

The following short section, including its references to two other good sources, might be useful to those who will prepare sermons for Evolution Sunday:

(2) Second, two *creation sagas and a story of covenant with creation* meet us at the start of Genesis, the book of “origins.” Both sagas differ from literal accounts or on-site reports, and display their “prehistorical” or mythic character. (Myth is pictographic or narrative truth, not misrepresentation of reality.) These sagas, and all first eleven chapters of Genesis, describe the creation as being valued by God the Creator quite apart from its usefulness for humanity. The covenantal relation that the Creator initiated with the creation is the central point. (A covenant, unlike a contract, is not between two sovereign parties.)

That covenantal relation is especially clear in the short story about the covenant with Noah which is no less a covenant “with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you” (9:8ff). The earth and all flesh, which at creation were deemed “good,” receive covenant as guarantee of God’s faithfulness even though humanity has become faithless: “I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (9:11). God’s “bow in the clouds” is “a sign of the covenant between me and the earth” (9:13).

If a hunter’s bow is hung up at rest on the wall, then he is no longer intent on death. God’s bow being hung up at rest on clouds that are departing with their “arrows” (lightning) is a sign that the wrathful drive toward death has ended. Life is now affirmed: “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (8:22). God’s “never again” to the flood of chaos and death, and his promise of life and peace to the creation, are reflected in prophetic writings, as we shall see. For instance, Isaiah 54:9-10 contrasts the “never again” of “the waters of Noah” with “my covenant of peace” that is guaranteed by God’s “steadfast love.”

But let us return to the two creation sagas. Preconditioning of the interpreter, but not the stories themselves, has led some readers to search for contrasts between scientific findings and these creation stories, also some readers to insist on literalism (as in the 7 literal 24-hour “days”). But the ancients were more sophisticated than to restrict all their thinking and writing to literal expressions. Further, no scientist writes in the way that these Genesis texts were written. To compare such different writings as saga and scientific treatise is worse than comparing apples and oranges. “It is more like trying to compare oranges and orangutans.” (Conrad Hyers, *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science*; Atlanta: John Knox, 1984, p. 31. I recommend this book.)

Genesis is theological writing, not scientific. A necessary unavoidable conflict between

evolution and creation is consequently not in the cards. The creation stories are about the Creator's dealings with the cosmic totality, humanity included, but without becoming anthropocentric. As H. Paul Santmire has commented, Genesis 1 and 2 "need to be read, not simply within the personal context of our salvation, but within a universal context that encompasses the 'last things' and 'all things.'" ["The Genesis Creation Narratives Revisited: Themes for a Global Age," in *Interpretation* 45/4 (October 1991), p. 366. He also offers on the basis of these texts some quite useful guidelines for theological reflection about "global issues of justice and environment."]

From John Gibbs:

This section comes from my article "'Creation Texts' in Scripture: Guidelines and Findings," which is posted at the website www.env-steward.com. The website also posts a concordance to those lectionary commentaries where my further comments on the first creation saga, and on Genesis 9:8ff. may be located.

That website is maintained by MEESC (Minnesota Episcopal Environmental Stewardship Commission) within the Minnesota Diocese of the Episcopal Church. Also available at that website are both a Bibliography which includes books that deal with the science-religion connections, and meditations or commentaries on lectionary texts.