

Mitch Brown, Evanston Mennonite Church, Evanston, IL

Evolution Sunday

When Darwin's *Origin of the Species* was published why such a reaction. Really Darwin came at the end of a long process of trouble for religion anyway. Since Spinoza in the late 17th century religion had been in trouble. Or at least one kind of religion had been in trouble. For religion will never be in trouble. As we have seen in our look at Karen Armstrong, humans have a religious urge, a religious need, a need for meaning that must be addressed. And that meaning had been addressed for thousands of years in one way, one paradigm, to use the language of science, but from Spinoza onward that old father god was being pushed out of the world. He still existed but as a moral God a God of meaning but decidedly not an active God. But until Darwin, I think, people still had hope that God was out there. Look at nature, look at its order its beauty surely this had to come from somewhere. Look at humanity, certainly our minds had to come from somewhere.

But Darwin ended that last lingering hope. He could explain where the "design" of nature came from. He could explain where the human mind came from. It was all physical. It was a mindless struggle that took place over unimaginable amounts of time.

What Darwin did was to remove God from the physical world. But should that cause us any fear? After all isn't our religion from the beginning about faith? Prior to Darwin perhaps we could avoid the issue. Yes we had faith but we didn't need to worry too much about faith. Why we had a world that we could fall back on. But Darwin ended that. He forced religion to grow up. To really become faith for the first time. There was only faith. The Doubting Thomas story at the end of John. Faith is required not physical evidence. The great commission is about building communities of faith and practice. Put this another way. we only have each other now. Our moral life the life of caring for other people of trusting other people of coming together in community that is our religious world. God is not going to help. The world is not going to help. We are alone.

Now there was somebody else who was alone too. What a fitting God for such a religion: alone on the cross. Utterly forsaken, utterly alone: My God my God why have you forsaken me? Mark 15

And before that we hear Jesus mocked with the words: "Let the Christ, the king of Israel descend now from the cross that we may see and believe"

Aren't we all standing with the mockers? When we are so troubled over a God who does not act when we long for the good old days of belief with a benevolent father God who responds to our wishes. But look at this scripture those good old days never were. Jesus comes at the end of the religion of Israel; a religion that had learned that God does not act. So the death of the traditional God did not start with Spinoza and the enlightenment, no that God died long time ago; that God die on a cross on Golgotha.

So we have nothing to fear from Darwin. Rather Darwin is good news for we are forced to take seriously radically seriously for the first time the teachings of Jesus. There is no escape. Our religion is here on the cross. There is no wish fulfillment. the good news is here; it is here in the community that forms around this Jesus. He did not come down from the cross.

But come on, what sense can such a religion make. Who will follow such a God and why follow such a God? Doesn't religious history teach us that immediately we will turn

from the cross and start to embellish, tells stories of a glorious birth, of a glorious resurrection of a powerful God who will do our bidding if we just believe.

And that once again is the problem. Such a god is always there to do our bidding. And we have to be honest, our bidding can be pretty sinful. The cross teaches us that God will not do our bidding. Darwin really is good news because it forces us to rely upon ourselves. Really, do I really want to say that > rely upon ourselves? Isn't that the problem. Where is grace in all this.

Right here. As we have seen over the past few weeks in the Gospel of Mark the good news of Jesus (not the good news about Jesus) but the healing miraculous Jesus was all about us. The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath. Jesus heals people without regard for theological nicety. So what am I saying? Does Jesus do away with religion. Some have argued that. But no that's not what I am saying. Or as Rick would put it if he were here: where is the revelation in all this?

And here we return to Karen Armstrong and a strong idea of myth. Myths are the stories that we inherit. The stories that we tell. They are revelation. Where do they come from? They come from Sinai; they come from Babylon, they come from the cross. They never come at one moment. They cannot be learned in a book. They take time, maybe not evolutionary time but they work in the same way, they build up sediments. There could be no cross without Sinai there could be no Sinai without Gilgamesh. Steven Gould, one of the predominant evolutionists of our time pointed out that evolution did not have to go as it did. If you were to rewind tape and go forward again it would not end up like this. So too with religion, our revelation is a bunch of chance encounters we who we are because of this history there had to be Babylon there had to be Egypt that had to be Rome or we would not have the religion that we do. Is that then revelation? No. Revelation is that at every historical moment there is someone there to hear God. To respond religiously to what is happening. That is faith that response to a God who we know only through God's historical effect. Prophets give us our revelation they respond in ways that draw us all in but each of us hears and knows God in our own way. A God who is above and beyond the world of science, the world of evolution this world is at the same time pure material they work in Darwinian ways and pure spirit. It is this world that we come to know religiously. Both together. Spirit and matter. Yes we are a slosh of chemicals but that slosh is what we experience as spirit. So is it more truly slosh or spirit? It is both. Fully and completely both. (fully God and fully man?) Spinoza actually said this a long time ago. Do we call it God or do we call it nature? Can there be any difference?

Book to check out on this subject: [The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World](#), by Matthew Stewart