

## On Re-Reading Genesis 1, 2 & 3

While I was recovering from my heart attack in March my daughter-in-law sent me Bruce Feiler's best seller *The First Love Story Adam, Eve, and Us* and it opened my eyes to a new way of reading the creation story.

Feiler, the New York Times author, says that Adam's rib is a euphemism, so I googled it and found that until the third century BCE rib was understood as a euphemism. I'll leave that to your imagination.

So Adam wakes to find a creature like him at his side, and says "*bone of my bone!*" and names her woman, and they live in innocence until one day Eve goes off on her own and sees some delightful fruit, and has to think, I'm not supposed to eat this pretty thing. She is challenged by her inner adversary, the word for satan: is this really so? Is Adam right? And she eats some of the fruit and then shares it with Adam and their eyes are opened to their naked innocence. Note, her eyes are not opened until she eats again with Adam.

Now, Feiler says, Michelangelo saw these apples (a fruit unknown in the Middle East) and painted them on the Sistine Chapel ceiling as figs which when held together look like testicles and the picture becomes a seminal story we know well: something grabs us by our inner being and we have to re-think everything, that every thing is not so innocent, and we are pushed out into a world where our sons murder their brothers and rape their sisters and maybe our wives are smarter than we are and our daughters-in-law send us books.

This far Feiler's interpretation.

Isn't this the story of our lives? At some point we lose our innocence. Even if we are not married, some significant other, maybe science, grabs us and we have to re-think what we thought we knew, science saying that the world erupted in a big bang and there is no need of a creator.

Feiler's is a different spin on the story but our inner spirit tells us to test it, and that our thinking is as legitimate as Paul's in the first century of our era, and Augustine's in the fourth century, who believed that eating the apple was a fall, Original Sin, making it a sin and our need of redemption. Eve is tempted but not a temptress as tradition has made her, to the detriment of women ever since. There is no quid pro quo to Adam from Eve, just sharing. This spin disturbs others who say "you have to have a fall, the reason for Christ's death on the cross." Some will take on the role of God, saying you can't re-work this story, that is not allowed, and they push you from their world.

The interesting thing about the Bible's story is that there is a motif, a rhythm of creation vs. sin and redemption. Genesis 1 is a creation story. Genesis 2 and 3, perhaps written by priests in David's court, bothered by the moral lapses of the court, seek an explanation for sin and write a new creation story because the first one doesn't answer how we got sin.

Two stories. The sin story continues in Leviticus - which appears to be only about proper ritual in approaching God. Leviticus tells us that the rituals of killing animals is to allow us to approach God for erasure of unintentional sins, the feelings of not being right with God for any number of reasons, like the the Muslim washing of feet before entering the sanctuary. But, Leviticus says, there is no forgiveness for intentional sin, like cursing your father; for that you are sent out of the camp to die. Then the Psalms go to the creation theme: there is repentance for sin if you ask, recall Psalm 51, and the Prophet Micah tells you the Lord does not require the sacrifice of lambs, but to do mercy, love justice and walk humbly with God.

Mark keeps the rhythm by presenting a new creation with Jesus who comes preaching repentance, but repentance for not being right with God, God's reign and intentions, as opposed to the world around them, not individ-

foresee the reign of God: a different kingdom. It is a puzzle to Jesus' listeners, an affront to the ruling class, it gets him killed. The Apostle Paul returns to the second theme of for-giveness, lifting up Jesus as a sacrifice for sin, but allowing that Abraham was saved by faith.

What happens if you see that the people to whom Paul writes already know the gospel story, he doesn't have to explain any terms - there was evidently wide knowledge of the sacrifice for sin idea, maybe due to Priscilla and Aquilas' work. Perhaps that is why Jesus' kingdom language seems so arresting. Even if Paul considered sacrifice important he yet says Abraham was saved by faith.

What happens if you do not make Eve a temptress? If you choose Genesis 1 over Genesis 2 & 3?

What happens if you see that the gospels do not talk about the fall but simply tell the story of Jesus' life and ministry, Jesus' life as bringing a new creation, the death of Jesus not a sacrifice (by God) but a way to live and die; that the Gospels, written after Paul's vision - heavy on atonement - tell Jesus' life and never get into theories of atonement; yet atonement becomes the major theme of our Catholic and evangelical church life. Think of the hymn of my childhood and maybe yours:

*There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins,  
and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. ///* (MacLendon)

The Gospels and we do see in Jesus' life a willingness to sacrifice himself, his death a challenge to the status quo: the government, the powers that be, who run things and you better not challenge them. We see Jesus' life divine in living this truth, sacrificing himself for it, telling the forgiveness available in God's love. A life we cannot match but follow, Jesus becoming the Son of God, as Paul says, upon his resurrection, completing the Biblical rhythm.

And we have heard the Bible's story and adopted it as our own.

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