

Don't know much about history / . . . Don't know much about a science book / Don't know much about the French I took // But I do know that I love you / And . . . that if you love me too / What a wonderful world this would be. (Sam Cooke)

There is a misconception that has persisted for a couple of centuries that science offers a more valid view of the world than our ancient Bible. For many “educated” people the Bible is all fairy tales compared to physics, astronomy, geology, anthropology, the more rational study of nature that prevails upon campuses today. This misconception arises from a misunderstanding of the nature of the Bible. Its intent is profoundly different from that of Sam Cooke’s “science book”. It’s a more poetic and as such highly insightful probing into the history of the world and of us who inhabit it.

The case can also be made that the Bible is quite interested in how nature works. The Wisdom books of the Old Testament ponder our created environment not mathematically, as does the physicist but by contemplating things that happen in terms of a meaning that’s more penetrating and morally applicable than a laboratory would require. It may prefer to operate by way of – for instance – a proverb. Take the following:

*Clouds and winds and yet no rain,
So is a man who boasts of gifts and never gives. (Prov.25: 14)*

*The north wind brings ruin,
Gossip in secret, cross looks. (Prov.25: 23)*

*When the wood runs short, the fire goes out,
Where there is no slanderer, quarrelling ceases. (Prov. 26:20)*

*He who touches pitch, it sticks to his hand,
And he who goes about with the scorner becomes like unto him. (Ben Sirach 13:1)*

*Like a moth in clothing or a maggot in wood,
Sorrow gnaws at the human heart. (Prov. 25:20)*

Notice how the writer observes nature and then shows how nature can tell us things about ourselves. Pitch sticks to things just as someone obsessed with somebody’s faults acquires the same faults. Or moths ruin clothing – just as persistent sorrow will eat your heart away. To the proverbialist nature all around him is by no means mute.

It’s as if nature itself were endowed with so many voices, a composite of many “teachers” who would enter into edifying dialogue with us – if we would but pay attention. And may we not say that in such proverbial wisdom lay the foundation for the more scientific dialogue we have with nature today. Far from science and the Bible being completely at odds – the Bible, in liberating ancient Israel from being spooked by a nature inhabited by gods and demons, introduced us to this world as something to be explored with all sorts of benefits – as in such gnomic utterances as: *Go to the ant, O sluggard, study her ways and learn wisdom . . . (Prov. 6:6)*

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