

The Doctrine of Creation

From the study of the essential character of God we now under the heading of the doctrine of Creation, turn to the relationship which exists between God and the universe.

The Doctrine of Creation in History

The ancient Greeks explained the existence of the world through what we call the dualistic theory, i.e. the belief in the eternity of matter, or alternatively they sought to explain the world in terms of an emanation from God, i.e. the creation was a out flowing of the being of God i.e. of the essence of God, and that in some way the creation is part of God.

To the ancient Greeks and others matter was eternal. To them it was absurd to suggest that anything could be produced from nothing.

1. *"Know first of all" said Epicurus "that nothing can spring from nonentity." Nothing can spring from nothing.*
2. Plato declared matter to be, *"co existence with God."*
3. Aristotle asserted the eternity of the world both in matter and in form.

However the Bible clearly teaches us that the earth its vegetation and living inhabitants have not always been, they have not existed form all eternity.

From the beginning the Christian church has taught the Doctrine of creation ex nihilo, that is God made the world out of nothing. This concept needs some explanation.

"It is not true to speak of nothing in such a way as to imply that "nothing" was a kind of material which God used. By ex nihilo, the medieval and Reformed theologians meant that antecedent (prior to) to God's first creative act in the universe there was no other material existence."

T. C. Hammond Page 58-- 59

This doctrine is found in the writings of the early Christian fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian and many others.

It was however Augustine who dealt with the work of creation in more detail than any of the others. He argued that creation was eternally in the mind and will of God and therefore brought no change in him. There was no time before creation, since the world is brought into being with time, rather than in time. The question what did God do in the many ages before creation is based on a misconception of eternity. (See a discussion on this question in James Orr's Christian View of God and the World page 152..) While the Church in general seems to have held that the world was

created in six ordinary days, Augustine suggested a somewhat different view. He strongly defended the Doctrine of creation ex nihilo, but distinguished two moments of creation, the production of matter and spirit out of nothing and the organisation of the material universe. He found it difficult to say which kind of days the days of Genesis were, but was evidently inclined to think that God created all things in a moment of time, and that the thought of days was simply introduced to aid the finite mind.

The Reformers of the 16th century held firmly to the doctrine of creation out of nothing by a free act of God -- and regarded the six days of creation as a literal six day period.

The Importance of Believing that the World was Created Ex-nihilo

Someone may ask, "What would it matter to me today if there had been some existing, eternal matter when God commenced to arrange the universe? Does it make any difference to us today whether God made the world out of existing matter or out of nothing? The answer is of course that it matters to the Christian a very great deal, for example;

1. If there had been in existence any uncreated matter, we have no assurance that God was, and is, able to control it. It may have proved uncontrollable -- in fact, this has been brought forward by some philosophers as a possible explanation of the origin of evil. For example John Stuart Mill thought that the difficulties of the universe could be best explained by supposing that the creator was and is hampered by the insufficiency and intractableness of the materials he has to work with. (The Christian View of God and the World page 146).

2. If God used existing material to make the world, how do we know that he succeeded in doing with it what he originally intended to do? He may have been thwarted by the refractoriness of the material in responding to his now limited will and power. An opinion very like this was worked out in Leibniz's philosophical view of the world, Theodicee.

3. It matters because the Christian might otherwise lack the assurance of God's final triumph. For if there had been some other eternal substance, which exists by as good a right as God himself, how can we be certain that his ultimate purpose will not be frustrated by a catastrophe over which he has no control?

Attacks upon the Doctrine of Creation

Biblical Protestantism asserts the Creator creature distinction as basic to its thought. Calvin says of man's philosophy that it has an axe to grind. It doesn't want to find God, to be man's creator. Though they cannot help being confronted with him all the time and everywhere, they seek assiduously to suppress this revelation. They seek for an exclusively immanentistic (Pantheistic, the belief that the universe is God) principle of explanation of all phenomenon with which they

deal. They say that all is water, that all is infinite, that all is air, that all is number, that all is change, that nothing is change. Or, when driven to the recognition of mystery and transcendence, they say that nothing intelligible can be said about the really transcendence One. Whatever the differences between them, they all are agreed in assuming that the Creator -- creature distinction is not to be as fundamental to our understanding. The "wisdom of this world" is always monistic i.e. it always tries to make out that all being is ultimately of one kind and that there is no such thing as the Creator -- creature distinction.

Perhaps the earliest school of evolutionistic speculation was at Miletus, the most flourishing city of Ionia. Thales whose name heads the list of the "Severn Sages of the Ancient World" was its founder. He lived approximately six centuries before the birth of our Lord.

That "nothing comes into being out of nothing", and "that nothing passes away into nothing", was the conviction with which he, and others who follow him, started on their quest. All around was change: everything always becoming something else; "all in motion like streams." Thales observing that things could become either vaporous or liquid or solid in turn and concluded that the primary substance of existence was water.

Anaximander his friend and pupil asserted that the origin of life was from the "moist element as it was evaporated by the sun." He was the first to speak of man as growing out of another creature namely a fish in the beginning. Epicurus, Lucretius and even Aristotle (384-322 BC) have been considered early evolutionists. Latter the Arabian Philosopher Avicenna was counted amongst the evolutionists. In what we might consider modern times Francis Bacon (1561- 1626), Rene' Descartes (1596-1650), Emanuel Kant (1724 1804) have been considered precursors of evolutionistic thought. The first biologists to make a contribution to evolutionary thought was Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707 -- 1788) the French naturalist. Another was Erasmus Darwin (1731 -- 1802) the grandfather of Charles Darwin. The first fairly complete theory of evolution was by the Chevalier de Lamarch (1744 -- 1829), who became professor of zoology at the Museum of Natural History in Paris and later popularised his views in the journal Philosophie Zoologique.

If the Theory of Evolution is so weak why is it so widely accepted?

First according to evolutionary theory everything is knowable, everything comes from something else and we can therefore trace the developments back. There is no need for anything from outside.

Above all there is no need for God who by the very definition of the word is one who is unknowable and who does not need to give an account of himself.

Secondly according to the theory of evolution, there is one explanation for everything. Everything evolves matter, life, ideas, even religion all evolve.

who created, and something of why he did it.

But it does not set out to tell us how. The world may have originated in a big Bang or in a steady state, our first parents may have developed from a collateral stock with monkeys or they may not. This is not a matter on which the Bible has anything to say. But what it does say is that behind the creature lies the Creator..."

Michael Green, *You Must be Joking* p. 28

The Day Age Theory

This is an attempt to harmonise the data in Genesis 1, with the massive time periods said to be required by the evolutionary process. The advocates of this view believe that the days of Genesis 1 represented time periods of say, one million, or even 10 million years. It is said that the Genesis account of creation is really a poetical way of describing the evolutionary process. The ancient Hebrews, it is claimed, could not possibly have comprehended so sophisticated a concept as that of evolution, therefore the description is of accommodation to the naive scientific outlook and culture of the people that day.

This outlook is seen to be unsound when it is remembered as Henry Morris reminds us:

"All of the ancient religions and philosophies were evolutionary systems regarding matter as eternal and the earth is extremely old, and developing into its present form to many ages or cycles. This was true in particular of the ancient Egyptians and Babylonians with whom the Israelites had frequent contact."

The Bible has the Answer p. 82

The Revelatory Day Theory

Another position taken by some is that of the revelatory day theory. This novel view believes that the six days of Genesis 1, were not days of creation, but days of revelation. That is to say, on the first revelatory day God taught Moses about the creation of light, on the second day about the creation of the sky etc etc.

In respect of this, it is true that the word "day" has several meanings in Scripture. It does not always mean a period of 24 hours (cf. Psalm 90:4). However difficulties with the view arise over the interpretation of the phrase "*evening and morning*" and the feeling is that it was not the writer's intention to contemplate such a view.

The Gap Theory

This opinion was popularised some years ago amongst evangelicals, through the notes in the old Schofield Reference Bible. It is asserted that Genesis 1:2 should be translated "*and the earth became*

without form and void." That is, it was created perfect, then something happened and it became disordered. Probably there existed a race that sinned and was destroyed before this one. Subsequently God recreated the earth by refashioning the chaos that still remained after he had destroyed the first creation. The gap in time allows for the supposed long geological ages before the earth was destroyed. The original creative act can then be pushed back and back to allow for the geological eras said to be approved by modern science. On this theory the New Bible Dictionary comments:

"It should be said that there is neither geological evidence for this nor is this translation at all likely. The phrase in Hebrew normally means "and it was", not "and it became."

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Many American Fundamentalists hold this view and individuals such as C. S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer have acknowledged parts of it as possibilities.

Scriptural Proof for the Doctrine of Creation

Scriptural proof of the doctrine of creation is not found in a single and limited portion of the Bible, but is found in every part of the Word of God.

We are not talking about a few passages quoted here and there on its pages, but a large number of clear and unequivocal statements, which speak of the creation as an historical fact.

We have the extended narrative of Genesis 1 and 2.

These pages certainly appear to the unbiased reader as an historical narrative, and as the record of historical facts.

See page 61, In Understanding Be Men

E J Young. Is Genesis poetry?

"To escape from the plain factual statements of Genesis some evangelicals are saying that the early chapters of Genesis are poetry or myth, by which they mean that they are not to be taken as straightforward accounts, and that the acceptance of such a view removes the difficulties. Some are prepared to say the difficulties about the resurrection of Christ are removed at once if you say that the writers of the Gospels do not mean us to understand that a miracle occurred, and that they are simply giving us a poetic account to show that Christ lives on. To adopt such a view, they say, removes all troubles with modern science. But the truth is that, if you accept such beliefs and methods, you are abandoning the Christian faith. If you act thus with Genesis you are not facing up to the facts, and that is a cowardly thing for evangelicals to do. Genesis is not poetry. There are poetic accounts of creation in the Bible -- Psalm 104 for example, and certain chapters of

Job -- and they differ completely from the first chapter of Genesis. Hebrew poetry had certain characteristics and they are not found in the first chapter of Genesis. So the claim that Genesis 1 is poetry is no solution to the question. The man who says, "I believe that Genesis purports to be an historical account, but I do not believe that account", is a far better interpreter of the Bible the man who says, "I believe that Genesis is profoundly true, but it is poetry." That latter has nothing to commend it at all. I disagree with the first man, but he is a better exegete, he is a better interpreter, because he is facing up to the facts. So I conclude that evangelicals who want to hold to evolution as the unbeliever holds to it, and to get over the difficulties by saying that Genesis is to be interpreted as poetry or myth and not in a factual manner, cannot, in my view, be honest interpreters."

In the Beginning p 18 - 19

We can also say that the many cross-references scattered throughout the Bible also record and regard these pages as historical accounts. They all referred to creation as a fact of history.

Berkof classifies the various passages in which they could be found as follows:

Passages which stress the omnipotence of God in the work of creation. Isaiah 40:26, 28, Amos 4:13

Passages which point to his exaltation above nature as the great and the infinite God. Psalm 90:2, Psalm 102:26, 27, Acts 17:24

Passages which refer to the wisdom of God in his work of creation. Isaiah 40:12 -- 14, Jeremiah 10:12 -- 16, John 1:3

Passages regarding creation from the point of view of God's sovereignty and purpose: Isaiah 43:7, Rom 1:25

One of the fullest and most beautiful of these statements is found in Neheimiah 9:6

"Thou art Jehovah even thou alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host; the earth and all things that are therein, the seas and all that is in them, and thou preservest them all; and the hosts of heaven worshipping thee."

Ibid 128

The Idea of Creation

The faith of the Church in respect to the creation of the world is expressed in the first article of the Apostle's Creed.

"I believe in God The Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

This statement sums up the belief of the early Church, that God by his Almighty power, brought forth the universe out of nothing.

Berkof comments:

"This is an expression of the faith of the early Church, that God by his Almighty power brought forth the universe out of nothing. The words, "Maker of heaven and earth", were not contained in the original form of the creed, but represent a later addition. It ascribes to the Father, that is, to the first Person of the Trinity, the origin of all things. This is in harmony with the representation of the New Testament that all things are of the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit."

Systematic Theology page 128

The expression "of heaven and earth" was inserted to counter the error of those who taught that matter is eternal. This clause does not appear in any of the Western creeds before the 7th century. (See Evan Daniel's on the Prayer Book page 448)

Creation is an Act of the Triune God

Scripture teaches us that God (that is all the Persons of the Holy Trinity) is the author of creation.

We say though God the Father is in the foreground of the work of creation 1 Corinthians 8:6

"But to us there is but one God, the Father of whom are all things, and we in him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him."

But the Bible also recognises that the work of creation is a work of God the Son and of God the Holy Spirit.

John 1:3 *"All things were made by Him (Jesus Christ) and without him was not anything made that was made."*

And in respect to the Holy Spirit's participation in the work.

Genesis 1:2 *"And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."*

Job 33:4 *"The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life."*

Berkof adds:

"The second and third Persons are not dependent powers, or mere intermediaries, but independent authors

together with the Father. The work was not divided among the three Persons, but the whole work, though from different aspects, is ascribed to each one of the Persons. All things are at once out of the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Ghost."

Systematic Theology page 129

Since the Father takes the initiative in the work of creation, it is often ascribed to him economically.

Creation is a Free Act of God

We say that creation is a free act of God in opposition to those who teach that creation is a necessary act of God.

The creation is a free act of God, determined by his sovereign will.

Pantheism teaches that creation is but a mere movement or part of the process of divine evolution. For the pantheist the infinite from eternity to eternity develops itself in the finite. The world for the pantheist is the existent form of God.

Hodge defines the pantheistic idea of God as follows:

"From what their sacred writings teach of the supreme being, we note that Brahma is never addressed as a person. It is never worshiped. It is said to be eternal, infinite immutable (unchangeable). It is said to have continued for untold ages in a state of unintelligent, unconscious being. It comes to existence, to consciousness, and life in the world. It unfolds itself through countless ages in all the forms of finite existence; and then by a like gradual process all things are resolved into unconscious being. The illustrations of the origin of the world commonly employed are sparks issuing from a burning mass, or better, vapour rising from the ocean, condensing and falling back into the source whence it came. Being as such, or the Infinite, is therefore, viewed in three aspects: as coming to existence, as developing itself in the world, as receiving everything back into the abyss of simple being."

Charles Hodge Systematic Theology Volume 1 page 312

However Scripture teaches us that creation is not some development of the being of God, part of some unstoppable development of some pantheistic being, rising and then falling back into the abyss from whence it involuntarily sprung.

The Bible teaches us that God created all things according to the council of his will Eph 1:11, Rev 4:11 and that he is self-sufficient and not dependent on his creatures in any way. Job 22 :2,3 Acts 17:25.

The Purpose for which God Created the World

The question of the final purpose for which God created the world has frequently been debated. In the course of history the question has received especially a two fold answer. The first we would maintain is an unsatisfactory answer the second is the Biblical answer.

1. The Happiness of Man or of Humanity

"Some of the earliest philosophers, such as Plato, Philo, and Seneca, asserted that the goodness of God prompted him to create the world. He desired to communicate himself to his creatures; their happiness was the end he had in view. Though some Christian theologians chimed in with this idea, it became prominent especially through the humanism of the Reformation period and the rationalism of the 18th century. This theory was often presented in a very superficial way. The best form in which it is stated is to the effect that God could not make himself the end of creation, because he is sufficient unto himself and could need nothing. And if he could not make himself the end, then this can be found only in the creature, especially in man, and ultimately in his supreme happiness. The purpose of creation therefore was the welfare or happiness of man and this kind of thinking was characteristic in such influential thinkers as Kant, Schleiermacher, and Ritschl, though they did not all presented it in the same way.

This theory however does not satisfy for several reasons:

a. Though God undoubtedly reveals his goodness in creation, it is not correct to say that his goodness or love could not express itself, if there were no world. The personal relations within the Triune God supplied all that was necessary for a full and eternal life of love.

b. It would seem to be perfectly self-evident that God does not exist for the sake of man, but man for the sake of God. God only is Creator and the supreme Good, while man is but the creature, who for that very reason cannot be the end of creation. The temporal finds its end in the eternal, the human in the divine and not vice versa.

c. The theory does not fit the facts. It is impossible to subordinate all that is found in creation to this end, and to explain all in relation to human happiness. This is perfectly evident from the consideration of all the sufferings that are found in the world.

2. The Declarative Glory of God

The Church of Jesus Christ found the true end of creation, not in anything outside of God but in God himself, more particularly in the external manifestation of his inherent excellency. This does not mean that God's receiving glory from others is the final end. The receiving of glory through the praises of his moral creatures, is an end included in the supreme end, but it is not itself that end. God did not create first of all to receive glory, but to make his glory extant and manifest. The glorious perfections of God are manifested in his entire creation; and this manifestation is not intended as an empty show, a mere exhibition to be admired by the creatures, but also aims at promoting their welfare and perfect happiness. Moreover, it seeks to attune their hearts to the

praises of the Creator, and to illicit from their souls the expression of their greatfullness and love and adoration. The supreme end of God in creation, the manifestation of his glory, therefore, includes, as subordinate ends, the happiness and salvation of his creatures, and the reception of praise from grateful and adoring hearts. This doctrine is supported by the following considerations:

1. It is based on the testimony of Scripture, Isaiah 43:7; 60:21; Ezek 36: 21, 22; 39:7 Luke 2:14; Romans 9:17; 11:36; 1 Corinthians 15:28; Eph 1:5,6,9, 12, 14; 3:9, 10; Col 1:16
2. The infinite God would hardly choose any but the highest end in creation, and this end could only be found in himself. If all nations as compared with him, are as a drop in a bucket and as the small dust of the balance, then, surely, his declarative glory is intrinsically of far greater value than the good of his creatures, Isaiah 40:15,16
3. The glory of God is the only end that is consistent with his independence and sovereignty. Everyone is dependent on whomsoever or whatsoever he makes his ultimate end. If God chooses anything in the creature as its final end, this would make him dependent on the creature to that extent.
4. No other end would be sufficiently comprehensive to be the true end of all God's ways and works in creation.

Berkhof p 135

Summary of Principles set out in this paper

1. The material universe is not eternal. It should be observed that the Genesis account concludes that the world did not have a beginning in time, but with time i.e. time began simultaneously with the world and on either side of the world's period of existence is the eternal abyss.
2. The material earth was given a definite beginning by God. "By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God". Hebrews 11:3
3. There was no compelling force which coerced God into any of his acts of creation. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (by a free act)
4. The world is not the same as God himself. While he is immanent in the world, yet he is distinct from it. He remains the self existent One who inhabits eternity Eph 4:6

Finally, the following four principles must be held tenaciously by Christians.

1. God was the one and only Creator of the world.
2. The world had a beginning, coeval with time.
3. There was a succession of free creative acts of God.
4. Man was the result of a special creative act and was ordained overlord of the other living beings.

Added Note:

Other Spiritual Beings

Before the creation of the visible world there already existed a number of spiritual beings, whom God appointed to be intermediary between the Holy Trinity and the world of men (they are called in Scripture "ministering spirits"). It is clearly stated that they were created by God and were not coexistent with him. We encounter at least three different orders -- archangels cherubim and seraphim, and angels.

There are also described malevolent spiritual beings. The Scripture speaks of them, too, as created. Of them, the chief, Satan, is also to be as described as created. There are, admittedly philosophical difficulties arising from this conception of a created being embodying within himself the principles of evil. Scripture gives us little information beyond warnings that he is now malignantly hostile to the sacred Trinity, though this was not always so, and is continually active in the affairs of men.

T C Hammond, In Understanding be Men p 61