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Psalm 104: 1-13
An evolving journey

Only the ocean existed at first. Then Ra (the sun) came out of an egg that appeared on the surface of the water. Ra brought forth four children, Shu and Geb and Tefnut and Nut. Shu and Tefnut became the atmosphere. They stood on Geb, who became the earth, and raised up Nut, who became the sky. Ra ruled over all. Geb and Nut had two sons – Set and Osiris, and two daughters – Isis and Nephthys. Osiris succeeded Ra as king of the earth. Set hated his brother and killed him. The powerful charms of Isis resurrected Osiris, who became king of the netherworld. Horus, son of Osiris and Isis, then defeated Set and became king of the earth.

This is only one creation story, from the Egyptian tradition, and many like it abound around the world. Since humans from the beginning have wondered – How did the universe come into being, and how will it end? Every culture, every religion, every ethnic group has developed their own stories, their own tales and narratives as an attempt to make sense of this question.

I speak of this today because there has been a lot of talk about Darwin this month whose theory of evolution attempted to make sense of the origin of our species. Darwin got in a lot of trouble for his theory. And it seems to this day the questions continue. 40%-50% of Americans today accept a biblical creationist account of the origin of life, while a slightly larger number believe that humans evolved over time.

Generally, there seem to be three popular categories: **Creationism** where God creates the universe during 6 consecutive 24 hour days less than 10,000 years ago; **Theistic evolution** where God created the first cell 14 billion years ago, then used evolution to guide the development of each species; **Scientific evolution** which is identical to the theistic view, except that God is assumed to have played no part in the processes. In addition, many seem to have embraced the **Intelligent Design** theory where a deity designed the universe and the species.

We as Christians trace our roots to Judaism, thus we embrace the creation stories in the Hebrew Scripture. However, we also recognize that these stories were written over 5000 years ago, when the Hebrews, as most ancient peoples, regarded the earth as a flat strip, suspended from corner to corner, supported on pillars, the lower ends of which reached under, the netherworld. There was heaven above where the gods lived; the earth where creatures lived; under the earth where the dead lived. So the Hebrews narrated their own story in Genesis 1 and 2, according to their own understanding at the time, sometimes borrowing for the stories of their neighbors.

However, the earliest faith of the Hebrews did not refer to Yahweh as Creator but concentrated on his amazing deeds in history. Hebrews insisted upon the historical character of human existence – where there is history, there is purpose. For them the meaning of life was not found in the rhythms and cycles of nature, as for their pagan neighbors, but in historical events in which they perceived revelation from God and heard the call to take part. The nature gods of the Babylonians and Mesopotamians did not have history and therefore, could not declare divine purpose. But Yahweh was the Lord of History, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who brought them out of Egypt, ordained kings and prophets, and continued to work in the present.

Under this light, the biblical stories of creation do not stand as attempts to explain the origin of life, rather they are the starting point of history for the people of Israel. They are the prologue, the preface, the introduction to the sacred history that unfolds beginning with the call of Abraham and continues with the covenant between God and the people. To say that God made the earth means that the earth belongs to God, and that the meaning of creation is that it points beyond itself to the Creator, hence the words of Psalm 104 which we read, and the two creation stories of Genesis. Thus the Genesis stories are not scientific expositions of the origin of life but the beginning point of Hebrew history.

It seems to me that the conflicting issues between creation and evolution, the big bang and intelligent design are often rooted in how we interpret the Biblical narrative and how we see faith and science, the spiritual and the rational. Remember *mythos* and *logos*. Mythos are stories to explain the mystical, the non-rational, the unexplainable in our lives. Logos are factual, scientific, rational, logical narratives to explain the tangible and concrete. Science is logos, rational. Faith is mythos, spiritual. Science cannot be spiritualized, as faith cannot be rationalized. While science attempts to tell us how the world is; faith attempts to tell us why it is. In Einstein's words – science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.

Yet throughout history science and faith, rather science and the Church, have had a strenuous relationship. Copernicus who theorized that the earth rotates daily on its axis and revolves around the sun yearly... was condemned by the church, and his work was put in the Index of Forbidden Books, by the Roman Catholic Church. Galileo building on insights from Copernicus, began to teach that the earth rotated around the sun and was part of a bigger universe. He too was attacked by the church, taken to trial and condemned to death unless he recanted. Other scientists too, were sentenced to confinements and house arrests. To this day this tension between religion and science continues and some people still are considered "heretics."

It is remarkable that many people of faith do not see conflict between their religious beliefs and evolution, their faith and stem cell experiments, between evolution and intelligent design, creationism and the big bang... When I am asked which I believe, I usually say – all of them but differently. I believe that each story, each theory contains some truth, a different kind of truth. I see evolution itself as extremely intelligent. As a natural process evolution is a methodical, orderly, meticulous movement, with purpose and intention. As such I cannot imagine why creation and evolution would not somehow belong together. I have never seen a contradiction between God and the galaxies, the Divine and the evolving species. I have always seen faith and science and all aspects of life as complementary and parallel, attempting to tackle different aspects of life, for the purpose of balancing and making whole.

It seems to me that sometimes such issues become casualties of western way of thinking which is generally dualistic and polarized, a worldview steeped in "either or." Notice that even when we converse in general terms we use say – Evolution versus Intelligent Design, not Evolution and Intelligent Design; faith versus science, not faith and science. This kind of thinking sets us up with a polarized and contradictory view of two things that essentially belong together. This worldview of "either or" creates polarity influencing us to see contradictions where there are parallels, opposites where there are counterparts. This limits and rigidifies our views, allowing for no additional possibilities, while the possibilities are endless, the options limitless. So, it is not "either or," it is also "both and" and more. By embracing "both and" we claim a more holistic worldview where things are not always in opposition but in harmony, in balance, complementing, adding, enriching one another.

And, even though science is a very successful way of knowing, it is not the only way. We acquire knowledge in many ways – arts, literature, philosophy, our senses, mystical experiences. Only a scientific view of life would be lacking. Only a religious view of life will be eschewed. Only a philosophical view of life will be incomplete. We need all inquiries to have a holistic worldview, a worldview where heart, mind and body meet. Don't forget the body!

Some suggest that God speaks through “two books” – Scripture and nature, and since there is but one author of the two books, there is no real conflict between what humans learn from solidly grounded science and solidly grounded study of Scripture. Evolution cannot be taken to mean a grand philosophical explanation of all life, nor can Scripture be the grand scientific discovery of our age. The unraveling of DNA and the strong evidence for the historical interconnectedness and common origin of all living beings makes sense, it fits with the notion of One God, one humanity, one universe, oneness of all creation, One wholeness that encompasses all that is.

This notion was strongly affirmed for me when I saw Lucy right here in Houston in the museum of Natural Science. Lucy is our 3.18 million year old ancestor who was the first bipedal who walked upright. It was an awe-filled experience to gaze at her bones, to witness such fragility and strength, to stand in the astounding intersection of the past and the present. It was quite amazing. This notion was also affirmed when I read about a new possibility in the book *Your Inner Fish* by Neil Shubin who as co-discoverer of *Tiktaalik*, a 375-million-year-old fossil fish whose flat skull and limbs, and finger, toe, ankle and wrist bones, provide a link between fish and the earliest land-dwelling creatures. Just fascinating! And how can I forget the book *The Seven Daughters of Eve* by Bryan Sykes whose account illustrates the unique traveler, mitochondrial DNA, helping scientists piece together the history of the human race. Incredible!

In my opinion, science and faith make the Divine into a living being who continues to work and speak, create and recreate today. God is still speaking. God is still creating. God is still being experienced, for God is not stagnant, unmoving or inert being, but a living Spirit who encompasses all life. Evolution itself is a genius that unfurls and unfolds. The intricate and complex synchronization we call life is by definition movement – always moving, evolving, unfolding, unfurling, proceeding, progressing, growing and changing. The extinction of some species, the birth of new ones...viruses never known before appearing, others disappearing, all attest to that. As a result evolution and God, science and faith, the rational and the spiritual are not antithetical but parallel journeys. They are not contradictory but complementary inquiries, not conflicting but corresponding paths, all pointing to the complexity, intricacy, intelligence and the mystery we call God in whom all life is contained and encompassed.

Science can give us the gift of epiphany as does Scripture. It gives us insight into the universe – its richness, intensity, variety, splendor, its complexity to the point where we today can think holistically – with mind, body and spirit. Our experiences are most powerful when we are integrated as body, mind and spirit, when all three are in harmony and we are aware of the profound mystery of all that is and the Oneness that encompasses it all. Then we experience the mystery. And, “the most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious.” (Einstein)

Resources used:

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Abingdon press

Darwin's Gift to Science and Religion, Francisco Ayala, Joseph Henry Press, 2007