
3. Pastoral and pedagogical applicability – Integration enhances faith formation and theological education.

These themes confirm that integration is not merely theoretical but has tangible implications for teaching, preaching, and theological formation.

Conclusion

Theological Authority**:** Scripture remains authoritative when interpreted through a genre-sensitive, context-aware hermeneutic that affirms its theological and narrative purpose without conflicting with scientific understanding (McGrath, 2019). Scientific Literacy: Scientific knowledge, particularly evolutionary biology, provides empirical explanations of natural processes and does not inherently threaten theological claims, emphasizing the need for epistemic humility in faith communities (Haarsma & Haarsma, 2018). Evolutionary Engagement: Evolution functions as a mediating variable that encourages theological reflection and refinement, especially regarding human uniqueness, divine action, and the dynamic nature of creation (Van Huyssteen, 2017). Hermeneutical Integration: Hermeneutics is the key mechanism for reconciling Scripture, science, and evolution, fostering coherent dialogue, complementarity, and interpretive clarity (Southgate, 2018). Practical Relevance: Integrative hermeneutics reduce faith–science tensions in contemporary churches and theological institutions, enhancing pastoral guidance, theological literacy, and educational effectiveness (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Recommendations

Theological Curriculum Enhancement – Seminaries should incorporate integrative hermeneutics courses to equip students for science-faith dialogue.

1. Pastoral Education – Churches should train clergy to address evolution and scientific topics responsibly in sermons and counseling.
2. Scientific Engagement – Faith communities should promote literacy in contemporary science to reduce misconceptions and fear.
3. Resource Development – Theological publishers should produce materials that harmonize biblical interpretation with scientific understanding.
4. Research Promotion – Academic institutions should fund interdisciplinary studies exploring Scripture-science integration for applied theology.

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