

vs. theology — is conflict inevitable?

That same quest to understand the origins and structures of the universe continues today. Asked why the question is perennially fascinating, physicist Charles Misner of the University of Maryland replied: "Why do people like to climb mountains? Because it's a combination of the most majestic and the most fundamental things there are to speculate about."

He also guesses that people enjoy "dealing with huge topics. It's exhilarating." And for those with a religious background, dealing with the origins of the universe encompasses all we know about God as creator.

A Notre Dame University graduate, Misner is a teacher and researcher in physics who doesn't think science and religion are necessarily incompatible. "It depends on the theology," he said, observing that there is nothing in Catholic theology that is incompatible with science or incapable of dealing with new scientific discoveries.

"An individual scientist can easily be a believer," he continued. The scientist can see his work as "a study of the beauty and intricacy and awesomeness of creation." Creation is amazing, Misner thinks, for there is "as much care and subtlety" on the small scale as on the large.

A religious bent can motivate a

scientist to pursue a line of research in hopes it will shed light on God as creator, Misner said. This can "spark the imagination."

But, the physicist cautioned, there are limits: A person who is a scientist can speak about God as a creator — but he does not do so specifically in his capacity as a scientist.

Misner pointed out that to date physicists, as such, can find "no explanation for the moment of creation." All science can do now, he observed, is "tell us how the universe behaved in its infancy." He added that the currently popular "Big Bang" theory does not explain everything either. The physicist pushes back to the edges of creation, he said, but to date has found no final scientific answers.

Misner commented that "science can manipulate the world but not create it." In his view, scientists and theologians can benefit from a dialogue.

Scientists "can hope to learn something about God by studying the physical universe," Misner said. And "theologians could gain insights by making use of the viewpoints of scientific discoveries and descriptions of the universe."

(Ms. Bird is associate editor of Faith Today.)

ned with the 'who' of creation

a backdrop for the moving drama of God's creative love and humanity's selfishness.

During their exile in Babylon, God's people ran the risk of becoming assimilated into the polytheistic culture they encountered. A concern of the Israelite priests was to counter this. The creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:4, written later than many people may realize, reflects this.

The Babylonians had their own story of the creation. It reflected their belief that the universe resulted from a chaotic struggle among squabbling divinities.

The Genesis account counteracts this crassly pagan myth. It insists that the universe is the work of the one true God.

So how did the universe begin? Scientists are still working with theories of this that sometimes seem to conflict with each other. The Bible doesn't really answer the question of "how" the universe was created either.

What the Bible does tell us is "who" created the world. The

biblical authors were theologians, not scientists. For that very simple reason there can really be no conflict between the Bible and science — except, of course, when either scientists or theologians exceed their limits.

The biblical authors do not pretend to say "how" God created, but they are sure, with the sureness of faith, that God did create.

Both accounts portray a God who is not only supremely powerful, but supremely good. Hence the world God creates is good, very good.

God is supremely loving, too. God creates on his own initiative, simply to share his life and his love.

Even after human beings tarnish the image in which God created them, he does not stop loving them. Instead he promises them ultimate victory over the forces of evil (Genesis 3:15).

(Father Castelot teaches at St. John's Seminary, Plymouth, Mich.)

FOOD...

...for thought

Think about what it means to continue God's creation — to be a modern creator, that is, a creative person:

1. To create something new, you need a fresh idea. This is an essential ingredient — a starting point.

It may be a new and totally original idea. Or it may be an old idea that you refine, or refresh, or present anew.

Your creative impulse may spring from your own, individual idea. But many creative ideas result from the efforts of two or more people.

Whatever the case, modern creators begin with an idea — or perhaps you will want to call it your intuition.

2. But more is required. New ideas need to be pondered and refined before they reach their final creative form.

In other words, creative people need to question their own ideas — to see whether they will work; and to see whether they are valuable or good.

You might ask, "What's the spirit of this idea? What's the value in the creative approach you have conceived?"

God the creator had a concern along this line, as the Old Testament Book of Genesis suggests: "God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good."

Inventors who produce new products or scientists who produce new medicines are readily recognized as creative people. So are artists and composers.

But there are many more ways of being creative. Undoubtedly one can take a creative approach to

- improving home life...
- planning education programs,
- serving the poor,
- or developing a strategy for achieving a community goal.

What makes the difference is the spirit behind the creative activity.

Biblical scholars say that in the Genesis creation accounts, what makes the difference is the Spirit behind God's creation. The biblical writers hoped people would get a message from their accounts: that the God of creation created with purpose and with love.

It's the love, and the commitment to humanity, that makes God such a special kind of creator.

Many people are more creative than they think they are.

In your opinion, what does it take to be creative? How do modern "creators" continue God's creative activity?

And where is your creativity needed?

...for discussion

1. Dolores Leckey thinks that every time a scientist unearths another fossil, every time a new star is noted, the intricacies of the mind of the Maker are uncovered a little more. Do you agree? Why?

2. The accounts of creation in the beginning of Genesis make a point about God's love and commitment to his people, Father John Castelot indicates. Why do you think it was important for the ancient biblical writers to make this point?

3. The Babylonian people told a story about the creation of the world that, in a basic way, was different from what the biblical writers went on to tell in the beginning of Genesis, according to Father Castelot.

—What was the Babylonian story?

—How did Genesis counteract the Babylonian story?

4. What is meant when people say that Christians today continue God's creation?

SECOND HELPINGS

"Getting to Know the Bible," by Father Melvin Farrell, S.S. This 112-page book is intended as an introduction to the Bible. A discussion leader's guide also is available. Father Farrell writes that the creation account in Genesis is, for believing Jews and Christians, the story of "God's own revelation of himself and of his relationship to the cosmos which he sustains in being. We discover in this story that God is good, that he is intimately involved in his creation and that his will for humanity is marvelously gracious." Among the author's topics: Why Christians read the Bible; how the Bible came to be; why we have four Gospels. (Hi-Time Publishing Corp., Box 13337, Milwaukee, Wis. 53213. \$5.95. Discussion leader guide, \$3.50.)