

Homily

Dear God, help me to say something meaningful. Amen

Recently there was a debate on CNN about evolution vs. creationism. The debate was between “Bill Nye, the science guy,” a popular science reporter, and Ken Ham, founder and president of “Answers in Genesis-U.S.,” the Creation Museum in Kentucky. Bill Nye is a quirky fellow in a bow tie with a gift for communicating his love of science, and for making it accessible to a mass audience. Ken Ham is an Australian “young-Earth” creationist who advocates a literal interpretation of the Book of Genesis. He came to the U.S. in 1987 and has developed quite a following as a “Christian” speaker and promoter.

Genesis describes how God made the world in six days. According to Mr. Ham, this is factual and happened 6000 years ago. He divides the time since the Creation into three eras of 2000 years each, from Adam to Abraham, Abraham to Jesus, and Jesus to the present. Ham had confident answers to questions Bill Nye asked about this, “Read your Bible; all the answers are right there,” and, “I’m a Christian.”

According to Mr. Ham’s website, he is in great demand as a “Christian” speaker, receiving hundreds of invitations annually. His Creation Museum, where dinosaurs roam alongside Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, has already received more than 2 million visitors.

It is tempting to dismiss Ken Ham as a wing-nut... or maybe just as ignorant and misguided, or a scammer, separating credulous people from their money. But he isn’t stupid or crazy. He is college-educated, well-spoken, well-traveled, and seemingly sincere.

His many fans share his literal interpretation of the Bible despite massive evidence to the contrary. Science has established that the world is more than 40 million years old... maybe even 14 billion, if the latest news about the Big Bang is correct... and that modern humans are the product of... **evolution!**

Why do many fervent “Christians” insist on believing things science has shown to be false? This seems very human to me. People have a hard time believing things we can’t see, and a harder time believing things we don’t want to see.

Ray [the lector] read one of my favorite lines in the whole Bible, when Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” I agree that faith in the unseen is a great blessing, but also often a challenge. As humans, we like “proof”... certainty, control! Jesus understood that the apostle Thomas--Doubting Thomas--needed to see and touch his wounds in order to believe in his resurrection.

But Thomas was satisfied with proof. Creationists refuse to believe even in the presence of extensive evidence. This goes beyond doubt, to **denial**, refusal to believe. Denial of scientific **reality** is much more troubling than doubt or shaky faith.

Moreover, those who insist on impossible beliefs are passionate, even angry, in defense of these beliefs. Not only is science “wrong,” but it is **very** wrong, actually blasphemy. “We are Christians,” these “believers” assert, while “they”... the rest of us... are **wrong**. Their insistence is so strong that there are schools in the U.S. using textbooks presenting the Genesis Creation story as fact, and referring to evolution as “dogma” and an “unproven theory.” **Why?**

I suspect the reason is that old, familiar culprit **fear**, cause of so much bad human behavior. Fear of the unknown, lack of control, desire to believe something tidy as opposed to wondering, What if? and having to wait and see if someone figures it out. Take the Big Bang as a possible alternative to the Biblical Creation story. One day millions... or maybe billions... of years ago there was an explosion, and a bit of matter the size of a marble started doing things like forming galaxies.... How did this happen? We don't know. What was there before the Big Bang? We don't know. When are we going to know? We don't know. This is **scary!** But it can also be affirmation of God's working in mysterious ways, in His own time, as yet unraveled by humans.

For people like Bill Nye, “the science guy,” science is exciting. It's fun to learn! We know more than we did a generation ago. Later people will know more than we do.

For others like Ken Ham, this is threatening. Science is too big! Too complicated and mysterious! So hard to grasp it can make us want to **deny reality** in favor of something easier.

To paraphrase theologian Paul Tillich, "The opposite of faith is not doubt: It is certainty."

Sadly, “Christians” like Ken Ham are some of the most **certain** among us. Their beliefs are a foolproof system of control, packaging everything neatly in an ancient Bible story... wishing

away uncertainty, fear of the unknown... as blasphemy, denying whatever is mysterious and thus threatening...thereby ironically, distancing themselves from God, the all-knowing, who has not yet revealed much of what He knows.

Isn't the real blasphemy denying that God our Creator... then and now... knows more than we do? Denying the brains God gave us? Wasting the opportunity to learn more about God's remarkable creation while clinging to an ancient story which denies modern reality?

Good science is the opposite of **denial**. It relies on evidence, reality checking, reproducible results. It unravels mysteries a step at a time. From Biblical times to the present, discoveries have changed our human experience: The world is round! Electricity! Antibiotics! And there are more to come: What happened before the Big Bang?

As humans we have a choice: Embrace the challenges of the unknown by learning, celebrating science and knowledge; or take comfort in the illusion of control by "believing" fiction. I feel compassion for those who feel safer choosing the latter, as I think Jesus did for Doubting Thomas. But by clinging insistently to familiar myth and metaphor as "fact," we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to develop a more mature faith, trusting God fully as our real Creator, and understanding our control as limited.

Using the brains God gave us is harder than being a Creationist. It requires us to work hard at understanding the **reality** of God's Creation as the complex and mysterious gift it is, while trying to discern His will for us as humans, and to do it, as best we can.

Amen.