

## The Doctrine of Creation in the Lutheran Confessional Writings

Severus said:

“The scholastics even disputed about the question of where  
God was before the creation of the world.”

The doctor (Luther) said, “Yes, Augustine mentioned this.  
But once, when he was asked, he said, ‘God was making hell  
for those who are inquisitive.’”

Then he added, “Where is God now, after creation?”

(Martin Luther, “Table Talk”)

That God is called Creator is an unfathomable thing, and yet  
God creates every day. As he made Adam out of the dust of  
the ground, so today he still takes a little semen, in which  
there’s no life, and forms, nourishes, and preserves the fruit  
in a supernatural way, though physicians have their  
explanations of a passage from the breast into the womb.  
Secondary cause obscure the first cause. (Luther)

## Genesis and Creation

- Lutheran Confession accept the first chapters of Genesis as an historical account of the origin of the universe and of humanity within it.
  - This does not mean that we are committed to a doctrine of creation which is opposed to evolutionary development of the universe.
  - Both evolutionary science and Biblical scholarship have made us aware that Genesis 1:1-11 is not about history.
- Our Present canonical text for Genesis
  - Comes from the time of exile or shortly after its end (5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.)
  - At the time of Ezra it achieved its final form.
- Genesis 1-5...Two traditions
  - Genesis 2-4
    - From 9<sup>th</sup> century BC
    - Etiological stories (where things come from)
  - Genesis 1 & 5
    - From the Babylonian Exile
    - Used to ground observance of the Sabbath
    - Genesis is not about where humanity came from, Rather about human destiny
      - » THE ETERNAL REST OF THE 7<sup>TH</sup> DAY

## Genesis and Creation

- An Early Creedal statement
  - Israel's communal narrative did not originally begin with the creation of the world.
  - **Deuteronomy 26:5-11**
    - The focus here is on God the Redeemer.
    - Israel's competitor "gods" were fertility gods
      - They spoke of birth and origins of the gods and...creation of the earth as the original redeeming act.
- Genesis 1 & 5 has an agenda
  - They are told in opposition to the Babylonian creation myth (god – Marduk)
  - JHWH – is now a cosmic God, not just a tribal god
  - JHWH – is now redeemer & creator
  - Note later creed statement under Ezra: **Nehemiah 9:6ff**
  - From this time come the ultimate text of the Torah
- Scientific findings and understanding
  - The universe is traced back 15 billion+ years
  - Earth @ 4-5 billion
  - Homo sapiens – 2 million (present human existence @ 30,000 -50,000)
  - Death...has always been a feature of life.

## The Lutheran Confessional Writings on Creation

- **Augsburg Confession**
  - No separate article on the doctrine of creation
  - God...is called "creator & preserver of all things..."
- **Small Catechism** (Book of Concord, p.354)
  - There is a statement about **my** creation and preservation by the Triune God.
  - Deals with conception, and development to the present moment of the confession
- **Large Catechism** (Book of Concord, p.432-433)
  - Similar to Small Catechism
  - Here, God is currently engaged in creation and preservation through all the dimensions of nature and culture.
- **Formula of Concord** (Book of Concord, p.488)
  - This theme of creation continues here despite the fallen and sinful character of my life and the lives of all human beings.
  - Again, the emphasis is on the continuing work in the universe.

## The Lutheran Confessional Writings on Creation

- In the Lutheran Confessional writings, as in the Old Testament itself,
  - The doctrine of creation belongs to the gospel
  - Luther expounds on the creed and distinguishes it from the 10 Commandments
  - The Creed – teaches us what we must expect and receive from God
  - God the Creator is also God the Redeemer
  - **The world is good, but because it has a “CREATOR” nothing in the world is to be worshiped as “god.”**

## Creation and Suffering

- What does this mean for suffering, evil, and brokenness in the world?
- If God is still creating...is God responsible for natural catastrophes, bodily deformities, sickness & pain....and the evil we humans can do?
- It is important to confess that God who is Redeemer is also Creator
  - Salvation encompasses God's creation.
  - The God in the 1<sup>st</sup> article of the Creed is the God of the entire creed (Triune).
  - We tell the story of God because Jesus is the crucified Messiah
    - The cross is the suffering and death of God.
    - **This is how we come to understand the sovereignty and the freedom of God**
- The confession of the freedom of God is present in the confession that God is the creator.
  - Jews & Christians affirmed the world as creation & God as creator
  - Greeks – God was “unmoved Mover” – outside of nature – untouched by the material world
    - Therefore the world could happen without intention or volition ( an emanation)
    - With this, creation could be differentiated from God.

## Creation and Suffering

- **The Freedom of God**
  - Not freedom from something – rather
  - Freedom for something: love, relationship...
  - Freedom to be for, available to, involved with the other.
- **Freedom means vulnerability**
  - Authentic love as authentic freedom means that one is vulnerable.
  - There is no authentic love which wills the good of the beloved without vulnerability.
  - If God is free for the continuing creation of the world, then God can be hurt when the creation hurts.
  - God can also be hurt by the world – hurt for the world – on its behalf.
  - The Cross is the final grounding that such freedom and vulnerability is not only a possibility.
    - It is the grounding for the claim that such freedom and vulnerability have actually occurred – in history and in the being of God

## Creation and Suffering

- **In the doctrine of the Trinity – God Suffers (Son, Father, H.S.)**
  - The gospels are the narrative of the suffering of the Son
  - Galatians 2:20; Philippians 2:8
  - **This is the Christ who forgives all not by overlooking sin**
    - **BUT BY ENDURING IT.**
- **Key passage: Romans 8:31-32**
  - God gives the Son over to death (Reflection of Genesis 22)
  - “handing over” – the meaning of God has to do with the final freedom of God for ultimate vulnerability.
  - The freedom of God to participate in birth and life is also the freedom of God to participate in death.
  - Meaning of “virginal conception” – not miracle...but handed over Son to death...**as do all parents when they give their children life.**
  - Freedom of the Son: affirms his life – willingly receives death.
  - Freedom of the Father: willingly hands over Son to life where death cannot be avoided.
    - This is the meaning of “Father & Son” – not patriarchalism.

## Creation and Suffering

- **The Suffering of the Holy Spirit**

- Spirit means Life (Genesis 2:7)
- If the cross is the death of the Son, then the cross is the negation of Life and the negation of the Spirit.
  
- ***Spirit*** means the down payment on the eschaton – the victory of the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 1:14)
- The cross is the triumph of the powers of the old age – powers of sin.
- Cross is the negation of the victory of the Kingdom of God & Spirit.
  
- ***Spirit*** means love (bond between Father & Son)
  - **In the cry from the cross** – we hear the cry of being abandoned.
  - Jesus experiences the alienation between Father & Son
    - *The negation of the bond of LOVE which is the Holy Spirit.*
    - The Spirit is “holy” - thus the cross is the negation of holy.
  
  - THIS IS HOW THE SPIRIT PARTICIPATES IN THE SUFFERING OF GOD WHICH IS THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

## Creation and Suffering

- **The proclamation of the Cross**

- No place is **so sinful, lonely, broken, evil, abandoned** that God is not there.
- Jesus & the Father experience the alienation of sin, the power of death, the victory of “law.”
- **But**...because of the resurrection, the cross does not have the last word.
- The gospel of the suffering of God is
  - The end of the “law” – our way of justifying ourselves
  - The end of sin – our refusal to trust God
  - The end of the power of death – our quest for self-protection at expense of others
- Jesus was crucified because God insists on being merciful
  - The kind of Messiah – who gathers the lost, the sinners, forgiving them.
  - In forgiveness, the forgiver bears the hurt of the sin with the sinner.
  - Powers of the “old age” become passe.

## Creation and Suffering

- **The concept of “perfection – acquires a new meaning**
  - Does not mean that God is
    - The ideal
    - The opposite of all imperfection in humanity
      - This understanding of God is idolatry.
  - It means simply – whatever God is, that is, whatever is revealed in the cross.
  - “All the messiness of human existence is encompassed and overcome in the cross through the suffering of the Father, the Son, & the Holy Spirit.

*O Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will.*

*But, do not remember all of the suffering they have inflicted upon us: Instead remember the fruits we have borne because of this suffering –*

*Our fellowship, our loyalty to one another, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown from this trouble.*

*When our persecutors come to be judged by you, let all these fruits what we have borne be their forgiveness. (prayer found at Ravensbruck Concentration Camp 1945)*

## Humanity as Created Co-Creators

- The Doctrine of Creation is an affirmation of my existence as a creature of God.
  - We were “made” by parents, grew in the womb, were shaped by family and social context.
  - God’s creative activity involves human beings & other creatures as “co-creators.”
  - Humans adapt the world in significant ways.
    - Clothing – building environments, structuring societies, etc.
    - This is important to remember in talking about human sexuality
      - Under normal circumstances human genitals are necessary for procreation that happens through sexual intercourse between a male and female.
      - But conception can happen without sexual intercourse.
      - Also – an enormous variety in sexual use of genital orders for heterosexuals.
  - We are called to be stewards of the world in ways that are respectful of its character as “creation,” that is, as given by God
    - We are to relate to other human beings and other beings in ways that are humane, collegial, and mindful of the future of human existence.

## The Doctrine of Creation & Human Sexuality

- A significant new factor in the Lutheran confessional teaching on human sexuality derives from Martin Luther's *A Marriage Booklet for Simple Pastors*.
  - The organization of sexual relationships in marriage is the business of the state, not the church
    - *It behooves those of us who are "spirituals" or ministers of the church in no way to order or direct anything regarding marriage, but allow every city and land to continue their own customs that are now in use. ... All these and similar things I leave to the prince and town council to create and arrange as they want. It is no concern of mine.*
- The work of the state.
  - Declares that clergy at marriages act as officers of the state – licensed.
  - Determines where pornographic material can be sold – if at all.
  - ...adult entertainment, prostitution,
  - The US Supreme Court – struck down state laws that defined homosexual actions between consenting adults as criminal.
  - Some state now are trying to order homosexual relationships.
  
  - We still need to address this and not assume that the state will do it. *"The larger society is not going to provide us with any direction on this issue; it is one for the church itself to address and resolve."*

## The Doctrine of Creation & Human Sexuality

- Our sexual drive is a gift of the creator
  - Strong in some...less in others...more in one period of life than another
  - Sexual orientation can be directed to persons of the same gender
  - Evolutionary biologist now tell us that a small but significant percentage of all bi-sexual "animal" creation has apparently always had a homosexual "orientation."
- Homosexual "orientation" is one of the controversial aspects of the discussion of human sexuality.
  - Other preferred terms "sexual preference" – and see it as a choice.
  - Some refer to a homosexual "life-style" – usually to portray a person as inherently promiscuous
    - This become a principle reason for their opposition to homosexuality.
  - Those who believe there is a choice see only two options for Christians who have homosexual sexual desires
    - Resist their desires and abstain from all homosexual sexual activity
    - Seek therapy for their desires – so that they will no longer have such desires.

## The Doctrine of Creation & Human Sexuality

- **The Current Scene Concerning Homosexuality** – Paul Jersild.
  - The focus has shifted, he says, from the homosexual act to the homosexual person, now defined “as possessing a stable erotic drive directed toward persons of the same sex.”
  - He says “the immensely complicated nature of human sexuality does not lend itself to clear and obvious scientific answers.”
  - He says – it is not like “an addiction or a habit one can deny with sufficient discipline or will power,” such as alcoholism
  - A more authentic understanding is that sexuality is “*an integral part of one’s self-identity as a person. It is not a piece of baggage that can be dispensed with at will; it is an immediate and intimate dimension of who one is.*”

## The Doctrine of Creation & Human Sexuality

- **Agreement in the Scientific Community**
  - The cause and prevalence of homosexual orientation has been inconclusive.
    - No genetic, brain structure, parental hormone – is a conclusive reason
  - Most researchers agree – whatever the origin of homosexuality
    - It is determined very early in life and is not self-chosen.
  - Most males and some females discover their homosexual orientation in adolescence – most females after adolescence.
  - **Important for the church to work with the best data that is available**
  - **Change?!?**
    - “cannot be changed by simple act of the will”
    - Every study on change – claims success – but...never high.
  - **If it is a “given” of their existence:**
    - Then a Lutheran understanding of creation would have to conclude
      - This is how human beings with a homosexual orientation are created through whatever biological and psychological processes by their creator.

## The Doctrine of Creation & Human Sexuality

- Violent & promiscuous use of our sexual orientation is not appropriate steward of the gift of the Creator.
  - Culturally we have codified this
    - Marriage.
- What is an appropriate human and Christian use of this gift for homosexuals?
- Because we adapt all of nature in culture, we cannot define “nature” except culturally.
  - Ex: Women changing “natural intercourse for unnatural” (Rom.1:26)
    - In the ancient world one “used” another person sexually in the same way one used wine or fish in dining
    - What Paul means by “against nature” is not “disorientated desire” but “inordinate desire.” (David Fredrickson)
  - What our culture regards as “natural” in sexual intercourse is quite different from what was regarded as “natural” in the ancient world.
  - ***We must not read our understanding back into the ancient world, and vice versa.***

## The Doctrine of Creation & Human Sexuality

- **Romans 1:18-3:20**
  - Paul argues that both Gentile & Jew (everyone) are under condemnation for their involvement in human sinfulness.
  - Gentiles are handed over to their culture outside of Torah as God’s judgment for their idolatry.
    - They are punished **by** being unclean in the sexual practices.
      - Not...**for** being unclean.
  - Jews should not judge the Gentiles because they are under equal divine judgment for their misuse of Torah.
  - Paul does not use the concept of *sinfulness* with regard to the actions to which God **handed over the Gentiles**. (William Countryman)
  - The question remaining is whether every sexual practice of persons with homosexual orientation is in itself sinful.
    - **Most troubling passage: 1 Corinthians 6:9**
    - “malakoi” & “arsenokoitai” (“masturbators” and “male prostitutes who service males”) belong to “fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers – who will no “inherit the kingdom of God.”
  - What does human sinfulness have to do with the Kingdom of God?
  - Why would masturbators and male prostitutes who service other males excluded