

June 13, 2004

The Second Sunday After Pentecost

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

To even the simplest reader of the Bible it is obvious that the first two chapters of Genesis contain two very distinct Creation stories. Both of them, surely, interpret the same *fact* of Creation, but they describe that fact differently, each viewing the identical truth from a unique perspective. In this respect the differences between them are analogous to the variations among the four canonical Gospels.

Thus, the first account (Genesis 1:1-2:4a) treats Creation as a transition (!) from nothingness; that is to say, the text speaks of no pre-existent matter out of which God makes the world. One of the Hebrew words used to signify "create" in this context is *bara'* (Genesis 1:1,21,27; 2:3), a verb that the Bible reserves exclusively for God. According to this first Creation account all things simply come forth in response to God's word: "He commanded and they were created (*nibera'u*)" (Psalms 148:5).

The perspective is different in the Bible's second Creation story. Here the Lord is said to "form," "to give shape to," the things that He makes (Genesis 2:7,8,19). This second verb, *yasar*, is less abstract and more poetic. Indeed, *yasar* is the biblical verb normally used for work in ceramics, and its active participle (*yoser*) serves as the Hebrew noun for "potter."

Through these two verbs the differences between the two Creation accounts extend also to anthropology. Thus, we observe in the first version that the verb *bara'* is employed three times with specific reference to human beings (Genesis 1:27), as though to accent the utter nothingness from which humanity is summoned, thereby stressing man's total dependence on God's creative word. In the second account, however, God scoops up a handful of the soil (*'adamah*) and shapes it into a man (*'adam*). This version thus emphasizes man's solidarity with the very earth from which he is formed.

In the first Creation account, there is no suggestion of different constitutional components in man. The living human being is a single entity. In the second story, on the other

hand, the living man is composed of both the earth and the breath that God breathes into his nostrils. Less material than the mud that the Lord shaped into the human body, this breath suggests the soul by which man becomes "a living being." Thus, one part of man is derived from the earth, so to speak, and the other directly from the Creator. We perceive here the root of the classical distinction between body and soul in the human composition, of which the Book of Wisdom will later remark that "the corruptible body (*soma*) presses down on the soul (*psyche*)" (9:15; cf. 2:3; 15:11; Matthew 10:28).

These two Creation stories also describe man's relationship to nature quite differently. In the first version the human being comes last, as the pinnacle and lord of all God's works. His relationship to the world is one of dominion (Genesis 1:28). In the second account man is portrayed, rather, as the caretaker of Creation (2:15). In fact, he already exists *before* the forming of the animals (2:19).

The anthropological difference between these two Creation accounts pertains likewise to sexuality. In the first version, male and female are said to be created together, at the same time as it were: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27). In this affirmation the emphasis lies on the complementarity, even the equality, between man and woman, both of them created in God's image.

In the second Creation story, however, we perceive the notion of hierarchy between the sexes. The male is formed first, directly from the earth. To him is given the name "man" (*'adam*'). The woman, his wife, derives her being from him by a separate act of Creation (2:21-22).

More specifically, woman comes from the place where she herself lives (and, in the context, sleeps)-at man's side. Indeed, she emanates from the part of man closest to his heart, so when he gazes upon her, man recognizes this "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." She is, as it were, the deeper but missing part of him. Thus, the sexual attraction between man and woman, in the eyes of the Bible, is metaphysical, having to do with an essential craving for inner wholeness (2:24). Later on, this verse will serve as the basis for a prohibition against divorce, which is a legal attempt to alter the structure of nature (Mark 10:8-9; 1 Corinthians 6:16-17; Ephesians 5:31-32).

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