

Wisdom Dancing

- Exploring creativity human and divine

OPENING THE WELL

First questions

Why is creativity important to us as Christians? Ask anyone to list the attributes of God, they will almost certainly begin with 'Creator'. 'Made in the image and likeness of God'¹ creativity must be must flow from the very essence of who we are. To grow in godliness should increase in the quality of creativity in our personal lives.

Scripture speaks of God being creative; the astonishing variety of references spiral around two primary reference points, 'power' and 'wisdom', which are themselves inseparably intertwined. Here is the environment within which our own experience of creativity finds its meaning and energy.

The masterpiece of God's creativity is the cosmos itself. We speak of it simply as 'creation'. A consequence of unimaginable power, we feel its continuing presence; not only in the huge physical forces at work within the world but also in the profound sense of the spiritual it conveys.

Of the many biblical words used to describe divine and human creativity, one stands out above all others, the Hebrew word *bara*. Found 46 times in scripture it is only ever used with reference to God creating. One aspect of this beautiful yet mysterious word may imply God's ability to bring into being 'something out of nothing' (Lat *ex nihilo*); an idea only implicit in the Hebrew scriptures but explicit in the New Testament:

'... so that what is seen is made out of things that are not visible ...'²

Spirit and Word

The power of God's creativity is repeatedly expressed in the two ideas of 'spirit' and 'word'.

'... a wind from God swept over that face of the waters ...'³

'... and God's Spirit hovered over the water ...'⁴

This image of *ruach* (wind, breath, spirit) - like a primeval zephyr blowing across the deep, or a 'windhover'⁵ hanging in the air in flight, or a broody-hen nurturing a cosmic

¹ Gen 1:26-27

² Heb 11:3

³ Gen 1:2 NRSV

⁴ Gen 1:2 Jerusalem Bible

⁵ An old English name for a kestrel



egg – introduces God’s creativity to us. This same *ruach* will go on to turn the red clay of *adamah* into *adam*, the first human being.⁶ God’s ‘spirit-breath’ sustains the very life within creation⁷ and inspires craftsman in their cunning and skill.⁸ It empowers all the creativity of Jesus and is at the heart of an authentic Christian expression of creativity:

‘... the wind blows where it wills ... so it is with everyone born of the Spirit ...’⁹

The ‘spirit’ and the ‘word’ of God are synonymous in God’s creativity:

‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were made
and all their host by the breath of his mouth’¹⁰

A person’s word is an expression of their very being and all the power associated with that. The Hebrew for the ‘creative word’ is *dabar*, it has close parallels with the Greek *logos*, which was seen as the ‘reason’ that pervaded and gave meaning to the universe. God’s word speaks the universe into existence and continually sustains its integrity.¹¹ It sets the scene for the creative power of the human word to bring life, encouragement, healing, forgiveness and judgement. God creates the possibilities of the wordsmith, whether prophet, poet, actor, singer, novelist, journalist, storyteller, teacher and others.

Creativity is about power, the ability to bring into being, if not from nothing, then certainly something that is unique, exciting and life-giving.

Wisdom

A final word that is intimately connected with creativity is ‘wisdom’. Creativity is about imagination, innovation and the ingenuity of ideas enabled by the practical dexterity and skill to bring them into reality; these are exactly the qualities of the Hebrew word *hokma*, meaning ‘wisdom’. It refers to the quality of God’s creative activity:

‘... by wisdom God founded the earth ...’¹²

Wisdom uniquely combines the mental process of thinking and planning with the physical activity of making it happen, this is creativity! God is the source of all wisdom, and for that reason it has two characteristics of ‘action’ and ‘values’.

Creative wisdom is about design and dexterity, it is the cunning of artisan and craftsman. God is ‘the maker of heaven and earth’.¹³ Divine hands and fingers are

⁶ Gen 2:7

⁷ cf Acts 17:25; Isa 42:5

⁸ cf Ex 31:3-5; 35:35

⁹ Jn 3:8

¹⁰ Ps 33:6

¹¹ Jn1:1-3 cf Col 1:17

¹² Prov 3:19

¹³ Gen 14:17



spoken of in terms of creation.¹⁴ God weaves and knits the human embryo in the womb like a textile worker.¹⁵ Shapes, fashions and forms individuals and nations like a potter working their wheel.¹⁶ Like an architect-builder God lays the foundations of the earth;¹⁷ when it comes to making the heavens we are presented with a divine metalworker,¹⁸ tentmaker or fabric designer.¹⁹

Among the human skills inspired by and expressing wisdom are metalworkers in brass and gold,²⁰ spinners, weavers and dyers, carpenters,²¹ husbandmen and sailors, even merchants plying their trade and others; creativity in every colour and hue.

Wisdom is practical action harmonising with the character of God. It is more than interesting ideas, it is communicating qualities and values. What is created, even if disturbing and provocative, should draw you to its source:

‘... ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are,
have been understood and seen through the things that he has made ...’²²

‘The God who made the world and everything in it ...
... that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him ...’²³

This is why an idol is more than wood, stone or metal carved into an image; it is what lies behind it, the values it communicates that is the issue.

The Messiah has the ‘Spirit of Wisdom’,²⁴ which we see in the creativity of Jesus. Our creativity, whether expressed as craft or character should match:

‘... the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy ... a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace’.²⁵

In Proverbs 8 there is a picture of God at work with creation with Wisdom personified alongside. It is popularly translated:

¹⁴ cf Ps 8:3; Job 12:9

¹⁵ Ps 139:13; Job 10:11

¹⁶ Jer 1:5; Gen 2:7; Isa 43:1

¹⁷ cf Prov 3:19; Ps 24:2

¹⁸ Job 37:18

¹⁹ Isa 40:22 cf Zech 12:1

²⁰ 1Chr 22:15; 2Chr 2:6; IKg 7:14

²¹ Ex 35:25, 35; 2Chr 2:6

²² Rm 1:20

²³ Acts 17: 24, 27

²⁴ Isa 11:2

²⁵ Ja 3:17-18



‘ ... I was beside him like a master-worker;²⁶ delighting him day after day,
always at play in his presence, at play everywhere in his world,
delighting to be with the human race²⁷

Here is wisdom playing alongside God during the work of creation; creativity as joyful and playful as it is awesome and serious!

Reading and Resources

- R Alter '*The Art of Biblical Narrative*' Basic Books 1983
E de Bono '*Serious Creativity*' HarperCollins 1995
C Booker '*The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*' Continuum 2004
J Cameron '*The Artist's Way*' Pan Books 1995
J Cameron '*The Vein of Gold*' Pan Books 1997
M Csikszentmihalyi '*Creativity*' Harper Perennial 1997
JE Davies (Ed) '*Stories of Change: narrative and social movements*' State University of New York 2002
NM Jackson (Ed) '*Right to Dance*' Banff Centre Press 2004
A Koestler '*The Act of Creation*' Picador 1975
C Seerveld '*Rainbows for the Fallen World*' Stride Publications 1988

²⁶ The stronger Hebrew reading is 'a child', 'master-worker' is a later rabbinic tradition

²⁷ Prov 8:30-31 Jerusalem Bible (slightly adapted for an inclusive reading)

