

“You Call the Worlds into Being...”

Psalm 19:1-6 Romans 8:18-25

Scott B. Martin - July 5, 2009

The UCC Statement of Faith, like the Bible itself, testifies to belief that at the heart of the universe there is a God who is active in creation and in what human beings call history. There is no talk of an “unmoved mover” or a distant deity that created the universe and then withdraws to glorious isolation. Indeed, what we find ourselves testifying to is a God who not only created in the distant past but who is at the heart of an ongoing creation, whose very presence brings about transformation. It is the nature of this God to create. If we but open our eyes and the eyes of faith we will find that **“The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.”** (Psalm 19:1-4)

These last words, of course, came from our reading from the Psalms. One of the interesting things about the UCC statement of faith is that it reflects modern scientific understanding. It speaks not just of the earth and the sun and the moon as the psalmist does. It speaks of the universe, the “worlds”, plural, being called into being. This is certainly appropriate.

There are segments of the Christian community that find their faith threatened by science, by concepts like evolution. Out of defensiveness they deny much of the scientific evidence. On one level this is understandable. We do not want a cold materialism that declares that there is nothing holy about creation; that the glory of creation can be reduced to a series of

mathematical equations and that's all there is, but we also do not want a religious view that excludes scientific explanations.

When I spoke at the Unity Church this past Thursday somebody asked me how the “new cosmology” fit into my discussion of the role of religion. What my questioner was referring to was the work of Episcopalian priest Matthew Fox and Brian Swimme, who is a scientist, into building the best of modern scientific understanding into an awe inspiring telling of the creation story.

Frankly, as wonderful as the two creation stories we have in the book of Genesis are I find the discoveries of science to be even more amazing and awe inspiring. As a teenager I use to read science magazines and be filled with wonder at what scientists were discovering about the world. To this day I love to get the latest edition of the National Geographic with all of its amazing photographs of the world and the universe. As people of faith why shouldn't we build them into our telling of the creation story?

This is exactly what the ancient psalmist was doing to the best of his ability thousands of years ago. He had no scientists to tell him that the earth revolved around the sun. He had no telescopes and no scientists to tell him about how sun holds the earth in its orbit and whirls it around itself at the amazing speed of 180 miles per SECOND! Just think of it! As we sit here in our pews this morning we and the earth we are sitting on are speeding along through the Milky Way at the speed of a racing car! The psalmist may not have had access to this information but he could marvel at how the sun appeared to move across the sky **“In the heavens God has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.”** (Psalm 19:4b-5)

Increased scientific knowledge has not decreased the amazement one can feel at how the sun moves and acts on the earth. If anything it should increase our amazement. Beyond that we can perhaps take a cue from the psalmist in his ascribing “JOY” to the sun, to its movement, to its very being. It may be anthropomorphizing but there is something “joyous” about being, about existence how things are inextricably interconnected.

Thich Nhat Hanh, speaking from the Buddhist tradition, speaks of the interconnection of creation saying, **“One thing is made up of all other things. One thing contains the whole cosmos.....A piece of bread contains the sunshine....Without a cloud, the wheat cannot grow. So when you eat the piece of bread, you eat the cloud, you eat the sunshine, you eat the minerals, time, space, everything.”** When you eat that small piece of communion bread at the end of this service keep Hanh’s words in mind. That little piece of communion bread is not “just bread”, it contains all that made it possible: clouds, sunshine, earth, minerals, time, space, EVERYTHING! The Apostle Paul declares in the opening of his letter to the Romans **“Every since the creation of the world God’s eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things God has made.”** (Romans 1:20)

The statement of faith, taking its cue from Genesis, speaks of God “calling”, “speaking” the world into existence. Christians came to see Jesus as the “Word” made flesh, the same Word that called the universe into existence. The opening words of the Gospel of John testify to that very point, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines**

in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:1-5)

Clearly the Christian testimony is that we gain insight into the God who creates from the life, words, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. There is something about Jesus call to love of neighbor, Jesus call to recognize the connection between rich and poor, men and women, and between humanity and God that reveals who God is and how God acts in the world.

The statement of faith, following the lead of Genesis, speaks of humanity being created in the image of God. The belief here is that there is a “holy and indispensable bond”, as Roger Shinn puts it, between God and humanity, a bond not present with any other creature in creation. Human beings, at their best, have the ability to build and create, an ability to exercise free choice, a capability to love in the fullest sense of that word.

Given all this, there is no doubt that human beings often squander and abuse these things. Sin, in all its forms, mars the image of God present in us. This is why as Christians we believe that God sent Christ into the world, to help us, through the grace of God, recover that image of God.

Roger Shinn points out that Dieterich Bonhoeffer and later Karl Barth, believed that the image of God was related to God creating human beings male and female. Shinn writes, **“This means that the image of God is reflected not in individual capacities or powers alone but in human relationships. It is our creation in community, as persons made to live with one another in mutual support and communion that we find the reflection of God’s being.”**

This ties into the idea of God as a Trinity, as a community of three persons. Interconnection and community seems to be at the very heart of creation. We look at the ecology and we talk about the web of life.

Everything is interconnected. This should give us pause as we consider such things as global warming, pollution and species extinction.

In Genesis 2 human beings are called to “till and tend” the garden. We are called to be good stewards of creation.

No wonder that the Old Testament and later the Statement of Faith declares that God has set before us the “ways of life and death.” In our freedom we can choose either one, but we must be aware that choice carries with it consequences, not just for us but for future generations. The closer we stick to God and God’s will the greater will be the joy of creation. The closer we stick to God and God’s will the more life will be enhanced, not destroyed. The closer we stick to God the more we will live up to the potential God created in us to reflect the “image of God.” Amen.