

Creation and Creator: Knowing and Glorifying God¹

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Our participation in God's creativity

A consideration of our human participation in the divine creativity can be regarded as a legitimate, indeed desirable appendix or coda to the theology of creation. It is essentially a consideration of the relationship between creature and creator, of the active relationship indeed of creatures, that is of ourselves, with God. A look at God's active relationship with us, at what the creator does with and for his creatures, means reflection on God's providence and on his government of his creation. A look at our active relationship with God, at what we as creatures do for the creator, means reflection on our ability and our need to know and glorify God.

But the question immediately arises whether it makes sense to talk about creatures doing anything for the creator; and it is answered by the very firm assertion that God has absolutely no need of his creation at all. We, all creatures, owe him everything, he has no need of us. Our need of him is total, he owes us nothing. Difficult to establish any relationship between such radical unequals, but leaving that point aside, we are faced with the next question that arises, which is why, in that case, did God create the universe. The only possible answer is because he wished to. And why did he wish to? The answer you give to over-persistent children—because he did.

God created the world for fun

To put the same answer in other and not exactly theological terms, we can say that God created the universe for fun, and enjoyed it—but we mustn't think that the fun he gets out of it in any way increases the fun he gets out of simply being God. Support for this apparently irreverent way of expressing it comes from that comment made on creation by the divine Wisdom—who is of course identical with the God whose wisdom she is—in Prov 8:30–31, in the Vulgate translation, which I am glad to see the Jerusalem Bible follows here. When God, she says in poetic detail, was creating the world, "I was rejoicing day by day, playing in his presence all the time, and my delight is to be with the

children of men”.

A more sober way of putting it, perhaps, is to say that God created the world because he is good, on the principle of *bonum diffusivum sui*, goodness spreading itself. Genesis 1, certainly, is very insistent that this goodness is stamped on God’s creation: “and God saw that it was good... and God saw that it was good... And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good” (Gen 1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31). There are two inferences to be drawn from this participation by creatures in the goodness of God: the first is that in some way or other and to some extent they are like him, and so are a means of our knowing him at least to some extent and in some way or other—to this I shall return in due course ; the second is that they haven’t just been created to be what they are—they have been created to become what they are meant to be, they have been launched on a course, on a history, because (another scholastic tag) *bonum habet rationem finis*, the good means the end or the goal; and again as Aristotle says, the good is what all things seek.

The history of creation is a tremendous drama

The fact that the creation story tells us of God making the world in six days, then finishing his work on the seventh day and resting on it (Gen 2:2), reinforces what I have just said about his launching his creation on a course, on a history that has a goal at which creation is aiming. Six days of time, time is what history is about; the seventh day somehow outside that series of six, its goal, its end. Sure, we immediately start again with the next week of six days and a Sabbath, as history proceeds. But that first week was not just the first week; it was, as the New Testament writers perceived, and no doubt the rabbis before them, a foretaste, a sacrament Augustine would call it, of the whole of time leading up to its conclusion in “the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God”, as the letter to the Hebrews has it (4:9), the eternal Sabbath of the new heaven and the new earth at the end of time and the end of the world (Apoc 21:1).

So the primary way in which creatures glorify God—not, remember, that he is in need of glorification, but creatures need to glorify him—is by acting their parts in this history, by moving, marching towards their final goal, their God-given destiny; by acting according to the natures given them by the creator, by carrying out, if you like, their evolutionary programme. The notion of evolution, incidentally, harmonises perfectly, in my view, with the Christian doctrine of creation, yes, with the biblical account of creation.

And what is, in the last analysis, the ultimate end or goal of

creation? What does that perpetual Sabbath consist in? God, God our last end as well as our first cause, God the goodness of all goodness, the good that all things seek.

I have just now talked about creatures acting their parts in the history on which their creator has launched them; and in fact I think a better word than 'history' for what God has designed for his creation is 'drama'. The word 'history' raises problems; or rather it prompts unrealistic and irrelevant questions with respect to the scriptures, of the "Did it really happen like that?" variety; and "If it didn't, how can the Bible be true?". But if you treat the bible as the script of a vast divine drama, a historical drama indeed, but still a drama, such tiresome questions simply evaporate. What theatre-goer or critic ever worried about whether Brutus really did say "Friends, Romans and countrymen", or whether Macbeth really did meet some witches on a blasted heath? Or, on concluding that the answer to both questions is probably "No", would they then dismiss Shakespeare's plays as untrue, and their author as an unconscionable liar? So let us take the creation narrative in Genesis I as the first scene in the first act of the divine drama, already pointing towards its climax in the gospels and the last act and the finale, whose text we can read in the Apocalypse.

The script of the last scene is there, but the play is still being staged, and that scene, that final act, has not yet been enacted. Can the bible be the complete script of the whole drama of world history? Well, it is the text of the core of the drama, you could say, and we are all included in principle in the *dramatis personae*—in either the sheep or the goats, for example, to be gathered before the judge on the last day (Mt 25:32); and it represents the standard, the canon, by which we as Christians should be interpreting the drama as it continues to unfold in our lives and in the history of the world and of the Church—a work of interpretation of the utmost delicacy.

Interpreting Genesis I

But at the moment we are only concerned with interpreting the script of that first scene that has already been enacted, the creation narrative of Gen 1:1– 2:4—also a task of some delicacy, to be sure. Later on we will take a look at a text from Job, in which creation is observed from a very different perspective. As regards the first creation narrative, in Genesis 1, I have already suggested that it supports my idea of all creatures, that is to say all the material creation as well as us rationally conscious creatures, glorifying God by playing their parts in the great drama, supports it through insisting on their goodness; so that they tend by their very nature to their last end, namely God, by realising in their

own way their likeness to God.

“That is to say, all material creation”; what about the spiritual creation, angels? Very evidently the writer of Genesis 1 doesn’t mention them, to the considerable embarrassment of the Church Fathers, who had to exert all their ingenuity in order to read angels into the text. But frankly, I think the writer didn’t mention them because he didn’t believe in them, like his intellectual descendants and heirs, the Sadducees; and he had no intention of encouraging his readers to believe in them, since he thought they were really only the heathen gods in disguise.

Bear in mind that according to the received scholarly wisdom he (this wisdom calls him P, short for *Priester/codex*) was writing, or at least editing, his account of creation during the exile in Babylon, as an encouragement to his fellow exiles to resist the blandishments of the apparently victorious heathen Babylonian gods, and to remain faithful to the one true God, and to the observance, *inter alia*, of his Sabbath. So we can regard P’s creation account as a kind of counterblast to the Babylonian myth of the origins of the cosmos, which told of how the gods, who were assumed to be simply parts of the cosmos, came into being from a kind of coupling of the male waters above the sky with the female waters of the deep below the earth, and of how they then produced the rest of the visible world in the course of a fearful cosmic conflict, finally making men out of the blood of one of the defeated demons of the deep to be their slaves².

P happily takes over several of the symbols of this myth and uses them to give us the picture we have of God, who is most definitely not part of the cosmos, calmly and benevolently, and of course wisely, creating an essentially rational, well-ordered, intelligible world—very possibly on the model (which P, not God, is using) of those stepped pyramids, those Babylonian temples called ziggurats. If you count carefully, you will find that in the six days of creation God performed eight works, corresponding, you could say, to eight stages in his construction of a cosmic temple for himself, an eight-tiered ziggurat. His eighth work was the creation of man, male and female, in his own image after his own likeness (Gen 1:26–27), on the analogy, very possibly, of the idol of the Babylonian god, which was housed in the shrine at the top level of its temple or ziggurat.

But as well as being God’s image in his cosmic temple—which is why Israel was forbidden to make images even of their own God, because they would be unnecessary, and would inevitably misrepresent the true God—man is also created last and placed in God’s cosmic temple as its priest. Yes, the material creation, nonrational creatures, is

all in some way like God simply by participating in his goodness, and so glorifies and praises God by imitating him to that extent, reflecting his goodness by being what he made it to be and doing what he made it to do. But nonrational creatures can't articulate their praise. They need us to do this for them, to act as their priests in relation to God, and to offer him their inarticulate worship. We can do this (see for example Ps 148, or the song of the three young men in the fiery furnace, Daniel 3, the *Benedicite*), we can do this because we have a rational, intelligent nature, and thus, through the characteristic which distinguishes us from all the rest of the material creation, are not only like God, but are in his image and likeness.

Augustine very reasonably distinguishes between remote likenesses which he calls *vestigia*, footprints or spoor, and the close likeness which we call an image. If you see tracks on the ground, you can tell, if you are a good tracker, what animal made them; they represent the animal, but don't immediately give you a full picture of it. You can only get that if you see the animal's reflection in a pool, for example, without actually seeing the animal itself.

How far can we know God

Now, what about knowing God, as well as glorifying him? It is in knowing him, in fact, that creatures achieve their most perfect likeness to him, that they imitate him most thoroughly and so praise and glorify him most perfectly. And in the proper sense it is only we rational creatures who are capable of knowing God. But it is the creation as a whole, the material creation, which helps us and enables us to know God. The psalm states that "the heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps 19:1), and St Thomas 'proves' God's existence by taking five looks, his five ways, at the visible world³. But more than that; perhaps man as microcosm, as a little world in himself, combining the spiritual/intelligent and the material, may be said thereby to do the world's knowing of God for it—again in a kind of priestly role representing the material world in the presence of God.

If the outer world enables us to come to a knowledge of God, thanks to its vestigial likeness to the creator, then presumably God's image and likeness in our inner self will make it possible for us to penetrate even more deeply into the divine mystery. This was Augustine's preferred route to the knowledge of God, as also, if I mistake not, John Henry Newman's. It was not just that Augustine looked within to the divine image in order to find a remote analogy which would help him towards an understanding of the mystery of the Trinity, to an understanding, to be precise, of the divine processions

within God. It was also that by a kind of generalised introspection he 'discovered' God as the ultimate Truth in the light of which we know whatever we do know, and as the ultimate Good in virtue of which we love whatever we do love.

We are made for a destiny beyond our natural capacity

But of course the knowledge of God which we can achieve in this life, even with the aid of revelation, is minimal compared with what we hope to enjoy when we see face to face, no longer as in a mirror in a riddle, when we shall know as we are known (1 Cor 13:12). To attain to that knowledge is the destiny for which we were created; and to attain to that knowledge is something we are absolutely incapable of doing by our own natural powers of intelligence. Thus God has given us a nature with a destiny which it is incapable of attaining by its own natural powers, incapable of attaining if left to itself. That is the extraordinary, the basic paradox of our human condition; that we were created with a nature in virtue of which we aspire to a destiny that, left to our natural resources, we simply cannot attain.

What ever, you may say, was God thinking of, in creating such a creature, made if you like too big for its boots—or perhaps with boots that were too big for it? Well, a first preliminary answer is that if God wished to make a rational creature in his own image, he just had to give it a destiny beyond its natural capacity. On the one hand, being endowed with intelligence we naturally want to know, want to understand—everything; and this natural desire to understand cannot be satisfied with anything less than understanding the supremely intelligible being, which is God; understanding him, seeing him as he is. But on the other hand, only God's intelligence is equal by its nature to understanding God as he is. Only the uncreated is capable by nature of understanding the uncreated. So if God created an intelligent creature capable of understanding him as he is by its own natural powers, he would have been creating an uncreated creature, which even God would find impossible, and meaningless, to do.

So we come to the definitive solution of the paradox, the definitive answer to the question, what was God thinking of in creating such a creature. It is that in fact (theological fact) God didn't just create man with his human nature, like that; he created man in grace, in a state of original justice, that is with an endowment that raised him above the level of his mere nature to what will be called in 2 Pet 1:4 a participation in the divine nature. It was this grace of original justice that was forfeited by the first sin; it is the lack of this grace of original justice, a lack inherited from the first sinner, as would have been the

original justice had there been no first sin, which constitutes that flaw or vice of human nature, that 'sin of nature' as Augustine calls it, which we name very ineptly and misleadingly original sin. In my metaphor of man having been created too big for his boots, you could say that in fact at creation God fitted him out with a pair of supernatural boots, which he tossed aside by sin, preferring some shoddy sandals of his own making. The alternative metaphor of man being created with boots too big for him is not so easily adjustable, and so had better be dropped.

The doctrine of man being created in the image of God

Neither the paradox nor its theological solution are stated explicitly in the creation narrative of Genesis 1. But I think they are implicit in its account of man being created in the image and likeness of God, and in the history of that surely very important doctrine in the rest of scripture. The very curious fact is, that after being repeated by P where he continues his narrative at the beginning of Genesis 5 (Genesis 2—4 are from another source, or writer, called J, the Yahwist, *Jahvist* in German), the idea is never referred to again in the Old Testament, apart from two references that in no way develop it, in Sir 17:3 and Wis 2:23. And the way in which it is repeated in Gen 5:1–3 is highly significant. The writer almost immediately confines being in the image of God to the first human beings, to Adam and Eve whom he here borrows from J; and he then goes on to say that Adam begot a son in his own likeness, after his own image, and named him Seth. So Adam in the image of God; the rest of us in the image, the distorted and tarnished image now, of Adam.

The only development given to the image-of-God idea in the New Testament, apart from the implication of Jesus saying "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mk 12:17), on being shown the coin with Caesar's image on it, is made by Paul, calling Christ himself the image of God (2 Cor 4:4, Col 1:15). This is in line with Gen 5:1 calling only Adam the image of God, which was, I take it, the received rabbinic tradition. Then Paul will underline the comparison between Adam and Christ, the first Adam and the last, by saying, for example, "Therefore, just as we have borne the image of the earthy man, so let us bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor 15:49); and again in Colossians he urges us to put off the old man and to "put on the new, who is being created according to the image of the one who created him, where there is no Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all in all" (Col 3:10–11).

So, in the theological language of original justice, the justice

forfeited in the fall is restored to us in Christ, “who was handed over for our sins, and raised up for our justification” (Rom 4:25). Thus already in this life, in this mode of existence, it is only by being conformed to Christ the perfect image by the grace of the Holy Spirit that we can realise, can activate, can fully become the image we were created to be; that the image defaced by sin can be restored in us to a true likeness. Likewise in the next life, in the resurrection, it will only be through Christ the incarnate Son, and as sharing in his sonship, that we will have access to the Father in the Holy Spirit; only by the grace of Christ transformed into the light of glory that we will be able to give God the praise and glory which is his due, by attaining our destiny of seeing him face to face, and knowing him as we are known (1 Cor 13:13).

Another perspective on creature and creator: Job 38—41

But a theology of the relationship between creator and creature based only on the creation narrative of Genesis 1 would be too cosy and common-sensical, encouraging any tendency we may have to intellectual smugness, if it were not balanced by an altogether more sombre, more sardonic view of the matter. That is provided in scripture above all by Job—or rather by God in the book of Job, answering Job from the whirlwind, Job 38 – 41.

Here we have a very different world from the rational, comprehensible, manifestly good world of Genesis 1. It is a world where man is definitely not the centre of the universe, where in fact he becomes puny and insignificant against the background of the tremendous cosmos, as in Ps 8:4–5: “When I see the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you established, what is man that you should keep him in mind, the son of man that you care for him?”. But much more than that, the world of Job, of God speaking in the book of Job, verges on the absurd. The writer, to be sure, shares the faith of Israel, of P, that God created the world and everything in it. His prime lesson to us is that we cannot call God to account in any way whatsoever. No easy rationalism for him; the idea that the evils which people suffer are always a just punishment for the evils they do is rejected throughout the book by Job himself, because he insists that he hasn’t done any evil, and yet here he is, suffering the most dreadful evil, his whole life systematically ‘decreated’ until he is left as a kind of *tohu-bohu* of a human being sitting on a dunghill. So the rationalism of his so-called comforters, all good disciples of P, won’t do.

But Job himself still clings to it in his heart of hearts, because he wants to blame God for his sufferings, and asks in effect why he should suffer if he is innocent—the question we are all inclined to ask, for

example after the appalling incident at Dunblane, or when we see the picture of a starving child in an advertisement for Oxfam. Then in these chapters God answers him “out of the whirlwind” (a most apt symbol of unpredictable non-rationality), and with biting, and gloriously poetic irony, asks him what he knows about the mysteries of the world he lives in. If he cannot explain them, how can he hope to explain their creator and his activities? I say ‘mysteries’; but at times they really are presented as absurdities. It is, to say the least, very much a world where man is certainly not the measure of all things. “Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, *to bring rain on a land where no man is*, on the desert in which there is no man; to satisfy the waste and desolate land...?” (38:25). And there is the famous description of the ostrich as the last word (God’s word) in created nonsense: “Could you create anything as splendidly stupid and inconsequential as that?” he asks in effect (39:1318). A salutary warning to all students of theology engaged in the enterprise of ‘faith seeking understanding’ that their success, if any, is always going to be very questionable.

But God also has an answer to the unspoken assumption behind Job’s complaints—an assumption often enough clearly stated in our modern world of divinised technology—that he could have made a much better job of creation (man could have made a much better job of it, and is going to do so from now on), if he had had the chance. That, at least, is the interpretation of Job 40:6—41:34 in which God introduces Behemoth and Leviathan, given in a most stimulating article I read many years ago in the biblical journal *Vetus Testamentum*⁴. The text as it stands is just a description of two creatures, even more absurd and meaningless than the ostrich; Behemoth, usually interpreted as representing the hippopotamus, and Leviathan, treated as the crocodile.

Kinner Wilson in this article, however, suggests that in this last part of God’s answer to Job, which is clearly presented as a second answer, God is challenging Job to come up and join him in his role of creator and his role of ruler of the cosmos, or as Wilson puts it, “his role of Hero who defeated the chaos monster Leviathan”. Behemoth is the result of Job’s effort at creation, or rather of his botching God’s work by joining in as co-creator: a completely unworkable animal with “his tail as stiff as a cedar”, and so quite useless; “the sinews of his thighs all intertwined”, equally useless therefore; “his ribs as tubes of copper”, bending at the slightest pressure; “his backbone as a bar of iron”, hence totally inflexible (40:17). It may perhaps be conceded that the writer had in mind what he had heard about hippos as a model; but he is turning him under Job’s inexpert hand into the most ridiculous

piece of *art nouveau*.

So all right then, Job; you've tried your hand at creating; now have a stab at dealing with the dragon, like a hero. What are you going to do with that most unruly and rebellious of your subjects, Leviathan? And of course, you can't do anything; he remains to the end "king over all the sons of pride" (41:34). Again, no doubt, the crocodile provided the author with his model; but Leviathan is in fact the name of a mythical monster mentioned in Ps 74:14, in Is 27:1, where he is a crooked serpent, and in Ps 104:26, where he is a whale or a sea monster; a figure of chaos together with that other monster, Rahab of Ps 89:10 (she is spelt differently in Hebrew from the prudent lady of Jericho, one of the ancestresses of Jesus, Mt 1:5). Job, man, modern technological man, turns out to be quite as useless at controlling, let alone taming, the monsters of chaos, as he is at creating a better world.

The moral? Yes, God's cosmos—no, that's the wrong word, as it implies order—God's universe is, from all sorts of viewpoints, absurd, impossible to make sense of; but you most certainly won't make better sense of things by blaming God for whatever you don't like, or can't understand in the world. And as soon as you start playing God with the world, instead of confining yourself to your role as God's image and in due measure co-creator, you will be making an almighty fool of yourself creating ridiculous monsters—and also unleashing hitherto undreamt of forces of chaos.

- 1 First given as a talk at a Lay Dominican conference in Glasgow, 27th April, 1996.
- 2 See *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, edited by J.B. Pritchard. The Babylonian myth is called *Enumah Elish*.
- 3 *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 2, 3.
- 4 The first picture of 'decreation', of God unmaking the world he has made, is given in the story of the flood, especially those sections contributed by P, which show the waters above the heavens and the waters of the deep—the waters of Apsu above and of Tiamat below, of the Babylonian myth—once more mingling and drowning the dry land between them; see, for example Gen. 7:11.
- 5 January 1975: *A Return to the Problems of Behemoth and Leviathan*, by J.V. Kinner Wilson. To appreciate his interpretation of the Behemoth section, one needs to have his translation of it to hand. So I give it here, Job 40:10–23. He justifies it, of course, with great erudition in copious footnotes.

- 10 Pray deck now thyself in glory and majesty,
clothe now thyself in splendour and state.
Pour forth the outbursts of thine anger,
look upon everyone that is proud, and abase him.
Yea, look upon everyone that is proud, and bring him low,
tread down the wicked where they stand....,
- 14 so that even I may confess thee (to be a god),
seeing that thine own right hand can deliver thee.
- 15 (So) behold now Behemoth which I have made with thy help.

He eats grass like an ox; behold the strength of him is in his loins,
and the might of him in the muscles of his paunch.

[So far, God's work]

- 17 But his tail is as stiff as a cedar!
The sinews of his thighs are (all) intertwined!
His ribs are as tubes of copper!
His backbone as a bar of iron!

[This is Job's contribution]

- 19 Shall *this* be the fruit of the work of a "God"?
Will his "Maker" then bring near companions for him?
Why, even the cattle of the mountains would howl at him,
and every beast in the field laugh (in scorn),

- 21 (Saying): "There doth he lie under the lotus trees,
in the shelter of rushes and marsh,
the lotuses covering him with their shadow,
the willow trees compassing him about.

"Behold, if the river breaks its bank, *he* will not run off:

he would stay hidden in his lair, though all Jordan were rushing forth!"

Thus far Job being invited to be a "creator god"; next, 40:24–41:34, he is invited to be a "hero god" and to carry out God's second most important work after creation, the defeat of the chaos monster, Leviathan. The answer to God's initial questions, however, being clearly "No", the re-enactment of the battle, with Job in the hero role, never takes place.

"Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head:" Some psychological reflections on Mary in Christian Thought

Brendan Callaghan SJ

Let me begin by thanking in the first instance Dr Sarah Jane Boss for the honour of being invited to give this inaugural lecture, celebrating the establishing of the Marian Study Centre here at LSU College of Higher Education. In offering such thanks, I would like to extend them beyond that invitation to include thanks for the establishing of the Marian Study Centre itself. Without having any sort of "inside track" information, I imagine that thanks for such a timely and courageous move are due not only to the interests and commitment of Dr Boss, but also to the creativity and energy of Professor Mary Grey and the innovative drive