

It is rather frustrating that, in today's culture, to speak of Creation is almost inevitably to be drawn into some rather silly debates about Creationism. That is the really quite recent idea that the world was literally created by God in six days just a few thousand years ago rather than in the ways now expounded by science: a Big Bang and a process of biological evolution over several billion years. I am from a family of scientists who are also Christians, so the idea of an inherent contradiction between science and faith has always seemed to me fairly absurd. The Bible isn't a physics textbook. It is about the *meaning* of the world; it does not set out to explain its material processes.

In fact, when we think about Creation as a theological doctrine, we need to get away from the idea that what we're talking about is simply "how it all began." Creation is more about **how we see the world and ourselves now, in light of a particular understanding of the creator God.**

To trace the history of this, we begin with our short passage from the book of Genesis. Abraham has just rescued his nephew Lot and protected his people from attack by neighbouring kings, so he is given a blessing by the Canaanite priest and king, Melchizedek. This blessing is given in the name of "God Most High, maker of heaven and earth." Remember this is before Moses and the disclosure of the divine name at the burning bush. Even the notion of one supreme god is new and controversial. Most gods at this time were local and not credited with creating the universe. They could also not necessarily be relied upon to help you. Abraham's God El-Shaddai was different. He moved with Abraham and the Hebrew people to the land of Canaan, and was proving his enduring faithfulness to them. Melchizedek, the Canaanite, seems to be recognising this same all-powerful, trustworthy God. So there is something very significant in this invoking of the maker of heaven and earth.

Atheist critics of religion would argue that the idea of a creator god emerged in human history precisely to answer human confusion about the origins of the universe. But, rather predictably, these people don't read the Bible. Because this phrase "maker of heaven and earth" as it is adopted from Canaanite language into the worship of the God of Israel, is not used in the Hebrew Bible to explain the origins of the universe. Rather it's about a particular understanding of *life in the world now*.

One Bible scholar writes, "It is a way of grounding faith in a time of crisis in the deepest reality about which we can speak... [It] becomes an assertion that we are not and need not be self-made. The power of life stands outside us and is given to us." (Bruggeman)

So the doctrine of creation is not fundamentally about origins. It is about understanding the creative and recreative power of God available to us now, in our daily lives. It is about understanding life, and everything around us, as a gift.

This little passage also, therefore, tells us something about priesthood, because Melchizedek is held to be the first representative of priesthood in the Bible. And here I'm not just talking about the individuals who are priests, like me, but the character of priestliness more broadly, what St Paul calls the priesthood in all believers, the priesthood of the Church. Priesthood is about tapping into this wellspring of creation in everyday life. The priestly sacraments we celebrate point to precisely this divine reality in the world now, God's actions of grace among us. As part of his blessing, Melchizedek offers Abraham bread and wine. And of course, that is our primary symbol of God's creative work among us, the Eucharist, the blessing that is the sign and instrument of Jesus' recreative power.

In the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is described as “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” And so all of this Old Testament backstory helps us a great deal in understanding who Jesus is and what he is doing in the gospels. He is the physical presence of the creator God in the world, making visible to us what that creator God always does – bringing light out of darkness, bringing hope out of despair, bringing life out of death. That is what is symbolised in this first sign of John’s Gospel, the miracle of the water turned into wine. It’s not just a clever trick to save the party and make Jesus look good. It is a sign of God’s ongoing creation in the world.

This is why the imagery of the creation stories run through the New Testament and particularly the Fourth Gospel. Like the book of Genesis, John’s Gospel begins with the words, “In the beginning...” John’s resurrection account takes place in a Garden, a new Eden where the risen Jesus is mistaken for the gardener, just as God is the gardener of Eden who walks in the garden in the cool of the day. And there are creation allusions in this story at Cana too. People wonder why Jesus appears to be so rude to his mother, calling her abruptly, “Woman”. It is because here she represents the first woman, Eve. But instead of disobeying the Lord as Eve does, Mary is the one who shows full obedience as she says, “Do whatever he tells you.”

In a moment we will recite the Nicene Creed which has inherited this formula from Melchizedek, an affirmation of faith in the God who is “maker of heaven and earth.” So, remember that we are not just making a statement there about the origins of the universe, much less a rejection of scientific understandings of our world. We are saying that God is the deepest reality within which we ground our lives. We are saying that life is a gift he has given to us, and our help comes from him. We are stating our belief in the recreative power available to us in Jesus Christ, in each and every moment of every day.