

“Not Enough ‘Jesus’!”?

“My help is in the name of the LORD who made heaven and earth.” (Psalm 121:2)

“Why don’t you talk more about Jesus on your blog since you call yourself a Lutheran Pastor?” I have been asked this question in a variety of ways from time to time. Considering my position as a pastor, it strikes me as a reasonable question. Seriously! I indeed do give more attention (OK, much more) to creation theology, including natural theology, *in my blog* than I do “Christology” of a kind that centers on Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection for our sins. And when on the many occasions I do zero in on the Bible, my fairly consistent focus is the interpretation of the opening chapters of Genesis which concern the creation of the heavens and the earth. For many LCMS (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod) Christians especially, it can appear that I have my priorities all wrong. In the recent publication, The Natural Knowledge of God: In Christian Confession & Christian Witness (A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 2013), the consistent theme is that natural theology, though important, is **inadequate**. After all, Jesus said, *“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life”* (John 5:39,40). It is therefore clear that Jesus Christ must be recognized as the center of the Holy Bible. Taken as a whole, our message as Christians is indeed inadequate whenever we neglect Him as that very center.

Yet inadequacy with respect to biblical themes can take more than one form. Langdon Gilkey began his book, Maker of Heaven and Earth (Anchor Books, 1967), with the question, *“What is the first thing Christians say when they begin to state their beliefs?”* He replies that the answer must necessarily be “creation” for the reason (expanded over several pages) that the efficacy of a given savior-figure is bolstered by the measured adequacy of that power-figure to actually save. The prophet Isaiah, for example, stated, *“Thus says the LORD your redeemer...I am the LORD who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens alone”* (Isaiah 44:24). Psalm 121:2 declares similarly, *“My help is in the name of the LORD **who made heaven and earth**”* (boldface mine, and there are no commas in biblical Hebrew).

Biblical, orthodox Christianity, which has its center in Jesus Christ, God’s Son, is Trinitarian. The term “trinity” consists of the two smaller words, “tri” (meaning “three”) and “unity.” Christianity does not embrace the “unitarian” belief in God as a *solitary* personage. We believe to the contrary in the mystery of the Trinitarian formula, “one God in three Persons [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit].” The consistent challenge of Christian belief is that we work to maintain a proper biblical balance in our consideration of the workings of each of these three Persons.

Now it is of course fundamental that there is no Christianity apart from the finished work of Jesus Christ, His death on the cross for our sins, and His resurrection from the dead. He is the foundation of my faith (which is orthodox Lutheran Christianity). For the record I hasten to add that the case for the historicity of the Gospels, for Jesus’ life and His miracles, and most especially for His resurrection from the dead, is so roundly vindicated by the results of rigorous historical investigation, that questions about the truth of Christianity at that level have come to bore me. And indeed these matters are already powerfully and effectively argued by a broad array of apologists.

It is significant that a fundamental premise of secular “science” includes the conviction that miracles are in principle impossible. *Secular* scientific belief (properly labeled “scientism”) asserts that since (as they say) matter is all there is, the only possible source of influence on a given natural process

must itself be a previous *mechanistic* event. Big Bang cosmology (notice my letter to Dr. Richard Dawkins in my previous blog) challenges scientism on that very contention. To repeat that argument briefly, the Big Bang reveals, in absence of scientific materials and processes, an absolute beginning of all things out of absolutely nothing. This means, assuming it to be true (and it is!), that the origin of the universe is, itself, a **miracle!**

On the basis of such relevant recent scientific evidence just described, questions of the biblical view of *creation* continue in their importance. A resurrected Christ who is left, pardon the pun, “hang-ing mid-air,” (that is, un-linked to other biblical truths) is NOT adequate to save. But Christianity doesn’t teach that anyway. Christianity says Jesus is our savior from sin precisely because He is God, and by “god” we don’t mean just “any old god.” The Bible does not call readers to believe in a generic “god.” To the contrary it calls us to distinguish between idols (false gods that are limited by definition and non-existent in any case) which tempt people of every culture and time, on the one hand, and, on the other, the only true and living God who both “made heaven and earth” at the beginning of time (Genesis 1:1), and in the fullness of time entered our world in the flesh in Jesus Christ (John 1:14).

An inadequate view of creation logically leads to an **inadequate** conception of the weight of the saving power of Christ in the blood He shed on the cross. Because He is God, God the Son, who “*in the beginning*” made “*all things*” (John 1:1,2), the blood of the “*Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,*” therefore avails for **every** sin and every sinner from all time who receives Him by faith (John 1:12). No being of lesser stature could accomplish that task. This is why I do not consider matters of creation unimportant. In itself the doctrine of creation is not *adequate* for salvation. But an adequate conception of creation is *necessary* for the robust doctrine of Christ’s redemption according to the Bible.

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