

THE CREATION

DEACONS' MEETING – MODULE 2 – PART 1

THE CREATION

There are three schools of thought today regarding the interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis:

- + There are those who appeal to modern science in order to dismiss Genesis as irrelevant and to disparage it as nothing more than the survival of a primitive pre-scientific view of the world.
- + There are those who try to interpret Genesis in a way that conforms to the theories and discoveries of modern science in order to uphold the relevance of Genesis.
- + There are those who believe that Genesis is to be taken literally and denying any further meaning to it.
- + The Orthodox Way:
 - Creation is a work of theology and not history or anthropology.
 - Modes of interpretations: Literal, Spiritual and Messianic. All three modes do NOT have to be present in every account.
 - Faith in true and real existence of accounts with deep understanding of symbolic and spiritual meaning through the framework of the Church fathers.
 - The message of the creation account of Genesis is that all is created by God and for God, and man has a God-given purpose on this planet, which means that man can never be truly happy for as long as he is not carrying out that purpose.

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How to read the accounts of Creation:

+ When interpreting scripture, remember that just like in our own modern languages, so in biblical language, there is poetry, there are idioms and figures of speech. It is not the sort of language one would expect to find in an instruction manual.

Origen of Alexandria, makes it clear that there are many passages of scripture which are not to be taken literally. In commenting on Genesis, he points out that in the first chapter of Genesis 'day' and 'night' exist before the creation of the 'sun' and the 'sky'. Therefore 'day' and 'night' are not meant to be taken literally. 'Who is so ignorant', he writes, 'as to suppose that God planted trees in paradise, like a gardener; or that he took an afternoon walk there?'

+ Given that the creation account in Genesis was not intended to be a work of science or history, what is its message and purpose?

Science tries to answer the question 'how?'

Philosophy tries to answer the question 'why?'

Theology tries to answer the question 'who?'

- Who is God?
- Who is man (image of this God)?

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth".
(Genesis 1:26)

THE CREATION

Who is God?

TRINITY

THE CREATION

WHO ARE THE HUMANS?

IMAGE OF THE TRINITY

WHO IS MAN (ADAM)?

IMAGE OF CHRIST

THE CREATION - MAN

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth".'
(Genesis 1:26)

The point of greatest interest here is the use of the first person plural: 'let us make man in our image'. There are three well-known interpretations for the use of the plural.

- 1) God is speaking with the angels.
- 2) It is the plural of majesty (the royal 'we').
- 3) The three persons of the Trinity are speaking together.

The first interpretation does not stand up to scrutiny, because no one has ever countenanced that man was made in the image of God and the angels. Man was made in the image of God alone.

The second interpretation does not stand up to scrutiny, because nowhere else in the scriptures is the royal 'we' used.

The third interpretation is the correct one and that of the Church Fathers: the three persons of the Trinity are speaking; man is made in the image not of one person, not of God the Father alone, but in the image of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is of great importance, because it means that man is created by a plurality of persons in one essence. 'God is love' because God is more than one person.

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THE CREATION - MAN

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Love must have an object: it can not exist without more than one person.

Therefore, man is made for union and communion with others: he is a 'social being'.

This is why God says "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen 2:13). Man, being created in the Image of the Trinity, is made to live in a community, in a union of persons; and the greatest union is that of marriage, when two become one flesh.

This notion of man made for fellowship with God is summed up in biblical language as man made 'in the image and likeness of God'. The majority of the Church Fathers state that 'image' and 'likeness' are not one and the same thing.

The **image** indicates **freedom** and **reason**.

The **likeness** indicates **assimilation** to God.

In short: we become like God by making the **right use** of our freedom and reason.

This is why the Church believes so strongly in free will. Without it, we are no more accountable for our actions than animals, and can never come into union with God. If God is love, then God is also freedom, because love is something that can only be freely given; it cannot be forced.

Love, as the Church understands it, is not an instinct; it is not implanted in us by nature.

We love because we choose to.

THE CREATION – POTENTIAL OF MAN

If the likeness of God is the potential of man through correct use of God's image, then it means that man had to develop.

He was made perfect in the sense that he was flawless and sinless, but he had yet to attain full union with God.

The likeness of God was something that man was given the potential of achieving through God's grace and providence and man's free will together. (Things fell to pieces when man made wrong use of his freedom).

And so, when God created man, he also gave man his share of the work. Man was not made to lounge around in an idyllic paradise eating strawberries: he had work to do. But what was the nature of this work?

“And the Lord took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.” (Gen 2:15)

Many commentators interpret this work in terms of the cultivation of agriculture: farming or gardening. But what is interesting is that, in the Hebrew, the same vocabulary – ‘work’ and ‘keep’ – is used to describe the priestly responsibilities of the tabernacle, or temple, in the Book of Numbers:

““They shall keep guard over him... before the tent of meeting, as they work (minister) at the tabernacle’. (Num. 3: 5-7)

This is the only other time in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) that the Hebrew verbs in Genesis 2:15 for ‘work’ and ‘keep’ are used – in describing the Levites’ priestly duties guarding and ministering in the Sanctuary.

MAN IS THE PRIEST OF CREATION

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THE CREATION – PRIESTHOOD OF MAN

What does a Priest do?

- Gives **Thanks** to God
- Offers **Sacrifice** to God
- **Offers creation back to God.**

In this way, creation becomes far more than the means of man's sustenance; it becomes a means of thanksgiving, blessing, sanctification and salvation. Furthermore, **man does not simply use raw materials**; he uses his **creative powers** to **fashion them into something different to what they were at first**. The greatest example of this is the **Eucharist**, which means 'thanksgiving'.