

The world doesn't begin until verse 26.

The first chapter of the Book of Genesis should be familiar to anyone who subscribes to our Judeo-Christian tradition. It tells of the creation of the world. The chapter was initially composed for use as a liturgical reading at ceremonies celebrating the origin of the world. It dates from the 500's BC. It was not intended to be an "eye-witness" account. "Eye-witnessing" is our modern and inadequate way of seeing things. Back then poetry offered a better perception.

The chapter starts off with a turbulent dark ocean. Then a sky appears out of nowhere. Then there appears dry land out of the waters. Then comes vegetation: seed bearing plants, trees. Then a sun, moon and stars emerge from above – illuminating the day and the night. Then the sea comes to life with the hugest and tiniest and weirdest of creatures while birds swim through the air – all with the power to recreate themselves. And then begins the circus parade: animals tame and wild, crawling things, earwigs and crocodiles . . . and finally *human beings* to observe and manage it all. And it says *God saw that it was good*.

Now it is true: creation can be imagined as happening that way – from a mute sea, earth and sky, progressively advancing to a plethora of life – historically. But if you want to "experience" Genesis 1 you have to start from its close, from verse 26, the creation of us human beings, before there is anyone *capable* of seeing the world unfold from waters to sky and flora and fauna and *all things bright and beautiful* - because *without human beings* the world remains still to be discovered – the equivalent of "empty" space.

It is we as endowed with some kind of magic that begin to notice *where* we are. The sea, earth, sun, moon and stars, the vegetation have no idea of where they are or why they are – and birds and animals a much more confined sense of things – driven only by their instincts.

But as a human being, as I drive up Highway Twelve in the early morning hours, horizon after horizon opens up so wide. I see seed-bearing plants and trees, I see birds in the air and fish (if only at the market) and deer crossing Arnold Drive knowing by instinct that a mountain lion is off somewhere in those hills. I see that old dog across the street making its daily rounds. I see water coming out of my well through a faucet and in rainy times dousing my roof. I am blinded by the sun rising in the east; I marvel at a full moon even at dawn and stars and human beings and all their works including the car I am in and the highway beneath my tires. The whole panorama of Genesis 1 opens up before me every day within an awareness promising more of the same.

It seems like a good thing for us to realize that – to marvel at it every day. It might make us less destructive, angry, forgetful, too, too commercial – as was the Cain of Genesis 5 who is described as the first city builder – of landscapes buried under brick and mortar to so drastic a degree – mindless of our amazing origin as caretakers of a world we are privileged to *know* in the biblical sense of the word.

Geoff Wood