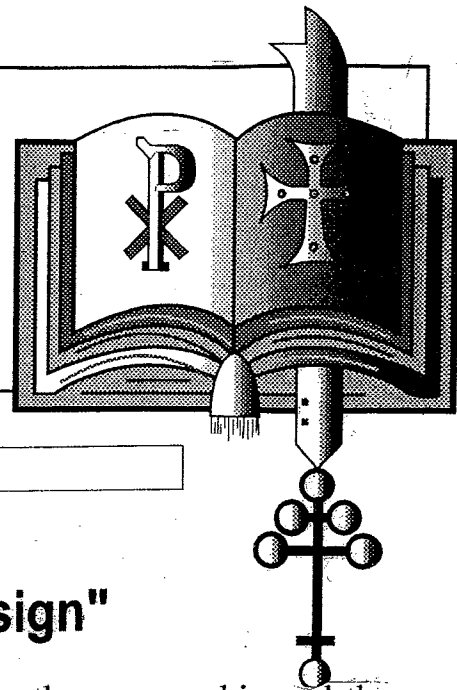


BRINGING LIGHT TO SCRIPTURE

A Newsletter of Biblical Literacy



Spring 2006

"The Creation Stories and Intelligent Design"

I was recently asked what I thought about the current effort to teach "*Intelligent Design*" in science classrooms based on a literal interpretation of the creation stories in Genesis. Since the two stories of creation found in Genesis reflect a pre-scientific understanding of the universe, I think it will be difficult to do. For the author of the first creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:3, the earth is the center of the universe. It is flat, surrounded by water on all sides. Water was also underneath the dry land making it possible to dig wells and reach the "*waters of the deep.*" The sky or firmament was a dome over the earth into which the sun was placed to illumine the day as it moved from east to west across the sky. There was a moon in place to illumine the night, regulate the tides and allow humans to count the passing of time. Also, in the night sky, there were stars. Above the sky was more water, which fell as rain.

In the second creation story in Genesis 2:7-23, the cosmology is the same but the details differ. The language

is much more anthropomorphic and the perspective more patriarchal. God made the man Adam out of the dust of the earth like a child making a mud pie. The man was made first, in the image of God, (different from male and female created together in God's image in the first creation story). Then the animals were created in a vain divine effort to find a suitable partner for the man. Finally, when that did not work, God created the woman Eve, out of the man and not in God's image, to be a helpmate.

Neither the scientific nor cultural beliefs in these Genesis creation stories, taken literally, are accepted by people today. For a generation of young people raised on the image from space of the earth as a beautiful sphere continuing its orbit around the sun, these pre-scientific understandings could be a hard sell. That they were literally true was even a hard sell in ancient pre-scientific days. Origen, who was a great Christian biblical scholar wrote in the third century C.E.: "*What intelligent person can imagine that there was a first day, then a second day and third day, evening and*

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morning without the sun, moon and stars? (The sun, moon and stars were created on the fourth day)...I cannot imagine that anyone will doubt that those details point symbolically to spiritual meanings by using a historical narrative which did not literally happen."

Our task is to interpret our world and what is happening in our lives in light of our knowledge and understanding of God and the Universe.

These stories were not written as a factual, literal account of how the earth and humans were created. They are allegories, metaphorical narratives written to address contemporary issues in the lives of the people of Israel at the time they were written. The creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:3, for instance, was written at a time of great crisis for Israel. Defeated by the Babylon (586 B.C.E.), the people's future as the chosen people of God was endangered. A major theological issue that had to be addressed was the belief in ancient times that the god (or gods) of a victorious nation had also defeated the god of the conquered nation. The writer of the first creation story wrote to show that Israel's God was not defeated, but was in fact greater than the gods of the Babylonians. They worshipped as gods the sun, moon and stars. The God of Israel created the sun, moon and stars---as well as all that

is. Obviously the God of Israel was greater.

Another issue this writer addressed had to do with the need for distinctive religious practices that would set them apart from the larger groups of people among whom they lived. The practices were a way of sustaining their unique Jewish identity so they would not assimilate into the larger group. Among the important practices that set them apart and maintained their identity was the observance of the sabbath. So, creation takes six days and even the God of Israel rested on the sabbath. This emphasized the importance of the sabbath for the people of the God of Israel.

In allegory and with symbolic language, ancient Israel told these stories to help their people understand and interpret their world, make sense out of what was happening in their lives and how to think about God. Our task is the same as theirs, to interpret our world and what is happening in our lives in light of our knowledge and understanding of God and the universe.

(Reference for continued study:
"Reading the Bible Again, For the First Time", Marcus Borg)

For prayer request, e-mail
ccamprayer@msn.com and we will
hold the high watch with you.

"The Drum Major Instinct"

The topic of one of the last sermons preached by Dr. Martin Luther King at the Ebenezer Baptist Church Feb. 4, 1968, reported in Time Magazine (1/9/06), caught my attention. His sermon was based on the biblical story of two of Jesus' disciples who sought the "most prominent seat" when Jesus came into power. We find the story in Mark 10:35-40 where brothers James and John make the request of Jesus following an argument among all twelve disciples about who should be most prominent (Mark 9:33-37). In Matthew's version of the story (Matt. 20:20-23), Salome, the mother of James and John asks Jesus for prominence for her two sons. Tradition has it that Salome was related to Mary the mother of Jesus and perhaps her request was prompted by that family relationship. Whatever her reason, the desire for prominence was an issue for the disciples of Jesus.

In his sermon, Dr. King said the disciples desire for prominence springs from a universal impulse for recognition and distinction that he called the drum major instinct. *"And the great issue of life"*, Dr. King declared, *"is to harness the drum major instinct."* He went on to say that an extreme drum major ends up trying to push others down to push themselves up and that this is what drives racism in cultures and arrogance in nations.

This drum major instinct was

very present not only among Jesus' disciples but was promoted by the social and religious culture of the first century world in which they lived. Prominence was about winning the attention and honor of others so one could feel puffed-up and self-important. This behavior was modeled by their religious and secular leaders. It located security and self-worth outside of individuals and was the cause of their anxiety, stress and fear.

"And the great issue of life is to harness the drum major instinct."

Dr. Martin Luther King

In the story, Jesus did not rebuke his disciples for their desire for prominence. That the request was made meant that they had missed the essence of what he was teaching and modeling for them. And so again he taught them that true prominence comes from humble service. To be humble required that the disciples must be empty of the personal self-preoccupation with being important so that they could be filled-up with the Whole Spirit of God.

The drum major instinct is as much an issue for people in the 21st century. It is even more endorsed by our *"culture of celebrity"* than it was back then. Our religious and secular leaders model it to the extreme with the resulting racism in our culture

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and arrogance in our nation. As Jesus' disciples did back then, people on the spiritual path still struggle with each other for power and prominence, and for the sense of self-importance it brings. This still leaves people on the spiritual path locating their sense of security and self-worth outside of themselves, causing them anxiety, stress and fear.

Jesus taught and modeled a better way. That way is the way of personal humility and humble service to others. Metaphysically speaking, humility must not be confused with weakness. The humble ego is not a weak ego. The weak ego is needy and dependent on recognition from others to feel okay with itself. It feels easily threatened and so is compelled to fight and defend itself by means of a number of ego defenses. This prevents the weak ego from turning itself over to be used by and filled with the Spirit of God.

It takes a strong ego to confront and surrender all its' desires for power, prominence and personal self-importance to truly serve God and others. The key element in such service is the action of self--(ego)--surrender, not self importance. We must make God the center of our lives over and above the use to which we desire to put God's power. Daily we must make it our intention and action to keep our heart centered in, loyal to, and

dependent on God above all things.

We are here together in Earth School. The core curriculum in Earth School is, as Dr. King said, learning how to harness the drum major instinct in a way that enhances our spiritual growth while also contributing to the spiritual growth and well-being of others. Dr. King closed his sermon saying, yes, he was a drum major--a drum major for justice, peace and righteousness. A few months later, on April 4, 1968, he was shot to death on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee.

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Everything I need to know about life I learned from Noah's Ark

One: Don't miss the boat.

Two: Remember that we are all in the same boat.

Three: Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.

Four: Stay fit. When you're 600 years old, someone may ask you to do something really big.

Five: Don't listen to critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done.



Six: Build your future on high ground.

Seven: For safety's sake, travel in pairs.



Eight: Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.

Nine: When you're stressed, float awhile.

Ten: Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.



Eleven: No matter the storm, when you are with God, there's always a rainbow waiting.



NOW, wasn't that nice? Pass it along and make someone else smile, too.

Soul Food Unity Ministry

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