

The Creationists' Truth

by James Eggert

*The sun is rising. All the green trees are full of birds, and their song comes up out of the wet bowers of the orchard. Crows swear pleasantly in the distance, and in the depths of my soul sits God.*¹

Thomas Merton

Many Public Television viewers will remember that wonderful series entitled “The Power of Myth,” which included, of course, the memorable Bill Moyers interviews with the late Joseph Campbell. Among other things, we learned the following: although myths may not be factually true, nor scientifically based, they have nevertheless provided our species with an “infrastructure of meaning” necessary for maintaining a cohesive culture over very long periods of time.

Mythological stories, Campbell argued, infused the collective mind with magnified “emotional truths” while teaching us about the origin of the Universe, the nature of Good and Evil, and the deep, abiding complexity of the human condition. Think of the great *Genesis* Creation narrative, or the story of the Garden of Eden, or my favorite, the parable of Noah’s Ark (where God’s command to Noah to save “every living thing” becomes a powerful ecological edict—a Biblical Endangered Species Act, if you will).

In addition, Campbell’s thesis has in my own mind made it easier for me to bridge that canyon of misunderstanding between scientific evolutionists and Biblical Creationists. My elaboration of this point first employs an analogy we all can relate to: myths relating to the “fact” of the *rising and setting of the sun*.

Recently, for example, I came across the Paiute Native American story entitled “Why the Sun Rises Cautiously.” It is a legend that clearly supports Campbell’s thesis, by using an everyday natural phenomena (“a rising sun”) to assist us in dealing with socially harmful traits, including selfishness, foolishness, and a destructive tendency toward violence. The story is of an irascible rabbit wanting to “get even” with the Sun (tab-e) for making his life miserable, as he suffers though the unbearable heat of a Utah summertime. Here’s a sample of the rabbit’s complaints and plan of action:

“Now,” said the cottontail, “tab-e, the sun, has gone bad. Last winter he was very good but now he has gone bad. I must see what is the matter with him. To make me brave and strong I will fight everyone I see until I get to him. I will whip him. Maybe I will kill him.”²

I won’t tell you the ending except to say that this story uses the reluctance of the sun “to rise” to explain who we are as humans, how things got to be as they are, plus offering some teachings about good vs. bad behavior.

The natural fact of the rising sun also plays a role in ancient Mayan texts, where we learn about the “First People” from the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred book of the Mayan Quiche. Briefly, the earliest humans were known as “mother-fathers” who lived their lives in a perpetual dawn, before the advent of days and nights and the predictable movement of the sun across the sky. In this “twilight zone” the mother-fathers were forced to wander “around aimlessly

in the darkness, with no sense of belonging to a place and with no conception of social order.”³

So what did they do about it? In the midst of this suffering, the “mother-fathers” climbed up a mountain called Place of Advice, and there resolved to turn the mass starvation into an act of penance. Tohil and the other gods were moved at this and responded by ordering Jaguar Quintze and his companions to keep their sacred images safe... And suddenly, the dawn began...

In their happiness, Jaguar Quintze and his fellows “cried sweetly” and burned incense in gratitude. *Then the sun itself came up.* As it did so, all the birds and animals rose up from the valleys and lowlands and watched the joyous spectacle from the mountaintops. The birds spread their wings of the sun’s rays and the first human beings knelt in prayer.⁴

Of course, these mythologies on the “rising sun” are based on a fact of nature: after all the sun *does* rise doesn’t it? All one’s senses affirm it. You can *see* the sun rise in the east. You can *feel* it on your skin. Flowers warmed by a rising sun release fragrance; in this sense you can *smell* a rising sun. Birds know the sun rises in the morning and if you are fortunate enough to enjoy their songs (as did Thomas Merton in the opening quote), you can practically *hear* the sun coming up. No question—the sun *is* rising!

The only problem is that scientifically the sun is *not* rising. It’s essentially still in relation to the Earth. The sun remains fixed despite the deep sensual/emotional truth that 99 percent of the time we forget that it’s the Earth that’s moving. The scientific explanation, as Galileo unsuccessfully argued with the Roman Catholic Church over 350 years ago, is an *invisible truth* lurking in the shadowy world beyond one’s senses. Indeed, it is a truth normally less important on a day-to-day basis than our common perception of seeing the sunrise in the morning.

Still, every once in a while, I try to make an effort to experience the reality of a dawn brightening by envisioning the fixed sun *awaiting* our great blue-green sphere as it slowly turns, as the Earth pulls its mountains, oceans, rivers, cities and all its children along and slowly circles down, down into the light of the sun. It is an interesting sensation. But it’s not the perception that has emotionally energized thousands of years of stories, legends, and time-tested mythologies.

The Creationists’ Truth

In recognizing the importance of mythological/emotional “Truths,” I can now better understand the Creationists point of view and their passionate argument against evolution. They too are immersed in an important and powerful mythological “Truth”: that God literally fashioned the stars, the Earth, and all the animal and plant species pretty much as we see them today. And like them, I too am reluctant to acknowledge an ancestry that descended “from the monkeys” as it were. Indeed, while attending a lecture by a leading Creationist, I saw a sign with a simple, but very thought-provoking question:

From goo to you???

“Yikes,” I thought. “My ancestors arising from primordial scum?” My ego whispered: “ridiculous...no way!” It should also be obvious (like the rising sun is “obvious”) that Darwin was wrong. It’s too important to my identity and my sense of what it means to be human. Yet, just as I can accept the scientific *fact* of a moving Earth and stationary sun, I