**[Slide 1]** Handout for Apostles’ Creed = Maker of Heaven and Earth

If you’re like me, you’ve probably been a believer for so long that creation is no longer an issue for you. It’s so natural to think of God as Creator that you don’t even think about it unless someone who doesn’t believe decides to use Creation as a club to beat you into submission over ethical, historical, political, or sociological issues and posit that belief in God and belief in scientific method are incompatible with each other. For me, that issue was settled once and for all in a Physical Anthropology class at the University of Southern California in 1970. The class was all about human evolution and I remember that interior voice speaking to me and saying, “Wow! If God used evolution like this, God is even more complex and powerful than you could have imagined.”

The problem comes, as one Southern Baptist theologian (back when there WERE thinking Southern Baptists) put it in describing how God reveals Himself: “I am not in a position to say that God can speak only this way and not in that way, nor is anyone else. God is free; we cannot confine his revelation to media that suit us.” [Humphreys, Fisher, *Thinking About God* (New Orleans, LA: Insight Press, 1974), p. 32.] And what does how God reveals Himself have to do with God as the Maker of Heaven and Earth?

**[Slide 2]** Let me use a crude illustration. Unless you were a car aficionado in the 20th century, you may not know what kind of car this is, much less the guy standing beside it. The car is a Shelby Cobra, THE classic high-performance sports car of the late 20th century. The man is Carroll Shelby, the designer of that car and many others. Now, if I study that sports car, I can know a few things about Shelby. I know he believed in streamlining and a wheel-base low to the ground. I know he liked high-performance engines and transmissions. I know he liked testing his concepts on both test tracks and in competitive races.

What I don’t know from studying the car is whether he was a good husband or father. I don’t know if he was generous or penurious. I don’t know if believed in God or not. I can extrapolate a lot of things about Shelby from looking at one of his sports cars, but it isn’t enough to know what he was really like. In a similar way, if we only look at creation or nature as our means of getting to know God better, we will have some success, but not enough. If we only seek God through what is measurable and demonstrable in the material world, we’re not going to have the full perspective of God. So, one mistake we make in thinking of God as Creator is to jump to the HOW and WHAT instead of the WHY and WHO.

So, usually when we consider God the Creator, we jump right to Genesis 1 and 2. But here’s an interesting idea about studying the “Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth:”

“The emphasis on the story of Creation at the beginning of the Bible has constantly led theologians to forsake the rule which they would otherwise follow namely, that the basis of *all* Christian articles of faith is the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.” [Brunner, Emil, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption: Dogmatics: Volume II* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1952), p. 6.] Although Brunner recommends that we start with John 1 and the fact that all things were made by the Word, it might be better to start with 1 Corinthians 8:6 …

**[Slide 3]** where everything comes from one Father (just as in the creed) and everything comes through Jesus (not only relevant to this discussion but forming a bridge to the next line in the creed).

As the source of all things, God is not the pantheist’s god of being the sum of all things—**[Click]** as per being all the drops of water in the ocean. The ocean comes from God’s reality according to God’s intention, but the ocean doesn’t equal God’s reality. Nor can we become Greek philosophers and say that God is the source of all things like the **[Click]** sun is a source of light which is carried on its way by beams or rays. Greek philosophers such as Plato believed that their idea of God was the ultimate cause but that creation came about through a near-infinite number of emanations, little gods if you will or, in our illustration, sunbeams. Why? Those beams or rays spread out as they get further from the source, hence become weaker. God is not weak. Hence, the Platonic ideal doesn’t work.

To show us that the created order doesn’t get away from the source, God through Jesus not only became Incarnate but He was involved as God in Creation and He is directly involved with us through His salvation and the promise of the Holy Spirit as our Comforter, Coach, and Guide. Rather, I like the imagery of Fisher Humphreys I quoted earlier when he pointed out that God made and is distinct from Creation much as an author is distinct from his book [Humphreys, p. 59.] I met former **[Click]** President Carter at a book signing for a work of historical fiction that he wrote. I spoke briefly to him about a written communication I had experienced with his White House transition team and, of course, I bought the book. There are aspects of his personality in the book which are revealed, but he himself doesn’t sit on my shelf.

The former University of Chicago theologian put it like this: “God transcends the world as distinct from it, and yet God is immanent within the world as the source of its being, as the principle of its life and order, and as the ground of its hope for fulfillment.” [Gilkey, Langdon, *Through the Tempest: Theological Voyages in a Pluralistic Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 92]. Why do we need to study Creation then? It makes sense of things and gives us a reason for living and a rational way to approach life.

**[Slide 4]** In fact, one of the big issues in creation is whether God started ordering primordial stuff or whether God created out of nothing. If we simply look at Genesis 1:1-2, you could argue either way. If we don’t take Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” as a headline, we could claim that the darkness and the formlessness were raw materials that were already there. “2) Now the earth was **[Click]** formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the **[Click]** Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” [NIV] BUT, if we look at the last phrase in Romans 4:17, that doesn’t hold. **[Click]** “…God, in whom he [Abraham] believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.” [NIV]

This is really important for some of the other things we believe about God. If he brought everything into existence, as opposed to merely molding what’s there, we can say that he is: “eternal (not temporal), incorruptible (not mortal), independent (a se) necessary (noncontingent), and omnipotent (without external limit).” [Gilkey, p. 90.]

**[Slide 5]** This is why, as the creeds developed, we see an emphasis on God as the **[Click]** Maker of things visible and invisible. This undercuts the idea of the emanations we talked about from Greek philosophy where the divinity of their god became weaker and weaker until it could deal with impure matter. This first creedal expression was the draft brought to Nicaea by Eusebius of Caesarea (the historian) which was largely adopted by the Council. In this case, the council **[Click]** added the qualifier “all.” This wasn’t entirely new. Clement, the Bishop of Rome from 92-97, confessed God as Father and creator of the entire cosmos, as well as Lord Almighty [Kelly, J. N. D., *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 83.] But removing the pagan Greek understanding of the universe itself as eternal was difficult. Still, the nice thing about adding “all” is that it indicated that even matter wasn’t excluded from the creation. God wasn’t the watchmaker who wound up the universe and left it to run on its own.

This may not sound important to you and me, but it was very important in terms of clarifying the proper teaching about Jesus’ nature as God and Human at the Council of Chalcedon where **[Click]** heaven and earth are added to the equation, most likely to emphasize the correlation of the divine with the material in the person of Jesus Christ. That was the **[Click]** big issue at Chalcedon where they reaffirmed the Nicean Creed but added a confession that stated that Jesus Christ was the same perfect in Godhead, truly God and truly man, the same of a rational soul and body, consubstantial with the Father [Kelly, p. 339.]. More on that in a future session, but it is dependent upon creation from nothing if we are to make that idea of matter not being evil to work.

**[Slide 6]** Genesis has some more to contribute on this, but for now, let’s keep the New Testament perspective in mind with the Old Testament perspective. We have already looked at 1 Corinthians 8:6 which kept Father and Son involved in creation, but other verses emphasize the Father as the source of creation. For example, compare Hebrews 2:10 and Malachi 2:10. What is the “common denominator” in these verses? It is the same as in our creedal statement. He is Father who made us. **[Click]** In Malachi, Israel was made for a relationship with God, the covenant, but they had abused the relationship with God by abusing each other. **[Click]** In Hebrews, it’s talking about Jesus as the perfect inaugurator of our salvation and we see that this salvation is for God’s glory.

Such a description of the Father as Creator does not reduce the other two expressions of God in the Trinity to second-class deities. After all, Colossians 1:16 identifies \_\_\_\_Christ\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ as the One in Whom all was created and John 6:63’s first phrase seems to agree with the Old Testament’s assertion in Job 33:4 that the \_\_\_Spirit\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ gives life.

**[Slide 7]** To put it another way: “We can aver that whereas the Father is the ground of creation, the Son is the principle of creation, and the Spirit is the divine power active in creation.” [Bird, Michael F., *What Christians Ought to Believe: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine Through the Apostles’ Creed* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016), p. 71.].

**[Slide 8]** Now, before I explain this diagram, I want to read you a couple of quotations. They express what God is as opposed to the two extremes here in the diagram which show the dangers of what God is not. Transcendence can be impersonal, unrelated, and independent in the sense of Creator God being BEYOND Creation. “As the supreme being or ground of being, the Creator and ruler of all, God transcends (exceeds or goes beyond) all creaturely characteristics; the reason is that the divine, so conceived, is the source and therefore not simply one more example of those limits, distinctions, and characteristics. As Creator of time and space, God is not in either time or space as all else is; …” [Gilkey, Langdon, *Through the Tempest: Theological Voyages in a Pluralistic Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 71]. Yet, the Incarnation keeps that absolute, impersonality out of it. “God is absolute, but God is not all there is, since there is also the real and relatively autonomous creation. …The word is totally and essentially dependent on God (non ex materia), and yet the world is not identical with God (non de Deo). …God transcends the world as distinct from it, and yet God is immanent within the world as the source of its being, as the principle of its life and order, and as the ground of its hope for fulfillment.” [Gilkey, p. 92.]

So, we can see the real danger in the two extremes. If we attempt to bind God to transcendence where He is so far above creation that He merely represents order, we get the first column. It leads to meaninglessness for our existence because everything is prearranged, necessary, and predictable. So, our decisions, our responses to God don’t matter. On the other hand, if God is so involved with the world that He just lets it go, we end up with chaos which, in turn, leads to meaninglessness for our existence because everything is so random, so reliant upon chance and unpredictability that our decisions don’t make any difference here either. That is why we need God as both the one who orders creation and intervenes in creation and history.

**[Slide 9]** But I promised I wouldn’t ignore the Genesis accounts before getting off on more theological thoughts. So, let me give you some vocabulary that is used for creating in the Old Testament.

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| **ברא** | **create** |
| **עשה** | **accomplish** |
| **יצר** | **shape** |
| **יסד** | **establish** |

The first one is pronounced “bah-rah.” It is the first verb used in the Old Testament. It means to create and, since it is only used to describe creation the way that God creates, I believe it suggests *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing). It is very useful for the Genesis 1 account where God speaks everything into existence and it illustrates God as the TRANSCENDENT God who is above and beyond His creation.

But that’s not the only word used for God creating. The second verb is “ah-sah.” It is used in Genesis 2 and literally means to “do” or to “accomplish,” as well as “make.” This verb tells us that God is active in God’s creation. He hasn’t wound everything up like a watchmaker and left it alone. It is also a word that is used in the Hebrew Bible to talk about what God has done in history. So this illustrates God as the IMMANENT God, God involved with His creation.

If we had the Genesis 1 God alone or the Genesis 2 God alone, we would have a God who was too distant from His creation to be helpful or a God who was too bound by His creation to be helpful. Instead, we have these two opposites balancing each other.

The third verb is one of my favorites. It is pronounced “yahtz-ahr” and means to mold or sculpt. This is the idea of God shaping His creation. I like to say, “getting His hands dirty.” He isn’t a remote God and He does change things, shape them, and craft them. It is also something like our earlier experiment with the paper. It says that He made His creation so it belongs to Him to do with as He pleases. It’s a good corrective to human arrogance.

The other verb is used a lot in the wisdom literature. It is pronounced “yuh-sahd” and it means to establish, to found, or to order. This is the rational, logical, measurable reality of God’s creation. Without this aspect of creation, we wouldn’t even have the natural sciences.

In summary, we need to consider what the implications are that God is Creator of everything?

1. Creation was not a necessity for God. C. S. Lewis’ famous quotation: “God, who needs nothing, loves into existence wholly superfluous creatures in order that he may love and perfect them.”
2. Transcendence can be impersonal, unrelated, and independent in the sense of Creator God being BEYOND Creation. “As the supreme being or ground of being, the Creator and ruler of all, God transcends (exceeds or goes beyond) all creaturely characteristics; the reason is that the divine, so conceived, is the source and therefore not simply one more example of those limits, distinctions, and characteristics. As Creator of time and space, God is not in either time or space as all else is; …” [Gilkey, Langdon, *Through the Tempest: Theological Voyages in a Pluralistic Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 71].   
     
   Yet, the Incarnation keeps that absolute, impersonality out of it. “God is absolute, but God is not all there is, since there is also the real and relatively autonomous creation. …The word is totally and essentially dependent on God (non ex materia), and yet the world is not identical with God (non de Deo). …God transcends the world as distinct from it, and yet God is immanent within the world as the source of its being, as the principle of its life and order, and as the ground of its hope for fulfillment.” [Gilkey, p. 92.]
3. Creation is good, but good for something. “Creation is not good merely because it is intricately engineered or beautifully put together, but because it comes from a good God. Creation is a gift through which we enjoy the Creator and Giver himself (cf. Ps. 19:1–2; 1 Tim. 6:17). Thus, to delight in elements of creation, no matter how great or small, should provoke us to celebrate God. Whether you eat or drink, do all things to his glory, recognizing his lordship over it all (Eccl. 2:24–26; 1 Cor. 10:31). [Kapic, Kelly M., *The God Who Gives: How the Trinity Shapes the Christian Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018), pp. 24-25.]   
     
   “It is not that God the Creator was believed to be good because God’s creation was known as good, but the reverse: the creation, despite its evident and deep ambiguity, was affirmed to be good because the God who made it was known in the covenant and later in Christ to be good.” [Gilkey, p. 91.]
4. Creation is for God’s glory and that’s for our benefit. Look at Psalm 100:3 and see our response in Psalm 89:11-12 and 1 Timothy 6:17. What is it?

If we had made time, I could have given you some historical notes on the Islamic and Jewish ideas of creation beyond our biblical perspective.

Islamic ideas

Avicenna (980-1037) – wrote that creation means “origination,” that an object “receives its existence from another” – unfortunately, he followed Plato too closely with the idea of emanations acting against each other in an “eternal” universe

[God as a necessary existent can have no connection with matter whatsoever because he equates thinking with immaterial activity, necessitating emanations as intermediaries between God and nature as in neo-Platonism [Adamson, Peter, *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Philosophy in the Islamic World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 130-131.]]

For which al-Ghazali (1058-1111) declared that this was against the Quran and Avicenna should be declared a heretic.

Averroes (1126-1198) saw God’s act of creation as converting potentialities into actualities such that was a change within the “eternal” universe rather than calling the universe into being in the first place

Summarized in [McGrath, Alister E., *A Scientific Theology: Volume One: Nature* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), p. 164.]

Jewish Ideas

Mixed since the idea of formlessness and darkness does not require strict creatio ex nihilo [McGrath, p. 160.]. Most definitive position by Isaac Abravenel who, in 15th century declared it to be the cardinal dogma of Judaism, provocatively suggesting that this was even more significant than the existence of God himself [McGrath, p. 161].

For the Old Testament, “God was first known as redemptive actor in history and then known as Creator of people, history, and nature. The logical order of concepts, however, the order of being goes the other way: Because God created the world, including nature, history, and men and women, therefore, (1) God is able to act in revelation and redemption within nature and history, and (2) time and creation alike were known to be good.” [Gilkey, p. 90.]

So, as we look at the Islamic and Jewish thoughts on creation, it should make us all the happier that we followed Emil Brunner’s advice to start with the New Testament and move backward.