

Chapter 1 Creationism's Credibility Gap

**There are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamed of
in our philosophies, Horatio.**

– Hamlet

BUBBA'S GOD OF LOVE

Back in high school, when I was a Jesus Freak, I hung out with a lot of Southern Baptists and other Christian Fundamentalists. We were like a little tribe or extended family, although as White American kids in the 70's we didn't even know those terms, much less use them. We were a Youth Group, and if we needed to be more specific, the Calvary Baptist Youth Group. We were all together, in harmony, saved by Jesus, and buoyed up by happiness about witnessing and saving other people's souls too.

All in all, it was fairly harmless. I was just glad to have friends and not be out-cast.

Most of my friends were raised to be Biblical Literalists, and believed God created the world as told in Genesis – in six days. Many of them also accepted as true modern scientific ideas like the Big Bang cosmology, and Plate Tectonic continental drift. If Genesis needed to be scrutinized, they would take up the theory of six God Days for the actual implementation of Reality, rather than six Earth days, retaining their Faith by saying things like "He could have done it in six regular days if he wanted to", but six God Days is OK in order to accommodate the findings of modern science.

My family believed in Science, and also in God. While the Creation of Genesis was not taken literally – there's two quite different versions of the story after all, both

officially true, and then there's all those dinosaur fossils and galaxies that are millions or billions of years old – nonetheless Jesus was/is literally the One Son of the One God and all that stuff. It never even occurred to me that any lines might need to be drawn, in the sand or anywhere else. Believing in things that were inconsistent was perfectly OK because in the final analysis, it was not about the words but about the assurance of having faith in one's own belief. Other people's beliefs were not wrong if they contradicted ours, but only if those other people tried to force us to believe the same. God, being the Grand Poobah of the Universe, is not something we can understand perfectly using human thoughts and words. By definition, He is far beyond all that.

In particular, I remember a guy named Bubba, whose parents were Missionaries in a Church that even the Southern Baptists thought was pretty out there. His real name might have been Peter or Daniel, or something like that, but he always went by Bubba.

Bubba was not the sharpest knife in the drawer. Some people might even put him in with the spoons. At his best he was an average student. But he had something that many much smarter people lack entirely. He was sincere, honest and respectful of other people's beliefs. If you talked on about evolution, Big Bang or other modern ideas that are not found in the Bible, Bubba would nod his head and say OK. If asked what he thought, he would just reply "Oh, I don't believe in that."

Bubba was a Six Day kind of a guy. But far more important to him was Jesus, and the teachings like "Judge not lest you yourself also be judged." He was completely clean and sober, in line with his church. One day we gave him a ride home, and he became very concerned when he saw the half empty bottle of Johnny Walker in the back window of our car. "Is that really whiskey?" Bubba asked nervously, as if this was the first time he had ever seen such stuff.

"Oh no!" my brother and I laughed. "That's just tea. We needed a prop for a play we're doing where somebody gets drunk as part of the story." Bubba was visibly relieved. A little while later, however, very respectfully, Bubba asked "Would you mind if I pour this out on the ground?" I guess the thought that it looked like whisky, and hence that it might actually be whiskey was a bit too disturbing for him. At no time did he give any sense of judging us, but was only acting to relieve his own distress about being confronted with the culture of drinking whiskey.

Coming from a long line of drunks (although my Texas cousins think I'm a bit of a slacker in that department), I never even would have thought twice about it. Nowadays of course I would at least put the bottle in the trunk of the car, even if it only had tea inside.

Decades later, I suspect Bubba's beliefs are much the same, and that he is raising his children to be good Christians too. If they have to go to a school where evolution is taught, Bubba probably tells them to just do their best to write down whatever answers the teacher wants on the test, even though it isn't what our family believes, just like he used to do in school. Life is difficult anyway, don't argue with the teacher. It's OK because we know what we believe, and one of those things is to turn the other cheek.

Bubba would not get involved in an argument between Science and the Bible, like so many vehement (and stealth) Creationists are doing these days. No matter that Science might prove the Bible to be full of factual errors about geology, cosmology, history or anything else. Bubba would just settle into his fallback position: "That's OK. No I don't believe that." Any reasonable person who believes in Science should respond with similar respect: "That's OK. I don't believe what you believe either." Either person trying to force his belief on the other opens the door towards a totalitarian intolerance.

Modern, politically aggressive Creationists seem to feel no such constraints regarding the conflict they see between the Bible's version of the World and various interpretations put forward by scientific inquiry. They completely ignore the dozens of equally interesting Creation Stories from various Religions in the World, of which Christianity is one of many. But they think theirs is the only true belief and they are trying to force others into compliance. These Bible thumpers do a great disservice to Bubba and to all of us living in the melting pot of the USA. To me, Bubba is a good Christian, and coercive Creationists are just the latest example of radical intolerance which has caused many centuries of grief and suffering in the name of some God who is not my God and not Bubba's God either.

Bubba's God is the God of Love. As I understand it, one god of love would not fight with another god of love. They would know they are both the same God of Love.

That's OK. I can believe that.