

I thank you, and your teacher Melinda Conlon-Hoffman, for providing me with your questions in anticipation of my meeting with you 7 Oct 84. In boldface print are your concerns in the printed order presented to me. Let's proceed this way:

PROCEDURE: (1) Anyone may call out a number who's willing to speak to it and my printed response (2) after I read my printed response. (3) Then, after each 1:1 conversation, free-for-all....**Point-of-view** of my printed responses: A good teacher succeeds in communicating information, and a better teacher succeeds in helping students make discoveries.

1. Noah, the ark and the orderly collection of animals. Your sentence has only one adjective, and I'll start with it: like science, the Bible is "orderly" if you have eyes for your right brain as (in science) you have eyes for your left brain. The story says that One God is in charge of nature ("the Flood") and history (human vicissitudes viewed as moral social/individual consequences); and it's "historical" at least in this, the more important, sense. Indirectly, doesn't it show ecological concern ("endangered species")? Clue: Science texts are worthless when you need religion, and sacred texts are worthless when you need science. No tool, and no medicine, can do everything; and it's unfair and stupid to expect "everything" of any tool, medicine, or text. In this sense, no tool or medicine or text is "perfect" in the abstract, though each is competent to its purpose-- and the Bible's purpose is to lead us to God and strengthen us in faithfulness to God as the Bible illumines God's nature and will.

2. Where did the women come from for the sons of Adam and Eve? Men want women so badly that they invent them if there aren't any around. Think about this "response": notice I'm giving "responses," not "answers": "answers" are to satisfy your curiosity, "responses" are to stimulate your curiosity and help you make discoveries.... A 2nd response: Why doesn't the Bible care about your question?.... A 3rd response: Did the sons marry their (unmentioned) sisters, or were A&E our first parents in some sense other than that they were the first humans?

3. Evolution vs. creation. In thousands of private highschools it's the other way around: creation vs. evolution. The "vs." correctly signals that you can't believe both in *divine* generation of life and in "*spontaneous* generation" of life: you can't believe both in *divine* selection and in "*natural* selection." Neither view is scientific, and public schools should not be permitted to teach either as science and should teach both as religion (but neither to the exclusion of the other). Darwin was a seminary dropout who near the end of his life regretted having also dropped out of his Christian faith; he could have shaped his theory without going atheist: he could have taught "evolution" (which is scientific) without inflating it into what scholars now call "evolutionism" (otherwise called "Darwinism," a philosophy-religion parading itself as science). Do your science teachers know the difference? Probably not: the myth of evolution(ism) is taught as science in most American highschools as it is in highschools of Communist countries.

4. Why is there death with a God in charge? Who decides who dies? Is the 2nd question social (the triage problem) or theological (the question of "supernatural" forces)? As for the 1st question, the Bible (with the possible exception of Ecclesiastes) teaches that death is not "natural" but rather the temporary result of moral evil in cosmos (Lucifer) and history (Adam & Eve)--temporary in being an enemy that will be overcome (1Cor.15 & Rev.21). Now, there is death *because* God, whose nature is truth/justice as well as love, is in charge.

5. Why do the good suffer and criminals go free? A translation: Those who should be rewarded are punished, and those who should be punished are rewarded with continued freedom. Jesus is executed, Barabas is released, "and that's the way it is" (as Cronkite used to say). The balancing statement is that the bad suffer and criminals get caught: equally true, isn't it? But why isn't it *only* the bad who suffer and *only* criminals who endure legal sanctions (court sentences)?

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For one thing, that would be laboratory neat and we'd be lab animals (not having to puzzle and ponder and make discoveries and choices and commitments--in short, not free). And for another, how's the question affected by Jesus' statement, "only God is good"? Again, what about the good effects of some suffering, such as Jesus'? Whom do you know, in your own life, who got good out of suffering?

6. Is there a devil? Do Congregationalists believe in the devil and heaven? Here's a wise phrase from our UCC tradition: "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity." Ponder our Statement of Faith in the light of your question and this phrase. Some clues: Is it logical to believe that evil is limited to our species? Or that God, who in Jesus Christ overcame death, cannot overcome our deaths when we open ourselves to God as Jesus did?

7. Time of Bible in comparison with current time. Methuselah? Time-sense is, always and everywhere, culture-bound: it's not a scientific fact any more than gravity is (though gravity was till it was discovered that if you believe in gravity, 99% of the universe is "missing": 11Sept84 Sc.Sec. NYT). Ditto for space and Einstein's space-time: all these notions are heuristic, search-tools, not facts (and so not "science" in the fact sense). Some folks speculate that mind developed out of matter, but the great scientist Max Planck said "I regard matter as derivative from consciousness" (as the Bible says the universe comes from God's mind). Small minds have doubts, great minds have doubts about their doubts; as Pascal said, "Be skeptical of skepticism." And Einstein: "Common sense is the collection of prejudices you acquired by age 18." Think, too, about time-sense vis-a-vis technology.

8. How can we really say that Jesus Christ is more than a prophet? Who's "we"? "When we follow him, we discover who he is" (Schweitzer). The Church teaches what we Christians have thus discovered, and you can't really believe it unless you yourself follow Jesus and discover for yourself who he is. For one thing, he's the kind of teacher who wants you to make discoveries for yourself. What gets our attention gets us, and what holds our attention is our god. Is Jesus getting your attention, for the God of gods?

9. Are we to believe the miracles (Red Sea, blood from stone, etc.)? "What actually happened?" is a modern historiographical question; instead, the Bible raises the question "Who as in charge?" and always answers "God." Miracle-stories put this answer in its most radical form and shock us (like Zen sayings) into another than our daily-worldly consciousness. Beyond that, many doubtless have what we call "historical" rootage: a famous Jewish scholar recently came out for the "historicity" of Jesus' resurrection, an essential of Christian faith.

10. Is the Book of Revelation true? True to what? It's certainly true to the Christian faith that God, who in Jesus Christ is winning battles against sin and death, will so win the final victory. But it's more about the present than about the future; and it reminds me to say that God (as known in Christ and Scripture) wants us to be free in, with, and from the Bible. Christians do not know God and then judge Jesus in that light: we know Jesus, through whom supremely God's light streams upon us. Jesus is not like God: God is like Jesus. We know very little, but all we need to know: "I am to God as my dog is to me" (Bertholt Brecht). Jesus said he didn't know the future, only God does; quote that at anybody who "knows" the future and is trying to lay that "knowledge" on you....Revelation dramatically lays out our Christian experience of struggle against evil and striving for God episodically: our tribulating is presented as a tribulation time-slot, and Jesus' victories in our lives and times become a "millenium" (1,000 years), and our yieldings to temptations become the devil's temporary victory after the millenium. In this light, my response to your **Could nuclear war fit into some of the promises of Revelation?** is "Yes, of course." Get it?

11. What about evidence found later than the Bible (Shroud, Cup, Dead Sea Scrolls, etc.)? A mix of solid, Bible-confirming archeological evidence and pious guesses tilting toward credulity. Scratch that Shroud.