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First Sunday of Lent

Angie O'Gorman | Mar. 11, 2011

We have to be very careful when it comes to Genesis. Heresies have been spun from its words and human lives ruined. Yes, our forbearers in faith were trying to understand the world around them and how it came to be. But, very specifically, tribal stories underlying the creation accounts were a way of grappling with the problem of evil.

First Sunday of Lent

Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7

Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17

Romans 5:12-19 or 5:12, 17-19

Matthew 4:1-11

Full text of the readings [1]

Before Genesis was the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation story. In the *Enuma Elish*, creation rises out of evil, formed from the bloodied remains of a defeated, uppity, female god named Tiamat. The lesson was that evil and violence were the very stuff and dynamic of creation. (Not to mention the fact that the Goddess had to be destroyed.) Creation is evil. Evil precedes good, and evil done in the name of the good is the way of the Gods. Walter Wink has called this the Myth of Redemptive Violence and refers us to the common cartoon for modern examples. Good always enters the scene in the form of violence -- a fist, a sword, a gun, a transformer, a drone -- and saves the day.

Genesis was and is an alternative to that story. That is why the Genesis traditions keep repeating: it was good, it was good, and God saw that it was good. In Genesis, women, men, and all of creation are made from and for love. And God saw that it was good. Violence and evil are neither creation?s foundation nor goal. (Yes, we still have a woman as a tool of evil needing to be banished. The Genesis authors were not fully free from their culture and cultic beliefs. Still, they?d come a long way.)

In Jesus? temptation in the desert, Matthew shows us something of the inner structure of evil, of how it works in our desires for power and control, for comfort, for most anything that gives our egos a boost. The long fast and solitude do not protect Jesus from being tempted; they may even have left him more vulnerable. But his practice gave him the strength, in the midst of upheaval and struggle, to remain true to his mission, his self, and his God. Here again we have the dynamic of fasting and penance not as a way of placating God, or of avoiding struggle, but as preparation to face our demons.

[This reflection is from *Coming to Consciousness: Reflections for Lent 2011* by Angie O'Gorman and is based on the lectionary readings for each day of Lent. *Coming to Consciousness* is a publication of Pax Christi USA and is reprinted here by permission of the author and Pax Christi USA.

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About the Author

Angie O?Gorman?s essays have been published in *America* magazine, *National Catholic Reporter*, and *Commonweal*. She has been involved in human rights work and nonviolent conflict resolution in the United States, Central America, and the West Bank. Her novel, *The Book of Sins* [4], was published last January.

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In a world that settles differences by armed violence and defines ?justice? as ?revenge,? Pax Christi USA [5] dares to break the cycle of violence by fostering reconciliation. Pax Christi USA is the national Catholic peace movement. Our membership includes more than 130 U.S. bishops, 800 parish sponsors, 650 religious communities, 75 high school and college campus groups, 300 local groups, and tens of thousands of individual members. The work of Pax Christi USA begins in personal life and extends to communities of reflection and action to transform structures of society. Pax Christi USA rejects war and every form of violence and domination.

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