

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM: PART II, SECTION I

THE CREATION ACCOUNTS

I. Genesis chapters 1 and 2 have creation accounts that emphasize different aspects. The first account views creation in general from the standpoint of order, culminating in our worship of God. The second account views creation from the standpoint of bringing about the perfection of man and woman.

A. The two accounts compliment each other, presenting God's creation and in particular the creation of man in different, but in the end consistent ways.

1. The first account is majestic, well-ordered and presents God as in perfect control, creating by His word. The second account presents God in a more anthropomorphic fashion, presenting God as doing such things as planting a garden, breathing into Adam, and fashioning woman out of Adam's ribs.

2. The two accounts both present man and woman at the high point of creation, but in different ways. The first account presents all of creation as leading up to man and woman, who are in God's image and likeness. The second account presents the creation of man (Adam) at the beginning and the woman (who will be called Eve) at the end, with everything else done for them. The first account uses the more philosophical idea of the man and woman being in the image and likeness of God, while the second account uses the more symbolic language of God breathing life into Adam, and Eve being created from him

3. Both accounts present the complementarity of man and woman. The first account presents this complementarity very simply as God creating them man and woman; society did not make this distinction, but rather God Himself did. The second account demonstrates this complementarity by describing Adam as receiving instructions from God and naming the animals, while Eve is brought to Adam to teach him how to love.

B. There is a great deal of dispute about authorship issues, but most commentators consider the first account to have been written after the second account.

1. The main reason for this belief is that the use of more abstract and structured language in a society tends to come later. In particular, such ideas as being in the image and likeness of God are likely from a later time, while the anthropomorphic vision of God probably reflects an earlier time.

2. However, the exact time that these accounts were written remains a subject of great debate.

- a. For example, many scholars argue that the structural similarities of the first creation account indicate that it was a response to the Babylonian creation myth. Because Babylon began becoming very popular in the seventh century B.C., they would date that account to that era or later, possibly during the Babylonian exile from 585-538 B.C.. However, the lack of any detailed reasoning or Babylonian language may reflect an earlier era.
- b. The anthropomorphic emphasis of the second creation account may indicate an earlier era, likely before the paganism brought in by Solomon (961-922) began to be more of a problem.
- c. In any case, the two accounts work together, for example by the emphasis on man and the purpose of creation, and of the morally ambiguity of mankind. They are not likely simply two accounts that happened to be put next to each other, but rather perspectives that the author or authors wove into a narrative.

C. In any case, such teachings as the presentation of the one God creating everything good by sheer command stands and the creation of man and woman in harmony with God and nature, sharing His image, likeness and breath with Him stand in stark contrast to the pessimistic views of paganism, old and new.

1. The first sentence states that theme for the entire book, i.e. that the one all-powerful God created all things and brought about the order that we know. In one sentence, the book repudiates that idea of many gods, or lesser gods, or any randomness in creation.

- Noteworthy, the account does give specific names even to the most powerful things; thus, for example, the sun and moon are simply called lights. It is Adam who names the animals. Even the sea is called yamin (literally "the seas") rather than the more common term yam ("the Sea"). The text goes out of its way to avoid using terms that were also the names of pagan gods. By putting created things below man and by describing man as giving them their names, the text is trying to get away from attaching personalities to things, or even worse, worshipping them as gods. Starting with Moses, the prophets would warn over and over again about worshipping natural things. See Duet. 4:15-19; Wis. 13:1-9.

- On the other side of the coin, all things are created directly by God and thus are His artwork. Thus, they do have a great dignity if referred back to God. Cf. Ps. 19:1-3; Dan. 3:59-81. (There is not Biblical term for "nature." Rather, all of what we call nature is the plan of God.)

- There is no contrast between God creating something and it coming about through a natural process. On the third day, God tells the earth to bring forth vegetation; it is both God's action and the earth's. Likewise, on the sixth day, God tells the earth to bring forth animals; but verse 25 also says that God make them. The fact that they sprang from the earth does not mean that God did not make them.

2. Strictly speaking, the accounts do not say that God created the universe out of nothing, for there was no term for creation out of nothing until later. See 2 Macc. 7:28. However, some theologians argue that the terms in Genesis 1:1, i.e. darkness, formless, wasteland, and void, are the author's way of getting to the same point.
- a. There is a specific Hebrew term for create (bara) as opposed to make (asah.) The term to create only has God for a subject; everyone else can make something out of something else, but not create.
 - b. Genesis 1 uses the term bara five times, once for the creation of all things in verse 1, once for the creation of sea creature in verse 21, and three times for the creation of man and woman in verse 27. The author seems to be indicating that the crucial moments of creation were: the creation of the universe in general at the beginning; the creation of the first animals; and above all the creation of man and woman.

3. God's creative force begins with His Spirit (ruach, which can also mean wind or breath) coming over the abyss. Everything depends directly on God and, as the accounts will repeatedly say, He makes all things good. See Wis. 1:13-15.

4. In contrast to pagan accounts, there is here a simplicity, an order, a deliberateness. Creation is comprehensible and not accidental.

II. Genesis 1 contains the creation account that uses a seven day structure to emphasize the order and goodness of creation and the omnipotence and goodness of God, with creation pointing to man, and man to the worship of God.

A. The neat seven-day structure provides an orderly notion of creation, with the first three days creating a background, or a home, and the second three days filling the home with life. There is also a natural progression in creation.

1. Thus, light and darkness are created on the first day, and, on the fourth day, the light is separated out into the sun, the moon, and the stars, which populate the day and night.
2. The "waters above," the "waters below," and the space between them (i.e. the seas and oceans, space, and the air) are created on the second day, and the waters and air are populated with fish and birds on the fifth day.
3. The earth and vegetation are created on the third day, and the earth filled with animals on the sixth day. Man is given authority over this earth and the animals.
4. As then-Cardinal Ratzinger pointed out in In the Beginning (1986), the seventh day, later called the Sabbath, holds everything together, pointing out the centrality of prayer.

a. The author does not here use the term "Sabbath," which the Bible will use later. One reason is that pagan cultures, and especially Babylonian culture, used the term Sabbath for each seventh day. The author wanted to distinguish the Jewish notion of a joyous worship, from the servile fear that marked the Babylonian and other pagan Sabbaths.

b. The overall order is that all things should prosper by serving man, who in turn serves God especially through the day of prayer, The chapter refers to God's blessings three times. First, He blesses the fish and the birds, telling them to multiply. Second, He blesses man and woman, telling them to multiply and have dominion over the earth and the animals. Third, He blesses that seventh day, making it holy. The blessings reflect prosperity (multiplying), order and holiness. If man upholds the holiness represented by the seventh day, he will remain in control to order nature, and he and nature will prosper. Unfortunately, the Fall will upset this harmony.

5. There is also a neat ordering of creation along the lines of division. As Dr. Kaas points out, the term divide is in the chapter five times, and implied ten more times when the text says that everything was of its own kind. The first distinction is between light and darkness, the things that exist everywhere. Then, God separates out general areas, the waters, the air and the waters above the air. He then brings about fixed land from the water and things that cannot move, such as vegetation. He then creates distinct things in the waters above that do move, i.e. the sun, the moon and the stars. He then creates sentient things on earth that move, but are not terrestrial, i.e. the fish and the birds. Then He creates sentient things on earth, the animals, and finally man, in His image and likeness. Things become more distinct and more themselves over time.

6. God speaks ten times in the process of creation. In The Beginning of Wisdom, Dr. Kaas argues that the ten-fold structure of creation is probably related to the Ten Commandments, which reflect the order of creation as embodied in human behavior.

B. After every day, except the second, God declares what He has made to be good, and after all the days, everything is "very good."

1. There is an emphasis that all things were created good. Contrary to the Gnostics and the pagan literature, the Bible affirms that all things, especially human nature, are essentially good, and are only corrupted by the sin of angels and men.

2. However, the text does not say that the division between the waters above and the waters below is good.

- The omission of any statement of the second day could be due to the fact that the waters below were separated from the waters above, this earth from heaven, and this separation was not entirely good. Sometimes God does use the waters, and the seas do praise God. See, e.g., Ex. 15:5-10; Ps. 148:7; Dan. 3:77-79. However, at other times, the waters would become a symbol of primordial chaos that God would overcome. See, e.g., Is. 27:1; Job 7:12; Ps. 65:8, 89:10; Rev. 20:13, 21:1.

3. The text also does not specifically say that man and woman are good. Rather, after they are created, God declares all things very good, for their creation is made greater by the completion in man. Whether man turns out good is for him to decide.

C. At the height of this majestic creation of the earth, the sea, the skies and "the water above the skies," as well as all that is in them, God makes man and woman in His image and likeness.

1. In verses 26 and 27, God creates man and woman in His image and likeness. Man and woman are distinct, but related, reflecting God's image together. The classic way that the Church Fathers used to interpret this notion is that human nature was and is in God's image, although now the image is obscured by sin. For, like God, we can know the truth, love the good, admire the beautiful, and seek the holy in prayer. However, sin for a time eliminated the likeness of God that we had by destroying the primordial order. By Baptism, we are restored to that likeness and made children of God.

- The term for image, *tslem*, comes from the way in which a statue or other image reflects something else. We see God in other people, as Jesus would later indicate in the parable of the goats and sheep. See Matt. 25:31-46.

2. In verses 28-30, God gives man dominion over the earth and the animals. There is a balanced teaching here. On the one hand, contrary to pagans old and new, the Bible does affirm that man is greater than nature and that nature is made for man. However, the Bible also affirms that we have a responsibility to God to care for His trust given to us. As Pope Benedict said in *Caritas in Veritate* 49 "In nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. If this vision is lost, we end up either considering nature an untouchable

taboo or, on the contrary, abusing it."

D. We can see the dramatic message of Genesis 1 when comparing it to the Babylonian creation myth described in the Enuma Elish, which was discovered in the 19th century. That myth has a seven-day structure that is remarkably similar to Genesis 1, but with a completely different vision of the gods and man.

1. In that myth, one set of gods led by Marduk overthrows and kills against the goddess Tiamet, who is his mother, and who represents primordial chaos. Out Tiamet's body and blood, Marduk and his allies make the earth and man over the course of six days, with the seventh day one of feasting. They create man because they will be more at ease if we serve them.
2. That myth indicates that strife and evil are mixed with good at the very core of creation, that creation came through a number of gods, none of whom are all-powerful or all-good, and that the gods created us that we may make their life easier by being their servants. The message of Genesis is radically different, indicating goodness and order at the core, one almighty God, and creation out of sheer goodness. We now can add that, far from God creating us to make His life easier, His Son suffered on the Cross for us.

E. It has been debated from the beginning of the Church whether the seven days in Genesis 1 were meant as seven 24 hour time periods, or symbolically. St. Augustine (354-430) in his Confessions and Origen (185-254) in De Principis book IV, read them to be symbolic, with St. Augustine saying that they reflect the order in which creation was revealed to the angels, and Origen saying that they are a seven-fold reflection of the mystery of God. By contrast, St. Basil the Great (320-379) and St. Ephraim (306-373) thought that the days were meant as time periods. St. Thomas Aquinas considered both views and thought it unnecessary to decide between them. See Summa Theologica, Part I, question 74, articles 1-2.

- At the end of his classic Confessions, St. Augustine also compares each day of creation to an aspect of the spiritual life. The first day reflects the first dawn of faith (or a dramatic renewal of faith.) The second day represents the mourning for sin

and sorrows, with the waters of sorrow in the world, now seen as separated from God; that is why, he argues, the second day is not described as good. The third day reflects the church and good works in the church; the church rising up from the sorrows of this world as the earth from the seas, and the fruits of the earth symbolize good works done for God. The fourth day, with its ordering and stars reflects the ordering of the faith and the witness value of the saints to the world; he considers the order of the light to the doctrines and governance that give the faith order and the moon and stars shining in the dark to the witness of the holy ones to the world. The fifth day, with its fish and birds, reflects the mystery of God shown through symbols to the world (symbolized by the fish in the sea) and through sacraments to the faithful (symbolized by birds, who connect heaven and earth.) The sixth day, with the animals governed by man and woman, represents the order of the world, with the animals symbolizing the passions and desires that man is meant to have control over, and the image and likeness of God that we are seeking. The rest of the seventh day shows forth the rest with God that is our goal, and is sometimes experience in part on this earth.

F. There is also a question of whether the Trinity is revealed in Genesis 1. On the one hand, the first verses refer to God creating through His Word and the Spirit (or wind) moving over the face of the deep. And, in verse 26 refers to God saying, "Let us make man in our image and likeness"; the verbs likewise are in the plural. As the Jews first read Genesis 1, those terms would have been referring to God's Word and Spirit as activities of God; and the use of the plural would have been a case of the "royal we," as in the Pope or a monarch referring to himself in the plural. However, God was apparently using language to set up the later revelation of the Trinity. It is noteworthy that the use of the plural in this account would be the only use of the "royal we" in ancient Near Eastern literature.

III. Genesis 2 has another, more earthy creation account that emphasizes man as a combination of material and spirit, the primordial state as one of harmony, and the complementarity of male and female at the beginning.

A. This creation account describes the creation of man first, whom God makes from the clay of the earth (representing our earthiness) and His breath (or spirit), representing our divine calling. There is a refutation of either the idea that we are really just material, or the idea that our souls are merely imprisoned in the body. Body and soul are naturally joined together from the beginning.

B. God creates an idyllic garden (paradise in Greek) with trees, including one that will give life and one that is tempting. Noteworthy, even the tempting tree of knowledge is created by God, for things become evil only when we put them to an evil

use. The tree of life, meant plainly for man, contrasts with the branch of life in the Epic of Gilgamesh, in which Gilgamesh finds a plant that will give immortality, only to have it snatched away by a large snake. Man was created for life; death came because of sin.

1. The four rivers of this paradise are the Pishon, Gilon, the Tigris and the Euphrates.

- a. Then, as now, the Tigris and Euphrates are well known and the center of an ancient civilization.

- b. The second river, Pishon, is associated with a land called Havilah, noted for gold and precious stones. The river Gilon is a winding one, flowing through Cush. The location of these rivers is unknown, and they may have a more symbolic meaning reflecting prosperity and an idyllic scene. Cf. Rev. 21:15-22:2. There are later references to Havilah and Cush being descendents of the evil Ham, with Cush as the father of Havilah and Nimrod, the first conqueror. See Gen. 10:7, 1 Chron. 1:9. Another Havilah was a descendant of the just Shem. See Gen. 10:26-29; 1 Chron. 1:20-23. Cush could also refer to Ethiopia, see 2 Kings 19:9.

C. God gives Adam, whose name means simply "human," a wide variety of trees to eat from, representing God's desire that we be happy even on this earth. The ability to choose between all of the other trees is quite sufficient for freedom, for freedom is the ability to choose the good.

1. The prohibition is only over one tree, which gives "knowledge of good and evil." Knowledge in ancient Hebrew was not merely abstract knowledge, but personal experience. God does not want us to experience evil, which will bring death. See Wis. 1:13.

2. The question arises about why God planted the tree if it would be tempting. One answer is that God wanted to give the first humans a choice of whether to trust Him or to go their own way.

3. Some theologians, such as St. Gregory Nazianzen, argue that God did want Adam and Eve to know about good and evil in due time, but not too soon. If so, that tree represents something that is good in itself, but not yet.

4. The tree of life would be taken away after the Fall, but is now restored by the Cross. Likewise, we can see the Eucharist as the fruit of this new tree of life.

D. This second account expressly describes the first marriage of Adam and Eve at the beginning.

1. Adam needs Eve, whose name means "mother," because he is alone. It is noteworthy that he has God, the angels, and the animals, but that is not enough. He needs one like himself. In a similar fashion, we learn and express the love of God by love of one like ourselves.

2. Adam names the animals and presumably relates to Eve what God has told him. Eve brings Adam out of loneliness and teaches him how to love. There is a complementarity of male and female here. Adam brings structure and order; naming things and receiving instructions is natural to him. He becomes a father later. Eve, by contrast, senses love first, and order later. She is named a mother in chapter 3, verse 20, before she even has children. Her maternal nature is there more naturally.

a. When the animals are brought to Adam, he exercises rationality by understanding the animals and giving them names. He does not create the distinctions; God does. However, he does exercise authority over the animals by understanding them and naming them. God does not command this naming; we naturally seek to reason and understand; the freedom God gives to Adam is shown by the anthropomorphic image of God waiting to see what Adam would name them.

b. But this rationality is not enough. Adam must have one like and unlike himself. And so God brings him Eve as a helpmate. Adam also gives her a name (woman, or ishah) that is related to but distinct from the name he gives himself (man, or ish.) He has come to a greater understanding of himself precisely through knowing her.

- Before this time, he is called simply Adam, which means a generic person. Through understanding Eve, he becomes more specifically a man, in Hebrew ish. Love makes a man more a man and a woman more a woman.

3. The first marriage is there at the beginning, ordering the rest of creation. God created only three institutions, marriage, the ancient country of Israel, and the Church. Humans created all other institutions, and can change their natures; but these three institutions are from God Himself, and immutable.