

March 27, 2010

Third Sunday of Lent

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

Whatever its merits as a tool of historical reconstruction, the classical Documentary Hypothesis was of precious little help in the actual exegesis of the Pentateuch. Whether or not the Jahvist or the Elohist actually existed, we young students of the Bible were taught-half a century ago-how to identify them as underlying literary sources that had been incorporated into Exodus, Numbers, or whatever.

I gave up the exercise about thirty years ago, when I noticed how the Hypothesis was cramping my biblical vision. In spite of all the modern exegetical tools developed during the centuries since his *Lectures on Genesis*, I found that Martin Luther better understood---and had more interesting things to say about---the first book of Holy Scripture than anybody in my lifetime. It struck me that a major difference between Luther and more recent exegetes was that Luther had never heard of Julius Wellhausen!

The Documentary Hypothesis placed a kind of grid between the Text and the reader, so that the biblical materials were separated and confined into compartments that were certainly arbitrary and very likely fictitious. As a result, the story line became disjointed; literary themes and theological motifs were lost. The Text had less continuity and coherence, because the grid served as a filter, which discouraged the reader from observing its otherwise obvious features. Reading the Pentateuch became a literary variation of Ezekiel's dry and disjointed bones.

Indeed, if the reader began with the opening pages of Genesis---often regarded as a reasonable place to start the Bible---the problem arose right away, when he observed that there were two accounts of Creation.

There was nothing new in this discovery, of course. Jewish and Christian exegetes had commented on it centuries ago, and they even devised various---usually theological---theories to explain it. St. Augustine's treatment is a good example.

Now, according to Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis, the Creation account in chapter one of Genesis came from a post-exilic writer, who was preoccupied with priestly concerns. He was identified as the Priestly or P-Source. Following the same theory, the account in Genesis 2 was assigned to a southern writer---in Judah---who was earlier. Since this source normally used the Sacred

Tetragrammaton when mentioning God, he was called the Jahvist, or J-Source. Then, having established that the two Creation accounts came from separate and independent sources, the biblical interpreter went on to demonstrate the differences between them.

Attention to such differences, however, provided no new or distinctive insights into the meaning of the Text. Those differences had been obvious to serious Bible readers for most of Christian history. The problem, it seemed to me, was this: the differences between the two accounts were not interpreted as differences *within a coherent literary unity*. It was as though the points of contrast between Hetty Sorrel and Dinah Morris had nothing to do with the literary intent of George Eliot. One would imagine that *Adam Bede* was pieced together by a combination of the HS-source and the DM-Source.

Nonetheless, assigning those two Creation accounts to two different sources did accomplish one thing: It discouraged the student of the Bible from observing rather obvious points of continuity between them. Let me mention an example which Martin Luther (correctly, I believe) thought to be important:

In each of the two Creation narratives, God takes special counsel with himself with regard to a unique work of Creation. The two places are strikingly similar: In Genesis 1:26, God says, *ne'aseh 'adam*---"Let us make man." And in Genesis 2:18 He says, *'e'eseh lo*---"I will make for him . ." Both places, Luther observed, point to the "unique counsel" of God indicating the superiority of the human being over the rest of Creation: the human vocation to immortality. The second passage is an extension of the first, he said, demonstrating the woman's "share in immortality."

Over and over Genesis 1 tells us that God, beholding each thing He made, declared it to be *good: ki tov*. Only of man did He fail to make this declaration. When God looked at man, He detected a deficiency, as it were, and declared, *l'o tov*---"It is *not* good." Inasmuch as man was alone, something in Creation was missing: the household. Man lost a rib to gain a home.

Commenting on this point, Luther explained that marriage is not simply an extension of the mating of animals. It is fruit of a "unique counsel, consecrating the shared life of the human couple made in God's likeness.

©2011 Patrick Henry Reardon

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
phrii@touchstonemag.com

Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:
www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html

Pastoral Ponderings:
http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral_ponderings.php