

reconciled with the scientific evidence, but the discrepancy is not small, and it is almost impossible to believe that the scientific results could be that wrong. The explanation is probably that the Genesis record of creation, written in a pre-scientific era, is not meant to be a scientific account. Rather, it proclaims the reasons **why** God created the universe, that he made us for relationship with himself, and that we are not accidental products of a meaningless universe: it is this truth that all Christians ought to proclaim.

What about Adam and Eve? Scientifically, there is no doubt that modern humans are closely related genetically and through evolutionary paths with other hominids, and prior to that with other animals and living organisms. Yet at a specific point in time, God chose to breathe life into Adam and Eve, to make them into persons capable of loving, responsive relationship with himself. In this, humans are quite clearly differentiated from all other animals and living things. Some people maintain that God breathed life into two specific individuals from whom all living humans are descended. Others hold that maybe God breathed life into a wider group of people, of whom Adam and Eve were a representative 'type', just as the one person Jesus was a representative for all redeemed people. Current scientific and archaeological knowledge are consistent with either view. The important point is that we are only here because God willed it to be so, however he chose to do it. We should not be frightened of what science uncovers: all truth is God's truth. If he chose to use billions of years of star formation before the earth was formed to build the atoms of which our bodies are made, or aeons of time allowing biological evolution on earth before he breathed life into humans, then who are we to say that this is any less an outworking of his creative activities than if everything were created in an instant?

Creation and re-creation

To see the full sweep of God's creative activities we need to understand that, although his creation is at present marred by human sinfulness, God's promise

is to renew it at the end of time in the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21:1). This is not a vision of a future nebulous place where people shall float around on clouds strumming harps. Rather, it is a place of concrete reality – real, physical reality – where God's people will finally be at home, where they will love and be loved, where God's original plans for his people when he first created the world will be fulfilled for all time. It will not only be a restored natural world, with streams, flowers and animals, but with cities too: places of human community, creativity and technology. In a very real sense, the way that as Christians we treat God's created world and his people in this present age should be a model, maybe a faint and imperfect model, but nevertheless a precursor of how we shall live in the new heavens and new earth when God's plans are completed.

For further reading

Beyond Belief: Science, Faith and Ethical Challenges
Denis Alexander & Robert S. White, Lion. 2004

Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes and the Meaning of Life
Alister McGrath, Blackwell Publishing. 2004

The Message of Creation, The Bible Speaks Today
David Wilkinson, Inter-Varsity Press (2002).

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Truth Matters is an occasional series of leaflets published by Reform addressing issues of importance for the understanding of the church today.

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Genesis and Creation

truth matters

Essential issues in Christian teaching and practice

Genesis and Creation

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ... God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.
(Genesis 1:1 & 31)

The book of Genesis is the foundation stone on which is based our knowledge of God's creative purposes for the universe in general, and for humankind in particular. It proclaims that God created the universe because he chose to do so, and that he made humans to be in a loving relationship with himself. The rest of the Bible is the account of God's dealings with humankind, of our rebellion and his great rescue made possible through the death of his son Jesus, and of the certain hope of the future heavens and earth where the creation order will be renewed.

God is the creator and sustainer of the world

The over-riding message of the first chapters of Genesis is that God created the universe and all that is in it, and that he was delighted with what he had made. He pronounced that it was very good (Gen. 1:31). Our secular contemporaries, beset by uncertainty, relativism, and the feeling that life ultimately is meaningless, need to hear this message just as much today as when it was first written over 3000 years ago.

The Genesis account emphasises that this world is not the plaything of capricious gods, nor is it the random and therefore meaningless outcome of impersonal 'laws of nature'. It is the purposeful design of a living and loving creator God. There is no room here for those who would say that God created the world, then left it to its own devices merely

working out the laws of nature that he had built into it. The God of the Bible is engaged intimately in his creation, sustaining and upholding it moment by moment, and interacting with it and with his people ('The Son ... is sustaining all things by his powerful word' Heb. 1:2-3; 'all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together' Col. 1:16-17). God is sovereign, and nothing happens in the world that he does not allow to happen (Is. 46:10; Matt. 10:29).

There is no scope in the Biblical account for us to worship nature itself, as is the tendency of much contemporary New Age thinking which permeates our society. God exists outside his creation: he was present before the universe was made, and when our current world eventually ceases to exist, God will still remain the same. It is God we must worship, not his creation.

People as stewards of God's creation

The material world that God brought into being is very good: God repeatedly says so in Genesis (seven times in chapter 1 alone), as well as elsewhere (e.g., 1 Tim. 4:4). This view is in marked contrast to almost all other religions, which maintain that the material world is a hindrance that holds us back from a somehow more important 'spiritual' world. Not so the Christian view. Although the world God created is now marred by the consequences of human sinfulness, yet at root it is fundamentally good. God has made us capable of understanding the world around us, and able to make use of it and to interact with it through our scientific and technological abilities. It is part of his faithfulness and graciousness towards us that we live in a rational, understandable universe.

From the beginning of history, God has given humans the charge to care for his creation (Gen. 1:26-31). It is our privilege to be stewards on God's behalf, with the delegated responsibility, being made in his image, to look after the created order as part of our worship. This creation ethic gives a solid grounding for Christians to adopt sustainable consumption practices, to care about global warming and environmentally sensitive development, to use our God-given abilities to develop methods of combating diseases, and to use technology to bring relief of suffering and for the good of humankind.

What about scientific explanations of origins?

The power of the scientific method in understanding the way the material world behaves has sometimes led to claims that science removes the need for God. Nowhere is this clearer than in discussions of origins. Some outspoken atheists, such as Richard Dawkins, have suggested that Darwin's theory of evolution or the 'Big Bang' removes the need for a creator God. But as Alister McGrath has exposed powerfully and clearly in his book *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes and the Meaning of Life*, such views are unsustainable on the very grounds of rational argument that Dawkins invokes. Scientific theories such as the theory of evolution cannot be used to support either theistic or atheistic views. No matter how powerful science may be, it can only ever describe how the material world behaves; it can never say anything about purpose, about why we are here in the first place. Only God the creator can tell us about his reasons for creating the world, which he does supremely in Genesis.

Another concern for some Christians is that because the Biblical genealogies from the time of Adam add up to 6,000 -10,000 years, then there appears to be a conflict with the great age of the universe indicated by science: numerous measurements give an age for the earth close to 4,500 million years, and an age for the universe of three times that. There are those who maintain that a 'young earth' position can be