

St. Patrick School of Discipleship
Doctrine of Creation

Westminster Confession of Faith **CHAP. IV.** - Of Creation.

1. It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good.

2. After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it: and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.

The amount of detail we could talk about surrounding the subject of creation is vast. Therefore, I would like to focus our discussion of creation around two modern questions: How are we here?/ Why are we here?

I. How are we here?

A. Ex-nihilo. The central tenants of Christian theology is that God created the earth ex nihilo- meaning God created the world from nothing. In other words, there was no preexisting world that He simply formed. The world as we know it didn't exist simultaneously with God but is the creation of God. In Eastern religions the creation did exist simultaneously with God. In fact, God is indistinguishable from the creation. Man is part of the great circle of life attempting to escape an existence he never can. This worldview rather than producing hope, produces apathy or despair.

B. Science/Creation Debate

Today, we can't talk about the "how" of our existence very long without encountering the question of science/evolution. Many believe that the discoveries of science have made the Genesis account of creation untenable. "Science has proven that the earth is older than the Genesis account seems to indicate." This has had the effect of casting skepticism and doubt upon the Bible's reliability. Many people suppose they have to either choose between one or the other; blind faith in the Bible or acceptance of the facts of science. I hope to demonstrate that an "either/or" position cannot explain the world as we know it and is by nature reductionist. John Calvin said long ago, "*God has two books, the book of his word and the book of his world and the two shall never contradict. If there is an apparent contradiction you have either misunderstood his word or his world.*") So obviously reductionist

tendencies exist on both sides of the debate. The following article by Thomas Nagel demonstrates that scientific reductionism is beginning to too lose popularity among intellectuals.

“I agree with Dawkins that the issue of design versus purely physical causation is a scientific question. He is correct to dismiss Stephen Jay Gould's position that science and religion are "non-overlapping magisteria." The conflict is real. But although I am as much of an outsider to religion as he is, I believe it is much more difficult to settle the question than he thinks. I also suspect there are other possibilities besides these two that have not even been thought of yet. The fear of religion leads too many scientifically minded atheists to cling to a defensive, world-flattening reductionism. Dawkins, like many of his contemporaries, is hobbled by the assumption that the only alternative to religion is to insist that the ultimate explanation of everything must lie in particle physics, string theory, or whatever purely extensional laws govern the elements of which the material world is composed.

This reductionist dream is nourished by the extraordinary success of the physical sciences in our time, not least in their recent application to the understanding of life through molecular biology. It is natural to try to take any successful intellectual method as far as it will go. Yet the impulse to find an explanation of everything in physics has over the last fifty years gotten out of control. The concepts of physical science provide a very special, and partial, description of the world that experience reveals to us. It is the world with all subjective consciousness, sensory appearances, thought, value, purpose, and will left out. What remains is the mathematically describable order of things and events in space and time.

That conceptual purification launched the extraordinary development of physics and chemistry that has taken place since the seventeenth century. But reductive physicalism turns this description into an exclusive ontology. The reductionist project usually tries to reclaim some of the originally excluded aspects of the world, by analyzing them in physical--that is, behavioral or neurophysiological--terms; but it denies reality to what cannot be so reduced. I believe the project is doomed--that conscious experience, thought, value, and so forth are not illusions, even though they cannot be identified with physical facts.¹

Nagel is saying that it is wrong to insist that the ultimate explanation of everything must rest upon scientific verification. For example, is it necessary to prove that the reason we believe genocide is wrong is due to the neurochemistry hardwired into our brains? Is there another reason we intuitively know that genocide is wrong? Physical science alone cannot do justice to reality as we experience it.² We therefore, have to say we are dependent upon some form of outside revelation about the origin, meaning and purpose of life. Which revelation? That's another day.

C. What difference does it make?

If reductionist evolutionary biology is right the implications are shocking. If there is no God and no future life and we are the sum totals of the variety of cells composing our bodies then why not have several wives, do acid, and practice unbridled consumption. Someone might answer that such things can be hazardous to one's health. Yeah and you might be a "Mr. Clean moral machine" and still succumb to early cancer or an accident? Personal well being is not a sufficient ground for morality.

¹ Thomas Nagel, The Fear of Religion; The New Republic; October 23, 2006

² Timothy Keller, The Reason for God; Thoughts and article borrowed from.

Someone might answer that you should refrain from certain things for the common good of mankind. (In evolutionary biology, “Give your noble cells upper hand”). Better answer, but what about all those others who decide to cheat (give their base heredity upper hand)? What happens when their cheating harms you or yours? In a world where it is natural for the strong to prey upon the weak then why be infuriated at any form of injustice? We know better. We demand justice because somewhere inside we have a concept of ultimate justice. Looking to biology to answer the ultimate questions simply cannot produce the kind of moral society that we can tolerate.

On the other hand what about Biblical reductionism; not allowing the light of nature to inform our understanding of Scripture? Put another way, not allowing the world to critique or enlighten our understanding of Scripture and therefore imposing either an incomplete or worse an erroneous view of reality upon the world. Well, you might guess the outcome of such Biblical reductionism. In the arena of the life sciences it can impede progress. Copernicus is a classic historical example of this tendency. In the social sciences Biblical reductionism can blind people to what the data is telling us which can lead to crimes against humanity in the name of God. Extreme cases include the refusal to receive medical attention based upon an erroneous interpretation of the Bible. The truth is, social science informs our reading of the Bible. Much social science is wrong-headed but many people’s interpretation of the Bible is too. The interaction between the Word and the World is not always clear-cut but the important point is that we need both. (See Addendum-Creation or Science?)

II. Why are we here?

A. Case from Creation. “And all very good”

In Genesis 1 after each act of creation you read the refrain, “*And God saw that it was good.*” The point is that God’s creation itself is good--Work, play, art, dance, engineering, marriage, singleness, sex, wine, cigars and a good conversation with a friend. And into this creation God placed mankind saying, “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.*” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.*” Genesis 1:26-28 (Known in theology as the Creation or Cultural Mandate) In other words, the creation itself is good and one of the central reasons we are here is to exercise dominion over the earth-to enjoy it and make it better.

B. A Problem.

If God created it all good why are so many parts of it so bad? That’s the second part of the story—the Fall. What happened? If God is good, why is there evil? If God is good why doesn’t He end it? He must be non-existent, weak, aloof, or not good. There is no easy explanation for the existence of evil. Here again you have different worldviews/religions giving different answers to the question of evil. Eastern

religions teach that evil and good coexist together for eternity. The goal of Eastern religion is to transcend to a spiritual plane where evil and suffering begin to lose their effect. On the other hand, Christianity teaches that evil is an alien invasion (Genesis 3) that will one day end. Oppression, suffering and death aren't the way things are supposed to be. You should rage against evil but in a way that you don't become evil or hopeless. The only way to do that is to see the One who suffered for you and defeated death for you. Christianity is the only religion that says God suffered and died; that He took the world's evil upon Himself and that He defeated its power. One of the ways that evil exerts its power over us is to suggest that real evil is "out there" rather than "in here" (within our own hearts). If Satan can convince you to declare "bad" what God has pronounced "good", you are boxing in his corner and don't even know it. Evil is the condition of our hearts that takes the good creation and makes it bad. This tendency, more than anything else, robs you of the joy of being human.

*"Essentially Gnostic thinking sets the pernicious trap of making spirituality more spiritual than it is, of driving a wedge between being human and being spiritual. Perceiving spirituality as something separate from the physical will lead headlong into the death trap of always having to validate your faith by another or a newer spiritual experience, or by a new and more concentrated effort. This effectively removes the "rest from striving" that should be ours based upon the truth of justification by faith alone. It robs us of our humanity and makes spirituality completely esoteric and of little practical good on the earth. It is also my contention that it makes "ghosts" instead of real people. It creates an insipid spirituality that sees no connection between dirt under the fingernails, hearty laughter, an evening with Mozart and Merlot-and the death and resurrection of Christ. I believe it was the C. F. Allison who said, "Jesus was crucified between two thieves and likewise the Gospel is always crucified between two thieves, on one side, the thief of legalism and on the other the thief of mysticism. Legalism says I must do the good and abstain from the bad in order to earn the favor of God. Mysticism says I must experience in order to earn the favor of God. Both thieves essentially drive a wedge between my humanity and the enjoyment of the favor of God. The thief of legalism does this by suggesting that human pleasure is a bad thing. So I'm stuck between either denying a significant part of my humanness in order to earn the favor of God or denying God in order to be completely human. The thief of mysticism does something very similar in that it makes me perpetually unhappy and restless with the mundane. I most always work to escape the normal in order to get to the spiritual. Christianity asserts that experience is valid but it's never experience minus life, its experience intertwined in the very fabric of life-birth, death, diapers, dinner, wickedness and worship."*³

We are here to be human. The creation mandate has never been revoked. We are here to multiply, create and cultivate. The earth beckons. Get on with it! (See Andy Crouch's great recent book "Culture Making-Recovering our Creative Calling")

C. Image of God. Gen. 1:26 "And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

³ Down to Earth, Short essay by Rev. Shane Sunn; attainable at www.saintpatrick.pc.org

“Christianity, alone among the world’s faiths, teaches that God is triune. The doctrine of the Trinity is that God is one being who exists eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity means that God is, in essence, relational.”⁴

Theologians distinguish between God’s communicable and His incommunicable attributes. His omniscience is one of His incommunicable attributes. Love is one of his communicable attributes. The reason we love is because we are created in the image of God. Evolutionary biology says the reason we love is because of a chemical reaction in our brain. Eastern religions believe that individual personality is an illusion, and therefore love is, too. What kind of value is that?

“If there is not God, then everything in and about us is the product of blind impersonal forces. The experience of love may feel significant, but evolutionary naturalists tell us that it is merely a biochemical state in the brain. But what if there is a God? Does love fare any better? It depends on who you think God is?”⁵

The creation of man is not an expression of the need of God but of the free outflow of His love.

“Why would a God like this create a world of beings like us? On the basis of Biblical passages such as John 17:20-24, Jonathan Edwards reasoned it out. Historian George Marsden summarizes Edwards’s idea: Why would such an infinitely good, perfect, and eternal being create?...Here Edwards drew on the Christian Trinitarian conception of God as essentially interpersonal.... The ultimate reason that God creates, said Edwards, is not to remedy some lack in God, but to extend that perfect internal communication of the triune God’s goodness and love.... God’s joy and happiness and delight in divine perfections is expressed externally by communicating that happiness and delight to created beings.... The universe is explosion of God’s glory. Perfect goodness, beauty, and love radiate from God and draw creatures to ever increasingly share in the Godhead’s joy and delight.... The ultimate end of creation, then, is union in love between God and loving creatures.⁸ God did not create us to get the cosmic, infinite joy of mutual love and glorification, but to share it. We were made to join in the dance. If we will center our lives on him, serving him not out of self-interest, but just for the sake of who he is, for the sake of his beauty and glory, we will enter the dance and share in the joy and love he lives in.”⁶

This world was not created by a God who is only an individual, nor is it the emanation of an impersonal force. It is not the product of power struggles between personal deities nor of random, violent, accidental natural forces. Christians reject these other creation accounts, which refuse to give love primacy. We believe the world was made by a God who is a community of persons who have loved each other for all eternity. You were made for mutually self-giving, other-directed love. Self-centeredness destroys the fabric of what God has made.⁷

⁴ Timothy Keller, *Ibid.* p. 214

⁵ Timothy Keller, *Ibid.* p. 216

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 217

Monotheists have a difficult time explaining how their god is not selfish. What happens when a parent looks to their child for love? It has a crippling effect of the child. If we were created by a God who needed our love; we are not free to frolic in our relationship with God.

Summary: You are created by a personal God who loves you. You are created in His image and are here to receive His love and to share it with others. And although His image in us is tarnished and the world we live in is broken, the world and His image in us is being restored through the person of His Son. Consequently, we can live differently. We can be human and subdue the earth looking to the ultimate hope; the restoration of all things.