

Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh,
Truth is Stranger Than It Used To Be
Chapter Six: "The Empowered Self"

1. What is the meaning of the lines from Lewis Carroll's last verse of the Mad Gardener's song? 108

He thought he saw an Argument
That proved he was the Pope:
He looked again and found it was
A bar of mottled soap.
"A fact so dread," he faintly said,
"Extinguishes all hope!"

2. What is Walsh and Middleton's starting point biblically for answering the question who am I? In relation to postmodern concerns? Why do they start there? 109

Imago dei because it is the biblical way of identifying humanity.

3. What does the postmodern or hypermodern self fluctuate between? What was the nature of the modernist view of humanity? 110

A new form of autonomy and the experience of victimization. Personal advancement, aggressive control, refashioning one's image plus insatiable desire for unlted experience of carnivalesque smorgasbord of life: meaningless, powerlessness, rootlessness, homelessness, fragmentation.

Hence, tyrant (homo auto) and victim.

Modernist view is that of a imperialist that was used to legitimate patriarchal, European ideology. Now there is this pull between tyrant and victim, centered and decentered, imperial and impotent.

4. When do Walsh and Middleton understand Genesis 1 to have been written? Why is this important for their thesis? 111

Because Israel's experience in Babylonian exile is like our experience to day in postmodern culture where we are pulverized by an alien culture.

5. What is the story of the Babylonian Enuma Elish, and how does it serve ideologically on behalf of the royal personnel of Babylon? 115ff.

It presents man as servant to the gods and was used by royal personages to keep the people in that subservient position. 117

6. What would have been the options for Israelites in conceptualizing their humanity in the midst of an Enuma Elish sanctioned culture? What were their two options? 117

1. To accept the consensus of the day and be engulfed by it.
2. Reassert their own view of man as *imago dei*. This was why Gen. 1 and the whole account of creation were written at that time with its use of Babylonian symbols and terms put to Jewish use. This vision of creation and of God dwarfs Babylon and shows a new vision of God and the world/ There is an option over against the two basic alternatives: one of being the subservient slave of the gods and the autonomous demigods 119

7. How does the notion of the *imago Dei* offset the idea of man as an insignificant nobody? 121

Gen. 1; Psa. 8. The fact of being God's image and likeness is extended to all, not just the king! Gen. 1 calls into question the ideology of victimization. We all have the privilege and task of ruling the world.

8. In what ways is the Gen. 1 narrative about man as *imago Dei* an antidote to the notion of autonomy as well? 123

We are creatures, finite, dependent. Use our power and rule for blessing of others. No ruling over each other; rather bone of bone, flesh of flesh. Condemnation of Cain, Lamech.

9. How does Enuma Elish legitimate violence against enemies? How does the creation account in Gen. 1 offset holy war ideology whereas Enuma Elish justifies it over against the enemies of the king? 125

EE is transposed to human history in which the political enemies of the empire are vanquished as the agents of chaos (chaoskampf = combat myth)

In Gen.1 God subdues no primordial monster to bring creation into being and in which each creature is good. A creation originally good sustains an entirely different sort of historical action.

10. What place is there for violence or how does it come about in the biblical story? 125

- There is the human vocation established in Gen. 1-2 (the toledot of the heavens and the earth)
- This is followed by the rebellion of imago dei to become dei, thus leading to violence, which is exemplified in Cain/Lamech, the antediluvians, and at Babel.
- God intervenes briefly with Cain/Lamech, the antediluvians, and at Babel especially where systematic expressions of power are prototypically brought to judgment and a screeching halt.
- God then seeks to get the story back on track with Abraham and Israel as the central agents in plot resolution.

11. What is the significance of the biblical doctrine of election as exemplified in Abraham and Moses? 127ff.

Abraham and Israel are called by God as his imago dei to restore the world back to its original blessing: in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (12: 1); for all the earth is mine (19: 6).

So with Moses, who as the first reluctant prophet, is called to deliver Israel from Egypt and get the plot unstuck so that God's purposes for Israel might be fulfilled.

12. What is the place and purpose of the call of the judges and of the kings of Israel and the role of the prophets in the biblical story? 130f

- Judges/Gideon: to restore God's elect people to their vocation in world history.
- Kings: elected by God or not (David was), they were thought by Israel herself to be the means of surviving in the hostile political world of their day (as the book of Judges seems to imply with the phrase, in those days there was no king in Israel). Yet, the threat was also internal, ethical and moral as well as external.
- The prophets were designed to call Israel's kings and the people back to covenant obedience, yet for the most part, they were ignored.
- After lengthy disobedience, the plot really gets stuck with two captivities.

13. Explain the profound significance of the book of Ecclesiastes and its and the OT's use of the word *hebel* as a commentary on the failure of the Israelite monarchy. 131ff.

The conflict between the weightiness of God and the worthlessness of idols in Jer. 2 provides two models or ways of being human as well, for those who trust in either God or idols as Psa. 115 makes clear. The glory or weightiness of being human is destroyed in the process and rendered *hebel*.

The second use of the word Hebel is that it is a name for Abel, who, paradoxically, is not the one reduced to worthlessness as his murderer Cain is. Abel has staying power as Heb. 11 testifies.

14. What is the significance of Abel eschatologically and the reversal and paradox of redemption? 134ff

Violent grasping at power renders all mankind and creation hebel; yet God will one day reverse this trend by redemption.