

## **Views from the Pews – The two aspects of creation theology**

There are two interlocking aspects of creation theology, concerning dependence versus origins, and the difference is important. One concerns the total and ongoing dependence of all life upon God; the other asks questions about origins.

(1) The historic (Biblical) creationist tradition is far older and more fundamental of the two. For the Hebrews, all discussions of creation concerned how God established a universe designed from the beginning to be a home for human life, and capable of providing everything they needed. Their faith in Yahweh (“the God who creates continuously”) was confirmed by their experience of the Exodus, understood as proof that the God of Abraham was stronger than the gods of their neighbours.

They believed that the only reason that the universe exists is that God delights in it for itself and positively wants it to exist - and that if God were ever to cease upholding it, there would be nothing. They wanted to know about what things mean, not about where they came from. They were confident that human reason is somehow an image of that same lawfulness that has always governed the rest of the world.

(2) The idea of creation out of nothing appeared only about 200 years BCE. None of the great prophets and wisdom writers of the Old Testament were aware of it, but it became very influential in the Hellenistic world of the New Testament. Scientists have long tried to relate the Priestly creation story in Genesis 1 to contemporary scientific cosmology, which sees the origin of the universe in the so-called “Big Bang”, but that is not the point of the Priestly story.

During the course of history the balance between the two interlocking aspects of creation theology, concerning dependence versus origins, became lost. By at least the end of the eighteenth century, and certainly by Darwin’s time, Christian creation theology was emphasising the idea of an original act, the beginning of life, much more than the older idea of a continuing process of upholding the ongoing conditions for life. That distortion of the Biblical insight caused great problems for Darwin, and eventually it helped to undermine his faith, as it still does that of many young people brought up in Christian homes. That disconnect shows why we need to take both theology and science seriously, and study both on their own terms.

*Kim King*