

**January 15, 2012**

Second Sunday After Theophany

### **Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings**

We have seen how Flavius Josephus distorted the Pharisees' faith in the resurrection of the dead by changing it to a belief in the immortality and transmigration of the soul. This interpretation, which Josephus certainly knew to be bogus, presented his educated readers with a recognizable idea, at least, since most of them were familiar with Plato's views on the priority and permanence of the soul.

A Jewish contemporary of Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, proposed a related distortion of inherited Jewish doctrine. Observing that the Bible presents two accounts of human origins, Philo construed that distinction along clearly Platonic lines.

According to the first account, "God made man; in the image of God He made him" (Genesis 1:27 LXX). In this verse, Philo believed, Moses---"raised to the very pinnacle of philosophy"---referred to the human being, not as a bodily or material creature, but as an immaterial being, "a copy of the original seal," "intelligible and incorruptible and a likeness of the archetype." That is to say, Philo taught that the first chapter of Genesis referred to the created Form (*idea*) of man.

Then Philo turned to the Bible's second account of man's origin, of which Genesis says, "God shaped man, dust from the earth, and breathed into his face a breath of life, and man became a living soul" (2:7 LXX). In this account, wrote Philo, we are no longer presented with "the original species or the archetypal idea," but with man as a physical being vivified by a soul, man crafted "as a vessel is formed by a potter." According to this second account, wrote Philo, there are two components in man; "he received his soul by God breathing the breath of life into his face, so that the structure of his nature was combined of what was corruptible and of what was incorruptible" (*On Creation* 2:8; *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 1.4).

That is to say, "There is a twofold being of men (*ditta anthropon gene*), the one heavenly, and the other earthly" (*Allegorical Interpretation* 1.31 [12]). In short, Philo started with the heavenly *idea*, or Form, of man and then went on to consider man in his physical and composite condition.

Although Philo's belief in the biblical doctrine of Creation set him apart from Plato, we can hardly fail to discern the deep imprint of Platonism in his approach to man's double creation. By postulating an "archetypal idea" of the human being prior to his corporeal existence, Philo showed kinship to Plato,

who taught that the permanent Forms (*ideai*) of things really exist, and that material objects are said to exist only in the qualified sense that they are derived from---and stand subordinate to---the *ideai*, the permanent Forms (Plato, *Phaedo* 99-118).

It is instructive to contrast Philo's interpretation of Genesis with that of the Apostle Paul. Whereas Philo began with man's heavenly being and then moved to his earthly existence, Paul went in the opposite direction; he started with man's material, composite, and corruptible nature. Citing Genesis 2:7 to the effect that "The first man, Adam, became a living soul (*eis psychen zosan*)," Paul went on to declare, "The last Adam became a life-giving spirit (*eis pnevma zoopoion*)." Indeed, one would almost imagine Paul had Philo in his sights when he proceeded to assert, "the spiritual (*pneumatikon*) was not first, but the natural (*psychikon*), and afterward the spiritual."

This transition from the earthly Adam to the resurrected Christ was, for Paul, the source of Christian hope: "The first man was of the earth---made of dust; the second Man is from heaven. Like him of dust, so also are those of dust; and like him of heaven, so also are those of heaven. And as we have borne the icon of him of dust, we shall also bear the icon of him who is of heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:45-49).

The operative contrast, for Paul, was not between the immaterial, "ideal" man and the earthly, composite man; it was between Adam and Christ. God, breathing into Adam's face, had given him a living soul. However, in raising Christ from the dead, God caused him to become a "life-giving spirit" for those who cling to him in faith. Christians are confident that this Christ, on his return to earth, "will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working by which he is able even to subdue all things to himself" (Philippians 3:21).

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