

Darwin, Design and Christmas

Colleagues,

1. Only in America! Only in America could this farce continue. This week we Americans have been given a definitive ruling. A judge has said: One way of comprehending about the world we live in is religion, the other way is not. Case closed.
2. Only in America, where religion thrives, is it a no-no to be “religious” about the origin of things—including yourself. Not that it’s a no-no to have such beliefs, but they are not public domain topics. Surely not in the schools where we learn the truth and the skills to survive.
3. The Origin of Species is no longer discussable, let alone debatable. It’s a done deal. We have a clear winner. And clear losers. Once the courts have spoken it’s “established.”
4. But origins and destinies are inescapably theological topics. No one of us can get back to the beginnings and tell the rest of us how it all started, nor can any one of us jump to the grand finale and flash back where things wind up. Origins and destinies, by definition, entangle us in God-talk. But that is, of course, only one point of view, and that viewpoint has its own set of definitions for the terms “origin” and “destiny.” The non-God-talk folks disagree. “Without-God” (a-theism) is more plausible for them. But such atheism is still an “-ism.” An ideology. An alternate religion. [In Britain that is now “official” in census reporting: atheism is one form of religion.]
5. Which raises the first question that came to my mind when I read “the judge’s” ruling this week: Where did you get

that definition of science? Of religion? Whose definitions are these? Who owns the language? Is there a scientific answer to these definition questions?

6. So one proposal for seeing the world is labelled religion—and therefore a no-no in public schools—and the opposite “religion” gets carte blanche. Sounds exactly what the founding fathers said was not to be: No establishment of religion! By which they doubtless had something quite simple in mind. Anglicanism shall not be the state church of the USA. But Anglicans shall not be restrained from being Anglicans. Baptists, Lutherans, etc. too.
7. Would it really damage pupils being prepared to live on our planet in the 21st century to learn that folks—especially in America—differ on the issue of origins? E.g., Some folks in our country (and the rest of the world too) think you don’t have to do God-talk to understand the origins of things, other folks think you do. Here are the warrants frequently given for one point of view, here are the warrants regularly cited for the other. And (with the two names that come to my mind right now) in both cases, they are molecular biologists, professors at x & y universities. The god-talk advocate I mentioned speaks as a Christian, he says. Other world religions do their god-talk about origins in other ways. Here are some samples.
8. Only in America, I suspect, is the Enlightenment still a modern nation’s public ideology. Even though “post-modernity” [the Aha! that nobody reads reality objectively; we all read through tinted-glasses] may even have been invented on our shores, our public ideology is still tar-baby stuck on antiquated opposite axioms. “Science provides objective truth. Untrammelled reason can get you there. It is indeed possible (even easy once you

learn how) to read reality without any lenses 'interfering' between reader and reality."

9. Walter Brueggemann, doyen of American Old Testament studies, had a brilliant article in the Christian Century recently (Nov. 29, 2005). Its title: "Counterscript." Where I've been speaking of lenses, he uses a wider net: scripts. He doesn't get into the Script and Counterscript discussed above, but he could have. Here's what he says: 19 theses.

- a. Everybody has a script.
- b. We are scripted by a process of nurture, formation and socialization that might go under the rubric of liturgy.
- c. The dominant script of both selves and communities in our society . . . is the script of therapeutic, technological, consumerist militarism that permeates every dimension of our common life.
- d. The script—enacted through advertising, propaganda and ideology, especially in the several liturgies of television—promises to make us safe and happy.
- e. That script has failed.
- f. Health depends, for society and for its members, on disengaging from and relinquishing the failed script.
- g. It is the task of the church and its ministry to detach us from that powerful script.
- h. The task of describing, relinquishment and disengagement is undertaken through the steady, patient, intentional articulation of an alternative script that we testify will indeed make us safe and joyous.
- i. The alternative script is rooted in the Bible and enacted through the tradition of the church.
- j. The defining factor of the alternative script is the

God of the Bible, who, fleshed in Jesus, is variously Lord and Savior of Israel and Creator of heaven and earth, and whom we name as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- k. The script of this God is not monolithic, one-dimensional or seamless, and we should not pretend that we have such an easy case to make in telling about this God.
- l. The ragged, disjunctive quality of the counterscript to which we testify cannot be smoothed out.
- m. . . . [and] is so disputed and polyvalent that its adherents are always tempted to quarrel among themselves.
- n. The entry point into the counterscript is baptism.
- o. The nurture, formation and socialization into the counterscript with this elusive, irascible God at its center constitute the work of ministry.
- p. Ministry is conducted in the awareness that most of us are deeply ambivalent [anxious, double-minded] about the alternative script.
- q. The good news is that our ambivalence as we stand between scripts is precisely the primal venue for the work of God's Spirit.
- r. Ministry and mission entail managing that inescapable ambivalence that is the human predicament in faithful, generative ways.
- s. The work of ministry is indispensable.

So far Brueggemann.

- 10. Is the Darwin/Design hassle about this? Central to the debate is also just what THE debate actually is. Is it scripts and counterscripts? Some of it surely is. Especially the parts that get folks all riled up—on both sides! Doesn't "survival of the fittest" contradict

Christ's rehabbing rejects, the patently unfit? Which script rules world history?

11. Brueggemann's words couldn't be more true here too—predicament, ambivalence, anxious, even double-minded. But he's no fatalist. "Ministry is indispensable." The assignment is to "testify . . . the alternative script," namely, "the God of the Bible, who, fleshed in Jesus, is variously Lord and Savior of Israel and Creator of heaven and earth, and whom we name as Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

12. I've been so teased by Brueggemann's script/counterscript essay, that I've (almost) decided to take that route for the homily I'm slotted to do at our congregation this Christmas Sunday. The Gospel for the day is the prolog of St. John's Gospel. It's John Christmas story. I'm tempted to read it to the assembly in a Revised Schroeder Version "In the beginning, when things got started, someone was reciting a script. It was coming from God's direction. God Himself was reciting the script. Right from the very beginning God was reciting scripts. Everything in the world came into existence when God spoke a script for it. And if God didn't speak a script for something, it didn't exist. Life happens when God does scripts. And with such scripted life, light shines for everyone. [Who needs light? It's all in the script.] People in the dark need light. So God's scripted light shines into the darkness, and the darkness can't stop it.

There was a man sent from God, named John. He came to recite God's light-script out loud, so that folks would trust the Script-writer. He himself was not the Script-writer, he came only to speak the light-lines out loud to us. His message was that genuine light, actually the Script Himself (!), was coming into the world to illuminate the folks in darkness, i.e., folks living their

lives by other scripts.

The Script-in-person was inside the cosmos, on stage where the drama was going on. 'Fact is, the cosmos and its drama wouldn't even exist if he had not scripted it. Yet the folks on stage were clueless about him. The Script-writer came on stage, the stage of his own drama, but to those on stage he sounded alien. Their verdict: your lines don't fit my script.

But some did tune into his script, and those who did, who entrusted themselves to his script, got new scripts themselves. Their new roles, still on the same stage, went along with their new titles: "God's own kids." The DNA for such status does not come from blood-lines or bio-genetics, but from the Script-writer himself. They are the Script-writer's own offspring, connected with Son #1. [See below.]

[So here's the big picture behind 0 Little Town of Bethlehem.] The cosmic Script-Writer took on our flesh and blood, set up shop on the same stage where we're scripted to be. We've seen the glow coming from him, glowing as the #1 son of the Script-Writer – 100% Grace, 100% Truth. Grace means incredible good news for folks who get hooked on scripts of darkness. And Truth too. His script tells it like it really is."

So far John 1:1-14 (RSV). Now to craft a sermon.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder