

“The Essentials”

In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things love.

Essential #3

God made everything from nothing
and everyone to be something

Genesis 1:26-28

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

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

²⁸God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Christians believe that God made everything that there is and that everything is originally good. The reason there is evil in the world and that nature itself is both destructive and subject to destruction is because God created the universe as a stage for beings with the capacity to love. These beings also have the capacity not to love—to be selfish and to bring evil into the created order.

The idea that creation is originally good was not the majority opinion in the ancient world (gnostics saw the material universe as an abortion, the mistake of a minor deity, and Hindus and Buddhists both seek to escape the material world, not to celebrate it.). It was the Christian/Jewish/Muslim belief in the goodness of creation that originally allowed for the development of science. But what has happened since?

Let me make a statement and you either nod yes or shake your head no:

SCIENCE AND FAITH ARE AT WAR!

In a typical church of any denomination, a number of you will shake your heads, a number will nod their heads, and a number will refuse to commit.

Genesis 1 does not appear to express what modern science has demonstrated about the beginning of the universe.

1. Vegetation is created before the sun and the moon (photosynthesis?)
2. Vegetation on land is created before sea life.
3. The worldview in Gen 1 seems primitive—God makes a dome and land to create a space between the waters above and below. (An ancient Near Eastern creation myth has Marduke slaying the sea monster and creating the world from its entrails.)

On the other hand, it is remarkable that there are no other supernatural beings involved in Creation. Furthermore, there are some significant parallels between Genesis 1 and modern science, parallels that do not necessarily exist in most mythologies:

1. The world is brought into being out of chaos (a reality where the laws of physics don't apply)
2. Light has a primacy in creation
3. Creation isn't instantaneous but follows a process
4. Humanity is a latecomer on the universal stage
5. Creation is "very good," majestic, awesome, orderly, and breathtaking whether viewed from microbiology or intergalactic astrophysics.

Indeed, for Christian scientists (and for Moses one suspects), the fact that modern science has vastly increased the scale in time and space of the universe is simply how it bears witness to the greatness of God.

There is both a tension and a harmony with science inherent in the creation story. A great deal depends on whether you read the story (and the Bible in general) literally or figuratively. The division between Christians who read their Bibles literally and those who read them figuratively is ancient. Already by the year 200 AD there were two theological tendencies identified with the two great centers of Christian scholarship at the time: Alexandria (in Egypt, where the great library of Alexandria was) and Antioch (in Syria, the place where the Gentiles first converted to Christianity). In general the great scholars from Alexandria (Clement, Origen, Athanasius) thought that the Bible should be read mostly figuratively. The great scholars

from Antioch (Ignatius, Nestorius, Chrysostom) generally believed that the Bible should be read mostly literally. At Antioch Gen 1 described a literal six-day creation, while at Alexandria Genesis 1 was figurative. Most Christians today don't have any idea what the "schools" of Antioch and Alexandria were, but if they did, half of today's believer's would be yelling "Go Antioch" while the other half would yell "Go Alexandria".

The most brilliant church father of all, St. Augustine of Hippo, did not hold to either school. He studied the first two chapters of Genesis with great care for several years before he came to the tentative conclusion that these passages did not require a literal reading. I cite him merely to show that authentic, dedicated Christians come out differently on this.

For the purposes of this message I would like to sketch three positions that Modern Christians take on the creation of the universe. Other positions and permutations exist, but these will best serve to illustrate the issues involved:

1. Young earth creationists. The earth (perhaps the universe) was created in six days about 6,000 years ago. Creationists choose to believe the Bible first. Creationist scientists then look for evidence in nature that supports that literal reading.
2. Theistic evolutionists. Darwin essentially was right and a figurative reading of Genesis allows for evolution. God set up natural laws and the process of evolution, and is letting nature take its course.
3. Intelligent Design. Nature is so complex that creation simply cannot be explained in terms of mere random processes or purely natural ones. Because the chances of the universe occurring randomly are so infinitesimal and the time required for the random formation of life is so enormous, there are enormous gaps in the explanations that science can offer. Evolution, therefore, is guided by a mind.

What are you, pastor? Well, if you held a gun to my head, I think I would have to say Intelligent Design. I think most Christians in the United States intuitively feel that the Intelligent Design position is the one that makes most sense.

So, why are scientists so opposed to Intelligent Design and Creationism being taught in the schools? Would it not be best to teach all points of view and allow the students to make up their own minds? Well, one reason is that many scientists (and many Christians, for that matter) like the idea of science and faith being at war. But you would be surprised to find even many Christian scientists opposed to teaching Intelligent Design or Creationism in school. Why?

1. By definition, science seeks natural (not supernatural) causes for things. The discipline requires the presupposition that things in nature have natural causes. The search for supernatural causes belongs either to theology or magic, not science.
2. It is evident that although for Christians nature bears witness to God, that witness is a *discreet* witness. God seems to want humans to approach the Divine presence in love planted in faith and watered by grace, rather than to play the part of a supernatural wish-granting Divine Genie. Many Christians have spoken of Nature as a beautiful veil or tent that both displays and covers the glory of God. By keeping scientific inquiry separate from theological inquiry, Christian Scientists are not only defending the independence of science, they are protecting the precious "deposit of faith."

So the first big point in this sermon is that we should study science: modern, secular, non-creationist science. There is nothing to be gained by keeping our children in the dark about the Theory of Evolution, any more than there would be in keeping them in the dark about the Theory of Gravity. This is not to say that we allow the Theory of Evolution to dictate our faith (as you will see), but that Christians should be well-informed. Augustine pointed out that God has written of Himself in two books: the book of Revelation in the Bible, and the book of Nature described by science. He also pointed out that while both books speak reliably about God, our reading of both may be mistaken. When Galileo was hauled into court for writing that the earth revolves around the sun, Scripture was not mistaken nor was he. Those who were mistaken were the theologians who thought that a literal reading of Psalm 19 (the sun runs its course) required the sun to revolve around the Earth.

When Darwin first wrote the Origin of Species that propounded evolution, a great many Evangelical Christians accepted his Theory of Evolution: Asa Grey, an important Biologist at Harvard; B.B. Warfield, the defender of the inerrancy of the Bible at Princeton, and Josiah Strong of Strong's concordance among them. About 50 years later, however, Evangelicals came to have a reputation as being anti-evolution. Why?

Because when Darwinian evolution is applied to humans, the result is poison. These are the three presuppositions that undergird Darwinian evolution:

1. Organisms adapt to changes in their environment in a competition for scarce resources.
2. Those that adapt best, survive. Those that don't, die out. (survival of the fittest)
3. All organisms descend from a single ancestor (with the implication that biologically humans are not any more special than a monkey or an amoeba. They are worth just the \$12.00 of chemicals that compose them.)

Christian opposition to evolution came in reaction to philosophers such as Spencer, Marx, and Nietzsche who took Darwinian evolution and applied it to human society. Take as a prime example a man who has been castigated as an ignorant fundamentalist Christian for his role in opposing evolution in the "Scopes Monkey Trial" immortalized in the movie "Inherit the Wind." William Jennings Bryan was a leading Christian politician, perhaps the greatest political speaker in the United States of the 1890's and early 20th century (his "Cross of Gold" speech is one of the 10 greatest political speeches of all time).

Bryan was a populist, a man who opposed the concentration of wealth in Gilded Age America. He was known as the "Great Commoner", and sought progressive measures all his life—income tax, abandonment of the Gold Standard, breaking up of monopolies, and Social Gospel. He was a leader of the Democratic Party (and was its presidential candidate twice). Early in his career he was moderately creationist, until after his role of Secretary of State before the US entered World War I. His reading brought him to the conclusion that an acceptance of "survival of the fittest" had influenced German militarism. (this opinion turned prophetic in light of the development of Nazism. 20 million people died in German concentration camps as Adolph Hitler sought to rid the world of what was weak and defective to make room for the higher evolved German race. Nazism viewed itself as highly scientific.). It was his concern that the "law of love" rather than the law of "survival of the fittest" govern human existence that led Bryan to oppose evolution.

Christians **must** be Creationist to this extent—we believe that Genesis 1:27 is to be read literally. All men and women, all humanity are made in the image of God. God made each person special, and each is to be treasured and honored.

I love Antiques Roadshow. I love it when someone brings what is supposed to be a rare and valuable chinese vase and the appraiser shows it to be fake because it doesn't have a key mark on it.

Do you remember last week how we said that God is like a beautifully complex cut gemstone? I have given a children's sermon in which I place a mirror in a box and say that I have the best picture of God ever made—indeed a picture of himself that God himself made. I then have each child look in the box to see her own reflection.

We Christians, indeed, are out to disprove Evolution. We are out to prove that we are not merely the product of biological processes but that we are "wonderfully and fearfully" (and supernaturally) made. But we cannot disprove Evolution scientifically. We cannot disprove Darwin from within nature. Instead, we disprove Evolution and prove that each of us is special when we show forth the mark of the One who made us, that God who is Love.