

עָפָר

## "DUST....DUST...DUST...."

Homeostatis continued from  
#3184: The creation stories  
as mutually corrective.

In the world's literature, the Bible is unique for having **twin** origin-stories suggestively set side by side. Suggestively? The redactor suggests that we meditate on them both separately & in conflation (a Hebrew-Jewish mental pattern so familiar to anyone with only a slight acquaintance with Talmud, rabbinic thinking).

For the (I think) necessary rethinking of "nature" (which I'm doing in this & the immediately prior Thinksheet), I am viewing Story **One** (Gn.1.1-2.4, 4 being a transitional link [with the chiasm heavens/earth//earth heavens]) & Story **Two** (Gn.2.5-3.24) mainly separately (as the two photos in a stereopticon) rather than binocularly (as through the stereopticon's lenses). The warrant for viewing them separately as well as "stereoptically"? The fact that the two origin-stories have different origins: we should not imagine that they are the work of one storyteller on different occasions. As each was heard/discussed by itself, we are entitled both to imagine what was said in each case & to relive the separate situations as we use both story & recreated situation in prayerful hope of illumining our situation. But doesn't this complex hermeneutical process allow free-play to the interpreter's subjectivity? Not so: biblical scholars check one another as to the quality of guessing on the scale from wild to learned. People who "have all the luck" have prepared themselves for luck to happen.

1 As an orchestra conductor palm-downs a too-loud section & palm-ups a too-soft one, God humiliates/humbles the arrogant & lifts up the lowly (as I said, in reverse order, in #1384.5). I see God doing that (in reverse order) in the Holy Book's two creation-stories. Questions: (1) Is my homeostasis-theory true to life, evidenceable by observation; or only true to task, a dual instruction as to how we human beings are to behave toward one another (in all the dimensions suggested by procreation) & toward "nature" (with the **high** anthropology of godlike ("image") "dominion" (as co-management under the Maker)? Both, I answer; but this storyteller, preaching task/duty/obligation, isn't into arguing from observation (indeed, the implicit assumption of his preachment is that human life as he observed it wouldn't lead to the logical conclusion that we don't need his sermon); (2) Since the other (the second) storyteller teaches that we are, though in a severely limited sense, God incarnate (heaven-breath in earth-dust), can he really be said to be preaching a **low** anthropology? I think so: he observes that by rebellious/disobedient behavior the dust-breath creature loses breath & thus returns to dust; the divine breath was only a conditional (not an essential) element in humanity.

The Bible (here, the redactor[s] of Genesis) says we need both stories--as I said in the second #3184.5, the first when we're too down ("For me the world was made!") & the second when we're too up ("Behold! I am dust and ashes!"). In #3184-3185, I am saying that vis-a-vis our impact on "nature," we need the second story more than the first; & the weight of "natural" evidence in support of this conviction is increasing. (E.g., the current NEW SCIENTIST says climate changes can no longer be attributed entirely to "natural" [i.e., nonhuman] causes. Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> is a causative factor in advancing desertification [southern Europe, the Am. Midwest] & monsooning [the Am. Northeast].) Of course we can produce enough "bread for the world," but at what cost to the world while we're growing/baking/eating it? Carbon dioxide floating upward out of more than twelve billion human lungs (two apiece), upward out of trillions of cooking-fires, upward out of heating/cooling (industrial [including nuclear powerplants] & domestic), upward from consumption of both nonrenewable (fossil) & renewable fuel, upward from forest-fires--while earth's acreage of CO<sub>2</sub>-consuming plants (nature's only CO<sub>2</sub> reducer) is decreasing (alarmingly in the Amazon river-system).

2 Where did I get this "high/low anthropology"? By analogy with high/low christology (with polysyllabic names for heresies treating Christ as so high as to be not really man / so low as to be not really God); & the high/low temptations of Christianity (high, to float off the earth into gnosticisms/mysticisms; low, to collapse back into [Jewish] tribalism). My ideas, I thought, but was humble enough to ask Google, which gave me 5pp on "high anthropology" & 2pp on "low anthropology" (as well as 10pp on "high christology" & 5pp on "low christology"). All very interesting, but diversionary.

"Golden lads and girls all must, / like chimney-sweepers, come to DUST [in Auden, the last phrase repeated]."--Cymbeline IV.2.262

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3 Balancing questions in hermeneutics, about a passage, are *What is here, and why?* and *What is not here, and why not?* Answering the first why, we need help from the second question as we compare/contrast (1) our two creation-stories with unbiblical creation-stories (prominently, the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh), & (2) our two creation-stories with each other. No space on this Thinksheet for looking at nonbiblical literature; some space for the whys vis-a-vis our two Bible stories; but first let's look at what's behind what's at stake.

4 What's at stake is (1) how to view **humanity vis-a-vis-"nature"** & (2) what decisions (personal/private/church/public) are appropriate to this perspective (the ways of seeing & living being interactive: e.g., pro-life & high anthropology being mutually supportive). So what's behind what's at stake? Compulsions (what I'm inwardly urged to think/do) & **revulsions** (what I'm inwardly urged *against* thinking/doing). Incentives/motivations within compulsions are such as love/lust/hate/rivalry/greed: within revulsions are no-trespassing signs marked HOLY! SACRED! SACROSANCT!

On its negative (dissuasive) side, ethics is the process/deposit of how/where to distribute the no-trespassing signs. On our UCC Confessing Christ (yahoogroups) Meeting 8.3.03, a Princeton prof. of ethics, Max Stackhouse, combined "creation" & "nature" by the phrase "the bio-physical world as God intended it"; "the Creator is the source and norm of life, not nature which is incomplete, temporal, and distorted." Thus the RC view that nature is "good but incomplete" & in need of the sacraments to overcome the fall; & the Reformed view is that "'common grace'" makes nature "discoverable by science, but not quite 'good'" (so technology is encouraged for invention, control, & economic development). But because (unlike the biblical religions) they (to use my analogy) erect no sign between humanity (which is thus sacralized) & the rest of nature (which is thus desacralized), the "ontocratic" religions integrate humanity into "the natural patterns of life," thus missing both of the Bible's values here, viz. de/sacralizing. So their societies are "trapped in perpetual poverty and not receptive to technology." Contrary to "the contemporary atheistic naturalness of much ecologism," "conversion is the most important ecological issue." I could not agree more.

5 In science class 73 years ago, I openly protested the atheist teacher's laying on the class what I might now call her **neo-ontogenic** (or neo-primitivist) collapsing of humanity into nature (her authority being an 1849 Darwin book whose 2nd edition [ & all subsequent editions] dropped out God). On the basis of the Enlightenment's too high anthropology (collapsing deity into humanity), she was pushing a too low one (collapsing humanity into nature). (The two-stage pancaking effect reminds me of 9/11, the collapsing of the Twin Towers' floors.) In that 1930 class session, my open retort was to quote the beginning of the Bible, which (I subsequently came to see) protects us against both collapses: because theocentric, the two stories together prevent anthropology from becoming either too high (story #1) or too low (story #2). A one-sided no-trespassing sign ("HOLY!") as humanity faces deity, a one-sided no-treespassing sign ("SACRED!") as nature faces humanity. Since the sign on God's side is blank, God can control & become man: since the sign on man's side is blank, man is free to "have dominion" over nature. A simple, neat, elegant cosmic arrangement, to be contrasted with pantheism's signlessness (as detailed in Arend Th. van Leeuwen's 1964 classic against the "ontogenic" [his word] mind).

Genesis' story #2 presents us with the problem of man's removing the "HOLY!" sign between him & God & man's consequent problem of where to put the "SACRED!" sign between him and nature (the ethical predicaments of contraception/abortion/same-sex "marriage"/ordaining gays/cloning/in-vitro fertilization/embryonic stem-cell use/eu-genic in-utero surgery/pollution/desertification, etc.). In its '66 review of van Leeuwen's book, THEOLOGY TODAY speaks of "the inadequacy of previous theological formulations"--which I've here underlined because it's a phrase useful for where I think we Christians now are, viz., *undertheologized* on the dismal, ominous fact that though God does not sin against us by **overcontrol**, humanity (beginning with Genesis' story #2) tries (unsuccessfully) to limit God's control, we are (successfully) overcontrolling nature, to the steady degrading of the biosphere. In a shocking letter to the editor (to which Max's post was a response), I tried to make the case that man should now re-perceive himself as **within**, not only as above, the rest of nature.