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God Speaking To Man through the Things He Has Created

The novelty value of Carver's research, combined with his compelling personality and humble origins, made him a journalist's dream. Some writers, unfortunately, embellished what would have been a fascinating biography left unembellished. As the list of Carver's products grew, so did the popular mythology that portrayed him, in seemingly contradictory terms, as a great scientist whose work bordered on wizardry.

With his deep Christian faith and mystical nature, Carver himself added to this confused image. He told of arising each morning at four to walk in the woods, commune with the Creator, and receive his orders for the day. He called his laboratory "God's Little Workshop," and he liked to quote scriptural passages that he believed had particular relevance to his work and thought.

In an article published in a Baptist periodical, a writer told how he asked, "What, Dr. Carver, is the most marvelous fact of the age, or of the ages, the most wonderful conception of your mind?" Carver's answer, said the writer, was "immediate and like a flash":

The creation story, the creation of the world. "In the beginning God . . . created the heavens and the earth . . . and God said, Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for food: . . ."

"Behold" there means "look," "search," "find out". . . That to me is the most wonderful thing of life.

In an essay published well before his rise to national fame, Carver described how beholding creation could bring a closer relationship with the Creator:

To me Nature in its varied forms is the little windows through which God permits me to commune with Him, and to see much of His glory, by simply lifting the curtain and looking in.

I love to think of Nature as wireless telegraph stations through which God speaks to us every day, every hour, and every moment of our lives.

In 1924, Carver addressed an audience at Marble Collegiate Church in New York. As reported in an Associated Press story, he asserted that "No books ever go into my laboratory. I never have to grope for methods; the method is revealed at the moment I am inspired to create something new. Without God to draw aside the curtain, I would be helpless."

An anonymous editorial writer in the *New York Times* found such talk deplorable. "Real chemists, or at any rate, other real chemists," said the writer, "do not scorn books out of which they can learn what other chemists have done, and they do not ascribe their successes, when they have any, to 'inspiration.' Talk of that sort simply will bring ridicule on an admirable institution and on the race for which it has done and still is doing so much."

Carver believed his words had been seriously misinterpreted. In a response to the editorial he wrote,

I regret exceedingly that such a gross misunderstanding should arise as to what was meant by "Divine inspiration." Inspiration is never at variance with information; in fact, the more information one has the greater will be the inspiration.

He went on to name many chemists who had influenced him and noted that he received "the leading scientific publications."

In another response to the *Times* editorial, Carver expanded on his definition of inspiration. A writer for the *Golden Age*, a Jehovah's Witness magazine, quoted him as follows:

I know that my Redeemer liveth. I know the source from whence my help comes. Inspiration, as I used the word in my New York lecture, means simply God speaking to man through the things He has created; permitting him to interpret correctly the purposes the Creator had in permitting them to come into existence. I am not interested in any science that leaves God out; in fact, I am not interested in anything that leaves out God.

To the end of his life, Carver's approach to his work closely combined his profound appreciation for creation with his faith in the Creator. Recalling Carver's visit in 1939 to the Starr Commonwealth home for boys in Albion, Michigan, Christy Borth told how Carver had held a youthful audience spellbound for three hours:

What began as a lecture on botany soon developed into a soul-stirring recital of how intimately all of the plants are related to one another, of how the plants and the animals—mankind included—are inextricably interdependent, and of how the whole of creation is related to its Creator.

Perhaps Carver's approach to life is best captured in a story related by his Tuskegee colleague B.B. Walcott. Describing the opening of the Carver art collection at the school in 1941, the writer told of the aging educator's response to someone who asked how he had done so many different things in his life:

"Would it surprise you," he replied gently, "if I say that I have not been doing many DIFFERENT things? . . . All these years . . . I have been doing one thing. The poet Tennyson was working at the same job. This is the way he expresses it:

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand

What you are, root and all, and all in all,

I should know what God and man is.

"Tennyson was seeking Truth. That is what the scientist is seeking. That is what the artist is seeking . . . My paintings are my soul's expression of its yearnings and questions in its desire to understand the work of the Great Creator."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

In a lecture at the Marble Collegiate Church, Carver told of receiving God's help while working in the laboratory.

Why was Carver criticized for his comments?

How did he define the kind of inspiration he received?

Have you ever experienced a similar kind of inspiration in your life?

Christy Borth recalled a lecture in which Carver described "how the plants and the animals—mankind included—are inextricably interdependent, and. . .how the whole of creation is related to its Creator."

What did Carver mean when he said plants, animals, and humans were interdependent?

Can you think of an example of this interdependence?

How is the "whole of creation" related to the Creator?

Carver said that the different things he had been doing for many years were really just one thing.

What was the "one thing" Carver had ultimately been trying to do?

How well did he succeed in his quest?