THE SEVEN DAYS OF THE NEW CREATION IN ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL: SOME FURTHER REFLECTIONS

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THE succession of days to which the reader's attention is rather pointedly drawn in the narrative of John 1: 29-2: 1 has often been thought to have more significance than a superficial perusal might indicate. Dr. Trudinger, who is Adjunct Professor of Sacred Scripture and Moral Theology in Washington Theological Coalition, Silver Springs, Maryland, carries the study of these days forward with a new interpretation of the day on which the marriage at Cana took place.

SOME fifteen years ago M.-E. Boismard published a study in which he argued ably for the deliberate, if somewhat artificial, use by John of a seven day schema in John 1: 19-2 11.[1] Several other commentators have looked favorably upon the possibility of such a schema,[2] though with varying degrees of conviction and allowing considerable possibility of differences in detail. Shortly after the

[1] *Du Baptême à Cana (Jean* 1: 19-2: 11) (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1956).

[2] Notably, amongst the most recent commentaries, Fr. Bruce Vawter in the commentary on John in *The Jerome Bible Commentary* (N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 424; J. N. Sanders, *The Gospel according to St. John* (ed. B. A. Mastin) (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 107-8; and Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* ("The Anchor Bible", Vol. 29) (N.Y.: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1966), pp. 105-6. Fr. Brown calls the theory "very attractive," but issues the caveat, ". . . but how can we possibly be sure that we are not reading into the Gospel something that was never even thought of by the Evangelist or the redactor?" (p. 106). He concludes by stating that the seven day scheme is only "a possible interpretation." There are several things which can be said in answer to Fr. Brown's question. Firstly, why is the opposite side of the coin, so to speak, considered less valid? In other words, why is the question not raised with respect to those commentators who make no mention of a deliberate theme-play here by John; ". . . but how can we possibly be sure that we are not omitting from our interpretation of the Gospel something that was important to the thought of the Evangelist or the redactor?" I protest that his is just as valid a question to raise. Secondly, and in a sense as evidence for the position taken immediately above, we must take into account the widely recognized penchant which John has for word-plays, for subtle reflections on Old Testament themes, for writing in such a way that several levels of meaning are open to the perceptive reader. All this is so clearly intentional throughout the Gospel that it is hard to believe that 1: 19-2: 12 gives such rich yields in terms of a play on the seven days of creation theme by mere accident or the over-fertile imagination of a few scholars, both ancient and modern.

appearance of Boismard's book, Fr. Thomas Barrosse wrote an article in support of the thesis, but wishing to supplement it by pointing up an aspect of the symbolism neglected by Boismard, namely, the ecclesiological implications of the seven days of the new creation.[3]

It is my purpose in this brief article to lend support, in the main, to the interpretation of this section of John's Gospel advanced by Boismard and Barrosse, but to differ from their scheme on one important point, a point which Barrosse virtually admits has no explicit support,[4] namely, the designation of the day of the marriage at Cana as the *seventh* day. Furthermore, I wish to adduce as evidence for the alternative scheme which I am suggesting, a point that neither Boismard nor Barrosse give any attention to. I refer to the several indications of a clear correspondence between what happened on the different days of the creation story in Genesis and what John relates as happening on the correlative days of the new creation.

Fr. Barrosse rightly points to the day of the marriage at Cana as being the culmination of the days of the new creation: the day on which the Church, the New Humanity, came to life. Its culminating significance, however, gives no warrant for its being designated the *seventh* day. No amount of juggling or circuitous explanation should allow us to escape the fact that John clearly indicates his "days", and that in his scheme, John 1: 43-51 is one day, the *fifth* in the sequence. We must not try to squeeze another day in at v. 45, where the text gives no warrant for it. Chapter 2: 1, therefore, begins the *sixth* day. This is very appropriate. God did his culminating work of creation on the sixth day. This was when humanity came to life. He did no work on the seventh. The seventh day, or Sabbath, as a motif, is always anticipated. Perhaps 2: 12 is John's way of saying that Jesus, like His Father, "rested" after six days of creation: "After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother . . . and rested there for a few days." For John, the final fulfilment for mankind, the Sabbath, is yet to come, though it is anticipated now. This motif comes through strongly in the septenaries built into the scheme of John's *Apocalypse*, which, as I believe Austin Farrer has rightly shown, bears strong affinities,

[3] "The Seven Days of the New Creation in St. John's Gospel," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 21 (1958), pp. 507-516.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 512 (line 8 from the bottom), and p. 514, line 13.

thematically speaking, with John's Gospel.[5] John 2: 1 ff., which I am suggesting is the *sixth* day, is designated by John as "the third day", a phrase which clearly points to the Resurrection, as Barrosse rightly emphasizes. That the sixth day should be seen in conjunction with "the third day" is central to John's theological intention. The sixth day is the day before the Sabbath, the day of the Crucifixion, when water is turned to wine; that is, when the traditional rituals of purification and cleansing are superseded by the shed blood of the Lamb of God. But to understand the saving significance of Jesus' death is to participate in His resurrection. To drink the wine is both "to show forth the Lord's death", and also to anticipate the final banquet of the Lord. The sixth day and "the third day" are one!

My first argument above in support of my designating the event of the marriage at Cana as the sixth day was based on the correlation of the culminating event of creation on the sixth day, namely, the coming to life of mankind, with the culminating event of the Cana episode, the birth of the new humanity, fittingly typified by a wedding feast. This argument will be greatly strengthened if it can be shown that the correlation here is not merely a fanciful possibility nor an accidental correspondence in this case, but rather is part of a deliberate though subtle scheme of correspondences between the events of the Genesis creation account and the new creation as set forth by John. We must be careful not to make the facts fit the theory, and yet even taking this caution to heart, it seems to me that a number of clear correspondences of a symbolic nature stand out, in addition to what I have already pointed to concerning the sixth and seventh days.[6]

On the *first* day of creation (Gen. 1: 1-5) light is separated or distinguished from darkness. Barrosse again rightly emphasizes the fact that in John's scheme the first day (John 1: 19-28) belongs to the Baptist. He, so reads the Prologue (John 1: 8), "was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light". That was the light which "shines in the darkness and which the darkness has not overcome" (1: 5). On this first day it is those whom John so often speaks of as representatives of the darkness, the priests and Levites, who come to question the Baptist. He distinguishes himself from the

[5] See *A Rebirth of Images* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949), pp. 24-30.

[6] For the initial stimulus to my thinking along these lines, I owe a great debt to the insights of an Australian Johannine scholar, the Rev. Dr. Frank Hambly, whose Bevan Memorial Lectures, "The Doctrine of the Church in the Fourth Gospel," delivered in 1954 under the aegis of Parkin College, Kent Town, I was privileged to hear.

light, but points to it, emphasizing the crucial significance for them, the darkness, of the light that is coming and is even now amongst them. It is one of John's themes that the light shows up the darkness and judges it: "This is the judgement, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light" (3: 19). Thus light is separated from the darkness by the witness of the Baptist.

On the *second* day of creation (Gen. 1: 6-8), the waters below the firmament are distinguished or separated from the waters above. Can it be mere accident, then, that on this second day (John 1: 29-34), John has the Baptist distinguish between his baptism, with earthly water, from that of Jesus, who will baptize "with the Holy Spirit", which is "from above" (32-33)?

The *third* day (Gen. 1: 9-13) is concerned with the appearance of dry *land*, and the fruits of the land. In John (1: 35-39), the Baptist directs two of his disciples to the Lamb of God,[7] Jesus, and they ask Him where His home is. Later, (45), it is made known that Jesus is from Nazareth, a town in Galilee of the Gentiles. He came from amongst "the People of the Land", the *'am hā-'āretz*. Those two disciples stay with Jesus and become His first disciples and the ministry of Him from Nazareth bears fruit. Furthermore, in regard to the land producing a harvest, the Genesis account speaks of plants yielding seed, and "fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed each according to its own kind". One of those first disciples spoken of in John's third day, Andrew, later brings his brother, Simon, and he too becomes a follower of Jesus, so that Andrew, as it were, bears fruit "after his own kind".

Lights are set in the heavens on the *fourth* day of creation, two of which get special mention: the greater and the lesser of the two "great" lights (Gen. 1: 14-19). On this day in John's account (1: 40-42),[8] the disciples first acclaim Jesus as the Messiah, whom John exalts as the Light of the world, and Jesus gives a special name and status to Simon, who as Peter was the chief of the apostles, the greatest of the lesser lights.

The *fifth* day of creation is chiefly concerned with the sea and its creatures (Gen. 1: 20-23). In John's account (1: 43-51), we

[7] It may even be argued that the term "lamb" in this context reflects, in one of its innuendos, the pastoral activities of "the people of the land."

[8] The fourth day is not as specifically denoted as the others. I: 39 implies the end of the third day in the sequence, as Brown points out (*Op. cit.*, p. 76). Furthermore, if the reading *prōi* (*mane* in the Old Latin) is accepted in v. 41, as it is, for example, in *The Jerusalem Bible*, another day is clearly marked off. (See Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 151, and Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-6.)

have the call of Philip, who comes from Bethsaida, "the city of Andrew and Peter", who were fishermen. We also have the encounter with Nathanael, whose only other appearance in the Gospel is in the context of the sea and fishing (21: 1 ff.). In Genesis, the command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the seas climaxes the events of the day, and Nathanael's concern for Israel's fidelity to its mission, which we sense from the subtle play on the Jacob theme, reflects Israel's destiny according to the promise, "I will multiply your descendants as the sand which is on the seashore" (Gen. 22: 17).

Thus we come again to the sixth day. I am fully aware that the correspondences I have drawn attention to vary in their degrees of obviousness/subtlety, but in the light of the compelling clarity of the correlations of the first and second days, for example, I believe that none of the above evidence is far-fetched. The correspondences are not to be considered exhaustive, or matching in every minute detail. Rather, they are suggestive, imaginative, and subtly symbolic, as we might expect from John, whose word-pictures we should view, I believe, like a canvas of a Chagall rather than a Constable. Sensitive as he was to the fulfilment of the Old Testament motifs in the event of the Word made flesh, it seems inconceivable that he would build into his pictures a scheme of the days of the new creation without reflecting some play on the motifs of the content or happenings of the several days. This, I believe I have shown, he did.

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