

Spirit and Creation

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There are two creation stories at the beginning of Genesis and it is in the first story (Genesis 1;1-2.3.) that God creates the world in six days and rests on the seventh day. Of course, this story (though stoutly defended by ‘creationists’) cannot be taken as a history of how the world began. It is a story about making. The Greek word for making is *poiesis* from which we get the word ‘poem’. This story is a highly structured piece of writing, in which day follows day, and could indeed be called a poem (or prose poem). The poet who made it creates God as a character in a poem about God creating the universe and us. It has been suggested that it was chanted or sung at the New Year Festival where God’s victory over the forces of disorder was celebrated. Not only is it a poem about making; it also has a lot to tell us about making a poem.

Verse 1 says: ‘In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless and empty, *tohu* and *bohu*, and darkness was on the face of the deep.’ God does not create the Earth out of nothing but out of a chaotic ‘deep’. This is like a poet who, in T.S. Eliot’s phrase, makes a ‘raid on the inarticulate’. The poet has to engage in an ‘intolerable wrestle with words and meaning’. Indeed, in some parallel creation stories God wrestles with Chaos or Tiamat, the monster of the deep. The inarticulate ‘deep’ is the poet’s *material*, the thoughts, feelings and experience which the poet must form – articulate – into a shaped body of words.

And God’s spirit (wind) moved – perhaps ‘was hovering’ – over the face of the waters. *Ruach*, meaning wind or spirit, is feminine in Hebrew and ‘hovering over’ suggests a brooding bird like the poet ‘brooding’ over the poem’s inarticulate ‘material’. Then ‘wind’ suggests some kind of energy, perhaps what Coleridge called the ‘shaping spirit of imagination’ or Blake called ‘poetic genius’. Then in Genesis 1 verse 2: ‘Let there be light!’ At last the inkling, the ‘take’ on the material, which enables the poet to go ahead and articulate it into a poem. The Genesis poem continues in an ordered sequence of days (‘stanzas’) each with the refrain: ‘And there was evening and there was

morning, the first/second/third/ fourth/ fifth/ sixth day.’ This refrain is usually accompanied by the phrase: ‘And God saw that it was good’ until the sixth, final day of creation when it becomes: ‘And God saw that it was very good.’

Finally, he is satisfied with his work. The poem is complete. In this story God creates by his word and his word is his deed. He creates a real, ordered universe from chaos. Although the Hebrew word for God – *Elohim* – used here is plural in form (suggesting a polytheistic past?) in this story there is one single God and the *universe* is the creation of a single mind. So was it that monotheist idea of one God creating one universe that is ordered, not chaotic, which made science possible?

The second creation account in Genesis (chapters 2-3) is a story about how to be a very bad father. Yahweh makes Adam from dust and Eve from Adam’s rib. He sets them in the Garden of Eden and forbids them to eat the fruit of one particular tree, the Tree of Knowledge. He gives no reason for it. It is always a bad idea for a parent to say to a child: ‘Don’t do that because I say so!’ Better to say: ‘Don’t touch the fire because it will burn you.’ Or: ‘Stop at the kerb and look both ways because you might get run over.’ So of course, Eve and Adam eat the forbidden fruit and get the knowledge. In fact, Yahweh did not forbid them to eat that fruit for their own good but to preserve his own power. Yahweh is angry and punishes them, just as in another story the gods punish Prometheus for stealing fire from heaven. (For Mary Wollstonecraft ‘*imagination* is the true fire stolen from heaven’ that renders us social by expanding our hearts.)

Now Adam and Eve become ‘like gods’, knowing good and evil (this does not seem to be a monotheistic story). Yahweh says: ‘See the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now he might reach out his hand and take also from the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever.’ So he drives them out of the Garden. But Milton is right when he says at the end of *Paradise Lost*: ‘The world was all before them...’ and Adam and Eve walk out into it hand in hand.

Traditionally, Christ (God) comes to redeem us from this ‘original sin’ of eating the forbidden fruit. But I think we should look at it the other way round. It is God who needs redemption. In the forbidden fruit story, God drives Adam and Eve out of the Garden for wanting to become like him. In the story of the Incarnation, God improves and wants to become like us, human, belonging to the real world. As the ‘new Adam’, he is born on Earth as a mortal man and dies. In the Prologue to John’s Gospel, the divine Word, who was in the beginning and is God, becomes flesh and lives among us. In the (earlier) *kenosis* poem in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, Christ Jesus who was ‘in the form of God’ empties himself, becomes human and dies a painful death as a condemned criminal, the death of the cross. He assumes the very depths of humanity. After his death he was seen – ὠφθη *ophthe*: (1 Cor 15:4-9, the earliest account we have where this word occurs 4 times). By this resurrection he becomes the figurehead of a new humanity, which is a ‘new creation’. He goes away but sends his Spirit, and just as the Spirit was active in the first creation story, now the Spirit is active in this new creation.

It is the spirit of fellowship and communion (κοινωνία *koinonia*), the spirit of kindness and love. God is Love, says the First Letter of John. Later in his great work *On the Trinity*, Augustine will define the Spirit as ‘the mutual love with which they love one another.’ ‘In Christ,’ says Paul, we are ‘all one’– all of equal moral worth. This is a powerful poetic vision of humanity as ‘one body all sharing the same bread’ in the same spirit. Christ does not return from up in the sky. Now he is embodied in humanity as an ‘earnest’ of its potential for humankindness. Now the supernatural is *emptied* into the real human world. It is left up to us.

Paul’s vision of humanity as the body of Christ, imbued with the spirit of kindness, is paralleled by Jesus’ own vision of a ‘reign of God’ coming on Earth, which will be good news for the poor and hungry; and by the vision in Revelation of the Beautiful City where tears are wiped away. These visions, created by the human poetic genius belonging to the wholly human spirit, are leading ideas or ideals of how humanity could be, a goal (Teilhard’s Omega point), ‘the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.’

ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE



A WORLD WITH ROOM FOR ALL THE WORLDS

As we know only too well, this spirit of kindness does not yet prevail throughout the world but is present somewhere here and there, sometimes now and again, and again. ‘You can’t kill the spirit... old and strong, she goes on and on and on...’

It is also a spirit of joy. As Coleridge puts it in his ‘Letter to Sara Hutchinson’:

Joy, Sara! is the Spirit and the Power,
That wedding Nature gives to us in Dower
A new Earth and new Heaven.

Or as it says in the ‘Ode to Joy’, which is the European anthem, the spirit of joy – enjoyment – reunites ‘what custom firmly kept apart’. It is a spirit which rejoices in difference in unity. We see it in London at her best, proud that Londoners speak 300 languages. We see it in all the positive aspects of the project to banish war and unite Europe, with all its different customs and languages. One reason why Duns Scotus was the poet Hopkins’ favourite philosopher was his idea of ‘thisness’ (*haecceitas*) and it is delightful that, for example, German is so German and French is so French, and all Europe’s other tongues with all their glorious poetry.