

# Henrietta United Church of Christ

Rev. David Inglis  
Genesis 1:1-5

January 29, 2006

## **“Creation, Intelligent Design, Evolution. . . and You”**

*Genesis 1:1-5 is read with pictures projected. During this reading, music might be played, such as the opening portion of “Musica Celestes” from Aaron Jay Kernis’ album, Colored Field.)*

*The numbers below refer to pictures and graphics that were projected during the message.*

11/ For millennia, this story, or stories like it in other cultures, satisfied most people’s need to understand how day and night, sun and stars, grass and giraffes, porcupines and people, all came to be.

But then people began pushing the limits of what they knew and began systematically penetrating the mysteries of the world, the universe, and life. And they made some amazing discoveries.

12/ The world is much older than they had believed— 4 or 5 billion of years old, in a universe that is maybe 15 billion years old.

13/ Life abounds in extraordinary variety and complexity.

14/ The universe is immense. It has at least 70 sextillion stars—more stars than the grains of sand on every beach and in every desert on this earth.

15/ It is a place of extraordinary energy, where new stars are being created in cataclysmic explosions, old stars are dying, 16/ and whole galaxies can get sucked into the maws of voracious black holes, collapsing space, time, gravity, and matter into little packets of nothing and everything.

17/ It is a place of imponderable mystery. Matter and energy are different manifestations of the same thing. Space and time are elastic and relative to each other. On the subatomic level, particles seem to disappear and reappear as something else. Waves appear as particles or particles as waves depending on how you observe them. Particles can seem to be in two places at once, and can affect another particle far away without any apparent connection.

18/ The more we explore the mysteries of the world and life and the universe, the more we realize we don’t know. We are haunted by such questions as, How did it all start? Who or what is behind it all? Is there a supreme design to it all, or is it all chance and accident?

19/ And we might realize that we are not just asking about the nature of the universe. We're really asking about ourselves. Are *we* a part of a bigger plan, or are *we* just random accidents of nature? Are our lives just a temporary arrangement of atoms and cells that work together for awhile and then come apart and become a part of the earth, or do we have some inherent connection to something that transcends the physical rhythms of life and decay?

I think it's these kinds of questions that are driving the controversy about how we teach science in our public schools. Can the schools tell our children—the citizens of the future—that we're all part of a divine plan? If so, whose name do you give to the Divine, and whose interpretation do you use? There's a problem there. Well then, should the schools teach that we're all just meaningless accidents of nature? That's what evolutionary theory implies. But doesn't that make a profound philosophical assertion that almost nobody really believes? This is our dilemma. Creationism, Intelligent Design, and evolution are all vying to tell our children how things came to be. And the stakes are high, because they all imply very different things about who we are and what life is about.

I can't solve this dilemma, certainly not in one sermon. But I can speak to it briefly, not as a scientist but as a person of faith who is also interested in understanding the world around me.

Let's look first at Creationism, which holds that the two creation accounts at the beginning of the Bible tell us, at least in outline form, how it all started.

There are some striking parallels between the Bible's creation story and what science has discovered.

20/ For example, the formlessness and void sounds a lot like the undifferentiated soup of subatomic particles and radiation that eventually began coalescing into stars and galaxies and planets. But science has also found the creation story to be naive and inaccurate as well.

21/ For example, the Bible doesn't account for the age of the earth or the existence of dinosaurs. So some literal creationists have made the assertion that God planted what look like dinosaur fossils in the earth to deceive faithless paleontologists. This is what happens when people read the biblical creation story as a factual scientific account. But that story was told and retold and finally written before there was such a thing. It was passed down generation to generation as a myth. "Myth" in this sense doesn't mean a falsehood at all.

22/ A myth is a meaning story that tells truths that are deeper than facts. The truths the Bible creation story proclaims are that out of the chaos and swirling primordial void, God created order, and in this order there was inherent good and worth. And human beings were created as an integral part of that plan, and given the responsibility to be caretakers of the earth. The creation story that immediately follows in Genesis says that humans were created in the image and likeness of God, and were given free choice—the ability to choose good and evil.

Neither science nor I can prove or disprove these truths, because they are meaning statements, not scientific statements. But I can put them to the test by living in accordance with them. And when I do that, my life is rich and meaningful and in harmony with the reality around me, and makes the world a better place. And I'll let you in on a secret. Most scientists don't realize it, but they're living in accordance with this myth too. If the world weren't ordered and inherently worthy and good, why would they be devoting their lives to learning about it? If we don't have the responsibility to be stewards and caretakers of it, why are so many scientists applying their brains to finding ways to improve the world and protect its ecology? If we weren't created in God's image with the capacity to transcend our limited little selves, why do scientists spend nights in the laboratory or days out in the field pondering, creating, developing, and contributing? Why are most scientists such self-giving, ethical people? And why do the best scientists so often talk like mystics? Albert Einstein said, "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mystical. It is the source of all true art and science." Edgar Mitchell, Apollo 14 astronaut, described what he saw from his space capsule:

23/ Suddenly, from behind the rim of the moon, in long, slow-motion

moments of immense majesty, there emerges a sparkling blue and white

jewel, a light, delicate, sky-blue sphere laced with slowly swirling veils of white, rising gradually like a small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery. It takes more than a moment to fully realize this is Earth...home. My view of our planet was a glimpse of divinity.

The creation myth lives because it works. And it works for us whenever we create beauty and order out of ugliness and chaos; when we reach beyond ourselves to love, heal, forgive, offer our gifts to the greater good, and work to make the world a better place.

Now what about Intelligent Design? This theory has been in the news lately as a new attempt to affirm to our children that they aren't just random piles of protoplasm going in and out of existence, or to sneak God into the classroom— depending on your point of view.

The study of science is based on the assumption and the marvel that, despite the apparent randomness and chaos and entropy built into the universe, nature behaves in ways that are elegantly orderly and law-abiding.

24/ As physicists say, "The universe speaks in mathematics." Time and time again, the most bizarre, counterintuitive predictions of the theory of relativity or quantum physics have been verified when ways have been developed to test them. Reality obeys the equations.

25/ Max Planck, the great physicist who discovered quantum mechanics, said, "All matter originates and exists only by virtue of a force.... We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent Mind. This Mind is the matrix of all matter."

26/ But the key word for a scientist there is "assume." Science has no way to prove or account for or describe exactly who or what this "conscious and intelligent Mind" might be. Nor would we want scientists presuming to do that. It is up to science to discover the laws and order implicit in the universe. It is up to religion to help people live in harmony with the divine, transcendent dimension life, including guiding the application of scientific discoveries towards the highest good.

27/ As Einstein said, "Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind." But it's a mistake for either field to try to do the other one's job for them.

The theory of Intelligent Design is currently challenging the theory of evolution in some schools in our country, so let's look at that.

First, it's a mistake to think of evolution as a theory in the way we usually think of it—as a hypothesis that hasn't been proven. Evolution is happening all the time, right under our nose. This year's flu vaccine has been found to be largely ineffective against a common strain of flu virus that it worked well against last year, because that virus has quickly evolved to be largely immune to it.

28/ But Charles Darwin, father of the theory of evolution, said, "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down." Proponents of Intelligent Design claim that his theory does break down at things like the sonar system of a bat or even the structure and process of a cell. Darwin himself could never discount the possibility of intelligent design. He wrote to Asa Gray of Harvard University, "I am conscious that I am in an utterly hopeless muddle. I cannot think that the world, as we see it, is the result of chance, and yet I cannot look at each separate thing as the result of Design."

My hope is that serious science will continue to be done by people more intent in seeking the truth than pushing their ideology on one side or the other. But I'll have to leave that to the scientists. What truly leaves me in wonder and awe is where the forces of nature and evolution have taken us.

29/ Our bodies and brains are made up entirely of subatomic particles that started with the Big Bang, that organized themselves into dust and stars and meteors and then the earth. But what has this space debris evolved into? Human beings that are sitting here today pondering the mysteries of the universe and the meaning of life, seeking to align our lives closer to the Creator, struggling to learn how to transcend our physical selfish nature and love more fully, creating a community of hope and love whose creative, life-giving energy we can feel renewing us week by week.

30/ So though I believe in evolution and see how we have evolved from lower life forms, I also detect a direction to it that leads to an awareness of the Creator of it all.

31/ If you look at the lives of human beings who are the most highly evolved spiritually, they are honest, loving, just, compassionate, creative, and full of life and light. They seem to reflect the very nature of God. And as we grow through the wounds and losses and disappointments and challenges of our own lives, don't we find ourselves moving closer to that enlightened level of living? If we are just collections of star dust that evolved randomly, how do you explain that? 32/ Personally, my soul soars to these words that Joseph Addison penned:

What though, in solemn silence, all  
Move round the dark terrestrial ball?

What though no real voice nor sound  
Amidst their radiant orbs be found?  
In reason's ear they all rejoice,  
And utter forth a glorious voice;  
Forever singing, as they shine,  
"The hand that made us is divine."

But I would never want this poem to pass for biology in school, nor would I want the biblical Creation story to be taught as a scientific explanation for how the world came to be. I totally support the separation of church and state, because public schools have no business advancing one group's religion over another.

But when we try to sterilize education of everything that is connected to religion and our spiritual nature, we are left with a lopsided education that implies that religion and spirituality have no real place in our understanding of the world and our place in it. And doesn't that mean that we're essentially teaching the belief system of secular humanism?

So I'll conclude with these questions. As beings that are struggling to evolve to reflect more fully transcendent qualities like love, truth, compassion, generosity, peace, and service to the common good, how can we help our children find meaning for their lives? How can we teach them that they have eternal worth and value because they are deeply related to the One Who has created everything? How can we teach them that they are deeply related to all that God has created, and that they should respect and care for what God has created, because it is intrinsically good? How can we teach these things in a way that respects each person's God given freedom to believe or not believe as they choose?

33/If we begin asking these questions as parents and educators, we just might see the **Creation** of teaching methods that **Evolve** according to a truly **Intelligent Design**.