

April 7, 2002
Holy Cross Sunday

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

When the Bible describes the creation of Eve, one gains the impression that our ancient mother was something, almost, of an afterthought. At least the sequence of the events insinuates as much. Having formed Adam and put him in charge of the garden, the Lord went on to shape "every beast of the field and bird of the air," remarking as He did - by way of explanation - that "it is not good for man to be alone." It was only after failing to discover among those animals a completely suitable companion for Adam that the Lord cast him into a deep sleep, remove a rib, and so forth. That is to say, in the creation of both Eve and the animals the guiding idea was to keep man from being alone.

But why? To keep Adam from feeling lonesome? It is worth suggesting that Adam's being alone involved a bigger problem than mere loneliness. Indeed, still in the state of innocence, a measure of loneliness might have been very good for Adam, causing him to long more intensely for God. Not having a wife to think about or animals to care for, Adam might have given himself over to deeper pondering and more ardent prayer, a contemplative with fewer distractions. In fact, Adam's earliest life resembled rather closely that of a consecrated hermit, quietly tilling the soil, tending his vegetables, communing with his Maker in purity of heart.

I propose here that the real problem of Adam's being alone was that he had no other creature to whom he was "answerable." Very simply, nothing ever responded to him. Left without wind or rain, Adam must have noticed, trees give forth no voice. Surrounded by plants, he had neither living thing to listen to nor, for all he could tell, living things that could listen to him. Nothing in his world "talked back." In his experience of these vegetative creatures, then, Adam had no real experience of "response." And hence no felt sense of being "responsible." Until Eve and the animals entered his life, there were very severe limits to Adam's ability to be "answerable" and "responsible."

Surely God formed Eve and the animals in order to render Adam more "responsible," more "answerable," for this trait is nearly the essence of what it means to be a human being. In order to make Adam a completely responsible being, then, God

made Adam a social being. His conscience would henceforth be formed, not only by his intellect's recognition of God's eternal law, but in part by that imaginative perception that Henri Bergson called *le moi social*.

The beasts of the field and birds of the air were, of course, decidedly secondary in this procedure. Adam's true socialization came through his relationship to Eve, which is the biblical prototype of marriage. Eve, you see, would respond. She really would look Adam right in the eye and answer back. She knew exactly what the words meant and she could use them as well as Adam. The latter, now a husband, would find an entirely new dimension to the words "answerable" and "responsible."

And together Adam and Eve started the first family, the original nucleus of mutual responsibility. This responsibility constrained them, in turn, to form certain kinds of controls, stern restraints beyond those that Adam had known when he was still single. These restraints were also of a different quality. As a moral being Adam had always been obliged to employ what Irving Babbitt called "the inner check" over his desires, but now his need for intentionally cultivated inhibition took on a social property. Adam had to learn the manly art of putting Eve (and their children) before himself. In the earlier days Adam could, within limits, use the world rather much as he liked; now, however, there was another to be consulted and other responsibilities based on *le moi social*. Back when he was yet all by himself, Adam had to speak the truth, whereas now he was obliged to speak the truth in charity. In the striking expression of Zbigniew Brzezinski, Adam and Eve together were now forced to contrive some "shared criteria of self-denial." In short, they became cultured and domesticated.

The latter participle, derived from the Latin word for "home," indicates the cultivation of discipline necessary to the proper humanizing of social life. The correct social inhibitions, learned in the family, are probably best regarded as exercises of artistic discipline, the proper influence of form on matter. Begotten and nurtured within the home, they are ever essential to social culture, the fundamental unit of which is the family. All of human society is but an extension of human families.

All Saints Orthodox Church
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

4129 W. Newport Avenue / Chicago, IL 60641

Church Office: (773) 777-0749

<http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/>

Father Patrick Henry Reardon, Pastor

phri@touchstonemag.com

Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:

www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html

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