

Views from the Pews: How things are and which things matter

All human cultures have developed stories that once were the only explanations of how things were (*facts*) and which things mattered (*values*). Most stories were metaphors, like parables, so were not in themselves literally true, but they had essential truth in them. Metaphorical truths keep communities together so long as they help people to understand the world around them (*how things are*) and the moral behaviour expected in it (*which things matter*) in similar ways.

The undisputed bases of Western facts and values until Copernicus were the two Hebrew creation stories. Genesis 1 shows **how things are in nature**. Contrary to the ancient cosmology of the surrounding cultures, which saw nature as controlled by pagan deities, Genesis 1 insists that God created the conditions needed by a home for humanity. God set the stage and the rules (day/night, heaven/earth, land/sea), and placed the sun and stars simply as time-markers, definitely not to be worshipped. God then created life *indirectly* by commanding the earth and the waters to be fruitful. Creation was endowed with the freedom to run itself according to God's laws laid down at the start, and it has always obeyed them. Therefore, **what matters** is that humans should obey, love and rejoice in God, whose service is perfect freedom.

Genesis 2-3 shows **how things are among humans**: Adam was formed by God out of the dust of the earth, and Eve by God out of Adam's rib. Therefore, **what matters** is that human bodies are formed from the earth, but life is given by God. Woman was made after man, and subject to man's authority.

Now science has taken over explaining "How things are", and the values derived from old stories no longer command universal assent. Misunderstanding the shift in authority can bring faith into disrepute. Cartoonists love making faith look ridiculous in the light of science. The solution is to avoid confusing science and faith.

Science takes things apart to see how they work, like the laws of genetic inheritance, or hydro-electric power.

Theology puts things together to see what they mean, like Thomas when he saw the risen Jesus.

Science and theology both try to make sense of the same world, but in different terms. Both are valid, and both answer our most basic questions, but they are not the same.

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