

280 The imagined Paradise

In our “We know best!” Reflection last week we considered examples in Scripture and in contemporary life of God being “elbowed out” of human activity, with the consequences of such folly soon appearing. We come this week to two highly topical examples of this tendency, each of which clearly demonstrates that even today we do NOT know best!

A senior cleric based at Cambridge University was speaking recently on the radio about the problem of why some people become obsessed with pornography. In his well-crafted arguments about Reason and Augustine and so on, he referred in passing to “a time of Paradise as imagined in Genesis” before he glided smoothly on. There we have “We know best” in the proverbial nutshell! – the assumption by a clever clergyman in academia that the pre-Fall Paradise described in early Genesis is a work of the imagination and never existed.

Why does such a view now prevail so widely both within and beyond the Christian Church? The answer is very simple: the wholesale acceptance of Darwin’s Theory of Evolution, which states that we have all got here by natural processes of evolution over millions of years, so the content of early Genesis is now recognised as being in the realm of “imagination” rather than of fact. It seems therefore that “Darwin also knows best!”, which brings us neatly to our second topical example – the increasing concern about global “biodiversity loss”.

This loss involves the potential or actual extinction of vast swathes of what is popularly termed “the natural world”, which actually means “God’s world”. Human beings are at last realising that Planet Earth is wonderful, precious and vulnerable, and so – wait for it – we need to be responsible stewards of it. “Well fancy that!” we could say, in view of Genesis 1.26-31 and 9.1-17 for example.

Yet sadly here again, as with our first example, the notion of the Bible, God’s Word, being sought out in public debates as our foundational guide for society’s conduct, is fanciful. Instead the line is, “We have all evolved; the Bible is irrelevant; God-talk is irrelevant; we steer our course by human reason and intellect; in short, we know best”.

But those who take this foolish line are obliged to sidestep some very awkward facts within those early chapters of Genesis we referred to earlier, quite apart from the many more such facts later in the Bible.

Firstly is the Flood account of Chapters 6 – 8. Does this really read as just some fairy-tale told around ancient camp fires? Why the meticulous construction details, the length of the ark being 6 times the width and 10 times the height, the basic ratios of ship construction ever since (6.14-16)? Why the “fifteen cubits upwards” of 7.20 (clearly the draught of the laden ark)? Why the dates being so carefully marked? – as in 7.6, 10-12, 17, 24 and 8.3-14. This Flood, as clear an expression of the reality of divine judgement as anyone could wish for, holds the vital key as to why the rocks and fossils and climate of this planet are as they now are. But this whole awesome event is explained away as just an exaggerated account of one local flood among the many others there have been, because “we know best”.

Secondly are the genealogies of Genesis Chapters 5, 10 and 11, the first one, because it is pre-Flood, being particularly significant. There are no other such lists remotely like these anywhere else in the world. So just what are they, if not what they simply purport to be? Have we ever heard of fairy tales with such extraordinary lists? But once again they are set aside, on the grounds that we now “know” we have evolved over millions of years (so Adam was actually nothing special), and the lifespan lists are laughable anyway since no-one lives to such great ages. Of course we don’t live so long now, but those great pre-Flood lifespans are easily explained by the massive changes in global climate as a consequence of the Flood. (Plotting on a simple block graph the lifespans from Adam to Terah (5.3-32 and 11.10-32) is rather interesting ...).

The Bible-excluders and the Bible-diluters, now “ruling the roost” wherever we look, do not know best, for they make these two crucial, foundational mistakes: they accept Darwinian evolution, and so they set aside the first eleven chapters of the Bible.

Whenever these two mistakes are rectified – by a plain acceptance of Genesis 1-11 and a rejection of Darwinism, both decisions being wholly in line with the actual scriptural and scientific evidence before us – then all else thereafter starts to fall into its proper place, including our having the right framework for our tackling contemporary issues such as sinful addictions and biodiversity loss.

And in the process that pre-Fall Paradise, airily dismissed as “imagined”, is seen to be Fact; and best of all, in Christ, it will become Fact once again (Acts 3.21).

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