

WORDS CREATE REALITIES

The ancients who gave us the Scriptures were masters of the truth that words create realities. Endless generations cherished the words that we have inherited in stories, songs and poetry. Long before anyone inscribed them on materials that could be read, our ancestors in faith held them in their hearts and minds. John reminds us in Chapter 1:1, that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Words for John become the source of all that is. Words do create realities for we who communicate and share communion with each other.

Given this reality, I have long wondered about the words in the four accounts of creation in Gen. 1:2-2:4b; Gn. 2:4b-3:24; Gn. 5:1-6:4; and Jn. 1:1. They are all so different. Historically, the bulk of interest has centered on the account of Gn. 2:4b-3:24. Little attention has been given to the creative process itself. Instead, we have launched headlong into the question that consumes all people, in all places, at all times. How come, if we are created in the image (*selem*) and likeness (*demut*) of God, we have the apparent limit we call death. In Gn. 3:22-24, we are told that God fears that humanity will snatch the divine prerogative of eternal life, so God banishes humanity from the garden and away from the tree of life.

Later on in Gn. 6:1-4, we once again hear that humanity is dangerously close to snatching immortality/divinity, so God limits the human life span to 120 years. For all of human history we have struggled and strained against this perceived limit. Every culture has tried in its own way to break the barrier and peer beyond the space/time border. I would like to suggest that the key that opens the gate to the beyond lies hidden in Gn. 2:7,-3:24. In Gn. 2:7, we are told that God created humanity from *adamah* (soil). Humanity was then placed as caretaker of God's next creation, that of plant life. It is only in Gn. 2:18, that we hear for the very first time that something was not good. It was not good for *adam* (humanity) to be alone. So God goes back to the *adamah* (soil) and creates animal life. This time God begins to involve humanity in the process by giving it the ability to name the beasts and the birds. However, *adam* does not find a solution to the loneliness problem in any of them.

Suddenly in Gn. 2:22, the author in Genesis switches from *adam* (humanity) or (a human) to *is* (man), and *issah* (woman). It is only after the change of state in the process, (using flesh instead of soil), that this critical differentiation happens. It appears that the creation of humanity went through stages of development. It seems that *adam* does not, can not, realize his maleness, until the female is created.

This fits perfectly with our current understanding of human development. In the first weeks of gestation, the gender of a human embryo is indeterminate. It is only with the hormonal event at about 12 weeks, that we can test for gender identity. This hormonal event occurs when the embryo is developed to the stage where it begins to manufacture its own hormones. Prior to this time the gender identity lies hidden in its genetic information.

I think a case could be made for the idea that a parallel situation exists in Gn. 2:7, 18-23. In Gn. 2:7f, our author uses *adam* to identify the stage in the process. This could be seen as analogous to the indeterminate state of conception up through 12 weeks. At this time it would be premature to call the developing human either he or she. It is a pre he/she. If development continues unhindered, the embryo will come to the stage of manifesting its gender potential by producing the hormones to differentiate itself. I suggest this is where the switch from *adam* is made to *is* and *issah*. It is here that we then find a correspondence to the simultaneous creation of male/female that are in Gn. 1:27 and Gn. 5:1. Now the differences disappear. Gn. 2:4b and following, just backs up one step in the process and makes visible the fact that God did choose a process to create humanity. This process moved from undifferentiated (Gn. 2:7 - *adam*), to differentiated (Gn. 2:22 - *is* and *issah*), to personalized

(Gn. 5:1 - Adam). It is in the mutual recognition of the other as 'one like me', that humanity becomes male and female. It is in becoming conscious of the "I" and "Thou" that we define our selves/humanity. Current ideas in human development bear this out at all levels, both as individual and social beings. This consciousness could be seen as the way in which we are indeed made in the image and likeness of

God. In Ex. 3:14, God identifies God's self by saying, I Am who Am / I will be who I will be. Conscious beings are the only ones that can say, I am, or, I will be. It is only as conscious beings that we can become corresponding companions for each other. This then addresses the original problem of aloneness. We move from the undifferentiated (chaotic) to the differentiated (orderly), from the preconscious to the conscious.

Moving deeper into our Genesis text, we can see the process unfold even more. In Gn. 3:1-13, we see the female and the male reaching out to know something for themselves in an experiential way. The stages of growth move from the two year old that wants to experience everything, to the teenager who also wants to experience everything, while at the same time wanting to avoid accountability for their choices. More could be said about Gn. 2:4b-3:24 to expand this idea, but I think this is sufficient to set the wheels of thought in motion.

If this insight has a truth in it, we are then forced to re-examine some of our ideas about reality. The first is; can we legitimately call **adam** a male prior to Gn. 2:22? Second: can we continue to care-less-ly use he/him when speaking about God? Even though most people will quickly say that they know God transcends any partial (eg. heretical) reality such as she or he, we need to do the hard work that will find a more accurate way to talk about God. We, unlike Jesus, do not live in first century Palestine. The ancients thought they were pious and wise when they refused to name God at all. Unfortunately, the fallout from this practice left us with a legacy of King, Lord, Ruler, Master, etc., which was not a step in the right direction either. Third; can we continue to cling to the idea that humanity as a species, had enough maturity at this level (Gn. 2:4b-3:24) to make a free and conscious choice against God? Finally, we need to seriously challenge the notion that the task ahead is to regain some lost innocence / pre-consciousness.

It seems more in keeping with God's creative process, to see us moving toward a fuller maturity / consciousness. These are but a few of the assumptions that we have to re-examine given our current understanding of human development. We know that any faith statement that refuses to contend with new information can easily become just an ideology if the new information is refused or ignored. Given the reality that in this time/space continuum, time only moves in one direction, forward, such an attempt is an evil in itself. It can become a refusal to accept our lives as God continues to create them.

The beautiful thing about this process way of probing Gn. 2:4b-3:24 is the freedom it creates. When we allow for movement from pre-consciousness, toward consciousness, we can find the full grace of Lk. 23:24;...forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. Jesus as the only fully conscious human being, saw humanity's choices flowing from ignorance. He knew that it is only through forgiveness that this limit can be transcended/redeemed. We also find a way to address the concern of death/mortality. When the fullness of time for an infant to be born arrives, it must leave its limited environment for one that will permit its continued growth. Likewise, when our embodied stage of development is completed, we once again sense that we are destined to move beyond this apace/time environment. We once again need space that will permit/foster our continued growth. In this model, death becomes a birthing into this enlarged reality.

Each age has to struggle with God's Word, given their place in the creation process. In times when we were truly ignorant of embryology, psychology, sociology, etc., we could honestly claim ignorance on some of these issues. Then we were confined to a static way of understanding. It was a world of either/or realities. Scripture is full of examples of either/or thinking. But hidden in the texts every so often we find examples of both/and thinking. This is especially true of the Gospels. These help us to break through the barriers that imprison us. Like Adam and Eve, each bite of the apple of consciousness, moves us forward to increased ability to respond. This increased ability creates a corresponding response-ability. We find ourselves, like Abraham, having to leave the familiar and reach out into the unknown lands before us. So words do create realities. In the Word we come to be (Jn. 1:1). In the Word we come together (Gn. 1 through 6) and in our words we need to be full of care. As full of care as the ancients who gave us all of the accounts of creation with all their diversity. I invite all who are drawn to these words into a dialogue. Together, let us explore what new realities await us in our own promised lands.

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