

Science and Religion: Gaia Myth or Fact? By Rev. Lori Staubitz 2/1/09

Chalice Lighting Prayer - Jean M. Rickard

Spirit of life, of principle and compassion,
Breathe through us this day.
Let us be the embodiment of the larger life
In all the little things we do --

As we listen and ponder and deepen and explore our faith,
As we laugh and play, greet and touch one another,
As we live this day in the integrity of our own souls,
As we live this day in the community of precious people.

Breathe through us as the wind caresses our bodies,
As we live in the fullness of this day. Amen.

Reading: From the introduction to volume 8 of Ken Wilber's collected writings:

"Science and religion, science and religion, science and religion. Their relationship really will drive humanity insane, if only humanity were sensitive enough. As it is, their relationship is merely fated to be one of those damnable dyads--like mind and body, consciousness and matter, facts and values--that remain annoying thorns in philosopher's sides. Ordinary men and women, on the other hand, have always drawn freely on both science (or some sort of technical-empirical knowledge) and religion (or some sort of meaning, value, transcendental purpose, or immanent presence). Still, how to fit them together: "Ah, and there's the rub," as Shakespeare would say."

(The journals I kept while writing and publishing *Sense and Soul*). ...are devoted to both science and spirituality). --adaptation of Wilber's original paragraph

"I am attempting to include direct contemplative and meditative spirituality in this debate, whereas most writers on the topic simply want to discuss the philosophical or scientific ideas involved: not direct experience but abstractions. It is as if a group of scholars were discussing the beaches of Hawaii, and instead of going to Hawaii and looking for themselves, they simply pulled out a bunch of geography books and studied them. They study the maps, not the territory itself, which always seemed rather odd to me. Surely there is room for both--direct spiritual experience, and more accurate maps and models of those experiences.

But what if, instead of science telling us about one floor [of reality] and religion about another, they both told us something different about each and every floor?

What if science and religion were related, not as floors in a building, but as equal columns in a mansion?

Not one on top of the other, but each alongside the other, all the way up and down? What then?"

Saturday I will join three other clergy for an interfaith dialog in Prince Frederick at the invitation of the American Chestnut Land Trust. Each of us will represent our respective traditions perspectives and responses to the shared environmental crisis we all face as people of faith. One of the first questions we will answer is

"What does your religion teach us about our responsibilities to be good stewards of the earth and to serve as its trustees for the benefit of future generations?"

I was surprised by the first question because it assumes a theological position from the start.

I welcome opportunities to engage in an interfaith dialog and strengthen relationships with our neighbors, so I was not relishing the role of heretic. However, in order to answer the question...of responsibility....the primary question of relationship must come first.

So...In the beginning.....

This is how many of our creation stories begin... we assume a time when there was nothing and out of the void life began. There are five different types of Genesis myths:

Each of these types set forward principal themes for defining our ultimate relationship and responsibility to the whole of creation.

There are those that begin with a time of chaos or nothingness.

Those that describe life as emergent- coming from something or someone;

There are creation stories that begin with two primal beings who are separated and then united.

Other stories begin with division

And still others that reveal a series of stages or times from which one world emerges from another.

Creation stories reveal profound truths about a people...for they are foundational to the development of identity.

Creation stories attempt to provide insights into mystery and miracle, to speak in prose, poetry and metaphor of our relationship to the unknown for which there are many images and names: Primal creative force; God, Spirit of life, ultimate reality, ground of being, source of life or first cause.

- the images and stories we tell ourselves about our origins are directly related to the ways we relate to the earth, to other human beings and to other forms of life. But to paraphrase Ralph Waldo Emerson: "What we believe, -we are becoming-so it behooves us to pay attention to the stories we tell ourselves."

The Hebrew Scriptural account of Genesis is foundational to Judaism, Christianity and Islam as well as Unitarian Universalism. So I know on Saturday we will be speaking from our respective theological positions in relationship to the same story: "The Garden of Eden".

Unitarian Universalism has its foundations in Judaism and Christianity....so we share a common history. While we value our heritage, as the "Progressive Faithful", we have continued our journey far beyond our ancestral roots. This point is especially true as it relates to our guiding principles which speak to our relationship to the whole of life upon

this planet. At the heart of our liberal tradition we know that what we believe we are becoming. Throughout human history our diverse creation stories have played important roles in the constructs of personal identity, group structure, culture and power.

The early American Unitarian Deist and founding fathers: Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams and Ben Franklin...envisioned a God who was far removed from his creation. Their concept of the primal force of creation was that of a "clock maker" or prime mover. In order to make sense of human free will, these early American founders conceived of a God who retained distance and separation from his creation, while giving particular men rights to the earth and its resources.

The Biblical concepts of "dominion", "Kingdom" and divine right are evident in the ways our common history has played out in rampant genocide of native peoples, other creatures and the destruction of the earth itself. Biblical interpretations of Genesis and focus on sin over creation gave rise to greater division and dualism between God and Creation; between humans and the earth as the concepts of heaven and hell dominated the Christian imagination for some time.

However, with the progress of science and the examination of other ancient religious ideas an important shift to the religious experience of our liberal theist founders.

Extemporaneous Preaching here from Minister's notes:

Darwin's Theory of evolution:

Rise of Transcendentalism: Influences (Hindu myth and Ideas of the "over soul" bridged the gap with the realization that all that we call holy can be experienced in and throughout creation. greater than the sum of its parts.

Emergent Liberation Theologies called forth the spirit of justice and freedom as emulated in stories of Moses and Jesus.

Who was this god of the great abolitionists, emancipators and freedom fighters??

He was a god who did not watch from on high but walked with his people:

1970's-80's rise of both the environmental movement and feminism: God came full circle within....incarnational theology—That was always at the heart of ancient mysticism

In The Beginning...A creation story from the Kabala – highlights process theology-which envisions god as inherent within life-not outside of it.)

This following story is adapted from the original Jewish version as told by Isaac Luria
(16th-17th c. Jewish Mystic)

In the beginning before there were any beginnings and endings, there was no place that was not already God! And we call this unimaginable openness, Ain Soph- being-without end. Then came the urge to give life, but there was no place for it to come forth. There was no place that was not already God. So Ain Soph breathed in to make room, like a father steps back so his child will walk to him. Into the emptiness Ain Soph set vessels and began to fill them with divine light, as a mother places bowls in which to pour her delicious soup. As the light poured forth a perfect world was being created!

Think of it! A world without greed and cruelty and violence! But then, something happened. The bowls shattered. No one knows why. Perhaps the bowls were too frail? Perhaps the light too intense? Perhaps Ain Soph was learning. After all no one makes perfect the first time. And with the shattering of the bowls, divine sparks flew everywhere! Some rushing back to Ain Soph, some falling, falling, trapped in the broken shards to become our world, and us.

From these fragments and shards emerged galaxies, suns, moons and planets. Bits of Ain Soph took shape as creatures alive in life giving waters, and soaring upon currants of air. The very stuff of life sprung forth taking shape; mountains, rocks, plants and warm soft blooded ones with fur and hair. All that is came into being.

The perfect world is all around us, but broken into pieces, like a puzzle thrown to the floor, the picture is lost, but each piece holds possibility and potential.

Each piece seeks to join in wholeness with others in the process of becoming. We do this again and again, each time the beauty and diversity of Ain Soph is revealed as we come together in new ways. In every moment, we are joined with all life as we recreate new vessels to contain the overflowing love which is Ain Soph. Each time this happens, the need for more vessels becomes greater- for as we come together in love, Ain Soph grows greater. There is no end to Ain Soph. There is no end to the possibility of love in all its diversity.

When we meet and talk, work and play, disagree with holiness in our eyes, seeing Ain Soph everywhere and in all things, then our feelings of brokenness will end, and we will form strong bowls, strong enough to hold the light, and our light will be gentle enough to fill our bowls. As we join together, bringing our pieces together we will learn that there is no place that is not God.

This same idea of brokenness is reflected in this ancient

North American Ojibway Prayer (found in our Hymnal # 518)

Grandfather, Look at our brokenness.

We know that in all creation, only the human family has strayed
from the Sacred Way.

We know that we are the ones who are divided,

And we are the ones

Who must come back together to walk in the sacred way.

Grandfather,

Sacred One,

Teach us love, compassion, and honor

That we may heal the earth and heal each other.

One aspect of this faith tradition is our ongoing examination of religious experience as it is reflected in varying cultures, times, text, traditions and individual testimony.

These two examples of ancient scripture point to a primary relationship that is severed but can be brought back together by the simple act of realization on the part of human beings...to remember...truly...re-member the wholeness of which we are a part.

Bruce Bawer, author of *Stealing Jesus: How Fundamentalism Betrays Christianity* sights an important point on distinguishing

These two Christian camps:

"What distinguishes members of these two groups of Christians is not politics but the essential understanding of the nature of God and the role and understanding of human life."

"We might rather speak of "exclusionists" and "inclusionists", because conservative Christians, unlike liberal Christians, tend to define the word Christian in a way that excludes others."

"The difference between conservative and liberal Christianity may be most succinctly summed up by the difference between two

Key scriptural concepts: law and love. Simply stated, conservative

Christianity focuses primarily on law, doctrine and authority; liberal Christianity focuses on love, spiritual experience and what is known as the priesthood of all believers."

"If conservative Christians emphasize Christ's resurrection and the "Great Commission" to "go to all nations and make them my disciples"

"Liberal Christians place their emphasis on the Great Commandment, which in Luke's Gospel reads as follows: "Love the Lord God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself"- scripture that draws heavily on ancient Hebrew text and the words of the prophets; scripture that is grounded in relationship rather than legalism and law."p;

These two distinctions are mirrored in two distinct relational paradigms at work in the relationship religious people apprehend the earth and their relationship to creation.

In 1976 Merlin Stone proclaimed "God was a woman" rocking the central myth of Judaism and Christianity and influenced by both ancient mythology and contemporary science.

What was hailed as The Gaia Myth was the re-emergence of the image of the earth as mother. Gaia- celebrated Greek goddess who is no other than the earth herself-both giver and receiver of life.

Biologists Lynn Margulis and James Lovelock developed a scientific theory with this holistic image of Gaia as its foundational hypothesis...the earth, was not an object but a self sustaining organism-and each life functions much like the cells within our own bodies....This hypothesis has been confirmed these many years later....and the alarming truth that Human life was behaving like a cancer upon the body of the earth is not longer a theory but a fact.

This concept of an Interdependent existence is upheld by our UU principals and is supported both by science and religious wisdom throughout human history.

The interconnected Web is not a new idea.

According to Hindu myth, the high god Indra once made a net with tiny bells attached at each intersections which enclosed the earth.

The slightest movement, even that which might be caused by thought was enough to set at least one bell ringing. Since the bells were so close together, one bell ringing would eventually cause all the other to ring, through a ripple effect. This story reinforces the power of our deep relationship to the air, water, earth. To every sparrow and grain of sand.

An authentic religion is not "based on a thing(s)." An authentic religion flows from what we as a people have come to love as truly worthy of our devotion - and devoted service - because we keep on finding the object(s) (or ways) of our religious love reliably life-strengthening, enhancing and empowering, for good. Or, we can't help believing they will prove so in future, even if they don't appear so now, and thus we are in practice loyal to them. That is why the most authentic form of religious address is, always first, witness. It's not talk about some "thing" separate from ourselves. It's talk about our experience of what we love greatly, far more than other realities we have come to see as less worthy -Rev. Alice Blair Wesley

In the beginning... in the first moments of human life...wonder and relationship were born.....and it was...and still is good.

We are each a part of the great story of co- creation as we move forward and evolve in our understanding and willingness to act upon the deepest truths of our existence.

Threat of Global Warming/Climate Change

Selection from the 2006 Statement of Conscience

Earth is our home. We are part of this world and its destiny is our own. Life on this planet will be gravely affected unless we embrace new practices, ethics, and values to guide our lives on a warming planet." "As a people of faith, we commit to a renewed reverence for life and respect for the interdependent web of all existence.

I close with an ancient Summerian prayer -adapted from Starhark:

"I am the beauty of the green earth, the white moon among the stars and the mystery of the waters. I call upon your soul to arise with me for I am the soul of all nature which gives rise to the universe." Those who seek to know me, know your seeking and knowing will avail you not unless you know the mystery.

For that which you seek, you will never find without; for I am with you always and I am that which is attained at the end of desire."

Let the story be told that we did not stand above, below or outside of creation...but stood with the earth to ensure that the unending story of creation would continued to unfold. And it can.

So may it be.

Benediction: From the Rig Veda-Hindu Scripture

Let us be united,

Let us speak in harmony,

Let our minds apprehend alike.

Common be our prayer,

Common be (our purpose for coming together

Common be our understanding and commitments)

Unified be our hearts;

Common be our intentions,

Perfect be our unity.