

## Law and Grace: Body and Soul

Rob Gieselmann, Epiphany 1B, Jan. 11, 2015

On Christmas Day, the *Wall Street Journal* published a column by Eric Metaxis, called “*Science Increasingly makes the Case for God.*” The title is misleading – because it isn’t science that makes the case; it is probability statistics. Regardless, Metaxis claims that the existence of life as we know it, on this earth, is so improbable that there must be a god.

In the 1960’s, Carl Sagan posited that two factors are necessary for life-sustaining planets to exist in other solar systems.

- a. the right kind of star or sun;
- b. the right distance of the planet from that star.

Based on Sagan’s theory, scientists concluded, there must be about one septillion planets in the universe capable of sustaining life. The problem is, we now know Carl Sagan was wrong. His list of two was far too short. Scientists now have a list that is over two hundred factors long, changing the probability completely – making it most *improbable* that other earths exist. In fact, the likelihood of there being *any* planet like earth – earth included – is about the same as tossing a coin in the air and having it come up heads, one quintillion times in a row. Further, the probability that a universe like ours exists in the first place is virtually zero.

At the Big Bang, four crucial forces were required to have been established within one-millionth of a second: gravity; electromagnetic; and both a strong and weak nuclear.

Had, for example, the electromagnetic force been out of sync with the strong nuclear force by one/one quadrillionth of a second, the universe would not have formed. Now - combine the two probabilities – that of a universe like ours and of a life-sustaining planet like earth both occurring randomly – the probability of your life, here and now, is about zero. In other words, you and I shouldn’t be here. The astronomer Fred Hoyle – who coined the term, *Big Bang*, quipped that – in the face of such odds – “my atheism is shaken.”

But the Book of Genesis ignores science, and speaks to life’s poetry. No credible theologian believes the earth was created in a literal six days. Yet, somehow and poetically, the holiness of God hovered over the deep – just like a mother eagle hovers in the sky above her nest. Imagine that – God as mother hovering over what was to become life: Your life, and mine. But first, light had to be pulled from darkness – *ex nihilo*, God created something out of nothing. And the poetry of God transcends the literal, just like the love of God transcends the physical universe that you see and feel and touch.

Deeper truths than mere science emerge from the Genesis. Jewish theologians say that three aspects of God are folded into its pages. First, God is intimate – Intimate, which means that God is not Thomas Jefferson’s clockmaker God who set the world in motion and then removed himself to some other room. Nor is God transcendent only, having no regard for the minutiae of your life. Your life matters to God.

This God strolls through the Garden in the cool of the day to find his friends, Adam and Eve, to spend time with them. When was the last time you spent time with God? God is intimate. And covets time with you.

Second, God is **lawgiver** – As lawgiver, God cares enough about the human race to help it create order. Order helps us know how to treat one another with care. *Respect the Dignity of every human being*, we promise at baptism, but chaotic, lawless societies everywhere, reminding us of our acute failure in this regard: think here of Iraq and Syria and Isis and Paris and even Ferguson, Missouri and Staten Island, New York. God issued the Ten Commandments, to establish the basics of respect, the outline of a kind civilization. God as lawgiver.

Finally, God is **Redeemer**. Even *this* early in Scripture, you find God redeeming. This redemption is far more than a repair of things gone wrong. In Genesis, God infuses life with meaning. You are here for a purpose – and it matters to God not only that you exist, but that, as Kaiser Permanente says, you thrive.

\*Now, it seems to me that we Episcopalians get stuck on the second aspect of God. Most people do: God as lawgiver. We have a heightened sense of societal justice – of right and wrong – something we pride ourselves on. We cook R<sub>EST</sub> Dinners, and grow food out back to feed hungry people. Our clergy preach about climate change and civil rights and so many of the things that really do matter to God and are important for a just society. But God is not just lawgiver. Nor is God an accountant, keeping tabs of whether you accrue more debits than credits, more good than bad. And yet, multitudes of people streamed to John the Baptist because they intuitively understood God as lawgiver, and that they had failed this lawgiver. *Repent of sins*, John preached.

But settling accounts is only the beginning of the Christian story. Like science is part of creation, and light from darkness is part of the poetry. One is coming after me, and he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire, John said. The same Holy Spirit who hovered over the deep like the mother eagle hovers above her nest: to protect and nourish her young. In other words, says John, you need more than science, or law, if you will – You need God's poetry. Holy Spirit and Fire. Intimacy and Redemption.

The *pentecostal* churches appreciate the Holy Spirit's intimacy and redemption far better than we do. They live as though the heavens were indeed torn apart – – ripped to shreds. God is intimately involved in their lives because that is how they *see* God.

How do you see God? When was the last time you sought God for guidance? Or just plain spent time with God? Walking through a garden in the cool of the day? Don't spend so much time on science that you miss poetry...On law that you miss spirit.

Taste and see, the Lord is Good.