

CHAPTER 2

MAN'S NATURE AND FALL

(Gen. 2, 3)

Genesis 1 is above all concerned with God as Creator. This is followed by a revelation of man's nature and fall. That man is the centre of interest is shown by the name Jehovah¹ being attached to Elohim (2:4, and some twenty times in the two chapters). Elohim is the God of power, whose existence may be known from nature (Rom. 1:19, 20); Jehovah is the God of personal revelation. This almost unique usage here is probably to stress that Jehovah who deals with man is identical with the Creator of the universe. In these chapters Elohim by itself is used only in the conversation between the snake and Eve, thus showing how little either knew of the true nature of God.

Here we are concerned with man rather than with creation in general. It is this change of stance which causes the differences in the story of man's creation, which puzzle the simple and give scope to the theories of liberals and lovers of fancy. Here the story seems to go back in its essentials to Adam and to God's answer to his enquiry how he came to be. We have no right to create gratuitous difficulties by generalizing from statements applicable only to Adam himself.²

¹ I use Jehovah as the form most familiar to English readers of the Bible in preference to Yahweh, which is almost certainly the name under which Israel worshipped its covenant God. Its meaning is discussed in ch.9.

² In spite of the arguments in E. K. V. Pearce, *Who was Adam?*, I cannot accept that Gen. 1 refers to paleolithic man, but Gen. 2 to neolithic man. I have no theory as to when the hominoids we know from the fossil record became man in the biblical sense.

Many and varied have been man's speculations about the cradle of the human race. The general impression created by Scripture and seemingly supported by archaeology is that it was somewhere in the Near East, and this is confirmed by the mention of the Tigris and Euphrates in 2:14. No certain identification of the other two rivers has been offered. Irrespective of our interpretation of the details of Noah's Flood, we must allow for major physical changes which may have been caused by it.

In the description of the creation of man (2:7) we find God forming (the verb is used of a potter at his work) '*adam*' (man, i.e. mankind) from the dust of the tillable ground ('*adamah*'); into his nostrils he breathed the breath (*neshamah*) of life, and so man becomes a living soul (*nephesh*), a living being.

The words used demand our closer attention. '*adam*' stands in Hebrew for mankind in general and includes the female as well as the male. He is here an individual only because he is the beginning; Eve is part of him. Not until 4:25, when there are children, does it become a proper name. Adam, i.e. mankind, is linked by his body-stuff to all God's physical creation and especially to his fellow-men, from whom he cannot live in isolation (Rom. 14:7). There is no real word for a living body in the Old Testament. We, basing ourselves on Greek thought, look on our bodies as the definers of ourselves. All in my body is I, all outside is not I. In Hebrew, however, "flesh" stresses my essential oneness with others.

My true individuality is not created by my body, but by my spirit. If *neshamah* is used here instead of the more usual *ruah*, it is probably to guard against the idea, usual in pantheistic religions and sometimes present in some Christian circles, that man has a spark of the Divine in him. There seems otherwise to be little or no difference in the use of the two words.

These two, flesh and spirit, fuse into a single whole, the *nephesh*, which is usually but misleadingly rendered soul.

My "soul" is the whole of me, the essential man, who knows the physical world through his flesh and makes himself known through it, while through his spirit he is in touch with God and the spirit-world. That which we generally mean by soul is normally expressed in Hebrew by "heart".

The first man was created in arid steppe country (2:5) – the mention of its not having rained must surely be interpreted in this context – before being moved into the garden which God had prepared in Eden away to the east. The obvious inference is that Adam was so to carry out his work in the garden, that he and his family would gradually extend it until it had embraced the whole world. In the mean time he was to guard it; such is the basic and natural meaning of the verb rendered to keep it or care for it (2:15). The form that evil might take was not told him, but he was warned that danger existed.

Just as Adam had to experience the bleakness of nature before he was transferred to the glories of the garden, so too he had to face loneliness and incompleteness before his need was met. First, however, he had to begin his work of authority and dominion. God brought the animals and birds to him, partly because being wild they would not have come spontaneously, partly to make it clear to the man that his authority was a delegated one. To give a person the right to name man or beast implied both an understanding of his nature and also authority over him, cf. Gen. 41:45, 2 Ki. 23:34; 24:17, Dan. 1:7. The very exercise of his authority impressed his aloneness on Adam. Though the animals had been brought under his authority, Adam knew that their very subjection made it impossible for them to be true partners.

The story of the creation of woman (2:21, 22) has been interpreted in the most diverse ways, from the most literal to the most abstrusely scientific. Here let it be mentioned only that the word traditionally translated "rib" almost

certainly does not mean this – the various rabbinic suggestions bear testimony to this – but more probably “side”. What is important is that every human being is derived ultimately not from two persons but from one; Eve is female Adam. The virgin birth of Jesus, his humanity derived from one person, marked Him out as a new creation, the last Adam.

The statement in 2:18 is general and applies to a woman equally with a man (the word used is *'adam*); God meets the man's need with more than a companion. He provides someone who really suits him, a partner (NEB). This partnership, with its differentiation of sex and all that flows from it, was implicit in God's creational purpose (1:27), and was not an afterthought. The only reason for the delay in his creating of Eve was to make Adam realize his need for her. They were not to be drawn together by mere sexual instinct and urge. Celibacy, where it is not the direct result of human sin and violence (Matt. 19:12), or of a malfunctioning of the body, directly or indirectly the outcome of sin, may come from the hermit's life or from a refusal of marriage. In either case the person embracing the single life risks damaging his personality or worse, unless he is called to a single life by God, who can give him or her abundant grace for the purpose.

The married state equally calls for the enabling grace of God. The cultural background both of the Bible and of modern life assumes that the bride will leave her home, her clan, her people it may be. In becoming one with her husband she is caught up into his world and family. But such is not God's purpose; “A man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh” (2:24). “Flesh” is used presumably because in their unity each retains his personal responsibility to God. This statement means that, without in any way denying the principle of the fifth commandment, under God the husband belongs in the first place to his wife, even as she does to him. They cannot become one, if either is still tied in part to the past.

This should make it abundantly clear, that whatever may be said in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, about the subordination of the wife to her husband may not be interpreted in any way as meaning that she is his inferior in any sense, or that he has the right to dominate her life.

In the garden two fruit trees are singled out for mention, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. There is no room for magic in God's creation. There is nothing created that can give life purely because it is eaten, and similarly nothing that can impart knowledge in the same way. The powers of the two trees lay not in their nature but in the role that God had imparted to them. There is no suggestion that an animal feeding on them would have acquired either wisdom or length of life.

The usual assumption is that Adam and Eve were in the position of young children, completely unaware that anything was right or wrong, and that the eating of the fruit imparted that knowledge. There are two fatal objections to this view. A being completely ignorant of moral right and wrong could hardly be said to have been created in the image and likeness of God. In addition, had they not known that it was right and good to obey God, wrong and evil to disobey him, we could hardly call their disobedience sin. However we define sin, we infer previous knowledge. If we think of it as missing the mark, we imply knowledge of a mark to be hit. If we think of it as lawlessness (1 Jn. 3:4), we imply the recognition of a binding law.

We shall find the probable answer in a peculiarity of the human child. To a greater or less degree, but never perfectly in more developed life, a young animal knows what is good and what is bad for it. This instinctive knowledge exists even when the young one has been taken from its dam at the earliest possible moment. This instinctive knowledge, however, is conspicuously lacking in the human child and, for that matter, adult also. Even so we must assume that Adam and Eve had to depend on God to know what the

physical outcome of their actions would be. That such is the meaning of the knowledge of good and evil is supported by 2 Sam. 14:17, Isa. 7:15, as well as by its use among the men of Qumran.

The story of the temptation is simple and straightforward; some light is thrown on what lies behind it by later Scripture, but we are intended to understand it as it is, even though some elements are probably symbolic. We need not ask ourselves how man and animals could communicate. The ability is implicit in man's position of lordship. Equally we are not to concern ourselves how the snake was influenced by Satan. What we must reject is the idea that Satan disguised himself as a snake or borrowed the snake's body for the occasion.

It is likely that the snake in its cleverness resented man's domination and was therefore open to Satan's suggestions. In apparent simplicity it asked, "Surely God did not say, 'You shall not eat of *any* tree of the garden'?" As is so often the case, the attack was not through what was but through what could be. By speaking purely of God the snake implied that since it knew God only as the All-Powerful, such behaviour by him would be quite possible.

By using "God" in her answer, Eve, instead of teaching the snake her higher knowledge of God, came down to its level. She soon betrayed part of the reason. To the prohibition of eating she added that of touching, but where did she get this idea? One feature of God's revelation is that he very rarely, if ever, repeated his commands, where their purpose was clear. Having warned Adam (2:16, 17), there was no reason why he should repeat it to Eve; that was her husband's task. We can hardly avoid the conclusion that he was playing for safety by adding "nor touch it"; this is another way of saying that he did not fully trust God, when he gave him Eve, and this doubt will soon have communicated itself to her.

Once the snake realized that Eve shared its doubts, there came the charge that God was trying to keep man in thrall

by withholding the knowledge that would set him free. He could become like God, not in creatorial power but in freedom, dependent on none. Even though AV "gods" has LXX backing, there is little to be said for it.

There seems to be little gained by linking 1 Jn. 2:16 with the stages of Eve's downfall (3:6). Eyes and heart in rebellion against God will always see things in a false light. There is no suggestion that there was anything about this tree and its fruit to mark it out. We may emphatically reject the rabbinic conceit that the snake pushed Eve against the tree, thus showing her that she had not died, even though she had touched it. It was an outcome of the rabbinic minimizing of the reality of sin and of the Fall. Even less acceptable is the rabbis' suggestion that the snake wanted Adam out of the way so as to have Eve for itself.

We are assured by Paul that "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim. 2:14). So we should ask ourselves why he, too, ate of the fruit. The only satisfactory answer seems to be that he decided he would stand by his wife, come what might. It was an admirable sentiment, but betrayed complete lack of trust in the possibility of divine forgiveness and restoration. If we must draw up a scale of guilt, it should be clear that Adam's was indubitably greater than his wife's. Doubt of God's love seems to have started with him, and it led to his deliberate defiance of God's will.

The first obvious result of their disobedience was their realization that they were naked. There is nothing in the story to justify the idea, still sometimes met, that until then they had been enveloped in radiance, which served as a garment, and that this had suddenly disappeared. Rather, this is the supreme anticlimax. It all happened as the snake had promised (v. 4); their eyes were opened, and they saw that they were naked . . .! But we should go further than this. There is much in the Bible conveyed by allusion, virtually symbolically, and this is the case here. It implies that there was an immediate deterioration in the relation-

ship between them, a breach in their oneness.

The reason is easy to find. Unity in the demonic and animal world implies domination or even absorption.¹ For two independent and equal personalities to co-exist in harmony they must move around a common centre, which is, of course, God. With the removal of that centre the harmony between husband and wife was marred, for each wished to be the centre around which the other should move. Human sin almost always hits the marriage partner first and the children next.

Worse was to come. There are mysteries about the conscience that the psychologist has never plumbed. Their nakedness, which had troubled their relationship and which they had tried to hide, was now suddenly seen as involving their relationship to God also (3:8-10), and the fig-leaf covering did not avail with him. Adam's noble desire to stand by his wife evaporated once sin began to separate them, and selfishness took over. Without hesitation he placed the whole blame on Eve, and even on God himself, for he had given him the woman (3:12). Eve's laying of the blame on the snake (3:13) had more justification, but there was no confession of her share in what had happened.

It is essential to notice that in God's sentence a curse is pronounced on the physical creation but not on Adam and Eve, who were merely reaping what they had sowed. Pedersen² is probably correct in saying that the relationship between sin and curse is as that between righteousness and blessing. In other words, even as sin separates from God so it separates from his blessing.

It is a matter of controversy whether we should render "Because you have done this you are accursed more than all cattle and wild creatures" (NEB), or "Cursed art thou from

¹ Cf. Screwtape's words to Wormwood, "We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in, He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over." (C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. 47.)

² Pedersen, *Israel I-II*, p. 437.

among all cattle . . .” (JPS). If one takes curse in the sense given above and remembers a passage like Rom. 8:19–22, the former rendering becomes the more probable. It was God’s will that the fullness of his blessing should come to nature through mankind. With the fall of man that blessing was cut off. The snake’s posture had been its glory, cf. Prov. 30:19, but now it was to be the outward sign of its humiliation and defeat.

It is very generally stated that the curse contains an old explanation why men are instinctively hostile to the snake. Such an explanation does not tell us why the enmity should be particularly with the woman. God was looking beyond what had happened to what lay behind it. The promise was addressed to the snake rather than to Eve, for it was primarily an expression of the sovereignty of God, rather than an expression of God’s mercy, cf. Ezek. 36:22. It spoke of a long struggle between man and the powers that would seek to destroy him, and of ultimate triumph after suffering. The stress on the woman and her seed could be understood only long after, when the fulfilment came.

It should be noted that the curse did not exclude from God’s care. The snake had its allotted place in the Ark, and we find it on the transformed earth no longer a source of death and disgust (Isa. 11:8), even though the far distant past would not be forgotten (Isa. 65:25).

As for Adam and Eve, they would be touched in that where they could glory most. The woman’s supreme glory is that from her comes new life, and in the giving of life she would be reminded of what she once did. More than that: whatever her motive she deliberately drew her husband after her into disobedience, so “your desire (*teshuqah*) will be for your husband”. The word *teshuqah* is found only twice more; in Gen. 4:7 it is used of the wild beast’s longing for its prey, and in Cant. 7:10, where passionate desire is probably meant. The woman’s love was to degenerate into the expression of deep-rooted passions, and the result would be “He will rule over you”. It is regrettable that

virtually all translations render "he shall rule over you"; TEV is a welcome exception. There is no command here but a plain statement of fact, that man in his selfishness would take advantage of his wife's weakness to enforce his will on her, instead of treating her as his equal and partner.

It can hardly be overstressed that in Eph. 5:23-33, where the wife's subjection to her husband in everything is stressed, it is linked with the command, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Where husbands do not obey this command, they can hardly expect their wives' "subjection in everything". It is an evil thing to appeal to Scripture, when it suits our purpose, and to forget or ignore those statements that make unwelcome claims upon us.

NEB, JB, TEV are correct in rendering "to the man" in 3:17; this is something that involves all mankind irrespective of sex. Mankind was to have dominion over nature, but now he was to find that even the soil revolted against him. Whether it is toil of hands or of brain, man always discovers that to whatever earthly Paradise he comes, whatever Shangri-la he finds, that ease destroys him and nature plays him false. Rabbinic exegesis, presumably to minimize the results of sin, insists on the basis of Gen. 5:29; 8:21 that the curse on the ground was only for Adam's lifetime, but human experience hardly bears this out. Perhaps if more of the rabbis had been agriculturists, they would have been less confident.

Man, made in the image and likeness of God, is to be earth-bound, returning at the last to the dust from which he had been taken. The warning had been that in the day they ate of the tree they would die. The Fall did not destroy the image in which they had been created, but it so marred it, that between man's spirit and God a barrier had been created. His spirit was lamed; it could no longer function as it should, and so man became less than man. Thus Paul could say of Jesus that he was the second man (1 Cor. 15:47). A careful study of death and dying in the Old Testament will

probably convince the student, that though in the vast majority of cases little if any discernable difference can be found between the Hebrew and the English concepts, yet from time to time we find cases where the meaning of the Hebrew seems to be above all that of impotence and non-functioning. Indeed this is the basic concept behind existence in Sheol (the abode of the dead; in Greek, Hades). It would seem that this, not unconsciousness or non-existence, lies at the root of the Hebrew concept of death.

Since fallen man could no longer function for the purpose for which he had been created, he had in fact died in the hour of sinning, even though the return to dust lay yet many years ahead. To drag out one's days without purpose is a mockery and misery, and this is symbolized by the barring of the way to the tree of life.

Just as God did not withdraw his protective care from the world as a whole, cf. Gen. 6:19–21, Jonah 4:11, so he did not from man either. The token of this was his making garments of skin for Adam and Eve. Many see in this the institution of sacrifice, but we are hardly justified in deducing this from the silence of Scripture, the more so as the story of Cain and Abel, rightly understood, does not suggest that the rejection of Cain's sacrifice was due to any shortcomings in its form, i.e. no animal had had to lay down its life, but rather to the fact of an unacceptable life (4:7). We do not have the right to use the silences of Scripture to force what is said into the straitjackets of our dogmatic systems. Since sacrifice plays such an important role in the Old Testament, one could reasonably expect that there would be a plain statement, if this were really the Divine institution of it.

Remarkably enough these chapters are not referred to, except obliquely, in the rest of the Old Testament, and only sparingly in the New. The reason is not far to seek. Man rebels against the concept of the sins of the fathers being visited upon their children to the third and fourth genera-

tion. He repeatedly dreams that he can mount higher on the ruins of the past, that he can "build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land".

Though history reveals again and again that each generation pays for the follies of previous ones, yet there are always those who think that by revolution or education they can so change things that the entail of the past will be broken. This optimism shows itself as clearly in religious circles as in secular walks of life. Even the theologians who most stress original sin and the depravity of man seem normally to forget their doctrines when they leave the study or pulpit.

Rather than harping continually on this fact in his revelation, God preferred, having given us the story of the original fall, to drive the lesson home by giving us the history of man in its failure, first in the world at large and then in his chosen people Israel. While Gen. 3 receives no direct mention in the Old Testament, almost every page is a commentary on it.

There is perhaps some excuse for the philosopher in the Greek tradition, with its stress on the spirit of man and depreciation of the material, when he rejects the concept of original sin. This excuse does not hold for the rabbi, the Marxist and the psychologist, who in one way or another stress the importance of the physical and of society as a whole. Indeed, the Christian doctrine is not that Jesus Christ sets a man free from his past so that he may exist in a vacuum until his final salvation comes, he sets him free so as to put him into a new society, the Church, the body of Christ, where every influence should be toward righteousness and the accomplishment of God's will and purpose, but even there we find the dark stains of failure throughout its history.

Man ate; and man acquired knowledge at phenomenal speed even in the antediluvian period. He has gone on, until today he seems to be on the verge of unlocking the ultimate secrets of nature. But what he has not acquired is the ability

to understand the wisdom and purpose behind creation, the “why?” of things. Equally he has not learned how to use his knowledge for his and nature’s good, or to be more fair, even when he has known, there has been a deep-rooted weakness of moral fibre, which has prevented him from applying his knowledge in practice.

Some who have read this chapter will have smiled with some feeling of superiority at its simplistic treatment of what they call a parable, or more likely, and misleadingly, a myth. So be it. Yet I doubt, whether, in spite of all their superior understanding of what happened at the dawn of man’s history, they will be able to deduce other or deeper spiritual truths from it. There are times when God has to use the language of the nursery in teaching men the cause of their failure, and we shall lose nothing in accepting the lesson in the way it has been given us.