

## God or Science?

Genesis 1:1-5; John 1: 1-3

Question: How do we know God exists? If science and logic can explain everything around us, then where does God come in?

How do we know God exists? If science and logic can explain everything around us, then where does God come in? Here at Crossroads Church, not only can you ask such a question out loud and in the worship service, you can expect some honest and helpful responses. Even the pastor can ask these questions and expect helpful responses from the congregation:

- What do you think about the question of evolution vs. creation?
- How would you frame the question about God and science?
- As a community that professes faith in the God who calls light into being from the void, where do you see Crossroads Church fitting in this debate?

So, how do we know God exists? Well, we don't -- not the way we know most of the known things in our lives. Then, if science and logic explain everything around us, where does God come in?

With the dawning of the Enlightenment and the development of the modern scientific method, the gauntlet was thrown before religion to justify its understanding of *creation*. Religion has been challenged to compete with science in fields of scientific inquiry such as how life developed and how it works.

The debate has been engaged again recently by representatives of both camps – science and religion. Unfortunately, extreme views on both sides have claimed the spotlight, making it seem that they offer the only alternatives. This polarization creates more heat than light. My hope today is to shed some light and to offer some perspective to help us embrace the gifts of science and, at the same time, strengthen our faith.

Francis S. Collins (M.D., Ph.D.) is a physician – a geneticist. He is by all accounts a brilliant scientist who has made landmark discoveries concerning disease genes. He has provided visionary leadership for the Human Genome Project (HGP) and is the director of the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI). Collins is also a devout Christian who came to his faith through a process of rational thought – somewhat like C. S. Lewis. His recent book *The Language of God* represents his effort to merge religion and science.

The November 13th issue of *Time* magazine featured Collins' debate with Richard Dawkins in an issue about God and science. Dawkins is an evolutionary biologist. He serves on the faculty of Oxford University and, like Collins, is clearly a brilliant scientist. He has done groundbreaking work in the field of evolutionary biology. He is also an outspoken atheist, secular humanist, and skeptic who has offered impassioned advocacy for evolution. He has been called, with grudging admiration, "Darwin's Rottweiler."

Dawkins premise is that the existence of God is not required to explain the design of the universe. Collins agreed even though he still believes in God as the designer. There is evidence, according to Collins, that *God could exist*. Both agree that this existence is highly unlikely based on the evidence. Collins says "yes" to the idea of God despite the slim evidence: "there are answers that science isn't able to provide about the natural world." (Paul Hartigan, 11 November, 2006 *Open Source Theology*, online forum)

An assumption that both scientists – Collins and Dawkins – make is that science is neutral and therefore able to weigh all evidence fairly. But this assumption that science is

uniquely situation to assess all truth claims with impartially is not necessarily true. When proponents of science and the scientific method attempt to determine the existence of God, they overstep the capacity of science. They begin doing what they criticize religion for doing -- determining the outcome before the results are in. The very act of eliminating the possibility of God violates the search for truth. It is very much like the act of pre-determining a particular creative design by God, and in fact pre-determining what kind of God might have done the designing, also violates the search for truth.

To return to one of the original questions, “can science and logic explain everything around us?” This is the important and basic question. The scientific approach, with its logical thought process, can lead to a great amount of insight, understanding, and knowledge about life and the universe. But can science and logic explain everything around us? This type of faith in science is almost religious in its fervor and may be too much weight for science to bear. We don’t know what we don’t know and we can’t know that we’re even seeing *everything*. Wise scientists remain open to mystery and to the unexplained – and perhaps unexplainable.

Both Collins and Dawkins agree that there is not a rational and intellectually compelling scientific argument for the existence of God in terms of the design of creation. They agree that the origin and unfolding of life in its balance, complexity, and intricacy can be explained by the natural order. Honestly, I suspect that many people of faith – perhaps many of you reading this – have at least as much faith in science as in religion when it comes to understanding the origins of life. I admit that I find the explanations of astronomy regarding how the universe developed and what’s going on now more satisfying intellectually than the Genesis stories of creation.

The biblical writers were not making a scientific statement in the Genesis account of creation. They presupposed a universe consisting of a flat earth with a domed sky. That’s just the way they understood it and who could blame them back then? *Everyone knew* what the universe looked like and describing its creation was only a means to the point of the story – not the point itself.

When proponents of creation of the design of God -- however God is defined – use that belief as a platform to deny the validity of a working scientific theory such as evolution, then they have obscured the very purpose of the biblical narrative. Let’s take a quick look at the creation story with which the Bible begins. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1 KJV). This whole narrative is a rewriting of the Babylonia creation myth – probably coming into the Jewish meta-narrative during the Babylonian captivity (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE). This ancient myth recounted a cosmic battle between Tiamut, the goddess of chaos and primordial waters, and Marduk her son, the god of sky. Marduk killed Tiamut and sliced her open. From her remains, he formed earth, sea, and sky. The sun, moon, and stars were deities observing that cosmic battle and, in some cases, taking sides.

The Hebrews creation story (Gen. 1) borrowed its sequence of creation from the Babylonian myth. What they changed was the source of that creation – their God. The Creator brought the universe into existence through the creative energy of speech rather than the violence of battle. The heavenly bodies were no longer deities and the culmination of creation became the day of rest -- the Sabbath. The whole point of the Genesis 1 creation story is revealed in its beginning: “God created....”

Christian scripture built on this story in the famous prologue to the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” The Word was the creative power of God who spoke life into existence. Later in that first chapter of John’s

Gospel came the uniquely Christian proposition that the “Word took flesh.” The creative energy of God was embodied and “we have seen it in Jesus.”

Belief in God’s existence and God’s nature and providence results from our choice to believe in God and not as a result of inescapable reason. We choose to believe in the nature of this reality (God). We choose to believe that God has embedded into the fabric of life those values we call love, justice, and peace. More than that, we choose to believe that, somehow, this reality is available to us in a personal way. Author Madeleine L’Engle tell us this story:

Uncle Douglas, who holds some rather unconventional views about God, talks with his niece Vicky about God and the questions about suffering and evil in the world.

One of the biggest facts you have to face, Vicky, is that if there is a God, he’s infinite, and we’re finite, and therefore we can’t ever understand him. ...When I wasn’t much older than you, I decided that God, a kind and loving God, could never be proved. In fact there are, as you’ve been seeing lately, a lot of arguments against him. But there isn’t any point to life without him. Without him we’re just a skin disease on the face of the earth, and I feel too strongly about the human spirit to be able to settle for that. So what I did for a long time was to live life as though I believed in God. And eventually I found out that the *as though* had turned into a reality.

[It’s like a jigsaw puzzle] You look at one piece and it doesn’t seem to be part of a picture. But you put all the pieces together and you see the meaning of it all. ...We jump to conclusions and decide that the one little piece we have in our hand is all there is and that it doesn’t make sense. If the one piece of the puzzle that is this life were all then everything would be horrible and unfair and I wouldn’t want much to do with God, either. But there are all the other pieces, too, the pieces that make up the whole picture. (*Glimpses of Grace*)

Faith is the renewing act of choosing to live each day as though God exists until the *as though* turns into reality. Faith is the recurring process of letting go images of what God is like when we mistake that image for the reality of God. Faith is the ongoing act of embracing new images of God and of living our lives and making our choices guided by these images. We do this all with the knowledge that one day we will grow into new and even more compelling images of God that will guide us into a more mature and dynamic way of living.

Faith is trusting that this process of letting go and also embracing new images not only doesn’t change who and what God is, but that the process actually moves us closer to the Truth, closer to God.