

Father Ronald Ketteler serves as Director of Ecumenism and of Continuing Education of Priests, Episcopal Liaison to the diocesan newspaper, the Messenger. He is also former Chair of the Humanities Division at Thomas More College. These columns appeared originally in the Messenger.



Creation ... the "Genesis" of John's Gospel

The first book of the Bible is named "Genesis," a Greek word meaning "origin" derived from the Septuagint version of the Bible --- *"In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth."* (Gen. 1:1)

A path through the creation narratives in Genesis will wend its way through salvation history and lead to a path which will at last be found in the Gospel of John.

"In the beginning was the Word ...," the opening phrase of the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel (Jn 1:1-18), alludes to that first line in the Book of Genesis. In some sense, the first chapter of the Fourth Gospel can be called the "Christian Genesis."

But, in contrast to the hymn of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:4, the Christological hymn in the Prologue does not begin in time; rather, its poetic structure identifies the pre-existent divine Word or Logos, through whom "all things came to be" (Jn 1:3), as existing eternally before creation and outside of time in the realm of God.

Father Raymond E. Brown, SS, (d. 1998) commented that the "Word" in the Prologue is "a union of wisdom and God's word, a divine person uncreated and existing with the Father" --- *"... and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (Jn 1:1)

In his Collegeville commentary on Gospel according to John, Neal M. Flanagan, OSM, explains that the concept of "personified wisdom" found in texts such as Wisdom 9:9-12 or Proverbs 8:22-36 in the Old Testament frames the structure of the Prologue. Thus, in the Bible that Wisdom exists "first with God, then shares in creation, will come to earth, and there gift humankind."

Since the Prologue in John is patterned on the same trajectory, the concept of "the Word" can be understood as "revelation." Divine revelation through creation and covenants, through the prophets and the wisdom writings,

will culminate definitively in the Incarnation of the Word "in whom God's glory, his presence, stands revealed as a sign of his enduring love --- *"And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth."* (Jn 1:14)

According to Father Flanagan, then, the Prologue is "an artistically fashioned poem summarizing the main point of God's supreme revelation:

Jesus of Nazareth is God's supreme revelation ... He is God's wisdom

speaking God's ultimate word about himself."

A number of biblical scholars extend the correlation of the creation narrative in Genesis to the first week of Jesus' public ministry recorded in Jn 1:19- 2:12. That section can be mapped out in a seven-day schema similar to the Priestly account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis.

John's Gospel artistically constructs the beginning of the first week of the New Creation with the witness of John the Baptist (Jn 1:19-28) on day one and its ending on day seven, the wedding feast at Cana (Jn 2:1-12). On that seventh day, Jesus manifests his glory --- "the manifestation of God's presence."

In this interpretation, the Cana miracle which closes the first week of re-creation becomes "the first manifestation that in Jesus is God's residing glory, his divine presence."

There are several textual clues to the allusions to the Book of Genesis. For example, Raymond E. Brown, SS, (d. 1998) noted that

Jesus' addressing his mother as "woman" (Jn 2:4) becomes intelligible when read from the backdrop of Genesis. First of all, the Prologue not only opens with the title

The Catholic Conference of KY (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops, established in 1983. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 388,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.

of Genesis --- "In the beginning" (Jn 1:1) but also speaks of light coming into the darkness (Jn 1:5). Again, on the second day of the new creation, the Spirit descended on Jesus at the baptism (Jn 1:33, reminiscent of the spirit of God "moving over the face of the primeval waters:" (Gn 1:2).

From this perspective, if the first week of the new creation in John can be viewed as initiating the work of the "new Adam," then Mary, the woman at Cana, can symbolize the "new Eve," compared with the woman in the garden of Eden at the original creation.

Pope Benedict XVI has referred to the initial verses of John's Gospel as "the conclusive and normative creation account." In his reflections on the creation narratives in *'In the Beginning...'* (1986), he observes that John adopted the opening words of the Bible in order to re-read the creation account in and through Christ "in order to tell us definitively what the Word is which appears throughout the Bible and with which God wishes to shake our hearts."

A Christian reading of the Old Testament, therefore, is "always with Christ and through Christ."

In "The Truth of Christianity," a reprint of a lecture originally given in 1999 at the Sorbonne, Pope Benedict XVI criticized the advocacy of the theory of evolution as a metaphysics or the new "universal philosophy." He rejected such an ideology which supplants religion and metaphysics with scientific materialism as the ultimate explanation of reality. He cites John 1:1 --- "In the beginning was the Word" --- as the warrant that posits the creative power of reason at the beginning of creation.

Asserting the priority of reason and rationality stands over against the thesis of an evolutionary materialism which argues for chance and irrationality at the basis of all reality. The Logos-Christology in John and other Christological hymns of the New Testament (e.g., Col 1: 15-20; Phil 2:6-11) validates the stance of the priority of rea-

son and the intelligibility of reality defended in the Christian tradition.

Pope Benedict XVI links the religious approach confirming a rational vision of reality with ethics and the primacy of love. Hence, the primacy of the Logos is coextensive with the primacy of Love and, in turn, relates creation with redemption.

Otherwise, abandoning rationality to an ethic based on evolutionary materialism spawns "a bloodthirsty ethic" grounded in a destructive survival of the fittest dynamic. That vision will ultimately undermine love of neighbor and virtue

At its heart, Christian belief and practice affirm the unity of love and reason which subsist together as "the two pillars of reality: the true reason is love, and love is the true reason." That unity of reason and love is the authentic foundation and meaning of all reality.

In earlier major theological work, *Introduction to Christianity* (1968), Pope Benedict XVI distinguishes the God of philosophy from the God of faith who "as thought is also love." He explains that "the *logos* of the whole world, the creative original thought, is at the same time love; in fact this thought is creative because, as thought, it is love and, as love, it is thought."

The creedal confession of faith, "I believe that God exists," is rooted in the conviction "that the *logos* --- that is, the idea, freedom, love --- stands not merely at the end but also at the beginning; that it is the originating and encompassing power of all being."

In his later thought, the Holy Father would contend that the discoveries of science open the mind to "a new and unheard-of creation account with vast new images, which let us recognize the face of the Creator." The universe does not emanate from "darkness and unreason" but takes its origin "from intelligence, freedom, and from the beauty that is identical with love."

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5th in a series on Creation and Evolution