

Anna M Spafford

English, Grand Canyon University

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Patricia Nereim

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Genesis and “The Emergence”

The book of Genesis from the Bible and The Navajo Creation story called “The Emergence” are two stories from different perspectives about the creation of mankind and the earth. The book of Genesis is a story written originally in the Hebrew language as the origins of the Jewish people but was then translated to Greek and then Latin before being translated to English by Christian translators. The title of the book of Genesis in Hebrew means, “In the beginning”. The Hebrew people resided in what is now the middle eastern area of Asia. The Navajo people are Native Americans which resided in the southwest portion of what is today’s United States in North America (Levine et al., 2016), their story “The Emergence” is a very complex story of how creation kept evolving and through four worlds under the earth until they emerge into the fifth and final world. Creation stories are humanities way of making sense of how the world was created and how people came to exist and inhabit the land as they do. When humans compare themselves to other living beings, they consider themselves more intelligent and their understanding of the world points to intelligent design by a creator. Every people group have different values and cultures and understanding those viewpoints can help us understand each other better. This paper will discuss the similarities and differences in cultural viewpoints and values that are reflected in the creation stories of the book of Genesis and the Navajo’s creation story called “The Emergence” due to each culture’s worldview.

The book of Genesis begins with darkness and water covering the earth and the Spirit hovering over the water according to the New International Version of The Bible. In the beginning, God exists before creation and begins speaking which creates light (day), darkness (night), flying animals, sea creatures, and then man and woman on the 6th day. We know God is

plural in the story of Genesis because God says, “Let us make mankind in our image,” in Genesis 1:26 (NIV). The Navajo Creation story, “The Emergence”, similarly has darkness and water in the beginning, then the water and sky meet, and it is the beginning of everything (Levine et al., 2016). There are spiritual beings (Nilch’i Dine’e) and the Holy People (Hashch eeh Dine’e) which exist in the beginning (Levine et al., 2016). These two types of spiritual beings create First Man and First Woman, another type of deity, together with two buckskins and two ears of corn (one white and one yellow) (Levine et al., 2016). Both stories contain references to spiritual beings that created the world and humanity which shows their deep connection to both spirituality and creation in their cultural identity.

After the man and woman are created in Genesis, they abide in a safe place known as the Garden of Eden where they abide in God’s presence according to Genesis 2 (NIV). The Garden of Eden is the place where four rivers converge, which run in different directions. God has given man and woman dominion over the land and the animals, and he has encouraged them to eat of every tree but one in the middle of the garden which was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2, NIV). In “The Emergence”, the spiritual beings, Nilch’I Dine’e, abide in what is known as The First World and it is known as a holy place (Levine et al., 2016). In the story, “The Emergence”, there are three rivers and four guardians for four places in the east, west, south, and north (Levine et al., 2016). Rivers are significant in both religions and beliefs because rivers are a source of life, and they signify their deep connection to the life-giving nature of their Creators.

In Genesis, Eve is tempted by a serpent and her and Adam eat from the tree of the knowledge of God tells them not to, therefore bringing separation from God and the Garden of Eden according to Genesis 3 (NIV). In “The Emergence”, the Nich’I Dine’e (spiritual beings)

repeatedly commit adultery and then get removed from their first dwelling, then they wander to multiple places repeating the bad behavior, until finally they dwell with beings and do not commit adultery (Levine et al., 2016). While in the book of Genesis, the removal of Adam and Even from the garden is punishment, in the Navajo story the new lands are always better than the one before. There are repeated references in both stories of disobedience and immoral behavior, which is representative of both cultures having a value of good behavior, which separates one from relationship with Creator.

In “The Emergence”, First Man and First Woman live together being successful in their endeavors of farming by working together (Levine et al., 2016). First Woman upsets First Man by saying something ungrateful for his contribution, and so First Man gathers all the men, and they leave and make a new settlement across the river. Finally, after years of being apart and the women almost starving to death, First Man and First Woman work out their issues and the women join the men at the new place (Levine et al., 2016). This references the value that Native Americans place on community, and how working together brings each individual success, rather than working on their own. Where the stories differ is that in Genesis, repeatedly God gives favor or punishment to His people based on the behavior of individuals, which is a reference to individualism. An example is seen in the story of Noah and the Ark, and the flood which wipes out every living thing except Noah and his family and the animals that arrived two by two to enter the ark, which is found in Genesis 7 (NIV). Individualism is where one works hard and earns his success on his own merit, whereas Native Americans value community, which is where they believe that one’s success comes from shared knowledge, common values, and mutual support.

In conclusion, the creation story of Genesis and the Navajo Creation story, “The Emergence”, are rich stories written from two different cultures. They are similar in values about spirituality, connection to the Creator, and importance of good behavior. Yet, there are parts of the Genesis stories that shows the cultural value on individualism and how an individual can earn favor or punishment from God, whereas “The Emergence” shows the Native American value community and believe that all individual success comes from the contributions of the group, including knowledge, support, and values. The story of Genesis comes from the Hebrew speaking people of the middle east, could also be considered early Israel, but the English translation has its own nuances due to cultural differences between Hebrew and how the Bible was translated to English by Christian translators. The Navajo creation story was written by the Navajo, which are Native Americans who reside in the southwest part of the United States (Levine et al., 2016).

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