

God Not Necessary for Creation, Hawking Says

Dear Teacher,

The news we've chosen as the basis of today's lesson was suggested to us in **The Wired Word** Forum by a subscriber. It concerns the just-released book *The Grand Design* by the noted British physicist Stephen Hawking, co-written with American physicist Leonard Mlodinow. It presents an argument that the universe was created spontaneously without any divine intervention and thus concludes that God is unnecessary to explain creation.

While the book apparently does not exactly say "There is no God," it does say that "God is not necessary," at least as far as the creation of the universe is concerned. We've heard similar claims before, but coming from someone with the brilliance of Hawking may make the argument convincing to some who've been uncertain.

This leads us to our topic for this installment of **The Wired Word**. We're not addressing the matter of God's role in creation but rather the larger issue behind it -- belief in God itself. It seems to us that for those who choose to not believe in God, there are always books, troubles, unanswered questions and other things around to support -- but not prove -- that choice. At the same time, for those who choose to believe in God, those books, troubles, unanswered questions and so forth are countered by testimonies, amazing grace, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, personal experiences of God, opposing arguments from believers and other things that support -- but do not prove -- that choice. In the end, believing in God is a choice -- a reasonable choice, but a choice nonetheless.

Remember, if you wish to provide your class members with an abbreviated copy of the lesson, [click here](#), and you can send them a copy via e-mail today.

May God bless you as you teach the Scriptures this week.

The Editorial Team of **The Wired Word**



God Not Necessary for Creation, Hawking Says

The Wired Word for September 26, 2010

In the News

The just-released book *The Grand Design* by renowned British physicist Stephen Hawking and American physicist Leonard Mlodinow counters Sir Isaac Newton's claim that an "intelligent and powerful Being" must have created the universe.

"Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist," Hawking and Mlodinow write. "It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going."

While many headlines about the book, including the one for this installment of **The Wired Word**, focus on that particular claim, the book itself is not an attack on religion, but an expression of one line of scientific thought. The mention of God as unnecessary for the creation of the world is one conclusion of that line of thought but is not the primary topic of the book, which seeks to explain the existence of the universe in scientific terms. In most of the book, God is not mentioned at all.

Still, the claim that God was unnecessary for creation has angered some faith groups and brought forth at least a few arguments from Christian spokespersons who seek to poke holes in the book's speculations. But

some other Christian leaders say the conclusions of Hawking and Mlodinow should not be treated as a threat to religious belief. They point out that the book seeks to answer the ultimate question of *how* the universe was created, using the laws of physics, whereas religion aims more at the question of *why* it exists and *what* is the purpose of our lives.

For example, Rev. Howard Flint, vicar of a church in Tunbridge Wells, England, told a reporter for the British paper *The Guardian*, "For me, science and the Christian faith are answering two different questions. His question is 'scientifically, what happened?' The Christian faith answers the question of 'why?' I do not think they are in competition, they are just different questions."

Other religious commentators say that human theorizing can never hope to explain what is essentially unexplainable. Commenting on Hawking's conclusion, Quentin de la Bedoyere, science editor of the U.K.'s *Catholic Herald* newspaper, wrote, "If all the physical laws had been explained and proved -- which is a million miles from the case -- our understanding of the actions of God would not be one whit greater: his existence and his actions are of a different order. Most particularly it would not touch the question of how something existing comes out from nothing. That is a question which science cannot answer, and will never answer, because nothingness is not within its domain. ... Neither [Hawking], nor you, nor I will ever explain creation, except through faith."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Stephen Hawking: God Has No Role in Universe. AOL News](#)

[The Grand Design by Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow. The Guardian](#)

[Hawking's Views on Creation No Threat to Religion. Kent News](#)

The Big Questions

1. To what degree is your belief in God a choice you have made?
2. For many people, their initial "decision for Christ" was largely driven by their emotions. But to what degree have your intellect and will been involved in your remaining a Christian after the initial emotional "high" wore off?
3. What is the difference between belief based on evidence and belief based on proof? Which kind of belief can be called "faith"?
4. How important is it that we know why we exist? Can't we simply exist without any grand reason? Explain your answer.

Confronting the News with Scripture

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Ruth 1:16

"Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God." (For context, read 1:1-18.)

Ruth, who spoke the words above, was a Moabite who had been married to a Hebrew man living in Moab. But now she was a widow, and it seemed that her best course was to return to her father's house. When her mother-in-law Naomi, who was also widowed, decided to return to Israel, Ruth wanted to go with her. But

Naomi, wanting the best for Ruth, urged Ruth to stay in Moab. That's when Ruth made the declaration above. In saying she was going to go with Naomi wherever she went and adopt her God, Ruth was, in effect, declaring, "I choose this direction, and I choose this belief."

The will, the ability to choose, is as much a part of the human personality as are our emotions, our intellect, our spirit, our dominant mood and our body. And having free will means that God does not take over our ability to decide.

In a purely analytical sense, when confronted by something that cannot be proven either way, the will works something like this: You look at the evidence in favor. Then you examine the evidence against. Since only one of the positions can be true and your intellect cannot verify either one to a certainty, you make a choice about which one to believe. Once you make that choice, you live and act as if your chosen position is true.

In reality, few of us actually operate in this purely rational sense. We listen not only to the evidence presented by our intellect, but to that presented by our feelings, our friends, our yearnings, our natural inclinations and so forth. Thus, while faith is a choice, choosing to believe is seldom an act of our will alone.

Question: What aspects of your personality besides your will help you to be a believer in God?

1 Kings 18:21

"How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." (For context, read 18:20-39.)

The words above were the challenge of the prophet Elijah to the Israelites who, following the lead of their king, Ahab, and especially their queen, Jezebel, had become worshipers of Baal. So Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a "trial by fire" on Mount Carmel. Both set up sacrifices, but did not light them. The prophets of Baal called on him to send fire to light their sacrifice, but nothing happened. Then Elijah, after soaking his sacrifice with water, called on the Lord God. Then fire from heaven consumed not only the sacrifice, but also the altar and even the water in the trench. This convinced the Israelite crowd of eyewitnesses: "... they fell on their faces and said, 'The LORD indeed is God; the LORD indeed is God.'" (v. 39).

But the person who had brought the prophets of Baal into the land was Jezebel, and she was not persuaded by this miracle. Apparently she was not present to see the event, but she heard about it from her husband, who, as far as we can tell, did believe it, though it did not cause him to become a better man. When Jezebel learned what had happened, the only effect it had on her was that she swore by the gods she did believe in to avenge herself on Elijah. And it's clear from the subsequent history of Israel in the Old Testament that the miracle on Mount Carmel had only a temporary effect in any case, for it didn't take long before the people were worshiping other gods again.

In other words, evidence, and even proof right before our eyes, is not necessarily enough to force belief. In the end, belief is a choice. There's plenty of evidence to support belief in Christ and to justify taking the step of committing yourself to him, but if you wish, you can explain all of it some other way, or even simply refuse to consider it.

Question: What evidence helps you to continue to decide to follow Jesus?

Luke 16:30-31

"He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (For context, read 16:19-31.)

This is from Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man lived very well in a fine house and dined on sumptuous meals. Outside his gate was a desperately poor, sick man named Lazarus, covered with sores. He was so hungry that he wished he could have even the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. But the wealthy man ignored Lazarus, and eventually the poor man died and was carried by angels to be with Abraham in paradise.

Not long afterward, the rich man also died, but he went to Hades, the final destination of the unrighteous. There he was in misery. He called to Abraham to send Lazarus to him with a drop of water for his tongue. But it was not to be. During your life, Abraham told the rich man, you had plenty and Lazarus had nothing. But now things have reversed, and following death, said Abraham, there was an uncrossable chasm between them.

The rich man then asked Abraham to at least let Lazarus go to his five living brothers and warn them to behave more compassionately to spare them the Hades destination. Abraham responded, "They have Moses and the prophets [that is, the Scriptures]; they should listen to them" (v. 29). The rich man replied, "But if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent" (v. 30). In other words, if they get real, tangible proof, they will be convinced. But Abraham came back with "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (v. 31).

Abraham was exactly right. So-called proof can always be explained away if you want to do so. In the end, belief -- *faith* -- is more about confidence in God than in proof.

Question: How does the evidence presented by "Moses and the prophets" (the Bible) help you to believe in God?

John 7:16-17

"Then Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.'" (For context, read 7:10-18.)

For those who make the decision to follow Jesus, there is a different kind of certainty available. Jesus referred to it one time when he was challenged by some of his countrymen about where his teaching came from. He responded with the words above. He was saying that it is only by embracing faith in God and by doing what we perceive as his will that we can gain a sense of the reality of Christ.

St. Augustine put it this way: "Believe so that you may understand. ..."

That is not what we usually mean when we use the word "certainty," but it is what we call "conviction," which means that we are convinced on a deep inner level.

Question: How does what you believe about God help you interpret the difficulties that come to you in life?

For Further Discussion

1. In what ways do the conclusions of scientific investigation help you in your faith?
2. Respond to this statement from a TWW team member: "Reason does not oppose faith. Faith goes beyond reason but not in a different direction from reason. Reason can carry us a long way toward faith, right to the point where we make the leap of faith to conviction."
3. What do you think of the claim that science cannot answer "the question of how something existing comes out from nothing"?

Responding to the News

There is probably no special response required to this news, other than to be willing to testify, when appropriate, to our choice to follow Jesus and to explain, insofar as we can, the reasons that support our choice.

Closing Prayer

O God, thank you for reason and for faith that goes beyond it to conviction. And thank you for the ways in which our conviction about you helps us to live from day to day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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*The news that sparked our next lesson concerns the just-released book *The Grand Design* by the noted British physicist Stephen Hawking, co-written with American physicist Leonard Mlodinow. It presents an argument that the universe was created spontaneously without any divine intervention and thus concludes that God is unnecessary to explain creation.*

While the book apparently does not exactly say "There is no God," it does say that "God is not necessary," at least as far as the creation of the universe is concerned.

This leads us to our topic for our next class. We're not addressing the matter of God's role in creation but rather the larger issue behind it -- belief in God itself. For those who choose to not believe in God, there are always books, troubles, unanswered questions and other things around to support -- but not prove -- that choice. At the same time, for those who choose to believe in God, those books, troubles, unanswered questions and so forth are countered by testimonies, amazing grace, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, personal experiences of God, opposing arguments from believers and other things that support -- but do not prove -- that choice. In the end, believing in God is a choice -- a reasonable choice, but a choice nonetheless.

If you wish to start thinking about our topic in advance, below is some introductory material.



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The Big Questions

Here are some of the questions we will discuss in class:

1. To what degree is your belief in God a choice you have made?
2. For many people, their initial "decision for Christ" was largely driven by their emotions. But to what degree have your intellect and will been involved in your remaining a Christian after the initial emotional "high" wore off?
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4. How important is it that we know why we exist? Can't we simply exist without any grand reason? Explain your answer.

Confronting the News with Scripture

We will look at selected verses from these Scripture texts. You may wish to read these in advance for background:

Ruth 1:1-18

1 Kings 18:20-39

Luke 16:19-31

John 7:10-18

In class, we will talk about these passages and look for some insight on the big questions, as well as talk about other questions you may have about this topic. Please join us.

Scriptures for the Wired Word Bible Study for 09/26/2010

Ruth 1:1-18

¹In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. ²The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. ³But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, ⁵both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

⁶Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had considered his people and given them food. ⁷So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. ⁸But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. ¹⁰They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." ¹¹But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹²Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, ¹³would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me." ¹⁴Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." ¹⁶But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!" ¹⁸When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

1 Kings 18:20-39

²⁰So Ahab sent to all the Israelites, and assembled the prophets at Mount Carmel.

²¹Elijah then came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people did

not answer him a word. ²²Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets number four hundred fifty. ²³Let two bulls be given to us; let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it; I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. ²⁴Then you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the Lord; the god who answers by fire is indeed God." All the people answered, "Well spoken!" ²⁵Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many; then call on the name of your god, but put no fire to it." ²⁶So they took the bull that was given them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, crying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no answer. They limped about the altar that they had made. ²⁷At noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud! Surely he is a god; either he is meditating, or he has wandered away, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." ²⁸Then they cried aloud and, as was their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood gushed out over them. ²⁹As midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice, no answer, and no response. ³⁰Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come closer to me"; and all the people came closer to him. First he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down; ³¹Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, "Israel shall be your name"; ³²with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. Then he made a trench around the altar, large enough to contain two measures of seed. ³³Next he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood. He said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." ³⁴Then he said, "Do it a second time"; and they did it a second time. Again he said, "Do it a third time"; and they did it a third time, ³⁵so that the water ran all around the altar, and filled the trench also with water. ³⁶At the time of the offering of the oblation, the prophet Elijah came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your bidding. ³⁷Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." ³⁸Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord indeed is God; the Lord indeed is God."

Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' ²⁵But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but

now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' ²⁷He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— ²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' ³⁰He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

John 7:10-18

¹⁰But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. ¹¹The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, "Where is he?" ¹²And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds. While some were saying, "He is a good man," others were saying, "No, he is deceiving the crowd." ¹³Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews.

¹⁴About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. ¹⁵The Jews were astonished at it, saying, "How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?" ¹⁶Then Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. ¹⁷Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. ¹⁸Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him.

Article starts below.

Stephen Hawking: God Has No Role in Universe

Updated: 21 days 8 hours ago

Text Size

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[Theunis Bates](#) Contributor

LONDON (Sept. 2) -- Entering the ongoing debate between faith and [science](#), renowned British scientist [Stephen Hawking](#) claims that modern physics has now proved that God played no role in the creation of the universe.

In a new book -- "[The Grand Design](#)," co-written with American physicist [Leonard Mlodinow](#) -- the theoretical physicist sets out to demolish [Sir Isaac Newton's](#) claim that an "intelligent and powerful Being" must have shaped the universe, which he believed could not have emerged from chaos. Hawking and Mlodinow rule out the possibility of divine intervention, saying that new theories have made the idea of a supernatural creator redundant.

"Because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing," the pair write, in an extract published in today's [London Times](#). "Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to

invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the Universe going."



Evan Agostini, AP

British physicist Stephen Hawking, shown here at the World Science Festival in New York City this summer, says he's changed his mind about the role of God in the universe's creation.

"The Grand Design," which goes on sale next week, is a significant shift away from Hawking's previous comments on the divine. In his 1988 best-seller, "[A Brief History of Time](#)," he suggested that it was possible to believe in the concept of God as creator and also hold a scientific view of the universe. "If we do discover a complete theory ... of why it is that we and the universe exist ... it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason -- for then we would know the mind of God," he wrote.

And in a 2007 interview, he appeared to portray himself as an [agnostic](#). "I believe the universe is governed by the laws of science," he told the BBC. "The laws may have been decreed by God, but God does not intervene to break the laws."

Hawking now argues that Newton's assertion that the laws of nature cannot alone explain the existence of life and the universe started to fall apart in 1992, when astronomers discovered the first [extrasolar planets](#) (planets beyond our own solar system) orbiting other sunlike stars.

"That makes the coincidences of our planetary conditions -- the single Sun, the lucky combination of Earth-Sun distance and solar mass, far less remarkable, and far less compelling evidence that the Earth was carefully designed just to please us human beings," he writes. Hawking believes that other universes, as well as other solar systems, are also likely to exist. But if God's purpose was to create mankind, he wonders, why would He make these redundant and out-of-reach worlds?

[Richard Dawkins](#), an evolutionary biologist and high-profile [atheist](#), welcomed the book, telling the Times that Hawking had developed a theory of Darwinism for the entirety of nature, not simply the creatures that live within it. "That's exactly what he's saying," Dawkins told the paper. "I know nothing of the details of the physics, but I had always assumed the same thing."

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However, religious commentators have criticized Hawking's theorizing, saying he can never hope to explain what is essentially unexplainable.

"If all the physical laws had been explained and proved -- which is a million miles from the case -- our understanding of the actions of God would not be one whit greater: his existence and his actions are of a different order," writes [Quentin de la Bedoyere](#), science editor of the U.K.'s [Catholic Herald](#) newspaper.

"Most particularly it would not touch the question of how something existing comes out from nothing. That is a question which science cannot answer, and will never answer, because nothingness is not within its domain. ... Neither [Hawking], nor you, nor I will ever explain creation, except through faith."

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Hot Leads

The Grand Design by Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow

Hawking and Mlodinow's new theory is about life, the universe and everything – except God

Robin McKie

The Observer, Sunday 12 September 2010

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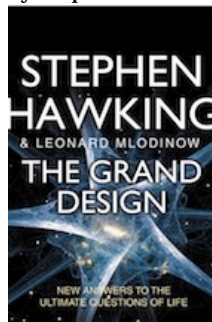


Professor Stephen Hawking: "It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going." Photograph: Murdo Macleod

For those who have spent the last couple of weeks on a caving holiday or who have been on a visit to the glaciers of Svalbard, the news that Stephen Hawking has published a new book – his first in a decade – may come as a surprise. For the rest of humanity, however, the information will by now seem as stale as a day-old pizza. Certainly, the blizzard of front-page stories that has greeted publication of the first extracts from *The Grand Design* has been extraordinary and, over the past two weeks, has given the scientist the kind of coverage that modern authors would sell their souls for (though for Tony Blair, this may be too late).

The Grand Design

by Stephen Hawking, Leonard Mlodinow



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"Hawking: God did not create universe", the *Times* announced on its front page, a splash story that was followed up for several days with as much furious religious reaction that the paper's writers could muster. Other media outlets followed suit –

"Bang goes God, says Hawking", the *Star* announced – while rabbis, archbishops and religious historians filled letters pages and comment slots with waves of apoplectic outrage.

It has been a dispiriting experience. Setting religion against science, as the media has quite deliberately done in this case, achieves little for our attempts to understand the complexities of modern cosmology, the specific aim of Hawking and Mlodinow's book. Worse, the furore suggests that at the beginning of the 21st century, in our apparently rational, secular society, the declaration by a leading scientist that God was not involved in the universe's creation is deemed to be newsworthy and deserving of front-page headlines in national newspapers.

Nothing could be further from the truth, of course. Like most other physicists, Hawking has never expressed a need for God in his equations and has only made previous mentions to tease his readers. Fortunately, most of them have had the wit to appreciate this point. In fact, there is hardly a mention of a deity in *The Grand Design*. In the opening pages, there are a few mentions of clerical attempts in the middle ages to make philosophical sense of the heavens and that is about it – until we reach the last chapter.

"Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist," Hawking and Mlodinow announce at this point. "It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going."

And that is just about it. The rest of the book is an attempt to account for the strange nature of reality as revealed by astronomers and physicists; to reconcile the apparent absurdities of quantum mechanics with the mind-stretching features of special and general relativity; and to explain why the forces of nature are apparently fine-tuned to allow the evolution of complex creatures such as ourselves. As Hawking and Mlodinow note, only the tiniest altering of the constants that control nuclear synthesis in stars would produce a universe with no carbon and no oxygen and therefore no humans.

"Our universe and its laws appear to have a design that both is tailor-made to support us and, if we are to exist, leaves little room for alternation," they state. "That is not easily explained, and raises the natural question of why it is that way." The answer, the authors say, lies with M-theory. (The M apparently stands for "master, miracle, or mystery". The authors are unsure which.) The vital point is that M-theory allows for the existence of 11 dimensions of spacetime that contains not just vibrating strings of matter but also "point particles, two-dimensional membranes, three-dimensional blobs and other objects that are more difficult to picture." Simple, really.

Crucially the laws of M-theory allow for an unimaginably large number of different universes. Thus we exist because the laws of our particular universe just happen to be tuned to the exact parameters that permit the existence of hydrogen, oxygen, carbon and other key atoms and which also generate laws that allow these entities to interact in ways that build up complex chemical combinations. Other universes are not so lucky.

M-theory is the unified theory of physics that Einstein was hoping to find, state the authors, and if it is confirmed by observation, it will be the successful conclusion to a search that was begun by the ancient Greeks when they started to puzzle about the nature of reality. "We will have found the grand design," Hawking and Mlodinow conclude.

It is all entertaining stuff, skilfully assembled and described in a fairly droll manner. The wave-particle duality of particles is described as being as foreign as drinking a chunk of sandstone, for example. The book is also commendably brief and by and large illuminating about the complexities of modern cosmology.

So read it to understand the universe. But if it is God you are after, my advice is to steer

clear.

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Hawking's views on creation no threat to religion

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Church leaders have welcomed Professor Stephen Hawking's views on the creation of the universe – despite God having no role in his theory.

Parish vicars in the region say the leading physicist's claims should not be treated as a threat to religious beliefs.

Instead they argue that his views, which have angered some faith groups, will inspire a healthy debate about how and why we are all here.

The prominent scientist's new book *The Grand Design* seeks to answer the ultimate question of how the universe was created using the laws of physics.

In his latest work he concludes God had no role in the start of life, saying that given the existence of gravity that "the universe can and will create itself from nothing".

He writes: "Spontaneous creation is the reason why there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist.

"It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going."

But Rev Howard Flint, the vicar of the Holy Trinity with Christ Church in High Street, Tunbridge Wells, said Prof Hawking has missed the importance of the difference between how and why the universe was created in his theories.

He believes science can only plug the gaps in how the universe was created but cannot answer why we all exist and give purpose to our lives.

Rev Flint said: "I was not surprised by Stephen Hawking's book. I was quite encouraged by it, as it carries on a conversation that is already ongoing.

"Richard Dawkins is an atheist scientist, who wrote *The God Delusion*, so the conversation has been going for quite some time about the relationship of science and religious belief.

"I thought Hawking's arguments were a welcome addition to this debate."

He added: "For me, science and the Christian faith are answering two different questions. His question is 'scientifically, what happened?' The Christian faith answers the question of 'why?'.

"I do not think they are in competition, they are just different questions. He gives his views about the Big Bang theory and the M theory, but as a Christian I am interested in 'why are we here?'

"If you ask a scientist 'why are we here?', they will have no answer to this as they see it as immaterial.

"But people wanting an answer to this and wanting a purpose in life, cannot find this without the existence of God. So I would say to Prof Hawking, 'where do people go to explain the purpose of life if not to God?'

"So I refute his claim that God is not needed. God is needed to understand the



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importance of life and the value of it."

Rev Mark Brown, the priest in charge of the parish of St Peter and St Paul in Tonbridge, agreed with Rev Flint.

The senior vicar, who is based in Church Lane, has a degree in chemistry and taught the subject for a year before entering the Church.

He said: "The question of science, evolution and the origin of the universe, and how this connects with the Christian faith has always interested me.

"I am happy for Stephen Hawking to talk about how the universe came into being but still people will ask the 'why?' question and we have to go to another level to discover the philosophy for this."

Rev Brown said: "I do not think his views are a danger to religious beliefs as they can stimulate discussion.

"It is quite reasonable for science to say 'we do not need God'. This is natural.

"But I think we have to look at why when we are saying how the universe was created. On one level a combination of science and religious faith can enhance the other.

"Yet I do not expect scientific enquiry to answer the question of existence. There has to be another level to discover the answer to the meaning of life and its purpose."

***What do you think of the argument? Join the debate and share your views by posting your comments below.**

POSTED: 18/09/2010 13:00:00

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Added: Tuesday 21/09/2010 14:11:09 UK

I personally believe in the validity of scientific works over the presumption of faith. I welcome Stephen Hawking's views in this book. I find it strange that in this day and age there are still human beings that feel the need to answer the "why" question. To them I ask this, why can't we simply exist? Why does there have to be a "why" or a grand reason? I don't think there is one and I am perfectly fine with that.

Lynx Blackstone, York, PA, USA

Added: Sunday 19/09/2010 08:58:32 UK

Hawking's theory occurs in imaginary time. Conversion to real time would again imply a beginning and an end. Hawking suggests that imaginary time is actually real time. Hawking: "...it is meaningless to ask: Which is real, 'real' or 'imaginary' time? It is simply a matter of which is the more useful description." The usefulness of a description is determined by the use one has in mind. His theory is useful to describe a universe containing no God, but no scientific criteria demand we follow him.

Chris, Strand, South Africa

Added: Sunday 19/09/2010 00:24:23 UK

I appreciate the mathematical approach of M-theory but I want ask question "what is difference between fool and wise?" Obviously wisdom, we can't show wisdom but we can differentiate between above two by their actions. Similarly God can not be perceived by our senses or limited Knowledge, as non-material thing cannot be exemplified with material thing. In Holy Quran (Islamic religious book) about 1400 years ago God explain many times that He is the creator of Earth and Heaven, stars all living things, light.

Badar Uddin Ahmad, London, United kingdom

Added: Saturday 18/09/2010 21:20:43 UK

I believe the universe (and energy, mass and time-gravity, and everything that exists big or small) all came from nothing, and God is having a laugh at all the scientific communities and their attempts to find the answer because the scientist must accept a certain elegance and beauty with manifestations from nothing. If there be a God he would find it simple and elegant, and scientists all over the world are still pondering on how it all started and will never accept a certain beauty about this specific function of the big bang theory as it flies in the face of the first law of thermodynamics and may never become a part of mainstream theoretical science.

I have a theory as to how nothing can become energy all of a sudden,



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