



**TRUE HORIZON**  
EMPOWERING THINKING CHRISTIANS TO ENGAGE THE WORLD

***Common Ground On Creation***

***Keeping The Focus on That God Created and Not When***

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## **COMMON GROUND ON CREATION**

Christian theism offers answers to life's most profound questions that stand in stark contrast to the anti-theistic alternatives presented by competing worldviews. Unfortunately, we in the Christian community spend a lot of time challenging one another about internal issues, and not enough time talking about the simple fact that the evidence for God's existence and involvement in the world is overwhelming. We can unify around a shared purpose to defend Christianity by understanding that Scripture and science complement one another in amazing ways on the topic of the creation.

### **Beginnings Need Beginners**

The first salient issue regarding the creation is supported by a stunning example of the way in which both general revelation (Nature) and special revelation (Scripture) reinforce one another regarding the pre-existence and transcendence of the Creator. Our approach to this issue improves if we begin not with Genesis 1, but with John's Gospel. There, the apostle makes the claim that the divine logos existed "in the beginning" with God and as God and who became incarnate in Jesus Christ. The logos concept encompasses rationality, intellect, and the attempt to comprehend God's mind. This is consistent with the wisdom that "was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before



the world began” (*Proverbs 8:23*), and offers us a new way to consider God’s being “before all things” (*Colossians 1:17*).

Because these Scriptural references place God’s existence “before” the universe He created, it is theologically correct to say that God pre-existed all matter, energy, space, and time. He cannot be a part of what He created. He is separate from it. This is the definition of transcendence.

Science confirms this concept of a transcendent cause for the universe by acknowledging a simple implication of the laws of thermodynamics. The First Law holds that energy there is only a fixed amount of energy available in the universe. The Second Law states that the universe is constantly using that energy. Like the gas tank in your car, a fixed amount of energy being continuously used means there must have been a point when the tank was filled. In other words, these two laws of nature point to an astounding conclusion – that the universe cannot have been going on forever. It must have had a beginning.

If the universe must have had a beginning, simple logic tells the scientist that it must also have had a Beginner. Things that begin to exist cannot cause themselves to come into existence. Science is the attempt to identify and understand causes and effects. The specific case of the beginning of the universe is no different. Both scientific



and theological orthodoxy imply that the Cause of the universe must have been in place prior to, and separate from, the universe itself.

In other words, science and the Bible tell the same story.

## **From Nothing, Everything**

Genesis 1 offers the clearest statement of the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* – that God brought the universe into existence out of nothing. This doctrine stems from the first verse of Scripture, “In the beginning God created (*bara*) the heavens and the earth (*shamayim erets*).” Though there are other Hebrew words that can be used to describe God’s making things, God pre-existed time and as such must also be self-consistent and separate from the creation. This is also the definition of transcendence.

Moses’ use of the Hebrew *bara* to describe the first creative act means that God created something brand new. The phrase *shamayim erets*, which has been translated “the heavens and the earth,” was the Hebrew way to describe all that exists. Taken in tandem, this entails God creating the entire universe out of nothing.

This concept is not unique to the Genesis creation account. In Job (38:4), Isaiah (45:7, 12), Colossians (1:16), and several other places,



Scripture talks of a universe “...formed by God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible...” (*Hebrews 11:3*).

Science also offers evidence that the universe we see today came into existence at a point that defies conventional understanding. Several cosmological theories, including *General Relativity Theory*, along with the laws of physics, have been verified back to an infinitesimally tiny moment after the creation event – a point when all matter, energy, time and space shared a common origin.

Because the scientific evidence for this beginning point is so strong, naturalistic scientists since Einstein have done their best to avoid it. The length to which some will go to deny the implications of their own evidence is literally infinite, but the theistic implications of this are perfectly consistent with Scripture’s creation *ex nihilo*. Christians have no reason to avoid these scientific theories. Indeed, we should embrace them as further proof of the correlation between both forms of God’s revelation to us.

## **In His Image**

Closely tied to God’s transcendent creation *ex nihilo* is the more specific issue of the creation of life in general and of humanity in particular. Here again, the first chapter of Genesis provides the foundation of the doctrine of the creation of man in God’s image – the



*imago dei*. The scientific evidence for the reality of a beginning of all matter, energy, space, and time is strong.

The Bible wastes no time establishing the fact that “...God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him...” Just prior to this, Genesis 1:24-25 uses the Hebrew term “soulsh” (*nephesh*) to describe the advanced animals – those that display traits like mind, will and emotion. But in the creation of man, God grants him a faculty that exceeds the “soulshness” of the animals – the ability to understand, seek and relate to the Creator himself. This is the *imago dei*.

Though this is a rich concept, philosopher Ken Samples contends that it encompasses the uniquely human capacities of moral awareness, creativity, thirst for knowledge, and appreciation of beauty. These aspects of our common humanity set us apart from all of nature in that we contain the ability to approach God in spirit and in truth.<sup>1</sup>

It would be overreaching to say that science offers direct confirmation of the *imago dei*, but there is scientific support for the existence of the human soul and mind. Astounding documented evidence from near death experiences is consistent with the reality of the human soul, while mathematicians and physicists have shown that the physical nature of the human brain cannot account for the functions we

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Samples, “Just Another Animal?” Connections, Quarter 2: 2006, 6-7.



associate with the human mind. In other words, contrary to what atheistic science claims, your mind cannot just be a “computer made of meat.”<sup>2</sup>

Our ability to engage in abstract thought and judge the truthfulness of propositions sets human intellect apart from some purely mechanical ability to process information. This is perfectly consistent with the concept of the *imago dei*.

### **Keeping the Big Picture**

*Intellect can create  
computers ... computers  
cannot create intellect.*

A detailed analysis of Genesis 1:1-2 has led theologians to make the case that the entire universe originated in a “formless and void” (*tohu wabohu*) state of chaos that was in place prior to the beginning of the Genesis narrative. This phrasing, present in only two other places in the Bible (*Jeremiah 4:23, Isaiah 34:11*), implies the notion of judgment. The initial presence of darkness and the sea, both of which are signs of imperfection in the Hebrew, stand in sharp contrast to the

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen M. Barr, *Modern Physics and Ancient Faith* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 195, 211-215.



much anticipated “new heaven and new earth” of Revelation 21, which contains neither sea nor night.<sup>3</sup>

On this view, Genesis 1 is an account of God’s preparing the universe for the saving work he began at the creation and will complete it with the abolishment of evil in the new heaven and earth.

The pinnacle of God’s creative work comes on day six with the introduction of man, through whom He initiates the establishment of his kingdom on earth. Thereafter, the Bible records the history of God’s actions that lead to the future defeat of evil. God’s choice to create man to be a part of His own glorification in this cause makes humanity the primary participant in the creation’s purpose and the central reason for the existence of entire universe. But is there any scientific evidence to support such an idea?

More than you can imagine.

Even atheistic cosmologists recognize what has been called the *Anthropic Principle* – the idea that the universe seems to be designed specifically to support conscious human life. Nature displays hundreds of distinct laws, forces, and unique relationships between them that are each specifically fine-tuned to allow life to exist. If any one of these

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Waltke, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Outreach Incorporated, 2000), 7-11.





were not exactly as they are, no life – let alone human life – could be possible anywhere in the universe.

The level of design that has prompted scientists to formulate these “anthropic” explanations fully supports the Scriptural idea that the makeup of the creation reflects the remarkable level of care that the Creator infused into it to serve his eternal purposes.

*... the universe seems to be designed specifically  
to support conscious human life*

This is what we should keep in mind. Far too often we seem to get overwhelmed in an internal debate about when God created the universe instead of focusing on the fact that He did and why. These are the issues that shape our worldview and bring it into sharp contrast with the naturalistic alternative that is having so much impact in our culture – and so much success at capturing our young people. The remarkable coherence of the Biblical creation model with modern science makes Christianity a clearly superior alternative and the most viable explanation for the world as we find it. That is some ground we can all stand on together.

