

What The Lord Is Talking To Us About, In The Bible Account Of Creation.

There is no other part of the Bible which has been the subject of as much debate, controversy and argument, than the first and part of the second chapters of the Book of Genesis. Here we have the Bible account of creation.

At one time it was universally believed that this was an account from God and given through Moses, of how it actually happened, day by day. No questions were asked. And the literal accuracy of that description is still stoutly maintained in some quarters to this day.

With the developments of scientific knowledge over the past 150 years, a serious questioning of the literal accuracy of the Genesis description of creation has ensued. There was a time when the Church quite confidently put a date on the age of the world and in some old Bibles, examples of which are still around, you will find a date assigned to the creation events, about 4,000 years B.C., as it was supposed. There is very good reason now not only to question such a date, but also to question the sequence of creation, as it is portrayed, and that it could have happened, or have taken place, so suddenly.

What then are we to make of that description? Do we join the minority who try to maintain the literal accuracy of the Creation story? Or do we abandon it as a quaint example of an ancient, well meant attempt to involve God in the creation process? Or is there something else that it holds for us which we would want to - and should - know about?

We would suggest that there is a fundamental mistake that people have made with regard to the Bible and that is to regard it as a book dealing with the world outside of them. In many ways it is not to be wondered that this is so. But it means that people have gone to it as if it were a scientific text book, and have presumed that on this subject of creation and the age of our planet it holds the final and never to be disputed word.

But we need to stop a moment here and think. Is it really - or has it ever really been - God's chief concern to give us scientific data or to tell us information which we would one day discover ourselves? Is it really important for us to know the history of a tiny and otherwise insignificant nation of peoples, the ancient Israelities? What they did and how they, or their leaders, behaved or misbehaved? Must we know of those episodes when backsliding took place? How Noah became drunk, for example?

Or how Jacob deceived his father in such a cold and calculated way? And the answer must be "no".

We can so easily overlook the fact that God's chief concern with us is our spiritual rebirth, or regeneration. God is not so much interested with the world outside of us, past or present. God's main interest lies with the world inside us. And when we get beneath the surface, that is what the Bible, or Word of God is all about.

It has been said that the Bible is a succession of many parables. And what we were getting at is that within those stories, histories, ancient laws, and all the rest, which you find there, there is a deeper, heavenly, meaning. God called upon those stories, such as the description of Creation, the story of Noah's Ark, the story of the ancient Israelites in Egypt, the stories of Samson, David and Daniel, to name but a few, much in the same way on earth as Jesus called upon the story of the sower, or the story of the people whose job it was to look after the vineyard, to convey truths and teachings to us about ourselves and about the way we should go about our lives.

Few things were taken up so extensively by Swedenborg in his theological writings than the nature of the Bible, and right at the beginning of it all he wrote, as follows.

"Just reading through the Old Testament you would never notice that it holds hidden depths of meaning about heaven, and that under the surface, the broad sweep of the Word and every detail refers to the Lord, His heaven, and religious belief - the whole vista. The overall subject seems to be just the rites and ordinances of the Jewish Church. The Lord did explain to the Apostles that the sacrifices represent Him, that Jerusalem and the land of Canaan stand for heaven (they are called the Heavenly Canaan and the Heavenly Jerusalem) and that Paradise also stands for heaven. However the truth is that a whole substructure of things like the very few which He pointed out to the Apostles, underlies the Word everywhere, unnoticed." (*Arcana Caelestia* 1).

We come back then to the description of creation in the earliest chapters of the Book of Genesis, not so concerned now about its factual accuracy - for this is not the important thing - but realising that the Lord is speaking to us through this story about ourselves. The day by day, or step by step process which is described in that story, holds within it the description of the stage by stage creation of a new person within us. Here the Lord shows us what is involved and how it takes place.

No one is made new overnight. No one is reborn in an instant. It takes time. Often a life time of struggle and effort is required. Perhaps more. And there are certain identifiable stages involved.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." (Genesis 1:1-2).

The story goes on from here to describe what took place on each day. On the first it was the division of light from darkness. On the second, a separation of the waters, those above the expanse from those below it. On the third day, the dry land appeared and grass, herbs, and trees started growing. The two great lights, the Sun and the Moon, were created on the fourth day. On the fifth it was fish and birds. On the sixth animals and, at last, man.

When we are born, potentially, there is both a heavenly and an earthly side to our natures. Another way of putting this is to say that we have both a spiritual and a natural mind. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." And what this refers to is the heavenly and earthly side of our nature or being.

"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep". Here again, this refers to the earthly side of our nature, or our "natural" minds. And how true this is, that at the outset, and before rebirth, or regeneration, they have no form; that they are "empty"; and that darkness reigns over them. It's not that we are born into sin, because we're not. Nevertheless quite self seeking inclinations have their home there. We are talking here about what is altogether the "darker" side of our nature; where our "darkest" thoughts come to us and where we think about things we wouldn't want other people to know about. "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep".

All through our infancy, childhood, youth, and adulthood, the Lord is on hand patiently looking for an opportunity to lift our thoughts and aspirations to a higher level and to awaken us to spiritual realities. In an amazing way He "broods" or "hovers" over us, hoping to stir us through the memory of some earlier teaching or example, to lift our thoughts and outlook and approach to life onto a higher plane. It might be that you are for a time 'lost' in dark thoughts about another person who, you consider hasn't done the right thing by you. But God, ever near and always hovering, brings to your consciousness things you once learnt, perhaps as a child or from the conversation of another person, about the need for tolerance and forbearance.

Where it was all dark, in comes a ray of heaven's light. We start seeing that there are two sides to the question. It's not just what we thought it was.

So much then for the first day of creation, or, as we now know is meant, the first stage of our being formed into a new person by the Lord. On the second day, God "separated the water under the expanse from the water above it". (verse 7) And what is meant here is the distinction which must be made very early in our spiritual rebirth, between life, and ways of looking at life, which are of God, and life and ways of looking at life, which comes from ourselves. We would be inclined to take revenge on people who hurt or offend us. But God shows us other ways of responding to them, and we've got to resist those inclinations to revenge which otherwise come too easily to us.

It's our first and early efforts to live according to the ways God urges on us which constitute the next step in our regeneration. On the third day, it is said, dry ground appeared and there was vegetation, grasses, herbs, and fruit bearing trees. There is this more living aspect to the creation sequence. Values and ideals and Divine teaching which have so far been in our minds, or memories, only now begin to be real and living things in our day to day activities.

It has always troubled people that "the two great lights", the Sun and the Moon, were only created on the fourth day and after vegetation had already appeared. But when we see the creation story as describing the successive stages in our regeneration the problem completely disappears. The sun and the moon are the Bible symbols of love and faith - two things which only really come into our lives after we have begun to actively and energetically apply what we know of the Lord's teaching to our lives.

The development, or progression we've been talking about continues into the fifth and sixth days, or stages, when man himself, or as is meant, a completely new person within us, is created. It's a challenging, but also a heartening progression which is outlined in the story of creation. If with the Lord's help we follow it through we can become completely new and different people. Born of our parents into certain ways and attitudes, we are reborn of the Lord so different from what we were before.

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