

**Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**  
**Episode 251**  
**The Church Fathers and Genesis 1**  
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**Guest: Craig Allert (CA)**

**Episode Summary**

Craig Allert is a scholar specializing in Patristic Fathers, those early Christian thinkers who lived and wrote just after the end of the apostolic age to (roughly 451 AD). On today's episode we talk with Craig about his work in analyzing how the early church fathers understood and interpreted Genesis One. We talk about the ways they approached Genesis One and how modern researchers use and abuse what the fathers said about Genesis in debating divergent views of creationism.

**Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 251: The Church Fathers and Genesis 1 with Craig Allert. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing?

**MH:** Pretty good. It's chilly up here in the Northwest—chillier than normal.

**TS:** Yeah? Well, it is getting close to Christmastime.

**MH:** Yeah. How chilly is it in Abilene?

**TS:** Not too bad. Actually, it's raining right now, so it's probably in the 40's.

**MH:** Oh, wow, I didn't think it got that cold there.

**TS:** Oh, yeah. It'll get to freezing. We'll have sleet and freezing rain. But the problem is, when the rain freezes, the roads get bad and we're not too equipped to clear all of the roads.

**MH:** Yeah, I lived in Dallas for a couple of years when that happened, and nobody knows how to drive in that and there's nothing they can do.

**TS:** What's it doing up there? You all don't get snow, do you?

**MH:** We've gotten three serious snows since I've been here (in 14 years), but it's mostly just cold. It feels a little colder than usual. I just don't ever want to remember the Midwest cold again. [laughs]

**TS:** Yeah, that's cold.

**MH:** We moved from Wisconsin. I had 12 years in the Midwest with brutal cold. Anything that makes that thought pop into my head again, I just don't like.

**TS:** Yeah. I would like to get a taste of that.

**MH:** No, you wouldn't.

**TS:** No? Shoveling snow? You wouldn't? I don't know.

**MH:** It's not the snow, man. It's like physically feeling the hairs in your nostrils freeze and break off. That's what you've got. So that's a little weird.

**TS:** Yeah. It still sounds fun, for some reason. [MH laughs] Maybe to visit—maybe not to live there. I don't know. But, Mike, I want to remind everybody that our voting for our next topic is going to start this Monday, December 17. So be on the lookout for that poll so you can get your vote in. It's going to run through December 31, so you have two weeks here to let us know what you want us to cover. We have three topics coming your way.

**MH:** I'm really going to be interested to see where this one goes.

**TS:** Yeah. Well, what are we going to be talking about this week?

**MH:** This week, we have Craig Allert with us, who is actually geographically pretty close to me. I didn't know that until I looked him up. I saw a recent book of his come out and I thought, "This'll be a great topic (an in-between topic, interview) for the podcast." We're going to talk about the Church Fathers, and how they looked at Genesis 1, how they interpreted some really fundamental creation texts in that first chapter of the Bible. It's an interesting discussion. They had a lot of different ideas—some the same. Craig's focus is not only going to be that, but how people today use the Fathers (either well or poorly) in the way they talk about Genesis 1. So I think it's going to be interesting.

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**MH:** Well, I'm really thrilled to have Craig Allert with us. What drew my attention to your work was a recent book. We want to focus on the content of this book today. I *know* our listeners are going to be really interested in this. We're going to talk about Craig's book, *Early Christian Readings of Genesis One: Patristic*

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*Exegesis and Literal Interpretation.* As you well know, Craig, this is hot-button stuff. How do we look at the opening chapters of Genesis? Before we get into the book, I'd like you to introduce yourself to our audience (short bio, where you went to school, areas of expertise, where you're teaching, that sort of thing).

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**CA:** Sure, no problem. So I teach at Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia. It's just outside of Vancouver, BC. My education is from Multnomah University in Portland, OR (my B.A.). My M.A. is from Trinity Western. And my Ph.D. is from the University of Nottingham in the UK. So I live in Abbotsford, which is about 20 minutes away from where I work, so an hour away from Vancouver. I have a wife of over 25 years, and I have two teenage sons. Actually, one just turned 20, so he's not a teenager anymore. My areas of interest and expertise range, but I'm a specialist in Early Christian Theology, particularly development of doctrine and historical theology. But I also have a great interest to communicate that and understand it in some way as prescriptive for contemporary evangelicalism. So I'm a bit of a... I don't know if I'm an expert, but I like to dabble in evangelicalism as a movement in Canada and the United States.

**MH:** Wow. So what do you teach? Could you just give us a few examples of classes that you teach?

**CA:** Sure. So I teach a couple of sections of Introduction to Christian Theology to freshmen every year. Then I teach a number of upper level classes. I teach a class on Formation of the New Testament Canon and the implications for theology of that. I teach a class on Church Fathers. I teach History of Christianity. I actually also am Director of our M.A. in Biblical Studies here at Trinity Western University, so I have contact with graduate students as well.

**MH:** Oh, wow. That's good. That does range a little bit wider than some professors. Some professors just have a really small box. [laughs] You're a little wider than that, which is nice. [CA laughs] Let's get into your book, because this is hot-button stuff. When I saw this come out, it was a little bit before ETS and SBL and it was in a book catalog, and I thought, "Man, this is going to be a great read. Good reference material, as well." I thought, "We have to get you on the podcast." So it's been a while trying to get you on, so I'm really happy that we were able to get you. But I think the easiest approach for our audience... We'll certainly put a link up on the episode page to your book, and hopefully this will help people see the value in it and you'll sell some. [CA laughs] But what I want to do is... [laughs] Yeah. That's always important, because you do all of this work, and it's like, "Please, someone, read my work." [laughs]

**CA:** Yeah, exactly.

**MH:** You know the drill. But I think what we'll do here is, the book is divided into two parts. Part 1 is devoted to understanding the context. So I'm going to just

take the first three chapters one by one and ask you to explain what the chapter is about, and I think that will actually, as Part 1 suggests (getting a context)... That will give us a context to drill down on a few things as we proceed. So the first chapter is, "Who are the Church Fathers, and Why Should I Care?" [laughs] So answer that question for us.

**CA:** Yeah. This really was... The first three chapters... All of Part 1 ("Understanding the Context") is so foundational to what I'm trying to do here in the entire book. I write unabashedly, really, for an evangelical audience. And I really am passionate for evangelicals to understand who the Fathers are and why they are important. Too many times, you hear them written off or people saying that they belong to a dark age (or an age that we've rejected as Protestants), that sort of thing. But there needs to be a recognition that the Church Fathers actually are really seminal for Christian orthodox theology (I like to call it Historical Christian Orthodoxy) and that our heritage as Protestant Evangelicals does not begin and end, really, at the Protestant Reformation, but that we have deep connections and deep roots back to the age of the Church Fathers (the first five centuries of Christianity).

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So really, that first chapter is an apologetic. I introduce who the Church Fathers are, and then "Why Should I Care?" I talk about those sorts of things. I talk about how they help us remember who we are as Christians. They established the firm essentials of Christianity. They dealt with a lot of these really hot-button issues like, who was Jesus in relation to God the Father and in relation to the Spirit? So the doctrine of the Trinity is really foundational. The New Testament that we hold as authoritative was formed in that age. It didn't drop out of the sky. It was formed. There were limitations made to documents that were used in that day and age, and the Church Fathers were central in that. I know for myself, when I began to understand that I started to wonder why I have been ignoring these really seminal figures in my own heritage and I started to recognize that they actually *were* part of my heritage, which was a bit contrary to what I was brought up to think.

**MH:** Yeah, I'm kind of in the same boat there. Without getting too specific, there *is* an impulse in certain streams of evangelicalism when they hear "Church Fathers," they think "Catholic dudes" and "I'm a Protestant so I don't have to pay attention." [laughs]

**CA:** Yeah. That's exactly right. And I think it gets to a misunderstanding of what the Reformation was about, too. There's this thinking that at the Protestant Reformation "we rejected those Catholic dudes." But in fact, Luther and Calvin actually wanted to maintain those really close connections to our own heritage so that we can actually claim them as part of our own heritage.

**MH:** Well, that's good. When you were talking just a few moments ago about canon and the Church Fathers... I'm a Semitist (Hebrew Semitics guy), but I do a lot with Second Temple stuff. One of the discussions I get drawn into a lot is,

“Should we consider 1 Enoch canonical?” I read James VanderKam’s pretty lengthy and detailed essay on this, and his book on apocalyptic Christianity was co-edited with... I can’t remember who the other guy was... William Adler. But one of the more interesting things to me was reading (I believe it was) Tertullian or Irenaeus, basically saying, “Look, you all know that I fought for this book out there, and I’m getting kind of old and I’ve noticed that I’m a lone voice out here.” [laughter] And he was willing... The part that struck me the first time I saw these excerpts was he assumed that the Spirit of God had moved and was behind the consensus against his own wishes. And he was fine with it. It was really instructive to me. So I know the Church Fathers go beyond just being an example. My own suspicion is that as our own culture moves through its post-Christian milieu into (in some cases, even an anti-Christian milieu)... We’re sort of moving forward into the past. We’re seeing a paganization of the culture. And that’s exactly what the Church Fathers had to deal with and respond to. So I think they’re going to become even more important for the kinds of debates that they had to have—that they’ll become points of reference. But that’s just my guess. It’s not my field. It’s just a hunch that I have.

**CA:** Well, that’s really interesting, because years ago, Robert Webber (I think it was 1999) wrote that book called *Ancient Future Faith*. It spurred on a whole *Ancient Future* series. And what he argues in that *Ancient Future Faith* book is that the shift from modernity to a post-modernity (or modernism to post-modernism) is basically opening the door for us to appreciate the Church Fathers much more, because the culture today (the post-modern culture) would be much more receptive to the way they thought. And also exactly what you said: they kind of are examples to us of how to work in that kind of context.

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**MH:** Yeah. A lot of what floats my boat is trying to get modern believers to take more seriously the supernatural worldview of the biblical writers. And these guys that we’re talking about now are the closest thing we have to the biblical period. They imbibe heavily in that. So yeah, I haven’t read that book (*Ancient Future Faith*), but as we’re sitting here I’ve made a note to myself to get it. [laughter] That sounds like a lot of the things I’ve been pondering. I could get lost in that subject, so I’m going to try to steer myself back here to Genesis. But that’s important, because when they do comment on Genesis, it’s not just, “Hey, we don’t have anything better to do. Let’s talk about Genesis.” They are responding to things they need to respond to. And they’re handling the text... They felt free to handle the text in such a way that they *could* respond to certain things.

So chapter 2... After you talk about why we should care about the Church Fathers (and yep, we should), chapter 2 is “How Not to Read the Fathers: A Survey of Creation Science Appropriation of the Fathers.” So that’s a loaded chapter. So what do you mean by “appropriation?” Tell us what you mean by the appropriation, and then give us some examples.

**CA:** Sure. So I need to give you a little bit of background on how this book came to be. A number of years ago, I applied for a grant from BioLogos Templeton called “The Evolution and Christian Faith” program. I received the grant, which allowed me (thankfully) to buy out some administrative duties and some courses, which, of course, as you know, gives you much more time to study and write. So what I proposed in that grant application was to do a book (and we have the product of that now). I looked at how organizations like Answers in Genesis, Creation Ministries International, and Institute for Creation Research (predominantly those three) were using the Church Fathers. As you can well imagine, there’s not a huge body of literature of them doing that, but there are some pretty key chapters in books and articles that appear on their website. I was struck (and in the book, I even say I was sometimes even appalled) at the way the Church Fathers were being hijacked to speak for creation science. So that’s really the foundation of this chapter. So what I do is I take many of the examples of these articles and these chapters in how they use the Fathers, and I uncover and show why that’s not the way the Fathers should be read or used. So how not to read the Fathers? Well, here are some examples, and here’s why you shouldn’t read them that way.

**MH:** So was it an issue of taking the Fathers out of context, or imposing a context, or taking their words to answer questions that they weren’t asking? How do you characterize that?

**CA:** I would say all of the above, actually. I think you can start from a big picture, where they paint the context of biblical interpretation in the age of the Fathers rather simplistically (and this gets to the third chapter as well) as a kind of literalists against the allegorists. And that is much too simplistic. They assume that when literal (or “according to the letter”) or expressions like that are used in the Church Fathers, that they mean exactly the same things as we do today. Literal to us means “in accord with history”—that behind the text there’s an actual history that happened. But that’s not the way the Fathers understood it. So there’s that big context. Then, there are examples where there’s selectivity. So you pick and choose and you proof-text, where context is completely ignored. And all you really have to do is look closer at the context of any given text that they’re citing, and you can quite clearly see that they’re being used in a way that they shouldn’t be used. There are examples of flat-out misunderstanding what they’re doing. So I take examples of all those kinds of things. Most of the ones I saw... There are few that I didn’t cover, but I think there’s a pretty good representation of what’s happening out there in those appropriations of the Fathers. And I conclude that you really can’t appropriate the Fathers for the creation science way of interpreting Genesis 1.

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**MH:** We’ll drill down into a few specifics in a few minutes. But before we move on to chapter 3, is this a problem only with Young Earth Creationist groups, or are Old Earth Creationist groups doing the same thing with the Fathers? I know that the organizations that you mentioned, I think, are all in the Young Earth camp, so

I don't know if you looked at Old Earth or not. Or maybe one of them *was* Old Earth.

**CA:** I didn't really look at Old Earth. They were all (I think you're right) Young Earth. I talked very briefly about the Intelligent Design camp, especially Hugh Ross. And he seems a little bit more aware of...

**MH:** He'd be Old Earth.

**CA:** Yeah. I didn't deal specifically with him. He seems to know a little bit more of the subtleties. But as I said, I did not dig very deep into Old Earth. It was predominately the three that I mentioned.

**MH:** The third chapter is "What Does 'Literal' Mean? Patristic Exegesis in Context." So if you walked up to a Church Father (maybe you could zero in on one in particular) and asked him the question, "Hey do you interpret the Bible literally?" what kind of answer would you get? And what would they mean by it?

**CA:** He would say, "Yes, I do." And I hope that would spur on a conversation of, "What do you mean by literal?" So you cannot draw a straight line from what we mean by literal today (in our post-enlightenment sensibilities) to what the Fathers meant by literal. So what I try to do there is go from that big misunderstanding of... I call it a false paradigm. "In the Early Church, there's a group of literalists and a group of allegorists, and they were constantly battling each other for the proper way to interpret the Bible." And that's really not the way it was. You may have heard of a group called the Antiochenes and a group called the Alexandrians. Often, what happens in these creation science appropriations is that the Antiochenes are labeled as literalists and the Alexandrians are labeled as allegorists. Antiochenes are said to be the forebears of our own way of interpreting what they would call "grammatical-historical," or something like that, and the allegorists resorted to all these wild interpretations and made the text say whatever they wanted it to say. [MH laughs] And that's a false paradigm. That's not the way it was.

**MH:** On both sides of it.

**CA:** Right. Exactly. The fact is that both the Antiochenes and the Alexandrians looked for figural readings. They were concerned with a higher reading of the text. The difference was in how they thought they could get that higher reading. That was the real difference. So what I tried to do is show some of those subtleties. I show how the Antiochenes were anchored in the rhetorical tradition, while the Alexandrians were anchored more in the philosophical tradition. And how those come together, even, in a Father like Basil of Caesarea, whom I discuss quite significantly, actually, in the book. And that context is really, really foundational. I consider chapter 3 the most important chapter in the book. It's based in that idea that if you want to understand what the Fathers are trying to do

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with Genesis 1 (or any other biblical text, for that matter), you need to understand what they think the Bible is doing and how they read it. And if we assume that they're reading the Bible the same way we are, we are off on the wrong foot right from the get-go, and we will not understand what the Fathers are trying to do.

**MH:** So the two sides... How did you put it again? Textual versus philosophical? How to get there? How to get to figural readings?

**CA:** The rhetorical tradition and philosophical tradition. That's where a lot of the terms arose. So when you see terms like, "according to the letter," or "the common understanding," or "*historia* (history)," or "according to the words" and things like that, those are all anchored in the rhetorical tradition. And the Antiochenes cared about what the text said. The Alexandrians also cared about what the text said. Their concern was not with what was *behind* the text (not the events behind the text), but the text itself was revelation. And that's where the battleground was (I'm not sure that's the best word). But that's what the issue was.

**MH:** How would they, in terms of... I'm going to ask you a two-sided question here. And I'm a text guy, but don't assume... I'm not laying a trap here for you. [laughs] Because I think that the way we teach exegesis now ought to be different. I'll put it in the most general terms I can. Procedurally, what would an Antiochene do with the text? What is he looking for?

**CA:** An Antiochene is looking for indications in the text to draw him to a higher reading, but that higher reading needs to be anchored in the text. And the problem that they had with the Alexandrian, who was also looking for a higher reading in the text, was that the Alexandrian readings (the higher readings) ceased to be connected to the text.

**MH:** Mm hmm. So the Antiochenes wanted to say things that were in some way in their mind tethered to the text somewhere...

**CA:** Right.

**MH:** But the Alexandrians more or less viewed the text as a launching point (a launching pad) or something like that.

**CA:** Yeah. Yeah, as a code to be cracked (I think is the way R.R. Reno and O'Keefe put it in their book).

**MH:** Would you use the word "esoteric?" Were they part of esotericism?

**CA:** No, I think esoteric is too loaded. Esoteric, to me, brings up this picture of really not being guided by anything. One common misunderstanding of the Alexandrians is that they went off on these wild speculations and these wild interpretations. But they were guided by a narrative. They were guided by what



one scholar calls “the architecture of the text.” So they were reading the text through a certain lens. And allegory needed to be connected to that lens (to that story) in order for higher readings to function the way they were meant to function.

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**MH:** Alright. I want to hold off until we get into some of the specific issues. I think that’s probably sufficient. The points that you’re making (to summarize for the audience) is that both of these approaches have a sensitivity to the text. One’s not leaving it behind, and saying, “Boy, we finally got out of that straight jacket called the text,” like, “We don’t even want to think about that now. Thanks for what you did for me, but I’m out of here.” So that is typically the way an allegorist (or an allegorical method) is caricatured. “Just let me... At what point, and how fast can I get rid of the text to start saying stuff I want to say?” And that goes much too far. So I think that’s helpful. And it’s probably a value judgment to look at both sides and say, “Well, this one ‘cared’ more about the text.” That’s probably an unfair way to frame the question. They both care about it, but in different ways and for different reasons. I like the lens metaphor that you just used, or the filter. I think we’ll come back to that as we proceed.

Let’s get into some specifics. In Part 2, which you have labeled as “Reading the Fathers,” I want to focus (we might go elsewhere)... I want to make sure that I hit chapter 5, and that is the creation out of nothing (the *ex nihilo* discussion). So did any of the Church Fathers argue for creation *ex nihilo* in Genesis 1? Because I can imagine that some of them said something that the creationist schools (or groups) that you mentioned... Your work was about how they appropriate certain things that the Fathers say. There’s got to be something that they latch onto and say, “Look, this guy was talking about Genesis (creation) just like we are.” So what’s the useful fodder when it comes to the whole *ex nihilo* thing? Or do none of the Church Fathers take that perspective? Which is it?

**CA:** It’s an interesting issue because the Church Fathers would agree... Let me correct that statement. There are some Church Fathers who would agree with the claim of some Old Testament scholars that Genesis 1 does not teach creation out of nothing. So you’ve got men like Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century who actually says quite explicitly that he agrees with Plato, that creation was from already existing matter. But there was a shift round about Theophilus of Antioch (so about 20 years after Justin), and every Church Father after Theophilus of Antioch would believe in creation *ex nihilo*.

**MH:** Wow. What caused that?

**CA:** Well, the shift was caused by the need to assert that, theologically.

**MH:** Okay.

**CA:** So you've got a really interesting situation here for "Christianity Today" evangelicalism that says, "We get our doctrine from the Bible and the Bible alone." And here are the Church Fathers basically showing us that there may be theological necessities that warrant a certain doctrine that is not necessarily explicit in scripture.

**MH:** Right. It's a possibility elevated to a place to land, based on a specific set of circumstances.

**CA:** Right. Which has since now become pretty much Christian orthodoxy, hasn't it (creation *ex nihilo*)?

**MH:** Yeah. Certainly, if you're in the Young Earth... Even if you're in the Old Earth, it's going to be tethered to Big Bang cosmology, but it's still a different way... The Big Bang and the Old Earth view is a different way to have the same discussion, essentially.

**CA:** Right.

**MH:** So what were they taking a stand against?

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**CA:** Well, it's instructive to look at Theophilus of Antioch. This is the first guy that we have an explicit argument for creation out of nothing. And he's finding that there are certain philosophies (and cosmologies in those philosophies) that are making the claim that since matter exists and God exists, that God is not above matter (put quite simply). So the theological need arises that for God to be sovereign over all—for God to be Lord over all—he has to be able to create the matter that he shapes.

**MH:** You have to have a dualistic approach.

**CA:** Right. So it is explicitly an issue with the philosophies (the theologies, if you want) that they were dealing with. And you can see this in Theophilus of Antioch. You can see it in Augustine and his dealings with the Manicheans. It's the same kind of thing, where creation out of nothing becomes a really foundational doctrine to "approve," if you will the sovereignty of the Christian God.

**MH:** But earlier Church Fathers wouldn't be (or would they be) Monists? In other words, would they make the same linkage between God and creation that Theophilus was trying to address, or would they just do something different?

**CA:** Yeah, I think they had different concerns. If you compare Theophilus (about 170) with Justin Martyr (about 150), they had different concerns. And Justin Martyr was really concerned with his very survival. So he was concerned to make an apologetic for the benefit that Christianity had for the empire. And those really weren't the concerns of Theophilus of Antioch 20 years later. So I think you can

just chalk that up to the different concerns they had. As time moves on, you've got a development of theology as well. You've got the development of the Trinity in those first several centuries. You even have Justin Martyr not really knowing what to do with the Son (Jesus Christ), calling him a "second God." But 20 or 30 years later, in Irenaeus, you have a much clearer understanding of the relationship of the Son to the Father. And that's what we call the development of the doctrine of the Trinity that culminates, really, at Nicaea in 325 and Constantinople in 381.

**MH:** Yeah, this is important, because we often forget that they're struggling with the text. "Okay, we got this thing sitting in front of us that makes certain statements. What do we do with that? How do we understand that?" So the caricature (among some; I'm not going to make a sweeping generalization here) that when the Church Fathers write stuff, they're just dispensing with scripture at some point and making stuff up... Okay, maybe somebody did that at some point. Typically, what they're doing is they're struggling with the text, and then they get (as they live their lives) confronted with problems (with questions, with issues) and then they're the smart guys in the room so they're supposed to answer these questions. And chances are, they have greater access to more material—even a Bible, because not everybody has a Bible. So they're not just free-wheeling and freestyling; they're struggling with the data that emerged from the text—not only how to understand it, but how to articulate it (how to articulate the understandings that they're coming to). And to me, the other thing we forget is that beyond maybe a copy of the Bible, it's not like they can go to a bookstore or a library or a Journal database and say, "Let's see what scholarship has said about that to help me think..." They don't have a lot of access to a lot of material, so it's entirely conceivable that they're locked on to one or two problems, and they never even encounter certain questions that 20, 30, 100 years later, a lot of Church Fathers are thinking about. They may never have addressed it at all. It may never have come up. But we forget that.

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**CA:** I think you're absolutely right. I think the way you put it, "struggle with the text..." We assume... I'll just point the finger at me. I will always remember the realization I made that, "You know what? The Church Fathers did not approach the text with the same history of theology that we have in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, with things that have been battled out, with things that have been developed." They were honestly trying to figure out who Jesus was. They were trying to figure out who he was in relation to the Father. So statements like, "I and the Father are one," what does that mean?

**MH:** Yeah, what does it mean, what doesn't it mean? What are the gradations of that?

**CA:** Exactly. That's right. And many other verses like that. In the midst of that, also interpreting the Old Testament Christologically... Christianity never rejected the Jewish scriptures. They never rejected the Old Testament (as we call it).

There was a group that wanted to, but they were... Marcion was soundly put in his place, I guess you could say. Trying to read certain passages like Proverbs 8 Christologically, they read it as about Christ. But at the same time, they're trying to figure out what the New Testament is saying about this Christ that they're actually worshiping in their churches.

**MH:** Yeah, and for those listening, if you don't think this happens today, spend an hour on the internet [laughs] and google some of these verses and these phrases, like "the meaning of" and then something like "I and the Father are one," and you're going to have a lot of people just say stuff that you look at and go, "Huh, well, that's worth thinking about," and then you're going to have a lot that, "Boy, that's just crazy town." [CA laughs] And so that situation that we have, this whole thing with the internet and YouTube, that's happening. In the Church Fathers' day, they're running into those kinds of ideas—certainly not the proliferation of them—but they're running into things that they have to think about. "Is that a dumb idea, or is that a good idea? Is that within the realm of plausibility here?" They have to come up with some way to understand and articulate, and either affirm or eliminate (or sort of just leave on the table) some idea, and they're expected to do that for the community. There's a lot of pressure there.

**CA:** You're right. Especially when certain interpretations are coming from within the Church itself—when they're coming from a deacon or a priest or a presbyter or even a bishop. When the very tradition of the Church—the very life of the Church—is at stake here, if you don't deal with the issue.

**MH:** Yeah. It's a little bit of the same. The stakes were higher. And you're right; they don't have any of the framework... A lot of these guys are saying stuff, and they don't know that they've stepped in it because they don't have any framework [laughs] to tell them when they've stepped in it.

**CA:** Exactly!

**MH:** It's not... They don't have the body of discussion.

**CA:** That's exactly right. As I tell a lot of my students. Take, for example, Arius, the fourth century priest who essentially argued that Jesus was a created being—created by the Father. When he offered that, he did not think he was offering heresy. And he wasn't automatically accused of heresy. He had offered it, there were some disagreements, and ultimately, a council was called so they could get together and say, "What do we think about what this guy Arius is offering? Is this what we believe the Bible to be teaching, or are we to believe the Bible to be teaching something else?"

**MH:** Yeah. He didn't have a precursor who stepped in it before him. [laughs]

**CA:** That's right.

45:00

**MH:** Yeah, he was the guinea pig. Well, what about... In another chapter, you talk about the days of Genesis. So there had to be a variance of opinion on how to understand the days. So give us some examples of what the Fathers were thinking and saying.

**CA:** Yeah, there certainly were some Fathers who would have said, "They're 24-hour days," but there were also Fathers like Basil and most famously Augustine who liked to talk about days in terms of a figure. So Basil, for example, would talk about the 8<sup>th</sup> day. And he connected it to the liturgy of the church, where the 8<sup>th</sup> day was celebrated, and he used that to move into the eternity of God. So the days... anchoring it in these historical, literal, 24-hour days really faded in the distance in Basil's understanding. And Augustine even made the famous statement (I'm paraphrasing, of course), "Anybody who believes they're literal is kind of crazy." [MH laughs] So there was a variety of meanings, which tells me that the Fathers that held to the 24-hour literal day were functioning quite well along with the Fathers who disagreed. You don't see a body of literature where they're disagreeing on that issue, and it's because they were reading the text for a different reason. And the guys that did hold to a 24-hour view (for example, Ephraim the Syrian), it was just kind of a, "Yeah, it's 24 hours. Now, let's get onto something that matters," kind of attitude. So they weren't reading the text of Genesis to find scientific clues to the way the world was created, or when it was created. There was something deeper that they wanted and they hold that in common.

**MH:** Well, that would be nice, if we approached it that that way now. [laughs] There's no... A couple of years ago, there was a big (mudslinging is pejorative) showdown—a planned showdown—at ETS, where you had the Old Earthers, the BioLogos people, and the Young Earthers in the same room, and everybody got to cast stones. And I talked to one of the guys afterwards who was with the BioLogos position, and basically it turned out that, "Well, at some point, everybody just threw stones at me." [laughter] There was a common target there. [laughter] There are lots of reasons that this discussion has been elevated to this perceived status of importance that it gets today, in contrast to what you just described. "Hey, whatever, let's just move on to something more significant here."

**CA:** Yeah. I should say that in the book my intent is not to prove that the Church Fathers were evolutionists. That's not at *all* what I'm trying to do.

**MH:** That would be impossible. They're not speaking the language of Darwin, who was 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**CA:** It's just as futile to prove that they were creationists, in the sense that Answers in Genesis would intend. That's not my intent. Nor is my intent to say,

“We need to get back to the way the Fathers interpreted the Bible.” I think the book should lead to that very, very important conversation, but the intent of the book is not to argue that. The intent of the book is simply to say, “Look, they approached the Bible differently than we did. Why did they do that?” And perhaps, we can in some way see that as prescriptive. Perhaps we can learn something from them.

**MH:** Well, that’s actually a good note to wrap up on, because if that’s what you’d like to see as the takeaway, that’s a good way to fade out here. I think that would be a good takeaway, because I think most of the people who have followed this podcast over the years are with me on this. My somewhat facetious line is, “I’m not going to land anywhere specific on the views of creation or of eschatology. I’ll let other ministries fight each other about that.” [laughter] Because there are ministries that essentially exist to fight with somebody else.

**CA:** You’re right.

**MH:** And I may learn something important by leaning in on that debate—that conversation—at some point, and that’s fine. But there are other people doing that, and I would rather gravitate toward (this is my own assessment) more important things. And believe it or not, that’s not just the Church Fathers, but it’s been all Christian thinkers. And frankly, just Christians collectively over the ages have made a distinction between things that they view as essential and things that are just less essential or nonessential.

**CA:** Exactly.

**MH:** It would be nice if we could get our focus back to the things that basically there’s very little disagreement on that are essential, and then be thinking back to Weber’s book about “How do we detect those things and build up strength on those things in a postmodern (post-Christian) culture?” That would be nice.

**CA:** Yeah. It would be nice to start with what we agree on and understand that, as you say, some things matter more than others and some things matter less. Let’s be clear on what matters and what matters less.

**MH:** Yeah. If the Church shifts at some point into the status of being monitored or persecuted in the West, the reality is that you’re going to be thrilled to bump into an evolutionary creationist some day (if you’re a Young Earther), because you’re going to see that they’re actually your ally when you’re in difficult circumstances. So you can see it there. Why can’t you see it now? Things like that. So thanks for being with us and talking about your book. This is recommended reading to my audience. It’s just good to know that there’s a variance of opinion, even back in the days of the Church Fathers—really formative periods. And we don’t want to... On our podcast, we focus on primary sources, and if you’re going to be quoting the Church Fathers to defend this or that view, for them that becomes a primary

source so don't abuse it. That's important, to treat your sources the way they need to be treated.

**CA:** Well said.

**MH:** Thanks for being with us.

**CA:** Yeah. Thanks very much. Appreciated it.

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**TS:** Alright, Mike, another good one. That was interesting. Just keeps getting better and better. I don't think we have one bad episode, to be honest with you. I might be a little biased.

**MH:** [laughs] There's another poll—another thing to vote on! Which ones were bad. Oh, let's not do that.

**TS:** Talking to these scholars (these types of episodes) really resonate with our listeners.

**MH:** Yeah, I think it's a valuable lesson, even if we disagree with somebody (in this case, the Church Fathers) just to appreciate their effort. Because they're struggling to understand scripture like we are and they had different reasons—different pressures on them. They had resources or not. Many of them didn't have resources. A totally different framework. But they devoted their lives to this sort of thing. So at the very least, we can appreciate the struggle that they were having.

**TS:** Yeah, absolutely. That's why I appreciate Dr. Allert's work so much. Because I'm not going to take time to go back and study Church history. Unless you go to Bible college or something, it's just not going to happen. So that's why this podcast is so valuable, that we can aggregate some of those...

**MH:** Yeah. Do all of that work ourselves. I'm the same way. I'm not going to go out and do degree-level work in Church history, but there are things that I sort of key on and it's nice to know who's done work in that. And if they'll come on the podcast and talk about that stuff, that's definitely worth doing. I do want to sprinkle in some Church historical stuff into the podcast when it relates to helping us think about the text. So this was a good one for that.

55:00

**TS:** Alright, Mike. Next week, we're going to do the Day of the Lord.

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**MH:** Yep. Day of the Lord. This is an important topic. It might sound like a boring, run of the mill, “What is there really to think about?” sort of topic, but trust me, there’s a lot to think about here. It has a lot of ramifications.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. We appreciate Dr. Allert coming on and want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.