Origins: a reformed look at creation, design, and evolution

is a book written by Deborah B. Haarsma & Loren D. Haarsma, who are associate professors in the Dept of Physics & Astronomy at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI. Deborah (Ph.D., M.I.T.) does research in galaxies and cosmology (her faculty home-page) and Loren (Ph.D., Harvard) studies the electrical activity of nerve cells (his faculty home-page).

The Big Bang. Creation. Evolution. Design. Can faith and science get along? When it comes to the history of the universe, many believe that science and faith are mutually exclusive. But not physics professors Loren and Deborah Haarsma. For them, God is sovereign over every part of life. In Origins, they explore what both God's Word and God's world teach us about creation, evolution, and design.

The Haarsmas clearly explain the science — what is well established and what is speculative. They take a Reformed view, focusing on areas where all Christians agree, while sympathetically presenting the strengths and weaknesses of positions when Christians differ.

Origins offers helpful guidance for Christians who seek to resolve their differences and come to a deeper, more biblical understanding of the origins of the universe. Each chapter includes starter questions for small group discussions.

— the description above is from the book's back cover —

• paperback, 255 pages; published 2007 by Faith Alive Christian Resources

• a revised Second Edition is now available, in August 2011.

• You can read the Introduction (overview,...) and Chapter 1 (God's Word and God's World) and explore the ASSOCIATED WEBSITE with "articles that expand on topics covered in the book.” {additional content}

• And you can buy the book.

Below you'll find DESCRIPTIONS & REVIEWS and TABLE OF CONTENTS.

DESCRIPTIONS:

Who is this book for? The authors say, "FaithAlive Resources, the publishing ministry of the Christian Reformed Church, asked us to write a book 'for the person in the pew' on issues of origins."

• from the publisher: In this book — the second in the "A Reformed Look at..." series — scientists Loren and Deborah Haarsma present a solid Reformed perspective on how to evaluate the competing ways in which Christians understand the origins and history of the universe. This book shows how both God's Word and God's world should be honored in coming to a responsible understanding of how God created the universe and our world. The authors offer helpful guidance for thoughtful Christians who are seeking to resolve their differences and come to a deeper, more biblical understanding of origins.

• from a book review by Darrel Falk: Origins: A Reformed Look at Creation, Design and Evolution is a theological and

REVIEWS:

• This book is on ASA's list of Recommended Books because it is "valuable as an introduction to the field for the person in the pew, high school and college students.” For several months it was featured in the "Bookstore" on the ASA homepage and is strongly recommended ...

• by Edward Davis, member of ASA's Executive Council (*) — "Loren and Deb Haarsma have extensive experience speaking and teaching about science and Christian faith to a variety of audiences and in a variety of venues. Their hard work is now available in a new book from Faith Alive Christian Resources. It is hard to find good helpful materials for Christian schools and home schooling families on issues of science and faith. We now have, in my opinion, the best answer for that problem. In a word, this book is splendid. I commend the authors for their courage to be faithful to both science and Christian beliefs." — * Professor of History of Science, Messiah College (and author of "Intelligent Design on Trial " in Religion in the News, Winter 2006)

• by Craig Rusbult, editor of ASA's website for Whole-Person Education — This excellent book is the best introductory overview I've seen about the science, philosophy, and theology of origins. I
scientific analysis of the variety of creation-views held by evangelical Christians. Examining these views from the cosmological, geological, and biological perspectives, it provides a clear, concise introduction of the issues in a manner that is accessible (and of interest) even at the high school level. Its impact, however, will extend far beyond the high school level. This book provides such a clear and broad perspective on the various approaches that it will be of value even to those who have been thinking about origins for many years. Each chapter concludes with a fine set of discussion questions and several references. Interspersed throughout the narrative are text-boxes which refer the reader to the book's excellent website for a more in-depth analysis of a particular topic.

• and excerpts from a press release by Calvin College:

A new book from a pair of Calvin professors strives to bring more light and less heat to Christian discussions about the history of the universe. ... The Haarsmas hope their new book... will help Christians who want to better understand the often controversial issues connected with life's origins and development,...

"The issues around creation, design, and evolution are complex — and interesting," says Loren Haarsma. But he adds, "These words mean different things to different people, and they tend to provoke arguments." The Haarsmas say that's because origins issues run close to some of life's deepest questions: does God exist, how does God relate to this universe, how did we get here, and who are we? But, they say, the culture wars often frame the argument as a false choice: believe in God or believe in science. "If we only have two sides to choose from," says Deborah Haarsma, "then believing in God means rejecting science, and believing what science says means rejecting God. So which do you choose: God or science? As scientists and Christians, we don't accept this simplistic choice. In the book, we argue that God and science are not at war — rather, science is the study of God's creation." ..... In writing their book... they drew on their many experiences of speaking at churches, and they had that same audience in mind for their book. ... "It's intended for people who aren't scientists and aren't trained theologians," says Deborah. "It's for people who are interested in issues of creation, design and evolution and want to learn more about them. These issues are often in the news, but news stories are too short or too biased to explain the real issues. This book will aid parents and educators who want a Christian resource that does more than push one point of view."

The Haarsmas note that Christians today hold a range of views about creation and evolution, and that they encounter that range in their own students each year. "As Calvin professors," they say, "our goal is not to tell students which Christians are right and which are wrong. We want to expose them to the data and arguments and teach them to carefully examine the strengths and weaknesses of each position. In the same way, with this book we want Christians to better understand not only their own position, but the positions of their neighbors in the pew." ..... Although the Haarsmas describe an array of opinions on origins, they emphasize a foundation of common Christian beliefs. They are resolute in their faith in a God who created and governs the universe, a God who reveals himself to humanity, a God who is a Redeemer, and a God who inspired the Bible — making it authoritative and place a high value on accurate understanding & respectful attitudes and the authors clearly describe a wide range of views accurately, with respect. If you're a "person in the pew" this book will help you learn a lot. And if you're experienced in this area, it will coherently summarize much of what you know, and more.

• and in ASA's journal (June 2008) a favorable book review by Darrel Falk, Professor of Biology at Point Loma Nazarene University, begins with a book description and concludes, "I have been waiting for a book like this for a long time. I have wanted a book that clearly lays out the options in a textbook-like fashion at the introductory level, one which allows the reader to come to his or her own conclusions without a sense of coercion, and one which provides a balance between theological and scientific considerations. This comes as close as any I have seen to being that book. I recommend it highly."

• praise from the book's back cover and publisher's website:

"Origins is a masterful book. It clearly and readably introduces the many different positions that Christians hold on creation and evolution, and the many complex issues involved, without caricature or oversimplification." — John Cooper, Professor of Philosophical Theology, Calvin Theological Seminary

"I have read a number of books that discuss Christianity and origins, but none are as thorough in exploring the range of views that exist within the Christian community. This is a book that should be on the shelf of any Christian interested in going beyond the simplistic view that one must choose either faith or science when discussing origins." — John Zwart, Professor of Physics, Dordt College (2004 President of the Iowa chapter of the American Association of Physics Teachers)

"Origins: A Reformed Look at Creation, Design, and Evolution offers a thoughtful, helpful study of the relationship between science and Christianity, focusing on various Christian approaches to understanding the origins of the universe and the human race. Especially strong are its presentation of ways in which science and biblical interpretation can enrich one another, its analysis and evaluation of Intelligent Design, and its evenhanded, thought-provoking discussion of various views on human origins, the fall, and original sin. This book will be helpful for those who, believing that both the universe and the Bible make God known to us, want to understand the relationship between these two means of revelation." — Ronald Feenstra, Heritage Professor of Systematic and Philosophical Theology, Calvin Theological Seminary

• and from others in the Christian community:

"The Haarsmas have provided the church with a timely, rare, and valuable gift. Origins displays that rare combination of comprehensive topical analysis (scientific and biblical) with clear explanation for laypersons. I strongly recommend the book to Christians, and especially to Christian educators, who seek to understand evolutionary science, without fear and without scientific or theological compromise." — Stephen Matheson, Professor of Biology, Calvin College

"Thoughtful Christians of all kinds will enjoy this clear and readable book. The authors combine reverence for the word of God in Scripture with a deep understanding of modern natural science. The result is a very helpful guide for churches, students and ministers thinking through contemporary debates surrounding the history of God's creation." — Alan Padgett, Professor of Systematic Theology, Luther Seminary (author of Science and the Study of God: A Mutuality Model for Theology and Science)

"This book carefully describes important scientific concepts with helpful examples; as a non-scientist I still found the material very clear to understand. Even more remarkable is the Haarsmas' theological depth; as a theologian I believe they provide the key questions that Christians face about origins. Their descriptions of several different answers to these questions, along with evaluations of possible strengths and weaknesses for each view, seem consistently accurate
sufficient for teaching us what we need to be saved. Yet as scientists they also believe that [quoting a CRC statement] “God reveals himself with full divine authority in the world of his making as well as in Scripture.”

As scientists and Christians, the Haarsmas are willing to ask difficult questions. “Is it ever appropriate for Christians to allow what they learn from the study of creation to affect how they interpret Scripture? Is it ever appropriate for Christians to allow what they learn from the study of Scripture to affect how they interpret creation?” They believe that the answer to both questions is a qualified yes, but that these things can be done in good ways and bad ways. ......

In their book they describe a number of ways in which Christians interpret the early chapters of Genesis. In their chapters... on human origins, they not only summarize the scientific data, but also look at key theological issues — the human soul, the image of God, original sin, and human mortality before the Fall. ... They present several views held by fellow Christians and then discuss the theological and scientific challenges for each view. ... They write, “In all the views presented in this chapter, God is the Creator of humanity. The differences among the views are in how God accomplished it.” The Haarsmas say that this foundational belief in God as the creator and sustainer is at the heart of how they do science. And their hope is that this approach will ring in their new book and resonate with readers.

In a negative review from a young-earth perspective, Joseph Pipa says "there is little that is 'Reformed' about their perspective, and the range of scientific options offered is weighted in favor of evolution.” He is very disappointed because "the authors' purpose is to establish that there is no conflict between old-earth science and the Bible," and he concludes that "a better model for scientific research on origins... is found in the work of Christian scientists that begin with the scriptural accounts of creation and the Flood and constructs scientific models compatible with God's revelation." (review)

• and from customers at amazon.com who say "essential reading for Christians interested in origins" & "highly recommended" & "one of the best overviews of the issues" & "presents the spectrum of Christian views on Genesis and origins."

CONTENTS: [note: all page numbers are for the 1st Edition]
Introduction [overview of ideas & chapters; about the authors] 7
Chapter 1 God's Word and God's World 16
Chapter 2 Worldviews and Science 31
Chapter 3 Science: A Process for Studying God's World 46
Chapter 4 God's Word and God's World in Conflict? 57
Chapter 5 Genesis: Concordist Interpretations 80
Chapter 6 Genesis: Non-concordist Interpretations 107
Chapter 7 An Ancient and Dynamic Universe 124
Chapter 8 Competing Views on Evolution 146
Chapter 9 Evidence for Plant and Animal Evolution 161
Chapter 10 Intelligent Design 177
Chapter 11 Scientific & Theological Issues on Human Origins 196
Chapter 12 Adam and Eve 215
Chapter 13 But What About ... ? [FAQ about origins] 233
Appendix A 1972 Statement on Biblical Authority by the Christian Reformed Church in North America 245
Appendix B A Spectrum of Views on Origins 250
and for more about these topics, [homepage for Origins Questions](#)

I am reading the book Origins: A Reformed Look at Creation, Design and Evolution by Deborah and Loren Haarsma. I will be summarizing each chapter and then writing a response to it, questions I have, maybe additional research I may do, or answers I find along the way from other sources. Please add to the discussion! However, I need to lay a few ground rules: 1) No insulting. 2) No bad language. 3) Please think before you post.