

**December 1, 2013**

Third Sunday of Advent

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

### **Cosmology, Conscience, and Christ**

The human being is not only a part of the created Universe; he is also the thinking part. Human thought is the only place where the Cosmos is conscious, critical, and self-reflective. It is the sole forum where Creation can examine itself, render an assessment, and even make cognitive adjustments as they are required.

The human being is also the only part of the created Universe where thoughts—both interpretive ideas and thoughts of resolve—are deliberately chosen. Man's mind is conscious of being free; indeed, cognitive freedom and critical self-reflection are so bound together that man may experience them as identical. For this reason, man is the sole portion of the Universe where "effects" cannot be adequately explained by purely physical causes. Man is innately aware of this freedom, nor does it take him very long to infer that his knowledge of it imposes moral responsibility upon him. Adam was---and knew himself to be---the head of the Universe, its sole deliberative agent.

Consequently, the human being is the only place where the Cosmos itself can deliberately, intentionally change its mind. Man's organic and formal cohesion to the rest of Creation is the reason Adam, when he fell, took the Universe down with him. For all of its brevity Genesis 3:6—"she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband who did eat"—describes the metaphysical mix-up of Creation itself. When the Universe fell, it fell "head first."

Saint Paul is explicit on this point. "Through one man," he wrote, "he hamartia eis ton Kosmon eiselthen, sin entered into the Cosmos, and, by sin, death" (Romans 5:12). In Adam everything—ta panta—succumbed to metaphysical bondage, and the very Universe became a medium of confusion and corruption. From that point on, "death reigned" (5:14).

And why did God, with a view to redeeming that hopeless situation, "give his only begotten Son"? Very simply, says Saint John, because He "so

loved the Cosmos”— Houtos gar egapesen ho Theos to Kosmon (John 3:16). This is the reason Saints Paul and Irenaeus argued that the Universe had to be “re-headed” by Christ, the incarnate Logos.

From Cosmology we may go on to speak of History. But to speak of History, we must first speak of language. There is no separating the two. None of the foregoing activity—freedom of thought, reflection, consciousness, choice—is possible without language, and language, in its turn, is inherited from History.

It is through language that Cosmology and History converge in human consciousness. There is an obvious corollary to this observation: History, as an object of man’s knowledge, must actually precede Cosmology. Israel certainly regarded reality in this sequence. In the New Testament, likewise, the thinking of the Church worked from her historical experience of the Man Jesus to her contemplation of the eternally begotten Word, in whom “all things came to be—panta egeneto.”

The ability to assess one’s consciousness with respect to the ongoing sequence of time and the incorporation of memory into interpretive narrative is among the most distinguishing features of the human being. It is arguably the feature most indicative of the metaphysical difference between human language and the emotive, communicative sounds used by animals.

The importance of these considerations is apparent if we bear in mind that a major underlying assumption of Christian Theology is—and here we come to the nub—the historical nature of Revelation and Redemption. Indeed, this assumption has the quality of a principle.

When I speak of the “historical quality” of Revelation and Redemption, I do not mean simply that certain facts and events actually happened. In this term I include, more particularly, the awareness and knowledge of specific human beings (patriarchs, prophets, sages, apostles, and, above all, the Savior) whose living experience incorporated and transmitted this Revelation and Redemption. That incorporation and transmission pertain in a special way to the composition of the Holy Scriptures, which both record Salvation History and embody the Spirit-filled dynamism of Holy Tradition.

In the biblical faith man neither seeks nor receives “deliverance” (redemption, salvation, deification, reconciliation—pick your favorite) by escaping from history and time. The biblical believer will insist, on the contrary, that “deliverance” comes only through a specific historical process.

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