

Epiphany VI Yr. B
February 12, 2006
197th Birthday of Charles Darwin
Topic: Science and the Doctrine of Creation
Rev. Doris Westfall, St. Charles, MO

This morning I am going to digress from the appointed texts. The reason for this is because today is the 197th birthday of Charles Darwin, as well as the 6th Sunday of Epiphany.

For the past six weeks we have been reading about Jesus coming into the world. We have read of the light of world breaking into humanity. Epiphany means to manifest, to suddenly become clear.

Epiphany is a time when the world, indeed when God, opens up and is understood in a new way and with a new clarity. And so, at this time of our liturgical year it is very appropriate to speak about revelation and unfolding and to speak about the cultural and religious tension concerning Creation, Science and the teaching of both.

I'm sure we have all read or heard about the court challenges to the teaching of evolution in public schools. In Texas, Kansas, and Pennsylvania-in a total of 30 states there are court cases trying to either throw out or discredit evolutionary science and in its stead teach creationism, or its more up to date title Intelligent Design.

Intelligent Design states that there are gaps in the theory of evolution and that creation shows such complexity that it must be created by an intelligent designer. This so called 'God of the Gaps' is akin to a cosmic watchmaker that started the cosmic clock called creation and left it to its own devices, only to have to occasionally reappear when things were going wrong to try and rewind it.

The issue here is that intelligent design is neither good science nor good theology. Despite the evidence across the disciplines of geology, physics, biology, paleontology, anthropology, archeology and chemistry, Intelligent Design insists that the world was formed some 6,000 years ago in six 24 hour periods.

The proponents of this argument also hold that in order to faithfully accept creation you cannot believe in evolution. I read one article where the author stated that if the creation story wasn't true the way it was written then all of Christian belief is a sham.

This argument is being played out on, of all places, our automobiles. Perhaps you've seen the symbol of the fish, indicating that the car belongs to a Christian. Then there appeared on cars fish that have sprouted legs and inside the fish is the name Darwin. To counter those who would have this type of fish on their car there came an emblem of a small fish with legs and the name Darwin being swallowed up by a larger fish with the word TRUTH inside of it.¹

This either/or proposition, this argument that you can have either credible science or faith, this insistence that there is only type of truth, is fallacious and points to what I believe is a misunderstanding not only of science but of theology and faith as well. To read the first two chapters of Genesis as a scientific treatise or historical account of the earth's formation is to misread not only the stories of creation (and I say stories because there are two of them in Genesis, each pointing to a different truth about creation), but also to misunderstand the purpose and role of the Bible.

For the past three weeks I have been reading quantum physics, evolutionary science, and different theologians on the Doctrine of Creation. Before your eyes glaze over and your heads start to bob towards your chest, let me reassure you that I am not going to speak to you today about particles and waves, string theory or Heisenburg's uncertainty principle. I will tell you that reading these disciplines has been fascinating and awe-inspiring and they most certainly deserve a place in any believer's library.

There are really two things I want to talk about today because that is all I have time for. The first is to speak about how we as Episcopal Anglicans have historically read and considered the Bible and the second is to consider what science is, what faith is and how they belong together in what is called the Doctrine of Creation.

The proponent of Intelligent Design I spoke about earlier who stated either you believe in the Creation story the way it is written or else all the rest of the Christian story is a sham-was really only half wrong. The Doctrine of Creation is what the rest of our doctrines are based on. It is foundational to everything else that follows in Christian theology.

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Luminous Web: Essays on Science and Religion*. (Cowley Publications, 2000) pp. 9-10 and in Rev. Jim Burko *Beyond the Fish Wars*, San Francisco Chronical 8/05 www.tpcp.blogs.com/musings

The Doctrine of Creation states the universe we know, a universe of time and space, matter and energy as well as humanity depends solely on the free will of God.² God created the world for no other reason than love and to share his love with his creation. To believe that does not require that you have to have a literal interpretation of the Bible.

The Anglican faith has never taken the Bible literally. The original writers of the different books of both the Old and New Testaments also never took the writings literally. Scripture was and is taken very, very, seriously but not literally. It has always been interpreted.

Before we look at what the Bible is, we must look at what it is not. It is not a science or history textbook. The Bible is not, to paraphrase one of my seminary professors, a book of Helpful Hints for Happy Living³, or a book of right answers or right doctrine, only to be believed and not discerned or otherwise engaged⁴.

The Bible is far more wonderful, profound and mysterious. It is an invitation to come into relationship with the God that lives, loves, saves and redeems us. The Bible is concerned with faithful relationships between God and God's people, and of all creation.

The story of creation and all that follows was meant to convey the confessional and covenantal history of God's chosen people. Genesis was written to show the other civilizations living in the ANE alongside God's chosen people that creation was not the result of a dual between their different gods but was the result of the love of the one true God; a love that continues to create throughout history.

Scripture is the Living Word from a Living God to Living people. To read it literally is to relegate it to history. It is to deny the ongoing revelation and creation of God in the world.

I heard a theologian say, "The Bible always means what it says. It just doesn't always say what it means." The Bible is probably the most mysterious, complex and difficult book in the world.⁵ It is not always clearcut. More often than not it is ambiguous and mysterious. But that is part of its good news. It is why it continues to inspire, provoke and speak to us thousands of years later.

² Thomas and Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3rd ed. 2002 p. 115

³ Dr. Don Armentrout, University of the South, School of Theology

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense*, rev. ed., 1997, p. 121, 123

⁵ Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, *Weavings*, vol. XXI, Number 1, Jan./Feb 2006 p.8

It has been said that science answers the “how” questions and faith answers the “why” questions.

Science is made up of observations about the world around us. It is objective and testable and rests on facts. Faith, on the other hand, deals with the spiritual, the meaning-making, the relationships. It is subjective.⁶ It is known not by observation and reason but by revelation. Both science and faith search for truth and both find it. But I would submit that there are different types of truth.

For example, a person could observe that a man by the name of David is often seen with a women by the name of Doris. The person could also observe that both David and Doris wear gold rings on their left hand, and that there are often 2 or 3 boys around them that call one Mommy and the other Daddy. A person might surmise from these observations that David and Doris are married.

They could look for additional evidence by creating an experiment. People who are married usually live in the same house. The person could test their suspicions by calling the house and seeing if indeed David or Doris answers or if one of the children answers to ask if David and Doris are home. As evidence is built they would become more certain that their suspicions of David and Doris being married are correct. All of the information gathered is true-as far as it goes.

But there is another truth that isn't so readily apparent. None of the information gathered speaks to the why of that relationship. None of it shows the deep abiding love David and Doris has for the other or why they came together in relationship to begin with. It cannot tell of the intimacy and bonds that keep them together as a couple or the meaning they make of their life together. Yet that is truth too-a deeper truth that is just as relevant. Together, both types of truth give a fuller picture than could be had separately.

Science and faith-they are not mutually exclusive. We should not look to science to confirm our religious experiences and doctrines any more than we should expect religion to answer questions concerning quantum theory. However, the intersection of science and religion need not be a place where one must choose between either. It need not be an either/or proposition. You do not have to stand up and proclaim one as truth and the other null and void.

⁶ Barbara Brown Taylor, [The Luminous Web: Essays on Science and Religion](#), (Cowley Publishing, 2000) p. 6

Both truths to which science and faith point are necessary. Both truths give a fuller picture of the world than either one gives separately. This false dualism between science and faith is ironic because it was the development of the Judeo-Christian Doctrine of Creation, that there was the Creator and the creation, which allowed the creation to be seen as not divine and therefore available to be observed, studied and examined.

Albert Einstein knew this. He is quoted as saying, “Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.”⁷ The reason we need to understand both is because Christ became incarnate-Christ came into this world, came into relationship with us physical and earthly creatures and loved us enough to die for us.

Both science and faith leave me in awe. The complexity of this grand universe, the realization that God made us to be a part of it is very, very humbling. The mystery of the atoms, protons, neutrons and electrons and the mystery of the incarnation are related.

Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest and author writes; “What is harder to believe: that we live in an expanding universe so vast that light from one frontier takes more than twice the age of the earth to reach our telescopes, or that within, beyond, and throughout this vastness there is a compassionate deity who knows each of us by name?”⁸

Perhaps what can be helpful in this argument is a good dose of humility-both on the part of scientists as well as on the part of the faithful. Both need “to recognize the limits in their way of knowing and leave room for the other.”⁹ Both need to stand in awe and wonder at the mystery of the physical creation, God’s incarnation in it and humanity’s call to be a part of it.

Science and faith are not enemies of one another but allies in teaching us about creation. William King, a Lutheran pastor at a major research institution, writes of a preeminent scientist by the name of William Bragg, who was a forerunner in the field of X-ray crystallography. Dr. Bragg was asked whether science and faith were opposed to one another. “Yes, he replied, ‘but only in the sense that my

⁷ *ibid* p. 18

⁸ *ibid* p. 90

⁹ *ibid* p. 18

thumb and forefinger are opposed to one another—between them I can grasp everything.”¹⁰

Amen.

¹⁰ William H. King, “Science and Religion: Getting the Conversation Going” *the Christian Century*, 7/2-7/9, 1986 pp. 611-614