

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes May 14, 2008

Guest: Bruce Sullivan, "Verses I Never Saw"

House cleaning items...

- Today's Special: "**Christ in His fullness,**" by Bruce Sullivan
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Today's Text: Genesis 1:14-19

And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.' And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

INTRODUCTION:

1. Personal background & conversion to the Catholic faith (5 minutes).
2. Marcus and I have a great deal in common, including a life-long interest in both the Bible and in the natural sciences.
2. However, despite sincere interest in both, it is possible to get skewed in the approach to one or the other.
3. It was when I began to study the Catholic faith that I first saw the significance of today's focus verses: Genesis 1:14 - 19.
4. In the process I found that my own approach to these verses was seriously flawed and, in fact, amounted to a misuse of Sacred Scripture.

I. My View of Genesis 1:1-31 as a Fundamentalist Protestant

- A. The seven days of Creation were seven, literal 24-hr days.
- B. Any other view was considered to be a sign of faithlessness.
- C. Literalism was employed like a litmus test for orthodoxy.
- D. But, was in reality a knee-jerk reaction based upon the fact that, in our modern culture, many have mistakenly portrayed faith and reason as being in conflict with each other.

II. The Confessions of St. Augustine

- A. The classic autobiography of the 4th Century Doctor of the Church who journeyed from sin to sainthood, from heresy to the heights of theological insight, from the darkness of worldly ambition to the changeless light of grace.

- B. Contains many beautiful passages that have resonated with countless souls for over fifteen hundred years.
1. Book I, Ch. 1 (*"Our hearts were made for Thee, and they're restless 'til they rest in Thee."*)
 2. Book 8, Ch. 7 (*"But I, wretched young man that I was--even more wretched at the beginning of my youth--had begged you for chastity and had said: 'Make me chaste and continent, but not yet.' I was afraid that you might hear me too soon and cure me too soon from the disease of a lust which I preferred to be satisfied rather than extinguished."*)
 4. Book X, Ch. 27 (*"Late it was that I loved you, beauty so ancient and so new, late I loved you! And, look, you were within me and I was outside, and there I sought for you and in my ugliness I plunged into the beauties that you have made. You were with me, and I was not with you. Those outer beauties kept me far from you, yet if they had not been in you, they would not have existed at all. You called, you cried out, you shattered my deafness: you flashed, you shone, you scattered my blindness: you breathed perfume, and I drew my breath and I pant for you: I tasted, and I am hungry and thirsty: you touched me, and I burned for your peace."*)
 6. Book 13, Ch. 8 (*"This is all I know, that apart from you it is ill with me, not only without but within myself, and all my abundance, which is not my God, is poverty."*)
- C. In Books XII & XIII he discourses on the meaning of the first chapter of Genesis and the concept of time.
- D. Prodded me to read more of St. Augustine and other Fathers on the topic of the meaning of the first chapter of Genesis.
1. *"We see that our ordinary days have no evening but by the setting (of the sun) and no morning but by the rising of the sun, but the first three days of all were passed without sun, since it is reported to have been made on the fourth day."* (*The City of God 11:6*).
 2. Origin had expressed similar thoughts more than a century earlier, noting Moses used the word "day" in a figurative sense not only because the sun and moon were not created until the fourth "day" but that after describing Creation as having taken six days, he then lumps all of them under the designation of one "day" in Genesis 2:4 (*"This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven."*)
- E. These statements by early Christians--writing more than a thousand years before the modern controversies associated with Darwinism--were not knee-jerk reactions to scientific theories that they found to be objectionable. Rather, they were simply based upon a reasonable approach to the words of the Sacred Text and a recognition of its intended purpose.
- F. All of this caused me to re-think my approach to the opening chapter of the Bible. The words of Genesis 1:14-19 were very familiar to me, but I had never seen their clear implication.

III. The Bible & Science

- A. Must emphasize first and foremost that the question is NOT whether or not God could have created the universe in seven days. Obviously He could have. In fact, He could have done so in less than an instant. The question is this: What is the proper interpretation of the Creation narrative in Genesis?
- B. Sound Exegesis of Scripture and solid science are never in conflict with each other.
 1. Wherever an apparent conflict exists, it is due to either (a) faulty exegesis or (b) junk science.
 2. These problems tend to arise whenever we try to employ either Sacred Scripture or science in a manner inconsistent with their respective purposes.
 - a. Sacred Scripture is not intended to offer commentary on the “nuts and bolts” of physical universe.

* PROBLEM THEN ARISES when passages of Scripture are employed in a way unintended by the Divine Author. Can lead to a sort of FIDEISM that says, “I don’t care what the physical evidence indicates, the Bible says THIS, so I’m sticking with it...”

- b. Similarly, science concerns itself with what is physically observable and quantifiable. It cannot, however, explore the deeper questions that pertain to origins, purpose, and final ends.

*PROBLEM THEN ARISES when men presume that their rapidly accumulating knowledge of the workings of the physical universe somehow does away with the need for (or reality of) God.

3. Consider the words of St. Augustine:

"With the scriptures it is a matter of treating about the faith. For that reason, as I have noted repeatedly, if anyone, not understanding the mode of divine eloquence, should find something about these matters [about the physical universe] in our books, or hear of the same from those books, of such a kind that it seems to be at variance with the perceptions of his own rational faculties, let him believe that these other things are in no way necessary to the admonitions or accounts or predictions of the scriptures. In short, it must be said that our authors knew the truth about the nature of the skies, but it was not the intention of the Spirit of God, who spoke through them, to teach men anything that would not be of use to them for their salvation" (The Literal Interpretation of Genesis 1:19–20 [A.D. 408]).

- B. Must understand (and respect) the purpose of Sacred Scripture and the limitations of the natural sciences.
 1. READ: Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) #283 - 284 (the value & limitations of science).
 2. READ: CCC #289 (The purpose of the Genesis narrative). Lays out for us the mysteries of our beginnings: creation, fall, and promise of salvation.
 3. In other words Genesis is not intended to give details pertaining to the natural processes that have shaped the physical universe (that is the role of science precisely because such truths are within the grasp of natural human reason). Science, on the other hand, is not equipped to answer the ultimate questions pertaining to human origins and purpose because they belong to the order of revealed truths that transcend our natural rational capacities.

- C. None of this denies the fact that men often, in the name of science, chose to close their eyes to the timeless truths of Sacred Scripture. Again, St. Augustine comments on this in Book V, Chapter III of his *Confessions*
- “Thou drawest near to none but the contrite in heart, and canst not be found by the proud, even if in their inquisitive skill they may number the stars and the sands, and map out the constellations, and trace the courses of the planets. For it is by the mind and the intelligence which thou gavest them that they investigate these things. They have discovered much; and have foretold, many years in advance, the day, the hour, and the extent of the eclipses of those luminaries, the sun and the moon. Their calculations did not fail, and it came to pass as they predicted. And they wrote down the rules they had discovered, so that to this day they may be read and from them may be calculated in what year and month and day and hour of the day, and at what quarter of its light, either the moon or the sun will be eclipsed, and it will come to pass just as predicted. And men who are ignorant in these matters marvel and are amazed; and those who understand them exult and are exalted. Both, by an impious pride, withdraw from thee and forsake thy light. They foretell an eclipse of the sun before it happens, but they do not see their own eclipse which is even now occurring. For they do not ask, as religious men should, what is the source of the intelligence by which they investigate these matters.”*

IV. The Problem of Selective Biblical Literalism

- A. Fundamentalists often assert that they are simply taking the Bible literally, which, they say, is simply the only way to read it.
1. They do so in Genesis 1 when they insist that the seven days of Creation must be seven, literal 24-hr days.
 2. They often do so with the Book of Revelation (written in apocalyptic language).
- B. But such “Biblical Literalism” is, invariably selective
1. Matthew 5:27 - 30 (plucking out of eyes and cutting off of hands)
 2. John 6:53 - 58 & Matthew 26:26 (“This is My Body...”)
- C. Such misguided literalism can inadvertently result in a discrediting of both our holy faith and the Sacred Scriptures.
1. Because it can put people in the position of having to chose between what they can plainly see and what the Bible supposedly says (which our Lord has never done)(cf. to all of Jesus’ appeals to folks to believe in Him because of the signs which they perceived with their senses).
 2. The fact that the moral teachings of Sacred Scripture often run counter to the grain of our fallen nature is another matter altogether. Those truths do not contradict anything observable to the physical senses (i.e. in the way that faulty Biblical exegesis can do in areas proper to scientific inquiry).

CLOSING:

In John 14:6, Jesus tells us, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Jesus IS the Truth.

Therefore, ALL truths--even ones pertaining to the physical universe--exist in, point to, and have their fulfillment in Him.

For this reason the truths of Sacred Scripture and the truths discovered by the natural sciences harmonize and compliment each other when both are properly understood. Therefore, both the theologian and the scientist should rejoice in the truths presented by each other.

Again, consider the words of St. Augustine (*Confessions*, Book XII, Ch. 25)

"But when he says, "Moses did not mean what _you_ say, but what _I_ say," and then does not deny what either of us says but allows that _both_ are true -- then, O my God, life of the poor, in whose breast there is no contradiction, pour thy soothing balm into my heart that I may patiently bear with people who talk like this! It is not because they are godly men and have seen in the heart of thy servant what they say, but rather they are proud men and have not considered Moses' meaning, but only love their own -- not because it is true but because it is their own. Otherwise they could equally love another true opinion, as I love what they say when what they speak is true -- not because it is theirs but because it is true, and therefore not theirs but true. And if they love an opinion because it is true, it becomes both theirs and mine, since it is the common property of all lovers of the truth."