

# Hawking's rejection of God unpersuasive, say faith leaders

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Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders have all rejected claims that belief in the divine has been disproved by British physicist Stephen Hawking, who recently asserted that science leaves no role for God in the creation of the universe.

In his new book *The Grand Design*, Hawking says, "Because there is a law such as gravity, the Universe can and will create itself from nothing. 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."

In a previous book, *A Brief History of Time*, Hawking had written that finding a theory for creation would be humanity's greatest achievement, "for then we should know the mind of God."

In response to Hawking's latest book, the archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, said in an article in the *Times* of London, "Belief in God is not about plugging a gap in explaining how one thing relates to another within the universe. It is the belief that there is an intelligent, living agent on whose activity everything ultimately depends for its existence. Physics on its own will not settle the question of why there is something rather than nothing."

Britain's chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, stated, "Science is about explanation. Religion is about interpretation. The Bible simply isn't interested in how the universe came into being."

*A Brief History of Time* remained on the British and U.S. best-seller charts for almost four years. *The Grand Design* was co-written by Hawking and a U.S. physicist, Leonard Mlodinow.

Until his retirement in 2009, Hawking was Lucasian professor of mathematics at Cambridge University, the post that was once held by Isaac Newton.

Ibrahim Mogra, chairman of the interfaith committee of the Muslim Council of Britain, said, "If we look at the universe and all that has been created, it indicates that somebody has been here to bring it into existence. That somebody is the almighty Creator."

George Ellis, emeritus professor at South Africa's University of Cape Town and a past president of the International Society for Science and Religion, told reporters, "My biggest problem with [Hawking's theory] is that it's presenting the public with a choice: science or religion. A lot of people will say, 'OK, I choose religion, then,' and it is science that will lose out."

In June, Hawking said he did not believe that a "personal" God existed, reported the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper. He told *Genius of Britain*, a television program, "The question is: is the way the universe began chosen by God for reasons we can't understand, or was it determined by a law of science? I believe the second. If you like, you can call the laws of science 'God,' but it wouldn't be a personal God that you could meet and ask questions." —ENI