

“Who & Why”
University United Methodist Church
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Carl W. Rohlf
Evolution Sunday

The Bible is the Church’s Book of God’s self-revelation.

Genesis 1:1-5, 26-31

1In the beginning when God created* the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God* swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

26 Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind* in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,* and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’

²⁷So God created humankind* in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’ ²⁹God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. ³¹God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 2:4b-8

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; ⁶but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— ⁷then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground,* and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. ⁸And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

This morning University United Methodist Church, alongside 441 other Christian congregations in 49 states is celebrating Evolution Sunday, an event coordinated with the 197th birthday of Charles Darwin – an avowed disciple of Jesus Christ. I am one of over 10,000 pastors who have signed a letter acknowledging that we believe “strident voices,

in the name of Christianity, have been claiming that people must choose between religion and modern science.” We believe this issue, like some others that create anxiety in our culture, is a false dichotomy.

We need not choose one or the other because religion and science are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they pursue different types of truth. Science seeks to explore and verify, asking the questions “What and When.” Religion, on the other hand, seeks that which cannot be verified, but which is implied in all that is. Science seeks “What, How and When”; religion seeks “Who and Why.” These questions are distinct, but not separable.

When Copernicus theorized that the earth was not the center of the universe, there were strident voices – many from the acknowledged religious establishment – who screamed, “Heresy!” Today, only the intransigent few would argue against Copernicus’ discovery. In the 20th Century, the same irrational cries were heard regarding Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. Strident voices contend that Darwin’s scientific theory is in conflict with Biblical revelation. I believe the conflict lies in mis-informed Biblical scholarship; not in the Biblical revelation. I will try to illustrate my belief with two examples.

First, consider the situation of a couple who has decided to marry. As a pastor I am honored to officiate at weddings – the cultural and sacerdotal moment when two human beings pledge covenant love for each other. As I meet with couples beforehand for a bit of pre-marital coaching, I like to ask them to tell me their “story.” How did they meet? How did they pursue being in relationship? How did the proposal-event transpire? I hear many wonderful stories – all of which differ in detail; but share common substance. The details reflect “what happened, when it happened and how did it happen;” but “What, How and When” are not near as important as “Who & Why”. What is universally important in proposing marriage is not “what happened, when and how”; but “who proposed and why.”

Second, if I decided to apply to the University of Texas Law School. I would be required to take the LSAT – a test to measure my aptitude for studying the law. Acceptance to law school would not be based on “who” I am or on “why” I want to attend law school. The issue of significance would be “What” aptitude test did I take and “How” did I perform on that test.

The Bible, by its historic purpose, is designed to answer the questions “Who & Why.” The physical sciences purpose to answer the questions “What, When and How.” To expect either to answer the other’s question is about as silly as proposing marriage to the law school or taking the LSAT to qualify for marriage!

Our scripture readings this morning are from the same book in the Bible. Both are very clear about “WHO”: **“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth”** and **“In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens”**; but if one asks of these accounts “How and When” one discovers discrepancy and ambivalence – was humanity created on the 6th day, after the plants and animals; or at the beginning of creation, before the plants and animals? The editors who placed these stories in scripture were not interested in trying to exact science from these stories. The truth that placed them in scripture is they correctly answer the question “WHO” created and beg the question “WHY.” The scriptures were not and are not interested in questions like the Big Bang or Intelligent Design. Theories can abound, but the scriptures are clear,

it was God who initiated creation. The faith journey of every religion is the quest to discover why God would do so. As a Christian I believe all God does – including creation – are divine acts to bestow grace and love upon us. God acts to draw us up to our highest potential; to redeem our lives from the trash-heaps created by humanity; and love us with an everlasting love, which, as those limited by time and space, we can only fore taste everlasting love.

In a recent conversation with a paleontologist, I discovered that the limestone fossil fields located on our ranch in Kimble County were formed somewhere around 100 million years ago! Wow! I'm glad someone is focused enough to scientifically discern such information. Kinda makes my seventeen years as "title" holder pale by comparison! He went on to describe the vast seas that once covered the Edwards Plateau and how it receded leaving the fossil-filled cliffs. Paleontologists focus on "What, When & How."

The central theme of the Bible is covenant. The marriage covenant – willingly binding one's self to the benefit of an "other" – is as close as we humans can approximate the proposal of covenant revealed by God through the Scriptures of our faith. The Bible is the story – in so many various forms – of the self-revealing God seeking to be in covenant relationship with humanity – each of us and all of us. The variety of human experience of the holy One as recorded in scripture reminds us that not one of us is identical to any other of us.

The universal truth the Bible addresses is "Who and Why." Science seeks facts; religion promotes faith. The best and latest of science is one of the purposes of public education. The ancient and most recent revelations of God's grace and love are the purpose of religious education, upon which there should be no restriction in the houses of faith throughout our land. Science education belongs primarily in the school house; religious education belongs in the church house. The faithful work in both of these houses will produce the best of minds and finest of souls. The Bible is the Church's Book of God's self-revelation; the Church does not need public endorsement or instruction to carry on its holy work.

I know of nothing in the Theory of Evolution that contradicts the Biblical witness that God initiated creation. Darwin did not address WHO created the building blocks of life; only HOW and WHEN those building blocks might have congregated and colonized to present life in its various forms. Darwin intended to discern "What, How and When." Those questions are not the focus of scripture – never were, never will be. To ask scripture to double-function as a science or a mathematics book is to claim more than the Bible itself would claim.

Scientists do not compete with scripture. In fact, as scientists discover more of the intricacies of creation, the theological questions of "WHO & WHY" cry louder for response. God – though available in time and space – is not confined to time and space. We are the ones confined to time and space. We are the ones gifted with inquisitive minds to discover the intricacies of creation. We are the ones who eventually peak into spaces that defy our intellectual grasp – and when we do, I believe it is precisely at that point that we see a glimpse of eternity and note that there is something beyond ourselves that is not limited to time and space. By whatever name we call it, is that not God?

Years ago, perhaps it was in *Christian Century*, there was a cartoon. It showed one mountain on every side of which there were the scientific disciplines

ascending – geologists, sociologists, biologists, physicists, physicians, chemists, paleontologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and on and on. Each of these was ascending the mountain. Arriving at the peak of their journey, they find – at the top – the theologian – who calmly says, “Welcome. I’ve been expecting you.”

Personal

It is not a misnomer that in classical thought, theology – the study of god – is considered the “Queen of the Sciences.” The inquisitive mind of humanity leads us further and further into information, truth and data; but the greatest of all journeys is to look beyond “What, How and When” and remember “Who and Why.” God initiated covenant and did so because God loves us.

Finally, I remember a story about an apocryphal time in the future when scientists will have discovered the means to initiate life. Boldly, they inform God, that God is no longer needed, and if God desires, God can go on to create another world. “Is that right?” asks God. “Yes, we can now do everything you have done.” “Can you create a human being?” “Yes, we can. Just like you, we can create a human being from the dust of the ground and make it live.” “OK, please do so.” At that point the scientist reached down to grab a mass of dirt. “Uh-uh,” said God, “use your own dirt!”

Personal

Strident voices tell us we must choose between faith and science. Balderdash! Horse feathers ! This is a false dichotomy. I do not believe Charles Darwin ever disputed the creation. He simply enlightened the world with a theory of how creation continues beyond its inception. “Who” brought being into the “**void**”; and “Why” still remain the purview of the Queen of the Sciences.