

On the Creation of Women

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I want to say several things which will probably be slightly disjointed. First of all I would like to speak of the basic relationship in the act of God's creation of Adam and Eve and what happened as the result of the fall, and secondly — and this I gleaned from Father John — there is the question of the possibility or impossibility of true fulfilment either in a relationship between sexes or apart from it, and I want to touch upon this.

There are several ways of interpreting the beginnings of Genesis, and I know that I disagree with Jamie in the interpretation. But I will present the one which to me makes sense, not only because I think it is truer to the text, but also because I think it makes sense of a number of facts of science which show us the presence in man of feminine qualities, and vice versa.

There are two stories of the creation of man, understood as a human being, in Genesis. In the first place, God takes some dust of the earth, some earth, and fashions man out of it. But in doing this, He does not say, 'Let *Me* create man in My image and resemblance', but 'Let *Us* create man in Our image and resemblance'. And this unique being which at that moment is fashioned by the hands of God appears to be an image of the complexity of God, of the fact that God is One in three persons, expressed in the fact that the human being is one in more than a monad, an arithmetic 'one'.

A point to which I would like to attract your attention in passing, but it is important, is that in the story of Genesis man is not shown to be the last term of an evolution in the sense that God does not take the most perfect ape He could find, subtract some monkeyish qualities from him and add some human qualities, and then creates man; God turns to the basic material of creation — to the earth, to the first thing He created and made, and by creating man from the primeval earth that emerged out of His command, He makes him akin to *everything* that was created: the earth, the origin of all things, man created out of it is of the same kind as everything else that exists, beginning with the greatest galaxy and ending with the smallest atom, beginning with the simplest form of life to the more complex of it.

And in that sense, man is absolutely basic, in the sense of being at the root of things.

And this is not without importance in our understanding of Christ; Christ, God become man, becomes man on these very terms; and thereby He is akin not only to mankind, which is obvious, but to all things created. And Saint Maximus the Confessor insisted together with more than one writer on the fact that Christ has a *cosmic* dimension; the man Jesus has got a cosmic dimension through His flesh, through His body. In Him all the created world could see itself fulfilled, having attained the fullness and perfection of its vocation, see itself in God united to God perfectly so that one day the promise given us

in Saint Paul's Epistle that the time will come when God shall be all in all, that man shall become partaker of the Divine nature, is already *there*, demonstrated as a possibility, and not only as something possible, but something possible for us, because it is *real* and *actually* happened in one human person — Jesus of Nazareth.

But in this view which I had begun to touch upon, man, the human being, is the total man, is a human being containing within himself all the potentialities, all that is possible for man to develop and to become. And in the second story of Genesis, in the next chapter, we see something different happening; it is not a repetition of the same story in other terms, it is a *new event*. And the new event is that this human being that contained within himself all the potentialities of femininity and masculinity, of all the complexity of what is male and what is female, this being is confronted with something that will make him make the next move in the self-knowledge: God brings to him all the animals of Creation for him to name them. I pass over the problem of the naming, but what happens at that moment is that man — and this is explicit in the Bible — discovers that he is the only being who is single, there is no pair for him. And at that moment he realises an incompleteness in himself, an incompleteness subjective, because he cannot *know* himself as being the sort of creative chaos out of which more than he can emerge. And because he feels that there is incompleteness, that he *needs* a companion that would be his equal, that would be what he is, at the same time *the* other one, God, in *response* to his new discovery of self, acts.

And the text which we read in practically every translation tells us that God brings a deep sleep upon Adam. Now, there is one translation which presents great interest because it was made a century before Christ and therefore is untainted from the point of view, say, of the Hebrew Bible, by Jews in Alexandria at the request of King Ptolemaeus who wanted the Bible to be translated into Greek. And in this text which we call the Septuagint text, the word used instead of the 'deep sleep' is *ekstasis*, which means ecstasy not in the sense of elation, excitement, but He brings him in a condition where Adam suddenly becomes more than he is: he outgrows himself. He doesn't become *less* than he was as far as consciousness goes as it happens to all of us when we go to sleep — we lose awareness of self, we are out of touch with everything around us, we are below ourselves. And here something happens to him, and I am not going to describe it because I cannot tell you what it was, in which he suddenly grew beyond himself and *Eve was born*.

And again, speaking of words, when we translate the text concerning Eve as being his 'helpmate', we immediately give a slant to the idea; because a helper is someone who is *less* than the person helped, while the text speaks of someone who will unite his — or her — strength to his, and stand face to face with him, shoulder to shoulder, being his equal in every respect, simultaneously his like, and, at the same time, ultimately *the* other one. And one can say that the creation of Eve is a moment when the human being is now fulfilled. He was germinally there as a possibility of fulfilment. Now, Adam and Eve, the two together, are the full human being, because one single being could not either contain or express all the potentialities of mankind, and each of them is endowed with potentialities, characteristics, possibilities which are complementary, unite them, and yet make them different to a point that makes their existence necessary.

In passing may I say, that when we speak of Eve being created out of the 'rib' of Adam, it's a poor translation because by many of the modern commentaries we are told that it's

not ‘rib’, but it means ‘side’ in the same sense in which the French can speak of ‘côte’ in the sense of a rib, and ‘côté’ in the sense of a side; man is divided, and the two halves are face to face with one another. And at that moment Adam looks at Eve, and says, ‘She is flesh of my flesh, bone of my bones’, he recognises her as *himself*, and yet himself outside of him, and he calls her — in all modern languages it is untranslatable, but in English we say ‘she will be called “woman” because she is taken from “man” — there is just a possibility of playing on the words, but in Hebrew it says, ‘I am “ish”, she is “isha” — she is the feminine of what he is.

And so the two are the complete, the total human being, and because they are *one* being, as Schopenhauer puts it, ‘one personality in two persons’, they do not see one another naked, because they do not see one another as the other, one as contrasted to *me*. There is a passage in the writings of a divine of the 3rd/4th century who says, in the Latin translation which is very telling, ‘before the Fall, each of them looked at the other and said, “he, or she is my *alter ego*” — the other *my* self; after the Fall, because something has happened that has broken the unity, to which I will come in a moment, *each* of them looks at the other, and says, ‘I am I — this is the other’... And the moment they can say ‘I am I — as distinct, as contrasted, as not she, or not he, they can see one another naked, because it’s *the* other one.

Now, this disintegration of the twosome, of the couple into two units is the result of their falling away from complete oneness, or rather complete communion with God to the extent to which their immaturity, their innocence allowed it. They loose God, and at that moment they break their oneness; someone has said that what happened is what occurs when the string of a necklace is broken: all the pearls are there, yet they are spread all round and they have no longer this cohesion and this unity of being a necklace. In the given case man, that is the human being has lost his wholeness, they are two, no longer one; and the only way in which this wholeness can be restored is the mystery of a love that will *conquer* the dividedness, and this time there is a necessity to conquer and not simply to grow over higher, higher and higher in oneness, to conquer this dividedness through a love which is what Christ describes as the perfect love: the laying down of one’s life for the other. What does it mean? It does not obligatory mean being killed for the sake of another person; it means that one grows into such attitude of mind, in such attitude of heart, in such directness of all one’s energies that the other one matters to us *more* than we matter to ourselves, that we can loose awareness of self for the sake of the contemplation, the loving, and the serving of the other one. This is what it means; I have said more than once that in our vocabulary the word ‘loving’ covers too vast a field: we speak in the same term of loving God and loving strawberries in cream; when we speak of human relationships very often loving means having some attraction or some interest in another person, and hooking the person as an angler hooks a fish — and we are the angler, the other one is solidly hooked as the fish. It may also mean a kind of equality in which both exchange what they have of good and endure what is not perfect in one another. But ultimately it is this vision of the other as the center, the meaning, the beauty of life. And we can see it accomplished in the beginning of the Gospel of Saint John, when Saint John says, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’: the Greek word which we translate by ‘with God’ because we have not got any better way of putting it, is *pros ton Theon πρὸς τὸν Θεόν* which means *Godwards*:

the Son exists *Godwards, towards* the Father, not in Himself, not for Himself, not in any way except this vision of the Father that fills Him in mind, in heart, in being, in essence.

So, this is the basic situation; and when we speak of love, of the imperfect love which we know that may grow into a more perfect one and in certain cases achieve true greatness, we may remember a passage from a manuscript of the New Testament which is kept in Cambridge, a Codex in which it is said ‘Christ was asked once: When shall the Kingdom come? — that is, when shall Paradise be restored, and *more* than Paradise, because Paradise was the place of innocence, of beginning while the Kingdom of God is the place of fulfilment — and He said, ‘The Kingdom of God *has* already come when two are no longer two but one’... So in that sense we can say that the relationship between man and woman, when they reach the point of the greatness of love, is *already* an accomplishment of the Kingdom of God: it is the Kingdom of God come with power. I say with power because it is not yet fulfilled, because there is more to come, because there are greater things to be given and to be received, because the Kingdom of God in its fullness will come *only* when it embraces all Creation; yet, it is incipiently there, it is incipiently already in the process of being achieved, and has reached a point of ‘no return’ as it were.

Now, this means that there are several situations we can consider; there is the basic situation of the Creation of the human being in the image of the Tri-une God containing within himself all the potentialities of man and woman; there is the act of God that occurs *in response* to the discovery made by the human being that as a single being, he is no fulfilment; and it is ecstasy, and not falling asleep that is the door to this creation; and indeed, Elisabeth Behr-Siegel had said, half-joking that if it is true that man is the crowning of the animal world, then one can say that Eve is the crowning of the human world. That is not true; it is a good joke but it is not quite true; but what one *can* say, is that the creation of Eve is the fulfilment of the creation of man; yes: without her, man, the human being is yet potentiality but not reality.

Now, what we find further in the Scriptures, is the Incarnation, and in the incarnation Christ, the Son of God becomes the son of man, born of the Virgin; He is truly and fully God because God is His Father, God is — and I am not using the word ‘Father’ in contrast with ‘Mother’ — God is, shall I put it this way, the origin of His Divine existence, Mary is the source of His human, bodily and psychological — I dislike this word because it has acquired so many connotations — existence. He is again the total Man; it is not in vain that we speak of Christ as being the new Adam; He is not a ‘new’ being come into the world — He is *again* what Adam was, but *fulfilled* to perfection; but if that be true, it means that within Him there is the fullness of what is man and the fullness of what is woman, and that in Him woman and man are fulfilled, expressed.

This is a very important thing, because when one speaks of the priesthood, when one speaks of so many things in the Church and outside of it, we tend too easily to speak of the Lord Jesus Christ as being a ‘man’ and therefore not a woman; and yet, there is this saying, I think, of Athanasius the Great, that what Christ has not taken upon Himself, He has not redeemed and saved: and if Christ has not taken the whole of womanhood upon Himself, the whole of womanhood is outside of salvation. And there is *no* way of getting out of this by fallacies. But if that be true, it opens long and very interesting vistas about the way in which man and woman relate to one another and relate to God, and *are* in themselves, what they *represent*, what they are: not only with regard to the priesthood,

but with regard to God in their communion to God, with regard to each other, with regard to the created world. So, this is a question which I am not going to touch upon.

Now, Father John mentioned to me the question of the possibility or otherwise of fulfilment within or outside of a sexual relationship. Well, I would like to say a word about the Church in that particular respect.

I know that we speak always of the Church — following Saint Paul — as being the Bride of Christ; I know that we think of Christ as being, in our Orthodox schemes, the Bridegroom: yes, but this is not the whole picture of things. Because if you take the imagery which we find in the Scriptures, and in the liturgical texts, and in passages of the divines, you can see that the Banquet of marriage is the image of the Church fulfilled and victorious at the End of Time; there are several parables of Christ, and there are many passages in the Old and New Testament that either *clearly* speak of it, or direct our thought in that direction.

So that marriage, understood as a transcending of two othernesses into a oneness that does not blot out the fact that they are unique, unrepeatable, that they cannot be reduced to one another, but that *together* they are a fullness while separately they are not, is an image of the Kingdom and is a fulfilment of it, yes; but there is also in the Scriptures and particularly in Saint Paul, a phrase telling us that the Church, the Bride, follows the Bridegroom ‘whithersoever He goeth’. An this is another aspect of it: marriage, the Marriage of the Lamb, to use a phrase from the Book of Revelation, or the Marriage of the King as we find it in parables, is here completed by another image. The image of Marriage is the fulfilment at the end which begins already now! — because the end, in a way, has already come; from the moment when God became man, in one person, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the End, in the sense of the total, ultimate fulfilment of all things has already happened and is in our midst! We live in a world when the eighth Day has already come *in* the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in which we participate to the extent to which we participate in what Christ *is*: through Baptism, which is *dying* in Christ and resurrecting with Him, through our communion through prayer, through life, and so on...

So that we can already see now, because the Eighth Day is already at work within the Seventh Day, if I may put it like this, eternity is already at work in history, is present not as a dream, not as a longing, but as an event that has already occurred. Because of that marriage, human marriage can reach the greatness of a vision of the Kingdom. But there is another aspect to it: we live *still* now in a fallen world, in a world of sin which means separateness from God, separateness from one another, dividedness within ourselves, incompleteness. We are like a damaged icon; we are an image of God which has been *badly* damaged, but potentially can be brought back to perfection; and in this context we cannot live by and in the glory of the Eighth Day, of the World to come, of the glorious Day which is expressed by the joy of Bride and Bridegroom; we live in a world which is, to everyone who is a follower of Christ by vocation, unless we betray our vocation, the way of the Cross. When the Scripture tells us that we are called to follow Christ, we must follow Him *all* the way, and beyond the Cross, to the Resurrection; but we cannot pass by the Cross, and say, Lord — death is for you, life is for me’...

And you can find that expressed very forcibly, very sharply in the story of Christ going to Jerusalem, telling His disciples that the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the

hands of men, that He will be judged, condemned, crucified and He will rise the third day, and then, James and John come up to Him, and say, ‘When You rise again — can we seat on the right and the left hand of Your glory?’: they overlook *completely* the fact that to become the victorious Saviour of the world, Christ must go through the ordeal of Passion Week, of the crucifixion, of death, of descent into hell — all that they have not heard; they heard only what they can benefit from as the *result* of His crucifixion. And Christ stops them at that, and says, ‘Are you prepared to drink My cup? Are you prepared to be *merged* into My ordeal?’ which is not a translation, but a rendering of ‘are you prepared to be baptised in My baptism?’ because ‘baptism’ in Greek means to be merged into something. And that is the question which is the Christian and the Church in history [?].

So, there are those two aspects; and there is in this following of Christ to the crucifixion what we can see in dedicated celibacy. I am not using the word ‘monasticism’ because monasticism immediately makes us think of a monastery, of a community, of institution; I am speaking of dedicated celibacy of men and women who for the sake of following Christ are prepared to let go of everything, every attachment, everything that could be an earthly fulfilment, to follow Him Who is their Lord, their Saviour, their God and their example. And so we find that in that situation there may be a separation of sexes without separation of vocation; and not to make my talk too long, I will end with one example which I find extremely interesting, because you can find it in the lives of Saints in the Orthodox calendar on the 18th of November — not that I know the calendar that way, but I know this one because a great friend of mine professed monastic vows on that particular day.

It is the story of two saints, Galaktion and Epistimia; they were two young people who loved one another, whom their families had destined to marry each other. And both had an overwhelming love of God, love of Christ, veneration of Him, and wanted to follow Him to His Cross, and beyond it, if necessary to descent into hell. And when they were married, and met in their bridal chamber for the first time, they spoke to one another about their attitude to God, to themselves, to one another. And as their attitude coincided exactly, they both decided that being married, being one potentially, being the Kingdom of God come with power, but not yet mature enough to be realised in glory, — each of them would go to a monastery, and fulfil his Christian, spiritual life in the monastic location. And they parted on that night, went, each of them, the one into a convent, the other one in a men’s monastery, and lived there for a period of time. Until one day news came to the convent where Epistimia lived, that a persecution had began in, I think, Alexandria, and that her husband Galaktion had been taken and was condemned to martyrdom.

And then, and that is the thing that moves me very deeply, she came up to the head of her convent, and said, ‘My husband Galaktion is going to suffer martyrdom — *my place is with him*... And the Higoumenissa said, ‘Indeed, yes! You must go and join your husband’... And they died together in the circus.

And this is a remarkable vision of what at the outset there is the oneness of two who through love enter into marriage on the level of the potential Kingdom; who in the fallen world in which we live, in the tragic world in which we live, choose to follow this dedicated celibacy without breaking the bond of love and marriage, and who when

death confronts the one, meet together to die together as a couple and fulfil their oneness in a joined martyrdom.

I don't know whether I have said anything of any value or interest, but here are a certain number of thoughts which are probably not your habitual thoughts, and perhaps you can begin to think, and starting with what I said, even reject it, but reject it knowingly, intelligently, actively, and replace what you reject by a more mature vision of what you probably accepted as a humdrum of life.

But I will end with one thing: we are in a period when the relationship of man and woman is being reconsidered by women more than by men; and this is a lethal mistake: the problem of women is a men's problem; it is *men* that have created the monstrous situation in which woman is enslaved, woman is a second rate human being, that woman has no place in so many ways, — and I am not speaking of offices and surgeries, I am speaking of the whole situation, in which in every situation woman is debased; we have *forgotten* that she is the equal of man, that she is called to be the *companion*, the one who stands face to face, mirroring in herself the glory of man, while man mirrors in himself the glory of woman, and being *one* human being together, but *not* otherwise. And it is the function of men now to *think* and reconsider the whole situation, and to work for the redemption of the monstrous situation that has been created since the Fall, — which describes *exactly* what will happen; it is not a commandment of God, but it is a sad declaration that, 'This is what you will do with the world which I have created to be an image of the Holy Trinity: of love perfect and glorious.'

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