HAS CREATION GOT A FUTURE?

Christians in Science
Tuesday March 7, 2017
“If you’re a Christian, you’ll go to heaven when you die.”
Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging round?
In Jesus' presence naught but calm is found.
It is enough: earth's struggles soon shall cease,
and Jesus calls us to heaven's perfect peace.

(Edward H. Bickersteth, 1825-1906)
“That Archangel Gabriel – ‘e’s always trying to get my wings orff!”
Jesus says to Judas:

“The souls of every human generation will die. When these people, however, have completed the time of the kingdom and the spirit leaves them, their bodies will die but their souls will be alive, and they will be taken up.”
“Cursed is the ground because of you ...”

(Genesis 3:17 cf. Isaiah 24 etc.)
He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

(Hebrews 1:10-12, quoting Psalm 102:25 ff.)
Is the final aim of God, in his governance of all things, to bring into being at the very bend a glorified kingdom of spirits alone who, thus united with God, may contemplate him in perfect bliss, while as a precondition of their ecstasy all the other creatures of nature must be left by God to fall away into eternal oblivion?

(Paul Santmire, The Travail of Nature, 1985)
Or is the final aim of God, in his governance of all things, to communicate his life to another in a way which calls forth at the very end new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, a transfigured cosmos where peace is universally established between all creatures at last, in the midst of which is situated a glorious city of resurrected saints who dwell in justice, blessed with all the resplendent fullness of the earth, and who continually call upon all creatures to join with them in their joyful praise of the one who is all in all?
“With the question posed this way, a large majority of modern biblical scholars would self-consciously, or as a matter of course, choose the first option .... in keeping with their interpretive assumptions which have been so thoroughly shaped by the spiritual motif.”
O measureless might, ineffable love,
while angels delight to hymn thee above,
thy ransomed creation, though feeble their lays,
with true adoration shall sing to thy praise.

(Robert Grant 1779-1838)
Lord, bring the day to pass / When forest, rock and hill,
The beasts, the birds, the grass, / Will know your finished will:
When we attain our destiny / And nature its lost unity.

Creation groans, travail, / Bound in its future plight,
Until the hour it hails / The new-born of the light,
Who enter on their true estate.
Come, Lord: new heavens and earth create.

(Ian Fraser, b. 1917)
Genesis 1

1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
2. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
3. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.
4. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.
5. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning - the first day.
6. And God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.”
7. So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so.
8. God called the expanse “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning - the second day.
9. And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so.
10. God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.
11. Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so.
12. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.
13. And there was evening, and there was morning - the third day.
14. And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years,
15. and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so.
16. God made two great lights - the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars.
17. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth,
18. to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good.
19. And there was evening, and there was morning - the fourth day.
20. And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.”

21. So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds; and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.
22. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.”
23. And there was evening, and there was morning - the fifth day.
24. And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so.
25. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.
26. Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”
27. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
28. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”
29. Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.
30. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground - everything that has the breath of life in it - I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.
31. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning - the sixth day.

Genesis 2

1. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.
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.
3. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.
4. This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.
From all eternity Jesus had, in his very nature, been the ‘image of God’, reflecting perfectly the character and life of the Father. It was thus appropriate for him to be the ‘image of God’ as man ..... Humanity was designed to be the perfect vehicle for God’s self-expression within his world, so that he could himself live appropriately among his people as one of themselves, could rule in love over creation as himself a creature ..... 

(N.T. Wright, *Colossians*, Leicester: IVP p.70)
18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.
Romans 8:18-25

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- ‘futility’ as in Romans 1—linked back to e.g. Genesis 3 by C.E.B. Cranfield, J.G. Dunn and others:

‘the sub-human creation has been subjected to the frustration of not being able properly to fulfil the purpose of its existence, God having appointed that without man it should not be made perfect. We may think of the whole magnificent theatre of the universe together with all its splendid properties and all the chorus of sub-human life, created to glorify God but unable to do so fully, so long as man the chief actor in the drama of God’s praise fails to contribute his rational part’

(C.E.B.Cranfield, ICC Commentary on Romans)

- then the redemption of the cosmos follows in the wake of the redemption of human beings (v.19)
36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."
37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.
38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?
39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."
40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.
41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?"
42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish,
43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

(Luke 24:36-43 NIV)
In Jesus Christ, God has restored the human pattern intended at the original creation ... He is the new humanity in to which man may be born, not through biological parentage, but by his decision in response to divine grace, Thus the Christian community, from the standpoint of faith given by God's revelation in Christ, looks backward and forward. It traces God's purpose to the first creation, saying, 'In Christ all things were created'; and it lives toward the future, saying, 'God will sum up all things in Christ.'

Astrophysics forecasts the end of the universe in due course (although not just yet ...):

• Big crunch?

• Death by extreme cold?

• Swallowed by black holes?
Dyson's eternal intelligence hypothesis

- An advanced civilization could survive for an infinite period of time while consuming only a finite amount of energy.
- Such a civilization would store a finite amount of energy in anticipation.
- It would then alternate brief periods of activity, in each of which they would use one-half of the remaining available energy, with periods of hibernation;
- Each cycle would then become increasingly lengthy, and each period of activity increasingly short.
- The cycle would, in theory, be infinitely long.

(Freeman Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe*, 1979)
“On the face of it, the ultimate prospects are bleak.”
So which is RIGHT and which is WRONG?
It’s not a question of how these two world views COLLIDE

It’s a question of how these two world views INTERACT
If there is a true and lasting hope - and it is a deep human intuition that there is such a hope - then it can only rest in the eternal mercy and faithfulness of God.”

To which I would want to add:

'This is also to follow the biblical story of the goodness of creation through to its climax'
"Hubble takes us to within a stone's throw of the big bang itself"

Massimo Stiavelli, Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, Md., and HUDF project lead
The *synchronic* understanding:

• '... It is only the world as it exists at the end of history that the eschatological transformation of things will happen, while the temporal line that runs from our present to the end of history simply then continues on into the eschatological age beyond.'

The *diachronic* understanding:

• '... The new creation of all things will be a taking, through transformation, into eternity, of all that has ever happened throughout the aeons of this world’s time'.

“However, the resurrection only anticipates eschatological closure. It bursts open the constraints of nature and history, promising an overwhelming good of a kind that will not, like any immanent theodicy, leave out the dead, the victims of history whose fate can never be justified by any product of history. Closure - meaning a finally satisfactory resolution of the problem of God's goodness in the world - is found in trust and hope, not in some explanation of the world that makes sense of evil, still less in the claim to human power to eradicate the evil human reason has understood.”

(Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in the Contemporary World*, SPCK 2016, p.14)
How the disaster unfolded

03:00
JAPAN
Epicentre

06:00

09:00

3.48pm
Two-metre waves reach Northern California, where thousands have been evacuated from their homes

12:00

15:00

18:00

1.20pm
Tsunami warning lifted for Guam and several other Pacific islands, but ocean waves 2m above normal height detected

1.30pm
Hawaii
Waves up to one metre hit. No serious damage
“Cursed is the ground because of you ...”

(Genesis 3:17 cf. Isaiah 24 etc.)
'Earthquakes are signals of activity. They tell us the story of plate tectonics as it is happening today'.

Peter J. Wyllie, *The Way The Earth Works*
“Mysteriously, this out-of-jointness seems to become entangled with the transience and decay necessary within the good-but-incomplete creation, so that what we perhaps misleadingly call 'natural evil' can be seen as, among other things, the advance signs of that final 'shaking' of heaven and earth which the prophets understood to be necessary if God's eventual new world was to be born. ”

Tom Wright, Surprised by Hope. London: SPCK 2007, p.106
Peter Bowler:

'... the central role played by suffering in the world may be just what we should expect if God had relinquished His control over nature in order to give His creatures a degree of freedom within their world. Unlike some other religions, Christianity can be presented as a religion in which God, far from sitting outside His creation, has actually entered into it and suffers along with the struggling creatures within it. Such a vision seems to make sense of the fact that the son of God himself suffered the consequences of human selfishness and intolerance - and the Father did not intervene to prevent this supreme level of involvement and sacrifice.'
He concludes:

This is powerful stuff, even for a nonbeliever like myself. Here is a totally different vision of the relationship between God, humanity and nature to that offended by the fundamentalists. ... It is a God who participates in the human drama and in the drama of creation, and if there is any kind of God who makes sense to the convinced Darwinian, this is probably it.
• This should not be understood synchronically; i.e. creation as it is at the end of time.

• It should be understood diachronically; i.e., ‘the whole temporal course of creation’s history’
WONDERS OF THE UNIVERSE

PROFESSOR BRIAN COX
& ANDREW COHEN

THE BOOK OF THE ACCLAIMED BBC TV SERIES
Ephesians 1:9-10

9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,

10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.
And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

- ? the nearest the NT comes to a promise of redemption for the whole universe (Colin Gunton)
- ‘all things’ = in heaven and on earth
- Irenaeus versus the gnostics
- following on from ‘forgiveness of sins’ (v.7)
“The discovery of the Gospel of Judas is astonishing.”
—ELAINE PAGELS

The Gospel of Judas
EDITED BY Rodolphe Kasser, Marvin Meyer, and Gregor Wurst
WITH ADDITIONAL COMMENTARY BY BART D. EHRMAN
Doctor Who and the Redemption of the Cosmos
The Cross

and

the redemption of the cosmos
CHAPTER 1

1 The creation of heaven and earth, 2 of the light, 3 of the firmament, 4 of the earth separated from the waters, 11 and made fruit, 14 of the sun, 15 moon, and stars, 20 of flesh and fowl, 24 of beasts and cattle, 28 of man in the image of God. 29 The appointment of food.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.

And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind; and God saw that it was good.

And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.

And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

And God blessed them, saying, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

And God blessed them, and God
CREATIONISM IS ALIVE AND WELL .... AND LIVING IN NOR'N IR'N

‘this curious and disturbing phenomenon ... is scarcely to be encountered in Britain’

“On this issue, Northern Ireland punches above its weight.”

(Garth Earls, NI Geological Survey)
CREATIONISM IS ALIVE AND WELL .... AND LIVING IN NOR'N IR'N

MERVYN STOREY (MLA)

Wants creationism taught alongside ‘mainstream’ science in schools
CREATIONISM
IS ALIVE AND WELL ....
AND LIVING IN NOR'N IR'N

THE GIANT’S
CAUSEWAY

One day (sigh!) we shall have a new Visitor Centre ....
But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

(2 Peter 3:10-12)
Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.
'If I was to try and look amongst my friends, family and colleagues for people who believed that there was a god, I'd probably be looking amongst the older (and to be perfectly frank) less well-educated ones.'
In basing its spirituality almost exclusively in redemption rather than creation, and in seeing this redemption more in terms of how it is applied and experienced in the individual than in its communal and cosmic significance, certain endemic weaknesses have appeared within evangelical spirituality. There has been, for instance, a recurring suspicion of various forms of art and culture, a reluctance at times, to see creation, ecology and social issues as Christian priorities, and a difficulty in developing theological and spiritual understanding from any base other than the work of God within the individual.

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.
16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.
17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.
19 For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, 20 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...
Colossians 1:15-20

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• starts with the universal Lordship of Christ (contra local heresies?)
• reconciliation of ‘all things ... in heaven and on earth’ (v.20) then redemption of human beings (v.22)
• ‘all things’ repeated including chiasmus (16c ... 20a)