Some RESPONSES to Some Questions Of 6TH-7TH Graders

Aim: to encourage these church-school students to keep thinking

Here's the wording, & order, of the students' questions last Sunday. I wasn't there & won't meet with them, but can't resist being an unofficial consultant. Individually, the questions in themselves interest me: collectively, they profile the current public-school/church-school interface on science & religion.

1 EVOLUTION VS CREATION

Two responses: (1) Why is there something instead of nothing? Science doesn't know, but the Bible does. What does the Bible say? It's the first thing the Bible says. Science is only one of the ways of knowing; another is revelation (God telling us what we could never discover by ourselves). (2) In this wording of the question, God the Creator is on one side of the "VS" but not on the other: so worded, the question is false. The first edition of Darwin's ORIGIN OF SPECIES ended with the statement that one aspect of God's creation was the processes of evolution. So to make a "VS" statement true, God must be removed from "evolution" (& that is what public-school "science"--not real science--does). The word for the false idea of evolution-without-God is "evolutionism." Thus "evolutionism [not "evolution"] VS creation." We believe in both the Bible & evolution: nobody can believe in both evolutionism & the Bible.

2 HOW COME GOD DOESN'T TALK TO PEOPLE ANYMORE

So many possible useful responses to this question! Right now, our church (the United Church of Christ) has an advertising campaign with the slogan GISS ("God is still speaking"): the Holy Spirit continues to unfold the meanings of what God has said & done in creation & history. Read the beginning of the Gospel of John: Jesus is himself the creating & redeeming Word; & the beginning of Hebrews: first came the prophets (who could only speak for God), then came Jesus (who was God "incarnate" [in-flesh] speaking, living among us & dying & rising for us). God the Holy Spirit continues to speak as "inspiration," but "revelation" is complete in Jesus (so we Christians recognize no prophets after him).

3 HOW DO WE KNOW FOR SURE THAT JESUS EXISTED, WHAT HE LOOKED LIKE AND IF HE TRAVELED TO ALL THE DIFFERENT REGIONS

How do we know there was a Big Bang? The consequences of something are so huge that the something needs a name. Historically, something happened to produce the huge reality we call "Christ-ianity," & the evidence (Christian, Jewish, & pagan) is that the name of that something was & is "Jesus Christ." Two things we can say about his looks: (1) Since nobody commented on it, he must have looked "normal" (i.e., like a Jew of his time & place); & (2) He must have cut an impressive figure, grabbing the people's attention & frightening the authorities. Travel? Only in Palestine & Transjordan (say, 40 miles E-W & 130 miles N-S). His mission required no more extensive travel.

4 WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SUFFERING / BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE

Again, many possible useful responses to this question! We Christians begin answering by asking the prior question: why does God himself suffer? If he made us suffer but did not himself suffer, he would be a sadist; if he could prevent our suffering but didn't, he would be cold, uncaring; but because he loves us, he suffers with us & (in Jesus's Cross) for us--& invites us to share in his suffering love for others. (Most of the caring missions all over the world were begun by Christians.) Of course some suffering is deserved, & we learn by suffering some things we couldn't otherwise learn; but undeserved suffering is a mystery illumined only by our conviction that creation is, as from the good God, good (Genesis 1:31, "very good"); evil is the absence of that good, & human evil springs from the absence of love. Two responses as to why "bad things happen to good people": (1) untrue, because there are no good people: we are all sinners; (2) life is more complex than a programmable computer under our control.

5 WHY DOESN'T GOD ANSWER ALL OUR PRAYERS

Again, no computer under our control. Again, our prayers bump into & overlap others' prayers: nobody could answer them all! Again, the fundamental answer to prayer is a growing relationship with & obedience to God--in which sense every prayer

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is its own answer. And again, thank God for not answering prayers we'd not have prayed had we been wiser! Finally, when we truly pray it, the Lord's Prayer is always being answered.

6 WHAT ARE GHOSTS, WHY DO THEY NOT GO TO HEAVEN OR HELL
"Ghosts" is an old word for "spirits": the Holy Spirit was called the Holy Ghost. The Bible rejects the notion that dead people hang around to bother the living, instead of (as the questioner says) going to their destinations. But the veil between the world is thinner than many think; mysteriously, we have the power to cooperate with angels or demons (i.e., bodiless good & evil consciousnesses).

7 WHY CAN YOU NOT SEE HEAVEN DURING SPACE TRAVEL
Yuri Gargarin, the first Communist "cosmonaut," said that his not seeing God in space proved that what Communism had taught him was true, viz. that God does not exist. He didn't understand the difference between measurement thinking (science) & symbol thinking (religion, poetry, art, philosophy). These two ways correspond to two meanings of "see": in the second way, the symbol way, we can see people & God; in the first way, the measurement way, we can't even see people (but only their bodies). Again, with our measurement eye, we can see the "sky"; but with our symbol eye, we can see "heaven." From the first question on this list, remember: there's more than one way of knowing!

8 DOES REINCARNATION EXIST
Religions which originated in India teach that if you've not been punished enough, you'll have to return for more of it & keep returning (being re-fleshed, "re-incarnated") until you've had enough. In the West, some misunderstand reincarnation, & use the word for their desire to have another go at life in the flesh--a desire to which God's promise of resurrection (of which our Lord's Jesus' resurrection was the first instance) corresponds: through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, we Christians look forward to participating in his resurrection "and the life of the world to come."

9 DOES POSSESSION AND EXORCISM EXIST
Not all "mental" troubles yield to psychoanalytic therapies. Jesus really did drive out ("exorcise") demons that had "possessed" some deeply distressed people; & real exorcisms continue to be recorded.

10 WHAT IS THE RAPTURE
It's one end-of-the-world picture in which some will be taken from the earth to save them from the troubles coming on the others, or to punish them. A picture, not an announcement of things to come. It's underlying message is warning: we are, & will finally be, responsible-accountable for how we have used God's gifts to us.

11 WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE GIVEN MORE THAN THEY CAN HANDLE, CREATING MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS (though God is "not supposed to" do that)
Whether or not God "gives" us everything that happens to us, God clearly gives us the assignment to try to help those who are burdened with more than they can handle.

12 WHAT IS IT LIKE TO DIE
Dying, Jesus said "Into your hands, Father, I commit myself." At 88, I think of it as walking into the arms of God. I would like to say so much more....

13 WHY ARE MOST MAJOR WARS ABOUT RELIGION
People fight about what they think important. Religion is most important, so it's most fought about: it's an honor to religion that it's most fought about, as it proves the supreme importance of religion. But religion is the heart of culture, & many wars are culture-wars rather that specifically religion-wars.

14 WHAT WOULD GOD THINK OF CLONING, ANTI-AGING PROCEDURES, TRANSPLANTS
God has given us "dominion" (Genesis 1:26,28) over, responsibility for, biological processes--to use for his glory, human prosperity, & the good of the "very good" (vs.31) earth. Those are the rough guidelines for what's being called medical ethics.

15 IS THERE REALLY A "FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH" TO LIVE FOREVER
We got chased out of Eden for that fantasy! (Genesis 3:22-24)