

“Christianity 101: Creation Story”
Genesis 1:1-19 and Genesis 1:20-2:4a

(Part I of a sermon series exploring foundational Christian beliefs)

Palisades Community Church
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You are likely familiar with *Letters from Children to God*, the best-selling series by Stuart Hample. In one letter, little Tom asks God: “Why is Sunday School on Sunday? I thought it was supposed to be a day of rest.”

As I mentioned in my update this week, deferring to our busy schedule, my challenge is to meaningfully consider in only a little more than six minutes what God purportedly took six days to accomplish. There is no record of an Annual Meeting on that original Sabbath!

Regarding the Genesis passage that sets the Old Testament stage, defenders of conservative Christianity claim that Moses himself is the author of this and most of the rest of the Pentateuch. He wrote as inspired by God, word for word, probably during forty years in the wilderness, some 1400 years before Christ. Numerous passages in the New Testament, and even Jesus’ own words, support that belief.

Contrary Biblical scholarship, so called “liberal”, attributes the authorship of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy to four ancient documents crafted by Jewish scribes. These documents, known as J, E, D, and P, trace to 500 plus years before Christ.

Whatever the origins and authorship of Genesis, one Palisades member, who shall remain nameless, offered a less than complimentary description of Chapter 1: “Yawn!”

None other than Walter Brueggemann, renowned teacher and scholar, agrees: “The text is rather boring to read”. Tiresome or not, the Creation story is important because it explains the relationship between God and humanity, between what is good and what is not as good, between perfection and sin, between the Presence of God and the Absence of God. And it points to Abraham and the lineage that lands ultimately on Jesus.

There are various views on the origin of the universe, the origin of life:

Are you a Creationist? By specific actions, God supernaturally made the heavens and the earth, instantaneously, out of nothing. Some creationists hold to a literal interpretation of Genesis 1, each of the seven days being 24 hours, God carrying out this plan tens of thousands of years ago, but not billions. Other creationists allow that each day may have been a much longer period of time, but with the same result.

Or are you an Evolutionist? Natural processes developed single cell organisms into more and more complex species, with more and more intricate forms of life evolving over billions of years. Mutations, natural selection, and the passage of time have forged life as we know it. Think Charles Darwin, and *The Origin of Species*. Most evolutionary scientists accept Genesis, then, not as fact but rather as a means by which ancient writers imagined the Divine/Human relationship.

Or are you a Theistic Evolutionist? God created life, but used the process of evolution to bring about the earth and the universe as we know them. Adam and Eve? They were ape-like bipeds within which God placed a soul, and that set animals and human beings apart.

Creationist? Evolutionist? Theistic Evolutionist?....YAWN!

A theologian by the name of John F. Haught, writing in the *Sewanee Theological Review*, provides helpful insight. Haught reminds us that for a Christian, the universe is both distinct from God AND loved by God. If the world is truly other-than-God, then it enjoys autonomy, and moves spontaneously as it will. But a God that truly loves the world, while allowing that freedom, will try to effect change through loving persuasion. To quote Haught: *“If God is love, and not controlling power, the world will be given leeway to experiment with an array of creative possibilities.”*

That, to me, takes the YAWN out of the Creation Story. It takes the YAWN out of the relationship between God and humanity...between what is good and what is not as good...between perfection and sin...between the Presence of God and the Absence of God.

Allow me to put this Creation Story in very contemporary terms:

On the one hand, the independent journeys of two young women take them quite coincidentally to the Tulane University campus, where by happenstance they discover that they are actually sisters, by virtue of having the same biological father, a sperm donor from Columbia. The world moves spontaneously as it will!

By contrast, on the other hand, a young woman in India, on the orders of tribal elders, is gang raped as punishment for falling in love with a Muslim. The world moves spontaneously as it will.

The “Creation Story” continues to unfold...between the Presence of a loving God, and the Absence of a loving God.