

➤ **INTRODUCTION** – God, I praise you for I am wonderfully and fearfully made. So are all of you, although sometimes we have a few doubts when our knees or hearts or eyes or ears give out, but nevertheless we are wonderfully and fearfully made. The daffodil is wonderfully and fearfully made when it opens its beautiful flower after receiving just the right amount of sunlight for the right length of time. The female black bear is wonderfully and fearfully made when she goes into hibernation – sleeping for months without eating, drinking, or going to the bathroom. Yet, in the middle of her long winter’s nap she gives birth and nurses her cubs. Even oysters are wonderfully and fearfully made; in laboratory tanks in Illinois their shells open and close in synch with the tides in the New England harbors where they hatched. Speaking of oysters, Episcopal theologian Robert Farran Capon tells a parable about an oyster who is complaining to God about its condition in life.¹ The oyster asks: “God, what in the world did you have in mind when you created me?” God replies, “All right, already. There are things you never dreamed of. All kinds of stuff. And stuff with moves you couldn't imagine if you tried.” God continues, “As a matter of fact, oyster, that's your problem. There you sit with a rock on one side and a starfish on the other. My apologies. It's a limited field of vision,” God says, “But in the evolutionary scale of business, you've got to put a lot of things near the bottom. Spoils the effect if you don't. Anyway, the moves I mentioned. I'll tell you a few. Basketball for example: the best ones are so flashy; they make you laugh, because you can't believe the guy made the shot.” Then God adds, “Squirrels going through trees are one of my best effects. You know the last time a squirrel missed his footing? I keep track of these things. It was May 3, 1438. I've got creatures so graceful, they almost

¹ Robert Farran Capon, Hunting the Divine Fox: Images and Mystery in the Christian Faith (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), 3.

break your heart ... a prima ballerina [for example]. Talk about moves!" Oysters, daffodils, bears, people, and millions and millions of other things, God's stuff according to our parable – wonderful, fearful, mysterious stuff. God's created stuff – God's miraculously evolved stuff – God's awesomely designed stuff, planned, designed, and created by an intelligence beyond human comprehension.

➤ **CREATION, EVOLUTION, & INTELLIGENT DESIGN** – So now we have this huge debate going on between proponents of creation and evolution and intelligent design. Some call it a debate between theology and science as if one is right and the other is wrong! Some infer that if you believe in science, you can't be a Christian; others infer that if you are a Christian, you can't accept science. I can hear God laughing about all this hoop-la. Yes, theology and science are different, but they are not incompatible. Theology and science are the why and the how of creation. Theology tells us why creation came about in six simple words: "God saw that it was good." Science tells us how the creation that surrounds us came about through the theory of evolution – evolution which is our best current explanation of "how." Theology tells why God created man and woman in God's image: "God wanted a companion." Science through evolution attempts to explain how we human beings got to be the way we are. I accept creation as a fact and I accept evolution as a fact, but a fact that is only proven in part. You see our God, the God who created the universe and the daffodil and the bear and the oyster and you and me, is divinely capable of creating the processes by which the one-celled creature became the daffodil, the bear, the oyster, and you and me. To declare that God is not capable of creating evolutionary processes reduces God to little more than the great sculptor in the sky. Certainly I believe God as creator is also an

intelligent designer, but identifying God as an intelligent designer reduces God to little more than draftsman. The God I praise because I am fearfully and wonderfully made, created me, but the God I praise also created the processes that caused me to be the me you see standing before you.

➤ **KNOWLEDGE & MYSTERY** – The writer of Psalm 139 declares God’s knowledge of her or him seven times – seven times! The Hebrew word for “know” means more than mere knowledge; it means a thorough, intimate knowledge. Remember we wink and nudge each other when we say, “They knew each other biblically.” And it may be just coincidence that “know” occurs seven times, the Hebrew number that signifies fullness and completeness.² Whatever – the message is reinforced that God fully and completely knows the psalmist, just as God knows you and me. “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,” proclaims the psalmist. Such knowledge is beyond comprehension; such knowledge is mystery. But, we can’t stand lack of knowledge – we can’t tolerate mystery. Amazingly, God has given human beings a gift of insatiable curiosity – God created us with the desire to solve mystery – whether it was Adam and Eve’s curiosity about the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil or the caveman attempting to solve the mystery of fire. And we keep working to know more about the mysteries of chemistry and physics and biology. When I studied physical chemistry a long time ago, we knew that the atom was made up of protons, electrons, and neutrons. Now we know that neutrons are made up of subatomic particles called quarks; there are up quarks, down quarks, strange quarks, charmed quarks, beauty quarks, and truth quarks. Anyway that’s more than enough about atomic physics, but interesting isn’t it that the

² J. Clinton McCann, Jr. The Book of Psalms, The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. IV (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1996) p. 1235.

quark names sound theological? But, even with all we know now, the atom still remains very much a mystery. And “the Word of God is [still] rich, mysterious, invitational, sometimes ambiguous, and ultimately unfathomable.”³ So as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, “Now we see in a mirror dimly.” We cannot understand all of God’s intentions in creation or God’s intentions for the evolutionary processes God set in motion. We certainly cannot comprehend the mystery of God’s intelligence. But through faith we can accept that God knows us individually, and knows us well.

➤ **GOD’S PRESENCE IN OUR CREATION AND OUR CREATIVITY** – The psalmist tells God: “you formed my inward parts;” “you, God wove me together in my mother’s womb;” “I was not hidden from you, God, when I was being made in secret.” Those verses trace God’s intimate knowledge of us as we were being created.⁴ Human life is a natural, biological occurrence that we can explain pretty well scientifically. Yet those verses of Psalm 139 eloquently describe that our lives are also the “will and work” of a Creator who loves us.⁵ We are the products not only of evolution, but the products of love, the products of a God who is ever near us. The products of our human creativity – art, music, scientific discoveries, our day-to-day work – are far more than just evolution products, evolution which in its simplest form could mean “chance emergence from a formless muck eons ago.”⁶ I am convinced that the paintings of Renoir or Jeri Platt and the music of Mozart or Steve Kimes are Creator directed, produced in part by the genetic evolution of their respective DNA’s, but Creator directed. And that is worth praise! The psalmist tells us that when declaring, “You hem me in from all sides and

³ Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, “Let Us Proclaim the Mystery of Faith”, Weavings, Vol. XXI, No. 1, p. 6.

⁴ J. Clinton McCann, Jr., p. 1235.

⁵ Ibid., p.1236.

⁶ Dr. Walter B. Hull, “Let Students Hear Intelligent Design Vs. Evolution Debate”, Columbus Dispatch Letters to the Editor, January 14, 2006, Vol. 135, No. 198, p. A13.

lead me.” There’s a painting of an operating room scene in Mt. Carmel West Hospital. You see the doctors and nurses standing around the operating table; behind two of the doctors, Jesus stands with a hand on the shoulder of each. Dr. Chris Lutman tells me that’s the way he feels when he goes into surgery. That’s why I so often pray St. Patrick’s prayer with you before surgery: “Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ to comfort and restore me.” I want to reaffirm God in Christ’s presence in the presence of the creative, God-given scientific process of surgery. God is revealed most completely in the firstborn of all creation, revealed in a named person: Jesus.⁷ Creation as God’s gift of life – creation as the conditions necessary for life come together as the good news of Emmanuel, God with us, in the birth of Jesus Christ.

- **Conclusion** – There’s a sculpture by Rodin in the NY Metropolitan Museum called “The Hand of God.” The hand is strong and sensitive, working with a lump of clay, fashioning a man and woman out of a chaotic mess. The Philadelphia Museum houses another of Rodin’s works, “The Hand of the Devil.” The two hands are essentially the same. Both are the strong, sensitive, long-fingered hands of an artist. But whereas the hand of God is fashioning form out of the lump of clay, the hand of the devil is idly working it, continually destroying any shape that appears. The clay continues to exist only as a meaningless lump, remaining a chaotic mass of nothing. “The biblical understanding of God’s creative activity is to bring order - imaginative, beautiful order - out of chaos.”⁸ When we accept evolution alone and deny creation, we get the meaningless lump –

⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2005) p. 53.

⁸ W. Robert McClelland, Worldly Spirituality: Biblical Reflections on Money, Politics and Sex (St. Louis, Mo.: CBP Press, 1990), 59.

when we declare evolution as the only way, we fail to explain our individual creative abilities of music, art, and science. Evolution is science, but as Nobel physicist Richard Feynman once put it, "science is imagination in a straitjacket."⁹ But when we declare evolution to be ungodly, we fail to give God full credit for God's mysterious creative powers that indeed bring order, God's powers to create not only things, but processes – powers that exceed our understanding. When we say that some of the things we see in creation could not have evolved, they were intelligently designed, we presume to know the unknowable mind of God, a mind containing weighty thoughts more numerous than the sand. You see in comparison to God, we human beings are only a little better off than the oyster caught between a rock and a starfish. Our perspective, our understanding, our comprehension is limited – we only see in the mirror very dimly.

AMEN

- A NOTE: Physicists are now telling us that there is "high mathematical probability" that some of the molecules in us this very minute have come from or will someday go to the furthest reaches of the cosmos. "A breath of air. A cell on your eyelid, in a drop of sweat, or in the wall of your heart has in all likelihood been to the edge of space." In other words, we are made of the ashes of dead stars. What's more, our ashes extend in time as well as in space. "There is an equally high mathematical probability that some of our molecular stuff has come from the primeval fireball of creation itself, the furnace in which the universe began. That we might literally have (for a while at least) within our very bodies some of the matter that was there during the very first moment, or some of the air with which Moses reiterated what he had heard when the One of Being said, 'I am'; or some of the air that charred that thin, barely audible sound of breathing, which calmed Elijah." --Source unknown
- A NOTE: But now ask the beasts, and let them teach you; And the birds of the heavens, and let them tell you. Or speak to the earth, and let it teach you; And let the fish of the sea declare to you. Who among all these does not know That the hand of the Lord has done this; In whose hand is the life of every living thing, And the breath of all mankind? -Job 12:7-10 NAS
- A NOTE: The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed. --Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions* (New York: Crown, 1954), 11.

⁹ Lawrence M. Krauss, *Hiding in the Mirror: The Mysterious Allure of Extra Dimensions, from Plato to String Theory and Beyond* (Penguin Group, New York, 2005) p. 11.