

A Dynamic Reading of Genesis 1 and 2

By Peter Stork

The interpretive model we use to read the Bible determines what we see in its pages. Recently I felt drawn to take a closer look at the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2, but this time I read it with dynamic model in mind.

Traditionally, the doctrine of creation is articulated in terms of causation and control, a view, which seems to fall far short of the richly interactive unfolding of creation suggested by the biblical text. It seems to me that the traditional top-down causation and control model distorts our understanding of God's creation as it presents it as a finished product of divine fiat and transcendent power.

One of the striking features of the Genesis account is the responsiveness between Creator and creation. Creation not only appears in response to divine utterance, but also God responds to what he has created: seven times he pronounces it good, on three occasions he names what he has created, and he continues to remain engaged with his handiwork by observation and evaluation. Apart from causing and producing, God also confronts what he has created in its otherness and potential independence with ongoing acts of shaping and divine blessing. At the same time, he implants creaturely activity (not just human) in the process of creation so that what has been created emerges as a co-creator with him. For instance, the earth is charged to bring forth land animals. In other words, it is not only God who causes and produces, but creation itself participates in the rhythms and processes of unfolding and ruling. What comes into view is a much richer matrix of interaction than that of the causation/dependence model. Even a one-to-one reciprocity between God and individual aspects of creation is insufficient, as God brings "diverse creaturely realms" into "fruitful, life-promoting associations of interdependent relations" with each other (Michael Welker). In short, we need to see God's call and promise designed to provoke a faithful response on the part of the creation to its Creator as the interpretive center of Genesis. Concerning the human creation, God himself remains also active within the drama of human existence through self-disclosure, and even dialogues with his creature.

From this perspective a responsive and mutually participative relationship between God and his creation on the one hand, and between creaturely domains on the other emerges as a model for reading the creation account. Yet, I am aware that that “reciprocity” in this context does not mean reciprocity in the strict sense. Rather we need to understand it in terms of a dialogical responsiveness whereby we give appropriate recognition to the qualitative difference of God’s relation to the human creation and of the human response. On the Creator’s part, an infinite relatedness is exercised while human relationality either concerning God (or more generally to the “other”), is circumscribed by a particular embodiment including our historical, cultural and sinful condition.