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God the all-creating : from conception to resurrection **'Your works are wonderful'**

Psalm 139 vs. 13-18 (Holy Bible New International Version)

¹³ For you created my inmost being;

You knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place.

When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

¹⁶ your eyes saw my unformed body.

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, o God! How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.

When I awake, I am still with you.

God is the source of human creativity

I have never considered myself to be an outstandingly creative person. I am not gifted with a lot of creativity in the sphere of playing music, writing poems or painting pictures. I haven't a quick sense of humour or a lot of brilliant ideas. Yet the Bible speaks in Genesis 1:27 of human beings being created in the great Creator's image. This implies that when I was created I was given some creative ability. I have discovered that in daily life I am creative in the sense of knowing how to pack a suitcase or to arrange things in a kitchen cupboard with skill. Also in my professional life as a researcher I find I have the capacity to separate, differentiate, define and analyse, all of which are creative actions. At this moment I am analysing texts in which doctors write about their medical errors. I separate the words they use which I consider to be relevant, differentiate them by putting them into categories and then try to define 'reflection in action'. I try to find out whether 'reflection in action' is able to increase awareness of error and eventually even to prevent the making of errors. Writing medical papers is also creative work. Composing an academic medical text is a very delicate creative process of working with words until finally the paper comes to 'birth'. At least that is how it feels when I am doing it. And is writing a Bible study for Medicine of the Person not also a creative process ?

Besides all this creativity I found in myself, I realized that I enjoy the creativity of the theatre. When I watch contemporary dance which is my favourite form of artistic expression, I feel a spark of excitement setting my heart on fire. It takes me up to a higher level in which I wonder at God's immense creativity, and I look in awe at the wonderful way in which he has made man. I see the gracefulness of the human body in harmony with the music and the stage design. At the same moment I find myself praising God the almighty creator.

For me, the human body is the greatest piece of art. In fact, it was the wonderful creation of the human body that was my main motivation for studying medicine.

I conclude that God is the source of all creativity and that we all reflect this characteristic of his to some degree.

Now I want to show you a video of one of my favourite pieces of contemporary dance which only takes a minute and a half. I chose it because it moves me deeply. The dancer is Sedrig Verwoert, a 21 year old Dutch dancer. With this excellent expression of creativity he won the 2013 Eurovision Young Dancers Festival.

Video Sedrig Verwoert, the 5th element (1:30 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmrciSS3flk>

Psalm 139

When I look in awe at the gracefulness of the human body, who is it that deserves to receive my awe? David says in Psalm 139 that it is the Lord God who has created life in all its aspects. In a moment we shall look more closely at the way in which David first describes life in the mother's womb, then at what he says about life after birth and finally at what he says about life after death. Before we do that, let us consider how this section of the psalm fits into the psalm as a whole.

This psalm, created by David, is a song and a poem which has a beauty and a unity of its own, and reveals four attributes of God. The first is the Lord's omniscience (vs. 1-6). God's knowledge of me is complete. He is the all-knowing One. Secondly we learn of his omnipresence (vs. 7-12). God is with me in every place; he is the One who is always present. Then in vs. 13-18 which we've just read, we find God's creatorship. God has the sovereign ownership of every part of me. He is in control of our whole being from conception to resurrection, as we shall see. Finally, in vs. 19-24, David speaks of the Lord's holiness. It is God's will that I should be like him.

What David actually says in this psalm is that my God knows everything, so I can't fool him; my God is everywhere, so I can't flee from him; and my God can do all things, so I can't fight against him. The final question is: What should I do? The answer this psalm gives us is that I should surrender to Him, in awe, reverence and worship.

Now we shall look in more detail at vs. 13-18.

Life in the mother's womb (vs. 13-15)

Possibly the greatest evidence of God's power is the birth of a child. Here we read about the wonder of how the life of each one of us began. David considered a new born baby to be a miracle from the hand of God. And perhaps all of us, whether we're doctors or not, can agree with Eugene Peterson when he said, 'In the presence of birth we don't calculate, we marvel.'

The first word 'For' in verse 13 indicates that what follows (vs. 13-18) is an explanation of God's omniscience and of his omnipresence, already expressed in verse 1 ('Oh Lord, you have searched me and you know me'). How can it be that the Lord knows me totally and surrounds me wherever I go? It is because from conception and gestation, through the days of my life and on to 'awaking' in eternity, He is my creator and possessor. The idea of me being born to these parents, with these siblings, in this country and at this particular point in time, springs from the creative mind of God. He wanted me in the first place to exist and to be alive here in this world now at the present moment. Is this not staggering and mind-boggling? The Lord created me, says verse 13. 'To create' means 'to acquire a possession', i.e. to purchase, and in the case of the Lord and the created order, 'to enjoy creative possession'. I belong to the Lord who takes delight in my existence. I am His, because He created me.

What more do these verses say about this creative process? God created both the invisible and the visible parts of my being. The invisible part, 'my inmost being' in verse 13, is literally 'my kidneys', as in my Dutch Bible. The kidneys were seen as the seat of the emotions, the sentient being. Something that is sentient is capable of experiencing sensations through the physical senses. This is in contrast to 'my frame' in verse 15 which refers to the bony structure, the physical being. So both the visible and the invisible parts of my bodily existence are the result of God's creation.

'You knit me together in my mother's womb', verse 13 goes on to say. God did not choose to reproduce human life by making babies to grow on trees so that you could pick one off, or to grow underground so that you could dig one out of the depths of the earth. No, the Lord has chosen to cause the unborn child to grow in its mother's womb as the fruit of an act of human love. The child's body is beautifully woven, knitted together within the body of its mother to which it is connected by thousands of threads, like a spider's web. Is this why the relationship between mother and child is unique and the only relationship that is initially unconditional? The German psychologist Erich Fromm (1900-1980) called a mother's love the highest form of love.

As we read on in verse 14, we come across the word 'fearful' in 'I am fearfully made'. It has nothing to do with being afraid but rather means "I am shuddering with astonishment; I am trembling with awe". It leads David to exclaim, 'Your works are wonderful' (verse 14).

Life after birth (vs. 16-18a)

In these verses David recognizes that God not only brings us into existence, but also makes us the object of his attention. God's eyes saw 'my unformed body'.

I was worth being seen by the great God, although I was still an embryo. This is in a very early stage, comprising the first eight weeks of development after fertilization. Human life starts as a zygote, a bump of cells, and after only three weeks its organ systems begin to develop. It is at this very beginning that the Lord sees me in my mother's womb.

He doesn't only see me in this secret place, but also already knows every day allotted to me, even before any of them exist. My whole life is known to Him.

God's knowledge of David leads him to express in verse 17 his wonder at the thoughts of God, precious and impossible to number. Referring to humans, Linus Pauling (1901-1994), an American scientist and social philosopher with Nobel Prizes in Chemistry and Peace, stated that 'the best way to have one good idea is to have lots of ideas'. If this is true for us, what can we say about the mind of God who is the source of all thought and without whom not a single thought could exist?

So verses 16-18 assure us of the nearness of our Creator, who knows every day of our life and whose thoughts about us are more than we can ever imagine. We know that our life is safe with the Lord as we trust and obey Him.

As doctors we are inclined to look at the development of the embryo with scientific eyes: when and how will the different parts of the foetus develop ?

We may have in mind cases we have seen among the patients who come to our consulting rooms of disorders developing at this stage, but right now let us try to see the development of new life as a wonder of God's creation. I want to show you to see a real life video in fast motion of the development of a foetus in its mother's womb.

Video of human life in utero (3:42 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJlKe9eJLh4>

Resurrection (vs. 18b)

But that is not all: there is still eternity ! 'When I awake, I am still with you', says verse 18. This awakening does not only refer to waking up after a night's sleep but may also refer to the great awakening when our bodies will be brought back to life. We cannot escape from the Lord. After we have died we will meet him. The verb 'to awake' is used elsewhere in the psalms in the sense of resurrection, as in Psalm 17, verse 15, where we read: 'And I – in righteousness I shall see your face; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with seeing your likeness'.

It is beyond me to imagine how the Lord will resurrect those who have died. My late mother had difficulties in believing this. Recently, on her birthday, I visited her grave where she was buried three years ago. I sat under an old weeping willow in the small graveyard in the countryside, looking up at the large branches of the tree above me. I was alone with my thoughts. I remembered the questions my mother once raised about our bodies being resurrected. She wondered, 'How will it be? Will there be enough room for everybody who has died throughout human history in every part of the world?' I understood something of my mother's hesitation. But this psalm reminds me again of God's immense creativity, and I am reassured that he has the solution to the question of the innumerable multitude of people who will be resurrected at the end of time.

I conclude with this: when we consider the wonderful works of the all-creating God who is at work from conception to resurrection, our only response must be to look in wonder at his works, to stand in deep awe of Him and to praise his name.

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