**Who Needs Theology?**

**Class #8**

**Doctrine of Creation**

Conflicted - Hymns: “This World is not my Home” vs “This is my Father’s World”!?

**Orthodox Christian Beliefs About Creation:**

1. God is the source of all creation.

-First line in the *Apostles* and *Nicene* Creeds - “Creator of Heaven and Earth”

-First line of the first book in the Bible (Gen. 1:1):

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

-God is the source of all that there is.

-God created out of nothing *ex nihilo* (not out of pre-existing matter or out of himself)

(One of the most basic and universal Christian beliefs)

-Every person in the Trinity of God was involved in creation.

-Gen. 1:26 - “Let ‘us’”.

-Gen. 1:2 – “The Spirit of God hovering over the waters.”

-John 1:1 – “Through (the Word) all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”

-Heb. 1:2 – God made the universe *through* his Son.

\*Read Acts 17:24-25

1. God’s creation is real and good.

-God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. (Gen. 1:31).

1. All of God’s creation is continually dependent on him.

-All of creation is dependent on him.

-The Triune God is the life source and sustainer of his creation.

-John 1:4 – “In him was life”

-Acts 17:28 – “In him we live and move and have our being.”

4. God creates in freedom and with purpose.

In Freedom – God’s greatness (he can create however he wants).

With Purpose – God’s goodness (he didn’t create flippantly, but with reason).

\*Why did God create?

-Answers given: Enjoyment; to glorify himself; out of love; to display his goodness.

-But God did not *need* to create nor does God *need* his creation.

-God was not lonely.

-Panentheism (creation/creator do not need each other).

1. Creation has fallen under a curse and needs supernatural healing.

-If God made everything then why are things bad?

\*Read Rom. 8:18-24.

\*Read Gen. 3.

\*Read Matt. 5:21-30 (We have fallen in totality)

-If God created everything out of nothing, where does evil come from?

Augustine

-Evil is not something, but the absence of good.

-Greater and lesser goods (evil).

“God did not create evil even though he created everything, because evil is not a thing. God did create the possibility of evil. He created a universe in which evil could happen.”

**Heretical Beliefs About Creation:**

1. Dualism

-A belief in two *eternally* existing and *equally* powerful opposite realities.

-Satan is a fallen creature not equal with God...

-i.e., Manichean (a form of Gnosticism) - spirit good / matter evil

-Folk Christianity (Spiritual ‘inner’ life is what really matters).

-i.e., \*Ying-yang (show picture)

1. Monism

-All reality is one substance.

-Pantheism: identification of creation with the divine being (Mother Nature)

-New Age Movement

-Everything is ultimately spirit (matter is illusion)

-Rom. 1:25

1. Naturalism

-Matter is all that there is.

-Secular enlightenment science.

-Secular humanism – human species as nature’s highest product with nothing higher.

-Mostly atheistic, although could be deistic.

Carl Sagan – Opened his TV series *Cosmos* saying:

“The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be”.

\*Go over heresy graph - (overemphasizing one side at the expense of the other).

**Different Orthodox Christian Positions on Origins**

1. Young earth creationism

-A literal reading of Genesis 1-3.

-i.e., Day = 24 hours / literal Adam and Eve and a talking snake.

-Bishop Ussher (17th century) – God created in 4004 B.C.

-Many will not be that specific, but believe the earth to be 6 to 10 thousand years old

-Appeals to Noah’s Flood to explain age and fossils.

Another view in this category (Philip Gosse – 19th century)

-God created the universe with the appearance of age.

-i.e., God created Adam and Eve as adults.

-The earth was young but God created it to appear old.

1. Theistic evolution

-God was behind the evolutionary process.

-We don’t take the accounts literally.

-They are metaphor, poetry, myth, or saga.

-i.e., Adam represents mankind, etc.

-Modern natural science has a pretty good grasp of explaining the way God did it.

-In fact, without God, evolution would be impossible

1. Progressive creationism

-A “Day/Age” theory.

-i.e., Day = period of time.

-God created in 6 major movements with long periods of time in between each one.

-Difference views on whether Adam and Eve were literal people or representatives.

-Do not believe that humanity evolved, but that God created them fully human.

-Held by Bernard Ramm, John Stott (Francis Schaeffer was open to this view).

-What needs to be realized is that Christians didn’t start debating the literalness of the days of creation with Darwin.

-The church fathers and Reformers didn’t all interpret the Genesis account the same way.

So, what about the Great Tradition?

**Dogma** - Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ… Through him all things were made…. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.

**Opinions**

**Cyprian [A.D. 250]**

The first seven days in the divine arrangement contain seven thousand years. (*Treatises* 11:11).

**Basil the Great [A.D. 370]**

And there was evening and morning, one day.’ Why did he say ‘one’ and not ‘first’? He said ‘one’ because he was defining the measure of day and night, since twenty-four hours fill up the interval of one day. (*The Six Days Work* 1:1–2).

**Augustine [A.D. 419]**

For in these days of creation the morning and evening are counted until, on the sixth day, all things which God made were finished. On the seventh the rest of God was mysteriously and sublimely indicated. What kind of days these were is extremely difficult or perhaps impossible for us to conceive! (*The City of God* 11:6).

\**Three (Four) Views on Creation*

-Christians from all these positions take the Bible seriously.

-The question is not about the authority of the Bible, but how you interpret it and about what literary genre you believe the first 3 chapters of Genesis represent.

-In the same way, end time’s beliefs have a lot to do with how you interpret books like Revelation, not whether you think Revelation is divinely inspired.

-i.e. Literal or figurative debate?

Rev. 20:2 *He seized* ***the dragon****—that* ***old serpent****, who is the devil, Satan—and bound him* ***in chains*** *for a* ***thousand years****.*

Gen. 3:1 *Now* ***the serpent*** *was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman…*

Psalm 50:10 *For all the animals of the forest are mine, and I own the cattle on a* ***thousand hills.***

**Conclusion**

-We must stand united and engage culture rather than get distracted by judging other Christians because of how many hours we think it took God to put the sun in the sky.

-Especially when many Christians (and their children) are untutored in the important Christian creation beliefs.

-Today it seems like the questions of *when* God created and *how* God created have *unfortunately* overshadowed many of the more important issues surrounding the doctrine of creation.

-I agree with Olson in the irony that a number of conservatives Christians, who hold staunchly to literalism of the Genesis account, also hold a number of wrong (even heretical) views about God’s creation.

-Unbiblical ideas such as the goal of life being to escape this earth.

-Narrow views about simply saving “souls”.

-Gnostic ideas that think matter is evil.

-Dualist ideas about good and evil.

-Poor environmental views (like being good stewards of creation).

-Regardless of where they land on the “how” of origins, Christians believe that:

1. God is the source of all creation.

2. God’s creation is real and good.

3. All of God’s creation is continually dependent on him.

4. God creates in freedom and with purpose.

5. Creation has fallen under a curse and needs supernatural healing.

**Questions**

1. Which hymn title has been more reflective of the way you have viewed the earth and God’s creation: “This World is not my Home” or “This is my Father’s World”?
2. Has anything you’ve heard in this section on creation caused you to rethink your position? (explain)
3. Do you think the “day” issue in Genesis is a scientific or a literary genre debate? (explain).
4. Do you think creation and evolution can be synergized? (why/why not?).
5. Which category do you generally fall into in regards to the *how* of God’s creation: a) Theistic evolution, b) Young earth creationism, or c) Progressive creationism?
6. Do you think Christians should be concerned and should get involved in environmental issues? (why/why not?).
7. Do you agree with Pastor Stef’s observation that many of those who take the “days” in Genesis 1 & 2 literally seem not to take seriously God’s command, in the same chapters, to “take care of the earth?” (why/why not).
8. Which do you think is a more important issue: How long the “days” were or God’s command to take care of the earth? (Why?)