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The articles in this journal are indexed, abstracted, or listed in: *Elenchus of Biblica*; *Internationale Zeitschriftenschan für Bibelwissenschaft und Grenzgebiete*; *New Testament Abstracts*; *Index Theologicus*/Zeitschrifteninbaltsdienst *Theologie*; *Old Testament Abstracts*; *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*; *American Theological Library Association*; *Religious and Theological Abstracts*; *Seventh-day Adventist Periodical Index*; *Theologische Zeitschrift*; *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*.

EDITORIAL: CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION ON CREATION

This past semester I led a doctoral seminar on the “History of the Interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2.” As we read and discussed the literature of the ages, it became evident that interpreters often shifted their methodology of biblical interpretation when they addressed the opening chapters of Genesis. There was an evident attempt to interpret the creation stories in harmony with the conceptual view of the cosmos and the origins of the cosmos in each age. For example, Philo of Alexandria, in *De opificio mundi*, attempted to describe the Mosaic rendering of creation as a reflection of Plato’s instantaneous creation portrayed in the *Timaeus*. Many Christians, including Augustine, continued the *tendenz*. Similarly, the theological point that the cosmos is one just as God is One, with which Philo ended this work, fits well into the geocentric cosmos received from Pythagoras and perpetuated by Ptolemy. In the wake of the Copernican revolution and the shift in worldviews from theocentric to naturalistic, the interpreters of Genesis tended to shift from a creation without time to a creation through greater and greater time. With the popularization of progressive evolution the onus was felt to accommodate Genesis 1 and 2 to the dictates of science. The text of Genesis did not change, but the reception of it certainly did.

It is true that these chapters are a different kind of history than Judges, Samuel, and Kings. There were no human eye witnesses to the creation of our world. The descriptions of God’s creative acts are given as both theology and history. They are both brief and all encompassing. As such, these first two chapters of the Bible leave more questions than answers, and yet present the basis for the whole relationship between God and humans.

This issue of *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, focusing on creation, is intended as part of a continuing conversation on the part of those who want to retain a high view of Scripture, even in the opening chapters of Genesis. The articles contained in this issue cover a wide range of issues in biblical theology related to the doctrine of creation. Of course, it is not possible in one small journal either to address all aspects of creation or be exhaustive on any single question. The intent is to add to the discussion.

Roberto Ouro demonstrates the importance in seeing the differences as well as the similarities between Hebrew Scriptures and other texts from the ancient Near East. Though he did not write this article specifically for a creation issue, it is included here because his conclusions are helpful for interpreting the opening chapters of Genesis. Similarly, though she does not address Genesis 1 and 2 directly, Jo Ann Davidson’s article on biblical narratives as both aesthetically pleasing and true emphasizes a principle that is appropriate

here. Jiří Moskala offers an exegetical study on “in the beginning,” identifying six grammatical options and five interpretive possibilities for the first word and first sentence in Genesis. He also demonstrates how the literary structure of Genesis 1 organizes the creation as a “forming” and “filling” sequence. Moskala’s second article shows the unified diversity of the two creation accounts in Genesis. Karen K. Abrahamson suggests that the theology-and-science dialogue is too often dominated by the Augustinian underpinnings of most Western thought, including both theology and science. She suggests that the answer lies not in abandoning Christianity in favor of non-Western thought, but in fresh biblical study that can critique the Augustinian foundations. Her article critiquing dual soul-and-body creations within the Christian tradition cautions those who see God’s special creation as including all of nature, not just the human soul, and to recognize the presence of “immortal soul” issues throughout science and theology. Terry D. Robertson addresses the tensions of authorities faced by the student researcher in addressing information on the creation/evolution debate. Randall W. Younker and Richard M. Davidson address *nāqiu’* in Gen 1:6-7 as it has been interpreted and misinterpreted throughout history and then provide a fresh study of the word as used in biblical contexts. The book reviewed by H. Thomas Goodwin also relates to an important issue involved in the creation discussions: care for the Earth.

Every few months yet another book comes out proclaiming itself to be the answer for how evangelical Christianity can accommodate the first chapters of Genesis to evolutionary explanations for the origin of life and the beginnings of humans. Many have nothing new to add to the discussion. John H. Walton’s *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* is an exception. Walton does have something new to add. His proposal that the Genesis creation accounts are intended to describe functional creation, rather than material creation, is presented in new detail. This issue includes four appreciative critiques of Walton’s book by Jan Åge Sigvartsen, Martin Hanna, Nicholas Miller, and Jacques B. Doukhan. Together they show how Walton’s insights into the functional aspects of the Genesis 1 creation story are helpful, but that his rejection of any material creation within the narrative causes more problems than it solves, especially regarding the aspects of evil and death.

This issue on creation neither answers nor even asks all the questions. It is offered to help those who are seeking to view Genesis 1 and 2 as an integral part of God’s revelation about Himself in relation to ourselves and our world.

JWR

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS

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Introduction

In 1902, the noted Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch presented a series of lectures on comparative studies under the auspices of the German Oriental Society. Delitzsch's lectures, entitled "Babel und Bibel," claimed that the literature of the Bible was dependent on, and even borrowed from, the literature of Mesopotamia. He questioned the appropriateness of the traditional theological terminology used to describe the Bible (e.g., revelation, inspiration) in light of its now evident dependency.¹ Delitzsch's work spawned a movement called "Pan-Babylonianism," which argued that all world myths and Christian Scriptures (OT and NT) were simply versions of Babylonian mythology.² As the series developed, however, it became clear that the lecturer's motives were not entirely pure. His interest was to minimize the values of OT teaching so that it could be contrasted with that of the NT.³

The widespread interest in finding connections between the Bible and other ANE cultures has bred its own reaction in the warning raised by several scholars against exaggerating the importance of such similarities, a practice baptized with the name "parallelomania."⁴ Of particular concern has been the often tacit assumption that such parallels can be construed as evidence for a genetic connection between the cultures that share them. Despite such warnings, the pendulum of biblical studies has continued to swing back and forth with remarkable regularity over the generations, as initial archeological discoveries have led to enthusiastic claims of similarities with various biblical practices and the implied, if not always stated, conclusion that these constitute *the source* for the biblical practice in question. Only in the afterglow of more

¹For further discussion on the question of revelation and inspiration, see A. M. Rodríguez, "Ancient Near Eastern Parallels to the Bible and the Question of Revelation and Inspiration," *JATS* 12/1 (2001): 51-57.

²See M. W. Chavalas, "Assyriology and Biblical Studies: A Century of Tension," in *Mesopotamia and the Bible*, ed. M. W. Chavalas and K. L. Younger Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 21-67, esp. 34.

³See H. B. Huffmon, "Babel und Bibel: The Encounter between Babylon and the Bible," in *Backgrounds for the Bible*, ed. M. P. O'Connor and D. N. Freedman (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 125-136.

⁴S. Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *JBL* 81 (1962): 1.

careful inspection has the questionable nature of these parallels become apparent.

Changing views about the biblical patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, provide a vivid example of this process. Many of the supposed parallels turned out not to be parallel at all. Often Israelite practices had been read into the cuneiform texts rather than legitimately being found there. What valid parallels did exist turned out to have been widely practiced, often over a long period of time, rather than limited to any particular epoch, much less the early second millennium.⁵

Methodological maturity began to be displayed in the careful work of W. W. Hallo, who promoted a balanced method called the “contextual approach,” which seeks to identify and discuss both similarities (comparative) and differences (contrastive) that may be observed between the Bible and the texts from the ANE by looking for diachronic and synchronic variations.⁶ “Hallo’s goal, ‘is not to find the key to every biblical phenomenon in some ancient Near Eastern precedent, but rather to silhouette the biblical text against its wider literary and cultural environment.’ Thus, we must not succumb either to ‘parallelomania’ or to ‘parallelophobia.’”⁷ This methodological corrective has exposed the dangers inherent in research that ignores either similarities or differences between the OT and the ANE.

Therefore, there are similarities between the ANE and the OT on historical, cultural, social, and religious backgrounds; but there are also differences on conceptual, functional, and theological backgrounds. J. M. Sasson has promoted some goals that should be set forth before making biblical connections: What are the differences in contexts? Are the texts in question of the same literary genre? Is etymological kinship always useful in helping to make comparisons?⁸ Our study is focused on several topics such as the gods, cosmogony and cosmology, and temples and rituals, and will investigate both similarities and differences between the OT and the ANE.

Methodological Principles of Comparative Study

A major methodological problem confronts anyone wishing to relate ANE texts to the OT.⁹ Control needs to be established over matters such as genre,

⁵F. E. Greenspahn, “Introduction,” in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. F. E. Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 6-7.

⁶W. W. Hallo, “Biblical History in Its Near Eastern Setting: The Contextual Approach,” in *Scripture in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method*, ed. C. D. Evans, W. W. Hallo, and J. B. White, Theological Monograph Series 34 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1980), 1-26.

⁷Chavalas, 43.

⁸J. M. Sasson, “Two Recent Works on Mari,” *AfO* 27 (1980): 129.

⁹See Rodríguez, 48-51, for discussion on the problem of similarities.

purpose, and religious and theological backgrounds. Unfortunately, there is evidence that scholars have tended to “biblicize ancient Near Eastern documents before they are compared with OT materials.”¹⁰ At the same time, the biblical documents are often interpreted mythologically.

Sasson has suggested that “it is imperative that the literature of each culture be appreciated on its own merits” before it is compared with the biblical texts.¹¹ Whenever we discuss the “relationship,” “connection,” “association,” “correspondence,” “parallelism,” “similarity,” and so on between them, as Kitchen notes, “it is necessary to deal individually and on its own merits with each possible or alleged case of relationship or borrowing by making a detailed comparison of the full available data from both the Old Testament and the Ancient Orient and by noting the results.”¹²

Over thirty-three years ago, S. Talmon published what has become a classic essay on the principles and problems of using the comparative method in biblical interpretation.¹³ He isolated four major principles:

(1) Proximity in time and place, that is, geographically and especially chronologically distant comparisons.

(2) The priority of inner biblical parallels, that is, analysis of a particular text comprehensively on its own merits, followed by a careful analysis of and comparisons between the various biblical texts of a topic *before* comparing them with other ANE texts of a topic.

(3) Correspondence of social function, that is, the need to treat societal phenomena by paying close attention to their function in the developing structure of the Israelite body politic *before* one engages in comparison with parallel phenomena in other ANE societies. With regard to texts in particular, the point is that if a certain (kind of) text has a specific function in a society, comparative work should see to it that the corresponding (kind of) text in the other society has a similar function in that society. This principle is actually a plea for paying due attention to the literary *Gattung* (genre) of the composition and its concomitant *Sitz im Leben* (setting of life), and using that as one of the major criteria for comparison with other compositions within its historical stream.

¹⁰J. M. Sasson, “On Relating ‘Religious’ Texts to the Old Testament,” *MAARAV* 3/2 (1982): 223.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 224.

¹²K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1966), 87-88.

¹³S. Talmon, “The ‘Comparative Method’ in Biblical Interpretation—Principles and Problems,” in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. F. E. Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 381-419 [Reprinted by permission of E. J. Brill from *Supplements to VTI* 29 (1977): 320-56].

(4) The holistic approach to texts and comparisons, that is, the holistic approach always should be given preference over the atomistic. Similar elements in two different cultures should be compared under the control of their shared comparable function within their distinctive cultures. If a genre of text had a particular function in the civilization in which it was composed, then it is important that one compare it with the corresponding genre of text from another culture that fulfills the same function there.¹⁴

When we come to the matter of the relationship between Ugaritic literature and the OT, the comparison is basically between different genres of literature. As P. C. Craigie says,

Ugaritic has provided no prophetic poetry. It has left us no unambiguous examples of psalmody, with the exception of those passages which might be identified as originally hymnic, but have survived only through integration within different and larger literary forms (myth or legend), and it has no extensive examples of literary narrative prose. This observation is important, for it means that virtually all Hebrew-Ugaritic comparative studies involve the comparison of *different* literary forms.¹⁵

Now, more than twenty-five years later, the situation has not changed much. It has become almost customary in modern scholarship to hold, for example, that Habakkuk 3 was influenced by Canaanite poetry. It may be questioned, however, whether this argument pays due attention to the difference between the two literary genres. Therefore, what scholars have actually practiced when comparing Ugaritic texts and Habakkuk 3 is not really a comparison of two literary wholes from different cultures and religions, but an *ad hoc* comparison of several fragments of Ugaritic myths and a part of the OT prophetic literature.¹⁶

In studies comparing Ugaritic mythology and OT literature in general, too much emphasis has been put on similarity or the “fact” of sameness in form,¹⁷ and insufficient distinction has been made between the synchronic approach and the comparative-diachronic approach.

According to Walton, there are ten important principles that must be kept in mind when doing comparative studies:

1. Both similarities and differences must be considered.
2. Similarities may suggest a common cultural heritage or cognitive environment rather than borrowing.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵P. C. Craigie, “Ugarit and the Bible: Progress and Regress in 50 Years of Literary Study,” in *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic*, ed. G. D. Young (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 107, emphasis original.

¹⁶See D. T. Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 148.

¹⁷Cf. A. Gibson, *Biblical Semantic Logic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 140, 24.

3. It is not uncommon to find similarities at the surface but differences at the conceptual level and *vice versa*.

4. All elements must be understood in their own context as accurately as possible before cross-cultural comparisons are made (i.e., careful background study must precede comparative study).

5. Proximity in time, geography, and spheres of cultural contact all increase the possibility of interaction leading to influence.

6. A case for literary borrowing requires identification of likely channels of transmission.

7. The significance of differences between two pieces of literature is minimized if the works are not of the same genre.

8. Similar functions may be performed by different genres in different cultures.

9. When literary or cultural elements are borrowed, they may in turn be transformed into something quite different by those who borrowed them.

10. A single culture will rarely be monolithic, either in a contemporary cross-section or in consideration of a passage of time.¹⁸

The areas in which comparison can take place are many and varied. Similarities of grammar, vocabulary, and syntax have all been enormously helpful in working out some of the obscure details of Hebrew. Religious and social institutions such as sacrifice, priesthood, temples, prophecy, kingship, and family structures can each be studied, comparing what is found in the ANE at large to what is attested in Israel. Similarities can help us to appreciate areas of continuity and influence, while differences are often traceable to theology.

Concepts and beliefs such as the origin of the cosmos, the structure of the cosmos, the origin and role of humanity, the existence of evil, the afterlife, and the retribution principle all have a basis for comparison. Each of the categories listed above depends on analyses of the pertinent literature. Nevertheless, the literature itself is yet another area in which similarities

¹⁸J. H. Walton, "Cultural Background of the Old Testament," in *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation*, ed. D. S. Dockery, K. A. Mathews, and R. B. Sloan (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 256; idem, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 26-27; see also J. Tigay, "On Evaluating Claims of Literary Borrowing," in *The Tablet and the Scroll*, ed. M. Cohen et al. (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1993), 250-255. For discussion of these points of theory and others, see T. Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1991), 30-36; K. van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 1-9; and W. W. Hallo, "Compare and Contrast: The Contextual Approach to Biblical Literature," in *The Bible in Light of Cuneiform Literature: Scripture in Context III*, ed. W. W. Hallo, B. W. Jones, and G. L. Mattingly, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies* 8 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990), 1-30.

and differences occur. Various genres were common to a number of Near Eastern cultures (e.g., wisdom, hymns, history, law). Often the very forms of the literature can be profitably compared (e.g., proverbs, treaties/covenants, casuistic law). Even literary devices may be shared by cultures and compared (e.g., certain metaphors, word pairs).

Finally, as Ringgren points out,

Comparative research in the Biblical field has often become a kind of “parallel hunting.” Once it has been established that a certain biblical expression or custom has a parallel outside the Bible, the whole problem is regarded as solved. It is not asked, whether or not the extra-Biblical element has the same place in life, the same function in the context of its own culture. The first question that should be asked in comparative research is that of the *Sitz im Leben* and the meaning of the extra-Biblical parallel adduced. It is not until this has been established that the parallel can be utilized to elucidate a Biblical fact.¹⁹

The Gods

Theogony/Ontology

When we compare the ANE ideas of theogony to the biblical portrayal of YHWH, the most obvious difference is seen in the absence of any theogony in the OT. The biblical text offers no indication that Israel considered YHWH as having an origin, and there are no other gods to bring into existence either by procreation or separation. Since the cosmos is not viewed as a manifestation of divine attributes, Israel’s cosmogony develops without any need of theogony.

The worship of YHWH was to be monotheistic and exclusivistic. Cities in the ANE often were filled with temples to various gods. Each of Babylon’s nine city gates was dedicated to a different god. Furthermore, the practitioners of the other religions often expended great effort either identifying their gods with the gods of other nations or demonstrating the subordination of other gods to their patron deity. Such god lists or stories of how YHWH had assumed the powers or duties of other deities would have been inconceivable to orthodox worshipers of YHWH. Israel’s God demanded more than a special place in their pantheons and hearts; he demanded their entire hearts, souls, and strength (Deut 6:5).²⁰

The OT portrays orthodox Yahwists as consistently and vehemently opposed to the worship of any gods alongside or in competition with

¹⁹H. Ringgren, “Israel’s Place Among the Religions of the Ancient Near East,” in *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel*, VTSup 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 1, cited in Talmon, 402.

²⁰See D. I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, 1st ed. (Jackson, MI: Evangelical Theological Society, 1988), 67-68.

YHWH. The book of Deuteronomy is characterized by a harsh polemic against any compromise with foreigners lest they turn their hearts away from YHWH. The prophets follow in the tradition of Deuteronomy, denouncing the veneration of deities other than YHWH with the strongest language. Idolatrous practices are treated as spiritual harlotry (Judg 2:17; 8:27, 33), an abomination (Deut 13:14-15), detestable (Deut 29:16), foolishness (Isa 40:18-20; 41:6-7; 44:9-20; 46:1-2; Jer 10:1-10), and utterly disgusting (Ezek 8:10 + 37 times in Ezekiel). According to the orthodox Yahwist, the God of Israel would brook no rivals. In this respect, the Hebrew view of Israel's relationship to its patron deity differed fundamentally from the perceptions of all the other nations around.²¹

Within the ANE context the words of Moses in Deut 4:5-8 were revolutionary. According to this text, the Israelites' knowledge of the will of their divine patron and their sense of his living presence among them were unique in their time. The Hebrew record of the self-disclosure of the God of Israel—who was at the same time the Lord of heaven and earth—by his mighty acts and by his revelation at Sinai, describes a unique moment in the history of the ANE.²²

The God of Israel was not the personification of the forces of nature and did not need the assistance of other gods or the participation of a king and his subjects in a divine struggle to maintain order in the universe, nor did he need to be tended or fed in temples. He is the transcendent one who created an inanimate universe of nature out of nothing and who continually maintains and controls it by his power. Oswalt states: "In many ways this is the profoundest insight of Hebrew religion. Whatever God is, he is not the world around us."²³

Furthermore, "Moses understood fully that unless the link between Creator and creation was broken, it would become impossible in any ultimate sense to maintain God's unity and exclusiveness, and his immunity to magic, all of which were central to the new faith."²⁴ Brichto notes that in the OT, nature is impersonal and the realm of ultimate power is personal, occupied by YHWH alone. In contrast, the ANE at large perceives nature as personal (the realm occupied by the gods) and the outside sphere of control attributes as impersonal.²⁵

²¹D. I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 69-70.

²²Ibid., 110-111.

²³J. N. Oswalt, "Golden Calves and the 'Bull of Jacob': The Impact on Israel of Its Religious Environment," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration*, ed. A. Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 13.

²⁴Ibid., 15.

²⁵H. C. Brichto, *The Names of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 61.

Existing above and apart from nature, God has not kept hidden his character and will. The gods of the other peoples did not reveal their will in clear and certain terms. As Jacobsen describes *Enlil*, “Man can never be fully at ease with Enlil, can never know what he has in mind . . . In his wild moods of destructiveness he is unreachable, deaf to all appeals,”²⁶ and as Kramer explains, “The proper course for a Sumerian Job to pursue was not to argue and complain in the face of seemingly unjustifiable misfortune, but to plead and wail, lament and confess, his inevitable sins and failings. But will the gods give heed to him, a lone and not very effective mortal, even if he prostrates and humbles himself in heartfelt prayer? Probably not.”²⁷

Revolutionary, then, was Deut 4:6-8 in praise of the Mosaic law as “your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples” and of Israel’s secure relationship to the Lord. Unlike *Enlil*, God is characteristically one who has revealed “what he has in mind” and who hears our appeals. The other nations needed divination through such things as household deities and departed ancestors, to discover how to deal with situations in their lives. Furthermore, such supernatural assistance often demanded great human agony and physical pain, even bodily mutilation (cf. Deut 14:1; 1 Kgs 18:26-29).

The basis for differences in gaining divine access or attention is yet another area of divergence of Israel’s faith from that of her neighbors: the nature of the relationship between the people and their god/gods. The gods of the nations were said to have created the world for themselves; humankind was an afterthought, a necessary nuisance whose function was only to serve the gods. Aside from irritation, about the only emotional response we find from the gods toward their human creatures is an occasional sense of pity or remorse for their grievous situation. The OT, however, presents humankind as the “crown of creation” and the natural world as theirs to oversee and enjoy.

Also, Block has shown that the gods of the nations were primarily gods of the land and only secondarily gods of the people of the land. They had a kind of feudal relationship in which the gods were lords of the estate and the people, whose sole purpose was to tend the land, were their serfs. The religion of Israel was unique in understanding God’s relationship to his people as primary, formed before he provided them a land, and continuing after their sin resulted in the loss of that land (cf. Deut 32:9; 2 Kgs 17:26; Ezek 11:16).²⁸

YHWH had formed a people, bound them to each other and to himself by covenant, and pledged to shepherd them faithfully.²⁹ Biblical

²⁶T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 101-102.

²⁷S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 125-126.

²⁸Block, *The Gods of the Nations*, 1st ed., 7-23, 28, 60, 96-97.

²⁹See J. G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, TOTC (London: InterVarsity,

religion gives at the same time a higher view of humanity and a higher view of God—omnipotent, undivided, purposive, merciful, and uniformly righteous (Exod 34:6-7). Finally, while the worship of YHWH included ritual as an expression of dependent faith, loyalty, and obedience, that ritual was never to be an end in itself (cf. 1 Sam 15:22; Pss 40:6; 50:8-15; 51:16-17; Hos 6:4-6). There was to be an internal quality to the faith of Israel that was not found in the other religions. The other religions aimed at manipulating the gods into granting favors. Thus they were driven by ritual. But YHWH looked on the heart, and he abhorred ritual that did not arise from righteous devotion. From the beginning Israel was enjoined not only to love the Lord, but also to “rejoice before the Lord your God” (Deut 12:12, 18; cf. 14:26; 16:11, 14-15; 26:11; 27:7) and they would be judged because they did not “serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity” (Deut 28:47). Thus Israel was to be a kingdom of priests, singing to the Lord and declaring his glory among the nations day after day, “For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (1 Chron 16:26).

Cosmogony and Cosmology

The word “cosmogony” is derived from the Greek words *kosmos* (“order, ornament, the universe”) and *genesis* (“origin, generation”); it means the origin of the (ordered) world (or process). Cosmology is the ordering, or mental construction, of the world (or structure).³⁰ In the OT, the early chapters of Genesis contain much cosmogony and cosmology, but Psalms and Job also add cosmologic information. The main issues for comparison are the creation of the cosmos, the creation of humanity, and the flood.

Creation Accounts

The main information concerning ideas about creation in Mesopotamia come from the work entitled *Enuma Elish*. In actuality, what similarities exist are superficial and could well be incidental. The differences, on the other hand, are significant.³¹

1972), 98-99; see also J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, TOTC (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1974), 70.

³⁰For Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Israelite cosmogonic and cosmologic accounts, see N. Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East*, Biblical Seminar 85 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 53-146.

³¹For a helpful summary, see W. G. Lambert, “A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis,” *JTS* 16 (1965): 287-300, cited in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, ed. R. S. Hess and D. T. Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 96-113.

(1) There is nothing lasting that is created by the deity (*Marduk*) in *Enuma Elish*. Instead, his activity of dominion involves the organization of the cosmos. In contrast, Genesis portrays YHWH as Creator as well as organizer.

(2) Elements of the cosmos are seen as coming into being in *Enuma Elish* by means of the birth of the god who is associated with that element of the cosmos (e.g., fresh water, sky). In this sense, cosmogony is expressed in terms of theogony (origin of the gods). This theological concept is countered quickly in Genesis with the words “In the beginning God.” There is no hint of theogonic mythology in the straightforward biblical narratives.

(3) A key difference is that creation (organization) in Mesopotamian (and Canaanite) texts takes place by means of, or in the aftermath of, conflict. Defeat of rebel forces or overcoming chaos opens the way for the deity to impose his order on the cosmos.³² The theological concept that appears in the Genesis creation account is an abiotic concept of the earth, that is, it describes an earth in which there is no life; it presents the absence of life—vegetable, animal, and human. That life then appears in the further verses of Genesis 1 by the *fiat* of God. In no case does Genesis describe a chaotic state of the earth as the result of mythical combats between the gods of the myths and legends of the ANE.³³

(4) Not only is the creation by divine *fiat* in Genesis unique in the ANE, the creation of light as the first creating act appears only in Genesis.³⁴ Sjöberg accepts that “there was hardly any influence from that Babylonian text on the Old Testament creation accounts.”³⁵ Hasel thinks rather that the creation account of Genesis 1 functions as an antimythological polemic regarding other cosmologies of the ANE (e.g., with the “sun,” the “moon”).³⁶

³²See J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and C. Kloos, *YHWH's Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

³³For a detailed study of God's history with the earth and life “in the beginning,” see R. Ouro, “The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic? Part I,” *AUSS* 36 (1998): 259-276; idem., “The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic? Part II,” *AUSS* 37 (1999): 39-53; idem., “The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic? Part III,” *AUSS* 38 (2000): 59-67.

³⁴See Lambert, *A New Look*, 96-109; idem., “Babylonien und Israel,” *TRE* 5 (1980): 71.

³⁵A. W. Sjöberg, “Eve and the Chameleon,” in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlström*, ed. W. Boyd Barrick and John R. Spencer (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 217.

³⁶G. F. Hasel, “The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology,” *ETQ* 46 (1974): 81-102; see also idem., “The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels,” *AUSS* 10 (1972): 6.

(5) Lambert and Millard point out that “in all probability the Babylonians conceived of man as matter (‘clay’) activated by the addition of divine blood,” while, on the other hand, “the Hebrew account of creation in Gen 2 explains that God imparted ‘the breath of life’ into man, and so animation began. . . . No similar doctrine is known among the Babylonians or Sumerians.”³⁷

Gunkel establishes, “The difference between the Babylonian creation account and that of Genesis 1 is great; it could hardly be more pronounced. In the Babylonian account everything is wild and grotesque; it is barbaric, riotous poetry. In Genesis 1 everything is quietly solemn and elevated; it is expansive and occasionally somewhat pedantic prose. There the gods emerged in the course of things; here God is one and the same from the very beginning. In the Babylonian account there is the deity who slays the monster in heated combat and forms the world out of its corpse; in Genesis 1 there is God ‘who speaks and it is so.’”³⁸

According to Sjöberg, who recently reexamined Sumerian connections with regard to the “tree of life,” there is no evidence for such a tree in Mesopotamian myth and cult. He says, “The identification of different trees on Mesopotamian seals as a Tree of Life is a pure hypothesis, a product of pan-Babylonianism. . . . There is no Sumerian or Akkadian expression ‘Tree of life.’”³⁹

Egyptian creation accounts appear in several different versions featuring different gods. While the intermixing of theogony with cosmogony is again prominent, the Memphite theology portrays a creator god (*Ptah*) creating by means of the spoken word, as in Genesis.⁴⁰ In this sense, the Egyptian material provides for closer parallels than the Mesopotamian literature, though the differences remain substantial.

Humankind Creation Accounts

Similarities exist in the creation of human beings to the extent that clay or dust is used by the deity as the molding material with an additional divine ingredient provided as a catalyst. In the Mesopotamian accounts, it is most often the blood of a slain rebel deity that is mixed with the clay, as well as spit in *Atra-Hasis*. In the Egyptian Hermopolitan account, the tears of the creator-god are the active ingredient. The biblical account does not mix anything in,

³⁷W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-Hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 22.

³⁸H. Gunkel, “The Influence of Babylonian Mythology Upon the Biblical Creation Story,” in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. B. W. Anderson, *Issues in Religion and Theology* 6 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 47.

³⁹Sjöberg, 221.

⁴⁰For further discussion, see J. Hoffmeier, “Some Thoughts on Genesis 1 and 2 and Egyptian Cosmology,” *JANES* 15 (1983): 1-11.

but it is the breath of life from YHWH that animates the new creation. This breath of life also may be referred to in Egyptian wisdom in the *Instruction of Merikare*.⁴¹

The Genesis account portrays people as having been created in the image of God. Again, it is the Egyptian *Instruction of Merikare* that offers the closest parallel. There, people are stated to be the likenesses of Re and as having come forth from his body.⁴² The suggestions of similarity on this point in Akkadian texts are much more problematic and have not been convincing.

The principal difference in the area of cosmology concerns the purpose and function of humanity. In Mesopotamian literature, people were created to provide relief for the gods. The work of maintaining the civilization the gods had created had become too strenuous and led to social stratification in the divine realm. To resolve these problems, people were created as slave labor to do the work the gods had previously been obligated to do and, thus, to provide for the needs of the gods. It was the latter function from which humankind derived its dignity—the gods needed them—rather than from some high purpose for which they were destined. On that count they had been only an afterthought for the sake of convenience.

In contrast, the Israelites viewed people as central to the eternal plan of God. Everything else that had been created had been created with them in mind and to suit the specification that would most benefit them. God entrusted to them the care of his creation, but he himself was beyond needs they could provide. The life of toil and hardship was not what they were created for; they had brought it upon themselves by their disobedience. Inherent dignity is to be found in their lost estate and in the surviving image of God.

An additional difference could be found in the biblical claim that God initially created one pair from whom all others were descended. It is this factor that serves the theological purpose of transmitting the sin of the first couple to all of their descendants. In Mesopotamia, on the other hand, there is never an indication that only one or two were created. In some contexts seven pairs are mentioned, but usually it appears to be creation *en masse*.

Flood Accounts

While Egyptian and Canaanite sources are virtually silent regarding a massive flood in antiquity, Mesopotamian literature preserves accounts for us in a number of different pieces of literature. Similarities include a decision by the deity to ravage the earth by means of a flood, the warning of a particular

⁴¹For further discussion, see J. M. Plumley, “The Cosmology of Ancient Egypt,” in *Ancient Cosmologies*, ed. C. Blacker and M. Loewe (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975), 36.

⁴²Hoffmeier, 9-10.

individual and instructions to build a boat to provide for the deliverance of some, a flood of vast extent, grounding of the boat on a mountaintop, the sending of birds to determine whether rehabilitation is possible, the offering of a sacrifice by the survivors, and a subsequent blessing on the survivors bequeathed by the gods.

Differences would include the type of boat, the length of the flood, the people who were saved, the outcome for the hero, the reason for the flood, and the role of the gods. The latter is particularly noticeable as the gods are in constant tension with one another in the Mesopotamian accounts. As a matter of fact, the intention of the divine council was that none would survive the flood. It was only an act of treachery on the part of the god *Ea/Enki* that let the information slip out to the one who was eventually saved.

Though the similarities between the respective literatures are striking, the case for literary borrowing is hard to make. Many of the similarities are of the sort that could occur coincidentally, i.e., any story of a flood might be expected to have them. The Israelite author, however, never really heard the story in its Babylonian form, for it would have been totally incomprehensible to him. In the Babylonian accounts, although the flood is sent by the gods, the events are described from the human point of view; it is a tale of the experiences of human beings. The biblical story is but a chapter in a larger work, in which every episode is construed as a revelation by YHWH of his will together with its earthly consequences. The perspective of the biblical flood account is from the vantage point of the divine, and not that of man.⁴³ Cassuto in his commentary lists nineteen parallels and sixteen differences.⁴⁴ Kitchen, who, unlike Cassuto, had access to Lambert and Millard's 1969 *Atra-Hasis*, lists seven similarities and nine differences.

Similarities:

- (1) A divine decision is made to send a punishing flood.
- (2) One chosen man is told to save self, family, and creatures by building a boat.
- (3) A great flood destroys the rest of the people.
- (4) The boat grounds on a mountain.
- (5) Birds are sent forth to determine availability of habitable land.
- (6) The hero sacrifices to the deity.
- (7) Humankind is renewed upon the earth.⁴⁵

⁴³J. Finkelstein, "Bible and Babel: A Comparative Study of the Hebrew and Babylonian Religious Spirit," in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. F. E. Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 355-380, esp. 373-374, 376.

⁴⁴U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part Two: From Noah to Abraham* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), 16-23.

⁴⁵K. A. Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), 28-29.

Differences:

(1) The Mesopotamian gods tire of the noisiness of humankind, while in Genesis God sees the corruption and universal wickedness of humankind.

(2) The Mesopotamian assembly of gods is at pains to conceal their flood plan entirely from humankind (this is not evident in Genesis at all).

(3) In the Mesopotamian epics, the saving of the hero is entirely by the deceit of one god; while in Genesis, God, from the first, tells Noah plainly that judgment is coming, and he alone has been judged faithful and so must build a boat.

(4) The size and type of craft in *Gilgamesh* is a vast cube, perhaps even a great floating ziggurat, while that in Genesis has far more the proportions of a real craft.

(5) The duration of the flood differs in the Mesopotamian and biblical accounts. *Atra-Hasīs* has seven days and seven nights of storm and tempest, as does the Sumerian version; *Gilgamesh* has six (or seven) days and nights, with subsidence of the waters beginning on the seventh day; none of the Mesopotamian narratives gives any idea of how long the floodwaters took to subside thereafter. In contrast, Genesis has an entirely consistent, more detailed time scale. After seven days of warning, the storm and floods rage for forty days, then the waters stay for 150 days before beginning to recede, and further intervals follow until the earth is dry one year and ten days from the time the cataclysm began (Gen 7:11; 8:14).

(6) In the Mesopotamian versions, the inhabitants of the boat also include, for example, a pilot and craftsmen; in Genesis, one finds only Noah and his immediate family.

(7) The details of sending out birds differ entirely in *Gilgamesh*, Berosus, and Gen 8:7ff.; this is lost in *Atra-Hasīs* (if ever it was present).

(8) The Mesopotamian hero leaves the boat of his own accord and then offers a sacrifice to win the acceptance of the gods. By contrast, Noah stays in the boat *until* God summons him forth and then presents what is virtually a sacrifice of thanksgiving, following which divine blessing is expressed without regret.

(9) Replenishment of the land or earth is partly through renewed divine activity in *Atra-Hasīs*, but simply and naturally through the survivors themselves in Genesis.⁴⁶

Temples and Rituals

There are similarities between the Israelite cultus and the ANE cultic practices. Temples were common in the ANE, and we even know about sacrificial altars like the one in the Israelite sanctuary. In Canaan, burnt sacrifices and peace

⁴⁶Ibid., 29-30.

offerings were offered to the deities.⁴⁷ These two sacrifices were very common in the Israelite sanctuary/temple rituals. However, when we place the specific terminology within the broad religious context of each religion, the differences are significant. Each religion expressed what was originally one basic practice or belief in a particular way, introducing significant differences but preserving some similarities. In the OT, through divine revelation, the Israelite cultus was divested of ANE distortions, *rejecting, polemicizing, adapting, redefining, and reformulating* some of the cultic practices of the ANE in order to use them as a proper vehicle to communicate the divine message to YHWH's people.⁴⁸

Temples

Talmon's second methodological principle is that "The interpretation of biblical features . . . with the help of inner-biblical parallels should always precede the comparison with extra-biblical materials."⁴⁹ For example, assuming that one has analyzed a particular text comprehensively on its own merits, one needs to do careful analysis of and comparisons between the various biblical accounts of temple building (see esp. Exodus 25–40, the tabernacle construction account; 1 Kgs 5:1[15]–8:66; 2 Chronicles 2–7; Ezekiel 40–48) *before* comparing them with other ANE temple-building texts, such as the Gudea Cylinders.

However, this is just as important for the nonbiblical comparative material. The Gudea Cylinders, for example, also need to be analyzed in comparison with other texts of their type from within their own immediate cultural and literary milieu. But there is one especially important difference. The Gudea Cylinders present the temple building and dedication process as essentially a step-by-step ritual process. Ritual actions and processes saturate the text and, in fact, structure it. This is not the case in the parallel biblical temple-building accounts. It requires a literary focus that pays attention to the peculiarities of this particular temple-building text. It is true that the dedication procedures for the tabernacle and temple in the OT involved elaborate ritual procedures, but that in no way compares with the obsessive concern for ritual guidance and confirmation in the Cylinders.

From the initial call to build the temple to the preparation of the construction area, the fashioning of the first brick, the design of the temple, the actual laying of the foundation, construction of the superstructure, the calling of Ningirsu (the patron deity of Lagash) and Baba (his consort) to occupy the temple, the staffing and furnishing of the temple on the divine

⁴⁷J. Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan: The Ras Shamra Texts and Their Relevance to the OT* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 192; B. A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of Cult and Some Cultic Terms in Ancient Israel*, SJLA 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 8-20.

⁴⁸See Rodríguez, 62-64.

⁴⁹Talmon, *Comparative Method*, 419.

level, the actual induction of Ningirsu and Baba into the temple, and the temple dedication feast of the gods—everything was permeated with ritual procedures. Thus Gudea had to pry the specific desires and plans for the temple out of the heart of the deity for whom the temple was to be built (i.e., Ningirsu, the patron deity of Lagash). There was no ready revelation as we have it in the OT (Exodus 25–40). This feature of the Gudea Cylinders has gone relatively unnoticed in the comparative discussion.⁵⁰

God showed Moses the model to be used in the building of the Israelite sanctuary (Exod 25:8-9). The earthly was to be patterned after the heavenly—that is, the earthly sanctuary is a symbol of a heavenly reality. This idea belongs to the phenomenology of temples in the ANE. The mentality in the ANE envisioned the earthly dwelling of the gods as corresponding structurally with their heavenly abode.⁵¹ Ideas such as these are also found in literature from Mesopotamia that compares temples to the heavens and the earth and gives them a cosmic location and function.⁵²

According to the biblical text, this idea was incorporated into the Israelite religion at a particular time and through a divine revelation. The conception of the temple is not noticeably different in Israel than it is in the ANE. The difference is in the God, not in the way the temple functions in relation to the God. The cycle of cosmic life is construed differently in Israel, since God's provision of food does not ultimately serve his own purposes by meeting his own needs.

Moreover, in contrast to the idolatrous cults, in which the deity was thought to indwell the image of himself or herself, Yahwism was a spiritual religion.⁵³ The temple in Jerusalem housed no image of YHWH; his presence was represented by his glory, the *kābôd*, which under normal circumstances rested above the sacred Ark of the Covenant inside the most holy place.⁵⁴

⁵⁰R. E. Averbeck, "Sumer, the Bible, and Comparative Method: Historiography and Temple Building," in *Mesopotamia and the Bible*, ed. M. W. Chavalas and K. L. Younger Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 95-96, 118.

⁵¹"The notion of a heavenly model for temples, cult objects, and laws is universal in the ancient Near East" (J. C. Rylaarsdam, "The Book of Exodus," *IB* 1:1021). See also G. E. Wright, "The Temple in Palestine-Syria," *BAR* 15 (1975): 180; B. A. Levine, "The Descriptive Tabernacle Texts of the Pentateuch," *JAOS* 85 (1965): 307-318; R. J. Clifford, "The Tent of El and the Israelite Tent of Meeting," *CBQ* 33 (1971): 221-227. These parallels do not show that Israel borrowed its theological ideas from the other ANE religions. Rather, they may go back to a common source.

⁵²See V. A. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic Writings*, JSOTSup 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 335-337.

⁵³Cf. H. Ringgren, *Israelite Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 66-71.

⁵⁴Cf. R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 297-302.

Hurowitz has shown that with necessary variations the tabernacle construction and erection account in Exodus 25–40 follows the general pattern of temple-construction accounts in the ANE: (1) the divine command to construct the tabernacle (Exod 24:15–31:18); (2) the transmission of the divine command to the people charged to implement it (Exod 34:29–35:19); (3) the collection of construction materials and enlistment of artisans (Exod 35:20–36:7); (4) the account of the actual construction of the tabernacle and its furniture (Exod 36:8–39:43); and (5) the final erection and dedication of the tabernacle (Exodus 40; cf. Leviticus 8).⁵⁵

In the ANE, the consecration of the temple is the moment in which the divinity affirms its sovereignty. In the same way, YHWH, by coming to dwell in the midst of Israel, affirms his sovereignty over the people of Israel and over the universe. Israel is the people of YHWH and of no other god. The consecration of the Tent of Meeting corresponds to the categorical affirmation of the first commandment of the law: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod 20:2-3, NKJV).⁵⁶

Investigation into some Mesopotamian accounts of dedication ceremonies shows that the events described in 1 Kings 8 on the dedication of Solomon’s temple derive from a common ANE pattern. The similarities lie in the essence of the ceremonies, the structure of the descriptions and numerous details (the participants in the festivities, the site of the festivities, the duration of the celebration, countless offerings, and sending the people home). The biblical account is divided clearly into three parts: (1) entry of the Ark and YHWH into the temple to the accompaniment of countless sacrifices (1 Kgs 8:1-11); (2) the king’s prayers (1 Kgs 8:12-61); and (3) the popular celebrations in the temple courtyard (1 Kgs 8:61-66). This three-stage celebration has parallels in the inscriptions of Sargon and Esarhaddon. It should be compared especially to the account of the dedication of Dur-Sharrukin found at the end of Sargon’s annals.⁵⁷

However, the descriptions of the buildings and vessels in 1 Kings 6–7 are different in nature from descriptions of buildings or vessels found in extrabiblical building accounts. The Mesopotamian building accounts describe the structures and furnishings in poetic but very general language. The Mesopotamian scribes emphasized mainly the valuable and rare materials—wood, precious stones, and metal—that were used in the buildings. Similarly, they often mention the high artistic level of the craftsmanship, stating

⁵⁵V. A. Hurowitz, “The Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle,” *JAOS* 105 (1985): 21-30.

⁵⁶R. Ouro, *Old Testament Theology: The Canonical Key* (Zaragoza, Spain: Luser, 2008), 1:148.

⁵⁷Hurowitz, *I Have Built You*, 271, 273-277.

frequently that the buildings and vessels were beautiful, sophisticated, immensely overwhelming, striking, and superior in some way or another to their predecessors. All the characteristics of these descriptions mentioned here are totally lacking in the biblical descriptions. In contrast, the descriptions of buildings found in Kings, and, for that matter, in Exodus and Ezekiel, are striking in the exact details given, and especially the fact that dimensions are provided.

It is true that dimensions are not entirely absent in the Mesopotamian texts. As a matter of fact, certain Neo-Assyrian building accounts may even display a tendency toward providing them. Even so, the given dimensions are never sufficient to allow a reconstruction of the building. Dimensions of vessels or furnishings are never provided. In cases where the dimensions of buildings are stipulated, the information is limited to the external dimensions of the buildings (length, width, and height). In contrast to this, the information provided by the biblical descriptions seems to be intent on enabling the reader to visualize the building or object described.⁵⁸

Hurowitz concludes: “Therefore, even if the biblical and Mesopotamian descriptions share a tendency to mention the metals and wood used, it is clear that they are vastly different in nature and intent. The biblical descriptions totally lack the laudatory aspect, tending instead towards precision, tangibility and concreteness.”⁵⁹

On the other hand, Fretheim points out that the shift in the divine abode *from the mountain as dwelling place to tabernacle* in the midst of Israel is not only a spatial move, it is an important theological move. The language used for God’s presence on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:15-18) becomes the language for God’s tabernacle dwelling (40:34-38), enclosing the entire tabernacle account. God leaves the mountain (the typical abode for gods in the ANE), and comes to dwell among the people of God. God, who is not like the other gods, leaves the mountain of remoteness and places his ineffable majesty and tabernacle right in the *center* of a human community. No longer are the people, or their mediator, asked to “come up” to God; God “comes down” to them.⁶⁰

In the OT theological system, the concept of the holiness of time takes precedence over that of the holiness of space. Such a hierarchy of values is unique in the context of the ANE. The polar contrast between Israelite and extrabiblical concepts is vividly illustrated by the fact that the Mesopotamian creation epic—*Enuma Elish*—closes with the building of a temple to the god Marduk, that is, with the sanctification of space.⁶¹

⁵⁸Ibid., 244-246.

⁵⁹Ibid., 247.

⁶⁰T. E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 272-273.

⁶¹See *ANET*, 68-69.

In the biblical creation account, it is the sanctity of time—the Sabbath—that is first celebrated. The sanctity of space appears explicitly for the first time in Exodus. The Israelite tabernacle in the wilderness inherently exemplifies this principle, for by virtue of its mobility the ground on which it is assembled can possess no intrinsic or permanent sanctity. The locale of the sanctuary becomes sacred space only temporarily, and it loses that status the moment the tabernacle moves to another site.⁶²

Anything connected with sexual function was part of the physical world; it was categorized as common, not holy. Sex could never be brought into the sanctuary, for unlike the Canaanite worldview, sexual activity was not a way to enhance spirituality or commune with God.⁶³ In the religions of the ANE, sexual activity among worshipers was believed to activate the gods into fertilizing the soil with rain. This activity was often performed within the sacred precincts of the god's shrine. In Israelite religion, it would be an abomination to engage in sexual activity in the tabernacle precinct (Lev 15:31).⁶⁴

Finally, there are also significant similarities and differences between the OT and the ANE regarding the motif of divine abandonment of the temple:

(1) The repeated references to the evils being committed in Jerusalem emphasize that YHWH's abandonment of the temple is provoked by human action. YHWH declares his response in terms reminiscent of the extrabiblical accounts (Ezek 8:18; 9:10).

(2) YHWH leaves his temple of his own volition. Although the ANE accounts of divine abandonment generally create the impression that in a crisis the gods left their shrines voluntarily, underlying these accounts are enemy invasions and the spoliation of divine images. Since the temple contained no image of the deity, however, such spoliation with respect to YHWH is impossible. On the contrary, Ezekiel highlights YHWH's independence at each stage of his departure: (a) The *kābôd* rises from the cherub over the Ark of the covenant within the holy of holies and moves over to the threshold of the temple, filling the entire court with its emanating brightness (Ezek 9:3; 10:4); (b) a magnificent vehicle with total and absolute freedom of movement appears, bearing an object resembling a throne (10:1-13); (c) the *kābôd* moves from the threshold and rests above the vehicle (10:18); (d) the vehicle, bearing the *kābôd*, rises from the earth and pauses at the entrance of the east gate of the temple (10:19); (e) the *kābôd* departs from the midst of

⁶²See N. M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1986), 214-215.

⁶³See J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC 4 (Dallas: Word, 1992), 214.

⁶⁴See B. A. Levine, *Leviticus*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 207, n. 10; and Hartley, 210.

the city and stands over the mountain to the east (11:23). But the description of the vehicle bearing the throne, with its absolute freedom of movement and limitless maneuverability, sends a clear and unequivocal message: YHWH will not be transported like any other image from his dwelling place by any human monarch.⁶⁵

(3) The vision describes the disastrous effects that would attend the departure of the deity from the city. YHWH would turn upon his subjects, delivering them into the hands of strangers who would execute them with the sword (Ezek 11:7-11) within the border of Israel, which had, ironically, been viewed as sacrosanct. This description is reminiscent of extrabiblical texts in which divinities abandon their shrines and then turn on their subjects as if they were the enemy.

(4) Whereas extrabiblical texts tend to emphasize the deity's change of heart prior to his or her return to the shrine, Ezekiel emphasizes that by a divine act the subjects' hearts will be changed (11:18-21; cf. 36:16-32). Instead of having his subjects polish the exterior of a dirtied image, YHWH declares that he will cleanse his subjects of their iniquity from the inside out, giving them a new heart so they will walk in his ways, and so he may renew the covenant with them. Those who insist on going their own way he will reject.

(5) The links between Ezekiel's vision of YHWH's departure from the temple in chapters 8–11 and the extrabiblical accounts of divine abandonment suggest to the reader that the prophet's story cannot end with YHWH's exit from the land (11:22-23). The pattern of the Mesopotamian accounts leads one to expect the regathering of the people to their homeland, the appointment of a new king, the institution of peace and prosperity to the people, and the return of YHWH to his temple. Although Ezekiel is silent on these matters in this context, in long-range terms he does not disappoint. Indeed, these four elements represent major motifs in his restoration oracles, proclaimed after Jerusalem had fallen in 586 B.C. (33:21-22).⁶⁶

Rituals

In the ANE at large, the performance of the cult was central and foundational to religion; it was the people's principal responsibility and superseded the element of belief (the mental affirmation of doctrinal convictions). The shape of one's belief was less significant in the ANE. It was not belief that counted, but performance of the cult that was the essential expression of belief, but there was adherence to the covenant, which included cultic performance but was not dominated by it.⁶⁷ Assmann states: "The world of the deities of Egypt was not an object of belief, but rather of knowledge:

⁶⁵D. I. Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 90.

⁶⁶Block, *Gods of the Nations*, 2d ed., 140-143.

⁶⁷Walton, *ANE Thought*, 132.

knowledge of names, processes, actions, and events that were superimposed, in a manner that explained and made sense of, saved, transfigured, on the realm of manifestations in the cult and in nature.⁶⁸

On the other hand, according to Hallo, the cultic calendar of ancient Mesopotamia, like its civil calendar, was largely tied to the phases of the moon, and not at all to the week or a week; in Israel, the cultic calendar was only minimally connected to lunar phases, whereas the sabbatical cycle was all-important. The ancient Mesopotamian year was based on the month, and the worship of the moon went hand in hand with it. The Israelite year was based on the week, and remained independent of the month even when the luni-solar calendar was adopted from Babylonia. Moon worship flourished wherever Mesopotamian culture spread. But in Israel it failed to gain a foothold; the full moon was not worshiped, the quarters were not specially observed, and even the new moon was ultimately relegated to the status of a half-holiday. Here, then, lies one of the great contrasts between biblical Israel and its Near Eastern matrix: sabbatical cycles versus lunar calendars.⁶⁹

The sacrificial system in the ANE seemed to have had the fundamental purpose of feeding the gods or providing for their needs, while in the OT that particular purpose is absent and rejected (Ps 50:12-13). In the Israelite religion, it was not only inconceivable to associate concepts of eating and drinking in their material sense with the conception of divinity, but it applied even to a human being such as Moses when he drew near to the divine sphere so that “he neither ate bread nor drank water” (Exod 34:28, NKJV; Deut 9:9, 18). This stands in contrast to the standard daily practice in the ANE ritual cult in which the placing of bread and pouring out of libation before the cult statue of the deity was conceived to be feeding the deity.⁷⁰

Once the cleansing of the sanctuary is finished, in the ritual of the scapegoat in Leviticus 16, the sin and uncleanness of the Israelites are placed on the goat for Azazel, which is then sent to the wilderness. Several ritual texts describing a similar rite have been found among the Hittites and Babylonians. A number of Hittite rituals feature the transfer of evil to an animal that is then sent away.⁷¹ This type of ritual is called an *elimination rite*, whose purpose was to eliminate or remove from the community sin or impurity. There are

⁶⁸J. Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 94-95.

⁶⁹W. W. Hallo, “New Moons and Sabbaths: A Case-Study in the Contrastive Approach,” in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. F. E. Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 315.

⁷⁰See R. E. Gane, “‘Bread of the Presence’ and Creator-in-Residence,” *VT* 42 (1992): 184-199.

⁷¹See D. P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature*, SBLDS 101 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 15-74.

some similarities, but when the ritual is placed within the conceptual context of each religion, the differences are significant.

In the Babylonian religion, what contaminated the temples was not the sin or impurity of the people, but rather demons. These demons posed a threat to the deity, and it was necessary once a year to remove them from the temple. This was done through the carcass of the ram. The demons became attached to the flesh of the animal and were returned to the underworld from whence they came. In Babylonian mythology, demons dwelt in the underworld and had access to the world of the living through rivers. By throwing the carcass into the river, they were sent back to their place of origin. Babylonians threw a slaughtered ram into the river and Israelites chased a goat into the wilderness. Mesopotamian rituals that transfer impurity often see the animal as a substitute for an individual—a substitute that will now become the object of demonic attack rather than the person. In the *Asakki Marsuti* ritual for fever, the goat that is the substitute for the sick man is sent out into the wilderness.⁷²

All of these differ significantly from Israelite rituals. In Israel, the temple was cleansed from the sin and uncleanness of the people and not from the threatening presence of demons—a concept totally absent from Israelite ritual. Additionally, the Israelite religion shows no intention of appeasing the anger of deity or demon, whereas this is the most common conception in the ANE rituals. However, in both cases there is a removal of evil and its return to its place of origin. God was employing a common ritual practice from the ANE and investing it with a very different meaning that was foreign to it to convey a biblical truth.⁷³

Yearly judgment of human fates by deities appears in Mesopotamian festival texts. Particularly striking parallels to the Israelite Day of Atonement are found in the Sumerian New Year celebration at the temple of the goddess Nanshe and the Babylonian New Year (Akitu) Festival of Spring,⁷⁴ which were believed to enact renewal of relationships between deities and their human subjects.⁷⁵

⁷²See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, AB 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1078.

⁷³See Rodríguez, 61.

⁷⁴The Nanshe Hymn is an Ur III period (ca. 2100-2000 B.C.) Sumerian text. It focuses on two New Year's Day celebrations at the temple of Nanshe, called Sirara, in the city of Nina. It is possible that the text was intended to be recited during the New Year celebration. The Nanshe Hymn does not indicate the season in which New Year's Day occurred.

⁷⁵M. Weinfeld, "Social and Cultic Institutions in the Priestly Source against Their Ancient Near Eastern Background," in *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies; Panel Sessions: Bible Studies and Hebrew Language* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies/Perry Foundation for Biblical Research, 1983), 105-109, 116-117.

There are similarities between the Nanshe New Year Mesopotamian cult and the Israelite Day of Atonement, as prescribed in Leviticus 16 and 23:26-32. Renewal of yearly contracts at the Nanshe New Year is analogous to the yearly review that takes place on the Israelite Day of Atonement. Somewhat like the Day of Atonement, the Nanshe New Year includes the possibility that persons can be cleared, that is, restored/vindicated, to good and regular standing: “The ordeal river in the house of Nanshe clears a person (line 130).”⁷⁶

The Nanshe New Year, like the Israelite Day of Atonement, shows a connection between cult and theodicy in that it involves judgment of persons on the basis of loyalty that must be demonstrated by adherence to the deity’s personal standards.⁷⁷

Elsewhere in the OT, YHWH’s divine perception is made explicit. For example, “The Lord watches over the stranger; He gives courage to the orphan and widow, but makes the path of the wicked tortuous” (Ps 146:9; NJPSV). Notice the parallel with lines 20-24 of the Nanshe Hymn: “She knows the orphan, she knows the widow. She knows that person oppresses another. A mother for the orphan, Nanshe, a caretaker for the widow, finding a way for houses in debt, the lady shelters the abducted person, seeks a place for the weak.” Here the special powers of Nanshe enable her, like YHWH, to help the socially disadvantaged who would otherwise suffer injustice (cf. Psalm 82).

Both in Mesopotamia and in Israel, divine administration of justice is based on divine rule over a human community. Thus the scope of judgment covers a community that is defined in relation to a temple/sanctuary and its deity. Nanshe determines fates of people who receive food from her temple (line 96) because she rules them. Similarly, YHWH rules the Israelites from his place of enthronement in the sanctuary above the Ark of the Covenant (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; cf. Exod 25:22; Num 7:89). Therefore, he judges them. Psalm 9:8[7] makes the connection explicit: “But the Lord sits enthroned forever, he has established his throne for judgment” (NRSV).

According to Gane, there are also significant differences between the Nanshe New Year and the Israelite Day of Atonement:

(1) The judgment at Nanshe’s temple takes place on New Year’s Day. The Israelite Day of Atonement, on the other hand, is the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev 16:29).

(2) The cleaning of Nanshe’s house by sprinkling with water appears to be purification simply from ordinary dirt. There is no indication that this

⁷⁶W. Heimpel, “The Nanshe Hymn,” *JCS* 33 (1981): 67-69.

⁷⁷R. E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 358.

activity has a result such as the purgation of sin of YHWH's sanctuary on the Day of Atonement.

(3) The Nanshe Hymn explicitly describes divine justice. Leviticus, on the other hand, implies divine justice through YHWH's requirement that his sanctuary be cleansed from the sins of his people in order for him to continue residing among them (see Lev 16:16b).

(4) In Israel, wanton sinners are condemned before the Day of Atonement (Lev 20:3; Num 15:30-31; 19:13, 20). The Nanshe Hymn, however, does not provide evidence that contracts of offending temple dependents are revoked on days other than the New Year.

(5) The Sumerian hymn describes judicial investigation leading to verdicts that are reached through the testimony of witnesses. Leviticus 16 does not explicitly refer to judicial investigation.

(6) In the Nanshe Hymn, clearing from wrongdoing is through ordeal, and the text does not indicate whether the cleared person was actually guilty or was only suspected. The Day of Atonement procedure deals with actual guilt and involves rituals performed by the high priest, accompanied by self-denial and abstaining from work (Leviticus 16).

(7) Nanshe is assisted by other deities, such as Hendursaga and Nisaba. YHWH has no other deity to assist him.⁷⁸

On the other hand, there are similarities between the Babylonian ceremonies of Nisannu⁷⁹ and the Israelite Day of Atonement.⁸⁰ Like the Israelite Day of Atonement ceremonies, the Babylonian rituals of Nisannu involve cleansing temple precincts and divine judgment at a yearly time of renewal, during which the religious and social order is reaffirmed.⁸¹ Like the Israelite rituals, the Babylonian rites are of three types with regard to the ritual calendar: regular, festival, and special.⁸²

⁷⁸Ibid., 360-362.

⁷⁹Partially preserved Akkadian tablets prescribe the rituals of the Babylonian New Year (Akitu) Festival of Spring, which were to take place during the first eleven or twelve days of the month of Nisannu. The text relevant to Nisannu 2-5 was published in cuneiform, transliteration, and English translation by A. Sachs, G. Çairgan, M. Cohen, and J. Bidmead.

⁸⁰R. E. Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure*, Gorgias Dissertations 14, Religion 2 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2004). Gane's dissertation includes the translation of the text relevant to day 5, along with detailed analysis of the rituals as activity systems (ibid., 199-243, 319-323).

⁸¹K. van der Toorn, "The Babylonian New Year Festival: New Insights from the Cuneiform Texts and Their Bearing on Old Testament Study," in *Congress Volume: Leuven, 1989*, ed. J. A. Emerton, VTSup 43 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 339; cf. 343-344.

⁸²R. E. Gane, "Schedules for Deities: Macrostructure of Israelite, Babylonian, and Hittite Sancta Purification Days," *AUSS* 36 (1998): 231-236, 239-244.

Milgrom has pointed out several similarities between the fifth day of the Akitu festival and the Day of Atonement: “On both occasions, (1) the temple is purged by rites that demand that the high priest rise before dawn (*m. Yoma* 1:7), bathe and dress in linen, employ a censer, and perform a sprinkling rite on the sanctuary; (2) the impurity is eliminated by means of slaughtered animals; (3) the participants are rendered impure; and (4) the king/high priest submits to a ritual of confession and penitence.”⁸³

Cleansing the Israelite sanctuary involves three stages, dealing with its three parts: inner sanctum, outer sanctum, and outer altar. Purifying the Babylonian temple precincts is also a three-stage process: cleansing of the great Esagila temple complex as a whole (lines 340-345), which includes the sanctuary of Marduk and his consort, and then two purifications of the smaller Ezida, the guest cella of Nabû (lines 345b-365, 366-384).⁸⁴

Gane summarizes some similarities between use of the Babylonian ram and that of the slain Israelite animals:

1. Ritual activities purge a sacred dwelling.
2. Animals function as ‘sponges’ to absorb evil nonmaterial entities that are not represented by any material symbols.
3. Animal ‘sponges’ are disposed of away from the sacred precincts—the Israelite animals by incineration and the Babylonian ram by throwing its head and body into the river.
4. Animals are regarded as units.⁸⁵

The king’s reconfirmation before Marduk involves a kind of judgment according to divine cultic and ethical standards. Such accountability for loyalty to the deity somewhat parallels the concern for loyalty on the Israelite Day of Atonement. In Babylon, it is the king who goes before the deity for judgment, just as the Israelite high priest represents his people before YHWH.

According to Gane, differences between the Israelite Day of Atonement and Babylonian ceremonies on the fifth day of the Akitu Festival of Spring include the following:

(1) The Day of Atonement takes place in the seventh month (Tishri), in the autumn. The Babylonian festival, on the other hand, is in Nissanu, the first month in the spring.

(2) The Babylonian festival lasts several days, but the Day of Atonement stands alone.

(3) The Babylonian day includes not only purification of the sacred precincts, but also a special reconfirmation of the king to prepare for his role on subsequent ritual days. Day of Atonement ceremonies, on the other hand, do not involve a human king.

⁸³Milgrom, 1068.

⁸⁴Gane, *Cult and Character*, 364-365.

⁸⁵Ibid., 367.

(4) Whereas plurality of deities and sacred locations were factors in the multiplication of Babylonian ritual activities, such plurality did not affect the Israelite Day of Atonement due to the monotheistic nature of the normative Israelite cult. YHWH fulfilled all divine roles that were divided among other deities in other ANE religions. “He alone was the King and Judge of the world.”⁸⁶

(5) The Day of Atonement is a climactic event within the Israelite cultic system, but the fifth day of the Akitu festival prepares for a climax that comes later in the festival.

(6) Whereas the Israelite sanctuary cleansing constitutes an enactment of theodicy, the Babylonian purification of temple precincts simply removes impurity in order to prepare for the roles of gods participating in the festival.

(7) Whereas the Babylonian cleansing of sacred precincts includes sprinkling water, in the Day of Atonement rituals it is blood that is sprinkled for the purification of the sanctuary. The blood rites familiar in the OT are not replicated in other ANE cultures.⁸⁷

(8) There are a number of differences between the Israelite purification-offering of purgation complex that purges the sanctuary and the Babylonian Kuppuru activities that contribute to purification of the Ezida. For example, whereas the former is a complex consisting of two individual rituals, the Kuppuru “rite” is only a subsystem of an individual ritual.⁸⁸

(9) Whereas the Heb. כָּפַר in ritual contexts represents the goal/meaning of activity, the Akk. *Kuppuru* denotes the physical activity itself: “wipe/rub” or “purify by wiping.”

(10) Evils removed by purification rituals are not the same. In Babylon, impurity comes from evil spirits, but there is no purification for sins committed by the Babylonian people. In Israel, on the other hand, impurities that affect the sanctuary come from human beings, and the impurities are purged from the sanctuary along with moral faults that the people have committed (Lev 16:16).⁸⁹ There are no incantations to exorcise demons.

⁸⁶J. C. de Moor, *New Year with Canaanites and Israelites* (Kampen: Kamper Cahiers, 1972), 1:29.

⁸⁷See T. Abusch, “Blood in Israel and Mesopotamia,” in *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*, ed. S. M. Paul et al., VTSup 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 675-684. G. Beckman indicates that among the Hittites the throat of the animal was slit with the blood being squirted toward the statue, and blood was used in purification ceremonies (“How Religion Was Done,” in *The Companion to the Ancient Near East*, ed. D. Snell [Oxford: Blackwell, 2005], 349-350).

⁸⁸Cf. B. Sommer, “The Babylonian Akitu Festival: Rectifying the King or Renewing the Cosmos,” *JANES* 27 (2000): 92.

⁸⁹Cf. Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 56, 103-105.

(11) The speech of the Babylonian king consists of self-righteous denial of his own wrongdoing (lines 422-428). He admits no need for moral cleansing. By contrast, the speech of the Israelite high priest over Azazel's goat (Lev 16:21) is a real confession, admitting the moral faults of the entire nation.⁹⁰ This is a crucial difference.

(12) Only the Babylonian king is "judged" on the fifth day of the Akitu festival, but all Israelites are explicitly in view on the Day of Atonement. There is no evidence that the Babylonian king represents his people, as does the Israelite high priest, in the sense that he performs purgation on their behalf. So, in spite of significant parallels, the fifth day of the Babylonian festival should not be regarded as a Babylonian "Day of Atonement."

(13) Objects of purification differ. The Day of Atonement rituals are concerned with purgation of sacred precincts, sancta, and persons. The Babylonian purifications of Nisannu 5 deal only with sacred precincts.

(14) Whereas the Israelite high priest performs the sanctuary purification rituals and is apparently immune to defilement through the process, the Babylonian high priest cannot even look on the first phase of the Ezida's purgation without becoming impure (lines 364-365).

(15) Finally, severity of impurity resulting from ritual participation differs greatly. Israelite assistants who lead Azazel's goat into the wilderness and dispose of carcasses contract minor impurity that lasts only until they launder their clothes and bathe, after which they are permitted to reenter the camp (Lev 16:26, 28). Babylonian functionaries who participate in the *kuppuru* purification of the Ezida are much more severely affected. They must remain outside Babylon for the rest of the festival—that is, until the twelfth day of Nisannu (lines 361-363).⁹¹

Conclusion

Since the biblical text has a theological significance emerging from an ancient context, we should pay due attention to the ANE ideas, concepts, beliefs, and worldviews because they may then be necessary for discerning the meaning of the text. So the aid of comparative study might sometimes be needed to help with the meaning of the text. More important are the many occasions in which the core meaning of the text is misinterpreted for lack of assistance from the ANE. If we do not bring the information from the ancient cognitive environment to bear on the text, we will automatically impose the paradigms and models of our modern worldview, thus risking serious distortion of meaning.

To investigate Israelite theology in relation to any other ancient theology, *we must go beyond the simple identification of similarities and differences to articulate the*

⁹⁰Milgrom, 1069.

⁹¹Gane, *Cult and Character*, 370-374.

relationships on a conceptual, functional, and behavioral level. For example, it is one thing to say that both Israelites and Babylonians used rituals for transference of offense. It is another matter altogether to understand the conceptual, functional, and behavioral implication of those rituals and the role they played in the larger theology.

Similarities could exist because Israel adapted something from the ANE culture or literature or because they simply resonated with the culture. Differences could reflect the Israelites' rejection of an ANE perspective, in which a practice was either ignored or proscribed, or they might emerge in explicit Israelite polemics against the views of their neighbors, in which extended discourse drew out the distinction. In all such cases, the theology of the text may be nuanced or clarified by an understanding of the cultural context, whether it resonates with its environment or stands in sharp relief against it.

When it comes to the formulation of our modern theology based on the biblical text, we may logically conclude that without the guidance of background studies, we are bound to misinterpret the text at some points. Often the words the writer or speaker uses and the ideas he is trying to convey are rooted in the culture and therefore need the assistance of background studies. Thus comparative study offers an alternative, and arguably more accurate, interpretation of the text.

INTERPRETATION OF *b're'sit* IN THE CONTEXT OF GENESIS 1:1-3

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“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”¹ This bedrock biblical statement, on which all the rest of God’s revelation depends and is its commentary, stirs an intense controversy. A heated debate exists among scholars regarding the first Hebrew word *b're'sit* (“in the beginning”). Is it written in a construct or absolute state? The critical question is whether Gen 1:1 is a principal independent clause or a subordinate temporal sentence. The implications of such a choice are enormous and seriously influence the answer to the question whether there was already something in existence on the earth before God’s creative activity of the creation week. Was matter in existence before the creative work of God (Gen 1:1)? What is the relationship of Gen 1:1 to vv. 2 and 3?² These crucial issues are subjected to a thorough scrutiny by different schools of interpretation. The proper evaluation of these pertinent questions depends on the translation, sequence of thoughts, intention, and theology of these verses.

When interpreting a biblical passage, the most important question is always concerning what the text really says, and one needs to be cautious not to impose on it one’s own worldview, current scientific understanding, or culture. We have to constantly remind ourselves that the biblical text must speak for itself in order to know the original intention of the author! As is well known, each translation of the Bible is already an interpretation; therefore, interpretation needs to be based on sound exegetical, syntactical, and theological principles.

Translation of the Hebrew Text

If the word *b're'sit* is grammatically an absolute, then the translation renders “in the beginning” (God created). On the other hand, the translations “in the

¹The seven Hebrew words are in the following sequence: (1) *in beginning*; (2) *created*; (3) *God*; (4) sign of the direct object; (5) *the heavens*; (6) *and*, with sign of the direct object; (7) *the earth*. The number seven is dominant in the first creation narrative—seven days of creation; the word “good” is used seven times; the second verse has 14 (2x7) words in Hebrew; the term *Elohim* occurs 35 times (5x7); and the noun “earth,” 21 times (3x7). I have presented the main ideas explored in this article to my students for more than thirty years. With this study, I wish to contribute to the current debate on the original intent and meaning of Gen 1:1-3.

²Victor P. Hamilton formulates the problem in the following way: “The larger concern is this: Does Gen 1:1 teach an absolute beginning of creation as a direct act of God? Or does it affirm the existence of matter before the creation of the heavens and earth? To put the question differently, does Gen 1:1 suggest that in the beginning there was one—God; or does it suggest that in the beginning there were two—God and preexistent chaos?” (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 105).

beginning of” (God’s creating), or “in the beginning when” (God created), take the word to be a construct.³

Six main interpretations of Gen 1:1-3, which are elaborations of four basic types of translations, seem possible:

1. *B^ere’sit* is a construct state. Verse 1 as a temporal clause is subordinate to the main sentence in v. 2: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (NRSV; see also NEB).

2. *B^ere’sit* is a construct state. Verse 1 as a temporal clause is subordinate to the main sentence in v. 3, with v. 2 being a parenthesis describing conditions of the Earth prior to God’s creation: “When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (JPS; see also NJPS and NAB).

3. *B^ere’sit* is an absolute state. Verse 1 is an independent main clause summarizing God’s creative activity (a title to the whole chapter), with v. 2 describing prior conditions, and v. 3 pointing to the divine act of creation. This explanation is made, for example, in the NIV: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (and many others such as ESV, KJV, NASB, NJB, NKJV, NLT, REB, RSV).

4. *B^ere’sit* is an absolute state. Verse 1 is an independent clause narrating God’s act of creation; v. 2 describes the conditions of the creating phase of v. 1; and v. 3 focuses on the further immediate creation work of God. This interpretation can be built on translations such as in point 3: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light: and there was light’” (KJV; see also, e.g., ESV, NASB, NIV, NJB, NKJV, NLT, REB, RSV).

5. *B^ere’sit* is an absolute state. Verse 1 is an independent main clause narrating the first act of creation. Verse 2 describes the consequence of v. 1 (condition of Earth after the first creating phase), while v. 3 is the beginning

³The term *b^ere’sit* is a *hapax legomenon* in the Pentateuch. The author of the first creation account deliberately chose it, even though he could have employed other words used elsewhere in the book of Genesis such as *bāri’sonāb* (“at/in the beginning,” “at the first”—Gen 13:4; see also Num 10:13-14; Deut 17:7; Josh 8:5-6, 33; 2 Sam 20:18; 1 Kgs 17:13; 20:9, 17; Prov 20:21; Isa 52:4; 60:9; Zech 12:7), or *batt^e hillāb* (“at/in the beginning,” “earlier,” “before,” “first”—Gen 13:3; 41:21; 43:18, 20; see also Judg 1:1; 20:18 [twice]; 2 Sam 17:9; Dan 8:1; 9:21). The noun *re’sit* (“the beginning”) is used several times in the Pentateuch and also outside of it (Gen 10:10; Exod 23:19; 34:26; Lev 2:12; 23:10; Num 15:20; 24:20; Deut 18:4; 21:17; 26:10; 33:21; 1 Sam 15:21; 1 Chron 31:5; Neh 10:38; Job 40:19; Pss 78:51; 105:36; 111:10; Prov 1:7; 4:7; 8:22; 17:14; Jer 2:3; 49:35; Ezek 20:40; 48:14; Amos 6:1; Mic 1:13).

of God's second creative act after an indeterminate period of time. This interpretation also stands on the translations reflected in points 3 and 4 (e.g., ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NJB, NKJV, NLT, REB, RSV).

6. *Bʿreʾšit* is an absolute state. Verse 1 is an independent main clause summarizing God's first creative activity, with v. 2 describing conditions of the Earth after Satan's rebellion against God and his judgment. Verse 3 points to the divine act of restoration of the original creation. Consider *The Scofield Reference Bible* translation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light; and there was light.'" The headings before each verse in the *Scofield* translation are crucial for understanding this type of interpretation: "The original creation—v. 1"; "Earth made waste and empty by judgment (Jer 4:23-26)—v. 2"; "The new beginning—the first day: light diffused." *The New Scofield Reference Bible* has a note following v. 2: "The second [interpretation], which may be called the Divine Judgment interpretation, sees in these words a description of the earth only, and that in a condition subsequent to its creation, not as it was originally (see Isa 45:18; . . . Isa 14:12; Ezek 28:12)."⁴

It is obvious that all translations and interpretations cannot be right. These various translation and exposition possibilities can be summarized in the following major interpretative categories, which compete among themselves (the first two represent a nonliteral reading of the text and the other three, a literal reading). Only a basic description and brief critique of these interpretations of Gen 1:1-3 will be mentioned here.⁵

An Overview of the Main Interpretative Possibilities

1. *Nonliteral reading: mythological narrative.* Some scholars take Genesis 1–2 as a general aetiological story of the origin of life on Earth, emphasizing similarities between the scriptural text and extrabiblical mythological stories and thereby concluding that the Genesis account is reminiscent of mythological imagery.⁶

⁴C. I. Scofield, ed., *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1. See also *ibid.*, 752, n. 2; and Arthur C. Custance, *Without Form and Void* (Brockville, ONT: C. I. Scofield, 1970), 41.

⁵For further discussion on this part of the Genesis creation account, see Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1987), 11-18; Richard M. Davidson, "The Biblical Account of Origins," *JATS* 14/1 (Spring 2003): 4-43; Gerhard F. Hasel, "Recent Translations of Gen 1:1: A Critical Look," *BT* 22 (1971): 154-167; Hamilton, 106-108; Bruce Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3, Part III: The Initial Chaos Theory and the Precreation Chaos Theory," *BSac* 132 (1975): 222-228; E. J. Young, "The Relation of the First Verse of Genesis One to Verses Two and Three," in *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976), 1-14; Hershel Shanks, "How the Bible Begins," *Judaism* 21 (1972): 51-58; Walter Eichrodt, "In the Beginning," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Studies in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 1-10.

⁶H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895).

This type of interpretation does not maintain the notion of *creatio ex nihilo*. Against this theory is the fact that the biblical creation account is a polemic against the mythological understanding of its time.⁷ This antimythological text lacks in its scope constructions such as “when from above”; nor does it mention fighting among the gods, the creation of gods or semigods, or an indication of preexisting material.

2. *Nonliteral reading: theological-poetic account.* Many scholars explain the biblical creation account as a mere theological interpretation of the origin of life on Earth, written in the form of a poetic and liturgical literary composition.⁸ According to this theory, the creation story is a nonhistorical story because theology and history are pitted against each other. This theory states that the biblical creation presupposes (according to v. 2) that the existence of the Earth was in a chaotic state before God’s creative activity. There is no explanation of where this unformed, uninhabited Earth originated. This view jeopardizes the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* and diminishes the portrayal of God as the Creator of all things. Matter stands beside God without explanation of when or where this matter came into existence. A comparison with extrabiblical creation stories plays a major role in this type of interpretation. This view usually argues for a theistic evolutionary theory,⁹ in which the days of creation represent long indefinite periods/ages, during which God used the evolutionary process to create life and everything on earth.¹⁰ A major

⁷Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): 81-102.

⁸Marty E. Stevens speaks about “a liturgy of praise” (*Theological Themes of the Old Testament* [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010], 2); Fritz Guy identifies Gen 1:1–2:3 as “an expression of praise, an act of worship” (“The Purpose and Function of Scripture: Preface to a Theology of Creation,” in *Understanding Genesis: Contemporary Adventist Perspectives*, ed. Brian Bull, Fritz Guy, and Ervin Taylor [Riverside, CA: Adventist Today, 2006], 93); Walter Brueggemann argues that the creation story “is a poetic narrative that likely was formed for liturgical purposes” (*Genesis*, IBC [Atlanta: John Knox, 1982], 22).

⁹For more discussion on theistic evolution and the reasoning of its proponents, see Richard F. Carlson and Tremper Longman III, *Science, Creation and the Bible: Reconciling Rival Theories of Origins* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010); Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2007); Michael Dowd, *Thank God for Evolution: How the Marriage of Science and Religion Will Transform Your Life and Our World* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2008); Alister E. McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect: Christian Faith and the Disciplines of the Mind* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010) John Polkinghorne, *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity: Questions to Science and Religion*, rev. updated ed. (Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 2006); idem, *Theology in the Context of Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); John Polkinghorne and Nicholas Beale, *Questions of Truth: Fifty-one Responses to Questions About God, Science, and Belief* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009); Robert John Russell, *Cosmology: From Alpha to Omega* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); and Davis A. Young and Ralph Stearley, *The Bible, Rocks and Time: Geological Evidence for the Age of the Earth* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008).

¹⁰One group of scholars who subscribe to this theory take *b’rešit* as a construct, and another group identifies *b’rešit* as being in an absolute state and accepts the

problem with this theory (along with the problematic exegesis, see below) lies in the fact that it includes death not as a result of sin, but as a natural integral phenomenon of the evolutionary process (death existed before the creation of Adam and Eve and their disobedience). Thus God uses death for evolving higher levels of life, which makes him a tyrant.¹¹

3. *Literal reading: active gap theory (also known as the ruin-restoration or reconstruction theory)*. In the beginning God created everything good and perfect (v. 1), but Satan rebelled against God and succeeded in setting a part of God's creation against him (an event that occurred during an indefinite gap of time between vv. 1 and 2). After Satan's rebellion, planet Earth *became* chaotic (v. 2), and God, in order to make everything right again, put things into their original perfection during the seven-day creation week (v. 3ff.). Thus Gen 1:1 and 3 are two independent clauses with v. 2 playing the role of a parenthesis that explains what happened during Satan's revolt against the Creator of the whole universe.¹² Consequently, the concept of *creation ex nihilo* is maintained in this view.

This theory is not sustainable because it stands on faulty exegesis. Syntactically, the three short sentences in v. 2 are descriptive in style, meaning that this verse is naturally tied with v. 1. Verse 2 does not stand on its own because the conjunction at the beginning of v. 2 is closely coordinated with v. 1, not being an apposition but circumstantial to it. F. F. Bruce correctly explains that the Hebrew construction of the "waw copulative with perfect [v. 2a] does not suggest an event subsequent to creation, but describes the condition of the earth as it came to exist."¹³ Consequently, it means that the word "was" is the proper translation—the earth "was" (and not "became") formless and empty during the first act of God's creating. In addition, there is no indication in v. 2 that it should be taken to describe the result of the war in heaven.

first verse as an independent clause that functions only as a title or a summary of all God's creation described in Genesis 1. See, e.g., Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, ed. and trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 103-133; W. Gunther Plaut, ed., *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, rev. ed. (New York: Union for Reform Judaism, 2005), 19-22, 34-35; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 74-112; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981), 3-13.

¹¹John T. Baldwin, "Revelation 14:7: An Angel's Worldview," in *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement*, ed. John T. Baldwin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 28.

¹²See *The Scofield Reference Bible*.

¹³F. F. Bruce, "And the Earth was without Form and Void," *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* 78 (1946): 21-23. Gesenius's assertion that *haytab* is used here "as the description of a state" also refutes this particular understanding of the beginning of planet Earth (see Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2d ed. [New York: Clarendon Press, 1910], 454, n. 141i). See also a lengthy explanation of the term "was" of Gen 1:2 in Weston W. Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled: A Critique of the Gap Theory* (Collinsville, IL: Burgener Enterprises, 1976), 87-112.

4. *Literal reading: no gap theory—young-earth and young-life view* (vv. 1-3 describe the events of day one). Verse 1 is taken as a main independent clause in the sense of a summary or title. Verse 2 is a subordinate (but independent!) clause describing God's initial process of creation (activity of an early part of day one), while v. 3 and the following verses describe the process of creation within seven days. The unorganized matter referred to in Gen 1:2 did not exist prior to the six-day creation, but represents the early stage of a process beginning on day 1 that was brought to completion in stages over a six-day period. This view stresses a short chronology of life and *creatio ex nihilo*. The age of the Earth and the length of life on the Earth are equally old.¹⁴

This theory is difficult to accept for at least three reasons: (1) several biblical passages suggest that life and intelligent beings were created in heaven before life was made on planet Earth (Job 38:7; Ezek 28:15). (2) According to Scripture, rebellion against God occurred in heaven before the actual creation of life on planet Earth (see, e.g., Gen 3:1-6; Isa 14:12-15; Ezek 28:11-19; Rev 12:7-12). The presence from the very beginning of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden suggests that Satan had access to this tree right from the time of God's making it. (3) It is difficult to take v. 1 solely as a summary view of the whole creation process of the first creation account, because vv. 1 and 2 belong together. John Sailhamer, who argues convincingly against the view that v. 1 is a title for the whole chapter, provides three compelling arguments: "1. In the original the first verse is a complete sentence that makes a statement, but titles are not formed that way in Hebrew. . . . 2. The conjunction 'and' at the beginning of the second verse makes it highly unlikely that 1:1 is a title. . . . 3. Genesis 1 has a summary title at its conclusion, making it unlikely it would have another at its beginning."¹⁵ Thus Gen 1:1 does not fit the requirement for being a title or a summary of the first creation narrative (see also above the last paragraph in point 3 above).

5. *Literal reading: passive gap theory—old-earth but young-life view* (unspecified period of time between vv. 2 and 3).¹⁶ The biblical author intentionally presents

¹⁴There are two opinions within this theory for understanding of v. 1: (1) God created absolutely everything in the whole cosmos within six days (Exod 20:12), making the entire universe only a few thousand years old, and sustaining the notion of *creatio ex nihilo*. (2) V. 1 represents the initial phase of what God created at the beginning of the first day, and the phrase "the heavens and the earth" refers only to planet Earth and its surrounding heavenly spheres. V. 2 describes the conditions of that initial phase. V. 3ff. describes how God created the material things and life on earth, as well as the entities in relationship to our planet in six days, but not the whole universe (in this scenario it is not clear when and how the rest of the entire universe came into existence). For the first view, all critical points mentioned in this section are relevant; for the second opinion, see below the interpretation on "the heavens and the earth."

¹⁵For more details, see Sailhamer, 102-103.

¹⁶This time gap between vv. 2 and 3 is implied, but not explicitly stated. This is not a unique biblical phenomenon that occurs only in Gen 1:1-3. One can encounter, e.g., similar implied time gaps in the OT in connection with the expectations of the establishment of the kingdom of God (no explicit distinction is made between the

how, what, when, and why God created the world.¹⁷ Verse 1 is understood as a main independent clause. God created the observable universe together with planet Earth at an indefinite point of time in the past—“in the beginning,” i.e., in the cosmic beginning; thus only a general statement with no date is given.¹⁸ The Earth was created in its raw state (in Hebrew terms as *tohu wabohu*, i.e., formless and empty, without forms of life).¹⁹ When the text mentions that the Earth was in a formless, uninhabited state (Gen 1:2), it means that it stayed like that for some time, a point worth mentioning; otherwise the stress would be on God’s creative activity. However, after a significant period of time (thousands or even millions of years?—the text does not specify), God, during the seven-day literal, historical week of creation, created life on Earth. Life is, therefore, a recent phenomenon of several thousands of years, but the Earth’s age may be much older. According to this view, God created the Earth in an unorganized and uninhabited primordial state and left it in such a condition for

kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory), or to the statements about the mission of the Servant of the Lord (no apparent difference is made in the biblical text between what the Messiah will accomplish during his first or second comings).

¹⁷The author of the Genesis creation account wrote from an earthly, rather than from a cosmic viewpoint. William Shea rightly asserts: “The Creation acts were revealed and recorded as if they had passed before an observer positioned upon the earth, not outside of its system. That point of view makes some elements in the narrative more understandable” (“Creation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000], 420).

¹⁸The word *b're'sit* appears outside of Gen 1:1 only in the book of Jeremiah (26:1; 27:1; 28:1; 49:34). In these four occurrences, this term is consistently used in construct chains together with the terms for “reign” and the king’s “proper name” (either Jehoiakim or Zedekiah). Thus the literary context reveals that this word has a totally different syntactical usage in Jeremiah than in Gen 1:1, where it is not connected with another noun, but is followed by the verb in the perfect. Even though the syntax is not similar, Jeremiah’s texts allude to the creation account because he stresses that “in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim/Zedekiah,” the Word of the Lord came to him. The allusion to creation is also supported in the context of Jeremiah 49 by God’s seven actions that he will perform according to the message against Elam (see Jer 49:34-39), which is reminiscent of the seven days of creation, seven statements of “God saw,” and the ten occurrences of the phrase “and God said” in the first creation narrative. However, it is important to notice that the phrase “in the beginning” has, in Jeremiah, more the meaning “during the beginning,” thus helping to nuance the meaning of the term *b're'sit*, thus referring to a period or duration of time rather than to a specific moment in time (Gen 1:1; Job 8:7; Jer 28:1). For this crucial observation, see John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1996), 38-42.

¹⁹The phrase “formless and empty” appears elsewhere only in Jer 4:23 (and in a loose way in Isa 34:11). The word *tohu* also occurs in Deut 32:10; 1 Sam 12:21; Job 6:18; 12:24; 26:7; Ps 107:40; Isa 24:10; 29:21; 40:17, 23; 41:29; 44:9; 45:18-19; 49:4; 59:4.

an unspecified period of time under the care of the Spirit of God (Gen 1:2).²⁰ Thus vv. 1 and 2 speak about a period of time preceding the seven days of the creation week.²¹ In this interpretation *creatio ex nihilo* is upheld.

Additional Interpretative Factors

Consideration of the following issues should be made when determining the best translation and interpretation of Gen 1:1-3:

1. The identical grammatical construction to *b're'sit* is the expression *mere'sit* (grammatically also a noun without the definite article plus the preposition) in Isa 46:10. Scholars agree that the word *mere'sit* is in the absolute state, thus translating it as “[declaring the end] from the beginning”;²² therefore, there is here a strong reason to also take *b're'sit* as absolute. Furthermore, a normal rule of expressing the construct relationship in Hebrew is that the word in the construct state needs to be followed by an absolute noun (which is not the case in Gen 1:1!), as it is consistently attested elsewhere in the texts associated with the word *b're'sit* (Jer 26:1; 27:1; 28:1; 49:34-35). The syntax of *b're'sit* in Gen 1:1 is unique—it is followed by a finite verb *bāra'*.

2. The verb *bāra'* in Gen 1:1 is in perfect (3d person singular, masculine), functioning syntactically as the predicate of the subject, *Elohim*. The verbal phrase “God created” is a unit, which has two direct objects: “the heavens and the earth.” Thus the translation should be “God created” and not “of God’s creating” (as if the verbal form of *bāra'* is the infinitive *b'ro*). In this way, the prepositional phrase *b're'sit* is set apart from this subject-predicate unit.

²⁰The verb *raḥap* (“hovering”; root of *merahēpet*, Piel participle feminine singular) is employed here to describe the activity of the Spirit of God. This word is mentioned only once more in Piel form in Deut 32:11, where an eagle is pictured hovering over its little ones: “Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.” The Spirit of God is thus portrayed in Gen 1:2 as the one who was a caretaker, sustainer, and protector of the newborn “baby,” planet Earth.

²¹Gen 1:1-2 forms a literary unit, and these two verses are set apart from the rest of the creation story, in which the first six days of creation are described in a deliberately literary style. The author uses specific formulas (speech formulas [“and God said”], commands, executions, approvals, “evening-morning” formulas) to mark the individual days (for details, see Wenham, 17-18; Brueggemann, 30), but this feature does not occur in the introductory verses; thus they are not only different in style, but actually happen before the first day of creation. John E. Hartley aptly notes: “The consistent pattern used for each day of creation tells us that verses 1-2 are not an integral part of the first day of creation (vv. 3-5)” (*Genesis*, NIBCOT [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000], 41).

²²The Hebrew word *mere'sit* has no definite article; however, scholars translate it “from the beginning,” “at the start,” because they identify this form as the absolute. See John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 233; Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40–66*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 89; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, O.T.L. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 357.

3. Ancient translations such as the Septuagint, Aquila, Theodotion, Symmachus, Targum Onkelos, Syriac, and Vulgate treat *b^ere'sit* as an absolute, thus rendering Gen 1:1 as a principal independent clause.

4. The Massoretic interpretation of the word *b^ere'sit* indicates that its construction should be taken in an absolute state because the Hebrew disjunctive accent *tifcha* was put under it.²³

5. A stylistic observation is that the sentences throughout the first creation account are short, clear-cut, and brief (in contrast to taking *b^ere'sit* as a construct, in which case the sentence would be very complex).

6. Verse 2, in relation to v. 1, is to be taken syntactically as the description of a state. The conjunction (“and”) plus the noun (“the Earth”) plus perfect (“was”) indicate that v. 2 is a disjunctive sentence and that its three clauses enumerate conditions of a previously mentioned situation. Verse 2 in relationship to v. 1 is to be taken syntactically as the subordinate clause.

7. Even if the grammatical form of the word *b^ere'sit* is accepted as a construct state, syntactically this form has the power of an absolute.²⁴ That the construct can have the absolute force in meaning is obvious from the above example of Isa 46:10.²⁵

8. The intertextual comparison of Gen 1:1 with John’s Prologue demonstrates that John clearly understood the word “beginning” of Gen 1:1 as the absolute beginning in time: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (John 1:1-2).

Thus according to the above analysis and evaluation, there are weighty arguments for taking *b^ere'sit* in an absolute state and Gen 1:1 as a main clause. One needs to incorporate into the discussion a broader theological perspective that sheds further light on this crucial issue.

Theological Considerations

The heavens and the earth have not existed from eternity; they had a beginning. The creation story testifies that God created the universe, organized matter, and made life on Earth. Everything has its origin in him. Only God existed before the beginning, prior to anything in our cosmos. When the verb *bārā'* (“created”) is used in the Hebrew Bible (38 times in the Qal and 10 times in

²³On the function of accents in the MT, see Jacques B. Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians: A Textbook for the Study of Biblical Hebrew in Relation to Hebrew Thinking* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1993), 181-190; and William Wickes, *Two Treatises on the Accentuation of the Old Testament* (New York: Ktav, 1970).

²⁴I am indebted for this observation about the intended absolute sense of Gen 1:1 to my colleague Jacques Doukhan, who pointed out this interpretative possibility to me in a recent conversation.

²⁵For further insight and examples, see Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, *Subsidia Biblica* 27 (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2006), ¶96 A l, m, q; ¶97 B c, C b; and ¶97 F a.

the Niphal stems),²⁶ God is always the author of the described activity or the implied subject of the passive verb constructions. Creation is an act of God alone! It is highly significant that *bārā'* in Gen 1:1 does not occur in a context in which materials are mentioned. The preexisting matter is not spelled out by the author's deliberate choice.

We recognize that *bārā'* does not automatically mean *creatio ex nihilo*,²⁷ but in a certain context, as it is here, it is its obvious meaning and demanded by the context. The verb *bārā'* stresses that God brought everything into existence (see also Ps 148:5; Rom 4:17; Col 1:16-17; Heb 11:3; cf. 2 Macc 7:28). Before the creation of matter, God already existed!

Sequence of Thoughts

The first three verses of Genesis 1 depict God's creative activity in two different stages: Verse 1 describes the first act of the divine creation (the so-called *creatio prima*) in general terms, in which questions concerning his material activity of when, who, how, and what are answered. Verse 2 then explains the conditions of the newly "born" Earth in the raw, unformed, uninhabited phase. Verses 3ff. depict the second phase of creation after an unspecified period of time (the so-called *creatio secunda* in the old-earth-but-young-life view) and describes what happened in the seven consecutive, contiguous days of the creation week (Gen 1:3–2:4a). The expression that God created "the heavens and earth"²⁸ is

²⁶Qal: Gen 1:1, 21, 27 (three times); 2:3; 5:1, 2; 6:7; Num 16:30; Deut 4:32; Pss 51:12; 89:13, 48; Eccl 12:1; Isa 4:5; 40:26, 28; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1, 7, 15; 45:7 (twice), 8, 12; 18 (twice); 54:16 (twice); 57:19; 65:17, 18 (twice); Jer 31:22; Amos 4:13; Mal 2:10. Niphal: Gen 2:4; 5:2; Exod 34:10; Pss 102:19; 104:30; 148:5; Isa 48:7; Ezek 21:35; 28:13, 15.

²⁷For further discussion on *creatio ex nihilo*, cf. J. B. Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1978), 203-212; John Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 70-71; Brueggemann, *Creation*, 29; A. P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 105-107; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 98-100; Wenham, 14-15.

²⁸"The heavens and the earth" is a merism (a statement of opposites to indicate totality), which expresses that God created everything, the cosmos as well as the Earth. Then during the creation week the focus is on God's activities related only to our planet and near heavenly surroundings. This dyad of Gen 1:1, "the heavens and the earth," should not be confused with the triad, "the heavens, the earth, and the sea," of Exod 20:11 because they have different realities in view, the former referring to the entire universe, and the latter to the three Earth habitats (for an excellent insight about these differences, see Davidson, 22, 32-36). There is a progression of thought in the first Genesis creation account in regard to the "heavens and the earth": (1) a general statement that God is the Creator of the entire universe (1:1); (2) the process of the creation of "the heavens and the earth" with "all the host of them was finished" after the six days of creation (2:1); and (3) after the creation of the Sabbath, the creation of "the heavens and the earth" came to its climax (2:4a).

a general summary statement of what happened before the seven-day creation week, and not a summary of that week's activities.²⁹

The literary structure of the first account can serve as aid for grasping the whole process of God's creative activity. The Genesis 1 account is built upon two Hebrew nouns—*tobu* ("formlessness," "without form") and *bobu* ("void," "emptiness"). There are three pairs of parallel days. The first, second, and third days are related to the concept of the forming, while the fourth, fifth, and sixth days are related to the concept of the filling activity of God. Thus the biblical account in v. 3ff. reverses what is described in v. 2: what was formless will be formed (first three days of creation—opposite to *tobu*), and what was empty will be filled (the additional three days of creation—opposite to *bobu*). After light and space were created and the content made, then the inhabitants of different habitats were created. The seventh day crowns God's creation work with the Sabbath, which is about God's presence and relationship with humans. Humans need to learn how to live in dependency upon God and in a personal relationship with their personal Creator God. Creation is about life; and the essence of life is relationship. The crux of both biblical creation narratives is about vertical and horizontal relationships. The literary structure of Gen 1:2–2:4a summarizes the whole creation account and provides an aid for understanding the seven-day process of creation.

Figure 1. Literary Structure of Genesis 1:2–2:4a

Without form (v. 2) <i>tobu</i> (formless) forming (v. 3ff.) Space	Without life/inhabitants (v. 2) <i>bobu</i> (empty) filling (v. 14ff.) Inhabitants (Content)
1st day: light—division	4th day: luminaries
day	sun
night	moon
2nd day: firmament—division	5th day: inhabitants of water and sky
water	fish (inhabitants of water)
sky	birds (inhabitants of air)
3rd day: dry land	6th day: inhabitants of land
earth	animals; humans (man and woman)
vegetation	food for humans and animals
7th day: Sabbath—God in relationship with humans	
Palace in time filled with God's presence (holiness)	

²⁹Against, e.g., Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 94, and Waltke, 58: "The daring claim of verse 1, which encapsulating the entire narrative, invites the reader into the story. . . . 'Beginning' refers to the entire created event, the six days of creation, not something before the six days nor a part of the first day."

The author of the biblical creation story gives humans knowledge of their roots and the ultimate meaning of life, which is derived from God. The intention is to provide the reader with an authentic account of the origin of life on Earth, and present and connect them with their God as their Creator.

Conclusion

In spite of some interpretative difficulties with Gen 1:1-3, the main message and intent of the author are clear: God is the Creator of the heavens and earth, i.e., the whole universe³⁰ and the ultimate source of life. The creation process was done by his special intervention. The first biblical sentence is a theological statement built on the reality of what the Creator God made. It is a proclamation about the when (“in the beginning”), who (*Elohim*), how (*bārā*), and what (“the heavens and the earth”) of his activities. He created the material world rather than only establishing its functions.³¹ Hermann Gunkel stresses the uniqueness of the beginning of the Genesis creation narrative: “Simply and powerfully, the author first establishes the doctrine that God created the world. No statement in the cosmogonies of other peoples approaches this first statement in the Bible.”³² He also maintains that the first verse of the Bible “can be best taken as a main clause ‘in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.’”³³

God and matter are not coeternal. In the beginning was God, and this solemn proclamation testifies that there was no physical element prior to creation. Only God existed before the creation of the universe. Only he can create without previous existing matter; he can make things out of nothing. He is the starting point and cause of all creation!

There is complete silence in the text about the existence of matter before or with God (cf. John 1:1-3). However, the ultimate purpose of the biblical creation stories is to praise the Creator. One cannot know God as the Creator without admiring and worshiping him. Creation is not to be argued about, but enjoyed and proclaimed. Even though Genesis 1 is not a liturgical text, it leads to worship.³⁴

³⁰See Wenham, 15.

³¹This is contrary to Walton’s assumption that the “beginning” mentioned in Gen 1:1 is a summary of the seven-day week and not something that preceded the week of creation. It is also against his claim that *bārā*’ is God’s functional and not material activity. For details, see his chapter “‘Create’ (Hebrew *bārā*) Concerns Functions,” in *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2009), 38-46.

³²Gunkel, 103.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Claus Westermann, *The Genesis Accounts of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 37.

A FRESH LOOK AT TWO GENESIS CREATION ACCOUNTS: CONTRADICTIONS?

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One would be exegetically blind to not see differences between the first (Gen 1:1–2:4a) and the second (Gen 2:4b-25) Genesis creation accounts.¹ The majority of scholars stress discrepancies between them because they assume there are two different authors or sources with several redactors involved in putting these texts together. They claim that the first creation story was composed by the “Priestly” (P) writer, the second by the “Jahvist,” (J), and later an unknown redactor or redactors put them together.² Richard E. Friedman states: “In many ways they duplicate each other, and on several points they contradict each other.”³ Are these two creation narratives really contradictory? Do they stand in opposition to each other?

¹The first creation account is found in Gen 1:1–2:4a, and the second account is in Gen 2:4b-25.

Bible scholars are divided over whether Gen 2:4a belongs to the first creation story or whether it is an introductory formula to the second account. Among those exegetes who take the first creation story as Gen 1:1–Gen 2:4a are Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 78, 178, 197; Jacques B. Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure*, Andrews University Seminary Dissertation Series, 5 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1978), 59, 78-79; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, 3d ed., AB 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 3-13. Those who see Gen 2:4a as an introductory formula to the second account include Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC, 1 (Waco: Word, 1987), 5, 36, 49; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 150-153; John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 35-36, 39-41, 65, 163; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 14-17; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 79, 83-84. For discussions for and against these positions, see Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnus Press, 1961), 1:96-100; Hamilton, 150-153; and Wenham, 5-10. The arguments in this article about the function of the first and the second creation accounts do not depend on either position. I concur with Cassuto that it may well be that Gen 2:4a belongs to both stories as a transitional statement.

²For a discussion on the authorship of Gen 1–2, see Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 50-246; John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 47-65; Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. and expanded (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 89-147; Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1985), 7-28; Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 159-185; Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis: Eight Lectures*, intro. Joshua A. Berman (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961).

³Friedman, 50.

In this article, we will examine twelve differences between the two creation accounts that point to a complementary relationship between them, followed by theological-exegetical responses to objections to understanding the Genesis creation accounts as being complementary in nature.

*An Examination of the Differences and Contrasts
between the Genesis Creation Accounts*

In this section, we will explore twelve differences or contrasts between the two creation accounts of Genesis that appear to point toward a complementary relationship rather than toward different authors or sources.

1. Number of Creation Days

The first narrative describes seven days of creative activity. However, the second account focuses on only one day of activity out of seven—the sixth one—because it begins with the creation of man (2:7) and culminates with the creation of woman and the institution of marriage (2:22-25). These activities correspond with God's actions performed on the sixth day in Gen 1:26-28.

2. Names of God

The first story consistently uses the Hebrew term *Elohim* as the name of God. This term refers to a transcendent, mighty, sovereign, and universal God of all humanity.⁴ The second account employs the proper name for God, the holy Tetragrammaton *YHWH*, which points to a personal, immanent, close, and covenant God of his people.⁵ Umberto Cassuto convincingly argues that the use of these two different divine names in the biblical creation accounts is theologically deliberate and not evidence for two different authors or literary sources. He notes that “One thing appears to me to be beyond doubt, that the variations in the choice of the Divine Names did not come about accidentally but by design.”⁶ To demonstrate that *Elohim* and *YHWH* are the same God, the author of the second account always speaks of God as *YHWH Elohim*.⁷

⁴The term God (*Elohim*) is used thirty-five times in the first account: 1:1, 2, 3, 4 (twice), 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 (twice), 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21 (twice), 22, 24, 25 (twice), 26, 27 (twice), 28 (twice), 29, 31; 2:2, 3 (twice).

⁵For the different nuances of these two divine names, see esp. Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis*, 30-33.

⁶*Ibid.*, 17.

⁷The designation *YHWH Elohim* is used eleven times in the second creation narrative: Gen 2:4b, 5, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22.

3. Manner of Creation

In the first narrative, God creates by his Word and from a distance. The phrase *wayyo'mer Elohim* (“and God said”) is repeated ten times for emphasis (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29; cf. Ps 33:6, 9: “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, . . . For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm”). The Hebrew verb *bārā'* (“created”) is employed three times in Gen 1:27, and the cohortative form of the verb *āsāh* (“let us make”) is used in Gen 1:26 in order to describe God’s creative activity in relationship to humans. On the other hand, the second story depicts God’s personal involvement in creating humans by taking the ground, forming Adam (word *yāšar* [“form,” “shape”] is used),⁸ and giving him life by “kissing” him (Gen 2:7, 21-22). The Hebrew word *bānāh* (“build,” Gen 2:22) is used for creating a woman, God’s final masterpiece, thus pointing to him as an architect.

4. Meaning of the Word “Day”

Genesis 1 uses the term *yôm* (“day”)⁹ to designate the literal twenty-four-hour periods of time that mark the days of creation (see discussion below). The second account uses the idiomatic expression *byôm* (lit. “in a day”), which means “when” (Gen 2:4, 17).¹⁰

⁸Elsewhere in the Bible, the term *yōšer* (participial form of the root *yāšar*) describes a potter making clay vessels (see Jer 18:1-6). Thus the creation story points to God as a potter. The Hebrew word *yāšar* is also mentioned for God’s forming specific animals and birds that he brought to Adam for naming (Gen 2:19).

⁹In the first biblical creation account, the noun *yôm* is mentioned in relationship to each of the seven days of the creation week, and this term is consistently used in the singular with numerals, but without the definite article, preposition, suffix, or comparative particle—Gen 1:5b, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31; 2:3. This word is mentioned once in each day of creation and is always situated at the very end of each described day of creation (with the exception of the seventh day, which is mentioned three times for emphasis).

Gen 2:2 utilizes the expression *bayôm* (“in the day”) twice, pointing particularly to the seventh-day Sabbath, when God’s creation activity was culminated and finished on that day.

The expression *hayôm* (“the day”) is used twice (Gen 1:14, 16) and has a different meaning. This expression stresses the fact that God appointed the sun and moon to divide between the day (a bright part of the day with sunlight; cf. Gen 1:5a) and the night (a dark part of the day governed by the moon). In this context, another occurrence of *bayôm* (used also in Gen 2:2, and thus altogether three times in the first account) appears in the phrase these lights should “rule over the day and over the night” (Gen 1:18).

The word “day” occurs once in the plural form, together with the conjunction “and” and the preposition *lamed* “for” in the form of *uleyāmim* (“and for days,” Gen 1:14), i.e., the sun and moon divide time into seasons, days, and years.

¹⁰See Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 68. “When God finished creating the heavens and

5. “Good” Versus “Not Good”

The first narrative states six times that everything God created was good (*tôb*; Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Finally, when God completed all his physical creative activities, he proclaimed that everything was “very good” (*tôb me’od*; Gen 1:31). This sevenfold repetition is in tension with God’s statement in the second narrative that “It is not good for the man to be alone” (2:18).¹¹

6. Absence of the Garden of Eden

The first account does not mention “the garden of Eden” (*gan-b’eden*), while the story of the second account revolves around and in it (see esp. Gen 2:8-22).

7. Merism of the Heaven and Earth

The first account begins with the profound proclamation: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1) and concludes with “these are the genealogies of the heavens and the earth” (Gen 2:4a). This literary structure contains the merism “the heavens and the earth,” which points in its specific context to the general understanding that God is the Creator of everything—the whole universe.¹² Between this *inclusio*, the author describes what was created in the different habitats of Earth, with the stress lying on the Earth and its surroundings.¹³ By contrast, the second account’s emphasis is on the events related to the Earth, as demonstrated in its introductory phrase “earth and heavens” (Gen 2:4b) that are a reverse order of the opening words of Gen 1:1, and on the creation of Adam, the Garden of Eden, and his wife.¹⁴

earth, there was not yet . . .” (Gen 2:4b-5). The same is true of God’s categorical statement: “When you will eat from the forbidden fruit, you will surely die” (Gen 2:17). See also, e.g., Gen 3:5; 5:1-2; 21:8; 30:33; 35:3; Exod 6:28; 10:28.

¹¹It is true that the Hebrew adjective “good” (*tôb*) describes the fruit of the trees and gold (Gen 2:9, 12), and it is also employed in the specific phrase about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (*tôb wārā’*; Gen 2:9, 17).

¹²See Jiří Moskala, “Interpretation of *b’rešit* in the Context of Genesis 1:1-3,” *AUSS* 49 (2011): 42, n. 28. The phrase “thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array” (Gen 2:1) appears right after the six days of physical creation and acknowledges that God tangibly created everything needed for life on Earth. However, until that point a crucial thing was missing, the spiritual dimension—putting humans into relationship with God. Only after this preliminary conclusion (2:1), the value of the Sabbath is presented (2:2-3). In this way, the creation story is made theocentric (for details, see my article “The Sabbath in the First Creation Account,” *JATS* 13/1 [2002]: 55-66).

¹³On the three habitats, see Richard M. Davidson, “The Biblical Account of Origins,” *JATS* 14/1 (2003): 34-36.

¹⁴Consider the following vocabulary and phrases used in the Genesis creation

8. Not Yet

According to the first account, everything was very good (Gen 1:31), meaning that there was no sin in the new creation. This is eloquently accentuated and explicitly elaborated in the introduction to the second narrative. Because sin was absent and evil had not yet marred the perfect world when God created the earth and the heavens, four things were not yet present (Gen 2:4b-5):¹⁵ (1) the shrub of the field (*šab hassādeh*), (2) the plant of the field (*‘eseb hassādeh*), (3) rain (*bimtir*), and (4) the cultivation of the ground (*la’abod ‘et-hā’adāmāh*). This description is given in anticipation of Genesis 3, where the story of the original sin is recounted, and when mistrust and the disobedience of the first couple will bring a change for the worse to everything.¹⁶ The consequences of sin will be dramatic: the shrub of the field will appear because the ground was cursed, and thorns and thistles will be produced. As a result, humans will need to work in their fields and cultivate the land to have a crop. By sweat and painful labor, they will toil for their food (Gen 3:17-19).

9. Details in the Creation of Adam and Eve

The first account stresses that humans, both man and woman, were created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27).¹⁷ The second narrative provides details

accounts (without paying close attention to whether the definite article or preposition are employed or not) in order to see this emphasis: “the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1; 2:4a); “the heavens and the earth and all their hosts [with all their vast array]” (Gen 2:1); “the earth and the heavens” (Gen 2:4b); “the heavens” (*šamayim*; Gen 1:8, 9, 14, 15, 17, 20); “the sky” (*nāqā’*; Gen 1:6, 7 [3x], 8, 14, 15, 17, 20); “the beasts of the earth” (*ḥayyat hā’āreš*; Gen 1:24, 25, 30); “the birds of the heavens” (*‘ōp haššamayim*; Gen 1:26, 28, 30; 2:19, 20); “the earth” (*‘ereš*; Gen 1:2, 10, 11 [twice], 12, 15, 17, 20, 22, 24, 26 [twice], 28 [twice], 29, 30; 2:5 [twice], 6, 11, 12, 13); “the ground” (*‘adāmāb*; Gen 1:25; 2:5, 6, 7, 9, 19); “the dry land” (*yabbāšāb*; Gen 1:9, 10); “water” (*mayim*; Gen 1:2, 6 [3x], 7 [twice], 9, 10, 20, 21, 22); “sea” (*yammim*; Gen 1:10, 22); “the river” (*nāhār*; 2:10, 13, 14 [twice]); “the garden” (*gan*; Gen 2:8-10, 15, 16).

¹⁵Jacques B. Doukhan, “When Death Was Not Yet: The Testimony of Biblical Creation” (unpublished paper, Andrews University, 2010); Randall Younker, “Genesis 2: A Second Creation Account?” in *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary*, ed. John T. Baldwin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 69-78.

¹⁶About the close relationship between Genesis 2 and 3, see Roberto Ouro, “The Garden of Eden Account: The Chiasmic Structure of Genesis 2–3,” *AUSS* 40 (2002): 219-243. See also Roberto Ouro, “Linguistic and Thematic Parallels Between Genesis 1 and 3,” *JATS* 13/1 (2002): 44-54.

¹⁷To be created in God’s image does not mean that humans were created as junior or “small” gods, but that (1) humans can relate to God as a person and communicate with him; (2) man and woman should rule over God’s creation as his representatives, exercise a delegated authority, and are responsible to him; (3) humans should reflect his character as human beings and should cultivate loving and kind-hearted relationships together as

regarding the creation of man (Gen 2:7) and woman (Gen 2:22-23) to demonstrate that the two beings belong together. God made them through his direct intervention. The creation of woman is stated for several reasons: (a) to underscore Adam's need of a partner; (b) to emphasize that a wife is God's gift; (c) to demonstrate that the wife is equal to the man; and (d) to underscore the institution of marriage. These details present God as the one who created marriage for humans and who wants them to be happy by bringing two individuals together to become one.

10. First Commandments

The first narrative includes several imperatives that humans need to exercise: to "be fruitful" "multiply," and "fill" the earth, and to "subdue" and "rule over" it (Gen 1:28), while the second account mentions another two of God's commands¹⁸ in relationship to eating from the trees in the Garden of Eden (2:16-17). God provided vegetarian food for humans (as well as for animals), commands freedom to enjoy it, but at the same time gives one limitation in order to maintain their sense of humanness, fragility, and dependence: they should not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

11. A Different Sequence of Themes

The first narrative presents three topics, which God himself mentions in his speeches to the first couple—sex (1:28a), work (1:28b), and food (1:29)—so that humans will know the proper usage of human mundane activities. The second account also deals with these themes, but in a different order: work (2:15), food (Gen 2:16-17), and the intimate relationship between husband and wife (2:24).¹⁹

living beings; (4) humans are created as unique persons with unique faculties and abilities as God is also unique, so they need to cultivate this individual uniqueness in order to be a blessing to each other in order to bring an irreplaceable personal contribution.

For discussion about what it means to have the image of God, see Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29-32; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983-1985), 495-517; Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 423-425; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 442-450; Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 35-36; D. J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *TynBul* 19 (1968): 53-103; and Richard Rice, *The Reign of God* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1985), 110-118.

¹⁸It is noteworthy to observe that the root *šāwāh* is used here for the first time in the Hebrew Bible. It is the Hebrew root from which "commandment" is derived.

¹⁹It is significant to note that according to Matt 19:4-5, the statement of Gen 2:24 is directly assigned to God himself by Jesus.

12. The Purpose of Each Account

Each account has a specific purpose in view. The first narrative culminates with the seventh-day Sabbath, which puts God's presence into human life and establishes humans' dependency upon him. This theocentric account institutes a vertical relationship between God and people, which both parties could cultivate to maintain happiness, and, specifically for the man and woman, to sustain their humanity and ability to grow into the fullness of their potential. This existential dimension is complemented in the second story by putting humans into relationship to one another, namely, by establishing a horizontal relationship between the husband and wife from which springs all other relationships among people.²⁰

The Genesis literary structures support this conclusion. After the magnificent and unparalleled introduction in Gen 1:1-2, the first narrative continues with two clusters of three days (formation on days one to three and filling on days four to six). After the prepared space was inhabited, the seventh-day Sabbath brings the whole narrative to a climax by putting humanity into relationship with God. The progressive literary structure of the second account in seven sections is as follows:²¹

Introduction (2:4b-6)

1. Formation of Man (2:7)
2. Planting a Garden of Eden, Plants, Four Rivers, the Task (2:8-15)
3. The Lord's First Two Commandments (2:16-17)
4. God's Plan to make a Companion for Adam (2:18)
5. Naming of Animals and Birds (2:19-20)
6. Creation of Woman (2:21-22)
7. Institution of Marriage (2:23-24)

Epilogue (2:25).

It becomes evident that the Sabbath (the climax of the first account) and marriage (the apex of the second narrative) are the summits of these

²⁰One can summarize both biblical accounts of creation with the word "relationship." The purpose of the first narrative (Gen 1:1–2:4a) is about establishing a relationship between God and humans, and the second account (Gen 2:4b-25) is about building a relationship in the most essential human bond, marriage. These two relationships, vertical and horizontal, are complementary and must always come in the described ordered sequence so that life can be meaningful, beautiful, and happy. First comes a cultivation of a loving relationship with God, then with our marriage partner, and finally with others. The closer we are to God, the closer we should be to our spouses and to others. Only God can provide all the resources for life so we can be a contribution and blessing to each other. We were created in total dependency upon God; therefore, only from him can we receive all we need for building deep and lasting relationships.

²¹This structure is built on the pertinent study of Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story*, 44-52, 78-79.

two literary structures and provide a purpose for the author.²² From the very beginning of this revelation, God is presented as the living one who creates life and as the God of relationships because the essence of life is relationship.

Preliminary Conclusion

The two stories are in parallel. The differences between the accounts, if studied in their particular contexts, do not contradict each other, but are complementary.²³ Each account presents a view from its specific angle (Genesis 1 is universal, while Genesis 2 is immanent and personal); together they paint a magnificent picture of the creation, with both accounts describing the same reality. The second account adds more details that enrich the first account. Thus the narratives belong together, were written purposely from the theological perspective, and have nothing to do with two or more authors/redactors or sources. The plain reading of the Genesis creation text is transparent and its purpose clear: to inform the reader about what really happened at the beginning of and during the creation week.

Answering Theological and Exegetical Objections to a Complementary View of the Genesis Creation Accounts

Some arguments against the complementary view argued for in this article call for close scrutiny.²⁴ The most surprising element in this debate is the

²²From the Garden of Eden until today, we have two precious God-given gifts: the Sabbath and marriage. These two vital institutions remind us of life before sin. Humans should remember their roots because without this past there is no meaningful present or future.

²³This complementarity is self-explanatory; e.g., it is true that the first creation account pinpoints the power of God's word, which created things, but it is never stated that God created humans by his command. The author explains that God first spoke about his intention to create humanity, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen 1:26a), and then he "created" humans in his image (Gen 1:27). The second narrative, then, gives the details of the whole stunning creation process by underscoring that this was done by God's personal involvement (Gen 2:7, 21-22). Thus these two stories do not contradict each other, but bring unique perspectives to the creation scene, bring it to life, and help the reader to better understand God's transcendence and immanence in order to feel God's closeness to humanity.

²⁴When I studied at Comenius Protestant Theological Faculty (today Charles University) in Prague more than thirty years ago, some of my Protestant friends and professors, such as Milan Opocensky and Miloslav Bic, supported a more metaphorical approach to Genesis 1-2. They spoke about contradictions between them and on this basis they were defending theistic evolution.

Today a few Seventh-day Adventist theologians follow a similar approach, which demands one to read the Genesis creation story in a nonliteral way. Representative

strong language that some theologians use in arguments employed against the complimentary view of Genesis 1–2. For them, such explanation is not only unacceptable, it is impossible. Guy, for example, claims that such a literal reading “seems not merely a misunderstanding but a distortion, trivialization, and abuse of the text.”²⁵ To deduce from the Genesis creation narratives that life on earth is a recent phenomenon and that God created “by fiat, over a period of six twenty-four-hour, contiguous days . . . is not merely unwarranted but actually refuted by Scriptural evidence.”²⁶ It is important, then, to ask what biblical evidence is used in support of positions such as Guy’s? What theological and exegetical arguments are used to prove his point? What matters hermeneutically is, first, the intent of the biblical author and, second, the text, whose meaning and interpretation must be determined by its own context. We shall now briefly examine some of the objections to the complementary-account view.²⁷

examples include articles by Fritz Guy, “The Purpose and Function of Scripture: Preface to a Theology of Creation,” in *Understanding Genesis: Contemporary Adventist Perspectives*, ed. Brian S. Bull, Fritz Guy, and Ervin Taylor (Riverside, CA: Adventist Today, 2006), 86-101; and Dalton D. Baldwin, “Creation and Time: A Biblical Reflection,” in *ibid.*, 35-51.

Usually when there is an attempt to harmonize recent evolutionary scientific theories with Genesis 1–2, the biblical narratives suffer. They are stripped of their strength, intention, and detail.

²⁵Guy, 93.

²⁶Guy, 87. This reasoning opens the way for theistic evolution, for a harmonization of the biblical view of creation (as interpreted by those scholars) with modern science, which maintains that life on Earth needs to be dated to millions of years old. In such harmonization, the biblical text loses and is exegetically and theologically twisted in such a way that the modern scientific view wins the ground. The biblical text is spiritualized and emptied of its intended meaning.

²⁷One can drive on this road of supposed contradictions only by accepting some or all of the following critical presuppositions and methodology (1) working with the Documentary Hypothesis; (2) approaching Genesis 1–2 from the perspective of the poetical text of Psalm 104; (3) imposing on the Genesis creation story the perspective of modern science; (4) interpreting the biblical creation story from the cultural perspective provided by the extrabiblical material; (5) not differentiating between the uniqueness of the creation week and the ongoing creation, between macrocreation and microcreation; (6) accepting a historical-critical reconstruction of biblical history and the origin of the biblical books; (7) assuming that the author of Genesis 1 uses correct cosmogony (theology of the origin of the cosmos), but builds it on the common ancient Near Eastern cosmology. For examples and details of these critical presuppositions and methodology, see Baldwin, 35-51; Guy, 86-101; Larry G. Herr, “Genesis One in Historical-Critical Perspective,” *Spectrum* 13/2 (1982): 51-62. For a scientific explanation of the origin of life without the acceptance of an evolutionary paradigm or the above-mentioned interpretative models, see Leonard Brand, *Faith, Reason, and Earth History: A Paradigm of Earth and Biological Origins by Intelligent Design*, 2d ed. (Berrien Springs: Andrews

1. The Story of Creation as Theology

The first objection against the literal and complementary understanding of the Genesis creation accounts is the claim that the biblical creation narratives must be read as “spiritual,” “metaphorical,” and “theological” text, rather than as a historical narrative with a description of factual events.²⁸ The problem does not lie in the fact that Genesis 1–2 is a theological text. Of course, the creation narrative is theological, and one should not be surprised by it. It boldly proclaims that the living God is the Creator of life and everything around us. Its monotheistic interpretation, with its emphasis on the material world that was created as very good, is unprecedented and unique among the ancient Near Eastern literature. What is at stake is the nature of that theology. Is this creation theology rooted in history, and does it reflect the facts of life, or is it only a kerygmatic proclamation, a faith reflection that has very little to do with the reality of what actually happened in a factual account of the creation?

Theologians who consider these texts as a purely theological statement deny the historicity of these accounts. According to them, there was not a literal seven-day creation week during which God created life on Earth.²⁹ However, to separate theology and history reveals a narrow understanding of theology, because biblical faith is always rooted in time and space. All of God’s salvific events are historical. In biblical theology, there is no discrepancy between faith, message, theology, and history. Genesis 1–2 is theology *par excellence*, in which time and space play a crucial role.

That the author of the biblical creation narratives writes from the theological point of view can be supported by the fact that he engages in a polemic with mythological stories of his time.³⁰ Thus this antimythological account reflects not only his knowledge of those extrabiblical creation epics, but also proves that he is free to make his own unique contribution as it was revealed to him (Deut 29:29; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 11:3). The author is writing from a specific standpoint, emphasizing antimythological points in order to clarify the true origin of the world.³¹

University Press, 2009); Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1998).

²⁸Baldwin, 36, 40, 49; Guy, 94-95, 97-98.

²⁹Baldwin, 36, 42; Guy, 87.

³⁰See esp. Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology,” *EvQ* 46 (1974): 81-102.

³¹In the process of presenting truth, philosophical and hermeneutical presuppositions play a crucial role by functioning as glasses through which we interpret the biblical text and how we approach Scripture itself. Often the real problem is not unbelief, but the hermeneutics of those who interpret the biblical message. Especially significant is the problem of understanding history.

How often I heard during my studies at the Protestant faculty in Prague: “What is important is the message, not history”! However, separating faith and history appears to lead to a tacit neodocetism, neognosticism, or neoplatonism.³² Consider how Jesus and Paul took the Genesis creation story historically at face value (Matt 19:4; 1 Cor 15:47-49). Historical fact and theological message belong inseparably together because salvation history is real history. The message of Jesus’ resurrection is crucial, and this historical fact is our only hope for eternal life (John 20:27-29; 1 Cor 15:12-20; Gal 4:4; 1 John 4:1-3). Discrepancy or tension between faith and history is foreign to the biblical Hebrew thinking. It is thus important for biblical theology to be based upon true historical facts. Just as ideas, theology, and message are important, so is history. Theology and history, faith and the reality of life are not in contradiction; they fit together, are complementary, and do not stand against each other. Dissecting the text in order to separate theology and reality is artificial, because for the ancient readers the text formed a unity.

2. Creation Account as Worship?

The second objection against the complementary interpretation of the Genesis creation stories is the identification of its literary genre³³ as worship. It is claimed that these texts must be “experienced as worship.”³⁴ Are the creation accounts worship text, or do they only lead to worship? Undoubtedly, knowing God as our Creator should lead to an adoration of him who is worthy of our praises (see, e.g., Pss 8:1-9; 19:1-4; 104:1-3, 31-35; Isa 40:28; Jer 10:6-13; and Rev 4:11). Claus Westermann argues that “the real goal” of the biblical creation stories is “the praise of the Creator”;³⁵ however, this does not mean that this text can be identified as worship.

³²To attempt to find a historical core in the biblical narratives and reject the rest is like removing the layers of an onion in order to get to the core, but after taking off all the layers there is no core because an onion is composed only of various layers. To build our theology only on kerygma or faith and without reference to physical life and history, leaves theology and the philosophy of life without a core. This neoplatonic understanding of the biblical reality considers only spiritual things and ideas as good. While the spiritual message is important, so is history.

³³The identification of a particular text with the literary genre is crucial for interpretation. Specific rules of interpreting are associated with different genres. Prophecy, parables, poetry, genealogy, narrative, hymn, prayer, lamentation must each be interpreted according to their individual genre in order to do proper justice to the studied text. It means that the reader must take seriously the literary genre in which the text is written and interpret it accordingly.

³⁴Guy, 93. Marty E. Stevens identifies Genesis 1 as “a liturgy of praise” (*Theological Themes of the Old Testament* [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010], 2).

³⁵Claus Westermann, *The Genesis Accounts of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 37. Westermann accurately observes that the biblical message about the Creator

The immediate context of the biblical creation narratives points explicitly to their literary genre as genealogy (Gen 2:4), rather than to their being mythology, poetry, prediction, metaphor, parable, worship, or hymn/liturgical. Genealogy is a historical account with obvious literal meanings: water is water, vegetation is vegetation, animals are animals, humans are humans, and days are days. Genealogy has literary patterns and repetitions, and this does not make it less historical and factual. Only three parts of the creation text of Genesis 1–2 are written in poetry (Gen 1:27; 2:2–3; 2:23).³⁶ This observation is even more important when one discovers that the literary structure of the whole book of Genesis can be divided into ten genealogies,³⁷ which provides a hermeneutical clue for reading the creation accounts as historical narrative that are written primarily in prose.³⁸

is almost always in the context of praise. An exception is Genesis 1–2, in which praises should be presupposed and anticipated because one cannot understand God as the Creator without admiring and praising him.

³⁶Only three passages of Genesis 1–2 are actually written in poetry. This choice is deliberate and intentional, highlighting the crucial points of the creation story: (1) Gen 1:27—creation of humans in the image of God; (2) Gen 2:2–3—creation of the Sabbath, which was the establishment of the vertical relationship between God and humanity; and (3) Gen 2:23—expression of Adam’s joy after God brought the woman to him, which was the establishment of horizontal relationship.

³⁷See Jacques B. Doukhan, “The Genesis Creation Story: Text, Issues, and Truth,” *Origins* 55 (2004): 17–18.

The Hebrew word *tôledôt* (“genealogy”) is from the root *yâlad*. There are ten genealogies given in Genesis (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1 [repeated in 10:32]; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1 [repeated in 36:9]; and 37:2). In the genre of genealogy, the most important pieces of a chain are usually the first and last elements. The last segment of the genealogy connects the whole unit with the following or another one. Genealogy is a factual, historical narrative of the family chain.

If the genealogies of Adam, Noah, Abraham (Terah), Isaac, and Jacob are literal and these persons are historical characters, it means that the author intended to interpret the genealogy of the heavens and the Earth in the same way. One needs to be consistent in the interpretation of the biblical text.

About the uniqueness of the Genesis genealogies, see esp. Richard S. Hess, “The Genealogies of Genesis 1–11 and Comparative Literature,” in *I Studied Inscriptions Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 4, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 58–72; Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 and Their Alleged Babylonian Backgrounds,” *AUSS* 16 (1978): 361–374.

³⁸Walter Kaiser speaks about “historical narrative prose” (“The Literary Form of Genesis 1–11,” in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. Barton Payne [Waco: Word, 1970], 48–65); John Sailhamer argues that the biblical creation account is a “historical narrative” and needs to be viewed as “mega-history,” noting that “I maintain that the Genesis narratives are to be understood literally and realistically. ‘Mega-history’ is the notion that God has revealed a history of creation in literal and realistic narratives” (*Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account*

3. Creation and the Light of the First Day

The third and most notoriously repeated argument points to a seeming contradiction within the first narrative regarding the events of the first and the fourth days of creation. The sequence of days was counted from the beginning of the creation week (Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31; 2:2-3), and the phrase “and there was evening, and there was morning” (Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31) was applied to each of the first six days.³⁹ However, if the definition of day includes the Earth’s relationship to the sun, moon, and stars, what was the light of the first day if these heavenly bodies were created only on the fourth day? In addition, if plants were created on the third day, how could they survive without the sunshine?

The solution for many is that Genesis 1 is not meant to be read literally. We do not know exactly when our solar system was created. It could be during the initial creation of Gen 1:1 or on the first day of the creation week. This apparent discrepancy or even contradiction has led Bible scholars to propose several solutions to this puzzling phenomenon of the creation process. Among all the suggested interpretations, two are worthy of closer consideration:

The first view states that God’s presence was the light of the first day. In Psalm 104, which is a poetic hymn describing each of the seven days of creation in the same sequence as Genesis 1, the light of the first day is associated with the glory of God, who wrapped himself “with light as with a cloak” (v. 2). The Lord is the light (Pss 27:1; 118:27; Isa 16:19; James 1:17; 1 John 1:5); therefore, his presence brings light; the light comes forth from God. Similarly, God’s presence was the source of light during the exodus from Egypt (Exod 13:21), as well as during the Red Sea experience, in which the Lord was a light to Israel and darkness to the Egyptian army at the same time (Exod 14:19-20).⁴⁰

The second view says that on the first day of creation, God created the solar system (this would explain the evening-morning cycle from the first day), but that the sun was not yet put to its intended purpose in relationship to the Earth. This would mean that on the fourth day God did not create the

[Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1996], 245).

³⁹The author of the Genesis creation account wrote from an earthly (not from a cosmic) viewpoint. William Shea rightly asserts: “The Creation acts were revealed and recorded as if they had passed before an observer positioned upon the earth, not outside of its system. That point of view makes some elements in the narrative more understandable” (“Creation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000], 420).

⁴⁰The idea of light having existence independent of the sun is attested in Rev 21:23 and 22:5, where God himself is the light. Ancient rabbinic sources also mentioned that the light of the first creation day was the splendor of the divine presence. Although according to the biblical view, the sun is a source of physical light, God is the ultimate source of light (Isa 60:19-20).

sun and moon, but rather appointed them to govern the day and the night, to separate light from darkness, and to mark seasons, days, and years (Gen 1:14, 18). Thus the sun and moon were in existence from day one, but visible on the surface of the Earth only on and after the fourth day. It may be that the water above the earth (mentioned on the second day of creation, v. 7) or heavy clouds (Job 38:9) could have covered our planet, which prevented the sun from being seen on the Earth.⁴¹ On the fourth day, the watery envelope or cloud cover would have disappeared.

According to the second view, careful analysis of the biblical text indicates that God did not create the sun and moon on the fourth day, but that he only appointed them to their specific tasks. Also Gen 1:14 can be translated as a purpose clause: “Let the lights . . . be (appointed) to separate the day from the night.” This translation assumes that the luminaries were already in the firmament. It is important to note that the statement in Gen 1:16 that God made two lights may be rendered as “had made,”⁴² implying that they were created before the fourth day. According to Hebrew grammar, such a translation is a legitimate possibility.⁴³

There is a plausible possibility of combining the two proposed solutions because they could be complementary. God’s presence may have been the principal source of light for the first three days, but this light could also have included light from the sun (the solar system being here from the first day). However, from the fourth day on the focus was directed on light coming forth from the astronomical bodies as we know them today.⁴⁴

⁴¹Roth, 316-318. See also Frank Lewis Marsh, *Studies in Creationism* (Washington, DC: Review and Harold, 1950), 210-218.

⁴²Hebrew does not have six forms of the past tense as we have in English. The Hebrew language expresses the past by accomplished action. It means that the translators need to choose according to the context how to interpret and render into English this accomplished action by deciding whether to use simple past, past continuous, present perfect, present perfect continuous, pluperfect (past perfect), or past perfect continuous.

⁴³See *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. Emil Kautsch and A. E. Cowley, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 348. Sailhamer, 132-134.

⁴⁴On the basis of syntax, we can conclude that God did not create the stars on the fourth day. The words “He made” and “also” in “He made the stars also” were supplied by the translators; they are not in the Hebrew text. V. 16 can be translated as follows: “And God made the two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, the lesser light to rule the night with the stars” (Colin L. House, “Some Notes on Translating in Genesis 1:16,” *AUSS* 25 [1987]: 247). Thus the starry heaven could have been created long before the creation week. According to Job 38:7, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” at the creation of the Earth. If “the morning stars” here represent angels and are understood as a personification of the starry heavens, then this text would support the existence of the angels and stars prior to the creation week.

4. The Lack of Rain and Cultivation

The fourth argument elaborates on the fact that there is a natural explanation for the absence of grass and shrubs: the lack of rain and cultivation (Gen 2:5). This seems like a contradiction to the creation of vegetation on day three, which Genesis 1 places before the creation of humans. Guy thus argues that “if a literal reading of the first representation [Gen 1] is presupposed, so that land and vegetation emerged (day 3) only seventy-two hours (more or less) before the creation of humanity (day 6), and if the second representation [Gen 2] is also read literally, the result is incoherent.”⁴⁵

First, Gen 2:5-6 states that “no shrub of the field [grass is not mentioned] had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground [note that the text does not speak simply about the existence of humans but about their specific activity, which was not yet needed], but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.”

Four things were not present before sin: thorny plants, agriculture, irrigation/cultivation, and rain. “Each of these things was introduced as a direct result of the entrance of sin.”⁴⁶ This passage, then, serves as an introductory or transitional text that anticipates Genesis 3 (chaps. 1–3 form a literary unit). Randall Younker correctly explains that Gen 2:4b-6 is “a bridge between the perfect Creation of chapter 1 and the introduction of sin into the world in chapter 3.”⁴⁷ Seen from this perspective, there is no contradiction between the two creation narratives.

5. The Sequence of Things Created are in Contradiction

The fifth and principal argument strongly asserts that the sequence of events on the sixth day as portrayed in the second creation account, if taken literally, contradicts the first creation story. The sequence of events according to Genesis 2 is as follows, while a comparison with Genesis 1 is in parentheses:

1. Man (formed on the sixth day)
2. Vegetation (appeared on the third day)
3. Animals (made on the sixth day) and birds (made on the fifth day)
4. Woman (created on the sixth day)

For the relationship between light(s) and time, see H. Ross Cole, “Genesis1:14—Translation Note,” *AUSS* 45 (2007): 63-67.

⁴⁵Guy, 95.

⁴⁶Randall W. Younker, *God's Creation: Exploring the Genesis Story* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1999), 50-58.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 57.

Friedman argues that the two accounts contradict each other even though they describe the same event, because they present what happened in a different order: “In the first version, God creates plants first, then animals, then man and woman. In the second version, God creates *man* first. Next, he creates plants. Then, so that the man should not be alone, God creates animals. And last, after the man does not find a satisfactory mate among the animals, God creates woman.”⁴⁸ Thus the result is evident: if seen from this perspective, there is a contradiction between the two accounts, because vegetation was created on the third day, birds on the fifth, and animals on the sixth.

Two issues are involved: the creation of vegetation and the formation of animals and birds. A closer look at the text suggests an alternative interpretation: “Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. . . . The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Gen 2:8-9, 15).

The text speaks about God’s planting of the Garden of Eden for humans, where he created a variety of beautiful trees, including two special trees in the middle of the Garden—the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This act of creating a special place for the first humans is not in contradiction with Genesis 1 because God’s two different activities are described. Genesis 1 addresses the creation of all plants in general, whereas Genesis 2 covers a specific creation, namely, the Garden of Eden with fruit trees. It means God made an orchard for humans with ready-to-eat fruit. This is additional information to what God did according to Genesis 1.

The second issue, the formation of birds and animals, leads to the question: Did God create birds and animals on the fifth and six days, respectively, as in Genesis 1, or did he make them after the creation of Adam, as it is suggested by a quick reading of Genesis 2? Again, two different actions of God are described in the two narratives. In Gen 2:18-21,

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh.

⁴⁸Friedman, 51. The same is argued by Guy, 94, and Baldwin, 46.

There are two possible explanations for this phenomenon: The first, which is less likely, puts the past tense of the sentence, “The Lord God formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air,” into the pluperfect,⁴⁹ which would mean that God “had formed” animals and birds already, but now he brings some of them to Adam to name.⁵⁰

Another explanation is given by Cassuto, who suggests that here one encounters God’s special creation made for this unique occasion in the life of Adam. It means that the LORD God, in addition to his previous creation of animals and birds, formed some new creatures and brought them to Adam in order to be named. This specific action was done in order to create in Adam feelings of need for a partner.⁵¹ Cassuto states:

Had the meaning, therefore, been that the Lord God created them then, they should have been referred to in unmistakable terms. . . . Hence it seems that in the passage *before us* [verses 19–20] . . . we must understand the creation of the beasts and the flying creatures in a similar sense to that of the growing of the trees in v. 9, to wit, that of all the species of beasts and flying creatures that had already been created and had spread over the face of the earth and the firmament of the heavens, the Lord God now formed particular specimens for the purpose of presenting them all before man in the midst of the Garden.⁵²

Verses 19-20 are, then, an insertion into the story for the purpose of explaining why it was not good for Adam to be alone. This intermission had a specific purpose to create in Adam a need for a companion for life. God first expressed his desire to create a companion for Adam. After God’s statement, one would expect that immediate action would be taken, but the reader needs to wait until v. 21 to witness the continuation of the story. In between, Adam names animals and birds to find out that he has no “helper suitable to him.” This phrase forms an *inclusio* for that insertion (vv. 18 and 20 end with the same thought that no suitable help was there for Adam). Verse 21 is a natural fulfillment of v. 18. Verse 21 describes the result. Thus

⁴⁹See n. 42 above.

⁵⁰The meaning of the word “all” (*kol*) can vary according to its context: either in the sense of totality or partiality. See Jiří Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology and Rationale (An Intertextual Study)*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series 4 (Berrien Springs: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2000), 240, 249.

⁵¹See Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, 128-133.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 129. Doukhan rightly underscores, in regard to the problem of the apparent chronological discrepancies between the first and the second creation narratives, that “it is resolved as soon as” we realize that in Genesis 2 “the perspective is essentially anthropocentric: everything is there in connection with mankind” (for details, see Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story*, 174).

v. 18 speaks about God's decision to make a partner for Adam, and v. 21 describes how he did it.

6. The Days of Creation

The sixth objection argues for the symbolic nonliteral days of creation in the first narrative. Were the creation days intended by the author to be twenty-four-hour or indefinite periods of time?

There are several good reasons for understanding the creation days to be identical to our week as we know it. The pentagonal evidence associated with the term "day" in Genesis 1 (singular in form; always connected with a numeral; standing as a plain noun without a preposition or any other kind of constructions; preceded by the temporal phrase; and tied with the divine rest) points unequivocally to one conclusion: the author of the book of Genesis intended to say that the "day" of the creation week is a regular day consisting of a twenty-four-hour period and cannot be interpreted figuratively.

On literary, syntactical, phraseological, intertextual, exegetical, and contextual grounds, one can confidently state that the creation week (the only time-cycle that is not derived from the natural astronomical phenomena) must be understood as consisting of seven literal, historical, factual, consecutive, and contiguous days. The author's purpose was to provide an account of what actually happened during the creation week of divine activity. According to Marcus Dods, if the word "day" in Genesis 1 does not refer to a regular day, "the interpretation of Scripture is hopeless."⁵³ A brief examination of the grounds for interpretation offers the following results:

a. *Literary genre.* The immediate context of the first story points explicitly to its literary genre as genealogy, i.e., a historical account (see above).

b. *Syntax.* The noun "day" (used 2,304 times in the Hebrew Bible) consistently occurs in the creation week in the singular.⁵⁴ Other characteristics of the word "day" in the first account include: it never occurs together with a preposition, suffix, comparative particle, or in a construct state, but always as a plain noun. Further, each day of creation is always accompanied by a numeral. Each time the Bible uses the noun "day" in combination with a numeral (used 150 times in the Hebrew Bible), it consistently refers to a regular twenty-four-

⁵³Marcus Dods, *Genesis*, Expositor's Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 1:4. For a detailed study on this topic, see Gerhard F. Hasel, "The 'Days' of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal 'Days' or Figurative 'Periods/EPOCHS' of Time?" in *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary*, ed. John T. Baldwin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 48-68; Walter M. Booth, "Days of Genesis 1: Literal or Nonliteral?" *JATS* 14/1 (2003): 101-120.

⁵⁴For details, see n. 9 above.

hour day.⁵⁵ Finally, when the word “day” is used in a numbered series, it always refers to a normal day (see Num 7:10-83; 29:1-35).

c. *Phraseology.* The unique phrase “and there was evening, and there was morning” always precedes a particular day of creation (Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31), thereby providing a temporal boundary that implies the existence of a day consisting of a twenty-four-hour period.

d. *Intertextuality.* Other scriptural texts also interpret the seven days of creation in a literal way. Two classic Sabbath passages about divine rest powerfully testify to this effect by giving an example for humans to emulate: “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day” (Exod 20:11); and “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested” (Exod 31:17).

e. *Witness of biblical scholarship.* Gerhard von Rad stresses that “The seven days are unquestionably to be understood as actual days and a unique, unrepeatable lapse of time in the world.”⁵⁶ Terence Fretheim agrees, noting: “Other possibilities for understanding *day* (symbolic; sequential but not consecutive; liturgical) are less likely. Efforts to understand *day* in terms of, say, evolutionary periods, betray too much of an interest in harmonization.”⁵⁷ Gordon Wenham concurs: “There can be little doubt that here ‘day’ has its basic sense of a 24-hour period.”⁵⁸ James Barr aptly states: “So far as I know there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that writer(s) of Genesis 1–11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that . . . creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵The unsurprising exception to this rule is “days” mentioned in the apocalyptic literary genre, namely Zech 14:7 and Dan 12:11-12. The Genesis creation narratives, however, have nothing predictive in their content.

⁵⁶Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 65.

⁵⁷Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 62.

⁵⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 19. For a different view, see John H. Walton, who argues only for the functional usage of the creation days in Genesis 1 (*The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2009], 54-71). However, function is always intimately connected with reality—they are inseparable, as the function of a car is closely linked with the car itself.

⁵⁹From James Barr’s personal letter to David C. K. Watson (23 April 1984), published in the *Newsletter* of the Creation Science Association of Ontario, 3/4 (1990/91). This is also confirmed by lexicographers, see, e.g., Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Boston: Brill, 2001); David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, eds., *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997).

7. Death before Sin?

The seventh objection has to do with the existence of death before the fall into sin (Genesis 3). This approach has to admit by default that death already existed before the fall. Richard Rice tries to smooth this *scandalon* by making a distinction between natural and moral evil.⁶⁰

However, according to the Genesis creation accounts, there is no room for death as all stress is on the creation of life and death is neither presupposed nor implied. On the contrary, the author underlines that the created world was originally “good” (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and “very good” (1:31), and creation was “not yet” affected by sin or death (2:5-6). Death will come into the picture only in Genesis 3 in relationship to the fall of Adam and Eve. The presence of death before the fall paints a distorted picture of God and twists his loving character. Such a God who would use death, predation, and cruelty in the evolutionary process would not deserve one’s admiration, but rather would tend to create atheists and agnostics. This fall described in Genesis 3, and not God, is the actual cause of death, predation, cruelty, and the evil we experience in today’s world.

Final Conclusion

Good theology must be built on solid exegesis. None of the seven scrutinized arguments used against the literal reading of the Genesis creation accounts has a satisfying theological-exegetical or hermeneutical strength or logic. Those who argue for a nonliteral reading of the text impose a superficial reading on it that is foreign to its intended meaning. There is a better and more consistent way to interpret the suggested theological-exegetical “problems” than by placing these two narratives in opposition to each other.⁶¹ The stories are

⁶⁰See Richard Rice, “Creation, Evolution, and Evil,” in *Understanding Genesis: Contemporary Adventist Perspectives*, ed. Brian Bull, Fritz Guy, and Ervin Taylor (Riverside, CA: Adventist Today Foundation, 2006), 10-22. See also Ervin Taylor, “Death Before Sin?—Yes,” *Adventist Today* 18/4 (2010): 10-13. On the opposite view, see Younker, *God’s Creation*, 68-75; Jacques B. Doukhan, “Where Did Death Come From? A Study of the Genesis Creation Story,” *Adventist Perspectives* 4/1 (1990): 16-18; idem, “When Death Was Not Yet”; J. David Newman, “Death Before Sin?—No,” *Adventist Today* 18/4 (2010): 7-9; Davidson, “The Biblical Account of Origins,” 38-43. For a view that the Earth was not in a negative condition of “chaos” when it was in a state of *tohu* (“unformed”) and *bohu* (“unfilled”) according to Gen 1:2, see Roberto Ouro, “The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic? Part I,” *AUSS* 36 (1998): 259-276; idem, “The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic? Part II,” *AUSS* 37 (1999): 39-53; idem, “The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic? Part III,” *AUSS* 38 (2000): 59-67; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1:1–11:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 140-144.

⁶¹It seems that some scholars underestimate the sense for unity in the ancient world. Why would the final redactor of the Pentateuch be so naive as to put together two contradictory narratives?

different, but they are not contradictory; they are written from two different, but complementary and unified, perspectives.

These two portrayals of the creative acts of God are parallel to one another, thereby reflecting one of the fundamental features of the Hebrew language.⁶² Thus chapters 1 and 2 do not present identical pictures of the original creation week, but instead reflect on the same series of events. Even though the author of the accounts writes from two different perspectives and underscores different aspects, he wants to convey a close relationship between them.⁶³ There is, then, nothing in these biblical stories that would urge the reader to perceive them as being simply metaphorical, symbolic, or spiritual in nature and as having inner discrepancies and incompatibilities. Theology and the reality of the creation event relate together in the mind of the author.

⁶²The parallel nature of the two narratives seems to go beyond the usual verse or section parallelism. On Hebrew parallelism, see N. H. Ridderbos and H. M. Wolf, "Poetry, Hebrew," *ISBE*, 3:892-897; Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, rev. and expanded (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

⁶³A close parallel between the first and second accounts was convincingly demonstrated by Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story*, 77-78; William H. Shea, "The Unity of the Creation Account," *Origins* 5 (1978): 9-38; idem, "Literary Structural Parallels Between Genesis 1 and 2," *Origins* 16 (1989): 49-68.

THE CREATION OF THE SOUL, THE CREATION OF THE BODY: DUAL CREATIONS IN CHRISTIAN TRADITION

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The Intelligent Design community¹ that sprang to life in the last decade of the twentieth century in the United States proposed, at least initially, to be a purely scientific, and not a religious, enterprise. For instance, William A. Dembski notes that “Proponents of intelligent design regard it as a scientific research program that investigates the effects of intelligent causes” and that this search for the “effects of intelligent causes” becomes controversial only when it is applied to “the natural sciences where no embodied, reified, or evolved intelligence could have been present,” as in, for example, the biological sciences.² Finally, and significantly, he contends that his concept of intelligent design does not “invoke a supernatural cause where an ordinary natural cause will do.”³

This proposal, while appearing vague on the surface of things, actually has a historical trajectory that connects it with other, older approaches to the theology-and-science dialogue. Although Dembski and his colleagues change the terminology and attempt to argue from a scientific perspective, the underlying meaning behind their concept of intelligent design falls within a debate that G. C. Berkouwer divides neatly into two theological categories: creationism and traducianism. The problem that Berkouwer speaks of relates to the question of the “mysterious nature of man.”⁴ He proposes that the core of the problem is “the immortality of the soul” and “the general questions relating to its origin.”⁵ Thus, while Dembski’s position is that Intelligent Design is a scientific rather than a religious concept, in actuality his proposal falls within Berkouwer’s problem of the immortal soul. While he would prefer to keep such religious and metaphysical perspectives in the background, a careful reading of the Intelligent Design movement’s writings show that at

¹Where Intelligent Design is capitalized throughout this article, I am referring specifically to the Intelligent Design movement spearheaded by Dembski et al.

²William A. Dembski, “What Intelligent Design Is Not,” in *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design*, ed. William A. Dembski and James M. Kushiner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 17.

³Dembski, 17.

⁴G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 279.

⁵Ibid., 279.

its foundation it is at least partly religiously motivated.⁶ The reason for this religious motivation lies in the Intelligent Design movement's differentiation between intelligent design and nonintelligent design, or as Dembski refers to them, "undirected natural causes." "Intelligent causes," he proposes,

can do things that undirected natural causes cannot. Undirected natural causes can explain how ink gets applied to paper to form a random inkblot but cannot explain an arrangement of ink on paper that spells out a meaningful message. To obtain such a meaningful arrangement requires an intelligent cause. Whether an intelligent cause is located within or outside nature (i.e., is respectively natural or supernatural) is a separate question from whether an intelligent cause has acted within nature. Design has no prior commitment to supernaturalism. Consequently science can offer no principled grounds for excluding design or relegating it to religion.⁷

Dembski's Intelligent Design proposal places a greater emphasis on the creation, or intelligent design, of the "mysterious nature of man," which, in distinction to other evangelical views, they believe may be documented empirically in nature.

However, if one has no definition of the supernatural or natural designer, then how does one differentiate between apparent and intelligent design? Dembski also seems here to give equal weight to the creation and design of natural artifacts, whether human or nonhuman, i.e., animal. Nor does he here differentiate between types of intelligences, whether supernatural, human, or animal. Finally, he contends that because intelligent design "does not require miracles" that it is not religious in nature.⁸ These

⁶Dembski, 17. Some Intelligent Designers, such as Michael Denton do not accept any form of biblical creationism, believing instead in a purely evolutionary development of the human being. Denton, who is a former member of the Discovery Institute, is now, however, more closely associated with the "directed evolution" perspective, in which the origin of life was laid down in the initial conditions of a fine-tuned universe (cf. *Nature's Destiny: How the Laws of Biology Reveal Purpose* [New York: Free Press, 1998]). Other proponents of this perspective include Alister E. McGrath, *A Fine-Tuned Universe: The Quest for God in Science and Theology*, The 2009 Gifford Lectures (Nashville: Westminster John Knox, 2009); and Simon Conway Morris, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁷William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge between Science and Theology*, foreword Michael Behe (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 259.

⁸Ibid. Such a proposal implies that Dembski believes that God, as a supernatural agent, works outside of time and history. Fernando L. Canale proposes contrastively that God works within human history, even though he is not limited to these parameters. This view of God's reality is compatible with the incarnation of God in the New Testament (see, e.g., "Doctrine of God," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000], 105-159; and idem, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presupposition*,

questions, although important to a definition of Intelligent Design, are beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, we will focus only on the question of the immortal soul, the traditional seat of intelligence in human beings. As we will demonstrate in this article, Dembski and his colleagues in the Intelligent Design movement actually do have a definition for their primary designer. In as far as this designer is the Christian God, I am comfortable with affirming that there is an intelligent designer, although I may disagree with some adherents' definitions of God. The source of my discomfort with the Intelligent Design movement lies in their mixed message: on one hand, they invoke a fully scientific program without ties to the supernatural, while, on the other, they imagine, as we will see, a national system of laws that intentionally invokes a classical Christian view of God as designer. Understanding the history and ramifications of this view of a designer God is important for understanding the Intelligent Design movement's place in not only the theology-and-science dialogue, but for its teaching in the public school systems of the United States.

In the light of Dembski's position, the purpose of this paper is to examine the terminology of dualistic conceptions of body and soul (i.e., monogenesis, traducianist, and polygenist perspectives) within the older orthodox traditions of the theology-and-science dialogue that arose in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in response to Darwinian proposals and against Berkouwer's theological backdrop. We will begin by examining theological categories cited by Berkouwer on the origin of the immortal soul.

*The Origin of the Immortal Soul in Humanity:
Traducianism versus Creationism*

Berkouwer begins his discussion of the problem by noting that "It is indeed true that both the Church and theology have been interested in the origin of man, in a sense; but this interest was always directed to the origin of the human race."⁹ However, he clarifies, the ancestry of humanity is not directly the problem at hand. The crux of the problem lies in the question of dual origins, i.e., the origin of the material universe and the origin of the immortal soul. Are there two separate creations of human body and of the human soul (creationism), or does the immortal soul, following the first direct divine impartation, come into existence with the body, i.e., the body and soul are inherited from the parents (traducianism)? While the debate over these issues can become very complex, this paper will focus primarily on the question of one versus two origins.

Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series [Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1987].

⁹Ibid.

Berkouwer notes that by separating the origin of the material universe from that of the origin of the immortal soul, science and theology have managed to find room for simultaneous, but discipline-oriented, discussion about the origins of humanity. Thus, whereas the origin of the material universe is spoken of from within the Darwinian scientific realm, the origin of the immortal soul falls within the purview of theology.¹⁰ However, he questions the legitimacy of such a dualistic approach, stating: “It can hardly be denied that the formulation of the two ‘questions of origin’ is quite different, and that this very fact suggests the question as to how justified the usual treatment in dogmatics is; in how far the dogmatician may legitimately speak of a duality of origin.”¹¹

Historically, questions regarding the creation and unity of the human race and the fall of humanity have been closely related. Berkouwer notes that “This is apparent already from the fact that traducianism has always appealed, in its fight against creationism, to the unity of the human race. . . . Both [traditionally] held to the unity of the human race in Adam (in which not only the story of creation but especially Paul’s statement in Rom. 5, and the text of Acts 17:26, played a role); and this was true in Catholicism (e.g., at Trent) as well as in Protestantism.”¹² Therefore, except for rare denials, the problems surrounding the question of the unity of the human race were of an “incidental and peripheral nature until recently.”¹³

The Problem of Science and Theology in Relation
to the Immortal Soul: Monogenism
versus Polygenism

The change in the biological sciences that came as a result of the Darwinian and Neo-Darwinian scientific proposals gave meaning to the related problem of monogenesis, or the origin of humanity from a single pair, versus polygenesis, the origin of humanity from multiple pairs.¹⁴ The terms may be applied to two separate, but related, issues: the issue of human ancestry and the issue of a dual origin of material and immaterial elements of creation.

Creationism versus Traducianism

Before turning to these two approaches to the origin of the immortal soul, it is first necessary to briefly clarify the relationship between traducianism and creationism, on one hand, and polygenism and monogenism, on the other.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., 279-280.

¹³Ibid., 280.

¹⁴Ibid.

As noted briefly above, creationism refers to the idea of separate origins of the material and immaterial, or spiritual, aspects of the human being, while traducianism contends that the soul comes into existence with the body. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* helpfully notes that traducianism is

the doctrine that, in the process of generation, the human spiritual soul is transmitted to the offspring by the parents. When a distinction is made between the terms Traducianism and Generationism, the former denotes the materialistic doctrine of the transmission of the soul by the organic process of generation, while the latter applies to the doctrine according to which the soul of the offspring originates from the parental soul in some mysterious way analogous to that in which the organism originates from the parent's organism.¹⁵

Whereas creationism posits the special impartation of the immortal soul in human beings, "Traducianism is opposed to Creationism or the doctrine that every soul is created by God."¹⁶ Thus Berkouwer posits that, due to their respective orientations toward the interpretation of Scripture, "we note in Lutheran theology a fairly general sympathy for traducianism, while in Catholic and Calvinist theology preference is given to creationism."¹⁷ Berkouwer clarifies how these two orientations differ:

Lutherans saw the image of God primarily in the spiritual attributes of man (*justitia originalis*) and thus had little interest in what distinguishes man from animal after the fall, since the (lost) *justitia originalis* was for them the one thing that matters. Calvinists and Catholics wished to concern themselves with 'the wholly unique essence of man,' and thus with what remained human also after the Fall.¹⁸

The relationship between creationism and traducianism and monogenism and polygenism is complex. However, as noted, both creationism and traducianism are grounded upon the unity of humanity. In other words, there is a unity in the coming together of bodily matter and immortal soul that creates a whole human being. The connection, then, to monogenism and polygenism, which will be discussed more extensively below, is that monogenism refers to this "mysterious way" in which the soul and body come together, either by being passed on from the parents (as in traducianism) or via a special and individual creative act by divine fiat (as in creationism). As we will see, these ideas are not separate from ideas concerning the ancestral origin of humans. In the following discussion of polygenesis and monogenesis we will focus only on the Roman Catholic orientation and responses to these issues. However,

¹⁵*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v., "Traducianism" (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15014a.htm>).

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Berkouwer, 286.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 287.

as noted, the Calvinist tradition shares a similar view, although it differs in its position from Roman Catholicism due to its orientation toward Scripture and tradition.¹⁹ Traditional Lutheranism tends more toward a position supporting traducianism.

Polygenesis As It Relates to Human Ancestry

The term “polygenesis” typically refers to the “origination of a race or species from a number of independent stocks.”²⁰ During the Renaissance, many traditional and orthodox ideas were openly questioned. Among these was the idea of the unity of the human race, which resulted in speculations that “only civilized men were descendents [*sic*] of Adam and that ‘savage’ people had been separately created,” ideas that were “closely associated with efforts to find a niche for the savage below civilized human beings on the elaborately graded hierarchy known as the ‘great chain of being,’ a traditional device for ranking all forms of life inherited from the Middle Ages.”²¹

However, the attempt to fix a distinct and inferior species of humans was not made until the Englishman William Petty, F.R.S., tried to do so in an unpublished paper of 1676-1677, but his “religious heterodoxy would preclude the widespread acceptance of such a mode of thinking about the ‘types of mankind’ until,” G. M. Fredrickson proposes, “the nineteenth century.”²² Indeed Petty’s ideas about race did not begin to fully engage until some fifty years later when, in Sweden, Carl Linnaeus laid out the different races of humans in *The System of Nature* (1735). *Homo Sapiens*, he proposed, include a number of races, or human subspecies: *Ferus*, *Americanus*, *Europaenus*, *Asiaticus*, *Afer*, and *Monstrosus*.²³

¹⁹For a more complete discussion of the Reformed understanding of creationism, see *ibid.*, 287 ff. Here Berkouwer discusses at length the positions of Bavinck and Kuyper.

²⁰Oxford Dictionaries, s.v., “polygenesis.”

²¹George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 10.

²²*Ibid.*, 11.

²³Caroli Linnaei, *Systema Naturae per Regna Tria Naturae, Secundum Classes, Ordines, Genera, Species, cum Characteribus, Differentiis, Synonymis, Locis*. Tomus I., edition Decima, Reformata (Holmiae, Impensis Direct. Laurentii Salvii, 1758), 20-23.

1. “Four-footed, mute, hairy. *Wildman* (i.e., *Ferus*).
2. Copper-coloured, choleric, erect. *American* (i.e., *Americanus*).
Hair black, straight, thick; *nostrils* wide; *face* harsh; *beard* scanty; obstinate, content, free. *Paints* himself with fine red lines. Regulated by customs.
3. Fair, sanguine, brawny. *European* (i.e., *Europaenus*).
Hair yellow, brown, flowing; *eyes* blue; gently [*sic*], acute, inventive. *Covered* with close vestments. *Governed* by laws.
4. Sooty, melancholy, rigid (i.e., *Asiaticus*).

In Germany, Johann Gottfried Herder²⁴ followed in the steps of Petty and Linnaeus. Rudolf Bultmann points to Herder as the beginning of sorrows for the German nation in Herder's affirmation of the *Völkische* (or populist, ethnic) Movement in Germany, noting that

It was Herder who broke away from the concept of the unity of human nature. He distinguished types of humanity which differ not only in physical but also in mental characteristics. In fact, he thought that the individual types were constant, namely, fixed by nature; they are products of nature. From this it follows that human history must be understood as natural history.²⁵

The notion of polygenism, once stated, was not scientifically confounded until the 1980s with the discoveries made about the human genome and its rich historical value by human population genetics.²⁶ While the question of humans as a unified single race has been answered affirmatively by science, evolutionary studies have reshaped the definition of polygenesis from the perspective of the question of dual origins of material and immaterial elements of the universe.

Polygenesis As It Relates to the Origin of the Soul

Within Roman Catholicism, the question of polygenism arises in regard to the impartation of the immortal soul into the material creation for the purpose

Hair black; *eyes* dark; *fevere* haughty, covetous. *Covered* with loose garments. *Governed* by opinions.

5. Black, phlegmatic, relaxed (i.e., *Afer*).

Hair black, frizzled; *skin* silky; *nose* flat; *lips* tumid; craft [*sic*] indolent, negligent. *Anoints* himself with grease. *Governed* by caprice.”

6. Fabled people (*Monstrosus*).

(Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment*, 13; cited in James Samuel Logan, *Good Punishment? Christian Moral Practice and U.S. Imprisonment* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008], 123).

²⁴See, e.g., Johann Gottfried Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968). Here Herder attempts to demonstrate that the nation of Germany had been set apart by Providence in terms of language, inclinations, character, and heredity.

²⁵Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, Gifford Lecture Series, 1954-1955, Lecture 1: “The Problem of History and Historicity” (<http://www.giffordlectures.org/Browse.asp?PubID=TPESCH&Volume=0&Issue=0&ArticleID=3>); in the German, see idem, *Geschichte und Eschatologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979), 11. The German states: “Herder zerbrach die Vorstellung von der Einheit der menschlichen Natur. Er unterschied menschliche Typen, die sich nicht nur durch physische, sondern auch durch psychische Besonderheiten voneinander unterscheiden. Er hat freilich diese individuellen Typen als constant angesehen, nämlich als durch die Natur festgelegt. Sie sind Naturprodukte. Daraus folgt, dass die menschliche Geschichte als Naturgeschichte verstanden werden muss.”

²⁶Spencer Wells, *Deep Ancestry: Inside the Geographic Project* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2006), 25.

of specially creating human beings. Jesuit scholar Teilhard de Chardin once commented that “in the eyes of science, which at long range can only see things in bulk, the ‘first man’ is and can only be a crowd, and his infancy is made up of thousands and thousands of years.”²⁷ What de Chardin means here is that Adam is a universal concept, the symbol of all fallen humanity who are marked by original sin in the moment that they become human beings. There was, contra Roman Catholic theology, no first Adam who committed original sin. Rather humanity is subject to original sin because this is the condition imposed upon humanity due to the evolutionary nature of the world—original sin is the law of the universe.²⁸ De Chardin’s justification for such a proposal is that even though the problem of monogenism versus polygenism is ultimately a theological problem, the fact that science studies populations rather than individuals (and Roman Catholicism, on this point, deals with the individual impartation of the immortal soul), means that there should not be a contradiction between theological explanations and scientific findings.²⁹

Karl Rahner, S. J., who similarly accepted polygenesis as a reasonable answer to the question of dual origins, stated, in contradiction to Popes Pius XII³⁰ and Paul VI,³¹ that “In the present state of theology and science it cannot be proved that polygenism conflicts with orthodox teaching on original sin. It would be better therefore if the magisterium refrained from censuring polygenism.”³² He continues:

It is doubtful, to say the least, whether a bodily, historical unity of the first human beings can be understood in terms of monogenism. It is a general principle of biology that true, concrete genetic unity is not found in the individual but in the population . . . and in the same biotype (organisms of the same genetic constitution). Only within such a situation can evolution

²⁷Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 185.

²⁸Robert Faricy, *Teilhard de Chardin’s Theology of the Christian in the World* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 158-159, n. 46.

²⁹Teilhard de Chardin, *Monogenisme et monophyletisme*, 1950: 1-2 (Woodstock Theological Center Library, Special Collections Division, Washington, DC, Box 7, Folder 38).

³⁰Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (Weston, MA: Weston College Press, 1951).

³¹Pope Paul VI, L’Osservatore Romano, 15 July 1966; cited in *Original Sin in the Light of Modern Science*, Patrick O’Connell (Houston: Lumen Christi Press, 1973), 90-91.

³²Karl Rahner, “Evolution and Original Sin,” in *The Evolving World and Theology, Concilium*, 26 (GlenRock: Paulist Press, 1967), 64; see also idem, “Theologisches zum Monogenismus,” *Schriften zur Theologie* 1 (1954): 262 (271-275).

come about since selection can exercise its pressure only within such a population and not in isolated individuals.³³

Thus the question of dual origins of the body and immortal soul, as well as the possibility of the dual origins of human beings as a result of evolutionary development, have become increasingly important to Roman Catholics, especially those promoting a so-called “healthy” relationship between evolutionary theory and the church’s teaching on the nature and ontology of human beings. Such a view, its proponents believe, is not in conflict with a long evolutionary process and can, according to some, allow for the accommodation of Roman Catholic theology to evolutionary perspectives. However, as we will observe later, Roman Catholicism has not pronounced any authoritative word on either the question of evolution or the issue of polygenesis, although several popes have commented, from a slightly less-than dogmatic position, in favor of monogenism and the “appropriate” use of evolutionary theory.³⁴

Monogenism As It Relates to Human Ancestry

Monogenism is the notion that humans are descended from a single pair of ancestors.³⁵ It has not only a biblical-theological, but also a scientific definition. The scientific understanding of monogenism is described by scientist Spencer Wells, who points out that “Any piece of DNA that is not shuffled through the action of recombination can be traced back in time to an earlier ancestor.”³⁶ Of the nearly seven billion pieces of mtDNA, or in other words, the world’s current human population, and about half that number of Y-chromosomes, all can be traced back to a sole root.³⁷ “This entity, known as the coalescence

³³Rahner, “Evolution and Original Sin,” 64. Two more recent articles accepting de Chardin’s and Rahner’s position on polygenism are Joan Acker, “Creation and Catholicism,” *America*, 16 December 2000, 6-8; and Daryl P. Domning, “Evolution, Evil and Original Sin,” *America*, 12 November 2001, 17-20.

³⁴E.g., Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, and Paul VI in *L’Osservatore Romano*. See also P. Schoonenberg, *Het Geloof van ons Doopsel* (Hertogenbosch, NL: 1955), 1:143-144. Berkouwer, 280, n. 3, states: “The canon [*Humani Generis*] affirmed belief in the common origin of the human race in Adam, and condemned those who denied it, holding that such denial would involve the dogma of original sin and the salvation of all men in Christ. It was prepared because of the denial of monogenism by some ‘geologists and ethnographers.’”

³⁵Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. “monogenesis” (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/?attempted=true>).

³⁶Wells, *Deep Ancestry*, 155.

³⁷Mitochondrial DNA, or mtDNA, is that which can be traced solely in the maternal line of inheritance. Y-chromosomes are one of two sex chromosomes, the other being an X-chromosome. Females have two X-chromosomes, while males have an X- and

point, is the single mtDNA or Y-chromosome type from which they all trace their descent. In any given sample of nonrecombining DNA sequences there must be a single ancestor at some point in the past.³⁸ This ancient pair have, evocatively, been named Adam and Eve.³⁹

Wells is only too happy to promote his concept of monogenism because as recently as the 1960s little was known about how the vast diversity observed in humans came about. He points to the anthropological work of Carleton Coon, *The Origin of Races*,⁴⁰ which became a standard text for students of anthropology beginning in the late 1960s, as an example of how the racial profiling of earlier generations continued to the present. Coon recognized essentially the same classification of human beings as Linneaus had, excluding only Linneaus's fictitious *Monstrosus* category. Like others before him, Coon used Darwinian evolution to explain how the races had once been united, but separated over time to create such a wide diversity as seen today.⁴¹

Wells comments on the basis of Coon's proposal that Coon's conclusions were based on

Very little, it turned out. Anthropologists of his era were largely limited to a method used since the time of the Greeks—*morphology*, or appearance. Although morphologists measured the physical traits they studied very carefully, derived complex formulae to describe their measurements, and inferred processes from the data, they were working at a disadvantage. This is because morphological variation is ultimately produced by genetic variation, and the under-lying [*sic*] genetic changes required to produce a change in morphology were (for the most part) still unknown.⁴²

Thus it turns out that Coon, on the basis of morphology alone, was saying that “it would have taken a million years of evolution to create the

Y-chromosome. DNA in the Y-chromosome passes from father to son, while mtDNA passes from the mother to both daughters and sons.

³⁸Ibid., 156.

³⁹Ibid. See also an interview with Rebecca Cann, lead researcher at Berkeley on the discovery of mtDNA (*Nova*, “Children of Eve” (Boston: WGBH Educational Foundation, 1986), transcript, 1.

⁴⁰Carleton Coon, *The Origin of Races* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971).

⁴¹Wells, 17. For two other sources of the effects of British and American racial profiling, see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981); and Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin's Sacred Cause: How a Hatred of Slavery Shaped Darwin's Views of Human Evolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). While Desmond and Moore may overstate their case as to Darwin's personal sentiments and its relationship to his theory on the descent of humanity, both they and Gould provide a sobering historical look at the extent of racial profiling and its encouragement by Christians, including politicians and men of the cloth.

⁴²Ibid., 18.

differences we see in different races.”⁴³ Wells’s and others’ research into the mysteries of the human genome have revealed uncontrovertibly that “Only the tiniest sliver of [genetic] variation . . . served to distinguish among the different races.”⁴⁴ Further,

As Lewontin explained it, if someone were to drop an atomic bomb tomorrow, and the only group of people left alive were the English—or the Australian Aborigines, or the Pygmies of the Ituri Forest—that single population would still retain 85 percent of the level of genetic variation found in our species as a whole. This incredible result provided clear evidence that Linnaeus and Coon were wrong. Rather than belonging to discrete subspecies, humans are part of one big extended family.⁴⁵

Wells’s proposals are a reaffirmation of the long-held belief in monogenesis as it pertains to human ancestry. According to biblical theology, the human pair from which humanity sprang was Adam and Eve (Gen 4:1: “Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, ‘With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.’”).⁴⁶ However, the question of monogenesis as it pertains to the origin of the immortal soul is still debated, as we have seen, by Roman Catholic scholars and others who posit a form of polygenesis in order to accommodate the role of evolutionary science in the origins of the material body and yet allow for the divine role in the originating of the immortal soul.

Monogenism As It Relates to the Origin of the Soul

Due to its obvious sense of dualism in regard to the impartation of the immortal soul in human beings, Roman Catholicism’s orthodox views, especially since the appearance of Darwinian evolution, have called for clarification. The first serious papal pronouncement on the topic of monogenesis took place with the publication of *Humani Generis* in 1950. Pius XII seems to have made this statement in response to the growing encounter between theology and science.⁴⁷ However, as P. Schoonenberg notes, the discussion had come up in the 1870 Vatican Council, which prepared a canon positing monogenism in response to the direction that biological science was

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., 21.

⁴⁵Ibid., 21-22.

⁴⁶It must be clarified that Wells and Cann, among others, do not support the notion that the biblical Adam and Eve were historical entities who brought forth humanity. Rather this couple are merely symbols, as noted above, of a universalized history of human origins.

⁴⁷Berkouwer, 280.

then tending toward. However, because the issue was not brought up during the council, monogenism never became dogma.⁴⁸

Darwin had published his *Origin of the Species* in 1859, and would, just months after the 1870 Vatican Council, publish his long-awaited treatise, *The Descent of Man* (1871), in which he proposed that no specialness separated human beings from any other living organism. “Man’s intelligence, use of language, altruism, and so on, all could be derived from rudimentary traits discernible in lower animals.”⁴⁹ Darwin thus noted in the conclusion of his first chapter in *The Descent of Man* that “the time will before long come, when it will be thought wonderful [i.e., incredulous] that naturalists, who were well acquainted with the comparative structure and development of man, and other mammals, should have believed that each was the work of a separate act of creation.”⁵⁰ However, in *The Descent of Man*, Darwin does not stop with the question of human ancestry, but pushes on to declare that “We have seen that the study of the theory of expression confirms to a certain limited extent the conclusion that man is derived from some lower animal form, and supports the belief of the specific or subspecific unity of the several races; . . . We have also seen that expression in itself, or the language of the emotions, as it has sometimes been called, is certainly of importance for the welfare of mankind.”⁵¹

The response of the Roman Catholic Church to such types of proposals, while not officially dogmatized, is one of concern for maintaining a clear proposal of monogenesis in regard to the unity of humanity. Claudio Basevi states:

From the perspective of the biblical doctrine of creation, the results are clearly sterile and exegetically incorrect when one focuses the discussion about Scripture and scientific thought on the fallacious dialectic between “creationism” and “evolutionism,” the first understood as the affirmation of the “immediate” appearance of all the species of living beings and the denial of any biological or even geological transformations, the second understood as a philosophical paradigm that interprets the morphogenesis of all reality in terms of a necessary and immanent development, or as the outcome of blind chance. Biblical exegesis can confront and dialogue with the facts, and therefore with evolution, physical or biological, explained in a scientific way and freed from presuppositions of an aprioristic philosophical character. The presence of analogous presuppositions

⁴⁸Schoonenberg, 143-144; see Berkouwer, 280, n. 3.

⁴⁹James D. Watson, “Commentary: *The Descent of Man*,” in *Darwin: The Indelible Stamp: The Evolution of an Idea*, ed. and commentary James D. Watson (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2005), 604.

⁵⁰Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, in *Darwin: The Indelible Stamp: The Evolution of an Idea*, ed. and commentary James D. Watson (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2005), 629.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 1257.

also cannot be excluded in what concerns the theme of “monogenism,” i.e., the origin of the whole human race from one sole couple of proto-parents. Supported by various biblical passages and by the teaching of the Catholic Magisterium, this belief is presented at times as something certainly denied by scientific results, without reflecting on the fact that, for obvious reasons, the scientific reconstruction, however accurate it may be, could never attain irrefutable proofs for or against it. To this must be added the consideration that scientific analysis can only deduce *a posteriori* if and when it finds itself in front of remains that are certainly human, but it cannot conclude anything about the appearance of a first couple of proto-parents in as much as the “final cause” of such an appearance—the spiritual animation of a body, a new creative intervention of God, etc.—does not belong to the empirical order, whereas only the consequences traceable back to it are.⁵²

Thus from the perspective of Roman Catholic orthodoxy, while there is room for scientific, even evolutionary scientific, discussion about the physical origins of humans, there remains a domain upon which science has little or nothing to add. This domain includes within it the origin of the immortal soul.⁵³ Basevi notes that the issue of monogenism is so important to orthodoxy because it is connected with the “‘normative’ consequences of the proto-parents for all of humanity, particularly to the doctrine of original sin, but also to the recapitulation in Christianity of all that was signified in Adam, to the point that the abandonment of monogenism would require a serious re-interpretation by theology of much of the content of Revelation.”⁵⁴

Summary

Roman Catholic theologians are thus divided on the issue of monogenesis, with those desiring a “healthy” relationship between the church’s theology concerning the origin of the immortal soul and the evolutionary pronouncement concerning the origin of the material universe calling for polygenesis, while those claiming theological orthodoxy proposing the separate creations of soul and body, and yet unified co-existence of these two elements as the foundation of human ontology. Both allow for the introduction of evolutionary science because in both the immortal soul, long considered to be the true essence of humanity, remains distinct from its material counterpart.

⁵²Claudio Basevi, “Sacred Scripture,” *Inters (Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Religion and Science)*, ed. Giuseppe Tanze-Nitti, Philip Larrey, and Alberto Strumia (<http://www.disf.org/en/Voci/12.asp>).

⁵³“Pius XII, “On Evolution and Monogenism,” from *Humani generis*, August 12, 1950 (http://www.disf.org/en/documentation/PioXII_en.asp).

⁵⁴Basevi.

The question remains, however, as to the importance of these issues to the dialogue between science and theology. As we shall discover below, not only were Darwin and his contemporaries concerned with the question of the immortal soul, but the Intelligent Design movement, as expressed through Dembski et al., also retains its alliance with the notion of an immortal soul. However, as we shall see, Dembski et al. carefully nuance their understanding of the origin of the soul behind their claim to intelligent design as a scientific concept.

Early Scientific Discussion Concerning the Immortality of the Soul

Darwin's Thoughts on the Question of the Immortal Soul

The debate between theology and science on the topic of origins, whether material or immaterial, was thus interactive and two-way. Darwin himself, as we have already seen, was concerned with immaterial issues, such as the emotions and the mind, which had generally fallen beyond the purview of science up to that point. Significantly, behind the scenes his researches were not simply dedicated to physical and psychological phenomena, but he also regularly included books on the topic of the immortal soul to his reading list; for instance, he included in his "Books to be Read" and "Books Read" Notebook Francis William Newman's *The Soul, Her Sorrows and Her Aspirations: An Essay Towards the Natural History of the Soul as the True Basis of Theology* (London, 1849); Alexander Copland's *Mortal Life: and the State of the Soul After Death: Conformable to Divine Revelation*; Oersted's *Soul of Nature* (which he describes as "dreadful"); and he notes Toland's 1704 "account of immortality of Soul, amongst Ancients."⁵⁵

Darwin experienced considerable turmoil about the immortal soul. His turmoil lay in part with his reluctance to hurt his closely knit family, especially his betrothed, Emma Wedgwood, who was also his cousin. In a revealing paragraph, Adrian Desmond and James Moore, recount Darwin's struggle, noting that just prior to his engagement his father advised him

to conceal his doubts about religion lest Emma fret for his 'salvation'. (The Doctor understood devout Wedgwood women, having married one himself.) But sharing so much of an outlook, Darwin thought candour the better policy, and a week after the engagement he went ahead and told her of his notebook heresies. Such shocking beliefs were a negation of her deeply intuitive faith. He was erasing the line between body and soul. To him, morality and religious feelings were inherited from beasts rather than Breathed into the body. What need, then, for revelation of religious truth in the Bible? If Jesus's resurrection did not reveal the promise of immortality, how could she and Charles belong to each other for ever? Traditional

⁵⁵Charles Darwin, "Books to be Read" and "Books Read" Notebook (*Darwin Online*, <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>).

Unitarianism, as espoused by Martineau, saw no necessary conflict here, and Darwin's views might have been squared with it. Not so Emma's Anglicanized Unitarianism, with its belief in an immortal soul. She sought reassurance and 'every word' he sent by return was a comfort. He said that he did not consider his 'opinion as formed' (too late was he heeding the Doctor's advice), which gave her hope.⁵⁶

Darwin works out his convictions on the immortal soul in his personal notebooks. For instance, in *Notebook B*: [Transmutation of species (1837-1838)], he notes:

The soul by consent of all is superadded, animals not got, not look forward. If we choose to let conjecture run wild then our animals our fellow brethren in pain, disease, death & suffering, & famine, our slave in the most laborious works, our companions in our amusements, they may partake from our origin in these one common ancestor; we may be all netted together.⁵⁷

Thus Darwin questioned whether the addition of an immortal soul into humans was in fact a reality. If all organisms were descended from one stock, then humans must have received the same orientation toward pain and suffering, among other conditions generally regarded as especially human, as did these lesser organisms.

In *Notebook E* [Transmutation of species (1838-1839)], Darwin finds a discontinuity between the pronouncements of Plato and Socrates on the immortality of the soul and his own conception of the "linear descendant" of "mammiferous animal."⁵⁸ He also struggles with the Platonic notion that "our 'necessary ideas' arise from the preexistence of the soul, are not derivable from experience."⁵⁹

In his "Old & Useless Notes about the Moral Sense & Some Metaphysical Points," Darwin plays with the idea of instinct versus soul in his musings on William Kirby's *Bridgewater Treatise, On the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of God*.⁶⁰ He notes: "As in animal no prejudices about souls, we have particular trains of thoughts as far as man; crows fear of gun.—pointers method of standing.—method of attacking peccary—retriever—produced as soon as

⁵⁶Desmon and Moore, 136.

⁵⁷Charles Darwin, *Notebook B*: [Transmutation of species (1837-1838)] (*Darwin Online*, <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>), 232. Darwin's notes are brief sketches of thought rather than developed prose.

⁵⁸Charles Darwin, *Notebook E*: [Transmutation of species (1838-1839)] (*Darwin Online*, <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>), 76.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 128.

⁶⁰William Kirby, *On the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of God, as Manifested in the Creation of Animals in Their History, Habits, and Instincts*, 2 vols., *The Bridgewater Treatises* (London: Pickering, 1835), 1: xli, xxviii.

brain developed, and as I have said, no soul superadded.”⁶¹ A footnote on this point states:

“[Lamarck] admits [man] to be the most perfect of animals, but instead of a son of God, the root of his genealogical tree, according to him, is an animalcule, a creature without sense or voluntary motion, or internal or external organs . . . no wonder therefore that he considers his intellectual powers, not as indicating a spiritual substance derived from heaven though resident in his body, but merely as the result of his organization (*N. Dict. Nat.* xvi. Artic. Intelligence, 344, comp. *Ibid.* Artic. Idée, 78, 80.), and ascribes to him in the place of a soul a certain *interior sentiment* . . .”

See also *B* 232, “The soul by consent of all is superadded . . .”⁶²

Thus Darwin does not take lightly the question of the immortal soul. His behind-the-scene thinking on the subject eventually resulted in the denial of humans as special creations endowed by God with immortal souls, leading him to conclude:

We must acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities, with sympathy which feels for the most debased, with benevolence which extends not only to other men but to the humblest living creature, with his god-like intellect which had penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system—with all these exalted powers, man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.⁶³

Darwin’s Contemporaries’ Thoughts Regarding the Immortal Soul and Its Relation to Evolutionary Theory

A brief sampling⁶⁴ of Darwin’s contemporaries demonstrates that they also deeply contemplated the issue of the immortal soul and its relation to their contemporary scientific theory. For instance, John Frederick William Herschel, F.R.S., an English mathematician, astronomer, chemist, experimental photographer/inventor and botanist, whose work in scientific methodology (1840)⁶⁵ greatly influenced Darwin, scoffed at those who believed that science

⁶¹Charles Darwin, “Old & Useless Notes about the Moral Sense & Some Metaphysical Points” (1838-1839) (*Darwin Online*, <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>), 36, elipses original.

⁶²*Ibid.*, brackets original.

⁶³Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 1055.

⁶⁴For a more complete discussion of Darwin’s contemporaries on the issue of special creation, see Neal C. Gillespie, *Charles Darwin and the Problem of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

⁶⁵John Frederick William Herschel, *A Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy: Part of Dionysius Lardner’s Cabinet Cyclopaedia* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1840).

“fosters in its cultivators an undue and overweening self-conceit, [that] leads them to doubt the immortality of the soul and to scoff at revealed religion.”⁶⁶ Rather, science, Herschel proposed,

by cherishing as a vital principle an unbounded spirit of enquiry, and ardency of expectation, . . . unfetters the mind from prejudices of every kind, and leaves it open and free to every impression of a higher nature which it is susceptible of receiving, guarding only against enthusiasm and self-deception by a habit of strict investigation, but encouraging, rather than suppressing, every thing that can offer a prospect or a hope beyond the present obscure and unsatisfactory state.⁶⁷

In 1844, Robert Chambers, F.R.S.E., who moved in highly influential scientific and political circles, anonymously published his *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*,⁶⁸ which claimed in the concluding chapter to be “the first attempt to connect the natural sciences in a history of creation.”⁶⁹ The book was highly criticized due to Chambers’s stance that God might not be actively involved in the sustenance of the natural and social hierarchies. In regard to the immortal soul, he contended that

A distinction is therefore [often] drawn between our mental manifestations and those of the lower animals, the latter being comprehended under the term instinct, while ours are collectively described as mind, mind being again a received synonyme with soul, the immortal part of man. There is here a strange system of confusion and error, which it is most imprudent to regard as essential to religion, since candid investigations of nature tend to shew its untenableness. There is, in reality, nothing to prevent our regarding man as specially endowed with an immortal spirit, at the same time that his ordinary mental manifestations are looked upon as simple phenomena resulting from organization [i.e., purely physical processes], those of lower animals being phenomena absolutely the same in character, though developed with much narrower limits.⁷⁰

Significant for our concern in this paper, Chambers’s remarks about the immortal soul indicate his concern regarding the possibility of dual origins of immaterial soul and material body. His footnote connected to this passage further strengthens this point, arguing that God, as first cause, was the creator of not only immaterial soul and mind, but also matter itself, through which these immaterial properties flow.⁷¹ However, he asks,

⁶⁶Ibid., 7.

⁶⁷Ibid., 7-8.

⁶⁸Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (London, John Churchill, 1844).

⁶⁹Ibid., 388.

⁷⁰Ibid., 325-326, n. *.

⁷¹Ibid., 326.

Can we say that God has not in matter itself laid the seeds of every faculty of mind, rather than that he has made the first principle of mind entirely distinct from that of matter? Cannot the first cause of all we see and know have fraught matter itself, from its very beginning, with all the attributes necessary to develop into mind, as well as he have from the first made the attributes of mind wholly different from those of matter, only in order afterwards, by an imperceptible and incomprehensible link, to join the two together?⁷²

This “imperceptible and incomprehensible link” between mind (i.e., immortal soul) and matter seemed to Chambers to be unnecessary. Rather a scientific perspective appeared, to him, to demonstrate the plausibility of an organic unity between the two elements, a unity given by God himself. Pointing to the New Testament, Chambers then concludes that the Scriptures do not present a soul, after death, having no connection with space and time, having no connection with matter. Citing Thomas Hope, *On the Origins and Prospects of Man* (1831), Chambers notes that the New Testament “promises a mind situated in portions of time and space different from the present; a mind composed of elements of matter more extended, more perfect, and more glorious,”⁷³ thereby demonstrating his remaining reliance upon older concepts of the immortal soul.

George Combe, a Scottish phrenologist, who, among other things, studied and sought how to reform and punish the criminal classes, distinguished between his understanding of the immortal soul and his view of death, which was similar to that proposed by Darwin. Combe, in 1847, notes that “The true view of death, therefore, as a natural institution is, that it is an essential part of the system of organisation. . . . Besides, organized beings are constituted by the Creator to be the food of other organized beings, so that some must die that others may live.”⁷⁴ To clarify whence his argument regarding death leads, he proposed that “To prevent, however, all chance of being misapprehended, I repeat, that I do not at all allude to the state of the soul or mind after death, but merely to the dissolution of organized bodies; that, according to the soundest view which I am able to obtain of the natural law, pain and death during youth and middle age, in the human species, are consequences of departure from the Creator’s law, while death in old age, by insensible decay, is an essential part of the system of organic existence as now constituted.”⁷⁵

⁷²Ibid., 326-327, n. *.

⁷³Thomas Hope, *On the Origin and Prospects of Man* (1831), cited in Chambers, *Vestiges*, 328.

⁷⁴George Combe, *The Constitution of Man and Its Relation to External Objects* (Edinburgh: Maclachlan, Stewart, & Co., Longman & Co.; Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., W. S. Orr & Co.; London, James M’Glashan, Dublin, 1847), 244.

⁷⁵Ibid., 244-245.

Also in 1847, Richard Owen, English botanist, creator of the term “Dinosauria,” and a fierce opponent of Darwin’s concept of evolution (he was himself an evolutionist, but felt that Darwin’s proposal was too simplified), proposed that “This [bodily] frame is a temporary trust, for the uses of which we are responsible to the Maker.”⁷⁶ A monogenist, Owen proposed that “The supreme work of Creation has been accomplished that you might possess a body—the sole erect—of all animal bodies the most free—and for what? for the service of the soul.”⁷⁷

Reactions to Darwin’s *The Descent of Man*

When Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* was published in 1871, the response was immediate and varied.⁷⁸ A review in *The Athenaeum*, no. 2262, 4 March 1871, opined that “An evolutionist of the Darwinian order is bound to be further than the moral sense and the intellectual faculties if he believes in the existence of the human soul. . . . As certainly as we evolve sex, so certainly must we evolve soul. If the former be due purely to natural selection, so is the latter.”

A review in *The Saturday Analyst and Leader*, dated 10 November 1860, proposed that there was no “contradiction in the endowment of man with an immaterial soul, supposing him to have originated according to the Darwinian theory, than if he had originated in any other way. Put it broadly: was it more easy for Omnipotence, to which all possible things are equally easy, to give man an immaterial soul, if made out of clay; than if he spring from the next resembling animal type?” Further, the Mosaic account “does not conflict with the indefinite modifiability of man, but on the contrary agrees with it.” The reviewer affirms this point by noting the great diversity of humanity that has proceeded from Adam and Eve, “in a word, all the different species of men on the face of the earth, must have developed and differentiated out of one primitive type.”

The *New York Daily Tribune* of 1 June 1871 noted that “Darwin himself admits that somewhere in the vast line of human development, the soul, by Divine power, was made immortal,” while *The Saturday Review*, 24 December 1859, postulated that “No conceivable amount of evidence derived from the growth and structure of animals and plants would have the slightest bearing upon our convictions in regard to the origin of conscience, or man’s belief

⁷⁶Richard Owen, *On the Classification and Geographical Distribution of the Mammalia, being the Lecture on Sir Robert Reade’s Foundation, Delivered before the University of Cambridge, in the Senate-House, May 10, 1859. To which is Added an Appendix: “On the Gorilla” and “On the Extinction and Transmutation of Species”* (London: John Parker, 1859), 50.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

⁷⁸A collection of reviews of the book, totaling 871 independent responses, may be found in the Cambridge University Library. This collection may also be found at *Darwin Online* (<http://darwin-online.org>).

in a Supreme Being and the immortality of his own soul. . . . We know that there are limits which human reason is unable to overpass, but we believe that those limits will be more surely ascertained and fixed by the right use of reason itself than by the edict of an external authority.”

Continuing in the vein of denigrating the “external authority” of Scripture, a review from *The Literary World*, 17 March 1871, remarked condescendingly: “He who believes in the advancement of man from some lowly organised form, will naturally ask how does this bear on the belief in the immortality of the soul. The barbarous races of man, as Sir J. Lubbock has shown, possess no clear belief of this kind; but arguments derived from the primeval beliefs of savages are, as we have just seen, of little or no avail.”

The Liverpool Leader, 18 March 1871, assured its readers that no danger was to come to natural theology as proposed by Paley by Darwin’s concepts of humanity. The author notes that no matter how one might conceive of the origin of things,

Our minds are so constituted that they cannot rest content with a mere sequence of lifeless and mechanical causes; they must work back until they reach, as the ground and cause of all these secondary causes, an intelligent volitional Being, in some way resembling that which is highest in the soul of man. At this point our curiosity can and does pause, not as comprehending, but as conscious that it has reached the end of its tether. The mind, knowing that it cannot in the least comprehend, or get behind, one of its own acts of free volition—every one of which is, on a smaller scale, a veritable creation—is for that very reason prepared to acknowledge that, when it has reached such a mystery as the will of an intelligent Creator, it has reached a limit which it cannot pass. Till it has reached this point, however, the search for causes cannot stop.

This idea of the restless soul that must search to find its meaning is also reflected in a review from *The Nonconformist*, 4 May 1871, which provides a fitting summation of the deeply ingrained notions regarding the immortal soul and its place within scientific discussion, especially in regard to the question of the essence of humanity. In a direct echo of William Perry’s earlier pronouncements of polygenism, the review proposes that Darwin’s theory of evolution must necessarily stop at the level of savage life because there Darwin

leaves humanity fixed, rigid, immoveable. In order to go beyond this, man must rise ‘above himself’ From this point the life of man is not simply human; it is Divine, and cannot be completed without Divine intervention, which infantile science ignores, and calls ‘a break,’ and leaves to be discussed in ‘another place.’ Yet here, if anywhere, the noblest Biology commences, and science must yet find some way of bringing its theories of evolution up to this better elevation. We do not ask this of

Mr. Darwin, and if the sense of deficiency has been forced upon us, he himself and his Psychology must bear the blame.

To be finally and completely human, one must possess that final element of humanness, the immortal soul.

Summary

Thus it is that Darwin and his colleagues struggled with the question of the immortal soul and its relation to Darwin's evolutionary theory. However, these are not merely the ramblings of an older, less-informed age. The debate over the immortal soul continues in contemporary discussions among theologians and scientists. It is to this hidden dimension in the writings of William A. Dembski and his colleagues that we now turn.

William A. Dembski et al. and the Immortality of the Soul

One particularly evocative hint that the newly emerging Intelligent Design movement of the late twentieth century was something more than a new, alternative approach to Darwinian evolution in terms of material origins was presented in *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design*, edited by William A. Dembski and James M. Kushiner. For the remainder of this discussion on the continuing importance of the immortality of the soul and its relation to science, we will look at the claims about the need for the reintroduction of the immaterial immortal soul into modern science made by the various proponents of the Intelligent Design movement.

John G. West Jr.

Some fifty pages after Dembski's pronouncement that "Proponents of intelligent design regard it as a scientific research program that investigates the effects of intelligent causes," and his assertion that the Intelligent Design movement is "not religiously motivated,"⁷⁹ John G. West Jr. boldly proposes that Intelligent Design

suggests that mind precedes matter and that intelligence is an irreducible property just like matter. This opens the door to an effective alternative to materialistic reductionism. If intelligence itself is an irreducible property, then it is improper to try to reduce mind to matter. Mind can only be explained in terms of itself—like matter is explained in terms of itself. *In short, intelligent design opens the door to a theory of a nonmaterial soul that can be defended within the bounds of science.*⁸⁰

⁷⁹Dembski, 17, 12.

⁸⁰John G. West Jr., "The Regeneration of Science and Culture," in *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design*, ed. William A. Dembski and James M. Kushiner, 66, emphasis supplied.

West then proposes five effects of an established belief in the immortality of the soul for public policy in the United States: within a legally recognized system of science based upon intelligent design that incorporates within it a belief in the immortality of the soul, (1) welfare policies would stop focusing narrowly on “changing material inputs” and would look at “issues of character and accountability”; (2) traditional morality would be reinstated and “would promote honest questioning of whether certain behaviors—such as adultery—really do serve a biological function” and “may provide a powerful way to check the moral relativism spawned by scientific materialism, especially in the areas of family life and sexual behavior”; (3) in regard to the sanctity of life, “Once the idea of a nonmaterial soul gains new currency, the ethical context in which issues such as abortion and euthanasia are debated will considerably expand”; (4) in defense of science itself, intelligent design would supply “a framework for science that can account for the full richness of what human beings really are” and “help restore the integrity of science”; and (5) intelligent design helps to support free inquiry because “it admits a far wider range of possible explanations in scientific discussions” and is not, like modern science, “monocausal.”⁸¹

Not only is West’s proposal for the reintroduction of the immortal soul seemingly inappropriate from the perspective of the Intelligent Design movement’s stated claims of “scientific theory alone,” but it also invites a sobering reflection on the meaning of a political system that is based entirely upon the views of one religiously oriented segment of the population.

John Mark Reynolds

In his essay, “Getting God a Pass,” John Mark Reynolds laments the lapse of psychology into materialistically oriented veins. He notes that “Traditional Christians have almost universally proclaimed their belief in an immortal soul, distinct from the brain. People have souls. If people have souls not made of matter and energy, an important limitation is placed on a naturalistic science.”⁸² The problem with “theistic naturalists,” Reynolds proposes, is that they have discarded the notion of the immortal soul, which they find to be “theologically controversial.” Such a move leaves people without souls and provides them with brains. “Mind, for these thinkers, can be explained as the product of matter and energy. There is no ‘ghost’ in the machine. . . . The

⁸¹Ibid., 66-68.

⁸²John Mark Reynolds, “Getting God A Pass,” in *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design*, ed. William A. Dembski and James M. Kushiner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 82.

theistic naturalist then argues that this is how biblical revelation and Christian theology should have been understood all along.”⁸³

Reynolds finds a corrective for this problem not in the realm of science, but in the act of worshiping, which joins together body and soul, noting: “From the first to the last “in the historic liturgy of the church the mystery of the Passion is connected to the mystery of the Word that became flesh. Christians have never hated matter and energy, for our God took on human form.”⁸⁴

Once again the question is begged as to how this reintroduction of the immortal soul fits within the realm of scientific discipline.

William A. Dembski

Dembski addresses the question of the soul in his book, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World*. In it, he challenges the notion that the earth is a place for “soul-making.”⁸⁵ He proposes that because “sin propagates through nature and brings about natural evil,” the “disordered state of nature mirrors the disordered state of our souls.”⁸⁶ The process of redemption, for Dembski, is based upon the notion of the free will of the soul. The turning back to God cannot be “coerced.”⁸⁷ But the role of redemption is broader in scope. For Dembski, it is about the “reordering” of everything, including the soul. “Thus nature, which now reflects humanity’s fallen state, needs to be restored,” an event which takes place in the redemptive processes of “the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁸⁸

Dembski also expresses his concern that mainstream contemporary Christianity has lost its traditional understanding of the fall. His following statement is telling about his views regarding the immortal soul:

Referring natural evil to the freedom of creation rather than to the Fall has become a consistent pattern in contemporary theology, which seeks to redress the Fall by rationalizing why the Fall isn’t, as it seemed to previous generations of theologians, a horrible tragedy. Such rationalizations are absent from the *O felix culpa* (O fortunate fault) tradition of classical Christian theology. This tradition redresses the Fall by pointing to the great redemption in Christ that the Fall elicits. In that tradition, just because a good outweighs an evil does nothing to make the evil less evil. Yes, in the end we will be better off because Jesus saved us from evil rather than because we happened to be descendants of an Adam and an Eve who escaped evil by

⁸³Ibid., 83.

⁸⁴Ibid., 87.

⁸⁵William A. Dembski, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2009), 31.

⁸⁶Ibid., 28.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

never sinning. But their sin and its consequences must, even in the *O felix culpa* tradition, be viewed as tragedy.⁸⁹

Dembski argues “that cosmic and transhistorical consequences to human sin remain eminently reasonable. . . . In fact, . . . viewing natural evil as a consequence of the Fall is entirely compatible with mainstream understandings of cosmic and natural history.”⁹⁰ Further, he proposes, “Redemption is a painful business. . . . Redemption is God having the final word.”⁹¹ Dembski has arrived at his concept of the soul and its relation to natural phenomena and science. In the interactive relationship between God and human beings, God seeks to restore the fallen soul and bring it and the creation into relationship with himself. Berkouwer is correct when he proposes that “Protestant discussion [of original sin] did not center on the dilemma of monogenism or polygenism, which played no role in the controversy between creationism and traducianism, but rather on the other question of the ‘inheritance’ of sin.”⁹² Thus for Dembski this inherited original sin is of a destructive nature not only to humans but to the whole creation. The process of redemption is one in which not only humans will share, but also the whole of creation.

In summary, it would seem then that Dembski proposes a type of traducianism—once the original purity of the soul is lost in the fall, the immortal soul becomes transmitted through parentage, as with the animals.⁹³

Summary

While it is quite true that Dembski et al. speak very little about the relation of the immortal soul in their concept of Intelligent Design, what they do say is significant and seems to reflect that their position in general is religiously motivated. First and foremost is the fact that the intelligent designer they invoke is not simply concerned with human ancestry, but, importantly, with the origin of the immortal soul. This is reflected in Dembski et al.’s application of the soul to the question of morality and the problem of evil. Further, all of the individuals examined here but Dembski seem to apply a Roman Catholic/Reformed paradigm of dual creationism to their understanding of the body and the immortal soul, while Dembski himself seems to lean toward a traducian perspective. Therefore, the Intelligent Design movement seems to fall within

⁸⁹Ibid., 30.

⁹⁰Ibid., 37.

⁹¹Ibid., 185.

⁹²Berkouwer, 283.

⁹³Ibid., 287.

the older tradition of the theology-and-science dialogues of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, making it an effectively religious position.⁹⁴

Conclusion

As we have observed, the question of the immortal soul remains an important element within the theology-and-science dialogue. Further, the meaning of the term “creationism” must be carefully understood, as it may be applied independently or simultaneously to both the origin of human ancestry and the origin of the immortal soul. As Neal C. Gillespie notes, “The core of special creation, then, was . . . the direct, volitional, and purposeful intervention of God in the course of nature, by whatever means, to create something new.”⁹⁵ However, as we have seen, even within this definition there is great room for differing perspectives. As Gillespie further notes: “The use of the word creation in itself means nothing. Its meaning can be determined only by the context in which it appears and by what is known independently about the beliefs of the author in question. Interpretation is further complicated by the fact that the same author may use the term in different ways during his career.”⁹⁶

It is important, then, for scholars in the theology-and-science dialogue to understand the terminology of creationism. Creationism, as applied to the origin of the soul, transcends the question of human ancestry by allowing the discussion of issues of God and morality, but it also allows human ancestry to be discussed exclusively within the purview of natural science. The Intelligent Design movement brings the question of God’s relationship to and activity in the world to the forefront. While this is helpful, it does not go far enough in defining the foundations of intelligent design, and it ultimately accepts the Creationist/Traducianist perspectives of traditional, mainstream evangelicalism of the twentieth century. For those who do not ascribe to the concept of the immortal soul, there remains a discontinuity between science and theology that begs a theological response. Creationists who espouse a biblically based understanding of creation, which is not evolutionary, and who do not believe in a doctrine of the immortal soul need to dig deeper for a responsible discussion on the creation.⁹⁷

⁹⁴It would, however, be more forthcoming if Dembski et al. would admit to their religious motivation, thereby giving their position more credibility if they “owned” this aspect at its foundation. Further investigation is needed to understand the political motivation behind their reticence to do so.

⁹⁵Gillespie, 22.

⁹⁶Ibid., 25.

⁹⁷For further discussion on this point, see my dissertation, “Toward a Holistic Interdisciplinary Causal Model: A Broadened Conception of the Anthropic Cosmological Principle: Life History and Teleology—”From the Starry Heavens Above to the Moral Law Within” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, forthcoming).

RETHINKING THE AUGUSTINIAN FOUNDATION OF THE THEOLOGY-AND-SCIENCE DIALOGUE

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Introduction

Religion-and-science discourse¹ has become increasingly important in the last twenty years as scholars have attempted to come to terms with complex problems such as the environment, genetic engineering, and other concerns related to the health and welfare of humans and their habitat. From a more narrow scope of research, Christianity, in the new and burgeoning field of theology-and-science interdisciplinary studies, seeks to find common ground upon which to build bridges across the gaps that separate the various disciplines. It appears that the foundational principle upon which this interdisciplinary dialogue is grounded is, ultimately, a theological one, even though the arguments often seem to be stated more in the languages of science and philosophy than in terms of theological affirmation and interpretation. Within this theological construct, a unifying and common ground for the interpretation of humanity, the problem of evil, and the meaning of history is found in the Augustinian tradition. The Augustinian tradition, as we shall discuss, transcends the denominational boundaries of mainstream evangelicalism, including Roman Catholicism,² Anglicanism,³ and

¹Religion-and-science discourse is differentiated here from theology-and-science dialogue, meaning that the term “religion” refers to the wider spectrum of discussion beyond traditional Christianity, especially to Eastern and Native American religions, which have become increasingly important to less-conservative Christians. This often takes the form of “nature romanticism or neoanimism” (cf. Anna Case-Winters, *Reconstructing a Christian Theology of Nature: Down to Earth* [Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007], 28, 77). Here, the term “theology” refers specifically to Christian theology.

²Augustine’s perspective of “signs” and “things” became standard hermeneutics for the Middle Ages. Peter Harrison notes that “God was not to be found,” according to Augustine, “in the creatures that he had made, despite their compelling beauty, but in the innermost recesses of the human heart. Here, in the mind, was the gateway to the invisible world, and those who would know God were directed by Augustine to look inwards, rather than outwards. It was the counsel of the Oracle at Delphi—‘Know Thyself’—that was ultimately to issue in knowledge of the divine” (*The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Naturalism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 31).

³E.g., Alister E. McGrath demonstrates his loyalty to the Augustinian tradition throughout his *Scientific Theology*. It appears that he came to Augustine through a deep study of Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics (A Scientific Theology: Nature* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001] xv).

the Protestant/Reformed traditions,⁴ and, significantly, even the foundations of science.⁵ This interdependence is deeply rooted in the classical Greek roots of Western society, which acknowledged that Providence lies at the foundation of all thought. Thus theology plays not only a grounding role in religion, i.e., myth (*theologica fabulosa*), but also in civic, i.e., political (*theologica civilis*), and natural, i.e., scientific (*theologica naturalis*) law.⁶

⁴Karl Barth, speaking from the realm of Reformed/Calvinist tradition, notes of Augustine: “We cannot be in the church without taking responsibility of the theology of the past as much as for the theology of the present. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Schleiermacher and all the rest are not dead but living. They still speak and demand a hearing as living voices, as surely as we know that they and we belong together in the church” (*Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert: Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte*, 2d ed. [Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1952, 3], cited in McGrath, xv).

⁵See Harrison, 29: “When, in the sixteenth century, the Protestant reformers began to dismantle this fertile and fecund system of allegorical interpretation [of Augustine], they were unwittingly to precipitate a dramatic change in the way in which objects in the natural world were conceived.” This process of deconstruction did not stop with the ending of the sixteenth century, but was employed by Charles Darwin as well. See my article “The Creation of the Soul, the Creation of the Body: Dual Creations in Christian Tradition,” *AUSS* 49 (2011): 67-87. While I examine only the issue of the immortal soul in this article, Darwin also challenged the Augustinian conceptions of history and the problem of evil as well. See my dissertation, ““Toward a Holistic Interdisciplinary Causal Model: A Broadened Conception of the Anthropic Cosmological Principle: Life History and Teleology—From the Starry Heavens above to the Moral Law Within” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, forthcoming). While Seventh-day Adventists are not willing to accommodate their theology to science, they do, nevertheless, support the notion that nature is God’s second great book of revelation and thereby seek to understand nature scientifically from this perspective. There are, of course, a spectrum of beliefs within Adventist theology on this issue.

⁶Alister E. McGrath, *A Fine-Tuned Universe: The Quest for God in Science and Theology*, The 2009 Gifford Lectures (Louisville; Westminster John Knox, 2009), 24ff. For further discussions of the impact of antiquity, including the Judeo-Christian, Greek, and Roman traditions, see, e.g., Giambattista Vico, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, trans., intro., and notes Elio Gianturco with a translation of *The Academies and the Relation between Philosophy and Eloquence*, trans. Donald Phillip Verene (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); and idem, *The First New Science*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, ed. Leon Pompa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 50th anniversary ed., trans. Willard R. Trask, intro. Edward W. Said (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949); Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. and preface David Ratmoko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); and Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, authorized trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927); and Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity*, The 1955 Gifford Lectures (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957).

Increasingly, however, theologians and scientists, who are working within the theology-and-science dialogue, are offering serious critiques and even reconstructions of natural theology that is grounded in the Augustinian worldview. In this article, we will examine two such attempts by, respectively, Anna Case-Winters and Rudolf Bultmann before attempting to articulate a non-Augustinian view based upon Seventh-day Adventist theology.

The larger question, addressed in this article, however, is where do Seventh-day Adventists fit within this discussion? Do they follow the evangelical model, especially when defining humanity, the problem of evil, and the meaning of history? Or do they find a non-Augustinian foundation from which to ground their beliefs?

Seventh-day Adventism and Evangelicalism

When entering the theology-and-science dialogue, the temptation has been, for many scholars, including Seventh-day Adventists, to critique Darwinian-based science rather than focusing on the pertinent methodological issues that have their roots in the Augustinian tradition that anticipate the theological, and, significantly, scientific interpretations. Adventists believe strongly in the sixteenth-century rejuvenation of Bible study out of which Protestant/Reformed and Radical Reformation traditions emerged, and trace many of the church's statements of belief to these periods of doctrinal development.⁷

⁷For further discussion on this point, see Denis Fortin, "Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism and Early Adventist Statements of Belief," *AUSS* 36 (1998): 51-67. As Fortin, 52, notes, Millerites, the millennialist movement from which Adventism came, "were not substantially different from other nineteenth-century Protestant denominations. In fact, as demonstrated by many studies in the last decades, it was Millerism's resemblance to other denominations that had been a cause of tensions with them. The common denominator to these studies is that Millerism was the product of nineteenth-century American evangelical Protestantism and revivalism. . . . 'Millerites were, in their origins, good evangelical Protestant Americans.'" Fortin notes, however, of early Adventists that "A theological comparison with evangelicalism is needed to get a fuller picture of Adventism's position within this heritage." Some early Adventist groups, he contends, "dissented from evangelicalism" (*ibid.*, 53). Fortin, 54, bases his analysis on four distinctive foci held in common by nineteenth-century evangelicals—"the new-birth experience, the centrality of the Bible to shape its message, mission, and the millennium"—, which he views "more as a religious temperament than as a theological system." This helps to partly explain why Adventists of the 1950s were not so concerned to demonstrate their unique contributions to doctrines such as creation that were held in common with other Christians (see further discussion below).

Fortin, 64, finds that Seventh-day Adventists, while cherishing many of the beliefs of mainstream evangelicals, differ from them in the following ways: (1) Its early

Further, the apparent acceptance of Seventh-day Adventism as a part of the evangelical movement was at least partially settled by conversations between evangelicals Walter Martin and Donald Grey Barnhouse and certain appointed Adventist leaders in the 1950s. The book that resulted from these conversations, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (1957),⁸ was heralded by one of its authors, LeRoy Edwin Froom, as a document that “completed the long process of clarification, rectification of misconceptions, and declarations of truth before Church and world, presenting our united and truly authoritative position on these long-misunderstood points.”⁹

While it is possible to understand this declaration to be one of wholesale acceptance of and by evangelicalism of all Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, Froom actually was referring specifically to three areas, identified in the previous paragraph under the category “Definitive Spirit of Prophecy Declarations Assembled”:

To complete the rather comprehensive presentation, and to give it maximum weight, complete search was made for all pertinent Spirit of Prophecy statements, through the years, bearing on the vital questions of (1) the eternal pre-existence and complete Deity of Christ, and His relation to the Trinity; (2) His sinless nature during the Incarnation—without our sinful propensities; and (3) the broader, *twofold* truth of the Atonement—as the

statements of belief showed “theological innovation,” centering its theology around “its doctrine of the sanctuary and the progressive work of Christ’s atonement.” (2) The conditional immortality of human beings and the annihilation of the wicked after the last judgment. “This view of the nature of the soul is fundamental to their eschatological interpretation of Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, their understanding of the character of God, and the type of life the redeemed will enjoy in the hereafter.” (3) “Furthermore, even though Seventh-day Adventists believe in the Holy Spirit and his active participation in the plan of salvation,” there was no separate article in early Seventh-day Adventist statements of belief on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, or the divinity of Christ. (4) In addition, many early Seventh-day Adventists were Arians. Fortin, 66, concludes that “These theological differences are sufficient to question to what extent nineteenth-century Seventh-day Adventists were theologically within evangelicalism in the official expression of their doctrines.”

By contrast, in Germany, as Daniel Heinz points out, Adventists made greater progress by emphasizing their evangelical roots that were especially evident in their pietism (“The Pietist Roots of Early German Adventism,” in *Parochialism, Pluralism, and Contextualization: Challenges to Adventist Mission in Europe [19th-21st Centuries]*, ed. David J. B. Trim and Daniel Heinz [Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010], 91).

⁸*Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Adventist Belief*, prepared by a representative group of Seventh-day Adventist Leaders, Bible Teachers, and Editors (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1957). A new annotated version has recently been published: *Questions on Doctrine*, Adventist Classic Library, ed. George R. Knight (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2003). All references to *Questions on Doctrine* will be taken from the first edition.

⁹LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1971), 484.

completed sacrificial *Act* of Atonement on the Cross, and Christ's *application* of its benefits through His subsequent High-Priestly Ministry, climaxing with the closing events of the antitypical *Day* of Atonement, or Judgment Hour. These are the three crucial areas.¹⁰

These “three crucial areas” were those that were especially brought under close scrutiny by Martin and Grey Barnhouse as distinguishing Seventh-day Adventists from other Christian theologies and were considered so vital to the discussion that they were further highlighted in three appendices by the authors of the book. Froom notes that “The relationship of the Spirit of Prophecy to the Bible was carefully and satisfactorily explained,”¹¹ thereby fulfilling “one of the main burdens and missions” of *Questions on Doctrine*—“to clear away any misconception of relationship between the two categories that we emphasize—the Commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus.” He then pointed out that “Sections I and II of *Questions* therefore first deal with those doctrines that Seventh-day Adventists share in common with other Christians. That point is basic, but had rarely ever before been stated in a comprehensive way.”¹²

The goal of *Questions on Doctrines* was, then, to illustrate especially those particular statements of belief in which Adventism differed from mainstream evangelicalism and to state briefly those points that Adventists saw themselves holding in common or maintaining a similar position to other Christians.¹³

¹⁰Ibid., emphasis original.

¹¹Ibid., 485.

¹²Ibid., 484-485.

¹³Sections 1 and 2 of *Questions on Doctrines*, which demonstrate Adventism's similarity to other evangelicals, comprise less than ten percent of the entire book (Section 1 covers pp. 21-32 and Section 2 covers pp. 33-86). These sections are preceded by a statement of the “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.” Seventh-day Adventists prefer to use the terminology “statement of belief” to describe their theological position, rather than the term “creed,” to affirm their understanding that the process of revelation-inspiration is ongoing, building on the theological foundations of the past, but also understanding that human knowledge, due to its epistemological limitations, must continue to learn and deepen in its search for truth. It, therefore, takes seriously the preservation of truth discovered throughout the course of human history, as well as the continuing task of affirming that truth at deeper levels of understanding. The Preamble to the Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs proposes: “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language to express the teachings of God's Holy Word” (<http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html>). The church takes this issue seriously, periodically adding to or revising its statement of belief.

Nevertheless, in spite of these good intentions, fifty years after the publication of the book, *Questions on Doctrine* is believed to be the most controversial book ever written within Adventism, with some accusing the church of giving up too much of its identity in order to be considered evangelical.¹⁴ While it is highly questionable that those elected to serve in this project had any intent to do so, nevertheless there is perhaps a level of naive relief in statements such as Froom's that imply that Adventism had passed the evangelical test by demonstrating that there were more things held in common by Adventists and other Christians than there were those that were different. However, Adventism is now facing considerable difficulty in some of these areas once believed to be held in common with other Christians. One of these is how to state and support its belief in the creation of humanity. Perhaps if the same rigor had been employed in the 1950s for explaining *all* the Adventist statements of belief, not just those which Adventists appear to hold uniquely, the church would have been better prepared for the problems concerning the inspiration and authority of Scripture and the accompanying questions concerning cosmology and cosmogony that plagued, and continues to plague, Christian theology from the 1980s to the present.¹⁵ As discussed in my

¹⁴Cf. <http://qod.andrews.edu>. This website contains the papers presentations of Seventh-day Adventist and evangelical scholars in memory of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*. The symposium was held at Andrews University's Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan, October 24-27, 2007.

¹⁵Evangelical scholar Roger E. Olson notes that "One issue that has bedeviled evangelical theology and often caused great dissension and controversy in the ranks of the theologians is *inerrancy*. Is the Bible without error? Many evangelical theologians distinguish between 'infallibility' and 'inerrancy' and argue that Scripture can be and is inspired and authoritative for faith and practice, while being flawed in terms of accuracy of details in history and cosmology. Its *infallibility*, then, is functional—it does not fail to communicate truth about *God* needed for salvation and Christian living. Other evangelical theologians insist that inerrancy is necessarily implied by inspiration and infallibility. They argue that if Scripture is to be trustworthy at all, it must be inerrant in every detail. This debate took place between evangelical theologians Warfield and James Orr in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; it was an ongoing disagreement about Scripture between theologians who agreed on most other points of doctrine. Warfield defended inerrancy, while Orr (a Scottish Presbyterian theologian who wrote against liberal theology) argued that Scripture can be and is inspired and authoritative without being inerrant" Olson, then, describes how these two approaches came to the fore again in the late 1970s: "The controversy erupted within evangelical theological ranks again in the 1970s with the original publication of Dewey Beegle's *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility* (Pryor Pettengill, 1988) (which was itself a revision of Beegle's earlier book *The Inspiration of Scripture*). Beegle attempted to demonstrate Orr's claim by showing that Scripture contains errors (e.g., contradictions) in history and cosmology that cannot reasonably be explained by appeal to mistakes of copyists. His motive was not to tear down faith in Scripture or its authority but to show that belief in the Bible's inspiration and authority does not depend on its strict

previous article in this edition,¹⁶ the term “creationism” often refers primarily to soul, or spiritual, creation in many mainstream Christian denominations. When Seventh-day Adventists use the term “creation,” however, the meaning does not address two separate origins—one of body (i.e., God-directed, or theistic, evolution) and one of soul (i.e., creationism)—, but is instead an affirmation of one creative activity in which body and breath come into existence necessarily and simultaneously to form a human being (“Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being,” Gen 2:7, NIV). The matter grows more complex as one considers the theological reasons why much of Christianity holds to some form of dual origins, and it is this point, I propose, that makes the foundation of the theology-and-science dialogue theological in nature, including, particularly, concepts of human nature and original sin, along with the accompanying problems of evil, eschatology, predestination, and the meaning of history. Science is not immune to these theological issues. Even Darwin responded to them; in fact, his reaction to them provides the foundation upon which evolutionary theory is built.¹⁷ It is, therefore, crucial that Seventh-day Adventists reconsider their relationship with evangelicalism for the purpose of understanding their own unique approach to these areas. It is also equally important to consider how mainstream evangelicals are responding to these same issues in light of late twentieth- and twenty-first-century scientific proposals. Finally, it is important that Seventh-day Adventists rise above the dual temptations of reaction and defense. As I will discuss in more detail in the future and briefly

inerrancy. This set off a furor among conservative evangelical thinkers that came to expression in Harold Lindsell’s *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan) in 1976. Lindsell argued that “Scripture’s authority depends on its strict, detailed, and technical inerrancy and that evangelical identity depends on that vision of the Bible’s accuracy.” Needless to say, the battle over inerrancy was on. When a summit was held in the 1980s that resulted in the “Chicago Statement on Inerrancy,” meant to “soothe the troubled waters,” the response of many evangelicals was that “the statement killed inerrancy with the death of a thousand qualifications; others viewed it as a reasonable resolution to the debate” (*The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004], 155). Whatever the effects were in mainstream evangelicalism, the impact would result in a splintering of Seventh-day Adventist academics, particularly along the lines of cosmology.

¹⁶Abrahamson, “The Creation of the Soul, the Creation of the Body,” 69ff.

¹⁷See, e.g., my discussion of his research into the soul (“The Creation of the Soul, Creation of the Body,” 79-80). Darwin also grappled with the question of history and eschatology, particularly in the purpose and directionality of time (see, e.g., Stephen Jay Gould, *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988]; idem, *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* [New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007]; idem, *Full House: The Spread of Excellence from Plato to Darwin* [New York: 1996]).

in what follows, Seventh-day Adventist theology has a number of important contributions to bring to the theology-and-science dialogue, but it must do so from within its own tradition, and not simply in reaction to and within the context of others' systems of belief.

In order to differentiate briefly a Seventh-day Adventist perspective from that of mainstream evangelicalism, it is necessary first to define and then seek to understand the way in which evangelicalism has responded to the Augustinian worldview. We will begin by looking at Augustine's own views of the immortality of the soul and original sin and then at his perspectives on history and predestination. We will then turn to two critiques of Augustinian-based evangelical theology that will serve as a connecting point between Seventh-day Adventist and mainstream evangelical thought in regard to the theology-and-science dialogue: Anna Case-Winters, who is informed by feminist, Process, and scientific thought, and Rudolf Bultmann, who deconstructed the Augustinian worldview in his 1955 Gifford Lectures.

Responding to the Augustinian Perspective

Augustine's Areas of Influence in the
Theology-and-Science Dialogue

Two central ideas in Augustine's perspective that are important to the Christian theology-and-science dialogue are, first, the twin notions of the special creation of the immortal soul and original sin and, second, the problem of history and predestination. Augustine's views on these areas are, briefly, as follows:

(1) *the immortal soul and original sin*. The soul is immortal for Augustine for two reasons: "it is the subject of a science which is eternal";¹⁸ and "it is the subject of reason, which is not changed," i.e., is timeless as God is, and thus it cannot become mortal.¹⁹ Augustine's complete human being is not a dual being as Descartes would later describe it; nor was it based upon the idea that the body was a corrupt vessel that "trapped" the pure soul within it. Rather, a true human being, according to Augustine, was a composite of body and soul. As Michael Mendelson notes, Augustine does see the material world as inherently evil in and of itself. We are not "trapped" in the world as in the Manichean proposal. "Rather, it is a more subtle problem of perception and will: we are prone to view things materialistically and hence are unaware that the sensible world is but a tiny portion of what is real [*Confessions* IV.xv.24], an error Augustine increasingly attributes to original sin [*De Libero Arbitrio* III.20; *De Civitate Dei* XIII.14-15]."²⁰ Humans become accustomed, due to this limited

¹⁸Augustine, *Immort. an. 1* (*Basic Writings of Saint Augustine* [New York: Random House], 1:301).

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 2 (*Basic Writings*, 1:302-303).

²⁰Michael Mendelson, "Saint Augustine," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

insight, to focusing only on the sensible world and so it becomes a place of “moral danger, one wherein our will attaches itself to transitory objects that cannot but lead to anxiety [*Confessions* VII.xi.17-18].”²¹ For Augustine, then, immortality was lost due to Adam and Eve’s free choice to disobey God: “Man’s nature . . . was created at first faultless and without sin.”²² Original sin is then passed on through “natural propagation.”²³

When challenged by the Pelagians on the passing on of original sin by “natural propagation,” Augustine contended that while human procreation is motivated “by the concupiscence which is in his members, and the law of sin is applied by the law of his mind to the purpose of procreation,” the righteous “do not carnally beget, because it is of the Spirit, and not of the flesh, that they are themselves begotten.”²⁴ Adam and Eve thus lost their first access to a limited immortality through sinning, and this tendency to sin was passed on in some mysterious way to their offspring, and on to the entire human race through the act of human willing to disobedience. Now humanity must find salvation through the subjugation of the will to God. For Augustine, then, the human being only reaches its true actuality when it subjects its will to God’s will and reunites the changeless, immortal soul with the changeableness of the human body and corrupted mind. The immortal soul becomes the true nature of the restored human being.²⁵

Immortality belongs to the soul, or mind, for, as Augustine proposes in a subtitle, “Mind is Life, and Thus It Cannot Lack Life.” “For whatever dead thing is said to be abandoned by life, is understood to be deserted by the soul. Moreover, this life which deserts the things which die is itself the mind, and it does not abandon itself; hence the mind does not die.”²⁶ Here Augustine’s Platonism comes to the fore. Plato, in *Phaedo*, records Socrates’s final conversation before his execution, noting that Socrates stated: “I want to make my argument before you, my judges, as to why I think that a man who has truly spent his life in philosophy is probably right to be of good cheer in the face of death and to be very hopeful that after death he will attain the greatest blessings yonder.”²⁷ He then asked, “Do we believe that

(<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/augustine/>), brackets original.

²¹Ibid.

²²Augustine, *Nat. grat.* 3.1.

²³Cf. Chris Siefert, “Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas on Original Sin” (unpublished paper, College of William and Mary, May 2000; http://www.memoryhole.net/~chris/research/original_sin.html).

²⁴Augustine, *Pecc. merit.* 2.11 (NPNF¹ 48-49).

²⁵Augustine, *Conf.* 7.17 (*Basic Writings*, 1:105).

²⁶Augustine, *Immort an.* 9.

²⁷Plato, *Phaedo* 64a, trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. with intro. and notes John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 55.

there is such a thing as death?” Having received an affirmative answer, he asked, “Is it anything else than the separation of the soul from the body? Do we believe that death is this, namely, that the body comes to be separated by itself apart from the soul, and the soul comes to be separated by itself apart from the body? Is death anything else than that?”²⁸ Socrates, after a discussion concerning the way that the body impedes the acquisition of knowledge, notes that “freedom and separation of the soul from the body is called death.”²⁹ The soul, Socrates proposes, after being imprisoned in the body becomes polluted by its association,

having always been associated with it and served it, bewitched by physical desires and pleasures to the point at which nothing seems to exist for it but the physical, which one can touch and see or eat and drink or make use of for sexual enjoyment, and if that soul is accustomed to hate and fear and avoid that which is dim and invisible to the eyes but intelligible and to be grasped by philosophy—do you think such a soul will escape pure and by itself?³⁰

The punishment for impurity is for such souls to wander, “paying the penalty for their previous bad upbringing. They wander until their longing for that which accompanies them, the physical, again imprisons them in a body, and they are then, as is likely, bound to such characters as they have practiced in their life.”³¹ Thus the soul becomes reincarnated in another body similar to the bad one that died. The goal is, then, to live a good life while it is possible to do so, for the soul is life itself. Socrates said, “what is it that, present in a body, makes it living?—A soul.” . . . Whatever the soul occupies, it always brings life to it?—It does.”³² For Socrates, death was only, then, of the body; his soul, he believed, would live on, enjoying the benefits of the afterlife.³³

If the soul and body, then, have different origins, from where does Augustine’s soul come? The *Catholic Encyclopedia* proposes that Augustine takes a moderate position between Traducianism, the heretical doctrine that proposes that, “in the process of generation, the human spiritual soul is transmitted by the parents,” and Creationism, “the [orthodox Roman Catholic] doctrine that every soul is created by God.”³⁴ Augustine’s position is known as “Generationism.” “When a distinction is made between the terms Traducianism and Generationism, the former denotes the materialistic

²⁸Plato, *Phaedo* 64c-d (*Complete Works*, 56).

²⁹Ibid., 67d (*Complete Works*, 58).

³⁰Ibid., 81b (*Complete Works*, 71).

³¹Ibid., 81e (*Complete Works*, 71).

³²Ibid., 105c-d (*Complete Works*, 90).

³³Ibid., 115d (*Complete Works*, 98).

³⁴*Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Traducianism” (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15014a.htm>).

doctrine of the transmission of the soul by the organic process of generation, while the latter applies to the doctrine according to which the soul of the offspring originates from the parental soul in some mysterious way analogous to that in which the organism originates from the parent's organism." The *Catholic Encyclopedia* goes on to note that both Traducianism and Generationism are against the notions of Emanationism³⁵ and Evolutionism due to the fact that both Traducianism and Generationism posit that "the first human soul originated by creation. They differ only as to the mode of origin of subsequent souls."³⁶

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* contrasts the pros and cons of Generationism, which Augustine held. Speaking in favor of the view, Generationism preserves, as does Creationism, the "union of body and soul, which constitutes the human being. A murderer really kills a man, although he does not destroy his soul." Further, humans differ and are hierarchically superior to animals due to humans' "spiritual nature which requires that it should be created by God." The argument against Generationism is that the "organic process of generation cannot give rise to spiritual substance" because "the soul is immaterial and indivisible," thus "no spiritual germ can be detached from the Parental soul (cf. St. Thomas, "Contra gent." II, c. 86; "Sum. theol." I:90:2, I:98:2, etc.). As to the power of creation, it is the prerogative of God alone (see Creation, VI)."³⁷ Roman Catholicism, then, while not explicitly condemning Generationism, is opposed to it and it cannot "be held without temerity."³⁸

(2) *history and predestination*. For Augustine, "predestination involves God withholding or making available, according to the divine will, the means by which salvation is possible. Augustine stresses that the divine judgment which determines who will be allowed to be saved in this manner is beyond human understanding."³⁹ Augustine, turning to the biblical examples of Tyre and Sidon, proposed that God knew from eternity that they would not believe, thus he did not make their eventual, eternal punishment worse by forcing upon them a direct knowledge of himself. For Augustine, predestination is from eternity and, therefore, beyond the choice of humans, unless so empowered from eternity by God in his foresight of individual human beings.⁴⁰ Augustine saw this as a merciful act by God, noting:

³⁵Cf. *ibid.*, s.v. "Emanationism."

³⁶*Ibid.*, s.v. "Traducianism."

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Alister E. McGrath, ed., *The Christian Theology Reader*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 415.

⁴⁰Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, bk. 2, chaps. 23-25 (Fathers of the Church).

Therefore the mercy is past finding out by which He has mercy on whom He will, no merits of his own preceding; and the truth is unsearchable by which He hardens whom He will, even although his merits may have preceded, but merits for the most part common to him with the man on whom He has mercy. As of two twins, of which one is taken and the other left, the end is unequal, while the deserts are common, yet in these the one is in such wise delivered by God's great goodness, that the other is condemned by no injustice of God's. For is there unrighteousness with God? Away with the thought!⁴¹

Human free will and the nature of the human being are called into question by the Augustinian worldview. If humans are dual organisms, even composite unions of body and soul as in the Augustinian perspective, then some evangelicals argue that classical theology is at risk for even greater dualisms in social orderings that lead to the subjugation of humans on the basis of issues such as gender or ethnicity and social classism (see Anna Case-Winters below). Others worry that the Augustinian worldview leads to the notion of fate in regard to human destiny and thus to a lack of human accountability (see Rudolf Bultmann below). These two concerns are also important to Seventh-day Adventist theology, and Case-Winters and Bultmann help to lay a foundation for Adventist discussion of these issues.

Anna Case-Winters: Reformed Theology and the
Relation of God to the World as Informed by
Feminist Theology, Process Thought, and
the Natural Sciences

A growing number of evangelical theologians express concern about the ecological and economic crises that assail the planet. As a result, a number of these theologians and scientists-turned-theologians have come to embrace forms of feminist philosophical theology (e.g., Rosemary Reuther, Sharon Welch, Nancy Frankenberry, and Vandana Shiva) and Process thought (e.g., Charles Hartshorne, Ian Barbour, John Cobb, John Haught, Philip Clayton, and David Griffin).

Anna Case-Winters, a professor of theology at McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, shares her concerns about the current ecological crisis that is facing planet Earth and searches for a way for Christian theology to address the problem.⁴² Writing from insights she has gained from feminist theology and Process thought, as well as from the religion-and-science dialogue, she

⁴¹Ibid., chap. 25. As McGrath correctly notes, "The contrast with Calvin is of particular interest, in that predestination is there defined as God's decision to save some and condemn others."

⁴²Anna Case-Winters, *Reconstructing a Christian Theology of Nature* (Aldershot, EN: Ashgate, 2007).

argues that Christianity has much to say about a theology of nature and encourages Christians to search for ways to live more conservatively and sustainably for the sake of the planet, especially for those who are most vulnerable. She rises to the challenge brought forth by critics of Christianity, particularly Christianity's "desacralization of nature, its dualisms and elevation of the spiritual over material reality, and its habit of ignoring or resisting scientific understandings of the natural world," believing that it is important to study such critiques so that *if* there is even a modicum of truth in them that Christianity should recognize and correct its theological expression(s) and approach(es) to nature.⁴³

Case-Winters begins by contemplating "Why We Need a New Theology of Nature," which includes deconstructing the traditional Christian views of "the state of nature" and "the state of theology." She finds a necessary relationship between the "companion crises" in ecology and economy, noting that "The work of eco-justice (*eco*-logical and *eco*-nomic) is one work."⁴⁴ Thus her goal is to better grasp human self-understanding in relation to the rest of nature.

In her book, *Reconstructing a Theology of Nature*, Case-Winters addresses a number of important deconstructive elements in the Augustinian worldview, three of which are important to this study: (1) "a critical appreciation of Christian tradition should be evidenced"; (2) "the anthropocentric and dualistic habits of thought that are embedded in Christian tradition should be addressed"; and (3) "an accounting that is fully conversant with scientific perspectives on the origin and operation of the natural world should be developed."⁴⁵

"A Critical Appreciation of Christian Tradition"

One of the most important points in Scripture is that God is involved intimately in the creation, sustenance, and maintenance of life in the universe. Case-Winters believes strongly in this point and draws a careful line between a pantheistic perspective, in which God is the world, and a wholly transcendent God, who is completely other than the world. Here she is heavily influenced by Process thought, which "maintains divine immanence alongside a reconstructed understanding of transcendence [she has] called 'relational transcendence,'"⁴⁶ which means that there is a two-way relationality between God and the world. She notes: "God is not the world and the world is not God. But neither are these two mutually exclusive. God is in the world and the

⁴³Case-Winters, see esp. chap. 2.

⁴⁴Ibid., 5.

⁴⁵Ibid., 145. For point 1, see her discussion in chap. 3 and throughout; for point 2, see chaps. 4 and 6; and for point 3, see chap. 6.

⁴⁶Ibid., 147.

world is in God. There is a genuine relation of mutual influence because God and the world are *internally related*. Internal relations between entities entails there [*sic*] being co-constituted in such a way that what happens in one affects what happens in the other and *vice versa*.⁴⁷ Case-Winters's perspective stands in contrast to the classical Augustinian view in which "the world is internally related to God (subject to divine influence) while God, on the other hand, is *externally related* to the world (not influenced by the world, impassible)."⁴⁸

While I strongly agree with Case-Winters's first point, that we must return to Scripture as our source for understanding God's relation to the world and with her contention that classical Christian thought needs to be thoroughly deconstructed in regard to God's impassivity to the world, I am uncomfortable with her reliance upon Process and feminist thought to accomplish her perspectives, primarily because it directs her away from a biblical perspective and toward a more nuanced philosophical perspective. She notes that "God leads the way in the creative advance, all the while supporting the creation in its freedom and respecting its integrity. . . . The traditional theological idea of a 'principle of plentitude' illumines this apparent directionality in the evolutionary process."⁴⁹ Yet, God guides, she proposes, all levels of the creation, from the tiniest particle to the most complex of all organisms, the human being, both allowing for freedom to thwart his plans and to conform to his "luring." Each level of the creation responds appropriately to God's activity at its own level.⁵⁰ The eschatological problem that arises from this position is that God has no ultimate goal for history—a problem that we will encounter again in our discussion of Bultmann—and responds only within the present evolutionary process. In other words, the historical acts of God in history are not to intentionally direct history toward an eschatological goal, but to make each act eschatological in the present moment. While there is certainly a freeing of the historical future from the eternity of the past and a call for human accountability in the present, both of which are needed, the focus seems more on human action and involvement than on God's directionality in history.

Anthropocentrism and Dualism

I also find Case-Winters's second point to be helpful in which she calls into question the problems of anthropocentrism and dualism that have become embedded in classical Christian thought. In chapter 1, she presents the case for a new theology of nature by offering a sampling of various ecological and

⁴⁷Ibid., 130.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., 143.

⁵⁰Ibid.

economic crises with which the world is currently contending. Her examples include the increasing consumption of nonrenewable energy sources such as fossil fuels, global warming, diminished biodiversity, and armed conflict over resources. While these examples are not new to environmental discussion, they are helpful in reminding the reader of the need for reform and for providing a reminder of the terrible impact that flagrant usage of natural resources has upon the poorest and most vulnerable elements of society. Her examination of economic crisis in the global economy is provocative and includes discussion of the ever-increasing gap between rich and poor (e.g., “In 2001, the average annual pay of USA CEOs was 350 times as much as the average annual pay of a factory worker, who earned on average \$31,260”), economic globalization (e.g., globalization has led to “human exploitation and environmental degradation,” meaning that there has been a “commodification,” in which people and their labor are treated as commodities, nature is commodified as well,” while local cultures have been annihilated and replaced with “a kind of consumer monoculture”), debt crisis (in which poor nations’ debts become a form of enslavement from which they can never escape), the AIDS pandemic (the poor cannot pay for medication to treat the disease and young people are cut down in their prime), and population explosion (Earth’s human population reached 6.2 billion in 2002, is now at 7 billion, and is expected to reach 8.9 billion by 2050). The “neo-liberal economic globalization” of economic trade includes “unrestrained competition and consumerism, privatization of public utilities and natural resources (like water), unlimited economic growth and accumulation of wealth—all without social obligation.” Of deep concern, then, is the fact that “Of the 100 largest economies in our world today, 49 are nation states and 51 are corporations.” In such a society, “the transnationalization of corporations and capital” mean that there is no “state” to provide moral or civil boundaries. There is no concept of “common welfare,” leaving labor and nature open for exploitation.⁵¹

In the face of such difficulties, Case-Winters asks, “Where do We Go from Here?” Her first response is to re-envision the “Common Good.” Based on the research of Herman Daly and John Cobb, she proposes that the common good is not something that is limited to humans, but must take into account the wider community of all living organisms, of seeing the world as a “community of communities.”⁵² Thus there is a need for understanding wholeness of life on Earth, for understanding the interconnectedness of all the parts together. Living organisms are valued not simply for their service potential for humans, but for their intrinsic value. For Case-Winters, humans become a part of the whole process of the universe, “reframed as a ‘link

⁵¹Ibid., 9-11.

⁵²Ibid., 14.

in the vast communitarian chain of the cosmos” and “humans cannot be abstracted out of this larger web of being as a species apart.”⁵³

For me, Case-Winters’s understanding of humans, as she expresses it here, is the most disturbing part of her proposal. Coming, as I do, from a more traditional view of humans as made in the image of God, it seems, by contrast, that she relinquishes too much in her attempt to stress the point that humans need to become more eco- and enviro-centric in their orientation and that in seeing humans as evolutionarily related to the rest of nature they are better equipped to step into these roles. I am not ready to acquiesce to the notion that there is no special difference between humans and other earthly life forms, although I can relate to her concern that seeing humans as the crowning act of creation can lead to a sense of entitlement over the so-called “lower” forms of creation. Nevertheless, her position is not a necessary conclusion.

The Genesis 1 account, or, in fact, any part of the Scriptures, do not in any way condone human dominance over the creation. Rather, the Scriptures hold humans responsible for care-taking as their divinely appointed task (Gen 1:26-28). Human beings were intended to bear the image of God in the world in the carrying-out of their role as care-takers of their earthly home. That this was to be a role of care-taking rather than the domination and exploitation of the natural realm is noted in Isa 11:8, which describes the “Peaceful Kingdom,” in which the law of God prevails supreme on Earth because humans willingly observe it (“They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea,” NIV), and in Rev 11:18c, which underscores that in the final outpouring of God’s wrath on unrepentant humanity, a significant purpose for the final judgment is “for destroying those who destroy the earth” (NIV). The connection between physical and moral perspectives is important from the point of ecological and economic crisis—as humans move through the world, their moral behavior, or lack thereof, has physical causal consequences, which put into play a series of events that are thereafter out of their control and which may lead to catastrophic consequences.

Such a view does not require Christian theology to fall into Neo-animism, in which God is virtually inseparable from the world. This perspective is also not only a rejection of Neo-animism, but of the Augustinian concept of the immortal soul. The relationship between God and his creation cannot be reduced to mere spirituality, but is, particularly in regard to human-divine relationships, of a personal nature. God comes to dwell personally with his people (“Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them,” Exod 25:8, NIV; “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means, ‘God with us,’” Matt 1:23, NIV).

⁵³Ibid.

This biblically based perspective also deals with the problem of original sin. While it is true that the consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve have been passed to the entire creation in the sense of cause and effect, the fate of individual humans is not a matter of predetermined destiny, a point that we will return to in our discussion of Bultmann.

A Scientifically Informed Natural Theology

Case-Winters's proposal that natural theology should be scientifically informed is a proposal that I can also agree with. Too often in the course of history, theology has relied more heavily upon the moral lesson than on the accuracy of the natural phenomenon, bringing with this an interpretation that splits reality into spiritual and material elements.⁵⁴ Originally, Augustine's intent was not to splinter reality into types, but to find spiritual lessons in natural phenomena. He notes in his treatise *On Christian Doctrine* that

⁵⁴See, e.g., a favorite allegory of the Middle Ages: the pelican, who through its beneficial death on behalf of its young, represented Christ's atonement for humanity. The legend stated that "If the Pelican brings forth young and the little ones grow, they take to striking their parents in the face. The parents, however, hitting back kill their young ones and then, moved by compassion, they weep over them for three days, lamenting over those whom they killed. On the third day, their mother strikes her sides and spills her own blood over their dead bodies . . . and the blood itself awakens them from death" (*Physiologus: A Medieval Book of Nature Lore*, trans. Michael J. Curley [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979], 9-10). The problem with this lovely moral lesson is that pelicans exhibit no such behavior. As Erich Auerbach notes, this type of mixing of lessons of truth (or rhetorical/ethical perspective) with natural phenomena was a highly developed feature of Christian hermeneutic. He notes: "All the more frequently, however, do we find the Fathers pursuing the interpretation of reality—interpretation above all of Scripture, but also of large historical contexts, especially Roman history, for the purpose of bringing them into harmony with the Judeo-Christian view of history. The method employed is almost exclusively that of figures. . . . Figural interpretation 'establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first. The two poles of a figure are separated in time, but both, being real events or persons, are within temporality [even as in the case of mythical creatures]. They are both contained in the flowing stream which is historical life, and only the comprehension, the *intellectus spiritualis*, of their interdependence is a spiritual act.' In practice we almost always find an interpretation of the Old Testament, whose episodes are interpreted as figures or phenomenal prophecies of the events of the New Testament" (*Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 15th anniv. ed., trans. Willard R. Trask, intro. Edward W. Said [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003], 73). While Auerbach's example is of the OT influence on the NT interpretation, the idea can also be applied to the same type of interpretative interaction between natural phenomena and, e.g., Christology.

All doctrine concerns either things or signs, but things are learned by signs. Strictly speaking, I have here called a ‘thing’ that which is not used to signify something else, like wood, stone, cattle, and so on; but not that wood concerning which we read that Moses cast it in bitter waters that their bitterness might be dispelled, nor that stone which Jacob placed at his head, nor that beast which Abraham sacrificed in place of his son. For these are things in such that they are also signs of other things.⁵⁵

Therefore, Augustine’s intent is clear: he is attempting to draw together the spiritual and physical things to draw moral lessons, or signs, from them.

Eventually, however, Augustine’s intent was lost. With Descartes came an intentional splitting of reality into moral and physical realms, the realms of mind and body. Case-Winters is correct in calling into question the truth of Descartes’s myth of the body/mind dualism in which he contends that

I correctly conclude that my essence consists in this one thing: that I be a cogitating thing. And, although I might perhaps . . . have a body which is very closely joined to me, because I have—on the one hand—a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am only a cogitating thing and not an extended one, and because I have—on the other hand—a distinct idea of [the] body, in so far as it is only an extended thing and not a cogitating one, it is still certain that I am really and truly distinct from my body, and that I can exist without it.⁵⁶

Not only does Descartes prioritize mind over body, but he makes existence immaterial. The mind does not need the body to exist. Such a view is not in agreement with the scriptural notion that “the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7, NIV).

While we must be careful in the separating of moral/spiritual and physical creations,⁵⁷ we must also take care not to overrelate the two elements of the human being either. First, it is not simply a God-of-the-gaps argument to say that we do not understand the relation between these two aspects of reality; their relationship is a deep and intriguing mystery that beckons us to a contemplation that eschews simplistic answers. Second, while I agree with Case-Winters’s reason for rejecting all forms of dualism—because it ultimately leads to the subjugation of the weakest elements of nature—once again, I propose that a thoughtful reconsideration of the Genesis 1 account in tandem with the rest of Scripture should lead to similar conclusions. In other words, each of the concerns brought forth by Case-Winters’s and the critics of Christian theology can be corrected by a fresh reading of Scripture.

⁵⁵Augustine, *Doct. chr.* 2, trans. D. W. Robertson Jr. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Library of Liberal Arts, Prentice Hall, 1958), 8.

⁵⁶Descartes, 1992, 76, cited in Case-Winters, 70-71.

⁵⁷See my “The Creation of the Soul, the Creation of the Body.”

Rudolf Bultmann and the Authentic Self

Rudolf Bultmann, who critiques twentieth-century evangelicalism's propensity toward Augustinian theology, examines Augustine's concept of time as it relates to history and eschatology, the soul and freedom of the will, and the understanding of human being.

Citing Gerhard Krüger, Bultmann orients *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity* toward the statement, "Today history is our biggest problem'. Why is it so?"⁵⁸ Looking back on the recent events played out in his own life, Bultmann shuddered at how history had, apparently, swept humanity along toward the cataclysmic events that resulted in World War II. Reminiscing on the unlearned lessons from the French Revolution, he notes,

The powers which rule as fate over man are not only foreign powers opposed to his will and plans but often such as grow out of his own will and plans. It is not only that "the curse of the wrong deed ever must beget wrong," as Schiller said, but good intentions and well considered beginnings also have consequences which no one could foresee and lead to deeds which nobody wanted to do.⁵⁹

The lesson that Bultmann gleans from history is that "willed actions reach beyond the mark of their intended goal, thus revealing an inner logic of things which overrules the will of man." In the French Revolution, what was intended to result in "a liberal constitution and a federation of free nations" led instead to military dictatorship and the death of countless innocent bystanders; "it intended peace, and it led to war."⁶⁰ The question at stake, then, is "whether our personal existence still has a real meaning when our own deeds do not, so to speak, belong to us."⁶¹ If history is a mere coming to be and passing away, in which humanity is "a ball in the play of the waves," then history can be nothing more than the playing out of fate.

Christ's entry into history forever changes the notion of time, Bultmann proposes. Prior to Christ, time was the place in which preparation for his appearing, under the guidance of Providence, took place. "The whole course of history has now a meaning."⁶² However, history in both OT and NT is seen as an "organic unit," a "unity of historical development." The Christian Church "amalgamates" Greek and OT traditions—medieval humanity finds freedom in the realization of God's order both in nature and history and

⁵⁸Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity*, Gifford Lectures, 1955 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 1.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 3.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 4.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 58.

through obedience to the laws of God given to the church. It is here that Bultmann finds his true, authentic self and true existence.⁶³

Augustine endorses this new teleological understanding of history, primarily on the grounds of his belief in creation. Time and history are not “eternal cyclical movement”; rather time has both beginning and ending that are determined by God. Bultmann notes that “The Christian understanding of man is the decisive reason for this view. Augustine has taken it over from Paul, and he unfolds it mainly in opposition to the ancient manner of thinking. For in ancient thought, man is an organic member of the cosmos, whereas for Augustine man has to be distinguished in principle from the world.”⁶⁴ It is here that Augustine’s view of the soul and original sin come to the fore. “Man as a being distinct from world” and as a “free person” is now able to with his own will to follow God or oppose him. “He is free in his decision for good and evil, and therewith he has his own history.”⁶⁵

As Bultmann studies the trajectory of Augustine’s view of history, now secularized as it proceeds through time, he finds its ultimate expression to be progressivism.⁶⁶ “This belief in progress is not in accord with the Christian faith, indeed, it is opposed to it. It originated,” Bultmann contends, “in the polemics against the Christian belief in providence.” Progress, according to Voltaire, becomes “the progress of knowledge; and the meaning in history is the fact that men become richer in knowledge and thereby in welfare.”⁶⁷ This understanding of history, combined with the discovery of civilizations that are older than the Judaic one and an “idea of progress promoted by science,” usher in biblical criticism and result in an understanding of “eschatological perfection [that] is transformed into that of the ever-increasing welfare of humanity.”⁶⁸

However, even as the understanding of history as progress appears to bloom, its fate is already sealed. This is because, Bultmann proposes, this teleological view of history, expressed so eloquently in Augustine, asks that humans either “stand at the end or goal of history and detect its meaning by looking backwards; or if we could stand outside history. . . . But man can neither stand at the goal, nor outside history. He stands within history. . . . And this brings us again to the question: What is the core of history? What is its real object?”⁶⁹ The answer, Bultmann states, is “man”; “to live in actions

⁶³Ibid., 7.

⁶⁴Ibid., 59.

⁶⁵Ibid., 60.

⁶⁶Ibid., 70. Bultmann is not alone in his criticism of progressivism.

⁶⁷Ibid., 70-71.

⁶⁸Ibid., 73, 71.

⁶⁹Ibid., 138-139.

is the very essence of man,” “history is constituted by human actions. ‘Action is distinguished from natural events in so far as it does not merely happen, but has to be expressly performed, borne and animated by some kind of consciousness.’”⁷⁰ But it is a consciousness that is undoubtedly influenced by natural events. Decisions about the present are influenced by past events, encounters, that brings about the future: “the future is open in so far as it brings the gain or the loss of our genuine life and thereby gives to our present its character as moment of decision.”⁷¹

In seeing himself as a free being, Bultmann ultimately rejects the Augustinian view of history, noting that in accepting a new life of grace, given by God, “I also decide on a new understanding of my responsible acting. This does not mean that the responsible decision demanded by the historical moment is taken away from me by faith, but it does mean that all responsible decisions are born of love. For love consists in unreservedly being for one’s neighbour, and this is possible only for the man who has become free from himself.”⁷² Bultmann’s view here is an echo of the apostle Paul’s second great statement on love in Rom 13:8-14. Paul’s central point in this passage is that love does not harm its neighbor; therefore, it follows the moral law as set out in the Decalogue, which can be easily extended to include Case-Winters’s concern for all living things. To care-take means to see other living things, including humans and natural resources, as more than things to be appropriated for one’s own use. Rather, the goal of care-taking is to see also others’ intrinsic purpose for being, granted through the creative acts of God.

Finally, and ultimately, Bultmann’s rejection of the Augustinian view of history is also a radical rejection of the Augustinian conception of predestination. “To be historical,” he asserts, “means to live from the future. . . . In principle, the future always offers to man the gift of freedom; Christian faith is the power to grasp this gift. The freedom of man from himself is always realised in the freedom of historical decision.”⁷³ No longer a prisoner of history and fate, of God’s eternal predestination, humanity is free to choose God’s availing power to do what is good and right. Augustine’s proposal seals the individual’s eschatological destiny from eternity. Bultmann, by contrast, recaptures the scriptural element by making every moment an eschatological choice; the future is changed by the actions of the present. For Bultmann, the “authentic self” is the moral being choosing to act under the direction of God’s power to do right.

⁷⁰Ibid., 139.

⁷¹Ibid., 141.

⁷²Ibid., 152.

⁷³Ibid., 152.

Beyond Augustinianism: A Seventh-day Adventist Perspective

Serious reflection on Genesis 1 and the initial conditions laid out by God, in which humans would participate in protecting the beauty and goodness of the world through their own ethical choices, is helpful as we consider how to respond to nature. Ellen White, reflecting on the events leading to sin as portrayed in Genesis 1–3, notes that

If the [human] race had ceased to fall when Adam was driven from Eden, we should now be in a far more elevated condition physically, mentally, and morally. . . . Men will not take warning from Adam's experience. They will indulge appetite and passion in direct violation of the law of God. . . .

From Adam's day to ours there has been a succession of falls, each greater than the last, in every species of crime. God did not create a race of beings so devoid of health, beauty, and moral power as now exists in the world. Disease of every kind has been fearfully increasing upon the race. This has not been by God's especial providence, but directly contrary to His will. It has come by man's disregard of the very means which God has ordained to shield him from the terrible evils existing.⁷⁴

There are two important reasons why the creation accounts were included at the beginning of the Torah, which is the explication of law. First, it was to remind its readers that the initial conditions that brought about the world matter and set the tone for what will come, and that human beings as moral, creative creatures have a stake in determining how history flows through time. Bultmann realized this point, freeing himself from the deterministic Augustinian worldview in which the responsibility of human behavior was ultimately removed from the acting human because his or her fate had already been determined from eternity. While I do not agree with Bultmann's eschatology in the sense that the heavenly kingdom is realized in this earth as it is and without a personal, historical advent of Christ that results in the recreation of a new earth, I do agree that each decision humans make is eschatological in the sense of creating an initial condition that potentially has far-reaching consequences as it moves history toward a new state of being.

A second reason for including the creation accounts at the beginning of the Torah is due to the legal nature of God's covenant with humanity. In contrast to the *theological civilis* of classical Greece, in which the rituals were concerned primarily "with the civic cults, religious institutions, figureheads, and rites, which offered society social change" and the *theological fabulosa*, with the often immoral actions of the gods,⁷⁵ the rituals of ancient Israel

⁷⁴Ellen White, *Review and Herald*, 4 March, 1875.

⁷⁵McGrath, *A Fine-Tuned Universe*, 24. McGrath, 24-25, notes that this use of civil religion as a mechanism for social cohesion is why the early Christians were considered a threat to the Roman Empire because the Christians refused to do those things that promoted cultural unity, such as worshiping the emperor.

were to have lasting personal and communal impact on the behavior of the worshiper both in society and in relationship to God. In the laying-on of hands upon the head of the sacrificial lamb, the one offering the sacrifice would be forced to stop and contemplate the personal impact of his sin upon his relationship with God, with humans, and even the creation as he took part in the lamb's sacrifice (Lev 1:1-4). As Roy Gane points out, "Ritual consists of rule-governed activity (Staal 1989: 260, 452). That activities are rule-governed means that they exhibit regularities for which rules may be postulated to account for them" (ibid.: 58). He, however, points out a problem with ritual: "The concern of ritualists is with performing activities in a certain manner according to rules rather than with achieving results in any possible manner."⁷⁶ Ritual that has become mere activity becomes devoid of meaning; however, a ritual imbued with meaning can provide a hierarchical system that contains meaning throughout.⁷⁷ He proposes that God's character of love is demonstrated in the cultic rituals and that humans, by practicing the rituals and laws given in the Torah, demonstrate God's character and thereby place a boundary or limit upon the types of activities that they participate in, the lifestyles they choose to live, the relationships that they have with other humans and with God.⁷⁸ It is not unreasonable, then, to extend this idea of ritual and law to all living and nonliving things that exist in this world. If we apply this ritual construct to the creation event itself as the opening statement of God's character, then it is possible to see that human physicality and morality are intimately related to one another from the very beginning. The creation account comes at the beginning of the Torah because God is the source of all law, not just moral and civil. While Genesis does not speak of physical law in scientific terms, it nevertheless points to the metaphysical foundation upon which natural, moral, and civil law is grounded, a point that Philo articulates (see below).

Thus it is that humans are a system of hierarchical processes and subsystems. As pointed out by Ian Barbour, they are not simply physical beings, but are also moral beings who live together in communities and who are governed over by cultural, societal, and religious rules for living together.⁷⁹ The Genesis creation accounts endorse this sense of community by (1) creating an appropriate environment for creatures to live in, (2) by placing these creatures together in integrated and dependent relationships, (3) by commanding them to reproduce and fill this environment, (4) by giving humans the ability to make moral decisions that would help to sustain and

⁷⁶Roy Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004), 2.

⁷⁷Ibid., 3.

⁷⁸Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

⁷⁹Barbour, 29.

maintain the environment, and (5) by placing humans within stable family groups that would provide a continuing resource for moral growth and development. These initial conditions, even though shattered by the fall of Genesis 3, were to be reaffirmed by daily choosing to endorse the initial conditions of the Genesis 1 account:

Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one: Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Deut 6:3-8, NIV).

This recounting of God's law was not simply the remembering of moral and civil law, but also natural. Humans were meant to look upon nature and see its lessons for life and to enjoy the blessings granted by nature and given to them by God. Thus it is that Seventh-day Adventists believe strongly in grounding their beliefs in the Scriptures and by practicing, like many other Christians, a holistic reading of Scripture. Some Christians are seeking for answers to the economic and ecological crises by turning toward pantheistic perspectives, such as found in Native American and Eastern religions. However, the Scriptures provide lessons on how to live balanced and joyful lives that are in relationship not only with God and others, but also with nature. God is above, rather than a part of, his creation and God's character of love is, ultimately, his law: God's "law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character."⁸⁰ By following his law in the essence in which it is intended, humans become successful relational beings.

But there is an even deeper lesson to be contemplated here in the first chapters of Genesis. There is a deep relationship between human behavior and nature. In the recounting of the great Deluge, the lesson is that as humans fell out relationship with God, one another, and nature, so nature became degraded. Nature and human degradation mirror one another. Interestingly, science is learning this same lesson.⁸¹

The climatic point toward which the Preacher of Ecclesiastes drives is that humans may choose to live their lives as they choose, believing that they are islands isolated from the rest of the world. However, in the end, God has been observing their actions all along ("Now all has been heard; here is the

⁸⁰Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 315.

⁸¹Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 90ff. *Home: The Movie* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqxENMKaeCU>).

conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil,” Eccl 12:13-14, NIV). In view of this reality, the Preacher urges the young to “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them’” (Eccl 12:1, NIV).

As one of the most influential passages of Scripture to both Christians and Jews, Genesis 1 proposes that the path to the creation of humans was, first, purposeful—each organism existed not only for its own intrinsic purpose, but also for the sustenance and welfare of the planet (each type of organism comes into being in a hierarchical fashion,⁸² each day’s creation adding a layer of complexity and structure to the framework of life on Earth) and for the glory of God (revealed in the celebration of the creation event [i.e., the action of God in the world] and the worship of God on the Sabbath). The individual and yet harmonious roles that organisms were to play were meant to be lasting, with each step of the process being blessed and living organisms being bid to carry out their roles into perpetuity through their multiplying and filling the earth (each day is called “good” by God after its completion, with the final, seventh affirmation of the Earth being “very good”). Importantly, in the naming of the animals (Gen 2:19) humanity was to recognize the uniqueness and intrinsic role(s) of each creature; in other words, there was to be no excuse for “destroying the earth” through the exploitation of the creation. While the first recorded sin, in Genesis 3, is about listening to and heeding the lies of the serpent, it might be suggested that there is also the sin of exploiting nature to obtain knowledge for one’s own personal gain; of making nature a “standing-reserve” or inventory⁸³ by perverting its intrinsic meaning—eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil to gain the wisdom of God. Similarly, the appearance of the evil one

⁸²Here the term “hierarchical” is referring to the idea that “new properties and capacities *emerge* at higher hierarchical levels and can be explained only in terms of the constituents at those levels. For instance, it would be futile to try to explain the flow of air over the wing of an airplane in terms of elementary particles. Almost any phenomenon studied by a biologist relates to a highly complex system, the components of which are usually several levels above the level studied by physical scientists” (Ernst Mayr, *Toward a New Philosophy of Biology: Observations of an Evolutionist* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998], 11, emphasis original).

⁸³Heidegger uses this term to describe how humans change the meaning of nature when they exploit it for their own singular purposes (“The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. and intro. William Lovitt [New York : Harper Torchbooks, 1977], 17). While he does not compare it to the original sin of humanity, it is, I believe, a fitting metaphor for Genesis 3.

as a beautiful creature called a serpent was for the purpose of deliberately deceiving humanity (Genesis 3).

Genesis 1, then, viewed from a global perspective, shows a world that becomes increasingly complex and ordered throughout the creation account. However, it also points to a moral beginning, which correspondingly becomes increasingly complex and ordered as the layers of physical and biological complexity grow. In this account, there is no separation of the moral and physical elements of the natural realm. Rather the success of one realm is dependent upon the other.

By thinking of Genesis 1 qualitatively, we are then able to see the potential for viewing it not only globally, for the purpose of understanding how order flows throughout the entire creative process, but also for understanding that the process described there is not simply a demythologized version of Babylonian mythology. There is no struggle between God and the forces of chaos. Nor is the account a mere recitation of quasi-historical events, given only for the purpose of narrating a story of origins for the Israelite people, but is meant to convey a sense of reality.⁸⁴

Philo of Alexandria asserts in the introduction to his work “On the Creation” that other “lawgivers . . . have sought to bewilder the people, by burying the truth under a heap of fabulous invention.”⁸⁵ Moses, in contrast, “made the beginning of his laws entirely beautiful, and in all respects admirable, neither at once declaring what ought to be done or the contrary, nor (since it was necessary to mould beforehand the dispositions of those who were to use his laws) inventing fables himself or adopting those which had been invented by others.”⁸⁶ Philo proposes that Moses did not make use of fables or myths because “the law corresponds to the world and the world to the law, and that a man who is obedient to the law, being, by so doing, a citizen of the world, arranges his actions with reference to the intention of nature, in harmony with which the whole universal world is regulated.”⁸⁷ He surmises that neither historian nor poet could surpass the statement of law and creation given by Moses, although we ought to exert ourselves to describe nature. The problem is, however, that

For some men, admiring the world itself rather than the Creator of the world, have represented it as existing without any maker, and eternal; and as

⁸⁴See chap. 5 of my dissertation. See also Trygve N. D. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative: A Literary and Religio-historical Study of Genesis 2–3* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007).

⁸⁵Philo of Alexandria, “On the Creation,” in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, new updated ed., trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), I.1 (p. 3).

⁸⁶Ibid., I.2 (Yonge, 3).

⁸⁷Ibid., (Yonge, 3).

impiously as falsely have represented God as existing in a state of complete inactivity, while it would have been right on the other hand to marvel at the might of God as the creator and father of all and to admire the world in a degree not exceeding the bounds of moderation.⁸⁸

Without the historical nature of God's actions in the creation, that are carried out according to his law, there would be no basis for obedience of the law by the people ("the law corresponds to the world and the world to the law," and as citizens of the world, humanity observes the law; I.3).

Law, then, in all its aspects—moral, civil, and natural—becomes the basis for a better life for all living things.

*Law and Restoration of the Creation by God
and the Human Free Will*

The Psalmist, contemplating his own place among the wonders of nature, asks God, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" (8:3-4, NIV). His answer echoes the words of God at the creation of humanity in Gen 1:26-28: "You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas" (Ps 8:5-8, NIV). In Psalm 89, after affirming God's "rule over the surging sea" (ie., primordial chaos, vv. 9-10) and his role as Creator of heaven and earth (v. 11), the psalmist praises God for his law: "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you. Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, Lord" (vv. 14-15). There is a reason why the physical and moral realms are not separated in the Genesis 1 creation account. This global approach recognizes that natural law and order, morality, and even chaotic creative changes from one state to another have their roots in God's law.

Proverbs 8 describes the role of wisdom personified, asking:

Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? At the highest point along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; beside the gate leading into the city, at the entrance, she cries aloud: . . . "I raise my voice to all mankind. . . . All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse. . . . Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her. I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion. I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech. Counsel and sound

⁸⁸Ibid., II.7 (Yonge, 3).

judgment are mine; I have insight, I have power. By me kings reign and rulers issue decrees that are just; by me princes govern, and nobles—all who rule on earth (vv. 1-4, 8, 10-16, NIV).

Here wisdom and law may be equated—wisdom is just, having knowledge and discretion, counsel and sound judgment. It is the foundation of law, both moral (choose prudence and abhor pride, arrogance, and evil behavior) and civil (kings reign and rulers issue decrees by wisdom).

But wisdom is also the foundation of natural law:

The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be. When there were no watery depths, I was given birth, when there were no springs overflowing with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made the world or its fields or any of the dust of the earth. I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the water would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was constantly at his side. . . . Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For those who find me find life” (Prov 8:22-30a, 34-35a, NIV; see also God’s speech to Job (38–41, NIV).

Without the context of Scripture, the Judeo-Christian perspectives about reality and human origins would be left only partially answered, for science, as we have seen, limits itself to an examination of the physical causes, knowing even then that human ability falls far short of even a complete physical answer, let alone a moral one. It struggles then to form an idea of morality based upon what it does know about reality. Without Scripture the divine activities that preceded and accompanied the origin of the physical act of creation would remain forever in the shadows.

The correspondence between moral and physical law within the animal kingdom is demonstrated in the establishment of the new creation following the reign of Messiah. In Isa 11:1-3, the Messiah is presented as one who comes from the “stump of Jesse,” having a Branch that bears the fruit of the Spirit of God: “the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord.” Further, he will be a wise ruler, who sees beyond the deeds and actions of humanity to their innermost motivations and who will judge according to his righteous law (vv. 3-4). “Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist” (v. 5).

The result of Messiah’s actions in the animal kingdom result in the return of peace to animals once antagonistic to one another in the previous fallen world:

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, the child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:6-9).

Thus even the created organisms other than humans experience the benefits and rewards of a restored divine law.⁸⁹ The image of the infant playing among serpents is striking. The adder, symbolizing the tearing down of the moral element of the creation, which results in its physical damage and destruction, is once again restored to its original position as a beautiful creature by its place beside the infant. The curse placed upon the serpent for its role in the deceiving of humanity in Gen 3:14b-15 ("Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel," NIV) is now lifted, the relationship restored. This simple illustration points to the fact that each entity within nature has its own intrinsic value and reason for being. Though the unmoral behavior of humans often misappropriates and uses the natural resources and even one another as inventory, each creature retains its original identity and reason for being in the mind of God. Part of the role of God's people is to help uplift these original intents and one of the activities of God in the new Earth will be to fully restore the creation to its original form.

Genesis 1 proposes that the creation was orderly and hierarchically structured. But the moment of creation becomes a chaotic moment of creative activity in which the Earth that was "without form, and void" and a place of darkness (Gen 1:2a) transitions into a new physical, biological, and moral state—a place of light and life as God himself provides the motion that creates and sustains life. Even during periods of terrible evil in the present world, following the fall of humanity (Genesis 3), the law remains effective and working, while the perpetrators of evil are held accountable for their

⁸⁹It is important to note here that a canonical approach to the interpretation of Scripture is being employed here. Brevard Childs, who developed this approach, did so in an "attempt to heal the breach between biblical criticism and theology." It belongs to the genre of literary criticism rather than historical criticism (John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984], 79, 90). Childs puts forth his canonical approach in *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) and his application of it in *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979). The canonical approach is interested in the text of the biblical canon as a "finished product" (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 82-83).

actions.⁹⁰ The fact that the law remains active, effective, and authoritative in all aspects of life—moral, civil, and natural—makes possible the restoration and transformation to a final state in which there is a new Earth void of death (1 Cor 15), evil (both moral and natural), and tears (Revelation 22).

Since the book of nature and the book of revelation bear the impress of the same master mind, they cannot but speak in harmony. By different methods, and in different languages, they witness to the same great truths. Science is ever discovering new wonders; but she brings from research nothing that, rightly understood, conflicts with divine revelation. The book of nature and the written word shed light upon each other. They make us acquainted with God by teaching us something of the laws through which He works.⁹¹

By taking our cues for care-taking of the Earth from Scripture, we can help to preserve and protect the creation and, at the same time, learn to read nature as God's creation. Such a view of the relationship of Scripture and nature moves us away from the Augustinian perspective that leads ultimately to humans as the mere pawns of history, swept along by the tides of time to an unknown fate. It forces us, as Bultmann desired, to reconsider our own responsibility and accountability not only to God, but to those living and inanimate things that we have been divinely charged to care for. To accomplish this task is to fulfill Case-Winters's desire for a life of relational transcendence.

Finally, eschatology mirrors the original creation (Genesis 1): a massive fall at the beginning of time requires a massive restoration and re-creation at the end (Genesis 3; Rev 21–22:7).⁹² However, simply because this present

⁹⁰While it is outside the scope of this paper, it is important to note that the cultic law of the Israelite nation demanded accountability for the carrying-out and support of evil. This process was worked out in the purgation rituals of the temple both at an individual and corporate level (see Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005]; idem, *Altar Call* [Berrien Springs: Diadem, 1999]; and idem, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004]).

⁹¹Ellen G. White, *Education* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002), 128.

⁹²John Polkinghorne goes halfway on this same position, proposing instead that protology follows an evolutionary trajectory, while eschatology is creation by divine fiat. He notes that there is an issue of “continuity and discontinuity” in “a credible eschatology hope”: “Without an element of continuity there is no real hope being expressed for this creation beyond its death; without an element of discontinuity, the prospect would be that of the non-hope of mere unending repetition. While it is for theology to say what it can about the ‘new’ that God will bring into being, if that new is to be understood as the eschatological transformation of the old, then science may have some modest role to play in clarifying what will be the necessary degree of continuity required for this to be the case” (*The God of Hope and the End of the World* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002], 12-13).

world will come to an end does not imply that humans are not to continue in their roles of care-takers of the planet; nor does it mean that in taking care of the Earth that we are helping to perpetuate the fall or imply that we no longer believe in a personal and historical second advent. Rather by care-taking we demonstrate to God and others that we cherish our current and only home, prepared with care and forethought at the creation by God. In honor of this loving act, Seventh-day Adventists celebrate the Sabbath weekly, looking both to the past (the Creation week) and to the future (the re-creation and restoration), which ushers in an eternity of harmony.

The purpose of this article has been to rethink the Augustinian foundation upon which the theology-and-science dialogue rests. It has been seen that there is a need to reconsider alternative foundations in the face of issues such as dualism, which too often leads to the subjugation of the weaker elements both in society and nature; it proposes an understanding of human nature and the immortal soul that cannot be verified either in Scripture or in science; its understanding of history does not allow for freedom of the will and makes humanity a pawn to fate. In response to such problems evangelicals are critiquing the Augustinian foundations of their beliefs. Some are offering deconstructive/reconstructive possibilities from within the Augustinian tradition itself, while others propose moving to another foundation completely outside of Christianity and within Neo-Animistic perspectives such as Native American and Eastern religions. However, this article proposes that while a serious rethinking of Augustinianism is indeed called for, one does not need to be limited by these two options. Rather, a return to a canonical approach that demands a fresh reading of the Scriptures provides answers to these problems and offers a new ground for examining the twin crises of economy and environment.

**THE MYTH OF THE SOLID HEAVENLY
DOME: ANOTHER LOOK AT THE
HEBREW רָקִיעַ (RĀQĪAʿ)¹**

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Introduction

Anyone who wishes to study ancient Hebrew cosmology will quickly discover that the common understanding among most modern biblical scholars is that the Hebrews had a “prescientific,” even naive, view of the universe. This understanding is built around the idea that the Hebrew word *rāqīaʿ*, which appears in Genesis 1 and is usually translated “firmament” in English Bibles, was actually understood by the ancient Hebrews to be a solid, hemispherical dome or vault that rested upon mountains or pillars that stood along the outermost perimeter of a circular, flat disc—the earth. Above this solid dome was a celestial ocean (“waters above the firmament”). Attached to the dome and visible to observers below were the stars, sun, and moon. The dome also possessed windows or gates through which celestial waters (“waters above the firmament”) could, upon occasion, pass. On the surface of the flat earth were terrestrial oceans (“waters below the firmament”) and dry land; below the earth were subterranean waters (“fountains of the deep”) and the netherworld of the dead, also known as *sheol*.² This understanding of Hebrew

¹This paper was part of a preliminary study of the topic undertaken by the authors for the Faith and Science Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. A fuller investigation is presently being prepared.

²As will be shown in this article, this understanding can be traced back at least to the eighteenth century. One of the earliest is Voltaire, who, in *The Philosophical Dictionary* under the entry “The Heavens” (new and correct ed. with notes [London: Wynne and Scholey and Wallis, 1802], 185-191), suggests that the ancients believed in a dome or vaulted sky that rested upon a flat earth (*ibid.*, 189-190). He, 190, seems to have derived this understanding from his reading of John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews* 14.1, 6 (NPNF¹ 14:433, 435), Lactantius (*Divinae institutiones* b. iii), and Antoine Augustin Calmet (“Heaven” in *Calmet’s Dictionary of the Holy Bible: With the Biblical Fragments*, 5th rev. and enlarged ed., ed. Charles Taylor, 5 volumes [London: Holdworth and Ball, 1830], 1:618). However, as Jeffrey Burton Russell notes, Lactantius’s views were never accepted by his contemporaries or subsequent church scholars (*Inventing the Flat Earth*, 32-33, 62). Calmet attempts to describe the worldview of the Jews as a flat earth capped by a tent-like heavenly vault, a view not shared by many of his contemporaries. See below for discussion. Other scholars who were early promoters of this understanding include John Pye-Smith, *On the Relation between the Holy Scriptures and Some Parts of Geological Science* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1839), 271-273; Charles Wycliffe Goodwin, “Mosaic Cosmogony,” in *Essays and Reviews*, ed. Frederick Temple, Rowland Williams, Baden Powell, Henry Bristow Wilson, Charles Wycliffe Goodwin, Mark Pattison, and Benjamin Jowett (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), 219-220; John William Colenso, *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua*:

cosmology is so common that pictures of it are frequently found in Bible dictionaries and commentaries.³

In support of this reconstruction of Hebrew cosmology, supporters bring two lines of argument to bear. The first is textual and linguistic: the context and meaning of certain words such as *rāqīa'* support this reconstruction.⁴ Second, this view was common to other peoples of the ancient Near East, especially the Mesopotamians, who were probably the source of Hebrew cosmology, an understanding that continued to be accepted throughout the early history of the Christian church and the Middle Ages.⁵ It was not, reconstructionists argue, until the rise of modern science that it was finally recognized that the biblical view of cosmology was naive and untenable.⁶

In this article, we will examine these two arguments, looking first at the history of the cosmological views of the ancient world, the early church, and the Middle Ages. We will then look at how nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars viewed the cosmologies of these earlier periods. We will conclude with a look at the Hebrew words and passages used by these scholars to reconstruct the so-called Hebrew cosmology.

Babylonian Views of the Heavens

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, critical scholars commonly suggested that the ancient Hebrews borrowed many of their ideas, including the notion that heaven was a solid hemisphere, from the Babylonians, probably while the former people were exiled there. The idea that the Hebrews borrowed from the Babylonians was especially common during the pan-Babylonian craze that gripped biblical scholarship for a brief period during the early twentieth century.⁷ Closer comparative analysis between Babylonian and Hebrew thought has, however, found so many significant differences between

Critically Examined (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1863), 4:98; and Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (New York: Appleton, 1896), 1:89-91.

³See, e.g., Giovanni Schiaparelli, *Astronomy in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 38; Samuel R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis, with Introduction and Notes* (London: Methuen, 1904); H. Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997); John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (London: T. & T., Clark, 1910); Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: With a Commentary*, trans. John Henry Marks (London: SCM Press, 1956), 51; N. M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 5; C. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 117.

⁴See Goodwin; and Paul Seeley, "The Firmament and the Water Above," *WTJ* 53 (1991): 227-240.

⁵E.g., Gunkel, *Genesis*, 108.

⁶Colenso illustrates how nineteenth-century critics argued about how the modern findings of science impacted the traditional biblical interpretation of the cosmos.

⁷See, e.g., George A. Barton, "Tiamat," *JAO* 15 (1864): 1-27; Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton*, trans. K. William Whitney Jr., foreword Peter Machinist (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); idem, *Genesis*, 108-109.

the two that the idea of direct borrowing has been virtually abandoned by subsequent scholarship.⁸

Still there have been some who continue to suggest that the ancient Hebrews borrowed cosmological concepts, including the idea of a solid domed heaven, from the Mesopotamians.⁹ However, even this idea had to be scuttled when more recent work by Wilfred G. Lambert could find no evidence that the Mesopotamians believed in a hard-domed heaven; rather, he traces this idea to Peter Jensen's mistranslation of the term "heavens" in his translation of the *Enuma Elish*.¹⁰ Lambert's student, Wayne Horowitz, attempted to piece together a Mesopotamian cosmology from a number of ancient documents, but it is quite different from anything found in the Hebrew Bible. Horowitz's study suggests that the Mesopotamians believed in six flat heavens, suspended one above the other by cables.¹¹ When it came to interpreting the stars and the heavens, the Mesopotamians were more interested in astrology (i.e., what the gods were doing and what it meant for humanity) than they were in cosmology.¹² There is no evidence that the Mesopotamians ever believed in a solid heavenly vault.

Greek Views of the Heavens

There is good evidence that as early as the sixth century B.C., the ancient Greeks suggested that the heavens might consist of a series of *hard spheres*.¹³

⁸See W. G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 96-113; Westermann, 89.

⁹See op. cit. n. 5; for an example of the enduring influence of Gunkel's ideas upon later Bible scholars, see Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible* (New York: MacMillan, 1958), 46-47.

¹⁰Wilfred G. Lambert, "The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon," in *Ancient Cosmologies*, ed. C. Blacker and M. Loewe (London: Allen & Unwin, 1975), 42-65.

¹¹Wayne Horowitz, a student of Lambert, actually found that the Mesopotamians believed the heavens consisted of a series of flat planes that were suspended above each other by a number of strong cables (*Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1998]). Yet this cosmology is not systematically set out and had to be pieced together from various sources. In reality, the various descriptions of the cosmos were created in isolation from each other, with no thought of how they might fit together. Indeed the cosmological description merely provided the stage upon which the gods conducted their activities. The physical setting provided a conceptual vehicle to explain or accommodate certain theological understandings about how the gods related to each other and to humanity. That some of the religious concepts might appear contradictory or mutually exclusive was not of any serious concern to the ancient priests who created them since they were never intended to be integrated into a single whole. No ancient Mesopotamian ever set out to tie all of the fragments together into a single cohesive cosmology—it was not necessary and would have made no sense.

¹²Ibid.

¹³David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific*

However, this idea should not be confused with the solid-vault or -dome theory that was suggested by later biblical critics. The critics have envisioned only a hard, hollow *hemisphere*, resembling half a sphere in the shape of an upside-down bowl. In reality, however, the Greeks argued for a *spherical* (not flat!) earth that was suspended inside a complete, hollow heavenly sphere, which, in turn, was also suspended inside additional outer spheres (a geocentric model). They believed that these spheres were necessary to explain the movements of the sun, moon, stars, and planets. It was thought that these celestial bodies were attached to, or embedded in, these large, transparent hard spheres, which carried the celestial bodies along as they rotated in space. A number of different spheres were needed to explain the separate movements of the celestial bodies. Generally, it was believed that there might be at least eight such spheres nested inside each other. The Greeks based the rotations of the spheres (and hence the celestial bodies) upon their own observations and on the written records of the ancient Babylonians. Aristotle (384 B.C.-322 B.C.) and Ptolemy (A.D. 90-168)¹⁴ provide the classic formulations of the

Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, Prehistory to A.D. 1450, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), see chapter 2, "The Greeks and the Cosmos." The Greeks envisioned the sky as a "crystal sphere" to which the stars were "nailed." Milton C. Nahm, ed., *Selections from Early Greek Philosophy*, 3d ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1947), 67. Robert C. Newman sees this as a reference to a dome, but the word *sphere* suggests that Anaximenes understood the sky as an *orb* or *globe* that completely surrounds the earth—not a dome on a flat earth (*The Biblical Firmament: Vault or Vapor?* [Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 2000], 1). For a review of Anaximenes's views, see Daniel W. Graham, "Anaximenes" in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 29.10.2009 (<www.iep.utm.edu/anaximenes>). For a convenient, brief summary with citations on the understandings of major Greek philosophers, see Russell, 24. Other ancient Greeks not included in this summary include Empedocles of Acragas (495-435 B.C.), who proposes an outer, hard, universal sphere, upon which the stars are fixed, and an inner sphere of double hemispheres, one of lighter fire for day, one of darker for night. For Empedocles's views, see John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2003). Eudoxus of Cnidus (410 or 408 B.C.-355 or 347 B.C.) was yet another Greek astronomer who suggested models of planetary motion via spheres. In his celestial model, the stars and planets are carried around their orbits by virtue of being embedded in rotating spheres made of an aetherial, transparent, fifth element (quintessence), like jewels set in orbs. For Eudoxus's views, see James Evans, *The History and Practice of Ancient Astronomy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁴Ptolemy played a key role in Greek thought about the cosmos. According to him, "Now, that also the *earth* taken as a whole is sensibly *spherical*, we could most likely think out in this way. For again it is possible to see that the sun and moon and the other stars do not rise and set at the same time for every observer on the earth, but always earlier for those living towards the orient and later for those living towards the occident. . . . And since the differences in the hours is found to be proportional to the distances between the places, one would reasonably suppose the *surface of the earth spherical*. . . . Again, whenever we sail towards mountains or any high places from

Greek celestial-sphere model that influenced all scholars of the early Christian church and the Middle Ages.

*Jewish Views of the Heavens*¹⁵

It was during the Hellenistic period that the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek. When the translators came to the Hebrew word *rāqīa'*, they chose to translate it with the word *στερέωμα* (*stereōma*, something established or steadfast). This is not surprising in that the Hebrew text equates *rāqīa'* with *šamayim* (heavens). The common belief about the heavens at that time (as with Greek views) was that they were solid.

The idea of hard spheres would be picked up by Hellenized Jews as early as the fourth century B.C. The pseudepigraphical work, *1 Enoch*, discusses a hard firmament with openings through which the sun, moon, and planets move in and out.¹⁶ *First Enoch* also describes coming to the ends of the earth as far as the heavens; however, there is some dispute about whether *First Enoch* is saying a person can touch the heavens at the ends of the earth or if there is still a chasm that separates the earth from the heavens. The latter seems more likely. The former would support a domed earth, while the latter is in harmony with the Greek idea of the earth being suspended within a sphere.¹⁷

Another Jewish pseudepigraphical work, *3 Baruch*, recounts the story of men building the Tower of Babel to reach the heavens in order to see what it is made of (*3 Bar.* 3:7-8). While some have suggested that this supports a “dome” theory, it can also be understood simply as supporting the idea of a hard heaven, which is not incompatible with the Greek celestial-sphere model. Given the prevailing Greek thought, the latter is more likely.

Early Christianity and the Heavens

Early Christians were following the discussions of the Greek philosophers with interest and speculated on how biblical teaching related to the Greek understanding of the cosmos. They accepted the ideas that the earth was

whatever angle and in whatever direction, we see their bulk little by little increasing as if they were arising from the sea, whereas before they seemed submerged because of the *curvature of the water's surface*” (*The Almagest*, trans. Robert Catesby Taliaferro [Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1948], I.4).

¹⁵By “Jewish” in this context, we refer to Hellenistic period descendants of the biblical Hebrews, Israelites, and Judahites.

¹⁶Kelley Coblenz Baultch, *A Study of the Geography of 1 Enoch 17–19: ‘No one Has Seen What I Have Seen’* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

¹⁷As noted in the section above, the Greeks at this time envisioned the heavens as hard spheres. See note 13 above. Robert C. Newman sees this as a reference to a dome, but the word *sphere* suggests that Anaximenes understood the sky as an *orb* or *globe* that completely surrounds the earth—not a dome on a flat earth (*The Biblical Firmament: Vault or Vapor?* [Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 2000], 1). For a review of Anaximenes’s views, see Daniel W. Graham, “Anaximenes” in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 29.10.2009 (<www.iep.utm.edu/anaximen>).

a spherical globe and that the biblical firmament was one of the celestial spheres, but they could not identify which sphere was the biblical firmament so they tended to add a few spheres to accommodate the Bible to Greek thinking.

Basil of Caesarea (330-379) and Augustine (354-430) are among the early church fathers who attempted to harmonize biblical teachings of the cosmos with Greek notions of the celestial spheres.¹⁸ This can also be seen in Jerome's translation of the Bible into Latin (405). Jerome used the Greek OT (Septuagint) as one of his sources and was undoubtedly familiar with Greek discussions about the celestial spheres.¹⁹ Thus when he came to the book of Genesis and saw that the Greek word used for the Hebrew *rāqīa'* was *stereōma*, he selected the Latin *firmamentum* to convey the Greek sense of the word. It is from the Latin *firmamentum* that the word "firmament," used to describe the "heavens," came into common usage in English.

It is important to note that the Latin *firmamentum* conveys the Greek concept of *hard celestial spheres* that was popular at the time; it should *not* be used to support the *dome* or *vault theory*. Dome theory, along with the idea of a flat earth, has been almost universally rejected by Christian scholars, both in the early Christian period and throughout the Middle Ages.²⁰ It should also be noted that while Jerome's translation may be seen as support for the notion of hard celestial spheres, not all Christians accepted this position. Basil, for example, was inclined to believe in a fluid firmament, not a hard sphere. In

¹⁸Edward Grant discusses how early Christian scholars such as Basil and Augustine subscribed to the idea that Greek philosophy and science could serve as "handmaidens to theology" and how they dealt with the question of the spheres and their composition (*The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 2-7, 335-336). Greek concepts of the celestial spheres are evident in Basil's discussion of the firmament in *Hexaemeron*, his commentary on the six days of creation (in *Saint Basil Exegetic Homilies*, trans. Agnes Clare Way [Washington DC: Catholic University Press, 1963], 42). In his literal commentary on Genesis (*De Genesi ad litteram*), Augustine wrote a section on the material shape of heaven, in which he deals with the apparent contradiction between Ps 103:2, which describes heaven as a stretched-out skin, and Isa 40:22, which seems to describe a vault. Augustine, obviously not unaware of Greek concepts of celestial spheres, writes: "Our picture of heaven as a vault, even when taken in a literal sense, does not contradict the theory that heaven is a sphere" (*De Genesi ad litteram* 2.9 in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis: Vol. 1*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, Ancient Christian Writers, no. 41, ed. Johannes Quasten, et al. [New York: Newman, 1982], 59-60). Edward Grant believes that Augustine was arguing for sphericity (*Planets, Stars, & Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200-1687* [Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1996], 115, n. 38).

¹⁹Jerome's earliest translations of the Hebrew Bible were based upon Origen's revisions of the Septuagint; however, around 393, he focused on manuscripts written in the original Hebrew (for further discussion, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998]).

²⁰For further discussion of this point, see below.

the *Hexaemeron*, he writes, “Not a firm and solid nature, which has weight and resistance, it is not this that the word ‘firmament’ means.”²¹

Augustine, on the other hand, was not certain of the nature of the other Greek spheres, nor of their composition. In some of his statements, he seems to argue that the firmament of Genesis must be a hard sphere since it held back the waters above; yet elsewhere in the same essay, he speaks of air and fire as the material essence of the heavens thereby suggesting soft and fluid heavens.²²

This unwillingness to commit to a hard-sphere theory is reflected in the common tendency by most Christian scholastics to translate the Hebrew *rāqîaʿ* as *expansium*, *expansion*, or *extension*, rather than *firmamentum*—the former expressions all convey the meaning of expanse and do not commit one to an understanding of something hard. As Edward Grant notes, “most Christian authors and Latin Encyclopedists during late antiquity . . . thought of the heavens (i.e. celestial spheres) as fiery or elemental in nature, and therefore fluid.”²³

Late Medieval Christianity and the Heavens

The theory of celestial spheres continued to dominate Christian thinking about the cosmos throughout the Middle Ages.²⁴ The existence of numerous hollow spheres or orbs around the spherical earth was almost universally accepted.²⁵ However, the actual nature of the spheres was an ongoing topic of debate. Were they hard, fluid, or soft?²⁶ The debate was a theophilosophical issue, determined by the questions such as: Were the hard spheres corruptible (and would a perfect God make something corruptible)? How, and in

²¹Basil, *Hexaemeron* 3.7 (Way, 47). For further discussion on this point, see Grant, *Planets, Stars and Orbs*, 335-336.

²²See discussion of the early Christian Fathers’ views on the cosmos, including Augustine’s, in Grant, *Planets, Stars and Orbs*, 335-336.

²³Ibid., 336. Grant provides a referenced list of Christian authors and scholars who held a “soft” view of the spheres during this period (see *ibid.*, esp. 336, n. 40).

²⁴Ibid., 113-122. Muslim scholars were not unaware of Greek and Christian thinking on the cosmos and made their own contributions to the discussions of celestial spheres (*ibid.*, 12-14).

²⁵Ibid. See also the discussion in Russell, 13-26. There were a few Christian theologians and philosophers who rejected the theory of celestial spheres, arguing instead for a flat earth and a flat or domed heaven, but these views were in the extreme minority and were considered idiosyncratic and rejected by almost all scholars of the time.

²⁶See Grant, *Planets, Stars and Orbs*, 324-370. In this discussion, it is important to note, as Grant points out, that ancient and early medieval scholars did not necessarily equate the word solid (Latin, *soliditas*) with hard. Solid could also refer to a soft sphere. The equation of solid spheres with hard ones did not come until the seventeenth century (*ibid.*, 345-348). So the context and time of the writing must be carefully considered.

what way, were these spheres congruent with the observations of various astronomers?

During the thirteenth century, it seems more scholastics thought of the spheres as fluid.²⁷ However, in the fourteenth century, there was a shift toward the majority viewing the celestial hard spheres as being hard.²⁸ It seems this view was widespread among scholars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as well, although there were also many for whom the precise nature of the composition did not matter.²⁹

Therefore, as in early antiquity, Christian biblical and Latin scholars of the early Middle Ages—even into the thirteenth century—did not view the heavens as hard or fiery.³⁰ Both prominent Jewish rabbis such as Abraham ibn Ezra and David Kimchi and Christian scholars of notoriety including Thomas Aquinas and Durandus of Saint-Pourçain preferred to translate *rāqīa'* as “expanse” during the early part of this period.

*Renaissance Views of the Heavens (Sixteenth
to Seventeenth Centuries)*

Three key developments occurred in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that had significant implications for how the cosmos was viewed. First, the observations by Tycho Brahe of a supernova in 1572 and the discovery of the Great Comet in 1577 seemed to defy the hard-sphere theory. Second, the championing of Copernicus’s heliocentric model by Galileo allowed for the possibility of intersecting planetary orbits. Interestingly, although Copernicus’s heliocentric model called for a different configuration of the celestial spheres, he still thought the spheres were hard as did Galileo.³¹ Nevertheless, the work of Brahe, Copernicus, and Galileo all contributed to the eventual rejection of the hard-sphere theory. Thus, by the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, the idea of hard spheres, which had been popular for three hundred years, was virtually abandoned. Emphasis was again on the notion of soft spheres.³²

In terms of biblical hermeneutics, however, the Galileo affair led to a third unheralded yet significant development—an essay promoting

²⁷See *ibid.*, 336, 342. Through an extensive examination of a wide range of scholastic texts, Grant has demonstrated that scholastic philosophers generally considered the celestial spheres to be solid in the sense of three-dimensional or continuous, but most did not consider them solid in the sense of hard. The consensus was that the celestial spheres were made of some kind of continuous fluid.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 338, 342.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*, 336. See Adam Clarke’s comments on Genesis 1:6 in *The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments with a Commentary and Critical Notes* (Baltimore: John Harrod, 1834), 31.

³¹Grant, *Planets, Stars and Orbs*, 346.

³²*Ibid.* 345-361.

accommodationism, written by the Benedictine scholar Antoine Augustin Calmet.³³ Calmet had been asked by the church to write an introduction to Galileo's *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems* that would set a proper distance between the church's position and that of Galileo. Calmet was not supposed to endorse Galileo's position. However, he was apparently sympathetic to Galileo's claims and proposed an accommodationist interpretation of the creation account that suggested that the inspired writer, in deference to the ignorance of his audience (the ancient Jews), used language and ideas that would be more easily understood by the original audience. Thus the heavens were described as a tent-like heavenly vault—perhaps the earliest such claim in which a nonliteral accommodationist hermeneutic was applied! Calmet's ideas would be picked up and promoted by Voltaire. Although a direct connection cannot at present be established, Calmet's ideas of what the ancient Jews thought about the cosmos would be very similar to those promoted by nineteenth-century biblical criticism.³⁴

Meanwhile, the translation of *rāqīa'* as "expanse" was almost universal among biblical scholars during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For example, this idea was reflected in the work of the Dominican Santes (or Xantes) Pagnino, one of the leading philologists and biblicists of his day, who was known for his literal adherence to the Hebrew text of Scripture. In his *Veteris et Novi Testamenti nova translatio* (Lyon, 1527), he consistently translated *rāqīa'* as *expansionem*.³⁵

Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Views of the Heavens

Biblical scholars of the eighteenth century, including Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten (1749), and Romanus Teller (1749-70), continued to endorse *expansionem* as the best translation of *rāqīa'*. An important application of this understanding is found in *The Mosaic Theory of the Solar or Planetary System*, in which Samuel Pye defined the firmament as an expanse or atmosphere of fluid. Significantly, he extends this notion to also include the other planets in the system.³⁶

³³For a full discussion of Calmet's views and his introduction to Galileo's *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems*, see Maurice A. Finocchiaro, *Retrying Galileo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

³⁴For further discussion of this point, see below.

³⁵Most of these sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars are referenced in John Gill, in his *Exposition of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1818). They include Paul Fagius, Pietro Martire Vermigli, Sebastian Münster, Immanuel Tremellius, John Calvin, Franciscus Junius, Joannes Drusius, Benedictus Arias Montanus, Christoph Rothmann, Johannes Pena, Johannes Piscatoor, Sir Walter Raleigh, Juan de Mariana, Johann Heinrich Hottinger, Thomas Burnet, and Sebastian Schmidt.

³⁶Samuel Pye, *The Mosaic Theory of the Solar or Planetary System* (London: W. Sandby, 1766), 22.

There are many examples from the nineteenth century which maintained this interpretation of *rāqiaʿ*. The British Methodist theologian, Adam Clarke, who produced *Clarke's Bible Commentary* in 1831, argued that earlier “translators, by following the *firmamentum* of the Vulgate, which is a translation of the *stereōma* of the Septuagint, have deprived this passage of all sense and meaning.”³⁷ Similarly John Murray (1786?-1851), a Scottish scholar with a Ph.D. in chemistry, retooled his expertise in ancient history and languages, including Hebrew, in *The Truth of Revelation, Demonstrated by an Appeal to Existing Monuments, Sculptures, Gems, Coins and Medals* (1831), to argue that the firmament was a “permanently-elastic” substance consisting of a mixture of gaseous matter and vapor that attracted water above it, which was in line with cosmologic views of the time.³⁸ Not only were his views in line with the current thinking of his time, but *The Truth of Revelation* became one of the early books in the emerging biblical archaeology genre.

*Nineteenth-century Biblical Criticism and the Origin of
the Flat-Earth-and-Solid-Dome Theory*

As we move the discussion into the developments of the nineteenth century, it is important to note two interesting and significant works on the history of science. Historians Jeffery Burton Russell and Christine Garwood respectively debunk the long-held view among modern scholars that ancient philosophers and scientists of the early Christian church, late antiquity, and the Middle Ages believed the earth was flat.³⁹ After an extensive review of the letters, papers, and books of all the major thinkers throughout these periods, Russell and Garwood made the surprising discovery that apart from a few isolated individuals, *no one believed in a flat earth*—indeed, the common consensus throughout this entire period among virtually *all scholars and churchmen was that the earth was spherical*. Where, then, did the flat-earth understanding of

³⁷See Clarke, c.

³⁸John Murray, *The Truth of Revelation, Demonstrated by an Appeal to Existing Monuments, Sculptures, Gems, Coins and Medals* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1831), 16.

³⁹Russell, *Inventing the Flat Earth*; Christine Garwood, *Flat Earth: History of an Infamous Idea* (New York: Thomas Dunn, 2007). In a lecture at Westmont College for the American Scientific Affiliation in 1997, in which he addressed the themes of his book, Jeffery Burton Russell argued that “The reason for promoting both the specific lie about the sphericity of the earth and the general lie that religion and science are in natural and eternal conflict in Western society, is to defend Darwinism. The answer is really only slightly more complicated than that bald statement. The flat-earth lie was ammunition against the creationists. The argument was simple and powerful, if not elegant: ‘Look how stupid these Christians are. They are always getting in the way of science and progress. These people who deny evolution today are exactly the same sort of people as those idiots who for at least a thousand years denied that the earth was round. How stupid can you get?’” (<www.veritas-ucsb.org/library/russell/FlatEarth.html>).

early Christian and medieval thought originate? They were able to trace its origin to the early nineteenth century when antireligious sentiment was high among many scholars and intellectuals.⁴⁰ This is not to say that there were not skeptics who believed in a flat earth/domed heaven prior to this. In fact, this view starts to emerge in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We have already made reference to the significant essays of Calmet. Voltaire also promoted this idea in his article “Ciel Matériel” (heaven) in the *Dictionnaire philosophique* (ca. 1764), in which he wrote the following about the ancient Hebrews’ views of the cosmos:

These childish and savage populations imagined the earth to be flat, supported, I know not how, by its own weight in the air; the sun, moon, and stars to move continually upon a solid vaulted roof called a firmament; and this roof to sustain waters, and have flood-gates at regular distances, through which these waters issued to moisten and fertilize the earth.⁴¹

However, this was not a widespread view and did not gain a consensus among critical biblical scholars until the nineteenth century.⁴²

According to Russell and Garwood,⁴³ two of the key individuals who helped introduce and popularize this idea in nineteenth-century scholarship were the American author Washington Irving (1783-1859) and the Egyptologist Antoine-Jean Letronne (1787-1848). Irving, in *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828), “invented the indelible picture of the young Columbus, a ‘simple mariner,’ appearing before a dark crowd of benighted inquisitors and hooded theologians at a council of Salamanca, all of whom believed “that the earth was flat like a plate.”⁴⁴ Letronne, who was known for his “strong antireligious prejudices,” “cleverly drew upon both [his studies in geography and Patristics] to misrepresent the church fathers

⁴⁰Russell, Veritas lecture.

⁴¹See Voltaire, *The Works of Voltaire*, ed. Tobias Goerge Smollett, William F. Fleming, John Morley, Oliver Herbrand, Gordon Leigh (New York: DuMont, 1901), 10:11-12. It can be seen from his own work that Voltaire’s understanding of ancient views (flat-earthers) was influenced by his reading of Lactantius’s (*Divinae institutiones*) and by the French Benedictine scholar, Antoine August Calmet’s “Sur le Systeme du Monde des anciens Hébreux” in his *Dissertations qui peuvent servir de prolégomènes à l’Ecriture Sainte* (Paris: Pere Emery, 1720: 1:438ff.). As noted above, Lactantius’s views were almost universally rejected. Calmet’s views are more interesting—he seems to have wanted to show that the ancient Hebrew view was naive so that Galileo could be justified in appearing to reject Scripture’s literal reading concerning the cosmos.

⁴²John Gill, an English biblical linguist of the eighteenth century, provides a long list of biblical linguists who translated *rāqîa’* as “expanse” in *An Exposition of the Old Testament* (1757) (<www.freegrace.net/gill>). He also endorsed this interpretation. See his comments on Gen 1:6.

⁴³Russell, *Inventing the Flat Earth*, 43, 49-57; Garwood, 6-8.

⁴⁴Washington Irving, *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, ed. John Harmon McElroy (Boston: Twayne, 1981), 50.

and their medieval successors as believing in a flat earth in his ‘Des opinions cosmographiques des pères de l’église’ [“on the cosmographical ideas of the church fathers,” 1834].⁴⁵

In particular, Russell’s debunking of the flat-earth myth is significant for understanding the widely held view among biblical scholars that ancient peoples believed that the sky or heaven above them was a metal vault. This attribution of the solid-sky/-dome concept to the ancients appears in Western literature at about the same time as the flat-earth myth. The idea of a flat earth becomes an integral component in the reconstruction of the “metal-sky/-dome” cosmology, in which the hemispherical dome necessarily rests or is anchored on a flat earth!⁴⁶ Thus it appears that the biblical critics of the 1850s built their ideas about ancient Hebrew cosmology upon the incorrect flat-earth concept of twenty years earlier. Further, they seem to have confused ancient and medieval discussions of hard celestial spheres with the hemispherical solid-dome/-vault and flat-earth myths, which were two quite unrelated concepts!

The flat-earth myth was widely endorsed by critical biblical scholars during the middle of the nineteenth century. At this time, a number of publications emerged that proposed that the Bible contained naïve views of the cosmos, including the idea that the firmament was a hard dome. One of the earliest suggestions of this nature was by John Pye-Smith (1839).

Examining the whole subject, by connecting it with some passages which have been quoted, and some yet to be mentioned, we acquire an idea of the meteorology of the Hebrews. They supposed that, at a moderate distance above the flight of birds, was a *solid concave hemisphere, a kind of dome*, transparent, in which the stars were fixed, as lamps; and *containing openings*, to be used or closed as was necessary. It was understood as supporting a kind of celestial ocean, called “the waters above the firmament,” and “the waters above the heavens.”⁴⁷

Other biblical scholars soon picked up on this flat-earth/dome heavenly cosmology. Among the better known was Taylor Lewis, a professor of Greek, an instructor in the “Oriental tongue,” and a lecturer on biblical and Oriental literature at Union College, in his book *The Six Days of Creation* (1855).⁴⁸ Likewise, Charles Wycliffe Goodwin, an Egyptologist, argued in a chapter titled “Mosaic Cosmogony” in the 1860 edition of *Essays and Reviews* that the Bible writer believed in a hard-dome heaven. Concerning *rāqîa’*, he wrote,

⁴⁵Antoine-Jean Letronne, “Des opinions cosmographiques des pères de l’église,” *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 March 1834, 601-633.

⁴⁶This can be seen clearly in all pictorial representations of the Hebrew cosmology, beginning with that of the Italian astronomer Schiaparelli, 38.

⁴⁷Pye-Smith, 272, emphasis supplied.

⁴⁸Taylor Lewis, *The Six Days of Creation, or the Scriptural Cosmology, with the Ancient Idea of Time-Worlds in distinction from Worlds in Space* (Schenectady: G. Y. Van Debogert, 1855).

“It has been pretended that the word *rakia* may be translated expanse, so as merely to mean ‘empty space.’ The context sufficiently rebuts this.”⁴⁹ Andrews Norton, an American Unitarian preacher and theologian who taught at Bowdoin and Harvard, points out the naivety of the Bible in his book, *The Pentateuch: and its Relation to the Jewish and Christian Dispensations*, that “the blue vault of heaven is a solid firmament, separating the waters which are above it from the waters on the earth, and that in this firmament the heavenly bodies are placed.”⁵⁰ Also influential was John William Colenso, an Anglican bishop to Natal, who commented that

If it would be wrong for a Christian Missionary of our day, to enforce the dogmas of the Church in former ages, which we now know to be absurd, and to mislead a class of native catéchiste, by teaching them that the Earth is flat, and the sky a solid firmament, above which the stores of rain are treasured,—when God has taught us otherwise,—it must be equally wrong and sinful, to teach them that the Scripture stories of the Creation, the Fall, and the Deluge, are infallible records of historical fact, if God, by the discoveries of Science in our day, has taught us to know that these narratives—whatever they may be—are certainly not to be regarded as history.⁵¹

By this time, the flat-earth/domed-heaven cosmology was accepted by both “biblical geologists” and mainstream historical-critical biblical scholars, in spite of vocal resistance by more conservative and evangelical scholars.

Vapor-Canopy Theory

Around this time, the conservative defense was undermined somewhat by a new theory that returned to the concept of hard spheres—an idea that generally had been abandoned by scientists (Christian or not) during the seventeenth century. The renewed proposal was called the vapor-canopy theory. Specifically, in 1874, Isaac Newton Vail (1840-1912), drawing on the expression “waters above the firmament” mentioned in Gen 1:7, proposed that the waters for the flood came from a “canopy” of water vapor (or liquid water or ice) surrounding the primeval earth. Unfortunately, this theory combined the abandoned hard-sphere theory with the vaulted-heaven interpretation to create a possible model for solving issues for conservative creationist views. This idea still has its defenders today, although its exegetical foundation is rejected by most evangelical scholars and its science is rejected by both evangelical and secular scientists.⁵² Nevertheless, liberal scholars have been delighted to receive support for their assertion of the naivety of the

⁴⁹Goodwin, 220, n. 2.

⁵⁰Andrews Norton, *The Pentateuch and Its Relation to the Jewish and Christian Dispensations* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1863), 3.

⁵¹Colenso, 289, n. 2.

⁵²See Newman.

ancient Hebrews' views of the cosmos from the more fundamentalist vapor-canopy theorists.

Pan-Babylonianism and the Solid Dome

The return to the development of the flat-earth/domed-heaven theory among mainstream historical-critical scholars received further “energy” during the pan-Babylonian craze of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, when it was suggested that the Hebrews borrowed the hard-dome concept from Mesopotamia during the Hebrew exile. As noted earlier, Jensen’s 1890 translation of the *Enuma Elish* played a major role in contributing to misunderstandings about ancient cosmological views.⁵³ His translation used the adjective “vault” to describe the Babylonian concept of the “heavens” (line 145 of tablet IV), resulting in the notion of the *Himmelswölbung* or “heavenly vault.” This error would be caught by William G. Lambert in his study in 1975,⁵⁴ but Jensen’s work was very influential for some eighty years.

During this time, a number of pictorial representations of Hebrew cosmologies were constructed, the first which was published by Giovanni Virginio Schiaparelli in his *Astronomy of the Old Testament* (1903-1905).⁵⁵ These cosmologies were patched together from biblical texts taken from different time periods and genres and were based on very literalistic readings. This approach was vigorously opposed by more conservative scholars such as William Fairfield Warren, who published a detailed response in *The Earliest Cosmologies* (1909).⁵⁶ In this work, Warren argues that the liberal reconstructions would not be recognized by the ancient Hebrews, even if it was drawn out for them on a piece of paper!

*Modern Advocates of a Flat-Earth/Vaulted-
Heaven Hebrew Cosmology*

In spite of vigorous opposition to the vault theory by more conservative biblical scholars and the demise of pan-Babylonianism, the idea that the ancient Babylonians and Hebrews believed in a hard hemispherical dome continued to be pushed. Harry Emerson Fosdick was an influential advocate and popularizer during the 1930s,⁵⁷ who, like most liberal commentators, continued to accept the view of a naive Hebrew cosmology without really providing careful historical review or in-depth exegetical defense. Liberal

⁵³See Peter Jensen, *Die Kosmologie der Babylonier* (Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1890).

⁵⁴See Lambert, “The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon,” 61-62.

⁵⁵Schiaparelli, 38.

⁵⁶William Fairfield Warren, *The Earliest Cosmologies: The Universe as Pictured in Thought by the Ancient Hebrews, Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks, Iranians, and Indo-Aryans: A Guidebook for Beginners in the Study of Ancient Literatures and Religion* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1909).

⁵⁷Fosdick, 46-47.

views were opposed by evangelical scholars such as Bernard Ramm.⁵⁸ The most recent exchange was by Paul H. Seeley and Robert C. Newman.⁵⁹ Within Adventist circles, the idea of a naive Hebrew cosmology has been supported by Richard L. Hammil and others.⁶⁰

Of course, even if it can be shown that in the history of Christian scholarship, the dome theory is really a recent nineteenth-century invention tied to incorrect Medieval thinking, the question still remains, *What did the ancient Hebrews think about the cosmos?* Certainly, many nineteenth-century scholars examined the Hebrew text, including, of course, the key word *rāqīaʿ*. In spite of the fact that most biblical linguists prior to the nineteenth century translated *rāqīaʿ* as expanse, rather than understanding it as something solid or hard (like a vault), many nineteenth-century scholars argued that *rāqīaʿ* was a metal substance, thereby supporting the supposition that the ancient Hebrews thought of the heavens above the earth as a solid vault or dome. Therefore, it seems appropriate to take another look at the Hebrew texts and words that mention the heavens and “firmament.”

*A Word Study of the Hebrew רָקִיעַ
(Rāqīaʿ) and Related Terms*

It is important to keep in mind that there is no single Hebrew text or passage in which the cosmological elements are brought together to provide a complete, systematic view of the supposed Hebrew cosmology. Rather, scholars have reconstructed the cosmos by piecing together different biblical passages, written at different times, in different genres, for different purposes, none of which were primarily cosmological.

Statistics of Occurrence in the Hebrew
Bible and Basic Meanings

The word *rāqīaʿ* occurs 17 times in the Hebrew Bible in the *nominal* form: nine times in Genesis 1 (vv. 6, 7 [3x], 8, 14, 15, 17, 20), five times in the book of Ezekiel (1:22, 23, 25, 26; 10:1), twice in the Psalms (19:2; 150:1), and once in Daniel (12:3).⁶¹ In *none* of these occurrences does *rāqīaʿ* appear in association with any metal. The passages from Genesis 1, the Psalms, and Daniel all refer

⁵⁸See Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).

⁵⁹See Paul H. Seeley, “The Three-Storied Universe,” *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 21 (March 1969): 18-22; and Newman.

⁶⁰Richard L. Hammil, “Creation Themes in the Old Testament Other than in Genesis 1 and 2, in *Creation Reconsidered*, ed. James L. Hayward (Roseville, CA: Association of Adventists Forums, 2000), see esp. 254-255 and Fig. 19-1. See also the recent book by Fritz Guy and Brian Bull, *God, Sky and Land: Genesis 1 as the Ancient Hebrews Heard It* (Loma Linda, CA: Adventist Forums, 2011).

⁶¹For a helpful discussion of the meaning of the word רָקִיעַ (*rāqīaʿ*) in the OT, see Newman, 7-16.

to the same heavenly reality described in the opening chapter of Scripture. In fact, the only time the nominal form of *nāqīa'* refers to a solid material substance is in Ezek 1:22, where the *nāqīa'* below YHWH's moveable throne is said to "appear like the gleam of crystal" (כְּעֵיִן הַקֶּרֶה הַנוֹרָא); but even here it is important to note that the text does not say it *was* crystal—only that it had the "gleam of crystal." Before examining these passages further, let us look briefly at the verbal form of *nāqīa'*.

The *verbal* form of *nāqīa'* is נָקַע (*nāqa'*), which occurs in the biblical text in its various stems twelve times. In its verbal form, *nāqa'* is explicitly associated with metal five times (Exod 39:3; Num 16:38-39; Isa 40:19; Jer 10:9). Three times it is used in conjunction with the earth (Isa 42:5; 44:24; Ps 136:6), twice with the stamping of feet (Ezek 6:11; 25:6), once with the smashing of an enemy (2 Sam 22:43). *Only one time* is it possibly associated with the sky (Job 37:18: "Can you, with Him, spread out the skies, Strong as a molten mirror?"); however, the term often translated "skies" in this verse most likely refers to clouds.⁶²

⁶²Job 37:18 records Elihu's challenge to Job: "Can you, with Him [God], spread out [*nāqa'*] the skies [*ḥāqīm*], strong [*ḥāzāq*] as a molten [*mūṣaq*] mirror [*ḥāq*]" Newman, 13-15, examines this passage, and points out, 14-15, that the Hebrew word *ḥāqīm* normally means "clouds" and not "skies" elsewhere in Scripture. See HALOT, 1464-1465. Unless there is unambiguous evidence in the immediate context that the term should be translated "skies," it is preferable to translate it as "clouds" here and elsewhere. Several major commentators (e.g., Tur-Sinai, Dhorme, Gordis, and Habel) have seen a reference to "clouds" and not "skies" in this passage (cf. NET which translates the term as "clouds"). Newman, 14, further calls attention to the fact that the word *ḥāq*, usually translated "mirror," is not the normal word for "mirror" in the Hebrew Bible, and, in fact, is a *hapax legomenon*, translated by the Septuagint as ὄρασις (*horasis*), which means "appearance" in Hellenistic Greek, not "mirror." This translation is supported by a slightly different pointing of the same Hebrew consonants (with a composite *sheva* instead of simple *sheva*), as נָאֵ (ḥāq), which means "appearance" and is found four times in the OT, including a single passage in Job from the same speech of Elihu (Job 33:21). Newman, 15, also notes that *ḥāzāq* can mean "mighty" as well as "strong," and *mūṣaq* literally means "poured out." He concludes that since in this verse the context is on-going weather phenomena rather than creation, the following translation of the verse is preferred: "Can you, with Him, spread out the mighty clouds, With an appearance of being poured out?" (ibid.). Regardless of the precise translation of the entire verse, if *ḥāqīm* means "clouds" and not "sky," there is no reference to a solid domed sky in this passage. Instead, we have an example of "a non-solid object (clouds) being spread out with use of the verb *nāqa'*" (ibid.). Alternatively, if one insists on translating *ḥāqīm* in Job 37:18 as "skies" or "heavens": "like a molten mirror" (כְּרֵאֵי מוֹיֵקָה) as in many modern versions, the passage still does not imply a solid metal dome. Kenneth Mathews, who follows this traditional translation, points out that "Job 37:18, which describes skies without rain as a 'bronze' expanse (cf. Deut 28:23), is figurative and does not support the common contention that the 'expanse' was considered a bronze dome by the Hebrews" (*Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary 1a [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996], 150).

Significantly, the verbal form *rāqa'* does appear in the same sentence as שָׁמַיִם (*šamayim*, i.e., heavens) in several verses, all of which have a creation context, but it is *not* used to refer *to* the heavens. Specifically, in Isa 42:5, 44:24, and Ps 136:6, the verbal participle form of *rāqa'* appears in the same poetic sentence as *šamayim*, but, surprisingly, is not used with regard to the “heavens,” but to the earth. Whereas the verb *rāqa'* is often translated as “stamp” or “beat [out]” elsewhere in its OT occurrences, in these verses it is regularly translated as “stretch [out]” or “spread [out].” This is because the noun upon which *rāqa'* acts in these verses is not metal, but earth, and because *rāqa'* occurs in synonymous parallelism with the verbal participle נֹטֵב (*noteb*), which also means “stretch [out]” or “spread [out],” making it likely that *rāqa'* has a similar meaning in the context of these creation-related verses.

This unexpected “switch” in Isa 42:5; 44:24; and Ps 136:6 to linking *rāqa'* with earth instead of heavens, even though the word “heavens” occurs in the same sentence, illustrates a number of important points for understanding the use of the term in the Hebrew Bible. First, the verbal participle qal stem form of *rāqa'* does not necessarily refer to the “beating out” of metal. Second, the ancient Hebrews did not have a set, rigid association of the verbal form *rāqa'* with *šamayim*. Third, attempts to provide a set and restricted definition of *rāqa'* are inappropriate. Finally, when associated with God’s creative acts in parallel with the act of creating the heavens, it clearly means to “stretch [out].” These facts should serve as a caution for those who would derive the meaning of the nominal form *rāqīa'* solely from verbal forms that are related to the beating out of metal.

In the verbal form, *rāqa'* usually describes a *process* (after all, it is a verbal form) that enables any given substance to cover or encompass a larger area by becoming thinner. The material acted upon may be any substance that can be spread or expanded by being stretched, hammered, or heated to a state where the material is melted or liquefied. There is, of course, a distinction between stretching and hammering. Stretching occurs when the substance is grabbed on its outer edges and pulled away from the center. Hammering is when the substance is pounded in the center, forcing the material to move out from the center to the edges. When something is heated to a sufficient temperature, the force of gravity will cause the melted or liquefied material to thin and expand. The net effect of all three processes is essentially the same in that the substance will cover a larger area by becoming thinner. In the case of metal, the process makes the material into a thin, flat layer so that it can be used as an overlay. All three of these processes for expanding materials are employed in the Hebrew text, and each are described by the term *rāqa'* (with reference to, e.g., various hard metals, molten metal, earth, cloud, dust). The basic meaning of to “expand” in these uses of *rāqa'* suggests that the noun *rāqīa'*, which corresponds to the verb and depicts various materials that are expanded, may appropriately be translated as “*expanses*.”

The Heavenly *Rāqia'* in Genesis 1 and
Elsewhere in the Old Testament

When we look at the use of *rāqia'* in Genesis 1, the meaning of “expanse” fits the immediate context, and the context also gives clues regarding the nature of this “expanse.” First, the function is “to separate the waters from the waters” (v. 6). As Kenneth Mathews restates this purpose, “God formed an ‘expanse’ to create a boundary, giving structure to the upper and lower waters (1:6-7). The ‘expanse’ is the atmosphere that distinguishes the surface waters of the earth (i.e., ‘the waters below’) from the atmospheric waters or clouds (i.e., ‘the waters above’).”⁶³

That this “expanse” is not a solid dome is evident from a second clue in the text: not only are the greater and lesser lights placed בְּרָקִיעַ (“in the expanse”) on the fourth day of creation (vv. 15, 17), but also the birds created on the fifth day were to fly עַל־פְּנֵי הַרְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם (“in the open expanse of the heavens,” v. 20, NASB). Mathews elaborates:

There is no indication, however, that the author conceived of it [*rāqia'*] as a solid mass, a “firmament” (AV) that supported a body of waters above it. . . . The “expanse” describes both the place in which the luminaries were set (vv. 14-15, 17) and the sky where the birds are observed (v. 20). Thus Genesis’ description of the “expanse” is phenomenological—to the observer on earth, the sun and stars appear to sit in the skies while at the same time birds glide through the atmosphere, piercing the skies.⁶⁴

A third clue in the text is that the *rāqia'* is given a name in v. 8: “God called the expanse ‘sky’ [*šamayim*]” (NIV). John Sailhamer asks regarding the various usages of *rāqia'* in Genesis 1: “Is there a word (in English) that accommodates such a broad use of the term ‘expanse?’” He rules out such terms as “ceiling,” “vault,” or “global ocean,” proposing that

They suit neither the use of the term in v. 20 nor the naming of the “expanse” as “sky.” Such explanations, though drawn from analogies of ancient Near Eastern cosmologies, are too specific for the present context. [And we would add that such terms do not represent the ANE cosmologies, as demonstrated above!] Thus it is unlikely that the narrative has in view here a “solid partition or vault that separates the earth from the waters above” (Westermann, 116). More likely the narrative has in view something within humankind’s everyday experience of the natural world—in general terms, that place where the birds fly and where God placed the lights of heaven (cf. v. 14). In English the word “sky” appears to cover this sense well.⁶⁵

What is true with regard to the “sky” in Genesis 1 also holds for the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Although *rāqia'* and parallel expressions depicting the sky are used in various poetic contexts employing different similes, there

⁶³Mathews, 150.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” *Genesis–Leviticus*, rev. ed. Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 59.

is no hint that the sky is a solid dome. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch provide a succinct summary regarding the meaning of the term *rāqīa'* with reference to the sky in Genesis and elsewhere in the OT:

רָקִיעַ, from רָקַע, to stretch, spread out, then beat or tread out, means *expansium*, the spreading out of the air, which surrounds the earth as an atmosphere. According to optical appearance, it is described as a carpet spread out above the earth (Ps. civ. 2), a curtain (Isa. xl. 22), a transparent work of sapphire (Ex. xxiv. 10), or a molten looking-glass (Job xxxvii. 18); but there is nothing in these poetic similes to warrant the idea that the heavens were regarded as a solid mass . . . such as the Greek poets describe.⁶⁶

Waters Above

If the *rāqīa'* (“expanse”) is the sky (*šamayim*) in Gen 1:6-8, then the mention of “the waters [מַיִם, *hammayim*] which were above [מַעַל, *mē‘al*] the expanse” (v. 7) is very likely a reference to clouds. This interpretation is supported by intertextual parallels to Genesis 1 in other OT creation accounts. Note especially Prov 8:28, where what exists “above” (מִמַּעַל, *mimmā‘al*) the “sky” or “heavens” (*šamayim*) is explicitly described as the “clouds” (*šəḥaqim*). Many modern translations recognized that *šəḥaqim* has the primary meaning of “clouds” and not “skies” and have rendered it thus in this verse (see, e.g., KJV, NET, NIV, NJB, NKJV, NLT, TNIV, RWB).

Psalm 78:23 likewise describes the “clouds above” (מִמַּעַל מִשְׁחָקִים, *šəḥaqim mimmā‘al*). Mathews notes that elsewhere in the OT “there is evidence that the Hebrews understood that clouds produced rain and thus, from a phenomenological perspective, ‘water’ can be described as belonging to the upper atmosphere.”⁶⁷ Old Testament passages depicting clouds producing rain include, e.g., Deut 28:12; Judg 5:4; 1 Kgs 18:44-45; Eccl 11:3; and Isa 5:6.⁶⁸ Thus there is good evidence to conclude that the “waters above” are

⁶⁶C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch: Three Volumes in One, Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 1:52-53. Cf. H. C. Leupold, who refers to these various figurative descriptions of the *rāqīa'*, adds, “these purely figurative expressions . . . are such as we can still use with perfect propriety, and yet to impute to us notions of a crude view of supernal waters stored in heavenly reservoirs would be as unjust as it is to impute such opinions to the writers of the Biblical books. The holy writers deserve at least the benefit of the doubt, especially when poetic passages are involved. Again: the view expressed in this verse [Gen 1:6] is not crude, absurd, or in any wise deficient” (*Exposition of Genesis* [Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1942], 60-61).

⁶⁷Mathews, 150.

⁶⁸An alternative interpretation of the term “above” is that it should actually be translated “from above,” denoting direction of flow and not the position above the *rāqīa'*. According to Gen 1:6-7, the *rāqīa'* was formed to separate “waters above” from “waters below”—the key point is the relative position of the waters in relationship to each other. Interestingly, the expression “waters above” (*hammayim . . . mē‘al*) does not appear again in the Hebrew Bible except for Ps 148:4: “Praise Him, highest heavens,

equated with *clouds* in ancient Hebrew thinking (as opposed to a celestial ocean of solid water above a vault).

Keil and Delitzsch present a clear summary of the meaning of “waters above”:

The waters *under* the firmament are the waters upon the globe itself; those *above* are not the ethereal waters beyond the limits of the terrestrial atmosphere, but the waters which float in the atmosphere, and are separated by it from those upon the earth, the waters which accumulate in clouds, and then bursting these their bottles, pour down as rain upon the earth.⁶⁹

Windows/Doors of Heaven

It is often suggested that the Hebrews believed there were literal windows or doors in the firmament or *rāqīaʿ*. However, in Gen 7:11, it is the windows of the *šamayim* (“sky”), not the windows of the *rāqīaʿ*; whence the waters above fall. Windows and/or doors never appear with *rāqīaʿ*, nor with the expression “waters above” (*hammayim mēʿal*), which occurs only twice in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 1:7 and Ps 148:4).

and the waters that are above the heavens!” This passage, of course, is figurative since the heavens don’t literally praise God; thus, it should not be gleaned too closely for accuracy with regard to physical realities.

A key word is *מֵעַל* (*mē ʿal*), which is found approximately 140 times in the Hebrew Bible, always in adverbial or prepositional phrases. It is comprised of two elements: the prepositional *מֵ*, which is often translated “from,” and *עַל*, which means “above.” It most frequently refers to spatial relationships or locations described as “above” or “upward.” In Ps 148:4, *mē ʿal* is used to describe the relationship of the “waters above” with the “heavens.” It is usually translated as “the waters *above* the heavens” (וְהַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל הַשָּׁמַיִם). However, in other verses the word is used to convey the idea of “downward from,” “descend from above,” or something that comes “from above” (e.g., Gen 24:64; Deut 9:17; Josh 10:27; Jdgs 1:14; 1 Sam 4:18; 1 Kgs 1:53). In each of these verses, the subject is being moved from a higher to a lower place—down from the altar, down from the donkey, down from the trees. From those usages, it could be suggested that Ps 148:4 be translated as “the waters that descend from the heavens above.” At the very least, these variances suggest caution against a more rigid understanding than the author intended to convey of the actual spatial relationship of the “waters above” to “the heavens.” This understanding is made more apparent by parallel expressions wherein moisture comes from heaven *above* (as opposed to the water above the heavens) such as is found in Gen 27:39: “Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, And away from the dew of heaven from above” (הִנֵּה מִשְׁכְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ יִהְיֶה מִזֶּשֶׁבֶד וּמִטַּל הַשָּׁמַיִם מֵעַל).

⁶⁹Keil and Delitzsch, 1:53-54.

Psalm 78:23 is decisive in understanding the meaning of terms “windows” and “doors of heaven.” In this verse, the term “the doors of heaven” is explicitly associated (by means of poetic synonymous parallelism) with clouds: “Yet He commanded the clouds [*s^hbaqim*] above and opened the doors of heaven.” This verse indicates that “doors of heaven” (and the parallel phrase “windows of heaven”) is to be understood figuratively as a reference to “clouds.” “According to the Old Testament representation, whenever it rains heavily, the doors or windows of heaven are opened.”⁷⁰ Other OT references make clear that the phrase “windows of heaven” and parallels are figurative expressions.⁷¹

If the “windows of heaven” refer to clouds, then it is reasonable to suggest that the opening of the windows of heaven, mentioned for the first time in connection with the flood, may imply that there was no rain on the earth (but only a mist which watered the ground, Gen 2:6-7) until the time of the flood. This would be in harmony with the explicit statement of Ellen White: “The world before the Flood reasoned that for centuries the laws of nature had been fixed. The recurring seasons had come in their order. Heretofore rain had never fallen; the earth had been watered by a mist or dew.”⁷²

Day Two of Creation Week: Material and Functional Creation

According to Gen 1:6-8, on the second day of creation week God was involved in both material and functional creative acts. Verses 6a, 7a, and 8 describe the material creation: “And God said, ‘Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters. . . .’ Thus God made the expanse And He called the expanse ‘Sky.’” Verses 6b and 7b describe the functional creation: “Let it [the expanse] divide the waters from the waters. . . . And [the expanse] divided the waters which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse.” Both material creation (the making of the “sky”) and the assignment of the function of that creation (to divide the upper atmospheric heavens containing water-bearing clouds from the surface waters of the earth) are an integral part of God’s creative activity during creation week.

A recent interpretation of Genesis 1 published by John Walton seriously challenges the traditional understanding of creation week.⁷³ Walton argues that the seven days of Genesis 1 are literal days, but refer to the inauguration of the cosmos as a functioning temple where God takes up his residence. The six-day creation week, according to Walton, refers only to “functional” and not to “material” creation. The week describes God’s establishment and installation of “functions.” There is need for a thorough critique of Walton’s thesis in another venue. But here we note that one of Walton’s major theses is that nothing material was created during the six days of creation. He

⁷⁰Ibid., 54. Besides Ps 78:23, see also Gen 7:11-12; Ps 104:3; Job 36:29.

⁷¹See, e.g., 2 Kgs 7:2, 19; Isa 24:18; and Mal 3:10.

⁷²Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1922), 96.

⁷³John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009).

facilely explains away the other days of creation, but faces a serious obstacle with regard to the second day. He acknowledges: “Day two has a potentially material component (the firmament *raqi’a*).”⁷⁴ His explanation seeks to sweep away this material component: “no one believes there is actually something material there—no solid construction holds back the upper waters. If the account is material as well as functional we then find ourselves with the problem of trying to explain the material creation of something that does not exist.”⁷⁵ However, if, as we have argued, the Hebrew word *rāqīa’* does not refer to a solid construction, but to the atmospheric heavens or “sky,” which we still today believe constitutes a material reality (a real location called the “sky”), then material creation was indeed part of day two and was not just a function established, then Walton’s general thesis of no material creation during the six days of Genesis 1 falls to the ground.

Conclusions

The idea that the ancient Hebrews believed the heaven(s) consisted of a solid vault resting on a flat earth appears to have emerged for the first time only during the early nineteenth century when introduced as part of the flat-earth concept introduced by Washington Irving and Antoine-Jean Letronne. Scholars who supported this idea argued that the flat earth/vaulted heaven was held throughout the early Christian and Medieval periods and was an idea that originated in antiquity, particularly with the ancient Mesopotamians and Hebrews. However, more recent research has shown that the idea of a flat earth was not held by either the early Christian church or Medieval scholars. Indeed the overwhelming evidence is that they believed in a spherical earth, surrounded by celestial spheres (sometimes hard, sometimes soft) that conveyed the sun, moon, stars, and planets in their orbits around the earth. Moreover, research of ancient Babylonian astronomical documents shows that they did not have the concept of a heavenly vault. Rather, this was erroneously introduced into the scholarly literature through a mistranslation of the *Enuma Elish* by Jensen.

A review of the linguistic arguments that the Hebrews believed in the idea of a flat earth and vaulted heaven shows that the arguments are unfounded. The arguments derive from passages that are clearly figurative in nature. One of the great ironies in recreating a Hebrew cosmology is that scholars have tended to treat figurative usages as literal (e.g., Psalms and Job), while treating literal passages such as in Genesis as figurative. The noun form of *rāqīa’* is never associated with hard substances in any of its usages in biblical Hebrew; only the verbal form *rāqa’*. Even the latter cannot be definitely tied to metals; rather, it is understood as a process in which a substance is thinned—this can include pounding, but also includes stretching. The noun *rāqīa’* is best translated as “*expanses*” in all of its usages and has reference to the “sky” in Genesis 1. The “waters above” and the “window/doors/gates of heaven”

⁷⁴Ibid., 94.

⁷⁵Ibid.

are figurative references to the clouds, which (during the Noahic Flood and thereafter would) produce rain. On the second day of creation, God was involved in both material and functional creation. He made the *rāqīa'* (the sky) and also assigned its function (to divide the upper atmospheric waters contained in clouds from the surface waters of the earth).

BIBLICAL NARRATIVES: THEIR BEAUTY *AND* TRUTH

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The LORD executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel (Ps 103:6-7,
emphasis supplied).

The Christian canon contains many types of written materials, including poetry, letters, laws, apocalyptic, and narratives. Only in the last half-century, however, have biblical narratives begun to receive the stature they deserve. Previously, for more than a hundred years under the commanding influence of the historical-critical method, biblical narratives were generally regarded as the conflation of numerous fragmentary primitive sources, redacted “carelessly” or “sloppily” by later editors. Modern Western writing techniques were the standard for judging the ancient books. These extrabiblical criteria are presently conceded as inadequate.¹

A field of study has emerged in theology as sensitivity to biblical writing idioms and appreciation for the impressive narrative skills of the biblical writers has increased. Meir Sternberg pinpoints important issues of interpretation, such as being aware of what the biblical narrator wants to accomplish, and under what conditions he or she operates. Therefore,

both the universal and the distinctive features of his communication must be taken into account. Those features combine, in ways original and often surprising but unmistakable, to reveal a poetics at work. Whatever the nature and origin of the parts—materials, units, forms—the whole governs and interrelates them by well-defined rules of poetic communication.²

Not only content, then, but also the sequencing of biblical narratives is now being studied. Choice of vocabulary along with the juxtaposition of the narratives to each other is perceived as intentional.³ For example, the narrative of Judah and Tamar, formerly derided for its unexpected position within the eleven chapters of the Joseph sequence in Genesis, is now regarded as deliberate and meaningful. The NT narrative of the divorced woman at Samaria’s well (John 4), following immediately after Nicodemus’s seeking

¹Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 53.

²*Ibid.*, 2.

³Jack Lundbom, e.g., urges attention to the nature of Hebrew literary composition, and the many various devices that are ordered into a unified whole, and proposes that the reader needs to become sensitive to these component parts (*Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric*, 2d ed. [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997]).

out of the Messiah late one night (John 3), is also perceived as intentional. Scholars are noting that “Viewed in isolation, an event may seem to have a particular meaning, but when it is placed in a narrative context, its meaning can change.”⁴

John Sailhamer urges sensitivity to the “intertextuality” and the connecting seams between the different narratives, which can illuminate the theological intent of the author.⁵ Biblical narratives exhibit an evocative choice of words placed within literary structures, that are laced with intertextual connections.⁶ As a result, many commentaries now seem inadequate for understanding the narratives. As Robert Alter notes, there is a difference between traditional commentaries and modern scholarship. This difference is evidenced in the fact that traditional commentaries generally see the text as “an interconnected unity, as the midrashic exegetes did, . . . assuming it is a patchwork of frequently disparate documents, as most modern scholars have supposed.”⁷

Biblical narratives are rightly acclaimed for their intricately constructed material manifested through a deceptively simple surface texture. Sailhamer, following the trend initiated by Erich Auerbach⁸ and James Muilenberg,⁹ contends that a “close reading” of the multiple narratives in the Pentateuch, for instance, reveals an unfolding coherent “macro-story” rather than an unsophisticated redaction of unrelated primitive myths.¹⁰ Discerning readers will discover a profound art of terse but elegant conciseness, challenging

⁴Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. The Gospel according to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991): 1:3. He argues that “I am concerned with a text not as an isolated datum but as a functional member of the total narrative. I am also concerned with the meanings and suggestions of meaning which emerge when we note how part interacts with related part.”

⁵John Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 423.

⁶Even poetic books, such as the Psalter, are increasingly appreciated as purposely structured. Brevard Childs contends: “I would argue that the need for taking seriously the canonical form of the Psalter would greatly aid in making use of the Psalms in the life of the Christian Church. Such a move would not disregard the historical dimensions of the Psalter, but would attempt to profit from the shaping which the final redactors gave the older material in order to transform traditional poetry into Sacred Scripture for the later generations of the faithful” (“Reflections of the Modern Study of the Psalms,” in *Magnalia Dei, the Mighty Acts of God: Essays in Memory of G. Ernest Wright*, ed. F. M. Cross, W. E. Lemke, P. D. Millers Jr. [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976], 385).

⁷Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981, 11).

⁸Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953).

⁹James Muilenberg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *JBL* 88 (1969): 1-18.

¹⁰John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 34-37.

higher-critical assumptions. As G. B. Caird proposes, “Unitary perception [of the canon] is, to be sure, a well-attested phenomenon, but it is characteristic not of the primitive but of the creative mind in all ages.”¹¹ If there ever was “a period in human intellectual development to which the term mythopoeic could apply,” it must “already lie far in the past before ever the earliest document of the Old Testament was written.”¹² Caird can find nothing primitive in either the court history of David or the Pentateuchal record.

Not surprisingly, both Testaments work within the same tradition due to the fact that, except for Luke, the NT writers are also Hebrews. Therefore, their narratives could be expected to reflect similar stylistic features, though written in Greek. Indeed, the four Gospels and Acts display superior narrative expression. Karl Barth noticed these types of narrative features, observing that the central doctrines of Christianity are found within a careful reading of the Gospel narratives. Biblical revelation, he acknowledges, is often expressed in the form of a story or a series of stories instead of systematic doctrine,¹³ insisting that it is the biblical “macro-story” that defines theology and not the other way around.

Norman Perrin goes so far as to contend that the NT Gospel narrative is “the one unique literary form produced by early Christianity.”¹⁴ Meredith G. Kline also applauds NT narratives, building a compelling case that the Gospel of Mark exhibits the same literary structure as the book of Exodus.¹⁵ The smallest, seemingly insignificant details, previously ignored or ridiculed, are now combed for their perceptivity.

Newer commentaries acknowledge all four Gospels as literary masterpieces.¹⁶ For example, the Gospel of Mark, formerly scoffed at as immature and lacking depth,¹⁷ is now praised for its narrative expression. David Rhoads and Donald Michie argue that

¹¹G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 197.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Therefore, Karl Barth proposes, dogmatics becomes “much less of a system than the narrative of an event” (*Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-1969], ii 362, 321).

¹⁴Norman Perrin, *The New Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 143.

¹⁵Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 172-203.

¹⁶E.g., George Mlakuzhyil, *The Christocentric Literary Structure of the Fourth Gospel* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1987), 370.

¹⁷E.g., Helen Gardner, who described Mark’s Gospel as having a “lack of literary quality as the product of honest uneducated sincerity” (*The Business of Criticism* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1959], 101-102).

The *Good News According to Mark* has proved the most enduringly powerful narrative in the history of Western civilization, perhaps in the history of the world. . . . It has thus succeeded on a literally unimaginable scale in the first aim of all narrative—the compulsion and maintenance of belief. . . . No earlier literary document bears the slightest resemblance to Mark's. One man, overwhelmed by a second man's memories of a colossal third man, preserves these memories as an urgent legacy to our race.¹⁸

Auerbach concurs, insisting that Mark's Gospel is a “revolutionary piece of writing recording the birth of a revolutionary spiritual movement from the depths of the common people.”¹⁹ He believes that concern for literary form in the biblical materials is an essential element in understanding the radical nature of biblical narratives.²⁰

Rhoads and Michie detail how Mark artfully employs word repetitions, two-step progression, questions in dialogues, and episode framing, with similar episodes in a series of three. For example, word repetitions often occur within episodes in various ways—“words in commands or requests are repeated in the descriptions of their fulfillment; a character may quote the writings and repeat key words in commenting on them; or the description of a situation or problem may be echoed in the reaction to it.”²¹ Another way in which word repetitions are used is for the purpose of bridging between episodes. The word repetitions “are verbal threads, which weave their way through the story, giving the fabric of the story an intricate design and unity it would not otherwise have.”²²

The two-step progression is, according to Rhoads and Michie, “the most pervasive stylistic feature in the gospel.” This narrative feature may be applied to, for instance, time and place references, such as “When it was evening, after the sun set,” as well as to people and objects, such as the woman who was a “Greek, a Syrophenician by birth.” In two-step progressions, the “first part is important, yet the emphasis often lies on the second step, which usually contains the more significant element.”²³ Two-step progressions may also take the forms of antithetical parallelism, where a negative step is followed by a step in the affirmative, such as “came not to be served, but to serve and give his life”; pairs of questions, such as “What is this? A new teaching with

¹⁸David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), xi-xii.

¹⁹Auerbach, 35.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 35-38.

²¹Rhoads and Michie, 46.

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*

authority?"; and pairs of imperatives, such "Keep watch, and pray that you don't come to a test."²⁴

Narrative dialogues often include "an extraordinary number of questions, mostly rhetorical." These are the types of questions that Jesus often poses to his disciples: "Why are you cowards? Don't you have faith yet?"²⁵

Rhoads and Michie note how framing devices create "suspense." A story is interrupted and the reader must wait through another narrative in order to learn how the first story turns out. "After being told that Jairus's daughter is near death, the reader must wait while Jesus heals the woman with the flow of blood before finding out what happens to the little girl." By framing the stories in such a way, they "illuminate and enrich each other, commenting on and clarifying the meaning, one of the other. . . . [T]he faith of Jairus for his daughter is comparable to the faith of the woman for her own healing."²⁶ Thus framing also plays a key role in bringing out the theological meaning of the Gospel.²⁷

Finally, Rhoads and Michie point to the threefold repetition of similar actions and events, noting that it is "Perhaps the most commonly recognized pattern of narration in Mark. Criteria for the identification of these series of three have included the repetition of narrative structure, verbal threads, a common theme, the continuation of a conflict, the involvement of the same characters, and the similarity of setting."²⁸ Some repetitions occur in direct sequence, such as Jesus praying before his arrest (Mark 14:32-42). Other times sequences occur at intervals, such as Jesus' three predictions of his impending death. "After each prediction, the disciples' response indicates that they do not understand. After each response, Jesus summons the disciples and teaches them the values of the rule of God implicit in his predictions."²⁹ Rhoads and Michie conclude that "a threefold series is no mere repetition of similar events, but involves a progressive development. Each incident uncovers more about the characters or conflicts, and the third fully reveals the dynamic of that entire series."³⁰

Joanna Dewey also insists that "Mark was a writer of considerable literary skill if not of elegant Greek; it is only by paying attention to the literary structure he created that we can hope to interpret his gospel properly."³¹

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., 54.

²⁹Ibid., 54-55.

³⁰Ibid., 55.

³¹Joanna Dewey, "The Literary Structure of the Controversy Stories in Mark

The structure of Mark's Gospel provides an interpretive key to his theology, with structural forms actually constituting the "major elements in its overall meaning, elements which are destroyed by the historical disintegration of the text."³² When understood in this way, narratives that initially seem to be problematic, such as Jesus' cursing of the fig tree, "make more sense when seen as part of a larger narrative sequence involving Christ's rejection of the Temple."³³

T. R. Wright even goes so far as to say that Mark's Gospel "should be seen as a form of theology, an interpretation of the significance of the raw material it has transformed. Mark's Gospel, in other words, is a prime example of narrative theology."³⁴

The other Gospel narrators are no less capable than Mark. Luke's narrative skills extend far beyond his careful observations as a physician. He is also recognized as a brilliant historian and Greek linguist. James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek appreciate Luke's unique style, finding that he uses various narrative elements that appear frequently in ancient history and biography, such as dramatic episodes, summaries, recapitulation and resumption (used to connect Luke and Acts), parallelism (the deaths of Jesus and Stephen), and interlacement ("focusing on one character, then another, and then back to the previous character"). Bailey and Vander Broek note that "What is obvious is that each evangelist used creativity in presenting Jesus as both source and paradigm for the church. Luke does this quite explicitly by writing two volumes, one featuring Jesus and one the early church."³⁵

Similarly, acclaim for the narratives of the Gospel of John remain unchallenged. Bailey and Vander Broek, who are two of many voices, note that

With literary artistry, the Johannine author fashions narrative scenes with fascinating exchanges between Jesus and his interlocutors (John 6), or forms dialogues and monologues that assume front and center stage in the overall drama (John 9; 14–17). Furthermore, the author's clever use of dramatic irony (John 18:33–38) and deliberately ambiguous symbols (e.g., water or bread) represents a highly developed literary style.³⁶

2:1–3:6, *JBL* 92 (1973): 401.

³²T. R. Wright, *Theology and Literatures: Signposts in Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 74.

³³*Ibid.*, 82.

³⁴*Ibid.* This need not suggest that Mark invented stories, but that he perceived the meanings in Christ's life and teaching, which he sought to express through his well-written and structured Gospel.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 95, 96–97. See also Tannenhill.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 95.

Thus all four Gospel writers masterfully employ literary devices to express their theology. Though ridiculed by earlier critical disintegration of the text, narrative details are vital for interpretation. The Gospel writers do not present their accounts of Jesus as random collections of miracle stories and teachings. Instead, the reader is confronted with theological expression of the highest quality.

Biblical narrative is not an inconsequential part of Scripture. Indeed it is a major literary form. God chose to reveal himself through intricately crafted narratives rather than systematic discourse. For example, the major Christian doctrine of the Atonement is never presented in didactic format. New Testament writers glean OT narratives and poetry to express their perspectives.

However, critical scholars, though confronted with the high quality of the ancient narratives, now argue instead that the high literary quality precludes historical accuracy. Biblical narratives are still defaulted, but for a different reason. It must be asked, Can biblical narratives be trusted? Does their high literary quality prevent historical trustworthiness?

It is striking to note how major critics such as Julius Wellhausen,³⁷ Hermann Gunkel,³⁸ and James Barr³⁹ comment on the historical content of OT narratives. Wellhausen, foremost champion of the Documentary Hypothesis, when speaking of the author of Genesis, writes: "He undoubtedly wants to depict faithfully the factual course of events in the coming-to-be of the world, he wants to give a cosmogonic theory. Anyone who denies that is confusing the value of the story for us with the intention of the author."⁴⁰

³⁷Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel: With a Reprint of the Article "Israel" from the "Encyclopedia Britannica,"* trans. John Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies, preface William Robertson Smith (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1885).

³⁸Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12,* trans. K. William Whitney Jr., foreword Peter Machinist (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

³⁹James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999).

⁴⁰Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels,* 6th ed. (Berlin: Reimer, 1905), 296; trans. Albert Wolters and cited in Alvin Platinga, "Evolution, Neutrality, and Antecedent Probability: A Reply to Van Till and McMullen," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21/1 (1991): 80-109; reprinted in *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives,* ed. Robert T. Pennock (Cambridge: MIT, 2001), 197-240, 216. There is an abundant literature on this topic. See, e.g., Robert Clifford, "Creation in the Hebrew Bible," in *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding,* ed. R. J. Russell, W. R. Stoeger, and G. V. Coyne (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 151-175; Dianne Bergant and Carroll Stuhlmueller, "Creation according to the OT," in *Evolution and Creation,* ed. E. McMullin (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 153-175; Bernhard W. Anderson,

Gunkel, father of OT form criticism, concurs, noting that “People should never have denied that Genesis 1 wants to recount how the coming-to-be of the world actually happened.”⁴¹ Barr comments similarly, proposing that “most conservative evangelical opinion today does not pursue a literal interpretation of the creation story in Genesis. A literal interpretation would hold that the world was created in six days, these days being the first of the series which we still experience as days and nights.”⁴²

After describing how evangelicals, whom Barr refers to as “fundamentalists,” have moved away from a literal interpretation of Genesis history, he continues: “In fact the only natural exegesis is a literal one, in the sense that this is what the author meant.”⁴³ Barr presses the point even further, noting that

so far as I know there is no professor of Hebrew or OT in any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1–11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that: (a) creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience; (b) the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provide by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to the later stages of the Biblical story, and (c) Noah’s flood was understood to be worldwide, and to have extinguished all human and land animal life except for those in the ark.⁴⁴

These words from scholars within the critical tradition remind that how one interprets a text should not override what the original authors had in mind.

Herbert Butterfield goes so far as to contend that Hebrew narrative writing presents “the very rise of historiography.”⁴⁵ Bible writers anchor the historical record within narrative texture, thereby effecting a major landmark in the development of the writing of history. Thus “the Bible is even the first to anticipate the appeal to the surviving record of the past that characterizes modern history-telling. . . . [M]ethod and rhetoric coincide: the distributed

“The Earth is the Lord’s”: An Essay on the Biblical Doctrine of Creation,” in *Is God a Creationist?* ed. R. M. Frye (New York: Scribner, 1983), 176-196.

⁴¹Hermann Gunkel, “Genesis,” in *Handkommentar zum Alten Testament*, ed. Wilhelm Nowack et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1896), 1/1; cited in Plantinga, 216.

⁴²James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 2d ed. (London: SCM Press, 1981), 40; cited in Plantinga, 217.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴James Barr, a personal letter to David K. Watson (23 April 1984), published in *Newsletter of the Creation Science Association of Ontario* 3/4 (1990/1991); cited in Plantinga, 217.

⁴⁵Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 80-95.

parts enhance the credibility of the whole, the present witnesses lend an air of truth to the evocation of the past from which they issued.”⁴⁶ Thus the repeated references to actual cities, rivers, mountains, trees, caves, and countries suggest that the writers meant the narratives to be understood as true history, seeming to invite the reader to verify the facts for themselves. Later biblical writers refer to earlier people, places, and events as if they actually existed and occurred. Jesus and the NT writers accept the historicity of the OT. In fact, all biblical writers rely on the certainty of OT historical events (e.g., the creation, Noah’s flood, and the exodus) to validate the certainty of future actions by God. Under inspiration, the Bible writers masterfully recorded God’s involvement in human history. In fact, the foundation of the covenant is based upon the fact that the history is true. The articles of the covenant are preceded by a relating of historical events in which God intervened in Israel’s behalf.

Arnaldo Momigliano stresses this point, noting that “The Hebrew historian only gave an authoritative version of what everybody was supposed to know.”⁴⁷ Sternberg argues that, as far as scope and strategy are concerned, Hebrew narrative “has no parallel in ancient times. . . . By incorporating the definition and command and observance, the narrative not only illegitimizes all thought of fictionality on pain of excommunication. It also uniquely internalizes its own rules of communication, whereby the remembrance of the past devolves on the present and determines the future.”⁴⁸ Sternberg notes that it is this “cultural imperative” that makes the biblical narratives “‘the greatest surprise’ in the whole story of history writing,” explaining how a people seem to appear out of nowhere to become “‘more obsessed with history than any other nation that has ever existed.’”⁴⁹

Bible writers intended for their narratives to be read as straightforwardly reliable. Regarding this intentionality, Sternberg notes: “In terms of the internal premises established by the discourse—the reader cannot go far wrong even if he does little more than follow the statements made and the incidents enacted on the narrative surface.”⁵⁰ Therefore, if scholars take seriously the voices

⁴⁶Sternberg, 31-32. Tremper Longman III concurs, proposing that “literary critics of the Bible all too frequently reduce the meaning of the biblical text to an aesthetic meaning. Literature, they say, does not refer outside of itself to external reality. . . . [T]he Bible intends to impart historical information to its readers, primarily concerning the acts of God for and among His people. . . . Biblical narrative, for the most part, intends to impart historical information” (*Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987], 68).

⁴⁷Arnaldo Momigliano, *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), 195.

⁴⁸Sternberg, 31.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., 51.

of the canonical writers, they should deny the modern argument that literary writing precludes historical accuracy. In spite of the fact that “to narrate is to explain,” it is significant that the biblical narratives often include specific external referents that can be verified. Luke, at the beginning of his Gospel, argues for the veracity of his historical narratives, noting:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-3).

It bears repeating that the assumption that literary writing always precludes historical accuracy is false. George Ladd cogently notes: “The uniqueness and the scandal of the Christian religion rests in the mediation of revelation through historical events.”⁵¹ There is no bifurcation between history and theology. Scripture narratives are rooted in a historical record and comprise a major portion of the system of truth the Bible contains.

The weakness found in many approaches to narrative studies comes from wresting the individual narratives from their original text and analyzing them without the control of the narrative sequences. Those who accept a holistic approach, in which the unity of Scripture is maintained, will find a rich field to work in. Narratives, along with the poetry, laws, letters, and prophecies of the Bible, build a grand mosaic of truth. Narratives help to increase the Bible’s veracity and impact, and convey theology not as doctrine, but as story. As Martin Buber proposes,

Scripture does not state its doctrine as doctrine but by telling a story and without exceeding the limits set by the nature of a story. It uses the method of story-telling to a degree, however, which world literature has not yet learned to use; and its cross-references and inter-connections, while noticeable, are so unobtrusive that a perfect attention is needed to grasp its intent—an attentiveness so perfect that it has not yet been fully achieved. Hence, it remains for us latecomers to point out the significance of what has hitherto been achieved, overlooked, neglected, insufficiently valued.⁵²

⁵¹G. E. Ladd, “The Knowledge of God: The Saving Acts of God,” in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. C. F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), 7.

⁵²Martin Buber, “Abraham the Seer,” *Judaism* 5 (1956): 296.

AN “INFORMATION LITERACY” PERSPECTIVE OF THE CREATION/EVOLUTION DEBATE

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Introduction

The pedagogical mission of my profession as a librarian is to train in “information literacy.” Within the context of higher education that is conceived of generally as instructing a student in using library resources to complete an academic writing assignment. The Association of College Research Libraries has identified the broad set of competencies required for this task, summarized as the ability to define an information need, and find, evaluate, and then use it ethically.¹ Of particular interest is how we mentor the effective evaluation of information in an information-saturated culture.²

The creation/evolution debate provides an intriguing case study on the process of evaluating information for the following reason: The two accounts are mutually exclusive. The information seeker cannot accept both as true. Often this results in accepting one as true and the other as false.³ And the distinctive accounts highlight the function of standard criteria generally presented in information literacy training: authority, independent corroboration, plausibility and support, and presentation.⁴

This essay will discuss the creation/evolution debate from the perspective of the novice information seeker, discussing and applying the principles of

¹Patricia Iannuzzi et al., *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000).

²The professional literature on information literacy is vast. Some good overviews include: John Budd, *Framing Library Instruction* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2009); Michael Eisenberg, Carrie A. Lowe, and Kathleen L. Spitzer, *Information Literacy: Essential Skills for the Information Age*, 2d ed. (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2004); Ann Grafstein, “A Discipline-Based Approach to Information Literacy,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 28/4 (2002): 197-204.

³Delimiting this discussion to the biblical-creation account and the standard evolutionary account is arbitrary in that virtually all religions and cultures have unique creation accounts, e.g., each of the ancient cultures of Babylon, Greece, and Egypt had well-articulated accounts; Native American cultures have their accounts; and so forth. However, unlike most creation accounts, the two under consideration in this discussion both make a scientific claim to reality.

⁴Don Fallis, “On Verifying the Accuracy of Information: Philosophical Perspectives,” *Library Trends* 52/3 (2004): 464-465. This article focuses on the evaluation of information found on internet web sites, more particularly on the accuracy of information, e.g., in the case of medical information.

information literacy. Ultimately, it will be suggested that these strategies can go only so far, and that criteria for accepting one account over the other will be based on subjective metaphysical presuppositions which find grounds formed through faith in an authority. It can also be assumed that, given the social context of this journal, I will argue for the biblical-creation account.

Working Definition of Information

Defining the term “information” has always been problematic because both the word and concept are used in many ways and in so many different contexts.⁵ Thus, for the purposes of this essay, the term will be delimited to the semantic vehicle by which knowledge is exchanged between two minds. This supposes a commodified form of communication medium using symbols that record the knowledge of an informer which can then be accessed independently by any number of informees.⁶ The most common information vehicles pertinent to the religion-and-science debate in the academic context are books and journals, whether analog or digital.⁷

A further distinction needs to be made.⁸ Some information (the knowledge obtained by an author expressed in a semantically commodified form) is descriptive. This class of information applies to those facts which can be verified independently in real time. I as an individual may not be able to visit the pyramids of Giza, so for information about the pyramids I rely on pictures and on what other competent authors have written. I am certain that if I were to travel to Egypt, I would find the pyramids as they have described them. The location on the map would correspond, as well as any measurements I might make.

A second class of information (knowledge of an author expressed in a semantically commodified form) incorporates the further analysis and interpretation of verifiable descriptive information by the author. In the case

⁵Dan Schiller, *How to Think About Information* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). Schiller’s discussion of the capitalistic commodification of information in a global context highlights many of the challenges the novice information seeker must take into account, including but not limited to the economic infrastructure that delivered the information.

⁶Albert Bormann, *Holding on to Reality: The Nature of Information at the Turn of the Millennium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 22. His definition for information is also multifaceted: “INTELLIGENCE provided, a PERSON is informed by a SIGN about some THING within a certain CONTEXT.”

⁷For a helpful distinction between knowledge and information, see Peter Suber, “Knowledge as a Public Good,” *SPARC Open Access Newsletter*, 2 November 2009, n. 130 (<http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/11-02-09.htm#publicgood>).

⁸These distinctions reflect the discussion by Luciano Floridi, “Semantic Conceptions of Information,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/information-semantic>).

of the pyramids of Giza, this class of information is illustrated by discussions of their history, methods of construction, religious significance for the builders, and so forth. Competent authorities have come to their conclusions on these matters, not because they were personally present and observed these events; but from their analysis of historical documents and their awareness of the social world of the builders, they have made logical inferences that they believe represent the way things happened. While I might be able to access some of the same historical documents and artifacts, I must accept their "interpretation" as simply that, and then decide whether or not they are justified in their conclusions. This is not a simple, straightforward matter of independent verification.

When evaluating the first class of information, the information seeker thinks in categories of accuracy and completeness, and believes it or not in terms of certainty. As for the second class, categories revolve around the reliability of the author, both in terms of method and bias, and the information seeker believes the information or not in terms of confidence. In other words, this is a theoretical expansion of the distinction between verifying facts and validating opinions.

While these kinds of distinctions are helpful in theory, actually confronting theological texts and scientific texts that give an account of human origins is much more complex. Whether supporting the biblical creation account or the standard evolutionary account, the authors are expressing their beliefs using the rhetoric of certainty and the language of factuality. Thus for the novice information seeker, the normal clues by which she categorizes fact and opinion may not be self-evident. Also, claims to authority not directly related to the content but present in the ambient culture may also prove influential in the evaluation process.⁹

In terms of the creation/evolution debate, my argument also assumes that the facts, those which can be observed and measured in real time by competent individuals, are not at issue.¹⁰ That there is a geologic column evident in the Grand Canyon is equally evident to all geologists, both creationist and evolutionist. That the fossilized bones found on a southwest Michigan farm and on display at Andrews University are from an extinct mammoth is uncontested knowledge for paleontologists. That species have adapted to their environment through an evolutionary process so that certain breeds of domesticated cattle that thrive in arid temperate climates do vary

⁹As lamented by Gilbert Keith Chesterton: "Modern intelligence won't accept anything on authority. But it will accept anything without authority" (*The Man Who Knew Too Much* [New York: Harper, 1922], 180).

¹⁰Steve Fuller, "Evidence? What Evidence?" *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (<http://pos.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/03/10/0048393111402778.citation>).

significantly from those that thrive in humid tropical climates is common knowledge for biologists.

My argument is based, however, on the understanding that it is the inferences and interpretations of such generally accepted facts that has led to mutually exclusive accounts of human origins.¹¹ It is this phenomenon that poses a substantive problem for the novice information seeker. But we should not simply reduce what can be known to the immediately observable, particularly in the context of this debate. Doing so would leave us with nothing more than perhaps interesting but rather insignificant trivia. It is also appreciated that the overarching hope of this debate is that these inferences and interpretations that take us beyond the facts will contribute to the understanding of the meaning or purpose of human life.¹² And it is also that larger purpose that renders the epistemic choice between the biblical creation account and the standard evolutionary account so psychologically compelling.

The Evaluation of Information

In the previous section, I argued for a definition of information as knowledge of an author expressed in a semantically commodified form. Within this definition, I distinguished between information that is verifiable in real time and information that has the added value of authorial inference and interpretation. In this section, I will discuss the various facets that are incorporated into the information literacy evaluation process.

Most educated and socially aware persons are tacitly adept at evaluating everyday informational knowledge exchanges, and so are able, for example,

¹¹Ibid. "Scientists who wish to embed their findings in more explicitly theoretical agendas are limited by the peer-review process. This leads ID [Intelligent Design]/creationists to complain (rightly) of a 'naturalistic' philosophical bias that allows scientific authors to use their articles' introductions and conclusions to articulate their findings in terms of broader Neo-Darwinian research themes but not those of ID/creationism, even though the same findings could be understood in those terms too. As a result of this asymmetrical treatment at the reviewer stage, ID/creationism is effectively censored before it can enter the scientific literature—unless ID/creationists manage to come up with testable hypotheses the success of which could not be explained equally well in Neo-Darwinian terms."

¹²Roger Smith, *Being Human: Historical Knowledge and the Creation of Human Nature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 240-241. "No one will question the unparalleled precision of the natural sciences. But knowledge about what makes a person significant, or an institution just, or a claim to truth persuasive, or a moment of perception beautiful, has a different character. It requires knowledge of particulars set in a story. Historically deracinated abstract knowledge, exemplified in the physical sciences, establishes no meaning, differentiates no shades of significance and points in no direction relevant to knowing what to do. It is knowledge about particulars, the place of people and events in a story, which opens such possibilities."

to recognize advertising hype or political propaganda for what it is, while also sifting out what is true and adding it to their own knowledge fund. However, academic-writing scenarios are not everyday knowledge exchanges, but rather a specialized and contextualized form. The challenge facing the information seeker in this setting is that not all information is created equal, and discretion is needed to select the most reliable sources.

That the engagement of such critical-thinking dispositions is necessary is based on the observed reality that the human minds that create the information are by nature limited and constrained in a number of significant ways, including space, time, language, and expertise. When the information is incomplete or inaccurate because of limitations imposed on the informer, it is described as misinformation. Cases are also plentiful in which the informer intentionally attempts to manipulate the informee for some personal gain; thus disinformation abounds.¹³ The burden of recognizing these counter-informing objects falls on the informee, who is also constrained by the same limitations. But it is the informee that bears the consequences of any misjudgment.¹⁴

Key criteria have been outlined for evaluating information and providing the novice with some initial guidance. These include verifying the authority of the source, seeking independent corroboration of factual claims, reviewing the plausibility and support for the propositions, and observing the clues embedded in the presentation of the information. It is also assumed that using these reliable methods to evaluate information will produce reliable results. A corollary to this thesis is that reliable sources are more likely to provide reliable information.¹⁵

However, in spite of the general success that these methods offer for recognizing good information, two cautions are in order. The first has been labeled the "information cascade."¹⁶ In this scenario, a proposition has been

¹³Bernd Carsten Stahl, "On the Difference or Equality of Information, Misinformation, and Disinformation: A Critical Research Perspective," *Informing Science Journal* 9 (2006): 83-96.

¹⁴Fallis, 464-466.

¹⁵John M. Budd, "Academic Libraries and Knowledge: A Social Epistemology Framework," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 30/5 (2004): 365-366. Budd is arguing that the library should take an active role rather than a passive role in both their instructional and collection development capacities when helping information seekers find accurate and reliable information.

¹⁶Originally coined and described in Sushil Bikhchandani, David Hirshleifer, and Ivo Welch, "A Theory of Fads, Fashion, Custom, and Cultural Change as Informational Cascades," *Journal of Political Economy* 100/5 (1992): 992-1026. For summary and updated bibliography, see Sushil Bikhchandani, David Hirshleifer, and Ivo Welch, "Information Cascades and Rational Herding: An Annotated Bibliography and Resource Reference," Working Paper: UCLA/Anderson and Ohio State University and Yale/SOM (<http://www.info-cascades.info>).

accepted as true because it seems reliable, though it is false, and spreads throughout a generally reliable academic discipline through standard citation practices. Thus the false proposition appears to have authority, independent corroboration, and plenty of disciplinary support with what appears to be a competent presentation. One classic example is the claim that Eskimos have many words for snow, and the assertion coheres well with the general appreciation for the effect of environment on language. The assertion was accepted as true by many in academic circles until it was tested and proved false.¹⁷ Another long-accepted example is found in the claim that there are parallels to the story of Job in the Hindu literature. When the citation evidence was traced back to its source, the claim was proven unwarranted.¹⁸

A second caution concerns epistemic circularity, in which a claim is supported only by reference to authority, plausibility, or presentation, and not by mind-independent reference to fact. In the courtroom, this class of information is usually rejected as hearsay. In other words, "one seeks to defend or demonstrate the reliability of a source in ways that require relying on beliefs generated by that source."¹⁹ Critics of religion have long made this case for religious beliefs.²⁰

Epistemology of Testimony

Because there are no eyewitnesses of human origins, and because the origin event(s) cannot be replicated, we must infer how it happened based on possibly related real-time observations of phenomena and processes. Such inference leads a person to belief, and hence to knowledge. When that knowledge is communicated anew, the added content of interpretation and inference to the description of the original basic facts takes on the characteristics of testimony.

¹⁷Laura Martin, "Eskimo Words for Snow: A Case Study in the Genesis and Decay of an Anthropological Example," *American Anthropologist* 88/2 (1986): 418-423.

¹⁸D. J. A. Clines, "In Search of the Indian Job," *VT* 33/4 (1983): 398-418.

¹⁹Ralph Baergen, *Historical Dictionary of Epistemology*, Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements, 70 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 65.

²⁰William P. Alston, "Knowledge of God," in *Faith, Reason, and Skepticism: Essays*, ed. Marcus B. Hester (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 43-44. The paper critiques an internalist version of epistemology in which a belief can supposedly be justified in a noncircular reflective fashion, in which Alston argues little if anything can then be known. The context of the article is a response to skeptics who claim knowledge of God cannot be justified. "Its externalist competitor has much more going for it as a general orientation in epistemology, and it opens up possibilities for knowledge of God that are closed to internalism. The price of this, however, is a renunciation of the aim at a noncircular demonstration of the reliability of our sources of knowledge and an abandonment of hopes for the autonomy of epistemology."

The evaluation of this enriched class of information can be instructed by recent work in the epistemology of testimony.²¹

That most of our knowledge has been gained from testimony is commonly noted. The simple human limitation of being able to inhabit only one unit of space and only one moment at a time in a linear sequence restricts our opportunities to form knowledge from only perception and memory. Relying on the testimony of others expands our intellectual horizons and empowers us to efficiently contribute to the collective knowledge of the community.

There are two main schools of thought as to the epistemic value of testimony in belief formation. Reductionists, following David Hume, require that testimony must have independent corroboration before it can be used to justify new belief. Antireductionists, following Thomas Reid, claim that testimony can be used to justify new belief without positive corroboration in the absence of evidence to the contrary.²² In the course of the debate between the two positions, many examples and counterexamples demonstrate the insufficiency of unilaterally adopting either position. Jennifer Lackey argues that the reductionist position best describes the epistemic duty of the hearer in that she must assess the reliability of the source, and that the antireductionist position describes the epistemic effort of the speaker, whose objective is to present a rational argument. Thus the communication exchange of information between two minds is a dualism. It follows that if the speaker is first successful in rationally justifying a claim through corroboration with factual knowledge, then the hearer can subsequently accept the claim as reliable without further epistemic work, since such further corroboration would be redundant.²³

Applied to academia, "information literacy" encompasses both the evaluation of information by an information seeker, which includes the epistemic task of incorporating new information into her knowledge base. The seeker is first a "hearer" and, by predetermining which are trustworthy sources, can accept the information provided as valid unless there are obvious reasons for rejecting the information as such. The informee/hearer in turn is expected to give expression to that newly acquired knowledge by authoring a new unique commodified information product. In authoring this new product, the informee/hearer becomes an informer/speaker and must adhere

²¹In addition to many articles, the following books provide a representative study of the epistemology of testimony: C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); S. Goldberg, *Anti-Individualism: Mind and Language, Knowledge and Justification* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); A. I. Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); J. Lackey and E. Sosa, eds., *The Epistemology of Testimony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*, *Modern European Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²²Baergen, 210-211.

²³Lackey, 177.

to the epistemic responsibility of providing validated information for the intended audience, a new information seeker. Lackey's dualism is pertinent for understanding the information-literacy cycle because the informee/informer incorporates both reductionist and antireductionist epistemic work in this new commodified information product. This line of argument highlights the social aspect of knowledge acquisition. Thus, the student author is expected to use trustworthy sources, and then provide trustworthy information in her written work, which, in turn, becomes an information source for a subsequent seeker.

Here is the crux of the problem facing a novice information seeker in a query about human origins. Both the biblical creation and the standard evolutionary accounts reflect interpretations of factual data, i.e., the objective, measurable phenomenon observed and recorded by multiple independent and competent persons in real time. Both accounts are supported by socially recognized and generally reliable communities following apparently sound methodological standards. Neither can claim the certainty of formal documented historical human eyewitnesses. Particularly in the case of geology, the inferences are drawn from relatively scanty and ambiguous data for which multiple plausible interpretations are inevitable.²⁴ Both could just as easily be cited by their critics as an example of information cascading, or could be demonstrated to be nothing more than a vicious testimonial circle. Scientists who hold to the biblical creation account are just as rigorous and thorough with the objective observable data as are scientists who hold to the standard evolutionary account. Criteria that normally would provide clues in the evaluation of this class of testimonial information do not provide conclusive answers.

One further contingency comes into play in the creation/evolution debate. Because of the socially constructed nature of the rhetoric, how a person evaluates a given proposition in the debate is based less on the potential truthfulness of the argument and more on what fits the worldview of the information seeker. Thus what generally happens is that a novice information seeker, who has been immersed in the standard evolutionary account throughout elementary and secondary education, and without social intervention from home and a faith community, will find the evidential claims supporting evolution more compelling. On the other hand, one who has been educated in a social context, whether family or church, that assumes the biblical creation account will find the evidence supporting that account more

²⁴Henry N. Pollack, *Uncertain Science . . . Uncertain World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 149. "Dealing with uncertainty about the past is a way of life with geologists, who in their work of reconstructing natural history are always working with half a deck or less. Nature is not a mindful conservator, and the inevitable consequence of time is that the record of what happened long ago becomes degraded and fragmentary. In their efforts to understand and interpret incomplete information, geologists always work with a handful of provisional scenarios relevant to explaining their observations."

compelling. This tendency reflects both the contextually formed worldview and prior knowledge of the informee.²⁵ How the informee then handles the ambiguities and knowledge gaps within the diverse accounts is indicative of her critical thinking dispositions, which are, again, open to critique and evaluation by observers who have their own commitments.

C. S. Lewis illustrated the interplay of worldview, prior knowledge, and logic in the task of evaluating testimony in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. After Lucy's second visit to Narnia with her brother Edmund, their older siblings brought the younger two to discuss their tale with the old Professor. Lucy's claim did not fit their worldview, while Edmund's did, thus the concern. After reviewing the particulars, in which Lucy claimed the events as true, and Edmund claimed Lucy's account was false and that they were just pretending, the Professor asks the pertinent question:

"For instance—if you will excuse me for asking the question—does your experience lead you to regard your brother or your sister as the more reliable? I mean, which is the more truthful?"

"That's just the funny thing about it, sir," said Peter. "Up till now, I'd have said Lucy every time."

The anxiety they were feeling was created by the dissonance between their worldview and the cumulative prior knowledge based on experience. After some further discussion about another possibility, the Professor directs the conversation to critical-thinking dispositions for an answer.

"Logic!" said the Professor half to himself. "Why don't they teach logic at these schools? There are only three possibilities. Either your sister is telling lies, or she is mad, or she is telling the truth. You know she doesn't tell lies and it is obvious that she is not mad. For the moment then and unless any further evidence turns up, we must assume she is telling the truth."²⁶

²⁵Michael Polanyi states: "All practical teaching, the teaching of comprehension in all the senses of the term, is based on authority. The student must be confident that his master understands what he is trying to teach him and that he, the student, will eventually succeed in his turn to understand the meaning of the things which are being explained to him" ("Faith and Reason," *JR* 41/4 [1961]: 243). Leslie Newbigin notes that "Reason is not an independent means for finding out what is the case. It is not a substitute for information. In order to be informed, we have to make acts of trust in the traditions we have inherited and in the evidence of our senses. Moreover, . . . all systematic reasoning has to begin by taking for granted certain things that are accepted without argument. There must be data without argument or, at least, without prior demonstration. . . . There exists no neutral reason that can decide impartially on the truth or falsehood of the Christian gospel. On the contrary, if it is true that Jesus is the Word made flesh, then to know Jesus must be the basis of all true knowledge" (*Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 96).

²⁶Clive Stapleton Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 47-48.

To summarize, the case study of applying information-literacy practices to the creation/evolution debate has not provided any decisive conclusions. The only difference between the two accounts seems to be the rhetoric of invention arising out of differing worldviews.²⁷ Unless there is a way to critique these distinctive worldviews, then the only conclusion is that the two accounts are equally valid. Except that intuitive logic cannot accept that being the case.²⁸ Whereas they may both be false, only one can be true.

	Biblical Creation Account	Standard Evolutionary Account
Authority	Eyewitness account of the Creator, as reported in texts and accepted for millennia as authoritative by Jews and Christians.	The general reputation of science, as defined by scientism, which purports to provide answers based on verifiable sense perception. Responsible for substantive progress in knowledge and evidenced in advances in technology and medicine. Accepted for a couple of centuries, but recently challenged.
Corroboration	Evidence of intelligent design and lack of evidence for evolutionary cross-speciation.	Geological and paleontological evidence for long ages. Computer models using measurable and verifiable variables.
Plausibility	So claimed by adherents.	So claimed by adherents.
Presentation	Testimonial. The original text provides a brief and limited description of how creation happened. This account is a prolegomena to a narrative of which the primary purpose was to establish the identity of the people of Israel.	Testimonial. The general theory emerged out of inferences drawn from new data using assumptions that questioned “religion” and the validity of ancient texts.

²⁷Fuller, 6. Fuller notes that “In short, debates over the scientific probity of ID/creationism and Neo-Darwinism have little to do with evidence per se but a lot to do with who speaks for the evidence, which in turn is a matter of permissible explanatory frameworks in science. In this context, the Popperian phrase, “metaphysical research program” comes in handy, since the closer one inspects the genuine points of disagreement between ID/creationism and Neo-Darwinism, the more metaphysical they become.”

²⁸Paul A. Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 1-7. He defines the problem of equal validity by popular media references to Lakota and Zuni human-origin myths, which are justified as “different ways of knowing.”

Hebrews 11 as a Biblical Response

Many of the key epistemological problems, as outlined above, were debated in the Hellenistic world of the first century. New Testament authors addressed these problems creatively in ways that affirmed the faith of the early church. For the purposes of this essay, one example will be discussed.

In the book of Hebrews, the author makes the claim: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see"²⁹ (11:1). While the context of the book, and, more particularly, the argument that follows make clear that the "in what"—that which is outside the immediate field of sense perception and yet to take place—refers to the promises given by God through the Scriptures and through Jesus Christ,³⁰ I suggest that the principle invoked could apply to any belief formed on the basis of testimony apart from perception. Thus I argue that the epistemic status of a belief formed solely by reliance on testimony is an act of faith.³¹ In Hebrews, that act of faith is warranted by the reliability of God as revealed through Jesus Christ. When applied to the creation/evolution debate, it requires an act of faith to commit to either account. As further evidenced in Heb 11:3, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." It is also an act of faith to claim that humanity evolved after a long process.

Exegetes and English-language translators have long struggled with whether Heb 11:1 should be interpreted as objective or subjective.³² The translation quoted in the previous paragraph represents the subjective interpretation.³³ A translation representative of the objective interpretation

²⁹Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the NIV.

³⁰R. L. Brawley, "Discursive Structure and the Unseen in Hebrews 2:8 and 11:1: A Neglected Aspect of the Context," *CBQ* 55/1 (1993): 97-98.

³¹Polanyi, 243. "But whether our confidence in the powers of our comprehension arises spontaneously from the depth of our inquiring mind or leans on our trust in the judgment of our teachers, it is always an act of hope akin to the dynamism of all human faith."

³²James D. Smith III, "Faith as Substance or Surety: Historical Perspectives on *Hypostasis* in Hebrews 11:1," in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World: Essays in Honor of Ronald F. Youngblood*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 381-392. It has been argued that the objective/subjective distinction broadly conceived was first systematized during the Enlightenment, most notably by Descartes, and that this distinction so construed has created an unwarranted disconnect between faith and reason. See Newbiggin, 29-44; James R. Peters, *The Logic of the Heart: Augustine, Pascal, and the Rationality of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 16-17; Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 23-26.

³³William J. Abraham, "Faith, Assurance, and Conviction: An Epistemological

reads: "Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don't see" (CEB).³⁴ "Confidence" and "assurance" emphasize the knower's internal subjective response, while "reality" and "proof" emphasize the external-mind-independent status of the knowable object. Valid arguments are given for both interpretations, so let me suggest that because of the ambiguity of the original Greek in conjunction with the constraints of English as a language, our understanding of "faith" should expand to include both meanings. Thus faith brings together both objective reality and proof with subjective confidence and assurance.

Faith is not needed for beliefs formed through perception, but only for beliefs formed from testimony. From the perspective of the novice information seeker, when there are competing accounts, she must evaluate the authority, corroboration, plausibility, and presentation of the testimony received. On the creation/evolution question, I suggest that the issue of authority takes priority, and that it is a commitment on that question that determines the subsequent outcomes in belief formation. In other words, faith is prior to knowledge; commitment precedes knowing.³⁵

Conclusion

The standards for the evaluation of information (authority, independent corroboration, plausibility and support, and presentation, as conventionally conceived in higher education), thus prove inadequate in and of themselves to aid the novice information seeker to come to a personal conclusion on the creation/evolution debate. These standards thus applied do, however, challenge a naive certainty in either account of human origins because both accounts find support among credible scientific authorities who competently present their diverse interpretations of the same verifiable data that reasonably appear to corroborate and validate the preferred account.

Commentary on Hebrews 11:1," *Ex auditu* 19 (2003): 65-75.

³⁴This translation is argued for by Robert G. Hoerber, "On the Translation of Hebrews 11:1," *Concordia Journal* 21/1 (1995): 77-79.

³⁵Polanyi argued for this priority in *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, corrected ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). He further applied the principle to religious knowing in idem, "Faith and Reason," 237-247. We come to know "only by relying on our awareness of numberless particulars, most of which we could never specify in themselves" (ibid., 245). He concludes his essay by stating, "Here we have a paradigm of the Pauline scheme of faith, works and grace. The discoverer works in the belief that his labors will prepare his mind for receiving a truth from sources over which he has no control. I regard the Pauline scheme therefore as the only adequate conception of scientific discovery" (ibid., 247). Building on Polanyi's work, Newbigin expands and more explicitly applies the priority of faith in Jesus to knowledge in *Proper Confidence*.

It is also within the scope of information-literacy-based critical-thinking dispositions for the novice information seeker to observe that both sets of interpretations are arguably derived from presuppositions grounded in a diverse socially constructed worldview, and thus each claim becomes in essence a "testimony" to perceived reality as experienced by the interpreter/interpretive community rather than an objective mind-independent reality. And so it might be assumed that the equal-validity doctrine inherent in much of the humanities and social-science discussions applies here. Yet admitting this is neither intuitive nor "realistic" nor ontologically satisfying.

From these observations, it is suggested that for the novice information seeker, accepting one account over the other be appreciated as an act of faith in a given testimony. Therefore, the seeker may need to move beyond the particulars of the information, and make further interpretive choices warranted by the credibility and authority of the interpretive community in its holistic engagement with reality.

It is the experience of many that God as revealed in the Judeo/Christian Scriptures corresponds to this holistic conception of reality and has been proven to their satisfaction to be a reliable authority. In a direct challenge to contemporary scientism, the Hebrew Scriptures reflect this appreciation of authority by giving voice to the Creator God, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand." (Job 38:4). And in the Christian Scriptures the Gospel of John affirms it: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind." (John 1:1-4). Given this acceptance of Scriptural testimony to divine authority for human origins, the appeal for faith enunciated by the author of Hebrews coherently follows, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (vs. 6). From this admittedly subjective stance,³⁶ it could be argued that the best evidence for human origins might be found in the realities of "life" as now experienced rather than in the data gleaned from the "past," which usually proves sketchy, incomplete, and subject to diverse interpretations.

³⁶Though, I would suggest, no more subjective than the stance underlying the standard evolutionary account.

**AN OVERVIEW OF JOHN H. WALTON'S
*LOST WORLD OF GENESIS ONE***

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Walton, John H. *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009. 192 pp. Paperback, \$16.00.

John H. Walton, a professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College Graduate School, specializes in the book of Genesis and in the comparative analysis of ancient Near Eastern texts and artifacts as they relate to the interpretation of the OT. During his college years, he developed an interest in comparative studies between the culture and literature of the Bible and the ancient Near East to help, especially Christians, gain a better understanding and appreciation of the OT. He has authored numerous books and articles and served as the general editor for the recently published (2009) five-volume series, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament*.

In his most recent book, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, Walton presents his case, laid out in eighteen succinct and easy-to-read propositions, for “a careful reconsideration of the nature of Genesis 1” (162), arguing that the biblical creation account should be read as ancient literature and not as modern science. He claims that ancient cosmology is function oriented and that this sentiment is shared by the author of Genesis 1. As such, the biblical account “does not attempt to describe cosmology in modern terms or address modern questions” (16), but rather describes the function of the cosmos. When read from this perspective, Walton proposes a *cosmic-temple-inauguration* view of Genesis 1, suggesting that the creation story gives an account of the building process of God’s temple from which he would reside and control the cosmos. The seven-day creation week should be understood as a seven-day inauguration of the cosmic temple, “setting up its functions for the benefit of humanity, with God dwelling in relationship with his creatures” (163). Walton gives the following six key arguments in support of his view:

- (1) The Hebrew word, **אָרָץ** (“create”) does not describe a creation of the material world out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), but the assigning of function to God’s creation.
- (2) The creation account in Gen 1:2 introduces a material cosmos in a state of chaos that God will order and assign function to during the creation week.
- (3) The first half of the week (days 1-3) relates to time, weather, and food—three major functions of life.
- (4) The second half of the week (days 4-6) assigns the roles and spheres to the functionaries that will operate within the cosmos.

- (5) The recurring evaluation of God's work as "good" describes its functionality relative to humans.
- (6) The climax of day seven, when God rests from his work, describes God taking control of his cosmos from his newly created temple (ibid.).

His new perspective of Genesis 1 is a natural and logical development of his study on the culture of biblical Israel and the ancient Near East as presented in his publication, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

Walton's interpretation has an important implication for the creation/evolution/intelligent-design debate since his proposal effectually removes Genesis 1 from the debate. According to this perspective, Genesis 1 no longer has any relevance for the question of material origins of the cosmos and offers no mechanism for material origins. He notes that his view would allow both the young-earth and old-earth creationists the freedom to consider the mechanisms suggested by modern science, while still retaining a high view of Scripture. Thus he asserts that every scientific explanation could be viewed as God's handiwork and given a *teleological evolutionary* meaning—the biblical creation account that claims God is the creator of the material world, while science reveals how God did it. Walton concludes that "whatever aspects of evolution that continue to provide the best explanation for what we observe should not, in most cases, be objectionable for Christians" (166).

Although *The Lost World of Genesis One* presents a helpful and intriguing new perspective on the biblical creation account of Genesis 1, nevertheless its grounding upon the ancient Near Eastern functional cosmological view means that this book does not sufficiently address two key problems this viewpoint causes for a creationist: the problem of sin and the reality of death.

Walton argues that "just because death came to us because of sin, does not mean that death did not exist at any level prior to the Fall" (100). He notes that the notion that there was no death would defy common sense since death is a part of the natural process; it exists on the cellular level (the epidermis level of the skin consists of dead cells), in flora (sprouting leaves, flowers, fruit, seed), and in fauna (carnivorous and herbivorous animals, birds, and fish). He concludes that human resistance to death was only due to their access to the Tree of Life. As such, death existed before the fall, but humans became subject to it only as a punishment for disobeying God, at which time they lost access to the Tree of Life.

While science provides us with data from current biological observations and the fossil record, no specific data exists from the Garden of Eden. Thus, while it is highly probable that biological function is the same now as it was then, we cannot assume conclusively, as we simply do not have the data. Biblical evidence suggests that biological function may have performed differently and that must be considered by biblical scholars. There are several passages

in the Bible that infer that life in Eden and in the coming Messianic Age was and will be quite different than current scientific observation. Some ancient Jewish traditions claim that the first couple were clothed in light as humans were created in God's likeness (Gen 1:26) and received a tunic of skin (ancient traditions makes a wordplay on the two Hebrew words אור ["light"] and עור ["skin"]) after the fall to cover their nakedness (Gen 3:21). This interpretation may explain why, for example, the skin of Moses' face is described as having shone when he returned from a lengthy visit with God (Exod 34:28-35), why Daniel describes the resurrected saints as shining stars (Dan 12:3), or why Paul states that the body of the resurrected will be glorified (1 Cor 15:36-49; for further extrabiblical examples, see James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998], 114-120, 132-136). Additionally, Gen 1:30 and Isa 11:6-7 imply that carnivorous fauna had a different diet in the Garden of Eden and will have again in the coming Messianic Age. However, this point does provide some support for Walton's claim that death did exist at some level prior to the fall as vegetarian fauna would have to consume and often kill flora.

In his discussion on the problem of sin (138-140), Walton deals with the theological problem that humans are created in the image of God, while at the same time are a result of an evolutionary process. He admits that there are no concise solutions to this problem and is led by his theological convictions to "posit substantive discontinuity between that [evolutionary] process and the creation of the historical Adam and Eve" (139). Walton admits the difficulty in explaining how God accomplished this discontinuity, but speculates that perhaps biblical scholars have made this issue more difficult than need be. This may be the Achilles's heel of Walton's endeavor to adopt evolution as God's mechanisms—it cannot give a theologically satisfying answer to the problem of sin and death, which is one of the major concerns of the Bible, and, as such, for creationists. If death pre-existed Genesis 1–3 and "Adam and Eve" were just the first humans who reached the evolutionary stage that God defined as "His image and likeness," such an assumption may call into question biblical ethics, Jewish/Christian philosophy, and the relevancy of Jesus' mission to this earth.

On the whole, *The Lost World of Genesis One* is a great contribution to the creation/evolution/intelligent-design debate, providing a helpful framework in which biblical scholars, scientists, and laypeople can dialogue about the Bible, theology, faith, and science.

IT TAKES A MIRACLE: AN ANALYSIS OF JOHN H. WALTON'S VIEW OF COSMIC TEMPLE INAUGURATION

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1. Introduction and Justification

In this article, I present a brief analysis of some interrelated issues that are highlighted by John Walton in his recent book *The Lost World of Genesis One*.¹ My goal is to evaluate his interpretation of Genesis 1 in connection with his view of miracles and theology-science relations. The focus of my analysis is justified in three ways:

First, it is justified by Walton's summary description of what he has presented in his book:

The position that I have proposed regarding Genesis 1 may be designated the *cosmic temple inauguration* view. This label picks up the most important aspect of the view: that the cosmos is being given its functions as God's temple, where he has taken up his residence and from where he runs the cosmos. The world is his headquarters.²

Second, Walton introduces the concept of miracles in close connection with his first two propositions concerning the inauguration of cosmic temple functions. He proposes that Genesis 1 is ancient cosmology (proposition 1) and, therefore, it is functional cosmology (proposition 2).³ Furthermore, he concludes that in Genesis 1, as in other ancient cosmologies, "there were no [supernatural] 'miracles' (in the sense of events deviating from that which was 'natural')." ⁴

¹John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2009).

²Ibid., 162, emphasis original. The "cosmic temple," as Walton terms it, is what we commonly refer to as the cosmos or universe.

³Ibid., 16-37. Each chapter of Walton's book addresses a specific proposition. In this article, I reference these propositions in parenthetical notations.

⁴Ibid., 20. Walton also makes the same point about miracles in an opposite way: "There is nothing 'natural' about the world in biblical theology, nor should there be in ours" (ibid.). These two ways of describing miracles are possible because Walton regards God's actions as supernatural from a theological perspective and as natural from a nontheological perspective. According to Walton, "a biblical view of God's role as Creator in the world does not require a mutually exclusive dichotomy between 'natural' and 'supernatural'" (140). "The common dichotomy drawn today between 'natural' and 'supernatural' did not exist in the ancient world" (134). See also the discussion of propositions 15-18 below.

Third, Walton draws implications for theology-science relations based on his cosmic-temple-inauguration interpretation of Genesis 1. At the beginning of chapter 13, he writes: “We have now completed the presentation of the view that Genesis 1 presents an account of functional origins and will begin to integrate this view into the broader issues of science and society.”⁵ His goal is that “God’s work is [to be] fully integrated with our scientific worldview.”⁶

While my brief review seeks to present an accurate interpretation of Walton’s views, I recognize that every interpretation inevitably involves the risk of misinterpretation. In my assessment of Walton’s views, I can only present some areas where I agree or disagree with him and some reasons for my conclusions. His book deserves a much more extensive analysis than I can present here. I have learned much from reading his book and I hope that my review will highlight additional aspects of some important issues that he has addressed. In the next section, I describe and assess his view of miracles and the inauguration of cosmic-temple functions as described in Genesis 1.

2. Interpretation of Genesis 1

2.1. Description of Walton’s View

Walton seeks to ground his views of miracles and cosmic-temple inauguration in what he believes to be an accurate interpretation of what Genesis 1 “really says” (i.e., “the intended communication of the author and the ability of the audience to receive that same intended message”) in its cultural context.⁷ In this way, Walton also seeks to understand God’s intention, since “God has communicated through human authors and their intentions.”⁸

Walton’s interpretation of Genesis 1 may be summarized as follows: cosmic functions were created (proposition 3) from a nonfunctional beginning

⁵Ibid., 114. Sean Cordry suggests that Walton’s “thesis has tremendous potential to reshape much of the ‘science-religion’ debate” (“*The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*,” in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, 62/3 [2010]: 2270.

⁶Walton, 143.

⁷Ibid., 102. This is the “face value” or “literal” interpretation of the text (ibid.). Walton, 102-104, further explains, “The same words can be used in a straightforward manner, or be used in a symbolic, metaphorical, sarcastic or allegorical way. . . . If a communication is intended to be metaphorical, the interpreter interested in the face value will want to recognize it as a metaphor. If the author intends to give a history, the interpreter must be committed to reading it that way. . . . If the Israelites, along with the rest of the ancient Near East, thought of existence and therefore creation in functional terms, and they saw a close relationship between the cosmos and the temple, then those are part of the face value of the text and we must include them in our interpretation.”

⁸Ibid., 106.

state (proposition 4) during three days of establishing functions (proposition 5), three days of installing functionaries (proposition 6), and one day of divine rest (proposition 7) in the cosmic temple (proposition 8).⁹ “These [creation days] are seven twenty-four hour days. This has always been the best reading of the Hebrew text.”¹⁰

For the purposes of my assessment below, I must ask the following question: How could all the events mentioned in Genesis 1 happen in seven days without supernatural miracles? Walton’s answer to this question is evident in his interpretation of Genesis 1, which he believes to be a statement about God’s ceremonial/liturgical inauguration of cosmic functions (proposition 9), rather than a statement about the material origins of the cosmos (proposition 10).¹¹ While not denying that God is the source of material origins,¹² Walton regards the functional-origin interpretation of Genesis 1 as providing a more accurate interpretation (proposition 11) than other approaches (proposition 12)¹³ that “are struggling to reconcile the scientific findings about the material cosmos with the biblical record.”¹⁴

⁹Ibid., 38-86.

¹⁰Ibid., 91. See also John Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 71.

¹¹Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 87-101.

¹²Walton writes: “If we conclude that Genesis 1 is not an account of material origins, we are not thereby suggesting that God is not responsible for material origins. I firmly believe that God *is* fully responsible for material origins, and that, in fact, material origins do involve at some point creation out of nothing. But that theological question is not the one we are asking. We are asking a textual question: What sort of origins account do we find in Genesis 1? Or what aspect of origins is addressed in Genesis 1?” (ibid., 44). He proposes that “A very clear statement must be made: *Viewing Genesis 1 as an account of functional origins of the cosmos as temple does not in any way suggest or imply that God was uninvolved in material origins—it only contends that Genesis 1 is not that story*” (ibid., 96). Therefore, “If we say that the text includes a material element alongside the functional, this view has to be demonstrated, not just retained because it is the perspective most familiar to us” (ibid., 93-94).

¹³Ibid., 102-113. Walton discusses the interpretive approaches of Young and Old Earth Creationism, the Framework Hypothesis, and various forms of Gap Theory (ibid., 108-113).

¹⁴Ibid., 113. Walton, *ibid.*, rejects approaches that “assume that the biblical account needs to be treated as an account of material origins, and therefore that the ‘different’ scientific account of material origins poses a threat to the credibility of the biblical account that has to be resolved. This book has proposed, instead, that Genesis 1 was never intended to offer an account of material origins and that the original author and audience did not view it that way. In fact, the material cosmos was of little significance to them when it came to the question of origins.”

The nature of Walton's inauguration interpretation of functional creation in Genesis 1 is evident in his comment on the relationship of the temple and the cosmos.

[T]he creation of one is also the creation of the other. The temple is made functional in the inauguration ceremonies, and therefore the temple is created in the inauguration ceremony. So also the cosmic temple would be made functional (created) in the inauguration ceremony. . . . The inauguration of the cosmic temple—its actual creation, [was] accomplished by proclaiming its functions, installing its functionaries, and, most importantly, becoming the place of God's residence.¹⁵

For Walton, Genesis 1 does not describe the material origin of the cosmos as taking place in seven days. Rather it describes the ceremonial and liturgical creation of the cosmos in seven days.¹⁶

Assessment of Walton's View

One way in which Walton's view of miracles and the inauguration of cosmic functions should be evaluated is in terms of the success or failure of his goals, which are to understand "what the Bible communicates," to "preserve" and

¹⁵Ibid., 88, 93. Walton argues that from the perspective of the ancient Near East, "Creation takes place by giving things order, function, and purpose, which is synonymous with giving them existence" (*Ancient Near East Thought and the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006], 135). Compare an earlier statement: "It is difficult to discuss comparisons between Israelite and Mesopotamian literature concerning creation because the disparity is so marked" (John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989], 26).

¹⁶Vern S. Poythress comments: "Walton correctly observes that Genesis 1 focuses on practical functions rather than on chemical (material) composition. But sometimes he shifts to a second meaning of 'material' and 'function.' He construes 'function' as narrowly religious: The seven days of Genesis 1 (which he construes as 24-hour days) describe the inauguration of a cosmic temple to its full functioning as a temple. Before the seven days there would still be an earlier ordinary operation of the astronomical, geological, and biological worlds over extended periods of time. These earlier events belong to 'the material phase' that Genesis allegedly does not mention ([Walton] pp. 92-99). The label 'material' now includes all aspects of physical appearance" ("Appearances Matter" in *World Magazine* 24/17, 29 August 2009 (<www.worldmag.com/articles/15785>). Walton asks in response: "Did the Israelites believe their Old World Science? Undoubtedly they did. Did they ever think about the material aspect itself? Again, undoubtedly. Does this mean the Bible is offering an authoritative revelation of material origins? Not at all. The material language simply represents what they understood about the material world to convey the functional significance" ("John Walton Responds to Vern Poythress's Review of 'The Lost World of Genesis One,'" in *The BioLogos Forum: Science and Faith in Dialog* (<<http://biologos.org/blog/john-walton-responds-to-vern-poythress>>).

“enhance” its “theological vitality,”¹⁷ and “to identify, truly and accurately . . . the thinking in the world of the Bible.”¹⁸

Walton seems to present his interpretation of Genesis 1 with a mixture of confidence and tentativeness. On one hand, he writes confidently: “I believe that this *is* a literal reading. A literal reading requires an understanding of the Hebrew language and the Israelite culture. I believe that the reading that I have offered is the most literal reading possible at this point.”¹⁹

On the other hand, Walton writes tentatively:

Even if the reader is not inclined to adopt the proposed interpretation of Genesis 1, his or her theology could still be greatly enhanced by the observations offered here by embracing a renewed and informed commitment to God’s intimate involvement in the operation of the cosmos from its incipience and into eternity. We all need to strengthen our theology of creation and Creator whatever our view of the Genesis account of origins.²⁰

This tentativeness is proper given the availability of significant scholarly research that provides a viable alternative to Walton’s interpretation of Genesis 1. Richard Davidson²¹ and Kenton Sparks,²² like Walton, seek to interpret Scripture with attention to the divine and human dimensions and the cultural context, without forcing a harmony with current scientific conclusions.²³ Nevertheless, Davidson and Sparks propose views that are substantially different from Walton’s concerning supernatural miracles.

Davidson proposes that Genesis 1 does present the concept of supernatural miracles with regard to material and functional origins, as well as with regard to divine interventions within the material and functional order. This interpretation is based on several factors: (1) the central doctrines of

¹⁷Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 7.

¹⁸Ibid., 19.

¹⁹Ibid., 170.

²⁰Ibid., 150. Similarly, concerning Moshe Weinfeld’s suggestion “that Genesis 1 could have served very effectively as the liturgy of . . . a [creation] festival,” Walton comments that this “suggestion has much to commend it both textually and culturally, though definitive evidence is lacking” (ibid., 91). Later he states that “Even though it is natural for us to defend our exegesis, it is arguably even more important to defend our theology” (ibid., 150).

²¹Richard M. Davidson, “The Biblical Account of Origins,” in *JATS* 14/1 (2003): 4-43.

²²Kenton Sparks, *God’s Words in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

²³See Davidson, 24, n. 69, and 86; see also idem, “Biblical Interpretation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 58, 60, 69, 85, 86, 95. See also Sparks, 313-322.

Christianity, (2) the literal, historical genre of Genesis 1 and the book of Genesis as a whole, (3) intertextual evidence from other parts of the Bible, (4) the polemic of Genesis 1 against other ancient cosmologies, (5) profound theology, (6) the commentary of a majority of scholars during the history of the church, and (7) the research of a large number of critical scholars who are not committed to traditional doctrines.²⁴

Davidson's conclusions are complemented by Sparks's proposal that the concept of supernatural miracles²⁵ was widespread in ancient cultures. Sparks distinguishes between a providential miracle, which may be explained naturally, and a sign miracle, which is "an overt sign of God's supernatural power. . . . [Supernatural miracles] are not concealed within the events of history but occur . . . as obvious evidence that God's hand has moved in history."²⁶ Concerning supernatural miracles, Sparks states:

[T]he universal scope of miracle testimonies gives one reason to suspect that miracles, while exceptional, do occur. . . . [These] miracles are possible only if there is a sacred or divine realm that could break into the world of our existence. . . . Indeed, the human perception that there is another dimension of reality, to some extent distinct from our own, is a widespread phenomenon. Any student of religion knows this.²⁷

In the next section, I describe and assess how Walton's interpretation of Genesis 1 and his view of miracles influence his perspective on theology-science relations.

3. *Application to Theology-Science Relations*

Description of Walton's View

Walton's interpretation of miracles and Genesis 1 is closely connected with his perspective on theology-science relations. First, as he views it, Genesis 1 does not contemplate any contrast between primary and secondary causation,

²⁴Davidson, "The Biblical Account of Origins," 10-19. Compare Walton's comments on ancient culture, genre, intertextual evidence, polemic, profound/strong theology, traditional interpretations (Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 23-37, 97, 102-107, 142-151, 171). Contrary to Walton, Paul Copan suggests that "A solid case can be made for *creatio ex nihilo* in the OT—that it is indeed *demand*ed by the text" ("Creation *ex Nihilo* or *ex Materia*? A Critique of the Mormon Doctrine of Creation," in *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9/2 [2005]: 34, emphasis original).

²⁵Sparks, 316.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 316. What Walton describes as natural miracle signs of God's constant action (Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 20), Sparks, 316, identifies as providential miracles.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 317. By using this quotation, I do not intend to imply that Walton rejects the distinction between God's reality and our reality. My purpose is to show how Sparks draws a different conclusion about supernatural miracles from this distinction.

just as it does not contemplate any supernatural miracles that deviate from what is natural. For this reason, he proposes that theology and science present different perspectives on the same reality. The metaphysics of primary causation is presented in theological accounts of cosmic origins, while the metaphysics of secondary causation is presented in scientific accounts (proposition 13).²⁸ According to Walton, God is “carrying out his purposes through the naturalistic operations of the cosmos . . . that . . . were decreed by the word of God.”²⁹ “What we identify as natural laws only take on their law-like quality because God acts so consistently in the operations of the cosmos.”³⁰ Therefore, “we should not expect anything in the Bible . . . to engage in the discussion of how God’s level of creative activity relates to . . . the laws of nature.”³¹

Second, the impact of Walton’s view of miracles on theology-science relations may be perceived in his proposal that Genesis 1 supports a unity in diversity between God’s actions of creating and sustaining the functions of the cosmos (proposition 14). One might be tempted to assume that Walton opens a space for fundamentally different kinds of miracles in his distinction between God’s acts of creating and sustaining. That assumption, however, would be unfounded since he subsumes the act of sustaining under the act of creating such that there is an ongoing creation that does not deviate from the natural processes that are studied by science.³² He is also critical of “the interventionist view [of miracles] that treats the functionality of natural processes too lightly, as being inadequate to accomplish God’s purposes.”³³

Third, Walton proposes that, from a theological perspective, the cosmos is a designed and purposeful supernatural divine activity (proposition 15), while, from a scientific perspective, the cosmos is natural, without purpose or design (proposals 16 and 18).³⁴ Therefore, he suggests that we should not separate “various aspects of origins” according to “whether God did it [supernaturally] or [whether] a naturalistic process could be identified.”³⁵ Walton regards this as “a distinction that is essentially unbiblical.”³⁶ For him, this distinction also leads to a “God of the gaps” theology in which the

²⁸Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 20, 114-118.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 117.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 134.

³¹*Ibid.*, 20.

³²*Ibid.*, 119-124.

³³*Ibid.*, 120.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 125-141, 152-161.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 114.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 115.

progress of natural scientific explanations leaves less and less space for divine actions.³⁷

Fourth, Walton reasons that, within the reigning paradigm of science, “to appeal to purpose is to shift to a different kind of [nonscientific] explanation (e.g., metaphysical, theological). . . . If scientists simply threw up their hands and admitted that a metaphysical, teleological explanation was necessary, they would be departing from that which is scientific.”³⁸ Yet, Walton questions “whether we can assume such hard and fast lines of distinction between the scientific and the metaphysical. It is true that observations can be put into one category or the other, but the fact is that such a categorization is artificial because none of us has a worldview comprised of only one of them. Science and metaphysics blend together in life.”³⁹

Nevertheless, Walton takes a neutral theological position with regard to what science suggests about material origins, possibly because scientists “at this point . . . are not willing to rewrite the current rules of science.”⁴⁰ He concludes that theology cannot be threatened by what science proposes because theology does not propose a description of material origins.⁴¹ For him, this approach to theology-science relations does not produce a weaker theology; it produces a stronger one (proposition 17).⁴² “When God’s work is fully integrated with our scientific worldview and science is seen to give definition to what God is doing and how he is doing it, we regain a more biblical perspective of the work—a perspective that is theologically healthier.”⁴³ For Walton, such a theology should emphasize the following themes: (1) God’s role in everything, (2) an ongoing Creator role, (3) God’s control of cosmic

³⁷Ibid., 114.

³⁸Ibid., 130, 116-117.

³⁹Ibid., 130-131.

⁴⁰Ibid., 129.

⁴¹According to Walton, “Science cannot offer an unbiblical view of material origins, because there is no biblical view of material origins aside from the very general idea that whatever happened, whenever it happened, and however it happened, God did it” (ibid., 113). “[Genesis 1] looks to the future (how this cosmos will function for human beings with God at its center) rather than to the past (how God brought material into being)” (ibid., 118). “Q: When and how did God create the material world? A: According to the interpretation offered in this book, the Bible does not tell us, so we are left to figure it out as best we can with the intellectual capacity and other tools that God gave us. But the material world was created by him” (ibid., 169). “Genesis 1 gives us no cause to argue with the idea of the physical world coming about by a slow process” (ibid., 150).

⁴²Ibid., 142-151.

⁴³Ibid., 143.

functions, (4) sacred space, (5) Sabbath, (6) order and disorder (sin), (7) the human role, and (8) the goodness of creation.⁴⁴

Assessment of Walton's View

I agree with Walton's concerns that (1) theological and scientific perspectives on causation should be kept distinct but not separate, (2) there is a sense in which divine creativity extends beyond the end of God's activity during the creation week, (3) theology should not be threatened by scientific progress or feel pressured to accommodate itself to current scientific theories, and (4) scientists sometimes fail to be metaphysically neutral. I disagree, however, with some aspects of his response to these concerns.

With regard to the first two concerns, I see no contradiction between the purposeful perspective of Scripture and the terminology of primary and secondary causation. It seems to me that Genesis suggests that God acts as primary cause when he miraculously creates the cosmos out of nothing, miraculously sustains it so that it continues to exist, and miraculously intervenes within it. Yet there is room for freedom, since God's miracles establish the cosmos as a secondary cause and enable secondary causes within the cosmos. This interpretation provides a viable alternative to Walton's proposal that primary and secondary causation are simply different ways of interpreting the cosmos. My interpretation also gives more definition to the paradox of intimate divine involvement with everything without compromising human freedom.⁴⁵

With regard to Walton's other two concerns, his comments imply that theology and science inevitably influence each other either positively or negatively. Therefore, I propose that his effort to be neutral is futile. Moreover, his neutrality aims for full theology-science integration, which leads to a compromise of biblical revelation concerning supernatural miracles. Instead, what we need is a mutually respectful dialogue between theology and science. In contrast to Walton's theology-science integration, theology-science dialog can result in a stronger theology grounded in biblical revelation and a stronger science grounded in God's general revelation in the cosmos.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Ibid., 142-151.

⁴⁵Walton, 122, mentions "several times" that his proposal "does not result in a view of God as a micromanager, but it insists that he cannot be removed from the ongoing operations." He concludes that "the paradox of intimate involvement without micromanagement defies definition."

⁴⁶Martin Hanna, "The Use of Science in Theology: Case Studies of Thomas F. Torrance and Langdon B. Gilkey" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2004). Walton's proposal seems closer to the dialectical or correlational model for theology-science relations proposed by Gilkey, where theology is involved with "correlatively . . . interpreting the human situation," which is "formed largely by . . . science" (*Message*

In addition, I agree with the themes that Walton includes in his version of a strong theology. I disagree, however, with the extent to which he neglects the concept of supernatural miracles when he (1) emphasizes the role of science to “give definition to what God is doing and how he is doing it,”⁴⁷ (2) minimizes distinctions between functional creation and ongoing creative-sustaining activity, (3) limits the significance of the creation of cosmic material, (4) distinguishes God’s person from his place in sacred space, (5) limits human imitation of God’s creative work and Sabbath rest, (6) discusses the cosmic order and the disorder of sin, (7) relates the human role to God’s intimate involvement with everything, and (8) explains the relations between moral and natural good and evil.⁴⁸

Finally, Walton has commented on the negative impact that secular scientific presuppositions can have on the credibility of the biblical revelation.⁴⁹ Also, he has interpreted Genesis 1 in a way that seems to place the content of its revelation beyond the threat of these scientific presuppositions. It may be, though, that scientific presuppositions have indirectly led him to underestimate the significance of the scholarly research that suggests that Genesis 1 does present God as supernaturally creating, sustaining, and intervening in the cosmos. Therefore, the theological challenge of scientific presuppositions should be addressed more directly.

Both Davidson and Sparks point out the scientific presuppositions of the historical-critical method and the need for Christian theology to clarify its response to these presuppositions. Sparks allows for scientific criteria of historical criticism (i.e., methodological doubt, analogy, and correlation)⁵⁰ to

and Existence [New York: Seabury, 1979], 53, 57-58). I prefer the dialogical approach proposed by Thomas F. Torrance. “A theological science . . . cannot but contribute to the purity of the human sciences, but it can hardly do that unless it is prepared to enter into a genuine dialogue with them. . . . This in turn will have a healthy impact upon theological science” (*Theological Science* [London: Oxford University Press, 1969], 284).

⁴⁷Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 143.

⁴⁸Ibid., 142-151.

⁴⁹“The historical-critical method suggested that we should accept as true only that which can be empirically proven. The new historiography was concerned only with natural cause and effect in history” (John H. Walton, Victor Harold Matthews, Mark William Chavalas, eds., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000], 211).

⁵⁰Sparks, 213-322. Modern skepticism about miracles has been influenced greatly by David Hume’s famous essay “On Miracles” (1748). The most influential advocate of Hume in biblical and theological studies was Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), who introduced three fundamental principles of historical criticism: methodological doubt, analogy, and correlation (Sparks, 314). According to Davidson, “The word ‘criticism’ is used here in the technical sense of Descartes’ ‘methodological doubt’ and refers to the autonomy of the investigator to interrogate and evaluate the scriptural witness, to

provide evidence for or against the historical accuracy of biblical accounts of supernatural miracles. But where Walton expresses theological reasons for rejecting the concept of supernatural miracles, Sparks proposes that there may be theological reasons for affirming certain supernatural miracle accounts even when there may be insufficient historical-critical evidence to validate them. He regards some of the supernatural miracles mentioned in the Bible as theologically necessary.⁵¹

In contrast with Sparks, Davidson proposes that secular scientific presuppositions are unsuitable for historical-biblical research, though he uses similar study tools as Sparks.⁵² This approach to the study of the Bible leads Davidson to a very different conclusion than Walton on the subject of supernatural miracles. Davidson regards it as theologically necessary to recognize the need for “supernatural spiritual assistance” in interpreting Scripture.⁵³ In addition, biblical scholars “must consciously reject any external keys or systems to impose on Scripture from without, whether naturalistic (closed system of cause and effect without any room for the supernatural),

judge the truthfulness, adequacy, and intelligibility of the specific declarations of the text. . . . The principle of analogy . . . assumes that present experience is the criterion for evaluating events narrated in Scripture, inasmuch as all events are, in principle, similar. . . . The principle of correlation states that history is a closed system of cause and effect with no room for supernatural intervention. . . . This is not to say that all historical critics deny the existence of God or the supernatural. But *methodologically*, historical criticism has no room for the supernatural” (“Biblical Theology,” 90).

⁵¹Sparks, 315-316, points out that “it is the very nature of the case that miracles are not caused by antecedent *historical* events. Their cause is not a product of human agency or of natural events; their immediate cause is divine agency, which moves into history from without.” Nevertheless, miracles may be evaluated positively within a historical-critical approach because “Troeltsch seems to have overlooked something in his analysis of miracles: once they occur, miracles certainly produce posterior historical effects. . . . Genuine miracles leave historical effects in their wake” (ibid., 318). Where there is insufficient historical evidence, “Perhaps we believe in the Bible’s miracles precisely because they are miracles of the right sort. . . . So critical historiography does not hold all of the cards when it comes to making judgments about history” (ibid., 319). “There is no reason at all that the church should consider these matters *only* in terms of modern historiography. The theological reflection of the church . . . also counts as evidence in our historical equations” (ibid., 320, emphasis original).

⁵²Davidson writes: “Those who follow the historical-biblical method apply similar study *tools* utilized in historical criticism. Careful attention is given to historical, literary and linguistic, grammatical-syntactical, and theological details, as outlined throughout this article. But while utilizing the gains brought about by the historical-critical method in sharpening various study tools for *analysis* of the biblical text, there is a consistent intent to eliminate the element of *criticism* that stands as judge upon the Word” (ibid., “Biblical Theology,” 96).

⁵³Ibid., 66.

evolutionary (the developmental axiom), humanistic (human beings as the final norm), or relativistic (rejection of absolutes).⁵⁴ Therefore, his face-value reading is very different from Walton's. Davidson concludes that "a Bible-based hermeneutic accepts at face value the biblical accounts of the creation of this world . . . and the other historical assertions of Scripture, including the supernatural, miraculous events."⁵⁵

4. *Summary and Conclusion*

Walton's view of miracles, Genesis 1, and theology-science relations is interrelated with his proposal that ancient cosmologies do not describe supernatural miracles. This led me to ask the question: How could all the events mentioned in Genesis 1 happen in seven days of creation without supernatural miracles? Walton's answer is that creation involved ceremonial and liturgical divine acts that established cosmic functions and installed cosmic functionaries. Therefore, viewed theologically, these actions are supernatural; and viewed scientifically, these actions are natural. This overlap of perspectives also applies to the material origins of the cosmos, which, for Walton, may be investigated by science. In this way, he avoids a "God of the gaps" theology that is threatened by the progress of scientific explanation.

In addition, Walton makes important distinctions between supernatural primary causation and natural secondary causation, and between God's actions of creating and sustaining. At the same time, he blurs these distinctions in a way that unfortunately leads to a practical identity between the cosmic process and God's design, purpose, and action. This leads to the paradox of how God can be intimately involved in this way without micromanagement that precludes human freedom. Nevertheless, Walton concludes that the full integration of theology and science will lead to a stronger theology that is not threatened by scientific presuppositions and conclusions. However, science may have influenced him to underestimate significant scholarly research that provides an alternative to his proposal.

In contrast with Walton's proposal, the historical-biblical research by Davidson suggests that Genesis 1 *does* indicate that supernatural acts by God were involved in the material and functional origins of the cosmos. Moreover, these divine acts include supernatural interventions during and after the creation week. Also in contrast with Walton's proposal, the historical-critical research by Sparks suggests that, since the concept of divine action from outside the cosmos through supernatural miracles was widespread in ancient cultures, we have historical reasons to believe that such miracles do occur.

Bible students would do well to explore the evidence supporting the interpretation of Genesis 1 as indicating that it takes various kinds of

⁵⁴Ibid., 67.

⁵⁵Ibid., 70.

supernatural miracles for God to create, sustain, and intervene in the cosmos. From this perspective, the origin of the cosmos cannot be reduced to cosmic processes. Neither can God be explained away by the progress of science. In addition, God's intimate involvement creates, sustains, and interacts with human freedom. While God does act indirectly through natural processes, he also acts directly to create, sustain, and intervene within them. God is always active, directly and indirectly. Either way, when God acts, it takes a supernatural miracle.

**A SCHOLARLY REVIEW OF JOHN H. WALTON'S
LECTURES AT ANDREWS UNIVERSITY ON
THE LOST WORLD OF GENESIS ONE**

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Earlier this year John Walton, a Professor of Old Testament studies at Wheaton College, came to Andrews University to share his thoughts on the question of how Genesis 1 should be read and understood. The crux of his argument was historical, and gave further philosophical background to his arguments found in *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009). His lecture, addressed directly to a Seventh-day Adventist audience, is helpful for understanding how his arguments are framed and understood in an Adventist context and how Adventists might relate to them.

After a brief overview of Walton's lectures and basic arguments regarding Genesis 1, I will consider the philosophy that appears to underlie his proposal. I will then examine some of the theological presuppositions undergirding his conclusions that Genesis can be reconciled with some form of theistic evolution. I argue that Walton's conclusions are in profound tension with, and even contrary to, core Adventist theological commitments involving theodicy, the loving character of God, and the theme of the great controversy between good and evil.

In his first lecture, Walton discussed the general interpretive approach to the OT, arguing that we can only understand the meaning of the stories in the Bible if we understand the worldview of its immediate intended audience. The Bible was written for their worldview, not for that of the twenty-first century; nevertheless, its spiritual and moral messages were also intended for today ("It was written *for* us, but *to* them"). Therefore, we should recognize, he argued, that its authority does not lie in its claims about the physical world and material reality. The Bible makes no scientific claims, he asserted, and its observations on the natural and physical world are not different from the existing worldviews of the surrounding cultures of the ancient Near East.

Walton claimed that the surrounding cultures, as shown in their literature and writings, did not have a materialist ontology, but rather a functional one. This meant that these peoples were primarily, if not entirely, concerned with how systems and institutions came to carry out their present functions, rather than when they first physically or materially appeared.

In his second lecture, Walton applied this model to the issues of Genesis 1. He observed that on day one, God did not actually create light, but rather put it to the use or function of marking off periods of light and dark. This observation on the function of light was what originally led him

to his hypothesis regarding the functional nature of creation as recounted in Genesis 1. From this insight regarding light, he posited that the Hebrew mind was, like the surrounding cultures, actually concerned about the function of things, and not their material origins. This concern with functionality was the model for all the days of creation in Genesis 1.

Walton accepted that the days of creation were seven literal twenty-four-hour periods of time, but that nothing was physically created on those days. Rather, the functions of the material world—the earth, the sea, the sky, plants, animals, and humans—were instituted, and the whole was inaugurated as a temple, or sanctuary, for God.

One does not need to agree with all of Walton's arguments to appreciate his insight into the role that function plays in the days of creation. A number of creation elements such as earth, sky, and sea all existed on day one. Indeed light itself existed well prior to day one, as Scripture proposes that heaven and angels exist in it, and even God himself "dwells in light unapproachable" (1 Tim 6:16). Under a completely materialist view of creation, it is hard to understand what actually was created on the first two days of creation week. On day three, one can point to the creation of green growing things, though the main point of that day also seems to be functional, the separating of the existing elements of land and sea. Recognizing a functional process to the interpretation of Genesis 1 helps to more fully explain how the first three days are truly acts of creation.

Viewing creation through lenses that include a functional prism also shows how integral the seventh day is to the creation week—a point that Adventists should truly appreciate. A functional view helps to clarify that the Sabbath is not merely an addition to the six days of creation. Rather, on the Sabbath day God created the ongoing temporal order and organization within which creation operates. Thus the seventh day is firmly a part of the week of creation and not merely an afterthought tacked on to the end. Therefore, the addition of a functionalist outlook on the creation week is something that Adventists can applaud and embrace.

However, what is concerning about Walton's proposal is the elevation of functionality to the exclusion of materiality in the creation week. He seems to view the creation process described in Genesis 1 solely as one type of creation at the expense of other processes, particularly the creation of matter.

Why must we be forced to choose between the two kinds of creation? Cannot functionality and materiality both play a role in creation as portrayed in Genesis 1? Is it possible to have a creation as complex and existential as that found in Genesis and not have both elements involved? These rhetorical questions lead to a practical one: What is Walton's view on when plants, animals, and humans were materially created? He suggests that one cannot answer these questions from Genesis 1 as it was not written for that purpose. During a question-and-answer session, he indicated that the Genesis account

would allow God to have created in one day, six days, or in some other length of time—in other words, God is not limited to creating within any particular length of time. In his writings, it is clear that, he accepts a good part of the current scientific evolutionary story. He writes, “I am not suggesting a wholesale adoption of evolution, merely that neither Genesis 1 specifically nor biblical theology in general give us any reason to reject it as a model as long as we see God as involved at every level and remain aware of our theological convictions.”¹

What are Walton’s theological convictions? First, God exists; therefore, “whatever evolutionary processes may have taken place, we believe that God was intimately involved with them.”² Second, Genesis 1 does not require a young earth; nor does it objection to biological evolution.³ While he proposes that God did something special at “the creation of the historical Adam and Eve,” causing a “material and spiritual discontinuity,” he finds it “difficult to articulate how God accomplished this.” Ultimately, nothing in the Bible provides an obstacle to “allowing us to reap from science understandings of how life developed up to and including the creation of the first humans.”⁴

In his lecture, Walton’s justification for his hermeneutical approach focused primarily on the nature of reality, the division between the natural and supernatural, and the implications of communication-“word/act” theory. In developing his hermeneutical model, Walton rejected the notion that reality is a like a pie that has been sliced into natural and supernatural realms. Under this model—essentially a “God-of-the-gaps” view—the more we discover about nature, the smaller the slices of the supernatural become. In response to this problem, he proposed instead that reality is like a layered cake, with a layer of “natural” on the bottom and a layer of “supernatural” on top. We can explore the natural world, make all the discoveries we wish, and never threaten the supernatural, which is over all and guides all. We are merely discovering the mechanisms and materials that the Creator uses to develop and guide his creation.

While proffered as an illustration of the ancient Near Eastern mindset, the layered-cake model actually bears striking resemblance to immanuel Kant’s divide between the noumena (supernatural) and the phenomena (natural world). This divide explains in part the sharp break we have in our contemporary world between the discipline of science on one hand, and philosophy, metaphysics, and theology on the other. This division has roots going back to Descartes, Hume, and Spinoza, who posited that there is no meaningful connection or

¹John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 137.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 138.

⁴Ibid., 139-140.

integration between the natural and supernatural realms. This view of reality lies at the foundation of many twentieth-century philosophical perspectives that have led to a devaluation of Scripture, and includes views such as positivism, historicism, materialism, and the higher-critical methods of biblical exegesis. A more recent and extreme way of describing the discontinuity of nature and supernature is the Non-Overlapping Magisteria (NOMA) model, described by Stephen Jay Gould, the late Harvard paleobiologist. NOMA is based upon the idea that science and religion govern two separate domains. The findings of one should not be allowed to shape, intrude upon, or define the other. Science interprets the physical, material world, while religion interprets the world of values, morals, and spiritual beliefs.⁵

The problem with NOMA is that it leaves no room for truly historical religions such as Judaism and Christianity. These religions say that the supernatural has invaded, and will continue to invade, the natural world from time to time. Even Walton himself is not willing to fully accept NOMA because it would exclude all the miracles of the Bible, including Christ's incarnation, miracles, and resurrection. He reserves his "layered-cake" model particularly for the early chapters of Genesis. In the NT, he prefers to view miracles such as the incarnation more like what he terms a "marble-cake," with the supernatural more obviously intruding into the natural world.

This mixed-methodological approach to interpreting different sections of the Bible in different ways appears inconsistent. Could Adventism afford to take Walton's approach seriously, even if they could swallow its inconsistency? I believe the answer is a firm no. It is an answer based in part on the profound theological differences between the Reformed tradition and the Adventist theological heritage, and it revolves around a core pillar of Adventist theology—the great controversy framework of history.

Whether he claims it or not, Walton is influenced by the Reformed Calvinistic tradition, in which the highest concern is the glory of God as shown in his sovereignty. On the issue of God's inscrutable authority, he invokes the classic Reformed argument that God's ways of dealing with humanity are truly beyond comprehension. He acknowledges that "an evolutionary system is difficult to reconcile to the character of God"; but he seeks to answer this objection with the argument that "God in his wisdom has done things in the way that he has. We cannot stand in judgment of that, and we cannot expect to understand it all."⁶

This may be a satisfactory response for a thinker within the Reformed tradition. Adventists, however, find their roots in Arminianism and have as their greatest concern the character of God, as demonstrated in his love and

⁵Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Ballantine, 1999), 49-67.

⁶*Ibid.*, 133-134.

fairness in dealing with his creation. While both Adventists and Reformed Calvinists value the other's views about God, when faced with the dilemma of choosing between God's sovereignty and human free will, Calvinists choose to emphasize God's sovereignty over his loving character. The result is a God who eternally condemns those who have no choice but to sin.⁷ Adventists, on the other hand, believe that a central point of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan, which God has let unfold for millennia, is to show that the ways of God are righteous and true and to reveal his true character of love—God allows all people to freely choose whether to follow him and then grants power to succeed in following his way. In the Adventist perspective, God voluntarily limits his sovereignty by respecting our free choice. This self-limitation is an expression of God's character of love.

How do these theological positions relate to Genesis 1? First, the Calvinist, who believes that God created much of humanity in order to condemn them to everlasting torment in hell, will have no qualms about God creating through a process that requires death, i.e., evolution, with its primary mechanism of survival of the fittest. If Adventists, on the other hand, were to accept a prefall "good" and call it "good," creation that involved suffering and death, they would see their whole theological framework based on the Great Controversy between good and evil basically splinter apart.

A God who creates through the use of sin and suffering is one who would not fare well even under imperfect human standards of fairness and kindness. The Bible goes out of its way to affirm that death came into the world *through* humanity's sin (Rom 5:12). It teaches that suffering and death in nature and the animal world is connected with the attempt to bring back fallen humanity. "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom 8:18-21).

This unwilling subjection to "futility" is not consistent with the "good" that God saw throughout his initial creation (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The problem of reconciling "goodness" with the suffering and death of sentient beings appears insuperable, at least if one believes that the Bible teaches a death-free heavenly world. Ultimately, Adventism cannot accept theistic evolution, or any variant of it, that allows suffering and death on earth before Adam's sin, because has staked its theological framework on the revelation of God's moral government and character of love in history.

⁷R. E. Olson describes Calvinist theologian Theodore Beza as putting it, "those who suffer for eternity in hell can at least take comfort in the fact that they are there for the greater glory of God" (*The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999], 459; see esp. 454-472).

**A RESPONSE TO JOHN H. WALTON'S *LOST*
*WORLD OF GENESIS ONE*¹**

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John Walton's main thesis is that Genesis 1 is not "an account of material origins"; it does not mean to speak about the creation, the beginning of the heavens and earth as such, but should be understood "as an account of functional origins."² What the biblical text is about, claims this author, concerns the beginning of the operation of creation—when creation started to be operative, to function, and to work for humans and nature—and not about the beginning of matter—of rocks, plants, and even animals and anthropological specimens, which did, in fact, precede this account.³ Walton defends his reading of the biblical texts on the basis of four literary and exegetical arguments. His defense is presented convincingly, and his reading of Genesis 1 offers, in the context of the science-and-religion debate, a highly seductive option. The problem that I have with Walton is that he is often right.

*Walton is Right: Near Eastern Cosmogonies are More
about Functionality than Material Origins*

Walton is right in his reference to ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies—they are indeed more about the functions of the cosmos than about its material. Using what the author identifies as "Near Eastern texts giving information about creation" or "full-fledged creation texts,"⁴ the author shows evidence of the functional intent of the Genesis accounts. What has been overlooked, however, in Walton's analysis is the reason for this emphasis in ancient cosmogonies. Unlike the Genesis creation accounts, these other cosmogonies are not meant to be "creation stories." Instead, they are cosmogonic texts. They are anthropocentric. Thus their purpose is not to explain the presence of created objects, but to provide reasons for phenomena observed in the present human condition. In Egyptian literature, for instance,⁵ we find Spell 1130 of the *Coffin Texts*, which, although constituted with cosmogonic

¹A part of this paper was presented at the Adventist Forum Conference, Chicago, Illinois, 3 September 2011.

²John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2009), 163.

³*Ibid.*, 169.

⁴*Ibid.*, 28.

⁵On the characteristic features of Egyptian cosmogony, see Susanne Bickel, *La Cosmogonie égyptienne avant le Nouvel Empire*, OBO 134 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Editions Universitaires, 1994), 213.

material, does not intend to inform about origins, but is for understanding the existence of evil in the world. The reason for these acts of creation is, in fact, explicitly given in the introduction:⁶ “to silence evil” (*n-mm.v.t sgrt jsft*). The intention of this text is, then, essentially anthropocentric. The actions of the divine Creator are all human-centered and serve only the purpose of accounting for a function of the world. What is noteworthy is that this literary role is also attested in the Hebrew Bible. Besides the Genesis creation story, whose cosmogonic nature is clearly and explicitly affirmed in its introduction as well as in its conclusion (Gen 1:1, cf. 2:4), the Bible contains a number of “cosmogonic” texts whose purpose is other than to account for the origin of the cosmos.

These other passages only use cosmogonic traditions anchored, this time, in the biblical memory to serve the purpose of a theological idea or to deal with an anthropological concern. Job 38–41 uses the creation to convey the idea of God’s grandeur versus man’s littleness and to incite repentance and humility (42:6). Proverbs 8:22–36 uses it to promote the search for wisdom (v. 35); Psalm 104 refers to creation to justify the acts of worship and blessing the Lord (vv. 1, 33–34), and Eccl 1:1–11 to teach about the vanity of the world and of the human condition (vv. 2, 14). Walton’s argument about the function of cosmogonic texts holds, then, only for those texts whose recognized intent is functional in nature; but, again, it does not hold for the Genesis creation text, whose explicit and primary intent is cosmogonic. The fact that the Hebrew Bible contains both genres—cosmogonic and functional, with the latter referring back to the former—constitutes another evidence of the cosmogonic intent of the Genesis creation accounts.

Another important problem in Walton’s connection with the ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies is his uncritical adoption of these texts as “the key” for understanding the biblical text of creation.⁷ He not only overlooks the significant differences between the two cosmogonic traditions, but also deliberately ignores the strong polemic intent of the biblical text precisely directed against these other cosmogonic traditions of the ancient Near East.⁸

*Walton is Right concerning the Functional
Uses of the Verb bārā’*

Walton is also right concerning the functional uses of the verb *bārā’*. Indeed in several biblical occurrences this verb does not directly refer to the historical

⁶CT. 1130 VII462c.

⁷Walton, 12.

⁸See esp. Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology,” *EvQ* (1974): 81–102; J. Doukhan, “The Genesis Creation Story: Text, Issues, and Truth,” *Origins* 55 (2004): 18–20.

“making” of objects, but appears in theological texts to express a theological idea implying function. Again, the purpose for this reference to creation is not to speak about cosmic origins, but to evoke an affinity with the process of the original event of creation. This is why in most of the passages in which the verb *bārā*’ appears it is connected to the idea of newness (Exod 34:10; Num 16:30; Deut 4:32; Pss 51:10; 102:18; 104:30; Isa 4:5; 41:19-20; 42:5, cf. v. 9). This also explains why the verb *bārā*’ is often used to evoke the idea of salvation, which implies a process of radical change from a negative to a positive state (Isa 42:5; 43:1, 15).

These texts are not just using the motif of creation for their own functional purpose; the way they allude or refer to the event of creation, the words, the syntax, and the structure of these texts denote clearly that they all refer to a single literary source as recorded in Genesis 1–2.⁹ This way of pointing back to the prior document presupposes the event of creation. It is not the idea of function—the experience of salvation or of newness—that has produced and, therefore, preceded the idea of creation, but the other way around. Creation is already assumed to be a past event, and it is on the basis of this reference that the functional idea has been generated and elaborated.

The fact that these secondary texts refer to the Genesis text of creation and apply it in a functional sense does not mean, then, that this was the sense implied in the creation accounts. This referring-back to that text may even suggest that the sense of function was not originally intended in the creation accounts, and may well have been an *a posteriori* application. Indeed among those texts that use the verb *bārā*’, there are a number that refer to creation for no other purpose than for what it is, namely, a specific historical event of the past (Isa 42:5; Deut 4:32; Ps 89:47; Eccl 12:1).

The same reasoning could apply to Ps 148:5, where the “celestial inhabitants” have been created, according to Walton, “to praise the Lord,” when the Psalm is, in fact, saying that creation is the reason for worship—not that the function of creation is worship, but that worship is the natural human response to creation, a message that pervades the whole book of Psalms. Worship follows creation; creation does not follow worship. Thus it is not worship that justifies and makes sense of creation, as is implied in a functional understanding of creation. It is creation that makes sense of worship. Besides, in the great majority of texts, as listed and classified by Walton himself,¹⁰ creation does, indeed, play a role in applying functions to real material objects. The cosmos, light, plants, animals, and people are material objects.

⁹Jacques B. Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story*, Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 5 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1982).

¹⁰Walton, 41, 43.

*Walton is Right in His Exegetical Analysis
of the Genesis Creation Story*

In his exegetical analysis of the Genesis creation story, Walton is right. Walton is right when he observes that at the precreation stage (Gen 1:2) nothing yet functioned. But the reason for this unproductivity is not just because it does not work; it does not work simply because there is nothing yet there. The terminology chosen by the author intends to mark nonexistence rather than just the absence of functionality, an understanding suggested by the parallelism of the two creation accounts, which makes the words *tobu wabohu* (“without form and void”) in Gen 1:2 correspond to the negative words *'ayin* (“not”), *terem* (“not yet”), and *lo'* (“not”) in Gen 2:5,¹¹ an equivalence that is confirmed in biblical usage (Isa 40:17; 45:19; Jer 4:23).

Walton is right in his functional understanding of the word *tob* (“good”), but it would not be right to limit the sense of *tob* to that meaning. Thus the word *tob* may also refer to aesthetic beauty (Gen 24:16; 1 Sam 16:12; 1 Kgs 1:6; Dan 1:4), especially when it is associated with the word *ra'ab* (“see”), as is the case in the first creation account (Gen 1:1, 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). *Tob* may also belong to the ethical domain (1 Sam 18:5; 29:6, 9; 2 Sam 3:36). Thus the view that God was only referring to function when he said “it is not good for man to be alone”¹² confines the value of the human conjugal condition to a mere utility and overlooks other aspects of the relationship, including ethics, aesthetics, and even love and emotional happiness, as the immediate context suggests it should have (Gen 2:23).

Walton is right when he sees function in the creation accounts. The most “enlightening” textual evidence is found in the passage reporting the creation of the luminaries. Here the syntax clearly supports Walton’s thesis of the creation of function and not of material. Indeed the objects mentioned in the text are directly and systematically related to their function through the *lamed* of purpose (vv. 14-18). The luminaries exist (vv. 14-15), are made (v. 16), are given (vv. 17-18) *for* the function (*lamed* of purpose) of separating day and night, light and darkness, and for ruling over time—a function previously held by God himself (v. 4).

Yet there are many other works of the creation week in which function is totally absent. On days five and six, the account records the creation of living beings—animals and humans—and the creation of their function of reproduction. Nevertheless, God did not just make them to reproduce, as if only function was intended.¹³ After having created humans “male and female” (Gen 1:27), God, then, provides for the reproductive system to function, according to Gen 1:28. The two creations, male and female, are dependent,

¹¹Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story*, 54.

¹²Ibid., 51.

¹³Ibid., 67.

the former being the basis for the latter. Also the parallel between the plants coming from the earth and the living beings appearing on the earth suggests that the creation of plants and seeds pertains to “the same sort of marvel.”¹⁴ This process confirms that the act of creation for plants is similar to that of the creatures, since these are, in the same manner, the result of an external divine creation and not merely the inner product or natural function of the earth.

Walton’s understanding of the creation of humans in God’s image as a function following and, therefore, distinct from the actual creation of the physical human, contradicts not only the holistic view of biblical anthropology, but also the actual biblical description of the creation of humanity as coming directly from God’s hands and breath (Gen 2:7). According to the biblical text, the divine creation of humans concerns their material *and* their spiritual components. Although Walton notes the difference between ancient Near Eastern texts, which “only deal with the mass of humanity” and have only an “archetypal understanding” of human origins,¹⁵ and the Bible, which speaks about the creation of an individual or a couple, he does not, however, draw the logical lesson from this observation. In actuality, the biblical focus on particular individuals, Adam and Eve, denotes a concern that is more historical than philosophical. Before serving as a spiritual message about the meaning of human destiny (function), the biblical account is, first, a historical report (matter). Thus the divine creative acts demonstrate how the creation of function systematically accompanies the creation of matter.

Walton’s view of function is not clear. Thus it often seems that function belongs to the spiritual domain (e.g., God’s image in man), distinct from the material substance of creation (e.g., human body). Not only is this dissociation artificial, but it also pertains to a dualistic approach that is foreign to biblical thinking. How can, for instance, the function of taste in the vegetable be separated from its material reality? For matter without its function, the body without the spirit, does not exist, just as the function without the matter or the spirit without the body does not exist. Significantly, the *ruah*, the spirit, is the principle of life (Ps 104:30)! Also significant is the fact that the biblical account does not totally ignore the creation of function; but the very fact that when function is intended, it is specifically indicated through the use of syntax and grammar suggests that when it is not there, it should not be assumed.

*Walton is Right in His Observation of the Connection
between the Temple and Creation*

Walton is right in his observation of the connection between the temple and creation, as in the ancient world “temples were considered symbols of the

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Walton, 70.

cosmos.”¹⁶ The Bible contains many evidences of that connection. Yet Walton’s deduction that “the Cosmos Is a Temple”¹⁷ and that, therefore, Genesis 1 “should be understood as an account of functional origins of the cosmos as a temple”¹⁸ goes too far and even distorts the biblical intention. In the Bible, it is not creation that is like the temple, but the temple that is like creation. It is not creation that speaks about the temple with the intention of conveying ideas of salvation; it is the temple that speaks about creation in order to emphasize the cosmic scope of salvation.¹⁹ The reason for this chronological misplacement is that in Walton’s perspective the temple precedes creation, and, therefore, Genesis 1 is a temple text that does not intend to speak about origins, but rather conveys spiritual lessons related to the life and liturgy of the temple, a hypothesis that is found in the controversial and never-documented premise of an enthronement festival or New Year celebration of creation.²⁰ In fact, this chronological reversal is consistent with traditional ideas foundational to biblical criticism that the creation story originated in the postexilic Priestly source, a view that has been reassessed by Y. Kauffmann.²¹ This reverse-sequence is also suspect as it betrays the classic Marcionite paradigm that prioritizes spiritual redemption over material creation,²² a scheme adopted by theologians such as R. Bultmann, K. Barth, and G. Von Rad, which still dominates the contemporary theological scene.²³ All this current of thought is, in fact, indebted to the mental habits of Western thinking anchored in the Cartesian paradigm that places thinking before existence (“I think, therefore I am”). Hebrew thinking takes the reverse direction and prefers, on the contrary, to place history and existence before spiritual and theological constructions (Exod 24:7). Indeed, Hebrew thinking is essentially historically oriented, which is immediately evident in the literary genre that characterizes

¹⁶Ibid., 79.

¹⁷Ibid., 78.

¹⁸Ibid., 84.

¹⁹See the theology of *kippur*, which promotes the “cleansing of the sanctuary/temple,” thereby implying the cleansing of the creation (Jacques Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000], 129-130; Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry Into the Jewish Bible* [Minneapolis: Winston, 1985], 124).

²⁰Walton, 90-91.

²¹See Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, trans. and abridged Moshe Greenberg (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 175-200.

²²See Claus Westermann’s discussion on creation/redemption in *Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 113-123.

²³See Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story*, 190-197; 227-240.

the Genesis creation story, a *toledot* (“genealogy,” Gen 2:4a).²⁴ Furthermore, the fact that the biblical author uses the term *toledot* for the creation of the heavens and the earth *and* for the genealogy of the patriarchs (Genesis 12–50) shows his intent to relate historically the event of creation to the rest of Israelite history. If history and the emphasis on the concrete physical flesh and matter are so fundamental in Hebrew thinking, as recognized by many biblical scholars, why, then, would such an important aspect of creation, its historical dimension, be completely ignored in the creation story? If “Genesis 1 is not that story,”²⁵ where is that story? Walton’s response is simply that “the material phase had been carried out for long ages prior to the seven days of Genesis.”²⁶ One implication Walton infers from this last observation is that “death did exist in the pre-Fall world.”²⁷ Not only is this information completely absent from the biblical text, but it even goes against the thrust of the Genesis text, which is all about life (Gen 1:29–30) and is written from the “not yet” perspective.²⁸

Walton’s connection between Genesis 1 and the temple also affects his understanding of the very nature of those seven days of Genesis and, by implication, the meaning of the seventh-day Sabbath. Since for him the cosmos is a temple, the seven days of creation relate, then, to the cosmic inauguration of the temple and do not concern material origins. In this view, the nature of the days of the creation week, as twenty-four-hour days, does not play a significant role because these days are not related to the age of the earth. They do not refer to the time of the cosmos, but to a liturgical time. They are temple days, not creation days. Yet nothing in the text allows such a “spiritual-functional” interpretation of the days, which are described in Genesis 1 as clearly and only creation days and not liturgical days in the context of worship. We have to wait until the end of the creation work, on the seventh day, to enter into a time of worship. For Walton, the Sabbath rest, although valuable and rich in content,²⁹ has lost its basic justification from creation (Exod 20:11). For him, the Genesis Sabbath does not mark the end of creation, but, on the contrary, the beginning of God’s ruling activity. Therefore, it does not apply to human observance: “Obviously, God is not asking us to imitate his Sabbath rest by taking the functional controls.”³⁰ Walton founds his views on the basis of the ancient Near Eastern cosmogonic

²⁴Ibid., 213–220.

²⁵Walton, 96.

²⁶Ibid., 99.

²⁷Ibid., 100.

²⁸See above my comments on the parallelism between the two creation stories.

²⁹Walton, 146–147.

³⁰Ibid., 147.

views of the day of rest. Yet his reconstruction in the light of these parallels does not do justice to the fundamental difference between the divine rest in the ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies and the divine rest that follows the six days of the Genesis creation story. Unlike the gods of the ancient Near East, the God of the Bible does not rest in order to rule and undertake “the normal operations of the cosmos” or to enslave his creatures and be served by them.³¹ Instead, God rests in order to conclude his work and thus enter into loving relationship with his human creatures. It is a time of worship, but it is also a time to remember the past and finished creation work (Gen 2:1-2).

In the rest of the book, in which Walton situates himself in the context of the science-and-religion debate, his philosophical presupposition is unveiled. In spite of his numerous affirmations against what he calls the “metaphysical implications” of evolution³² and his protest that “this book is not promoting evolution,”³³ Walton’s reading of Genesis 1 stands in good harmony with evolution, as he seems to recognize, noting that “Genesis 1 offers no objections to biological evolution.”³⁴ “There is no reason to believe that biological evolution teaches something contradictory to the Bible.”³⁵ “In the interpretation of the text that I have offered, very little found in evolutionary theory would be objectionable.”³⁶

This last observation may reveal the other problem I have with Walton’s approach to the biblical text. Although he holds a high value of Scripture in the evangelical tradition, his theological and philosophical presuppositions still prevail over his exegesis. He readily confesses this priority, stating: “Even though it is natural to defend our exegesis, it is arguably even more important to defend our theology.”³⁷ Perhaps Walton could have reached different theological conclusions had he reversed the sequence and just remained faithful to the principle he meant to uphold, namely, that “we must be led by the text.”³⁸

I do understand Walton’s dilemma and share his concern, especially in regard to the science-and-religion debate. If the biblical text means what it says—that there was a creation of matter in six literal days—we have a serious problem; our thinking, our intelligence, is challenged. We are thus confronted by the following alternatives: either we suppress our thinking and by faith we

³¹Ibid., 73.

³²Ibid., 136.

³³Ibid., 165.

³⁴Ibid., 138.

³⁵Ibid., 166.

³⁶Ibid., 170.

³⁷Ibid., 150.

³⁸Ibid., 94.

slavishly and naively submit ourselves to the words of the text, or we ignore the text so that we can feel comfortable with our thinking. As thinkers of faith, neither of these options is satisfactory. Thus the temptation has too often been to change the text or “interpret” it so that it fits with our thinking. Concordism, which has often been the option of choice for those who hold a high view of Scripture along with a high view of science and reason, becomes a tempting alternative for breaking the tension and solving the unbearable question, a trap which Walton denounces.³⁹ I do not think that this direction is satisfactory either. I suggest, then, that, whether we receive the biblical text as it is or are engaged in the demanding adventure of thinking, we assume our question without answer. For the question without answer is more important than the answer without questions. On the other hand, the answer that is given to us is more important than the answer that we may give. Unfortunately, in our discussion about our questions without answer we have missed the answer that was contained in creation itself. The beauty and the power of life and the wonders of creation, all that which makes my question irrelevant, is more important than all my brilliant solutions. Indeed we should not abandon searching for the complexities of the divine creation, “all that has been done under the sun,” for this is the “grievous task God has given to the sons of men” (Eccl 1:13). At the same time, we should realize with Qohelet that all this enterprise is mere “vanity and grasping for the wind” (Eccl 1:14). We should, therefore, or at least also, meditate on this wonder of creation that has been offered to us, which is far more important than all the answers we are tempted to give in order to solve it.

³⁹Ibid., 16-19.

BOOK REVIEWS

McKibben, Bill. *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*. New York: Times Books, 2010. xviii + 253 pp. Hardback, \$24.00.

Bill McKibben, rightly regarded as one of the nation's leading environmentalists, helped launch public discussion of global climate change with the publication of *The End of Nature* (1989) and has subsequently authored more than a dozen books that engage environmental themes. In his latest book, *Eaarth*, McKibben continues this tradition by advancing two claims: (1) we have already altered our planetary home in profound ways and might as well recognize this fact (thus the modified name, *Eaarth*); and (2) we can (and must) learn to live in our challenging new home—and to avoid catastrophe—by redefining the goal and scale of our global economy.

In the author's analysis, the problem and its cause are clear. *Eaarth* represents a warmer, stormier, more extreme, and biologically impoverished world compared to the planet of our birth; and it's a world that *we* have made—the byproduct of modernity's relentless pursuit of economic growth powered by the consumption of fossil fuels (chap. 1). Life on *Eaarth* is tougher and less predictable than in the world of our birth, and transitioning society to these circumstances will be painful. However, McKibben believes that it can be done—but only if we put in place new ways of living that favor maintenance versus perpetual growth as the goal of economic life (chap. 2).

At heart, in McKibben's view, these new ways of living will rescale the focus of our economic activity: from highly interconnected, global commerce critically dependent on giant corporations judged “too big to fail” (recall the bank bailouts in 2008) to more local, loosely connected economies that respond to local needs and offer greater resilience to economic meltdown; no failed community bank will bring down the global economy (chap. 3). Downsizing economic scale will be essential, he argues, in two particularly crucial sectors of the economy, agriculture and energy, where giant corporations and unsustainable practices now dominate (chap. 4).

McKibben ends his book by asking how we can make this transition while retaining the positive contributions of modernity: a liberalized social order in which family background, race, and gender no longer define status, and the capacity to learn about and from the global community. He fingers the Internet as an innovation that arrived just in time to facilitate this transition.

In *Eaarth*, McKibben offers a clear-headed, well-informed, and passionate argument for how we ought to live on our altered planet. He builds this argument in direct, nontechnical prose by skillfully weaving together key statistics with multiple examples to support a few central claims. To give just one example, McKibben supports the claim that small-scale farming can compete with industrial-scale agriculture in productivity per acre by combining statistical analysis from the U. S. Department of Agriculture with

multiple case studies that flesh out productive small-scale farming practices in Indonesia, East Africa, Bangladesh, and elsewhere (168-170).

This style of argumentation gives life to the text for general readers who lack technical background in the relevant fields, but it sometimes invites criticism from the technically inclined. For instance, McKibben cites a pair of devastating, record-breaking rainstorms in his hometown in Vermont, spaced about six weeks apart, to illustrate the claim that global warming (and consequent increased storminess) “is no longer a future threat. . . . It’s our reality” (xiii). However, this claim goes well beyond current climate science, which cannot link particular weather events with global climate change.

The book is heavily referenced. Most references are to nontechnical, public-news sources—perhaps not surprising given that the author is an environmental writer, not a climate scientist, who builds much of his argument through assembled examples. Of potential concern, however, is that he sometimes relies on such sources when documenting technical claims. For example, he relies on an article in *The Wall Street Journal* to document a technical claim about the expected trajectory of ocean acidification (10).

McKibben’s argument closely mirrors scientific consensus on the reality, causes, magnitude, and probable human impact of climate change. However, his prescription for how to respond to the consequent challenges—by downscaling to more local, loosely connected economies that favor maintenance over economic growth—represents a departure from conventional wisdom and raises questions he does not adequately answer. For instance, can we fairly ask the poor nations of the world to forego economic growth when their citizens desperately need an elevated standard of living?

For the record, I believe McKibben’s analysis will ultimately prove correct; economic growth cannot continue indefinitely on a finite planet, and we must learn to live more lightly, simply, and locally on our altered planet. However, I am less certain that now is the time to abandon the power of growth-based markets as we transition to greener ways of living. Interested readers may wish to engage other perspectives, such as that of economist Jeffery Sachs, before reaching a personal conclusion.

The author—a practicing Methodist—does not explicitly draw on biblical or theological themes in building his argument in *Eaarth*, although he does so in other books (notably *The Comforting Whirlwind* [2005], cf. *AUSS* 45 [2007]: 153-154). Nonetheless, I believe *Eaarth* will interest many readers of this journal: the book addresses a timely topic in nontechnical, accessible prose, provides insightful analysis, and proffers a solution that aligns well with biblical principles of community, simplicity, stewardship, and Sabbath rest. It deserves careful reading, reflection, and discussion by all who recognize humanity’s role as stewards of creation.