

John Calvin for Everyone
The Institutes of the Christian Religion
Book 1 – Chapter 14 – Part 1

EVEN IN THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE AND OF ALL THINGS, SCRIPTURE BY
UNMISTAKABLE MARKS DISTINGUISHES THE TRUE GOD FROM FALSE GODS

In this chapter Calvin continues his arguments for understanding God as a particular kind of God. He does so by addressing four topics: creation, angels, the devil/demonic and the spiritual lessons of creation. This article addresses creation, which occupies the opening and closing of the chapter.

Summary: Calvin's purpose in discussing creation is to offer what he believes is a more accurate picture of God than is offered by the "heathens" and "philosophers" of the day. He writes that *"..we must depict the true God more distinctly than they do. Since the notion of God as the mind of the universe (in the philosophers eyes a most acceptable description) is ephemeral, it is important for us to know God more intimately lest we always waver in doubt. Thus it is his will that the history of creation be made manifest, in order that the faith of the church, resting upon? this, might seek no other God but him who was put forth by Moses as the Maker and the Founder of the Universe."* (pg. 160)

Calvin needs to deal with this issue because there was not only a growing knowledge of other cultures and their creation stories (he mentions the Egyptians) but also the works of philosophers such as Aristotle, all of which raised questions about the accuracy of the Biblical creation story and by extension the traditional understanding of God and the purpose of creation. Calvin's defense of God as Maker and Founder of the Universe, is based on a literal reading of the six days of creation, as well as the timeline and ages of both individuals and generations in scripture. This leads him to the conclusion that creation *"has not yet attained six-thousand years."* (pg.160) Toward the end of the chapter he carries this concept further by declaring that God endowed *"...each kind (creature) with its own nature, assigned functions, appointed places and stations.." and that ".he provided for the preservation of each species until the last day."* (pg. 180) Thus the world is and always will be exactly as God made it in those six days of creation. These realities, for Calvin, help us see more clearly who God is.

This literal reading of the creation stories also allows Calvin to show the purpose of creation; that all of creation exists for the benefit of humanity. *"Now when he (God) disposed the movements of the sun and stars to human uses, filled the earth, waters and air with living things, and brought forth an abundance of fruits to suffice as foods, in thus assuming the responsibility of a foreseeing and diligent father of the family he shows his wonderful goodness toward us."* (pg. 162) *"It is to recognize that God has destined all things for our good and salvation, but at the same time to feel his power and grace in ourselves and in the great benefits he has conferred upon us, and so bestir ourselves to trust, invoke praise and love him."* (pg. 181) In a sense even if the earth were not the center of the universe, humanity was the center of creation.

Reflection: The struggle with faith/evolution and how we are to read the Bible are at the heart of much of the cultural conflict raging in our nation today. The question for us therefore is whether using the best scientific information of our age and a non-literal reading of the scriptures can we too "bestir ourselves to trust, invoke praise and love God"? I believe the answer is yes. Writers and theologians such as Karl Giberson ([Saving Darwin](#)), Denis Alexander ([Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose](#)) and Kenneth Miller ([Finding Darwin's God](#)) among others, show us ways of living with both evolution and a deep and abiding faith in God. They make the case that committed Christians can believe in evolution. There are also Biblical scholars such as the late Marcus Borg who show us that we do not have to read scripture literally in order to have a prayerful relationship with the living God. Our challenge then is to find that point in our lives in which science and faith can live together.

Questions:

1. How do you see God at work in the creation of the universe?
2. How do you balance the concepts of God as creator and theory of evolution?
3. Where do you see God's love for you in the creation around you?