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**Westhampton, MA**

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:1-2:4a

### **The Great and Powerful God**

A couple of weeks ago Darwin's theory of evolution was on "trial" before some members of the Kansas Science Curriculum Standards Committee. The trial challenged the primacy of the theory of evolution in order to include intelligent design, an "alternate theory," in the science curriculum for the state's public schools. The proponents of intelligent design seek to have it serve as a counterweight to Darwinian evolution. This sub-committee heard three days of testimony, mostly scripted questions, from advocates of intelligent design. Scientists boycotted this trial to deny intelligent design scientific legitimacy and parity with the theory of evolution.

Intelligent design maintains that the complexity of the natural world could not have come from random occurrences and that the world is a result of a well ordered plan. In spite of the scientific language that intelligent design's proponents use, its foundation and basic premise is this pericope from Genesis.

This is a highly charged political issue in that its Christian proponents believe their faith is not accepted in public school. The proposed revised draft of the Kansas Science Education Standards by intelligent design proponents who sit on the curriculum committee reads in part, "Some scientific concepts and theories...may differ from the teachings of a student's religious

community or their cultural beliefs. Compelling student belief is inconsistent with the goal of education. Nothing in science or in any field of knowledge shall be taught dogmatically.”<sup>1</sup>

Evolution is still a theory, which means that it is not airtight. The proponents of intelligent design exploit these gaps because they have their certainty, God. Never mind that intelligent design cannot be verified independently by other scientists or that it cannot withstand peer review in generally accepted scientific journals or that most theologians understand that the Creation story is not science.

Although not true on its surface, the Creation story has truth. That truth lies beneath the surface story. It is truth that touches us and dwells in us. When you think about a holy book that teaches its readers about a supreme being, it should begin with a description of this god. Yet, where is that in our holy book? The opening of Genesis is a pointer to God, a being so great, so large, so awesome, that we cannot comprehend God’s fullness. We cannot find words adequate enough to describe God in a physical sense. So instead, we have the opening words of our Holy Book, the Bible, describing God through God’s actions, not God’s physical attributes. Indeed, the physical description of God is very brief, “And God created man in His image, in the images of God He created him; male and female He created them” (1:27)

We can still believe in the Big Bang Theory, but that does not answer the question how that mass got there in the first place. We can accept the theory of evolution, but the theory still does not identify the source of life itself. Quoting from the current Kansas Science Education Standards, “Science is the human activity of seeking natural explanations for what we observe in the world around us. Science does so through the use of observation, experimentation, and logical argument while maintaining strict empirical standards and healthy skepticism.”<sup>2</sup> For

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<sup>1</sup> Kansas Science Education Standards Draft 2: March 9, 2005

<sup>2</sup> Kansas Science Standards. Kansas State Board of Education. Adopted February 14, 2001. Page 4

people of faith, like us, we look to God to help us understand the imponderable and the incomprehensible.

Science and faith are not incompatible. Science answers and demystifies. Science has provided the answers to many phenomena that we once attributed to God. Indeed, for every question science answers, new ones arise. Each new question pushes us to probe further. With each new question we glimpse at something much larger than us. We make sense of it through our faith. As people of faith, we believe that what we see is God. God stands between us and the unknown.

But God is not the same as being the answer. When God is synonymous with the answer to the imponderable and the incomprehensible, we shut down inquiry. There would be no need for further inquiry because the explanation is not natural, but supernatural. We will stop asking questions. God will no longer be awesome because we have explained the complexities of this world by containing God in the smallness of our minds. God does not exist in our minds, but is outside of us and apart from us.

This creation story has truth because as a pointer to God it resonates with our unconscious understanding of God. We not only want God, but we need God to be the great, powerful, and awesome One. This story has truth because it responds to our collective unconscious or archetype of God. An archetype is as Carl Jung described, “a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals.”<sup>3</sup>

Creation is a mystery. Cultures around the world make sense of it with their own creation stories. The one in Genesis has strong parallels to similar creation stories from other cultures in the Ancient Middle East, most famously the Ancient Babylonian story, the

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Jung. *The Concept of the Collective Unconscious* from **The Portable Jung** edited by Joseph Campbell. The Viking Press: New York. 1971. Page 60

Gilgamesh. How can we make a claim that this story in Genesis holds greater validity than any of the other creation stories? We have these stories because people have the archetype of God. We, not just Christians, but people across many cultures across the globe need the One who stands between us and the unknown.

Theologians who do not accept this version of Creation as fact do not toss it out. I don't know how many times I have read this story. But even reading it for this sermon, it touched my soul and left me in awe. How great and powerful is this God who brought order to the primordial chaos? How wonderful is this God who loves me and knows me, one so small and insignificant in comparison? I find that incredible and absolutely re-assuring. As the psalmist wrote (139:1-10):

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.  
You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.  
You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.  
Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

The creation story reminds us over and over again that the fullness of God is beyond our limited ability to comprehend. The fullness of God exceeds the capacity of any container, even our minds. This story's truth reassures us that God's power will protect us when we face the unknown. This story's truth fills our yearning for someone who loves us and cares for us, especially when we feel most vulnerable and most alone. When we think of powerful people, how many of them know people as comparatively insignificant as you and me? But God, the One who put order to the primordial chaos, who separated the light and who separated the dome of the waters and who gathered the waters in one place to make the dry land appear and put all

vegetation on it, knows you. The One who made day and night and who put birds in the air and Leviathan in the seas and who put all creeping things on the land loves you. And the One who did all that created you in his own image, male and female. How great is that?