



## ORDER: GOD'S, MAN'S AND NATURE'S

### The Doctrine of Creation: A Theological View of Science

Robert C. Bishop  
Wheaton College  
Draft: 1/12/2012

In teaching at an evangelical liberal arts college holding firmly to the inspiration and authority of Scripture, I find most of my students think the biblical doctrine of creation (DoC) is limited to two points: (1) God created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) and (2) God created the world in six days (whatever they think “days” is supposed to mean!). My students are fairly representative of contemporary evangelicals’ understanding of the DoC. This contemporary understanding is problematic, however, because it is much narrower than the full doctrine as it was developed by the Patristic fathers. Given that the DoC is perhaps one of the most helpful pieces of theology for thinking about science, it’s worthwhile recovering it in all its glory. What follows over the next few parts of this blog is a brief tour through the elements of this amazing doctrine.

Two preliminary comments to get started. First, our tendency is to cut up doctrines into chunks like the DoC, the doctrine of providence, the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of eschatology, etc. Nevertheless, we need to realize that this is somewhat artificial on our part as we strive to understand one grand doctrine of God and His activity. All of these doctrines interpenetrate and inform each other as can be seen in what follows (e.g., much of God’s ongoing work of creation is continuous with His providence in creation; likewise, if God hadn’t created, there would be no providence, salvation or sanctification).

Second, all of the elements composing the DoC have been hard fought, won and then lost over and over in the history of Christian thought. If many of the following elements seem surprising or new to you, that’s largely because since the 18<sup>th</sup> century the DoC has suffered significant decline such that contemporary Christians usually only have a very atrophied version of the doctrine in mind when they think about creation, God’s work in creation, and science.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Although not his main theme, James Turner’s masterful history, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America*, Johns Hopkins University Press (1986), reveals much of the DoC’s decline during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## Creator/Creature Distinction

Let's start with the creator/creature distinction, something that is familiar to us and that we recognize as part of the DoC when we think about it. This distinction actually has some important yet often missed implications. For example, the distinction implies that God intends for creation to be something different from rather than similar to Him. God didn't make creation with the same infinite being or nature as Himself. Creation's being distinct from God implies it's to be distinctly itself, literally to become uniquely what God calls it to be in Christ.

Moreover, the creator/creature distinction implies that all of creation is valued—it has the kind of nature and functionality God intended it to have. After all, when He “saw all that he had made and it was very good” (Gen 1:31), God is valuing all of creation. The Hebrew term in Genesis 1 and 2, *tob*, often translated as “good” has a variety of meanings in different contexts including moral goodness and craftsmanship. However, it's commonly used in the OT in the sense of functioning properly. For example, “It is not good [*tob*] for the human [*adam*] to be alone, I shall make him a sustainer beside him” (Gen. 2:18). The man isn't fully functioning without a sustainer appropriate to his created nature. So the repeating refrains of “good” in Genesis 1 and 2 primarily means value as in properly functioning or working as intended, fulfilling assigned purposes. From the beginning, God is telling us that creation does—and will do—what He intends.

Moreover, we see God's valuation of creation especially in Jesus' incarnation: What higher affirmation could there be of the value of the material order than the second person of the Trinity taking on the material nature of creation and inhabiting its order, an order that Jesus Himself established and blessed in the beginning (see below)?

A final implication of the creator/creature distinction is that creation has what theologians call contingent rationality. Creation is contingent in two senses: (1) it is utterly dependent on God such that if Christ ceased sustaining creation it would disappear instantly and (2) God could have made any kind of creation He wanted but chose to make this particular creation. God didn't need or have to create anything. He was under no compulsion or necessity. Rather, being a loving communion of three persons, out of the overflow of that love God brought into existence a particular kind of creation for His glory and for its own sake. Furthermore, creation has its own rationality, its own particular order, structure and functionality, which is at least partially intelligible to us.

The creator/creature distinction has implications for science as well. First, since creation is so valuable to God, its study is a worthwhile human activity. Second, the contingent rationality of the created order is what science seeks to uncover and understand (whether or not scientists realize that both this order and its intelligibility are good gifts from God).

## Ex Nihilo Creation

That creation was made *ex nihilo*—literally out of absolute nothing—is implied by the creator/creature distinction. The Patristic fathers inferred the *ex nihilo* nature of creation from this distinction and various passages like John 1:1-3, 1 Cor 8:6, Col 1:16, Heb 11:3, Rev 4:11 in their struggle with ancient Greek natural philosophy (the latter maintained that matter was eternal). This element of the DoC was not easy to achieve and required the Patristics to “think

away” what was false from the Greek philosophical ideas that so permeated their world and their education.

The theological significance of ex nihilo creation is hard to overestimate. For one thing it protects God’s sovereignty showing us that all things in creation are subject to Him. Moreover, it distinguishes God’s creative activity from all other religious creation stories. There is no pre-existent matter giving rise to divinities as in all the ancient Near East creation accounts. The creation is pictured as originating in covenantal love (Jer 33:25) rather than conflicts among deities. God is never once seen to be struggling to shape recalcitrant matter (a constant theme in other ancient Near East creation accounts).

Another important implication of ex nihilo creation is that there can be no creation out of nothing without purpose. Creation was no accident on God’s part. He has reasons for what He’s doing, one of which is for creation to become what God destines it to be in Christ (see below).

Finally, a creation made out of nothing is particularly fragile! Its tendency is to always fall back into nothing meaning that creation requires God’s constant preserving care. Here, there is a clear connection between God’s creating out of nothing and His general providence sustaining the being and order of creation.

### Sovereignty in Creation

God’s sovereignty in creation is something that is obvious when we think about it. The Bible pictures all of creation as subject to God in contrast to all the ancient creation myths and cosmologies, where divinities are always struggling with each other and with recalcitrant matter. Instead, the Bible pictures God as in control of all things: “See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power and his arm rules for Him” (Is 40:10a), “He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in” (Is 40:22b), and

Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all (1 Chron. 29: 11-12a).

From Genesis 1 to Revelations 22 God is king and ruler over all! One of the most relevant implications of this for thinking about science: God rules over all natural processes! Therefore, anything a scientist says about processes in creation can only be describing something that is sustained by God and subject to His sovereignty.

### God’s Action in Creation Is Mediated

This element of the DoC is more subtle and sophisticated than the previous ones but crucial to understanding how God is at work in creation. What does it mean for God’s action in creation to be mediated? This means that God’s activity in creation is shaped by or takes place through something else. Theologians identify three forms of mediated divine action: divine command, the

involvement of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and a ministerial form through creation itself.<sup>2</sup>

### Divine Command

God's action in creation is mediated through divine command. This form of mediated action is probably the most familiar to us as we see God issuing commands in Genesis 1 and responses to those divine commands by creation. The giving of divine command or word in Genesis 1 and elsewhere indicates plan, order and purpose are at work bringing creation into being and shaping it for its destiny. The creation is neither an emanation from divinity as many Near Eastern accounts would have it, nor ordered by abstract rational or cosmological principles as the Ionian and Pythagorean natural philosophers would have it. Creation exists through the intentions and purposes of God with divine word as a means through which His power, will, wisdom and love are at work in creation.

### God's "Two Hands"

Often forgotten in Christian thinking about creation is the fact that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are intimately involved in creation (Irenaeus famously referred to this as God's "two hands"). For instance, we see Jesus involved in creation in various ways: "For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible..." (Col. 1:16a). "Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made" (Jn. 1:3).

Similarly, the Spirit is also involved in creation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Gen. 1:1-2). "When You send Your Spirit, they are created, and You renew the face of the Earth" (Ps. 104: 30). Biblically the Spirit is always involved where there is life, renewal, creativity and diversity (e.g., in the Psalms, Eze. 47:1-12, 1 Pet. 3:18) as Jesus noted, "The Spirit gives life" (Jn 6:63) and is captured in the Nicene Creed, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son". The Spirit enables creation to fulfill the Father's purposes of consummation in Christ Jesus.

### Ministerial Action

A third form of mediated divine action shows up in Scripture: Some parts of creation are called and empowered to serve as mediators or ministers to other parts of creation, so that creation participates in becoming what God calls it to be. For example, in Genesis 1, "God said, 'Let the earth grow grass, plants...'" (Gen. 1:11) and "God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures...'" (Gen. 1:24). God calls and enables us through the Holy Spirit to minister to others. Similarly, in these verses we see God calling and enabling creation through the Spirit to minister to creation. The great creation psalm, Psalm 104, is filled with examples of creation ministering to creation under divine call, guidance and enabling: trees and mountain crags providing shelter for animals, grass and water providing sustenance and refreshment for plants and animals, cycles of day and night and the seasons for sustaining the livelihoods of plants and animals, lions looking for their food from God by hunting for it, etc. Or think of Jesus' sermon on the mount where He says, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matt 6:26). The diets of birds are quite varied as various species eat seeds, plants, insects, worms and more. Different species deploy

<sup>2</sup>For example, see Colin Gunton's very useful survey, *The Triune Creation: A Historical and Systematic Study*, Eerdmans (1998).

different strategies for finding food, but all of these feeding behaviors are described by Jesus as the Father feeding them—by being active in creation so that creation provides the foods needed by birds (compare with Job 38: 39-41).<sup>3</sup>

The ministerial nature of creation implies that God has endowed creation with the capacities to bring about creation in participation with Jesus and the Spirit. This kind of cooperation fulfilling God's purposes shows up in the first chapter of Genesis:

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of each kind, cattle and crawling things and wild beasts of each kind." And it was so. God made wild beasts of each kind and cattle of every kind and all crawling things on the ground of each kind, and God saw that it was good. (Gen. 1:24-25).

Note that verse 24 has the earth bringing forth living creatures in response to God's call while verse 25 pictures God as making these creatures. Moses isn't schizophrenic here saying that the earth is bringing forth and sustaining creatures then that God is bringing forth and sustaining creatures! Rather, these verses are telling us that God and creation are both at work fulfilling God's purposes in bringing forth and sustaining living creatures.

Genesis 2:4 is the first of eleven occurrences of the Hebrew phrase 'elleh toledot ("This is the account of" or "This is the generation of" or "These are the developments that arise out of") in the book of Genesis. There is some dispute among biblical scholars as to whether these phrases introduce or conclude sections, but ten of the occurrences are related to genealogies. So a first it may seem odd that 'elleh toledot as a literary structuring device would be introduced with reference to the heavens and the Earth. However, if we see the ministerial activity of creation as a form of divine action mediated through creation, then the biblical formula in 2:4 is parallel to the subsequent occurrences, indicating that what follows (or precedes) describes what is generated or develops out of the heavens and the Earth rather than the means or processes by which the heavens and the Earth were generated. Just as in Genesis 1, the text indicates that the creation genuinely brings about the life and diversity while it is also God who brings this about.

The Bible gives us several examples of mediated action where an activity is attributed to one person but carried out through—mediated by—others as means. For example, Genesis 41: 47-49 tells us that during the seven years of bumper crops in Egypt, "Joseph collected" what he land produced and that "Joseph stored" huge quantities of grain. Yet, clearly Joseph did not go around Egypt and do this by himself. Rather, according to his plan and orders, numbers of laborers built storehouses and granaries, gathered up the abundant crops and stored them for the coming famine years. As another example, 1 Chronicles 21:29 tells us that Moses made the tabernacle, but his "making" was mediated through the Israelites giving the materials, craftsmen and skilled laborers creating the individual components, and a large team of people assembling the final product. In this example, notice that Exodus 35 and 36 explicitly state that God gave craftsmen such as Bezalel and Oholiab the wisdom and ability to design and make all the artifacts (which they accomplished through other Israelites, so the pattern of mediated action continues). In other words, the Spirit enabled the craftsmen and skilled laborers to carry out the

---

<sup>3</sup>Here, we have important overlap between God's ongoing work of creating life and His providential sustaining of life.

work they had been called to do with the skills and wisdom they had been given.<sup>4</sup>

As a third example, consider Paul's statement to Christian at Ephesus and other cities in the region: "[Christ] came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near" (Eph. 2:17). This preaching was done by Paul and his traveling companions, so again we see the idea of mediation: Jesus' preaching takes place through Paul and other Christians. Throughout the Scriptures we see a consistent pattern of mediated action, where God works through means to achieve His purposes. We should expect that this pattern of mediated action holds for all God's dealings with creation, salvation and sanctification (see below).

God's mediated action is also crucial to the Christian community's understanding of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. The Bible is God's word given to us, so it is a divine book (2 Tim 3:16). At the same time, God's word was written by human beings through their personalities and historical circumstances, so the Bible is also a human book (2 Pet. 3:15-16). In other words, God wrote the Scriptures through the agency of human beings enabled by the Spirit.

#### God's Ongoing Activity in Creation

These three forms of God's mediated action in creation don't take place only at the origin of creation. They are ongoing expressions of God's involvement in creation.<sup>5</sup> For instance, divine command certainly is present at the beginning of creation ("And God said...") giving structure, order and function to creation. But God's activity mediated through command is also involved in the ongoing sustaining and guiding of creation ("Let there be..." and "Let the earth [seas] bring forth..."). So divine word continues to give structure and order to creation. Indeed, God's command bringing forth creation is the same command that is sustaining and guiding creation:

Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place forever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away. (Ps 148: 5-6)

...long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed...By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire... (2 Pe 3: 5, 7)

Similarly, the activity of Jesus and the Spirit are in the origin as well as the ongoing sustaining and guiding of creation to its destiny in Christ.

God's divine word structures the ongoing development of creation and what God started "in the beginning" God is finishing in Christ through the Spirit. Here are two implications of taking God's Mediated activity in creation seriously. First, Genesis 1 is by no means a picture of a finished,

---

<sup>4</sup>Compare also Deuteronomy 10:3 with Exodus 37:1. Moses made the ark of the covenant but did so through the skill and agency of Bezalel.

<sup>5</sup>Again, there is significant overlap between the DoC and divine providence, here.

completed creation. This text describes the beginning and ongoing nature of God's project of creation (compare with Ps. 104) that is being consummated in Christ. Second, the regularities God established in creation that minister to and provide the capacity for creation to become what God calls it to be are the same regularities that scientists study. From the perspective of the DoC, physicists, chemists, biologists and geologists are studying God's regular activity as it is mediated through command, God's two hands and ministerially through creation.

Various sectors of Christianity conceive of science as offering alternative explanations for God's activity in creation. In contrast, the DoC helps us see that science actually investigates God's activity, both past and ongoing (whether or not scientists realize this). Instead of seeing science as somehow competing with Christianity or the Bible, the DoC enables us to view science as revealing aspects of God's mediated activity in creation which can inspire our praise as surely as the psalmist in Psalm 104 praises God for such mediated activity.

### Personal Involvement of the Trinity

We're used to thinking about how God is personally involved in the lives of His people, but we rarely think about how the Trinity is personally involved in creation.<sup>6</sup> Personal involvement is pictured at the beginning of Scripture: "On the day the LORD God made the earth and heavens..." (Gen. 2:4b). The Hebrew phrase translated as "LORD God" is Yahweh elohim, God's personal name revealed to Moses. So early in the second creation account we have an indication of personal involvement with all aspects of creation, humanity in particular. Moreover, the fact that God's action in creation is mediated through Christ and the Spirit implies God's involvement in creation is intimate and loving. This is pictured beautifully for us in Psalm 139:13: "For you created my inmost parts, wove me in my mother's womb."

In addition to the origin of all things, the Trinity is personally involved in preserving and sustaining creation: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by His powerful word" (Heb 1:3). "...the LORD our God, who gives autumn and spring rains in season, who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest" (Jer 5:24b). As well, God is personally involved in governing and guiding creation to its destiny in Christ: "The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all" (Ps 103:19). "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:20-21). Here Paul indicates that the ultimate destiny of creation is tied to our destiny! Admittedly, it's difficult to understand fully what it means for creation to participate in the Fall, but as Colin Gunton points out that, "in some way or other the created order suffered a primal catastrophe of cosmic proportions, and that human sin – a disrupted relation with the creator – is in some way constitutive of it."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Thinking of God's personal involvement in creation largely went out of fashion in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (see Turner *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America*, Johns Hopkins University Press [1986]).

<sup>7</sup>Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creation: A Historical and Systematic Study*, Eerdmans (1998), p. 172.

## Purpose for Creation

Although we may not have exact details, the Scriptures reveal that God has several purposes for creation. Of course, one of God's purposes is to exhibit His glory: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Rom 1:20). "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands" (Ps. 19:1).

Another of God's purposes is for creation to serve as His temple: "And He built on the heights His sanctuary, like the earth He had founded forever" (Ps. 78:69). "The LORD reigns...Yes, the world stands firm, not to be shaken. Your throne stands firm from of old" (Ps. 93: 1-2). "This is what the LORD says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool'" (Is. 66: 1a). The idea of creation as God's temple and His rule are explicitly linked in Gen. 2:2: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work." In ancient Hebrew culture as in all other ancient Middle East cultures, a god "rests" by occupying the throne of his temple and ruling (an understanding that contrasts sharply with our modern notion of resting from work).<sup>8</sup> So Moses' audience would have immediately understood Gen. 2:2 to be declaring that God was filling His temple and seated on the throne, where all of creation was God's temple!

Another of God's purposes, that we've already seen, is for creation to become uniquely what it is called to be in Christ. For example, God's action in creation accommodates itself to the nature of what He has created. God doesn't say "Be," but "Let there be..." and "Let the earth bring forth..." Moreover, God gives grace to creation to be a reality other than God (as in the creator/created distinction). Finally, God, through the Spirit, graciously enables creation to become itself. God's grace towards creation is much like His graciously enabling you to become uniquely who you are called to be in Christ.

A further purpose of God is to populate creation with life: "It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it" (Is. 45:12). "He did not create [the Earth] to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited" (Is. 45: 18b). And inhabited not just with human life! In Genesis 1 we see that God intended a diversity of life.

And last, but certainly not least, God intends for creation to be an arena for comprehensive redemption—human as well as the rest of creation: "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:20-21). Christians sometimes think about redemption only in terms of saving souls, but God's redemption is for the whole human—body and soul—as well as the entirety of the created order: "which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. (Eph 1:9b-10). "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col 1:19-20). God is working redemption out here and now and everywhere!

---

<sup>8</sup>Temples in ancient Middle East cultures were miniature copies of the world from which their gods ruled.

It's unlikely that God's personal involvement in and purposes for creation are scientifically detectable. After all, scientific methods aren't particularly good at discerning purpose. Nevertheless, the authors of Job, the Psalms and the various New Testament letters had no problems seeing God's activity and purposes in creation. Although those wedded to scientism<sup>9</sup> likely will only think that what is scientifically detectable exists, the DoC affirms otherwise. Whether we can always see it or not, God is as intimately involved in creation now—from quarks, to kingdoms, to the entire cosmos—as at its beginning.

### Creation/Salvation/Sanctification Parallel

Another element of the DoC is that God's action in creation parallels His action in salvation and sanctification. For instance, creation, salvation and sanctification are all mediated by Jesus and the Spirit. When examining the Bible, we see these parallels show up in numerous ways. For example God saves in space and time, and God creates in space and time. Genesis 1-2 largely focuses on one place—Earth. The Hebrew word yom, translated as “day” in Genesis 1 indicates that the original creation was not instantaneous but extended in time. Moreover, compare Genesis 1 with the description of Israel's deliverance from Egypt in Exodus 14: 21-22. In these two accounts, Moses uses the identical language of spirit or wind blowing, of the separation of waters from land among other parallels. The very same elements of the creation account are involved in Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery. For another example, compare Isaiah 40:26, where God creates the stars calling them by name, and Isaiah 43:1, where God redeems His people calling them by name. Historically, the earliest attempt to distinguish God's activity in creation from salvation is found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Gnostics.

God also sanctifies in space and time: “For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose” (Phil 2:13). “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor 5:17). In particular, the Spirit renews and restores in space and time. We see this the Spirit's role in the restoration of Israel in the vision of the valley of bones (Eze 37:1-14). As well we see this in Jesus' resurrection: “...the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead...” (Rom 8:11). “[Jesus] was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit” (Pet 3:18b). In sanctification, the Spirit of Christ works in our lives to bring about growth and change at a pace suited to our nature never moving us faster than our nature can accommodate (though sometimes it feels like He does!). Similarly, in creation the Spirit of Christ works with and through natural processes suited to their nature never moving faster than those processes can accommodate.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup><http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2010/03/1174>

<sup>10</sup>At least in His normal dealings with creation. An important category of miracles are instances where God does things that are outside the nature of creation's processes (e.g., the Spirit's work in Jesus' conception in Mary's womb or Christ's resurrection).

A particularly important parallel among God's action in creation, salvation and sanctification is God's patient action (not that God sits around and waits; rather, God is always at work in patient, intentioned ways). We're used to thinking of God as love (1 Jn 4:8) and that love is patient (1Cor 13:4). And we're so thankful that God patiently worked in our lives and drew us to Himself! But God's patient action isn't limited to salvation alone. Think about God's creating in time and space. If God's relationship to creation is fundamentally one of love, then this means that God is not in a rush. Space and time is an arena for patient action: "For you created my inmost parts, wove me in my mother's womb" (Ps 139:13). Nine months is lots of patient action!

God's patient action in creation is related to His intention for creation to become itself. God loves creation enough to give it the patience and grace to become what it's called to be in Christ and the Spirit enables creation to become what it's called to be. Furthermore, God's patient action in creation is related to His activity in creation being ministerial ("Let the earth bring forth..."). God is active in creation so that it participates in becoming itself under the superintendence of Christ and the Spirit in a time frame suited to the nature He's given it.

### Creation Is Meant to Be Limited

The DoC also teaches us that God intends for creation to be limited. For example, this follows from the creator/creature distinction. Creation is different from God! God is infinite in being but creation is finite in being. God is self-existent but creation is dependent. The finitude of creation is also connected to God's purpose for creation to be itself. God intends for creation to be something other than divine. God is all-powerful while creation is limited in power. God's intention for creation to be limited is also connected to God's creating in time and space. Creation has a beginning! And the limited nature of creation is also connected to God's personal involvement in preserving creation. If creation had infinite being, it wouldn't need God to sustain it and there would be no need for God's patient action in creation.

We see that creation is limited rather than unlimited in the Scriptures. For instance, Genesis 1 pictures creation as in need of divine guidance and shaping. The limited nature of creation also shows up in such powerful passages as Psalm 104:2b: "He stretches out the heavens like a tent." Or in the cycles and seasons of creation: "There is a time for everything...a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot" (Ecc 3:1-2).

The limited nature of creation isn't a bad thing (though American Christians seem to chafe at the idea of limits!). God desires to accomplish His purposes through limited creatures (e.g., the first three kings of Israel). Indeed, God created all finite, limited things and pronounced them good! Most impressively, in the incarnation, God in Christ took on limited, finite human nature conferring the highest imaginable honor on finitude and limits!

The fact that creation has a limited nature is important for scientific inquiry. If creation had infinite being like God, its nature would be unintelligible to our finite minds. There would be no possibility of investigating and understanding creation's processes.

## Creation Has Functional Integrity

The final element of the DoC I'll cover is the functional integrity God has given creation. Creation has the causal capacities to both be itself and to create elements of itself, so creation can accomplish what God intends it to accomplish in Christ. The functional integrity of creation follows from God's purpose that creation be itself (i.e., be something other than Him). It also follows from the ministerial form of divine mediated action. A large part of God's activity in creation is bringing about creation through creation (e.g., Gen. 1:24, Ps. 139:13). Indeed, several of the Church fathers (e.g., Augustine) used creation's functional integrity to argue against creation being a distortion or dilution of divine reality (as in creation isn't some kind of reduced or diluted emanation out of God's being).

However, we have to be careful about creation's functional integrity. Creation's integrity is NOT independent of God. Without God's sustaining it there would be no functional integrity and no creation. Also, as we've seen, Jesus is crucially involved in upholding all things and this includes creation's functional integrity. Moreover, creation's functional integrity in bringing about other elements of creation reflects God's creativity, not some independent creativity—it's a form of God's activity mediated ministerially through creation. And wherever creativity and multiplicity in creation are mentioned in Scripture, the Spirit is crucially involved. Finally, creation's functional integrity serves God's purposes in creation, salvation and sanctification and Jesus and the Spirit are always involved in these purposes.

This element of the DoC perhaps more than any other underwrites science. The study of the regularities involved in creation's development only makes sense in light of creation's functional integrity (this idea played an important role in Scientific Revolution and development of scientific methodologies). Furthermore, creation's functional integrity provides a basis for natural laws and regularities and ensures that there is an order to creation that is intelligible. Moreover, creation's functional integrity is an expression of God's character. He's not capricious! Finally, the fact that God gave creation a particular kind of functional integrity—contingent rationality—implies that we have to investigate creation to discover the particular nature of this ordered functionality.

## Miracles

The DoC leads naturally to considering miracles. Since the Scientific Revolution, it has become customary to think of miracles as violations of natural laws (David Hume's formulation). We can understand miracles of this type as suspensions of creation's functional integrity—i.e., God acting in creation in ways differing from His usual mediated activity. The incarnation and resurrection would be examples.

But before the concept of natural laws was formulated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, another conception of miracles was anything God did leading to awe and wonder (e.g., Augustine). Although, this conception includes God acting apart from creation's functional integrity, it also includes instances of the Spirit's enabling creation's processes to work much more rapidly than their normal rates. An example Augustine used was Matt 8: 14-15. When Jesus touched Peter's sick mother-in-law, she was rapidly and fully healed. The human body has the natural capacity to heal diseases and wounds, but the Spirit enabled those healing capacities to perform these

tasks much more rapidly than is usual.

We don't need to restrict miracles only to suspensions of creation's functional integrity. The DoC allows us to see God's miraculous ways with creation's functional integrity fully involved in such instances as unexpected healings, timely gifts of money or food that avert the closure of an orphanage, or the avoidance of a near accident.

A typical objection to miracles is that if God can intervene in nature in unexpected ways, then the idea of scientific investigation is pointless: We can never know for sure when God might do something that defies the normal order, so the motivation for searching out and understanding regularities drains away. However, the DoC helps us see that this objection is misplaced. The DoC affirms that the regularities we experience are God's normal ways of acting in creation—creation has contingent rationality!—so there is a genuine order to search out and understand.

A last comment on miracles: Sometimes Christians and nonchristians alike fall into thinking that God is only active in creation when there are miraculous violations of natural laws. Otherwise, the natural order carries on without any Divine involvement whatsoever. In contrast, the DoC affirms that this is a false dichotomy. God is as intimately involved in the gravity keeping you glued to this Earth as He was in resurrecting Lazarus from the dead.

## Evolution

To this point I've mostly drawn general connections between the DoC and science, so I'll close with some specific thoughts on evolution. The DoC gives us a vantage point for interpreting evolution and seeing its consistency with biblical Christianity.

If, as the DoC teaches, God intends for creation to become itself, something distinctly different from God, then we would expect to find it has capacities for development and growth. Indeed, biblically creation is God's project moving towards its calling instead of being a static work completed in the past. Psalms 104, 139:13, among others, indicate God's acts of creation didn't cease with the "seventh day" of Genesis 2. Evolutionary mechanisms are consistent with this biblical expectation and represent a means by which God fulfills His intention for creation to participate in becoming what it's called to be in Christ.

The ministerial form of God's mediated action—God's activity in creation mediated by creation—is relevant, here. The general stability of environments and cycles (e.g., day/night, seasons) ministers to life by providing conditions favorable for the shaping and maintaining of life. An important way creation ministers to creation is through some organisms sacrificing themselves so that others may live (we call this hunting and feeding). Moreover, the genetic variations appearing in each generation of organisms minister to that population by providing an ability to cope with a variety of challenges such as adapting to environmental change, or further penetrating an ecological niche.

If the Spirit is crucially involved in variety, creativity and beauty in creation, then evolution represents a means through which the Spirit produces variety, creativity and beauty reflecting

the glory and wisdom of God. According to the DoC, the randomness of genetic variations<sup>11</sup> would represent the Spirit's ministry of variety and creativity on behalf of creation. Evolutionary processes and the developing of new species would then be the results of the Spirit's enabling creation to fulfill its calling in Christ.

Darwin emphasized that evolutionary mechanisms produce "just good enough" solutions to making a living in environmental niches. Hence, we see organisms very well adapted to their environments through what properly can be called just-good-enough features. For example, it's well known that the human body has a number of non-optimal, but good-enough features.<sup>12</sup> Such features are entirely consistent with Jesus and the Spirit sustaining and enabling creation to become what it is called to be according to its nature.<sup>13</sup> The Spirit's work in perfecting creation—including our bodies—begun long ago is not finished! We, body and soul, are not yet what we will become in Christ.

Finally, through the DoC we can view evolution as a means God uses to create in space and time in ways paralleling His saving and sanctifying in space and time. God works alongside and through the functional integrity of creation to bring the creation to full consummation in the incarnate Son "in the fullness of time."

---

<sup>11</sup>When biologists say mutations are random, unguided, or undirected they simply mean that offspring don't receive their genetic variations from their parents because such variations are good, bad, or otherwise for the organism. Nevertheless, the randomness of variations is fully consistent with there being underlying causes as to why particular members of a population of organisms received the particular genetic variations they did. Importantly, nothing about the randomness of these variations rules out Trinitarian involvement.

<sup>12</sup>For examples, see Neil Shubin, "This Old Body," *Scientific American*, January 2009, pp. 64-67.

<sup>13</sup>There is nothing in the doctrine of creation, or the nature of God for that matter, implying that anything in creation should be optimal or perfect, now or in the past. That depends upon the particular nature God has given creation and is a matter we can only determine by investigating that nature. The idea that there was an original creation that was perfect derives largely from ancient Greek philosophy (see Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creation: A Historical and Systematic Study*, Eerdmans [1998]; Peter C. Bouteneff, *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives*, Baker Academic [2008])