

Chapter 2

In the Beginning God

“God saw all that he had made,
and it was very good.” Genesis 1:31

Good stories are told, not explained. There is an art to telling a story well. Storytellers give us a sense of direction and lead us into the drama. We feel the energy of the plot. They help us to identify with the characters and they keep our emotions in play with the meaning of the story. Some people don't tell stories well, because they're always interrupting themselves with unimportant details. They distract themselves and frustrate their listeners. They lose their train of thought and forget where the story is leading them. A good story doesn't trail away from the plot and get lost in petty details or bogged down in uncalled for explanations. Stories should be told with the message in mind from the beginning.

It's one thing to tell a story well and another thing to hear a story well. Good story tellers need to do their part, but listeners have a role to play as well. The precocious listener who always interrupts the story with idle questions and a peculiar curiosity never really hears the message of the story. They study the opening chapters of Genesis and all they can think about is how long the days were? Are these 24 hour days or great epochs? How did Cain find a wife—where did she come from? When they hear God, say, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness . . . ,” they are ready to discuss the Trinity. And as every believer knows the Triune God is one of the most important truths to affirm, but now is not the time to debate this truth. It will only interrupt the story. We need to be vigilant about staying in the story and not distracting ourselves from the main truth of what God is proclaiming to us in his Word. If we debate the identity of the snake in Genesis 3, or the origin of the unique beings described in Genesis 6, we are approaching Genesis in the wrong way, and we will go from one debate to another, never getting to the story.

We make the mistake of assuming that since we have read the Bible in personal devotions, attended small group Bible studies, and listened to sermons we know the Salvation History story. We often bring a heartfelt sincerity to our studies and a prayerful attitude to our devotions, but not a great awareness of the dynamic of the Gospel story. If we were asked to open the Bible at the beginning and explain the unfolding course of salvation history we would probably defer, claiming that we needed to study more. Students come to seminary to learn how to tell the Gospel story from cover to cover, but this is where seminaries, even good strong evangelical seminaries, disappoint students right off the bat. By focusing on prolegomena and background issues seminaries have a way of exhausting students and preventing them from beginning at the beginning. Good teachers know this and guard against it. They defy the scribal propensity to overwhelm students with the complexities and intricacies of scholarly opinions. They do not teach as if it were their primary duty to debunk students of their intellectual naivete, but instead lead students into the powerful story of God's revelation. There is a place for careful explanation where interpretations are weighed, but only after the Genesis story is understood in the flow of

salvation history. First of all, we want to be concerned with the primary focus of Genesis, what the Spirit-inspired author and the Spirit-enabled editors had in mind when they wrote Genesis. Later we can go back to the perplexing, and often complex, side issues we uncover along the way.

Wisdom dictates that we first hear the story before dissecting the text. By the time many seminarians plow through the scholarly introduction of a biblical book, including authorship, sources, date, setting, redaction criticism, exegetical problems, etc., they have lost the intellectual and spiritual energy to hear the story, much less proclaim it! These academic questions and concerns can be important, but their priority should be reversed. Begin with the story, revel in the truth and when once that storied truth is internalized in the soul, turn to the textual technicalities. It is hard to proclaim what we have been trained to see as textual conundrums and scholarly debates.

To use an analogy, seminary professors are trying to teach advanced auto mechanics to people who haven't even gotten their driver's license. Textual experts need to be careful with the biblical story. Their love of grammar and syntax may cause them to miss the tone and texture, and especially the truth of this real life story. Scholars can exegete a biblical passage, and pastors can work up sermons, but yet never really tell the story.

Good storytellers are selective about what they say and how they say it. The apostle John finished his Spirit-inspired version of the gospel with a disclaimer of sorts. "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (21:25). John made no claim to being exhaustive. How could he? But if John felt this way about Jesus' life and ministry, how much more did Moses and his editors feel this way about Genesis. The need to be selective and focused was obvious.

In the Beginning

We should be resolute about beginning right where Genesis begins. Whatever lies before this beginning is only hinted at as the story unfolds. There is absolutely nothing before the fullness of God, and yet we know from what the Bible tells us that there are beings and events outside of our human history. Isaiah and Ezekiel imply this with their description of the expulsion from heaven of angelic beings who turned demonic (Is 14:12-15; Ez 28:11-17). But this poetic prophecy is intentionally vague. We were never meant to be caught up in it. It is enough for perceptive people to realize that evil personalities and forces are not limited to this space/time world (Eph 6:12; Rev 12:7-9). It is not our job to explain the origin of evil. Evil appears sometime before the special beginning of Genesis 1:1. Evil lies outside of God's creation, as a privation of his goodness, outside of God's will and beyond human invention (James 1:13). It is neither a rationale nor an excuse for humanity's fall into evil.

We begin in Genesis because the Spirit of Christ makes us into a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"(2 Cor 5:17). It is only because of the mercy of God and the renewing of our

minds that we are able to begin at this beginning (Rom 12:2). It is logical for those who place their trust in nature alone to recoil at the first line of the Bible, but for those who "by faith... understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible," it makes perfect sense (Heb 11:3). The person who believes that there is no God can begin their story anywhere they chose, but for those who believe in Christ this is where we begin. "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:16-17).

To begin our story with Genesis 1:1 implies a hidden spiritual discipline. Many of us are in the thoughtless habit of telling our story with a secular slant. Some talk as if they were masters of the universe, in control of their destiny, while others lament their vulnerability, feeling like victims of despair. In either case, the secular nature of our self-perception comes out in our story telling. Practically speaking, we tend to talk about our lives as if there was no God. Whatever the pride or pathos of our past may be, faith in Christ reorients our personal story and gives us a new beginning. We begin the way the Bible begins, by intentionally orienting our story to the will and work of God. The apostles were true to this reorientation when they emphasized predestination and election. To be chosen "in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Eph 1:4) was another way of emphasizing, "In the beginning God..." To say that the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ our Savior, "was slain from the creation of the world," is to stress, "In the beginning God." (Rev 13:8).

What shall we say then about the life we lived before we knew Christ? When we would have glibly told our life story without the mere mention of God, let alone confessing, "In the beginning God..." A good example is the apostle Paul. Undoubtedly, God used the apostle's preconversion experiences, his scholarship in the Scriptures, his family heritage, and his vocation as a Pharisee, for Kingdom purposes. But Paul totaled them up as a loss and considered them rubbish that he might gain Christ (Phil 3:8). Like Paul, all of our confidence in the flesh amounts to "nothing." Apart from God everything is chaotic. It is formless, empty and dark.

Every new person in Christ can read Genesis 1:1-2 on two levels. For how God created the universe out of nothing is how he created us anew. We don't begin this story to simply explain the past or enter into debate about the origins of the world. We were not meant to hear the Genesis account and feel compelled to come to its defense. The whole story is indeed under attack from cover to cover. In fact everything about the biblical story is challenged today, but God hasn't employed us to be his defense attorneys. We shouldn't labor under a self-imposed obligation. People can sense a defensive spirit or a dogmatic approach, but neither response is justified if we truly hear the story. Let Genesis speak for itself. Let God's Word free us up to behold his glory. It's not our job to defend God's honor. Rightly understood, this story doesn't box us in intellectually, but liberates us to see the world as God intended us to see it. Genesis is not like a complex calculus problem that needs to be solved, but a powerful story that must be heard and believed. I wonder what the outcome would have been if the early church fathers had been more influenced by the God of Genesis and less influenced by Greek philosophical notions of God. What we find in Genesis is the God who relates to creation as Creator in surprising and

dynamic ways. God's linguists come to know and appreciate that Genesis is not a puzzle to be figured out but a true story to be told with passion and purpose.

The mystery of life is not primarily biological or philosophical, but personal. Life is not a problem to be solved by remedying human ignorance, but something to be celebrated by redeeming human existence. The great fictional detective Sherlock Holmes approached every murder investigation as a mystery to be solved, but not all mysteries need solving. The mystery of love is an obvious example. We were never meant to get to the bottom of the mystery of love. Love is not something we expose by discovering hormones; love is a reality we embrace by discovering the person. Marriage is a very different kind of mystery than a murder investigation. There are mysteries due to ignorance and there are mysteries due to wisdom; some mysteries require solutions other mysteries give inspiration. Some mysteries we solve, other mysteries save us. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know what kind of mystery is involved in knowing the three-personed God.

Faith in God is a mystery that we can never control by our own explanation. We enter into a relationship that is very real, but it is beyond us. It is only over time and through growth and maturity that a child gains appreciation for her loving parents. This is a helpful analogy for understanding our relationship with the triune God. We are not cosmic orphans abandoned by an impersonal deity, but the true sons and daughters of the heavenly Father. "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Eph 1:4).

To demand full disclosure from anyone right from the outset is to deny how relationships are formed. If the description of God in Genesis 1:1 seems vague, it is not due to any deficiency in God's revelation. It has more to do with our ability to grasp the nature of the divine disclosure. God has the first word in time, in creation and in our relationship with him. There is a mystery that surrounds all meaningful interpersonal relationships, how much more this is true of our relationship with the Lord. The disclosure comes on the Lord's terms and it is wise for us to listen. Knowing God is not unlike knowing a person, in fact he is the most important person we will ever know. It is the world's denial of this most fundamental personal relationship that gives rise to the personality cult. The void people feel is so great that they try to live vicariously through the lives of famous personalities.

The Voice of God

If we listen to the beginning of the story we can't miss the fact that the subject of the story is God. We pick up the pattern right away. We hear over and over again, some twenty times, with only slight variation, "And God said...God created...God made...God saw...God called." These poetic harmonies evoke wonder and worship. There is a rhythm to God's creating, making, evaluating, defining and blessing. The insistence that nature alone is responsible for the universe flies in the face of all that science is revealing. The case for personal agency and intelligent design is everywhere evident. The myth of the self-made man or woman is exposed. We are not the masters of the universe or the captains of our souls that we like to imagine. Nor is the goodness of God's creation so obscured today by evil that we cannot see the beauty and order

and majesty of creation. The nihilist and cynic may insist on seeing only the emptiness and darkness, but God's verdict stands: "And God saw that it was good."

This puts all of our effort into a new light. We are born into a world filled with reason and rhythm that deserves to be respected. All of our work was meant to be in partnership with God. It's not just the farmer and the surgeon who were meant to be aware of this. The refrain, "And there was evening, and there was morning..." reminds us that we sleep while God's Word sustains the universe (Heb 1:3) and awake to a new day in God's world. One day in seven is set aside to rest and celebrate God's goodness. God set the example by establishing a day of rest, a weekly reminder to us that we rest in God.

Creation was and is the result of the will of God. It was intentional, not accidental; it was by design, not default. The relationship between the Creator and creation is not explained or analyzed. God created (five times) and made (five times), but the verbs of choice refer to God's speech (fifteen times). The irreversible, binding link is established through language. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. The science behind this simple command was meant to be so outrageous that it would forever evoke praise and worship. In Genesis it is stated for the sole purpose of drawing our attention to God's permission for creation to be created. God's authoritative tone is not authoritarian. There is a difference between dictating and deciding, calling forth and imposing. God is under no obligation or necessity to do this and there is no resistance to God's invitation, "Let there be..." There are no magical incantations or clever embellishments; only simple, calm commands summoning existence into being.

We cannot help but be impressed with creation's response to the voice of God. The calmness of these straightforward commands is in contrast to Job's description of the voice of God as thunder (37:5). The psalmist said the voice of the Lord could shatter the cedars of Lebanon (Ps 29:5) and the prophets said it could shatter nations (Is 30:31). "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" (Jer 23:29). Whereas creation can be called forth calmly, the hardness of human hearts provokes the voice of the Lord. We know how frustrating it is when we are not listened to, when our voice is not heard. But do we listen to the voice of God? The speech of God calls creation into existence but does it get our attention? Does the Word of the Lord set our lives in order and receive the same obedient response that creation gives to God? Creation itself should challenge us to passionate listening.

What is especially striking about God's Word right from the start is that it cannot be voided, nullified, counterfeited or in any way rendered useless. What God says goes. "It will not return to me empty," says the Lord, "but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Is 55:11). We are used to the discrepancy between words and deeds; the gap between what is said and what is done is great. From this contradiction springs all types of deception, litigation, and disillusionment. We have come to accept it and joke about it in politics. Couples are particularly sensitive to it in marriage, and parents are vigilant about detecting it in their children. All forms of manipulation, from overt propaganda to subtle forms of public relations, play on the inconsistency between speech and action.

This discrepancy is a huge factor in our culture's resistance to hearing the Word of God and to trusting one another. We are tempted to fill the gap between word and deed with images that define success and style and sensitivity, images that lack both true words and real deeds. When there is no dependable connection between what we say and what we do, images take over and script our speech and turn our actions into a performance. Yet the expectation of communication and communion that connects words and deeds is deep within our souls. It is in the character of our souls to want to hear truth and to be true. The Author of Life, whose speech creates and sustains the universe, has endowed us with this built-in longing. It is one of the reasons why our hearts remain restless until they find their rest in God.

The climax of creation week is the creation of human beings. There is dialogue within the Godhead, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..." and there is dialogue with man, male and female, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it..." Of all things made only man is addressed. Everything else is "hard-wired," governed by laws and instincts, but human beings are entrusted with responsibility and stewardship over creation. They are made for communion with God. What sets these image-bearers of God apart from the rest of creation is that they have souls and are endowed with the gifts of communication and language. Those who truly hear this story cannot help but talk and act differently.

Like a single atom packed with energy, this simple sentence, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" is packed with significant truth. To dismiss it as a rhetorical device, a "plural of majesty" or a royal "we", slights the character of God's self-disclosure, which is both subtle and startling at the same time. Humanity made in the image of God is mystery enough but the added dimension of the interpersonal character of God deepens the mystery considerably. To be made in the image of God is more than a static list of capacities and aptitudes, it is to be brought into a dynamic interpersonal relationship. We are not the product of a solitary God, but the personal creation of the living God who is essentially social. At the core of our human identity is a capacity to relate to God and to one another like no other creature in creation, and this capacity is based on the being of God who is already a communion of persons.

The initial verb, "Then God said," is singular, but the verb "Let us make" is plural. There is no indication, as some Jewish commentators have suggested, that either the text is faulty or that angels are being addressed. The intentional paradox in tenses between singularity and plurality, confirms the subtle distinction in Genesis 1:1-2 between God and the Spirit of God.

What is striking in the description, is that when human creation is described, our attention is diverted from ourselves and drawn back to the mystery of God by the simple words "us" and "our". It is as if we were listening to an artist describe a particular work that all the art critics praise as his masterpiece. Our attention is drawn to the work of art as he describes how he painted it, but when he unexpectedly shifts to why he painted it our eyes instinctively focus on him. To be made in the image of God explains our capacities for love and worship, language and relating, but the phrase, "Let us make man in our image," adds a very important dimension. We are the intentional result of the interpersonal dialogue within the three-personed God.

The closest parallel to this phenomenon that comes to mind is when a husband and wife determine to conceive a child. The serious love and deep intimacy that they share belies the seemingly casual, simple expression, "Let's have a baby." It is a striking parallel to the divine rationale that is not intended to impose on God our human feelings, but to help us understand the origin and depth of our feelings. In a strong marriage, the decision to have a child is not to save a marriage, but to express a couple's love. It is not out of a selfish need or lack of self-esteem that they conceive a child, but out of a deep desire to be a family and share their love. The love we feel so deeply has its origins in the God whose love is free from all necessity and contingency. Behind the phrase, "Let us make man in our image," is an absolute love and complete communion that is independent of anything we can supply.

In the Garden

The harmonies of Genesis chapter one, composed of rhythms of grace heard throughout creation, are now filled in with the colorful melodies of human fellowship, responsibility and intimacy. The story moves from the cosmos to the garden; from the God of the Universe to the more personal name for God, Lord God, the God of the Covenant (Yahweh). Eden means "delight" and it was as its name implied, perfect. It was a place that lacked nothing, but had everything in abundance. There was plenty of water and an abundance of resources. The Garden of Eden was not man's achievement, but God's gift to man and his partnership with man.

The gift came with instructions which God carefully spelled out in a three part message. First, man was entrusted with a vocation—a calling. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (2:15). Second, man was given permission to enjoy and benefit from the Garden. "And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden'" (2:16). Third, man received an unambiguous prohibition. "But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (2:17). Man was expected to honor his vocation, explore his freedom, and respect the prohibition. It is human nature, I suppose, to concentrate on the prohibition and neglect man's calling and commissioning. We easily forget the respect and freedom that God offers.

These two trees in the middle of the Garden stand for life in God and life apart from God. The tree of life is a metaphor in the book of Proverbs for wisdom, righteousness and hope: "She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed" (Prov 3:18; cf. 11:30;13:12). In the book of Revelation, eating the fruit of the tree of life is a reward for those who have overcome in Christ, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God"(Rev 2:7; cf. 22:1-5). Some have suggested that the tree of life has sacramental value, as a symbol of the life-giving grace of God. Given the fact that God gave man the freedom to eat "from any tree in the garden," except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we may assume he ate of the tree of life. However, there was no magical value to eating the fruit from the tree of life. Eternal life was no more assured in eating from this tree than eating the bread and drinking the cup in Holy Communion.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil stands for human autonomy and a denial of our God-given limits. If man wants to assume the prerogative of God and decide what is good and evil this is the tree he eats from, even though God has prohibited him from doing so. God's "No" is clearly for our own good. Henri Blocher states, "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents ingratitude and rebellion against God's provision, the absurd pretension to abolish dependence and the disastrous misuse of the privilege of being freely accountable to God. It represents our deviation into death and the absurd" (Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning*, p.133).

God's "Yes" is appealing and freeing. The divine positive is expansive and liberating, and far exceeds the negative. "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden." God's "No" is particular and protective. The divine negative is a specific warning for our own good, "but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. . ." The "yes" and "no" in the Garden offers a significant indication of the proportionality between freedom and limitation in God's will for us. The "yeses" far exceed the "no." And the prohibitions are not sponsored by a rule bearing god who sought to lay down arbitrary restrictions for the fun of it. Yahweh is not like the whimsical gods and goddesses conceived by the Greeks, who took great pleasure in acting selfishly. Even the "no" is entirely a matter of God's grace towards us. "For the grace of God that brings salvation," wrote the apostle Paul, "teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:11-14). Parents, professors, employers, and spouses, may be selfish and arbitrary, but God isn't. We should resist transferring the angst and animosity triggered by human authority figures onto God.

To help illustrate this, picture a happy mother baking cookies with her daughter. They're having a great time. The mother patiently lets her little girl help her by spooning the dough on the cookie sheet. When she pulls the cookie sheet from the oven she warns her daughter not to touch it because it's very hot. She gives her daughter a cookie and puts the baking tray out of reach. She repeats her warning and then turns her back for a second. True to form, the little girl, with a cookie in one hand, climbs up and grabs the burning sheet with her free hand. In tears she looks up at her mother as if to say, "How could you let me burn myself?!"

The tree symbolizes our insistence on choosing for ourselves what is good and evil and refusing to listen to the voice of God. The prohibition against eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was absolutely necessary in order for man to know his limits as creature. Sin describes the resistance to God's will that lies deep in our souls. There is an inherent, innate streak of rebellion that runs right through us. I think of this, whenever I return a rental car and drive through the entrance way with spikes sticking up. Big, bold signs are posted on both sides warning the driver not to back up, or "serious tire damage will occur." Normally I would never think of backing up, with or without spikes in the road, but there is something about those signs and my predisposition that makes me want to!

The second creation story, which describes the human impact of creation, offers a poetic picture of intimacy between husband and wife. What began with the transcendent majesty of God, the Lord of the Universe who sovereignly calls the cosmos into existence, ends with an endearing picture of God's concern for our relational wholeness. "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'"(2:18). In the past some have seen the creation of woman as an afterthought and used it to defend the subordination of women. But just the opposite is true. "Woman is the crowning event in the narrative and the fulfillment of humanity" (Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p.51). God's blessing could not have been greater and for us to in any way disparage or diminish God's creation gift is to discredit the wisdom and beauty of God's creation.

God risked a great deal in the lavishness and abundance of his wonderful creation. God has never played it safe, the power and majesty of creation ended up being worshiped in place of God. The all knowing Lord of the universe was not surprised when people made idols of the sun and stars. The beauty of creation, from the stars to sex, coupled with human intelligence and freedom reflects the kind of creation and fellowship God took pride in. "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (1:31). The Cross of Jesus Christ, the sacrifice of the Incarnate One, was the ultimate expression of divine risk, but it is in keeping with the God who gave us everything in the beginning.

Stay in the Story

The purpose of Bible studies, preaching and theological education is to help people understand and share the story of God's Salvation History. To do that we have to insist on staying in the story in every conceivable way, from our personal identity to our academic work. We must let the story shape every part of our lives from ethics to worship. To stay in the story is the same thing as abiding in Christ. We cannot tell this story well if any part of who we are is left out of the story. We are called to be God's linguists, entrusted with the responsibility of sharing the Gospel story from one generation to another and from one culture to another. Genesis begins at the beginning. God is God. This is God's story before it is our story, but by God's grace we enter into the story and it becomes our story too. It is impossible for God's linguist to remain coolly detached from the meaning of the story. The biblical text is not a specimen to be dissected but the source of all wisdom and devotion.

The difference between an academic linguist and the tribal linguist in northern Ghana is so great that the western linguist cannot figure out what if any comparison exists between them. Just how an African story-teller came to be called a linguist is a mystery to the professional linguist. But the nuances between the two definitions are especially meaningful when it comes to theological education and pastoral preparation. On the one hand we have biblical scholars who are like western style linguists. They are Scripture specialists, trained in the technicalities of the text, who in turn train their students in the various strategies of criticism. Because their work focuses on the technicalities of the text they can continue to do their work without regard for a passion for Christ. On the other hand we have pastor-teachers who go beyond observing the text to telling the story. They are the poet-linguists of the Word, in step with the Spirit, using the

language of Scripture to tell the truest of true stories—the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Genesis sets the tone for this story. It offers us direction in how God's Salvation History story is to be perceived and proclaimed. Genesis is neither argumentative nor apologetic. It is declarative. The Word of God shatters ignorance and speculation and fills the void with revelation. Everything outside of this beginning is summed up in a line, "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep." Pity the technical linguist who opens up the early chapters of Genesis and sees only a host of critical problems and feels no overwhelming joy to proclaim, "God said, 'Let there be...'" But, praise God for true linguist who loves to tell the story and never stop saying, "Thus says the Lord..."

Creation and New Creation

In all true relationships, the mystery of the person does not become less it becomes more and the deeper the disclosure the greater the mystery. But how does this work with knowing God? How is it that some think that the more we know about God the harder it is to believe in God? How is it easier to believe in Genesis 1:1 than it is to believe in John 1:1? What makes God's own self-disclosure so threatening for people, that they would rather know less about God than more about God? Is it because they fear that God is too good to be true? Theologian Colin Gunton offers an important perspective:

“It is part of the pathos of Western theology that it has often believed that while trinitarian theology might well be of edificatory value to those who already believe, for the outsider it is an unfortunate barrier to belief, which must therefore be facilitated by some non-trinitarian apologetic, some essentially monotheistic ‘natural theology’. My belief is the reverse: that because the theology of the Trinity has so much to teach about the nature of our world and life within it, it is or could be the center of Christianity’s appeal to the unbeliever, as the good news of a God who enters into free relations of creation and redemption with his world. In the light of the theology of the Trinity, everything looks different.” (*The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd ed., 7-8).

Because of the history of God's self-disclosure we cannot read Genesis 1:1 without thinking of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The spoken Word of Genesis is none other than the Word that was made flesh and lived for awhile among us. And the Spirit of God hovering over the waters is none other than the Spirit that gives birth to the spirit (Jn 3:6). As Jesus said to Nicodemus, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (3:8). The Gospel of John reveals a deeper, fuller meaning of Genesis, and Colossians 1 elaborates on it even further centering everything, creation, redemption, and the church, in a personal relationship with Christ. There is nothing in Paul's theology in Colossians that does not lie behind Genesis 1:1. The fuller the disclosure the deeper the mystery.

To be chosen "in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Eph

1:4) is another way of saying with emphasis, "In the beginning God..." To say that the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ our Savior, "was slain from the creation of the world," is to stress the fact that the beginning is both creative and redemptive. (Rev 13:8). Thus the more we learn about the Lord through his own self-disclosure the more we were meant to appreciate his love and redemption.

We are sadly mistaken if we think we can know the God the Creator apart from knowing God the Redeemer. As Karl Barth stressed, it is not easier to believe in God as our Maker than to believe in God as our Redeemer.

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. When we approach the truth which the Christian Church confesses in the word 'Creator', then everything depends on our realizing that we find ourselves here, as well, confronted by the mystery of faith, in respect of which knowledge is real solely through God's revelation. The first article of faith in God the Father and His work is not a sort of 'forecourt' of the Gentiles, a realm in which Christians and Jews and Gentiles, believers and unbelievers are beside one another and to some extent stand together in the presence of a reality concerning which there might be some measure of agreement, in describing it as the work of God the Creator. What the meaning of God the Creator is and what is involved in the work of creation, is in itself not less hidden from us men than everything else that is contained in the Confession. We are not nearer to believing in God the Creator, than we are to believing that Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. It is not the case that the truth about God the Creator is directly accessible to us and that only the truth of the second article needs revelation. But in the same sense in both cases we are faced with the mystery of God and His work, and the approach to it can only be one and the same."

"It is impossible to separate the knowledge of God the Creator and of His work from the knowledge of God's dealings with man. Only when we keep before us what the triune God has done for us in Jesus Christ can we realize what is involved in God the Creator and His work. Creation is the temporal analogue, taking place outside God, of that event in God himself by which God is the Father of the Son....what God does as the Creator can in the Christian sense only be seen and understood as a reflection, as a shadowing forth of this inner divine relationship between God the Father and the Son....Knowledge of creation is knowledge of God and consequently *knowledge of faith* in the deepest and ultimate sense. It is not just a vestibule in which natural theology might find a place" (*Dogmatics in Outline*, New York: Harper & Row, 1959, p.50, 52).

Our need for redemption led the apostle Paul to use *adoption* as an analogy to illustrate the God's love for us. The natural affinity between parent and child did not take place between God and us, but like the prodigal son who rejected the Father's love, it is we who abandoned God and not God who abandoned us. Nevertheless *in love* God chose to adopt us in Christ "before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship" so that we would receive our full inheritance in Christ (Eph 1:4-5). Therefore, "the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom 8:16).