

Creation and Evolution: Sermon on Genesis 1 & 2

by Reverend Alexander Mielke, Martin Luther Church, Toronto

www.martinluther.ca

There is a little legend. According to it, God was addressed by four pert angels as he created the world. The first one asked, "How do you do this?" The second, "Why do you do this?" The third, "Oh, how could I make this better?" And the fourth, "What is the value of all this?" "How do you do this?" – that was a scientist. "Why do you do this?" – that was the first philosopher. "How can I make this better?" all technicians come from him. "What is the value of all this?" was, of course, a real estate agent. But there was another angel present, who applauded enthusiastically and began to sing. That was the first church musician.

The first two chapters of the Bible encourage us, most of all, to sing and to praise God. Statement about natural science or confession of God the Creator – that is the big question in view of this great text at the beginning of the Bible. For a long time, a big dispute has been carried on regarding this question. Time and again, the attitude of the creationists is conspicuous, who strongly emphasize that the Biblical statements were also the basis for natural scientific findings. Opposing this are atheists like Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens, who fight in the name of science against any belief in God.

It is my conviction that partly unnecessary fights are fought here. It is not supposed to be about single statements of the Bible being declared absolutely binding for natural science. But a serious and deep dispute has to take place concerning this question: Is the natural science theory open to the belief in creation? Do the natural sciences cross their own boundaries by assuming that certain laws and the large dice of chance are the singular origin of our world? Or is it still possible to connect natural scientific research with the belief in creation?

When the American Apollo 8-rocket circled the moon for the first time in 1968, and the astronaut Frank Borman could see the shining blue earth in the midst of the black

universe, he read aloud the great creation text from the beginning of the Bible. For me, this is a sign of hope: It is possible to connect the breathtaking new natural science theories and technologies with the belief in creation. To do this, however, we must **understand Genesis 1 and 2 correctly: Not as statement about natural science, but as confession of God the creator!**

The beginning of the Bible is, when understood correctly, a great praise of God. In conjunction with the ideas of that time, it is confessed here: This world did not just happen by chance, but was created by the good God. It is a great confession: We are not delivered unto many mysterious powers without help and without orientation. No, we humans and the entire creation come from the hand of the one and only God and remain in his hand. For this reason, too, I do not consider the term "Creation Story" to be correct. This here is **a praise of creation, a creation hymn, a confession**, which retains its validity even though details of the natural scientific reconstructing change time and again. A praise of the Creator as we also find it in Psalm 104, verse 24: "O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures."

God's first word in the Bible "Let there be light", testifies to **the easiness and effortlessnes, also the purposefulness of the act of creation**. Here, thoughtful people have often asked the question, "How can that be? At first, light is created here – and then later on the sun, moon and stars? How can there be light when there was no sun or stars?" The amazing thing is: Modern natural science is of the same opinion. "Big Bang" really means: At the beginning of the world there was a great explosion, not yet of matter, it was not there at the beginning of the universe, it came later, just as time and space developed within this great expansion. Therefore – also according to current scientific opinion: First there was light in the form of a great, immense radiation, and not until very much later the stars developed.

It is interesting that a convinced Christian has taken part in the development of the Big Bang theory. It has not only been formulated by the two Russian scientists Friedman and Gamow, but also by the Belgian Jesuit Father Georges Lemaitre. And in 1951 Pope Pius XII already said with enthusiasm during a meeting of the Vatican Academy, "You

see, gentlemen, the 'Fiat lux', the 'Let there be light' can now also be understood by natural sciences."

But what about the seven days? Presently, the very interesting exhibition at the ROM about Darwin's evolution theory has ended. When he sailed around the world on the Beagle, Darwin carried along a large Bible, in it was written at the front, "Creation of the world in the year 4004 B.C.. October 23rd, 6:00 a.m." Thus, Bible interpreters had worked out this date according to dates given in the Old Testament. In the meantime, we assume that the big Bang has taken place 15 billion years ago – what a gigantic difference! Charles Darwin was buried in the London Westminster-Cathedral. That indicates that Darwin has in no way considered himself to be Antichrist, and that conciliation between evolution ideas and Biblical concept is really possible. Even between the step by step creation of creatures in Genesis 1 and the evolution concept there is a clear similarity and also influencing.

It is my conviction that the Bible, by speaking of the seven days, wants to testify to God's sovereignty. It was so easy for God to create the world! It was not hard labour, it was not a dangerous fight with beings opposed to God, as it was often the idea in antiquity. No, with great easiness and sovereignty stands God's creation at the beginning of the world. Great theologians have always emphasized the relativity of this time frame. Augustin said that the seven days are only formulated in our concept of time; they lose their meaning before the eternal creation act of God. Because of the seven days, it is, however, possible for us humans, to live within the rhythm of God's works. The seven days indeed go towards the Sabbath, and every seventh day is a feast day; for us Christians it is the Sunday, when we celebrate God the Creator, through Jesus Christ the Risen Lord, and before him we gain calmness and strength.

And there is another significant purpose-orientation. "And there was evening and there was morning, the first day, the second, the third..." So it says time and again. This is Biblical sense which contradicts ours today. For we think that the day begins with sunrise and ends with sunset. Then, however, all the beautiful things of the day would finally submerge into the darkness of the night. In the Bible it is told differently, „And there was evening and there was morning, the first day." At the beginning there is

darkness, above which the light rises. **The creation begins in the dark, which finds its culmination and purpose in radiant light.** The Jews consequently practice this Biblical concept, when the new day begins for them in the evening at 6:00 o'clock, so it leads out of the night into the light.

The Biblical hope is expressed here twofold in the first verses. Because God is the Lord of Creation with great sovereignty and effortlessness, this purpose-orientation is woven into the world and our life: Our road leads out of the dark into God's light.

It is strange when some Christians protest against the concept time and again, that human beings descended from the apes. Also **in Genesis 1 and 2, the far-reaching relationship of the human with animals is being testified.** On the same day, the sixth, God creates the animals and humans who live on earth. Accordingly, it is said in Genesis 2, God formed man from "the dust of the ground". Viewed biologically, man does not consist of a special material.

Therefore, when natural science points out the relationship between man and animal, we must not feel uncomfortable, it is truly Biblical. What is, however, very much disputed, is that **humankind is the image of God.** Bear in mind, however, it is said about **every person, not just a king or a certain race.** Hereby, these verses represent **also the origin of our modern human rights.** Also, man and woman are both to the same extent God's image. Equality of man and woman has its right in Genesis 1 und 2.

But that we humans are supposed to be God's image, many people dare not express. Too great is the bad conscience in view of the abuse of this permission from God, "Subdue the earth". So much destruction man has already done to the environment – even leading to climate change, where now necessary countermeasures must be instituted.

Understood in the correct Biblical sense, it is a great gift to be God's image and a great challenge. The gift of reason, the gift to be able to understand reasonably and make decisions, to be allowed to face God as a person, to be under and with him. That is **the special dignity of humankind, under God and above all creation.**

But just as man is **called into communion with God**, so he is **called into communion with creation**. According to Genesis 2, man ought to be active in creation like a gardener, like one who recognizes the right to live of every plant and animal, who brings everything together into a beautiful order. And according to Genesis 1, there should be no killing and devouring in God's original order. The animals have received the lowly herbs for their nourishment, the people the fruits of the high trees, all shall be vegetarians. That it is very different, that killing and being killed are basic processes in our world, shows how poorly our present world responds to the original peace of God. But it remains to be a weighty mission to keep searching for ways to a good togetherness.

Often the Biblical concept is so misunderstood, as if man were the crown of creation, as if everything were leading to man as the culmination and goal. But in Genesis 1 and 2 the true concept is: God himself is the crown, the origin and destination of creation.

For this reason, the seventh day shall be a feast day, on which God is honoured. God's praises shall be sung on this day, and not just by people, but by the whole creation. Often enough it is said in the Psalms, as in Psalm 96, "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy."

God as the crown, as origin and destination of creation – in medieval times this was summarized by a famous sentence: **Deus est circulus cuius centrum est ubique, cuius circumferentia vero nusquam – God is a circle of which the centre is everywhere, but nowhere the circumference.**

Let us do as the fifth angel on the day of creation did, clap our hands and praise God, as, for instance, in Psalm 104: "When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works." Amen.