

Evolution, Creation and the Hidden Cause

by Fr. Stephen Freeman

Recent pop culture presented a debate between a scientist and a fundamentalist Christian over evolution and creation. The Christian, a Biblical literalist, holds to the idea of a “young creation,” a universe that is roughly 6,000 years old – this – based on calculating from the Biblical record. It is the most extreme form of Biblical literalism – one in which the appearances of the universe to be much older must be themselves understood as “effects” of how God created the world. God created a universe that only *looks* 14 billion years old.

There is a strong strain within some Orthodox circles that is deeply skeptical of evolutionary theories. Any account of the world that dismisses the existence of God, or seeks to disregard God as Creator, feels like an attack on the most basic tenets of the faith. Thus, it is not unusual to see sympathy for anti-evolutionist efforts.

There are deep theological flaws in all of this – both in the anti-evolutionist Christian positions and in the ill-informed attempts by scientists to undermine the Christian Scriptures.

A Tutorial on Creation

Classical Christianity holds that God created the universe from nothing. The universe had a beginning – it has not always existed. Its existence is not necessary. The fathers are quite clear that all things that are not God Himself are created: space, time, matter, energy, all beings, etc.

The Biblical account of creation portrays God speaking all things into existence with the words: “Let there be light!”

And now we begin to engage in theological reflection. What does it mean to say that God created? How did He create? How did God *cause* the universe? It is at these questions that theological reflection enters into silence. For the nature and work of God’s causation cannot be known. They are not objects or works within the universe that can be observed and studied. We can see the effects of causation, but not causation itself. In the language of Orthodox theology we may say that God *causelessly causes*.

It is the teaching of the Church that God cannot be known. He is utterly transcendent, beyond observation and all knowing. It is also the teaching of the Church that the God-Who-Cannot-Be-Known made Himself known in the God-Man, Jesus Christ. What we know of God, we know through Christ.

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*. (Joh 1:18 NKJ)

But saying that Christ has made God known, is not the same thing as saying that Christ has now brought the nature of God’s causation into the world of phenomena. The God who cannot be known remains hidden, except as He chooses to reveal Himself in Christ.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

This renders the creative work of God opaque to His creation. We may see its effects but cannot pass beyond those effects to gaze at the cause, for the Christian teaching is that God Himself is the Cause.

An early Soviet cosmonaut famously announced from orbit that he did not see God. Nor will any work or effort of science. It would be perfectly consistent for human science to study and research, theorize and “prove,” and do so without a necessity of mentioning God. Perhaps unique within the opaque universe is the simple fact of its *beginning*.

That the universe has a beginning is perhaps the greatest “discovery” of modern science. And this was achieved by fairly simple observation. Prior to the 1920’s, it was generally accepted that the universe was static and had “always” existed. The universe was the definition of “what is.” But through the work of Edwin Hubbell and other physicists, it was established that the

universe is not static – it is moving – and it is moving in all directions – expanding. The simple arithmetic of this movement is that the universe was moving from a single point, a beginning. And again by simple math, that single point can be calculated at roughly 14 billion years in the past.

This was deeply problematic for some. Here was straight, clear, observable evidence of a beginning. And, as work has continued in physics, a beginning from nothing! There have been many efforts to posit models other than “universe from nothing,” but they remain (and will remain) within the realm of pure theory.

But Christians cannot point to a point of origin as evidence of the Cause, only as evidence of an origin. At that point, we must stand shoulder to shoulder with those who do not believe and simply wonder. For it is in our wonder that we encounter Jesus to whom the Apostles bare witness that He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

We meet the Cause within history itself and only know about the Cause because He Himself has told us. We report the story of His resurrection, and His continual presence among us, but never in such a way that He becomes a mere cause, an inert effect with which we may convince those who do not see. God will not be argued.

There are many who want a God who will be argued, a God who will take His place on the playing field of human debate. God as a cause among the causes becomes useful for the human project (whatever we imagine it to be). But ultimately such a God is no God at all, just a god surrounded by the many gods, not the One, but one of many.

For the literalists, God is the cause of the Bible and the Bible is the great effect by which all causes may be explained. But even here they err, making of the Bible what the Church never received. The Word became flesh (not paper). And the Word is to Scripture what He is to the universe. Even in the Scriptures He remains hidden, the Causeless Cause. Documents, stories, poems, legends and tales, histories, doctrinally-shaped accounts, letters and apocalypse, all revealing their very human hands, and yet His word.

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. (Joh 5:39 NKJ)

And they testify much like the Big Bang. We stand even at the edge of the Scriptures and wonder.

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. (1Co 2:14 NKJ)

And this is the true character of theology. We know the unknowable God. This both makes us shout from the rooftops and remain mute. For we proclaim the Causeless Cause, who has come among us. And because we know Him we see Him and proclaim Him. But you cannot see Him until you know Him. The universe and creation reads like a parable.

And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. (Mat 13:10-13 NKJ)

From Blog, *Glory to God for All Things*, written and maintained by Fr. Stephen Freeman.