

THE GROANING OF CREATION (Continuation)

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pain until now. (Rom 8:22)

Rom 8: 18-22

"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now."

Indirectly referring to the sin-story of Genesis 3, Paul explains the "restlessness" of creation as a reaction to the "futility" to which it had been subjected, not of its own will and undoing, but on account of "the one who was meant to subdue it" (v.20b).

To whom does this "subdue" refer? Most current translations of the text imply that the "subdue" is God. A good number of scholars support such textual interpretation, arguing that God alone has the right and the power to condemn all of creation to frustration because of human sin. However, there is good ground for believing that the "subdue" Paul had in mind was the one who, according to the original divine plan in Genesis 1-3, is meant to "subdue" the earth, namely, the entire human race in the representative figure of Adam.

Paul seems to be alluding to the vision of the creation accounts according to which the rest of creation finds its proper fulfilment only in relation to human beings – and vice versa. Having been dragged down because the human race has chosen to frustrate its own relationship to God, and not accepting its present desperate condition as final, creation cherished the hope that it too would be restored when relations between God and human beings would be set aright in Christ.

Jesus Christ: the New Adam and Embodiment of God's Faithfulness

Paul says in Rom 3:21 that God's "saving faithfulness" has been manifested through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. The fundamental problem, in Paul's view, is human sinfulness, the age-old blockage to God's work of creation and to human beings' co-responsible participation in this work. Paul conceives of Sin (with a capital "S") as a power that dwells within the human person and operates through his / her flesh or mortal body (cf. Rom 7:22-24).

By the mere fact that human beings are "flesh", they have an inclination to sin and are powerless to change that situation. "Flesh" is the term used by Paul to signify the weakness and corruptibility of human beings. The term points to their belonging to the world and being subject to temptation and desires that lead to doom and death. It is the dimension of the human personality through which Sin attacks and which Sin uses as its instrument.

By sending his Son "in the flesh", God reaches out the lost, alienated world enslaved by Sin, and freely offers a renewal of friendship. A wondrous interchange is intended – by the Son of God participates in the human condition of being in the flesh, so that by surrendering that flesh on the cross, human beings may participate in his victory.

When Jesus Christ took on flesh, we could picture him joining in our imprisonment in the body of death, so that he could unlock this prison from the inside. As the new Adam – flesh of our flesh – he encompassed all of us in his body. He then resolved the problem of human flesh by surrendering that flesh to destruction on the cross. Since we were united with him in the flesh – he being our new representative – we too were nailed with him to the cross. So just as we are all "in Adam" in a corporate solidarity in Sin, so we can be "in Christ" in the corporate solidarity of redemption, because the corporate body that was nailed to the cross was vindicated by the Father and raised

from the dead. In raising Christ from the dead, God ensured the victory of grace. The Creator has shown faithfulness by radically addressing in Christ the age-old blockage. Sin presents to the ongoing work of creation. This is the sense in which, for Paul, Christ embodies the saving faithfulness of God.

Obedience as the Climax of Christ's Faithfulness

It is faithfulness that moves the Creator to reach out and heal the broken relationship with the sinful world. It is an error to think that God demands a price for the forgiveness of Sin. The suffering and death of Christ are not to be seen as the "cost" that must be paid to God to save the world. Rather, the cost is demanded by the human situation. Christ suffered and died because he embodied God's faithfulness in a world alienated from its Creator, a world where the "sin-story in Adam" had set up encased structures of selfishness, self-interest and pride.

The world struck back at Jesus because in his teaching, in the company he kept and the stances he took, he consistently represented perfect human response to the God of grace. This abiding responsiveness rather than the following of a specific command, was what made up Christ's obedience unto death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:8).

Although he is God's Son, Jesus Christ perfectly modelled the right human creaturely relationship to God, thus reversing Adam's prideful aspiration to be "like God". In Adam is told the age-old story of human refusal to be a creature in love and responsibility before God. Christ facilitates and models the new possibility opened up by grace.

From the book by Bernardita Dianzon, FSP: Glimpses of Paul and His Message