

God Created Me

By Richard Rice

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” The great poem with which the Bible begins is filled with dualities. Consider a few that appear in its opening lines: darkness and light; God and world; chaos and word.

As the text reads, the earth was waste and void—empty and formless—when God began his creative work. In a series of majestic, transforming moments, exquisitely and dramatically timed, his words brought cosmos out of chaos, producing a magnificent reality, filled with beauty and purpose, bursting with enormous possibilities. His climactic act was the creation of beings who reflected their maker in a unique way.

They were responsive and responsible to the Power that had made them. Their minds were open to his mind. Their thoughts aspired to his thoughts. Their place *in* creation resembled his own sovereignty *over* creation. They of all God’s creatures were able to appreciate the one in whom all creatures live and move and have their being.

This is not the Bible’s only account of creation, of course. The very next chapter of Genesis paints a different picture. God’s creative work has a distinctly hands-on character. He formed Adam out of dust and breathed life into his nostrils. There are other biblical accounts that describe God wrestling with the primal forces that have always threatened human existence. But the serenity and the majesty of this opening account have important things to tell us.

As expressed in an ancient formula, the first word of Christian faith is an affirmation of God’s creative work. “I believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth,

and of all things, visible and invisible.” This is a statement with profound implications, and great minds have spent centuries exploring its meaning. It gives us a complex view of things. Ultimate reality does not consist in the physical world. There is something more than matter and energy. Yet this mysterious other is not opposed to the world; it does not negate or contradict the significance of finite reality.

Instead, it affirms it. “God saw that it was good.” The story of creation upholds the value and importance of the world as a reflection of something even greater. It portrays the world in its primeval splendor as a mirror of God’s great purpose. To quote German theologian Ernst Fuchs, “In the beginning was the Yes. And the Yes was with God. And God was the Yes.”

There is something else these words provide us. They not only assure us that the world is important when it fulfills the Creator’s original purpose. They also assure us that God cares for the world just as much when it falls drastically short of that purpose.

In other words, Genesis 1 tells us that God not only expresses himself in the world, God also commits himself to the world. In fact,



God's relation to the world is so important to him that from the moment of this great beginning he links his identity to it. Henceforth, God is inseparable from his creation. What happens among his creatures affects the inner life of God. Like parents who deeply love their children, God's care for his creatures binds his destiny to theirs. His decision to create was irreversible. From that beginning he would love the neighbor, the world, as he loved himself.

It is natural to let these majestic words—the greatest opening line in all literature—give flight to our loftiest metaphysical speculations, but these alone do not express the full meaning—or even the most important meaning—of this basic affirmation. According to Martin Luther, to recite the opening article of the creed is really to confess, "I believe that God created me." Think of all the things that this involves. It means that the great dualities of cosmic creation have their counterpart in my own life.

I believe that I am utterly dependent, here and now, on God's creative, sustaining power.

I believe that God values everything that makes me what I am.

I believe that I am as important to God as he is to me.

I believe that God's eternal purposes have a place in them for me.

I believe that God's own eternal destiny includes his companionship with me.

I believe that my faults and failures disappoint God, but they do not quench his love.

I believe that my sins separate me from him, but not him from me.

I believe that God grieves over the tragedies and disappointments of my life. But I also believe that he, and not they, will have the last word.

To say "I believe that God created me," like every statement of faith, flies in the face of all appearances—the impersonal objectivity of natural law, and the cold reality of life's bitter circumstances. How can we say "God created me," when the biological odds against our own existence were overwhelming? A single act of

conception involves millions of genetic possibilities.

How can we say "God created me" when so much that happens, and so much that happens to us, could not possibly be what God wants? As each day's news reminds us, life is tenuous, even life in the quiet suburbs of a modern city, in the world's most powerful country, in the era of civilization's most sophisticated technology. There are no guarantees for nice people, for good people, for God's own people.

Like God's original words of creation, the statement of faith, "God created me," confronts a dark and formless reality. Yet, like those words, it carries the promise of light and life and beauty. There is no darkness that his word cannot dispel. There is no void that his presence cannot fill. There is no grief that his comfort cannot assuage. In other words, "God created me" are words of promise and hope. They direct us from darkness to light, from the present to the future, from reality to possibility.

Furthermore, this account of creation assures us, this all can happen more quickly than we can imagine—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye—with the speed of thought. True, God doesn't always operate this way. In fact, it doesn't seem to be his preferred way of doing things. But it is always a possibility. The God who moves with great deliberation can also act with gracious speed. And he is never more eager to act than when we need his care.

In one of his sermons, John Donne expresses God's willingness to help with these words.

God made Sun and Moon to distinguish seasons, and day and night, and we cannot have the fruits of the Earth but in their seasons. But God hath made no decree to distinguish the seasons of his mercies. In paradise the fruits were ripe the first minute, and in heaven it is always Autumn, his mercies are ever in their maturity. God never says, you should have come yesterday, he never says you must again tomorrow, but today if you will hear his voice, today he will hear you. He brought light out of darkness, not out of a lesser light; He can bring thy Summer out of Winter though thou have no Spring. All occasions invite his mercies, and all times are his seasons.

I have had the opportunity to visit Greece with a number of university study tours. One summer, the woman who had been our guide for several years described what it would be like for her to return to the village where she grew up. She was by that

time thoroughly urbanized and modernized, a woman of the world. She said if she went home the people there would still recognize her as someone they once knew, but to be sure, they would ask her this question: "Whose are you?"

In Greek villages to this day, a woman's identity is determined not by asking, Who are you? but Whose are you? To whom do you belong? Who claims you as his own? A man in traditional Greek thinking has his own identity, but a woman's identity is always connected to a man—either to her father, or to her husband.

Martin Luther's interpretation of the creed reminds us of the most important thing about us. As he interprets these great words of Genesis, the most essential question we can ever ask is not *who* we are, but *whose* we are. It's not our name, our profession, our fortune, or our accomplishments that matter most. The most important thing about us is the one to whom we belong.

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was arrested for helping to plan Hitler's death. His captors executed him just a few days before the end of World War II. While in prison, he produced a number of writings, including a poem entitled, "Who am I?"

It draws a sharp contrast between the way other people saw Bonhoeffer and the way he saw himself.

Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell's confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a squire from his country-house.
Who am I? They often tell me
I used to speak to my warders
Freely and friendly and clearly,
As though it were mine to command.
Who am I? They also tell me
I bore the days of misfortune proudly,
Like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
Struggling for breath,
Yearning for colours,
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness,
Weary and empty at praying, and ready to say
farewell to it all?

Who am I? This or the other?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
And before myself a . . . weakling?
Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
[But] whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine!

When Bonhoeffer asked himself, "Who are you?" he couldn't find an answer. But he did find an answer to the question, "Whose are you?" If wondering *who* we are leaves us uncertain or discouraged, then let's ask the other question. It's not *who* you are, it's *whose* you are that counts.

Can you say with all your heart, "I believe that God created me?" If you can, then you belong to God. Your identity is secure. You are everything you ever need to be.

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