

Gen 1:2:4a

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oR5hWbfZsYs&feature=related>

Is it possible, to hear the opening chapter of Genesis one minute, Stephen Fry's musings the next, and conclude that both are right?

Many people would say no. But there is one striking feature of Stephen Fry's logic, which is particularly contemporary and which is largely what, I think, makes him as popular figure as he is. And that is, that Stephen Fry's logic is not cold and hard and detached. It is a logic which is knowingly bound up with his emotion.

I can remember a celebrated Bible Teacher near where I lived in Somerset, being marvelled at because he could explain Scripture so well. Because he had used the metaphor of the train and the carriage – to explain how mind, logic, reasoning work in conjunction with emotion, experience and reason. And that is, that logic must always be the driving force – logic must be the engine, and emotion – which is always present, should only ever be in tow. Implication being, you don't want a load of emotion-driven clap trap in Christian worship!

But let's be clear. Even in worship, even the coldest, most detached liturgies – are used and shaped by emotional factors. Part of the lie of the modernist era is that emotion can be separated out from logic. The fact is, it cannot. Everything we do, every thought and calculation and decision is emotion-driven. Our emotions cannot be deactivated or restricted to certain parts of our life.

And when it comes to the debates between science and religion, those who make the loudest noise on either side of the debate, tend to use only logical arguments but are so blatantly emotion-driven, it's almost funny.

Now it is this modernist spirit which, for so long, has caused us to mis-read Genesis one, as though it were a scientific declaration by God about how the world began. God clearly thought one day, that it would be useful for human beings to have some solid foundations for grasping life, the universe and everything – so he states clearly and calmly that he made the universe and he did it in seven days. Three cheers for God, end of story, - and anyone that doesn't believe that, isn't a proper Christian.

The trouble is, this way of reading Genesis is deeply unbiblical. It refuses to take seriously both the genre in which Genesis One is written, and the context in which it was written. The context, as you may know, is this:

6 centuries before Christ, the people of Judah rebelled against the then Super-power Babylon – believing that the God of Israel would come to their aid. And ... he did not. Judah was crushed. It's people were slaughtered. The city of Jerusalem was flattered. The temple of God was destroyed. Its leaders, were taken into captivity, in a far away land – and were left wondering how it could be that the God whom they had built their lives around, had been defeated.

If you can even begin to imagine the situation they faced – it was one of the deepest emotional distress for all who experienced it. And just when these people think that's it, that's the end of everything – they hear the words, "In the Beginning, Elohim created the

heavens and the earth.” Not some tribal deity who has been defeated, but a God who built and created everything ... and who has blatantly Not been defeated. The creation account we heard today, in other words, is a message of encouragement and healing for a broken people – not scientific fuel for a never-ending blog-site debate between science and evolution.

That is the context. And the genre is Hebrew poetry. It is impossible to read this text seriously in the language in which it was written, and declare anything different.

But still, even if this is poetry – the idea of one God? If this is the God who created the heavens and the earth, why all the nastiness and horribleness of life? Well both the text and the context certainly do not claim that because God created everything, then everyone will have a safe and happy life as long as they worship him!

In fact, Scripture never teaches monotheism – the belief in One God, in the modern sense. Apart from the fact that the new testament talks of a god of this age who blinds the minds of unbelievers. In Scripture, monotheism simply means that there is no part of our life or world that does not come under the authority of God.

But this, in turn, begs the question of why horrible things happen to people and animals, if God is in charge. Surely, if God is God, he could just click his fingers and fix everything.

Over the next few weeks, our evening services will take a whistle stop tour through scripture, to look at how Scripture itself is set up to address this very question. At this stage, all we can say is this – that Scripture has always been about human beings’ experience of God. For Moslems, Scripture was dictated directly God Allah. But Christian and Jewish Scriptures, the authors are pointing towards the God who is revealing himself in their life and experiences.

And a long narrative unfolds. What is perfectly clear – is that the Scriptures are not written from the divine perspective – and delivered to us as cold, hard, objective fact. The Scriptures we call Holy, are a pointer towards who God is from people in the midst of suffering and anguish and uncertainty and hope. At times it is written from a perspective of joy and privilege and security – but only when those things are experienced within the wider context of suffering and anguish and uncertainty and hope.

Scripture is written from the perspective of the lamb being eaten from inside. Read Genesis again from the perspective of Stephen Fry’s lamb, and it is no longer the cold hard scientific document we have been programmed to think it is. It is rather a hint of something bigger than the present reality – that will nevertheless impact upon our present reality, here and now.

Scripture is written from the perspective of the lamb. My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? That question is woven through the dna of the Scriptures we hear week in week out.

