

Text: Revelation 3:14, 22:13

Title: “The Arche and Telos of Creation”

[Regent College Pastors Conference – 2010  
“Wonder and Devotion:  
Bringing Science and Faith Together for the Church”]

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The text for our closing reflection is a claim.

A claim Jesus of Nazareth makes about Himself.

A claim the risen Jesus of Nazareth makes about Himself  
relative to the themes we have been exploring in this conference.

The claim is found in the last book of the Bible.

Hear the Word of God.

Revelation, chapter 3, verse 14.

Jesus is speaking to the church in the first century city of Laodecia,  
a city famous in part for its first-rate medical school.

Jesus, speaking of Himself, says:

**“The Amen, the faithful and true witness,  
the Beginning of the creation of God, says ...”**

And Revelation, chapter 22, verse 13.

**“I Am the Alpha and the Omega,  
the first and the last,  
the beginning and the end.”**

Let us pray:

“Lord Jesus Christ.  
We believe that You spoke the words we just heard  
to your servant John.  
We believe that You enabled Him to record them accurately  
for our sake.  
Will you now help us understand what You are claiming.  
And even if we cannot fully understand,  
will You help us live the reality of which You are speaking.  
We pray this in Your name ...  
and for the greater fame of Your name.”

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I grew up in the world of science.

The formative years of my childhood - kindergarten through grade seven –

were lived in Los Alamos, New Mexico,

a small city tucked up in the mountains of northern New Mexico

about 35 miles North west of Santa Fe, the capital of the State.

Los Alamos is the city where the atomic and hydrogen bombs  
were developed.

When my family first moved there it was a closed city.

One had to have top secret clearance passes to get in and out of the city.

All of our mail was simply addressed to Box 1663 Santa Fe, New Mexico.

No-one was supposed to know where we were living.

In fact my youngest brother’s birth certificate reads:

Born: PO Box 1663 Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The city was, and is still, run by the University of California  
on behalf of the United States National Research Laboratories.

My father, then in his late twenties, early thirties,  
was doing physics for “The Lab” as it was called.

In his early days working mostly with design and testing of nuclear bombs –  
both fission and fusion,  
both atomic and hydrogen.

At the time, he was one of a dozen or so people in the world  
who knew how to assemble and detonate such powerful devices.

He witnessed the explosion of the second hydrogen bomb  
on the Enewetak atoll in the South Pacific.

He was part of a team of scientists who taught those first bulky computers  
to think in two dimensions.

He was the one the first persons to teach computers  
to think in three dimensions.

He loved his work as a physicist.

I can still see the awe and wonder in his eyes  
as he tried to describe to me and my brothers  
what it was like to watch the hydrogen bomb go off.

Although he loved his work as a physicist,

he later regretted his part in the production of weapons  
of mass destruction.

He regretted that he had given into the fear that drove the Cold War.

The fear that gave rise to the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction,  
MAD for short.

Truly a mad doctrine.

The doctrine that argued that

if the United States and the Soviet Union each

had enough nuclear capacity to destroy the other  
neither would pull the trigger.

I can still remember the day the Soviets

put the first man-made satellite into the sky -Sputnik.

I remember the next day as we were out at night

my dad was trying to show us it going across the sky.

I remember a week later,

the school district eliminating all courses in dance and art and shop  
and making us all take science and math.

We were going to beat the Russians!

I am the oldest of five sons.

In a Swedish family, the oldest son is expected

to follow the father's foot steps.

So I, too, took up physics and mathematics,

earning my undergraduate degrees in both

at the University of California, San Diego.

I took theoretical physics from Edward Teller the father of the atomic bomb.

I took micro-biology from Jonas Salk inventor of the Salk vaccine for Polio.

I studied the Philosophy of Science with Thomas Kuhn  
who wrote the influential book the Structure of Scientific Revolution.

I cannot remember who I took Organic Chemistry from,

but I still have these nightmares

where I am going to the Organic Chemistry exam

and I cannot remember the formulas!

So, like my dad, I too loved science.

I, too, loved calculus, especially differential equations.

I, too, loved electromagnetism and quanta mechanics

and the theory of relativity.

During my third year of study, I had a fresh encounter with Jesus.

And fell more deeply in love with Him.

I then began to wrestle with a call to the preaching ministry.

On April 4th 1968, the night that Martin Luther King Junior was murdered

I gave in to that call.

In the following week I ventured out

to tell my professor of Thermal Dynamics –

Thermal Dynamics is the study of heat and energy transfer –

to tell him that I was thinking about leaving physics to go to seminary

to learn how to preach Jesus and His Gospel.

He was shocked.

And disappointed because he had been trying to get an internship

for me at the Institute of Plasma Physics in Berlin, Germany.

He asked me straight out,

“Why do you want to throw away your brain to preach Jesus?”

Shortly after that, I was sitting in a lecture on Quantum Mechanics,

as a visiting scholar was developing for us a very sophisticated

differential equation.

It took up three blackboards!

That morning I had read the hymn to Christ in Colossians one.

You know it well.

**“He – Christ – is the first born of all creation.**

**For by Him all things were created ...**

**all things were created by Him and for Him.**

**And He is before all things,**

**and in Him all things hold together.”**

I was reading the J.B. Phillips paraphrase of the NT at the time.

I was, as a science student, stunned by how Phillips

renders Paul’s words:

**“He – Christ – is both the first principle**

**and the upholding principle**

**of the whole scheme of creation.”**

That afternoon

as the lecturer wrote out that exquisitely beautiful equation

I thought, “He is simply describing how Jesus puts things together!”

And I wanted to worship!

The person who has helped me the most to integrate

a love for science and a love for Jesus, Richard Bube,

who, when I first met him – 1971 or so –

was professor of Material Science and Electrical  
Engineering

at Stanford university.

In his own field, he is known for books like

“Electrons in Solids”,

“Photoconductivity of Solids”

“Photoelectric Properties of Semi-Conductors”

and other such bedtime reading.

In his book, **The Human Quest** –

that I think warrants the label “classic” –

Dr. Bube leads us in one of the most helpful ways of integrating  
science and faith.

Bube’s central theme is that reality –

reality being the subject of both faith and science –

is so massive and so complex



that it has to be studied and understood on many different levels,

from many different angles.

He puts his thesis this way – it is on page 27 of his book.

“There are many levels at which a given situation can be described.

An exhaustive description on one level

does not preclude meaningful descriptions on another level.”.

So take for example the sentence “I love you”.

“I love you.”

“I love you” can be described on many different levels.

On the numerical level, for instance:

There are eight letters, two of them a repeated “o”.

The letters are the 5<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> 22<sup>nd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of the English alphabet.

And they are arranged in the order 9... 12, 15, 22, 5... 25, 15, 21.

That is a true and exhaustive description of that sentence on one level.

There is also the phonetic level, the level of sound.

We have in this sentence a long 'I' a short "O",

a liquid constant "L",

the voice fricative "V",

a silent 'E'

the palliative semi-vowel "Y"

and the diphthong "U".

That is a true and exhaustive description of that sentence on that level.

Right?

There is also the vocabulary level.

The level of words.

The letters and sound interact to make words

and the words point beyond themselves to another reality.

And then there is the grammatical level.

There is the subject 'I' ,

the verb 'love"

the object "you".

The verb is in the present tense.

This, too, is a true and exhaustive description of that sentence on that level.

And on it goes the through other levels

until it get to the per formative level

where the letters, sounds, words and grammar

start making things happen.

"I love you" moving the heart of the person who hears those words.

That is where you wanna get guys, right to that sentence.

I do not think women are real interested if you tell them about

the numerical, or the phonetic or the grammatical level of this sentence.

It is the per formative level "I love you".

Again the thesis,

"there are many levels at which a given situation can be described.

An exhaustive description on one level

does not preclude meaningful descriptions on another level.”

Indeed,

a complete description of any given situation

requires description on every level.

Reality, the universe, we human beings in it

has to be studied and has to be understood on many different levels.

And these levels include from the bottom up

origins,

physics,

chemistry,

biology,

botany,

zoology,

anthropology,

psychology,

sociology,

theology.

We do not fully understand the world.

We do not fully understand ourselves

until we take into consideration the description of  
reality

on all of those levels.

Physicists are right –

we are a complex packet of mysteriously interacting energy  
forces.

But that is not all we are.

Chemists are right –

atomic and sub-atomic particles and waves

interact to form molecules and non-living matter.

We are complex chemical machines.

We are made up of carbohydrates, minerals and all kinds  
of acid,

proteins, lipids, sugars.

We are 60% H<sub>2</sub>O.

But that is not all we are.

Biologists are right.

Chemicals interact and combine to form more complex forms of life.

We are complex cellular computers.

Buckminster Fuller was right when he said of us

that we are a self-balancing, 28 jointed, adaptor based biped,

an electro-chemical reduction plant integrated with segregated storages of special energy extracts and storage batteries for the subsequent actualization of thousands of hydraulic and pneumatic pumps with motors attached.

We are 62, 000 miles of capillaries, millions of warning signal , railroad an conveyor systems, pressures and cranes and a universally distributed telephone system needing no service for 70 years if well managed etc.

We are all that and more.

For the botanist and the zoologist can describe our world even more fully.

And the anthropologist and the psychologists can tell us

about who we are even more fully.

They can tell us how and why we relate.

How and why we make decisions,

how we laugh and cry and love and hate.

And then the sociologist comes along and helps us understand

why we have this need for community

and why it works and why it does not work.

And then the theologians come along

and relate it all to the ultimate reality

to the maker, upholder and redeemer of the whole scheme of reality.

Again, an exhaustive description on one level does not preclude meaningful descriptions on another level.

A complete biological description of the human being, for instance, does not do away with the need for a theological description of the human being.

And a complete theological description of a complete human being

does not do away with the need for a biological description.

The problem comes

when one of these levels thinks it has the whole.

The problem comes

when the other levels will not pay attention to each other.

And so we come to the claim Jesus makes.

To the claim Jesus makes about Himself relative to all this.