

Reconstructing the Context of the Edenic Myth to empower its Message for today

The Genesis aetiological myth presupposes a place on earth (Eden of course) where death does not exist and where humans live in harmony with animals, a veritable vegan "paradise" (in Semitic languages, Greek and Latin ... an enclosed park or garden). This is not heaven. It is a place cordoned off from the world outside; guarded by the fiery angel you will recall. In the world outside, death is the natural state of things. In Eden, humans have the potential to become immortal and perfect. In the myth this is squandered by jealousy of God's prerogative in discerning good and evil: initiated by the original and prior Luciferian Fall, aka the snake. The result is to be cast out of Eden so as for humans not to suffer separation from God eternally - everything in Eden is eternal consequent upon choices and consequences. The casting out, therefore, is a merciful act of God, not a punishment. Without that casting out and the susceptibility to death beyond Eden, humanity would have been eternally separated from God and robbed of the possibility of redemption. Eden would have turned into hell.

Death is not a punishment for sin therefore, it is a consequence of sin on the one hand (self-inflicted, as the "wages" of sin), but on the other hand it is also a space created by God for redemption, hence the necessity of Christ's death. In the resurrection, death is overthrown and humanity's re-entry to paradise is made possible. After human transformation in paradise - made real in the environment of the Church Militant here on earth - there is Heaven, the sphere of the Church Triumphant and a New Creation, all of which is the deifying union of God and his image, humanity - the eschatological goal of salvation and through humanity even the Cosmos itself..

Since Eden of course is a myth as a literal historical environment, we need to take the truth from this myth and reclothe it in a plausible historical narrative which is fully in accord with our present knowledge and understanding of human origins. We also need to compare these insights with the approach of other religions to our human predicament.

The universal sense of the loss of enlightenment, God and the possibility of perfection is common to most if not all human cultures and faiths. In the religions of the Indian subcontinent and the Far East the loss is one of fullness of life and reality, (explained in post Vedic Hinduism by *maya*, the deadly illusion of the unreal), or of the cyclical darkness of suffering engendered by desire and the idolatrous lust for static permanence, exemplified in the Buddhist analysis of our predicament. Death is overcome through negation of desire and ascetical effort. Semitic monotheisms characterise the loss as the deprivation of divine union through wilfulness and the arrogance of autonomy from God engendered by human pride. Death is the possibility of hope through either the Incarnation (Christianity) or moral effort, (late Judaism and Islam).

If Christians are to retell the story of Genesis intelligibly then they need to show how a spiritual hiatus in hominid evolution has, over time, led to an alienation from God and each other. In part this was and is due to the problem of consciousness and individuation whereby the ego becomes inflated beyond its natural capacity. This hubris is the father and mother of death, non-being and social alienation. It can only be overcome by divine intervention, allowing for free agents to die to themselves, to deflate the ego by divine grace and to rediscover the possibility of true perfection in a return to "Eden" - but made new by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Monastics are pioneers in this regard, but the possibility of divine perfection in the human, holiness, is open to all and urged upon all. It is, after all what salvation is all about. What is essential in this reconstructing of Genesis is the necessity of not getting distracted by an absurd literalism which will prevent a spiritual seeker from learning in contemporary terms the existential power and truth of the Genesis myth, the precursor for our salvation in Christ.