

*Wednesday August 11, 2013*

## **And so God created mosquitoes**

By Jim Taylor

I've just returned from camping and hiking for a week in the wilderness of the South Ram River, near Rocky Mountain House in Alberta, with the Skyline Hikers of the Canadian Rockies, a group that has organized these expeditions continuously since 1933

The campsite was gorgeous. The company, excellent. The food, superb. The hiking, wonderful. And the mosquitoes -- well, mosquitoes never manage to be anything but irritating.

The first chapter of the Bible declares, "God saw everything that he had made, and it was very good... Thus the heavens and the earth were finished... and God rested on the seventh day."

The Bible doesn't tell us how God rested.

I can't help wondering what thoughts might have flickered through God's mind, as he lay back in his newly created lounge chair and surveyed all that he had accomplished.

Perhaps it went something like this:

"And on the seventh day, God observed all that he had created, and it was good. Indeed, it was very good. Nay, it was more than very good -- it was perfect.

"And God thought, 'Of course, because I am perfect, anything that I create must also be perfect.'

"But then a thought troubled God. Because if everything that he created had to be perfect, perhaps he was not as almighty as he had supposed. Was it possible that he was incapable of creating something imperfect?

"On the other hand, if he did create something imperfect, might that also imply that the creator himself was imperfect?

"This dilemma troubled God so much that he could no longer lie back in his lounge chair and watch the universe unfolding as it should. He resolved that he would have to break his Sabbath rest, to see if a perfect being could create something imperfect.

"So he rose from his rest, and declared, 'Let there be, umm, let me see, I've got it, mosquitoes.'

And behold, there were mosquitoes.

"At once all those creatures who had been living in symbiotic harmony began itching and scratching, flicking with their tails and swatting with their hands.

"'Aha!' God said, 'Now I understand what I made those appendages for!'

"Moose stampeded into shallow waters to escape the little bloodsuckers. Horses galloped across the grasslands trying to outrun them. Humans stripped lemons off trees and smeared themselves with lemon peel to protect their tender hides from mosquito bites.

"Only the polar bears, squatting on their frigid ice floes, wondered what all the fuss was about.

"Then God clapped his hands in delight, and said to himself, 'There! I have proved that a perfect being can produce something that is not perfect!'

"Ever since, it has been understood by all -- imperfection does not require an imperfect creator. On the contrary, if an imperfect entity attempted to create something imperfect, its imperfections would interfere with its intentions. It would fail. The negatives would cancel each other, resulting in positive perfection.

"But if a perfect being chooses to create something imperfect, then of course that perfect being will achieve its intention.

And when God saw that mosquitoes were not good, God declared, 'That's perfect!'"

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## YOUR TURN

What constitutes responsibility? I raised that question last week, and you responded.

Isabel Gibson shared a similar experience, with a mining company rather than a broadcaster. “Decades ago, I was teaching business in Saskatoon and we did a business case for a mining venture in Chile (I think). There were serious concerns about human rights issues and the Board of the company had to decide what to do. In the class discussion, I made the point that all anyone could be responsible for was their own behaviour. If everyone said, ‘We may as well do it because if we don't do it, the next guy will’, then you don't even give the next guy the opportunity to step aside too.”

“I agree with you completely,” wrote fellow editor Christa Bedwin. “Passing on gossip is endorsing gossip. Same thing with news. Passing on negative horrible stuff increases its power. Likewise, choosing to pass on uplifting stories and points of view increases their power.

“I also agree that we have the power and the duty not to help negative, horrible literature get into the market. Editing *Mein Kampf* would be like being an accessory to a crime.”

Steve Roney disagreed with Christa. “If no one else is available to edit *Mein Kampf*, I think we as editors would have a duty to edit it and to make it as good as possible. Suppression of opposing opinions is always immoral; if we have a commitment to truth, truth is arrived at only by the freest possible exchange of opinions, as per John Stuart Mill. We cannot know that we know the truth unless we have heard all sides, and this is of course equally true for our readers. We have no right nor ability to decide things for them.”

Steve Roney questioned whether British Israel could be considered a religious denomination, like the Rosicrucians or the Theosophists. Could you be thinking of Garner Ted Armstrong, and his father Herbert W.? If so, I think your description of it as fascism, racism, and virulently anti-Semitic is way off. As it happens, I once listened to Garner Ted regularly. Not out of choice: I was working as a night watchman, and he was the only thing on the radio at that time. I did not agree with much of anything that he said -- he was, among other things, anti-Catholic -- but it would never have occurred to me then, or now, that there was any reason to refuse him air time. Actually, I enjoyed him. As a performer, as a rhetorician, he was brilliant, and consistently entertaining.”

Jim Henderschedt supplemented my closing words: “For me, the operative words are ‘take responsibility for’. You continue with ‘what we say.’ I believe that can be expanded to include ‘do’ and maybe even ‘think.’ This is something that seems to be missing from the equation in today's society.”

Pastor Mac MacGrew also wanted to add something: “You have hit the nail on the head, so to speak, that we need to take responsibility for what we say and do as individuals. I have what I refer to as the preamble to the Ten Commandments. Unless we can get past the third chapter of Genesis where Adam and Eve set the standard for not taking responsibility, then we can never get to the Ten Commandments themselves.”

Allan Baker asked, “Do corporations have a social conscience? Are they willing to accept responsibility for their actions, as humans are called to do? Why did mining companies lobby so hard against rules that would hold them accountable for their actions abroad? I agree with you that it seems that they are unwilling to do so and the most

recent example is the railway called Montreal Maine and Atlantic. In a world where corporations rule, we need articulate people to demonstrate that the emperor has no clothes.”

Dale Perkins noted, “Well said. — ‘Follow the money’ was a prophetic word in Watergate time, is just as relevant today, and even more essential with our hyper-surveillance-mentality at the controls.

“I think sites like 'truthdig' and writers like Chris Hedges are our best defence against the sickness that is so pervasive in our culture. Right now Big Corporate Money is setting the agenda and controlling almost every aspect of American culture, and Canada isn't far from that with the likes of Harper in charge here.

“But it starts with the kinds of rationale you've written about so well....”

Finally, Marjorie Bradley spent several weeks thinking about how to respond to my column about remembering and celebrating anniversaries. She sent this experience: “I have a particular interest in memory, which you linked to being human, because of my mother who has experienced a gradual loss of memory, both short and long-term, and at almost ninety years, now lives in a nursing home. When we speak on the phone most evenings, I recount the events of my day, and ask about hers. If she is alone, she may respond that she is well cared for -- or she may comment on the view out her window. The tone is one of contentment or at least positive, but the conversation about her day is short. We have resorted to music to extend our visit. I place the cell phone on the music stand and play old time music on her father's violin... Sometimes when I've put away the violin and picked up the phone again, she is humming that last tune. If I remind her that this is her father's violin that I'm playing, she will comment on his particular skill with the instrument. My visit with Mom always ends with a bedtime story...

“On occasion, I have called in the afternoon, and then again in the evening. Mom doesn't remember that I called earlier. I'm not sure how long she retains the memory of my phone call or even a visit in person, but I do know that while we are connected, she is celebrating that connection. So, like Cliff Boldt, I would place the ability to celebrate higher than the ability to remember on the list of characteristics that make us human. It is important to me that those of us who can no longer remember, still have their humanity recognized. It is in the ability to respond to others, celebrating the gifts of life, that I see in my Mother now. Should the time come when she can no longer recognize me, when she doesn't recognize the experiences of others, then the next question arises: when we have forgotten who we are, are we human? Is it enough for us just to be... and still be human? Hmmm...”

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## PSALM PARAPHRASES

For some reason, I don't have a paraphrase of Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19 in my book *Everyday Psalms*. So here goes with something a little more radical than anything I put into the book.

Hey! You!

You claim to have created this messy reality  
that we call sub-atomic physics.

Before we knew there were such things,  
you created protons and elections, quarks and leptons, bosons and photons  
for our use.

You set them spinning and whirling in Shiva's intricate dance  
of life, and death, and renewal.

Everything we are, everything we can be  
depends on these invisible dancers.

But your score has hit some sour notes.

Some have used your quantum packets of energy  
to destroy others  
to poison environments  
to threaten the survival of entire species.  
Come back! Tweak your creation back on track!  
Close off the destructive dead ends,  
and keep us out of cul de sacs.  
Just because we can doesn't mean we should.  
Set us on the straight and narrow again,  
and we will not stray off your path.

For other paraphrases, you can order my book *Everyday Psalms* from Wood Lake Publications,  
[info@woodlake.com](mailto:info@woodlake.com) or 1-800-663-2775 in Canada.

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#### YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other web links worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, [www.seemslkegod.org](http://www.seemslkegod.org);
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [www.traditionaliconoclast.com](http://www.traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca), or send a note to [sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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