

What on *Earth* Is God Doing? Relating Theology and Science through Biblical Theology

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It is common to consider faith and science in terms of two books: "The Book of Scripture" and "The Book of Nature." In our media, schools, universities, and even in some churches, it is held that these two "books" are incompatible—one is correct, the other is in error—which-is-which depends on your point of view. The problem with this polarizing view can be seen in how the word "literal" is used by both atheists and Christians alike to support their respective positions. However, if God is the Creator, then this position is untenable, since both books of revelation reveal the same God.

This article seeks to develop a unique approach, using biblical theology and, in particular, an understanding of the missio Dei as the basis to outline the "literal" meaning of scripture—as the original authors and hearers understood the text. Biblical theology therefore provides the means to hold the two books of revelation together, by identifying the central theological themes that make the early chapters of Genesis so important.

For many, we live in an age in which two competing meta-narratives exist, two "big picture" stories upon which to base one's life. The first, provided by materialistic science, speaks of deep time, evolutionary history, and scientific progress. Furthermore, in the context of secular Western culture, which believes itself to be "the highest, most enlightened, most liberal, most rational, most modern/post-modern and most civilized thinking of humankind,"¹ the scientific worldview provides the major interpretation of existence. In contrast, Christianity speaks of a creator God and identifies the world as "Creation," which for some means that a more "narrow" (literal) interpretation of scripture is required for a biblical faith. As a result, the conflict model often portrayed between science and theology

is really about two competing narratives of life.²

To move away from a conflict model, these two metanarratives are often held together by talking of "two books"—the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture—the two sources by which the mission of God is revealed to us, in which God is both Creator and Redeemer. So often, however, our understanding of the *missio Dei* (Mission of God) focuses on God as Redeemer—salvation history centered on Christ—and we forget that

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God's mission is primarily that of creation history—from creation (Genesis 1–3) to new creation (Revelation 21–22)—the time when God's mission for all of creation will be fulfilled. Salvation history then becomes God's reorientation of creation history toward its proper goal, after God's intention was distorted by sin.³ In this context, the goal and purpose framing the biblical narrative becomes critical to our theological methodology so that the wider parameters that frame the broader sweep of the biblical narrative are not lost.⁴ As John Haught suggests, "As long as the universe is unfinished, so also is each of us ... Our personal redemption awaits the salvation of the whole."⁵

As Christianity comes to terms with the advances of science and how that shapes our understanding of the world and the universe, biblical theology provides a means to critique the philosophical assumptions that have been associated with materialistic science, especially through atheistic naturalism, as well as to critique a narrow literalistic reading of scripture, both of which perpetuate the conflict model between science and theology.⁶ Biblical theology, the drama of scripture as canonically received, remains faithful to the theological pattern of scripture by placing importance on the context of the text⁷ (the "face value"⁸ meaning) and the theological themes that unify scripture. As a result, the text is read as the ancient authors intended and as the ancient audiences would have heard it, while also giving cognizance to the deeper theological truth claims underlying the text that unify scripture as a whole, rather than setting "literal" over-and-against "metaphorical" or "symbolic."⁹

While encompassing the historical-critical methodology of biblical criticism, including considerations of the genre which, for the early chapters of Genesis, are described as "mythology" in its stricter academic sense—a narrative giving expression to a symbolic universe or primitive cosmology,¹⁰ proto-historical story,¹¹ or primeval history¹²—biblical theology reads scripture "in its totality according to its own, rather than imposed categories."¹³ A comparable approach is seen in the philosophy of science in which reductionism focuses on the details, while emergence identifies the "whole" as more than the sum of the parts. Thus, a fruitful way to understand the biblical metanarrative is to talk of the *missio Dei*, in which mission derives from the very being of God,

as the God of sending love.¹⁴ One way to express this is to ask the question, "What on *Earth* is God doing?"—both theologically and scientifically. To answer this question, biblical theology will be used to identify what the word "creation" means theologically in the first chapters of Genesis, and then to identify the purpose of God's act of creation. Following from this understanding, we can determine the role of humanity within creation, including the God-given gift of science within the realm of God's creation.

The Sphere of Creation: Garden-Sanctuary

The approach of biblical theology is even more relevant in our age of modern scientific discovery, in which the creation accounts recorded in Genesis 1–3 have been a focus of polarizing views. Our proposal seeks to affirm a biblical faith that is consistent with the understanding of "literal" for the majority of Christian history that emphasizes the meaning that the original authors intended.¹⁵ From Origen (ca. AD 185–254) to Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430) to John Calvin (AD 1509–1564), the meaning of the creation narratives is deeper than the words alone and emphasizes the sense that the author intended, rather than the modern narrow understanding of "literal."¹⁶ Augustine in his final commentary on Genesis 1–3, *De Genesi ad Litteram*,

is insistent that the literal meaning thereby derived may never stand in contradiction to one's competently derived knowledge about "the earth, the heavens, and the other elements of this world."¹⁷

Furthermore, John Calvin (a central figure of Reformed theology) makes the point several times in his commentary on Genesis with reference to astronomy, that "Moses therefore, rather adapts his discourse to common usage."¹⁸ For the majority of Christian history, the understanding of "literal" moves us away from any notion of conflict between science and theology on textual grounds, and stands in stark contrast to the narrow literalism proposed by some Christians today. As we are suggesting, a correct "literal" reading of scripture does not contradict what is found in the book of nature.

The recent emphasis on the *missio Dei* provides a theological framework for biblical theology in which the totality of God's activities includes any-

thing and everything that comes within the creation and sustaining of the cosmos. This includes humanity as male and female, who are called to fulfill all that God intended as beings made in the image and likeness of God—including science, which has given us a new vision of God's creation, from its vastness to its infinite detail. At the center of God's mission is the act of creation, in which the primary distinction in the biblical creation account¹⁹ is that between God the Creator (who alone is uncreated) and everything else that is both a creation of God and contingent on God for its existence.

Furthermore, the worldview described in Genesis is undergirded by a functional ontology,²⁰ in which the theological importance lies in the creation of the various *domains/functions* of existence (light, darkness, sky, water, land) and the establishment of the various *functionaries* within these domains (sun, moon, stars, birds, fish, animals, humans) reflected in the pairing of the days (days 1 and 4; days 2 and 5; days 3 and 6).²¹ The assumption behind these texts is that God was responsible for material origins, even though this is not the theological focus of the text.²² Thus this functional ontology is in stark contrast to the material ontology proposed by scientism, in which science in its methodology focuses purely on the material world but is given ontological status through materialism.²³ In addition, a more fundamental/literalist view of scripture also uses a materialistic ontology, in which the focus becomes the timing of creation rather than its function. As a result, reading the Genesis accounts with a functional ontology as originally intended is vital for a correct interpretation of these passages and avoids any notion of conflict between science and theology on materialistic grounds.

Moving from the general sphere of creation to the more specific features of the creation account, Genesis 2 identifies one of the most significant features regarding the garden that is obvious, yet frequently overlooked. The garden that is planted by God (Gen. 2:8) is not *coextensive* with all creation, but is rather a specific region upon Earth, delineated with boundaries and guarded entry points—it is a *sanctuary*. Within the garden is security and order, while beyond the garden walls lies the uncultivated and more chaotic existence. It is into this environment that the “archetypes of humanity”²⁴ were brought (Gen. 2:15). There are subtle nuances at this

point between the first and second creation accounts: although created from the ground, the man is not created *in* the garden but *brought in* and located in the garden, having been formed outside. Significantly, these themes are also identified in the experience of Israel entering the promise land, in particular, in the Song of Moses in Exodus 15 and in Exod. 19:5–6a. The theological significance of these passages is that they identify God's intention clearly—that is, that the establishment of the sanctuary upon a mountain of God's own possession is central to God's purposes in and through the gathering of a holy people.²⁵

By investigating the ancient Near Eastern context of the Genesis creation accounts, Rikk Watts identifies that the garden/sanctuary lies within a larger context which describes “creation as temple-palace.”²⁶ God's act of creation thus becomes “the creation of the cosmic temple with all its functions and with God dwelling in its midst,”²⁷ a process brought to completion in the new heavens and earth of Revelation 21–22. In this context, “new” denotes completion or transformation rather than destruction and remaking. Furthermore, there is some delineation of space within the garden. The clearest indication of this is the river that flows out of Eden and into the garden (Gen. 2:10). The implication is that some notional delineation may be drawn between Eden and the garden. There is a sense that the source of the river is located in the dwelling or temple of God, and that the garden is the immediate surrounding area. God is noted walking to and fro within the garden in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8), with the suggestion that this is something of a visitation, albeit from within the neighborhood. The whole encounter between the serpent and Eve, together with the subsequent disobedient actions, is not described as being in the clear presence of God. The garden is a space owned and inhabited by God, but Eden and all that it represents by way of the temple court of God is also distinct.

If this analysis is valid, then some notional tripartite delineation can be proposed. First, at the center of Eden is the temple-palace of God, God's dwelling place, the center of all that is life giving, where decisions are made and the mission of God proceeds. Secondly, surrounding this is the walled garden, the Garden of Eden, with qualities of fertile earth to be cultivated and a fruitful abundance to be enjoyed. Walton describes this archetypal sanctuary as the

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"antechamber,"²⁸ the sacred space adjoining God's dwelling place and the place where humanity dwells and worships God. Thirdly, beyond the garden are areas of the earth lacking these qualities, wilderness and desert-like, where habitation is imperiled and subject to greater threat and disorder. It is this wider world that needs to be subdued and transformed into the garden as it extends its boundaries. This is land to be inhabited and cultivated through the agency of humankind living up to its calling and capacities as the image and likeness of God. Importantly, as G. K. Beale clearly identifies, there are significant parallels between this tripartite division of Eden—temple garden sanctuary / anti-chamber / the outside world—and the tripartite division of Israel's tabernacle, and later temple, that emphasize the theological importance of such a view.²⁹ As such, humanity is called to live in the presence of God who resides in the temple (Holy of Holies), and to extend the sanctuary boundaries to cover the whole earth.

The Purpose of Creation: *Shalom*

Creation as represented in Genesis 1 and 2 is not a static state to be preserved in pristine condition, but an ongoing project of cultivation and culture making in which order (creation as God intended) is imposed on chaos/disorder (a state of creation that is not yet ordered as God intends).³⁰ From this depiction, we can make significant statements about the character and direction of God's creative purposes. There are two indicators as to what this involves. One is the reference to "rest" as the goal of creation as realized in the final day, day seven (Gen. 2:1–3). In ancient Near Eastern context, rest is the outcome of triumph over chaotic forces: in the first creation account, it is the *telos* of creation, its goal and endpoint. God now rules from his residence (Eden), sustaining the normal routines of creation.³¹ This reference to rest at the conclusion of this first account is relatively brief, but it receives more extensive attention in later passages where it comes to embody the second indicator, that of "*shalom*," as the fullness of all that creation was intended to be (most clearly as delineated in Psalm 132, among other passages). As Cornelius Plantinga suggests,

In the Bible *shalom* means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in

which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, all under the arch of God's love. *Shalom*, in other words, is the way things are supposed to be.³²

The expression of this state, with its potential for enhancement and fulfillment, is first seen in Eden and the surrounding garden—a limited part of creation with all the qualities of *shalom* as an environment as much as an individual state and experience. God created humankind, male and female, in his image and likeness, to be agents in this ongoing creation project: to till the soil, to cultivate, and to be culture makers—creating community and society while reflecting the image of God. From this point, the historical development of scripture then moves "from garden to city, from Eden to New Jerusalem,"³³ where the whole of creation is restored as God's creative act reaches its goal.

For much of the twentieth century, the notion of purpose has been rejected in the philosophy of science, especially within evolutionism in which, a priori, the existence of both God and purpose is denied so that the evolutionary process is "at its core, directionless and purposeless."³⁴ In this view, chance is the antithesis of any notion of God's divine providence and design. This metaphysical position has recently been challenged from within science by recent understandings of evolution identified as consonant with aspects of theology, including purpose, Christology, and pneumatology.³⁵ Furthermore, the understanding of emergent evolution, a new philosophy of science, identifies a narrative property in evolution that is consonant with the narrative structure of religious belief;³⁶ both can be included within a "holistic epistemic network."³⁷ Significantly, the understanding of *shalom* from biblical theology broadens such a view by including the potential for enhancement and fulfillment, so that emergent evolution results in the fulfillment of all that God intended for creation. Therefore, *shalom* encompasses what Haught calls the "promise" of creation, that is, that the purposefulness of the universe means that it is "orientated towards the implementation of something intrinsically good."³⁸ With the arrival of humanity, *shalom* also includes a process to make creation as God intended, by the extension of the garden through human agency.

The Process of Continuing Creation: Humanity and Extending the Garden

Biblical theology identifies the sphere and purpose of God's creative activity within a functional view of creation that is completed when the functionaries are established, primarily God in the temple-palace (Eden) and humanity as the image-bearers of God in the garden (of Eden). The creation of male and female in the image and likeness of God not only features as the crowning element of creation, but also theologically identifies humanity as sharing in and employing the dominion of God, through vice-regal authority, over the rest of creation. Humanity thus functions as the installed image-bearers of God within creation to look after creation on behalf of God,³⁹ extending order over that which is yet to come under God's authority in the process of filling the earth. This is a participatory role in the ongoing creative process of addressing a world that still needs to be brought to order and subdued, where the mandate to spread out, fill, and subdue is an activity from within the garden as it extends its boundaries. A further indicator of the commission and responsibilities given to the human race comes with reading the second creation account in parallel to the first. There are numerous points of connection between the two accounts, but we should note that the indicators that Gen. 2:15 is an elaboration on the mandate given in Gen. 1:28 are the key verbs that specify Adam's functional responsibilities in the garden: to "till" the garden and to "guard" it.

Within the dialogue between science and theology, there is currently much discussion about the historicity of Adam and Eve: were they the first humans, or are they purely figurative characters within the narrative? Again, these are positions that cause tension between those seeking a "literalistic" view (original first couple directly created by God) and those taking a scientific view based on human evolution through common ancestry (figurative view of Adam and Eve).⁴⁰ However, the current arguments are still forcing a choice based on material ontology. In contrast, our reading of biblical theology focuses on the theological importance of Adam and Eve while affirming their existence.

Recently, R. J. Berry published a detailed study on various perspectives about Adam, but significantly the appeal to biblical theology needed to be taken further.⁴¹ Berry's claim that "both an individual Adam and a 'generic' Adam seem to be exegetically possible"⁴² is largely based on the "Fall" and New Testament passages on sin (Romans 5-8, in particular). There is, however, a theological pattern that can be discerned, in that, as the archetypal representatives of all humanity, what is true for Adam and Eve is also true for all humanity, both in terms of God-given mandate and in terms of disobedience.⁴³ Therefore, it is possible to see Adam and Eve both as a particular man and woman (but not the only humans, as suggested by Gen. 4:12-17) and as a representative couple, the archetype of all humanity. Although this may be self-evident, in many churches and in secular society people are forced to choose between these two options.

The argument from biblical theology for allowing a both/and position can be seen in the high priestly overtones in the sanctuary imagery in Genesis 2,⁴⁴ and the role of high priest in Old Testament tabernacle (Moses) and temple worship, in which the high priest is both a specific individual and a representative of the people. This idea is taken further in the New Testament with Christ who is understood as the great High Priest, and it again emphasizes the specific and representative nature of Christ (Heb. 5: 1-10). Another important understanding in biblical theology is the pattern of God calling specific people in bringing about the *missio Dei* (e.g., Abraham, Moses, David, the twelve disciples, Mary the Mother of Jesus, and Paul). Therefore, it is possible to talk about an actual Adam and Eve from within a small population of *Homo sapiens*,⁴⁵ who emerged out of a creative biological process (evolution) to be the first ones who could respond to God in "covenantal fellowship."⁴⁶

The "Fall" is, as Berry rightly suggests, an important theological consideration for identifying a historical Adam and Eve.⁴⁷ If Adam and Eve are understood as archetypes, the "Fall" marked the rise of human autonomy in defining for oneself what is good and evil rather than dependence on God, something that has marked human history ever since.⁴⁸

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A consideration of shalom is important at this point. The “Fall” was an opting out of relationship as seen in the disruption of relationship between Adam and Eve, the disrupted relationship between humanity and the rest of creation, and most importantly, the broken relationship between humanity and God for which humanity was created.⁴⁹ Far from the increasing or expanding outworking of all that creation was intended to be, that is, the bringing of shalom through human agency, every level of community or society is now characterized by disorder, destructiveness, and the realization of conflict, exploitation, and evil conduct: from family to wider community, the blurring of orderly relationships between the heavens and the earth, and finally rebellion in the form of an entire city-state. Aligned with this is the failure of humanity to bring shalom to creation as a whole—thus, nature is left in its imperfect state. As a consequence, expulsion from the safety and order of the garden and the resulting lack of access to the Tree of Life, meant leaving the arena of shalom behind and entering the world of disorder and natural death.⁵⁰ However, the same mandate remained. In this act of disobedience, God’s creation project has been stalled, now requiring both a great work of salvation, reconciliation, and redemption—the redeeming of what is good and complete out of the mess that rebellious humankind has wrought on the created world.⁵¹ Central to this work of salvation is the movement to restore sanctuary, not only to re-enter the garden but also to see the manifestation and extension of the garden-sanctuary here on earth. The great creation project, while imperiled through disobedience and rebellion, has not been thwarted.

In summary, as archetypes, Adam and Eve were the first with the unique ability to respond to God, and as actual people were brought into the garden-sanctuary by God. Now within the environment of shalom, these two were not only given the mandate to cultivate, guard, and extend the garden, but also, in doing so, to bring all of humanity into a relationship with God.⁵² Their failure to do so resulted not only in expulsion from the garden, a return to their natural state of mortality,⁵³ and further chaos for all humanity and creation as a whole, but also in God taking the “long and tortuous route”⁵⁴ to complete the *missio Dei* begun with creation. While the provision of God’s grace can be identified as the narrative

unfolds, it is with the unmerited call of Abram and Sarah that the purposes of God in creation are re-established (Genesis 12).⁵⁵

Science within a Continuing Creation

The title of this article, “What on *Earth* Is God Doing?,” summarizes the approach taken to understand the meaning of “literal” in terms of biblical theology. In doing so, scripture and science are not seen as incompatible, but rather together they add to our perspectives on God’s creation and the role of science within that creation, as an activity within the mission of God.

As suggested, God’s creation project is continuing toward fulfillment (Revelation 21–22), and humanity is still the means through which God is working for the whole of creation. Therefore, we can ask a further theological question, “How does science fit within what God is doing?” The move from Genesis 1 to Genesis 2 identifies a concern with the significance of the garden/sanctuary and the mandate given to the man, complemented by his corresponding partner, the woman. Together they are charged with tasks and duties that fall within the ongoing creative purposes of God, within an environment provided by God that is both a fertile and potentially productive context for human endeavors. Significantly, the mandate, to till the earth and to guard it, is not a commission to keep it in pristine condition or to maintain the status quo—to care for the natural state of things and not exploit natural resources. The calling for the human race is more than maintenance and responsible stewardship. While acting as functionaries (God’s representatives) within God’s creation includes this, the calling is more specifically for the productivity and cultivation of the garden. This links well with the definition of “culture making” suggested by Andy Crouch who stated that “culture is what we make of the world” and is part of our God-given mandate.⁵⁶

Within this context, what we make of the world includes the activities of science. Recognizing the plurality of God and the manner in which various elements of creation are intended for one another, the essential dimension to such culture making is relational. To be tilling the earth and guarding the

garden is to be caring for creation as well as making community and guiding the shaping of society in a manner that honors and reflects God's creative and orderly purposes. Again reflecting the activity of God, humans are created for conversation, for an ongoing dialogue with the totality of creation: here, "conversation" provides a theological re-visioning of the scientific endeavor as humanity continually explores that which God has made, understanding how this creation was made in order to "guard" and "till" it. As Crouch insightfully puts it,

From the beginning, *creation requires cultivation*, in the sense of paying attention to ordering and dividing what already exists into fruitful spaces ... Human creativity, then, images God's creativity when it emerges from a lively, loving community of persons and, perhaps more important, when it participates in unlocking the full potential of what has gone before and creating possibilities for what will come later.⁵⁷

If we may borrow from Philip Hefner, this would be the fullest expression of what it means to be the "created co-creators,"⁵⁸ with the mandate to extend the garden until order and fullness extend over all the earth. The expansion of the garden is a continuation of the creation process, and one in which all of humanity are to put into effect their divine calling as God's image bearers and to do so through the employment of the aptitudes and capabilities that come with being created in the likeness of God. Therefore, humanity engaging in science is a reflection of the image of God, in which the archetypes of Adam and Eve not only move from *Homo sapiens* to *Homo divinus*,⁵⁹ but also to *Homo scientia*—having to learn how the natural world works in order to harness and develop the material world in order to fulfill the mandate to extend the Garden.

Rather than being opponents, both the biblical metanarrative and scientific understandings can be placed within the *missio Dei* using biblical theology, as part of the God-given mandate to extend the garden resulting in the expansion of God's dwelling place until the whole earth is drawn into and transformed into the habitation of God; all this is suggested through the attainment and experience of shalom. If God's intention for creation is shalom, characterized in the bringing of order and symbolized by the expansion of the Garden of Eden, and if scientific exploration and knowledge is part of God's

mandate to humanity for culture making, then there is an ethical mandate for science not only to explore God's creation, but also to function in a way to further God's purpose of shalom. Again, this is to position science theologically within the mission of God, when so often today the scientific endeavor is identified with a profit motive and the exploitation of nature.

In biblical theology, the narrative of Eden identifies Adam as working the garden to further God's purposes. We can then ask, "What might science in the Garden look like?" This is more than a fanciful question, since God's intent is to bring about the fullness of the Kingdom of God and includes human agency in this process. Therefore, the bringing of shalom provides a biblically sanctioned ethic for the scientific endeavor, in which the scientist (especially scientists who are Christians, but hopefully all scientists) can function in order to increase shalom in creation. Linking this with other biblical mandates such as "neighbor" and "sacrifice,"⁶⁰ along with secular criteria of beneficence and nonmaleficence, provides a powerful, biblically based ethic in which the scientific exploration and application can function in a process consonant with God's purposes for humanity and the whole of creation, thereby avoiding exploitation and greed. This does not mean that science operates to replace God, as has been the case since the Enlightenment, but rather, in a penultimate manner,⁶¹ science must fulfill the God-given mandate to extend the garden.

Conclusion

We have shown how biblical theology identifies the threads in the biblical narrative, of cultivation, guarding, rest, and shalom, all of which are integral to the foundational spheres of the garden-sanctuary and the dwelling place of God as the hope of Israel and, ultimately, the hope for us all. Within such a framework, the book of scripture and the book of nature can be brought together; thus, the intent of the original author and the understanding of the original audience, along with the undergirding theological themes, provide the means for "literal" interpretation today. As such, the *missio Dei* continues, and we understand what God has been doing and continues to do on Earth, including all that science discovers.

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Notes

- ¹Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1996), 310.
- ²See Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners?* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000).
- ³A similar movement is also observed within systematic theology in a Trinitarian context in which creation history is centered on Christ (John 1), restored through the cross and resurrection, and the purpose of creation continued through the work of the Holy Spirit.
- ⁴This highlights the importance of distinguishing the means from the *telos*—salvation is not the goal or *telos* of the mission of God, but the critical means to that *telos*.
- ⁵John F. Haught, *Deeper than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in the Age of Evolution* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2003), 155.
- ⁶Both these approaches fuel the conflict model between science and theology, and as John Haught suggests, both a literalistic reading of nature (naturalism) and a narrow-literal reading of scripture (young earth creationism) represent a misreading of their respective contexts. *Ibid.*, 13–25.
- ⁷Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 195.
- ⁸John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 102–6.
- ⁹The theological importance of the biblical metanarrative identifies history as neither “bare fact” nor “subjective interpretation” but is “the meaningful narrative of events and intentions.” Therefore, biblical theology identifies that the Bible can be read as the drama of God’s sovereignty in the renewal of all creation, in which all authority belongs to God revealed in Jesus Christ and the Spirit. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 82 and 139–44. The result is a multilayered approach that Wright describes as a five-act model.
- A six-act drama has also been proposed. See Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (London: SPCK, 2006). Biblical theology is different to, but not exclusive of, systematic theology and philosophical theology. For an overview of biblical theology, see Craig Bartholomew et al., eds., *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 5 of *The Scripture and Hermeneutics Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).
- ¹⁰Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 14–5.
- ¹¹Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, ed. John D. W. Watts, vol. 1 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 54.
- ¹²Tremper Longman, *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 64, 101–25. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 1:xlvi, lii. “Theological history” is a broader term also utilized. See Longman, *How to Read Genesis*, 60. These descriptions of genre do not negate the importance of these writings, but rather, locate them within their historical context of the ancient Near East in order to understand what the original authors intended and what the original audiences would have understood within a worldview very different to our own. Even though these writings come out of an ancient Near Eastern context, as Wenham notes, Genesis 1–11 does however represent an alternative worldview to that found in other cultures of the ancient Near East. See Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 1:xlvi, xlix–l. Also see Rikk E. Watts, “On the Edge of the Millennium: Making Sense of Genesis 1,” in *Living in the Lamplight: Christianity and Contemporary Challenges to the Gospel*, ed. H. Boersma (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2001).
- ¹³Bartholomew, *Out of Egypt*, 1.
- ¹⁴The church’s mission in this context is to participate in God’s continuing mission for all people and the whole of creation. See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, vol. 16, American Society of Missiology series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 370–93. C. J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*: 67–8.
- ¹⁵N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: SPCK, 2005), 53–5.
- ¹⁶For examples, see Origen and Augustine in Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2008), 155–6; Augustine in Alister E. McGrath, *A Fine-Tuned Universe: The Quest for God in Science and Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 100–3.
- ¹⁷H. J. Van Till, “Basil, Augustine, and the Doctrine of Creation’s Functional Integrity,” *Science and Christian Belief* 8, no. 1 (1996): 29. Also see Davis A. Young, “The Contemporary Relevance of Augustine’s View of Creation,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 40, no. 1 (1988): 42–4; Andrew J. Brown, “The Relevance of Augustine’s View of Creation Re-evaluated,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 57, no. 2 (2005): 134–45.
- ¹⁸John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. John King (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1847), 79–80, 84–7. Quote taken from page 87.
- ¹⁹Although modern historical-critical methodology identifies more than one creation account, as canonically received, these do form one consistent theological account.
- ²⁰Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 23–8, 35.
- ²¹*Ibid.*, 54–68. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 1. Watts, “On the Edge of the Millennium,” 133–4.
- ²²Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 43–4.
- ²³Scientism is the metaphysical belief central to secularism that truth is only obtainable through science, in which scientific knowledge provides the “most profound and accurate knowledge” and provides “the paradigm for true knowledge.” Harold W. Turner, *Frames of Mind: A Public Philosophy for Religion and Cultures* (Auckland: The DeepSight Trust, 2001), 241–2; Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 32, 48. Scientism can also be called “naturalism,” “scientific materialism,” or “scientific naturalism.” See J. F. Haught, “Science and Scientism: The Importance of a Distinction,” *Zygon* 40, no. 2 (2005): 364–5.
- ²⁴Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 70–1. Adam and Eve as archetype means representative and definer of class, so that what is true of the archetype is true of all humanity.
- ²⁵G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, vol. 17 of *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press,

2004), 69–70. Also see Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988). It is curious that the more regular term for being placed is not used (*sûm*), but a rarer verb is employed, semantically related to the notion of resting (*nûah*). While such details are no more than suggestive, they do point in the direction of a qualitative existence, not just mere presence.

²⁶Watts, "On the Edge of the Millennium," 143–6. —, "The New Exodus/New Creational Restoration of the Image of God: A Biblical-Theological Perspective on Salvation," in *What Does It Mean to Be Saved? Broadening Evangelical Horizons of Salvation*, ed. J. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 18–20. Also see Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985), 142–5. As Rikk Watts suggests, it is the experience of the Exodus that shapes the writing of the biblical creation accounts ("On the Edge of the Millennium," 143–6).

²⁷Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 84.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 82.

²⁹Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 17:29–80. This tripartite division is also evident in the tabernacle and its associated festivals and observances. At a symbolic level, the layout and furnishings of the tabernacle reflect an essential cosmology of the heavens and the earth. The tripartite division is clearer, with the most holy place corresponding to the inner sanctum, the temple dwelling and heavenly court of God, surrounded by the holy place, the sanctuary. Taken together, these two correspond to the temple palace that comprised Eden and the surrounding garden. Outside the tabernacle precincts lie the wider world, potentially inhabitable and the realm in need of cultivation and culture-making endeavors. The color schemes within the tabernacle reflect elemental colors in which the foundations of mountains are securely located above deep waters, while the horizons of earthly plains meet the greater skies, resplendent in jewels and lamplight and the grandeur of the heavenly expanses as the greater reality setting the celestial context for earthly existence. The fusion of heaven with earth is foreshadowed as the goal of the great creation project and indicative of what truly constitutes the dwelling place and royal court of YHWH. Any approach in this direction is entirely through the agency and provision of God, a means of grace without which life will be confined to the vulnerability, struggles, and chaotic forces outside the garden.

³⁰This is "chaos" in a theological rather than a scientific sense, and is not used to indicate forces in opposition to God, but rather that the material world is in a process of being continually created/ordered.

³¹Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 72–7. Walton makes the important point that a deity only rests within a temple.

³²Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 200.

³³Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 104–5.

³⁴Quote taken from John F. Haught, "Does Evolution Rule Out God's Existence?," in *An Evolving Dialogue: Theological*

and Scientific Perspectives on Evolution, ed. J. B. Miller (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 340. Also see Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation: Conflict, Conversation, and Convergence* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 49. Daniel Dennett calls evolution "a mindless, purposeless process," as quoted in Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion*, 95.

³⁵Recently Simon Conway Morris has explored purpose in evolution. See Simon Conway Morris, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). —, ed., *The Deep Structure of Biology: Is Convergence Sufficiently Ubiquitous to Give a Directional Signal?* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008). For theological reflections, see Graham J. O'Brien, "A Theology of Purpose: Creation, Evolution and the Understanding of Purpose," *Science and Christian Belief* 19, no. 1 (2007); —, "The Story of Our Creation," *Colloquium* 41, no. 2 (2009); John Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity: The Christian Encounter with Reality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

³⁶O'Brien, "The Story of Our Creation."

³⁷"Holistic epistemic network" is taken from Robert John Russell, "Natural Sciences," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 330–1.

³⁸Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 128, 42–4 and 85–6.

³⁹Watts, "The New Exodus," 18–20. Also see David J. Bryant, "Imago Dei, Imagination, and Ecological Responsibility," *Theology Today* 57, no. 1 (2000): 36.

⁴⁰To get a feel for the growing tension, see Richard N. Ostling, "The Search for the Historical Adam," *Christianity Today Magazine* (2011), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/june/historicaladam.html>. For an outline of three models, see Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, 234–43.

⁴¹R. J. Berry, "Adam or Adamah?," *Science and Christian Belief* 23, no. 1 (2011): 33–9. In trying to develop an approach based on the biblical metanarrative, the context of the garden-sanctuary however is not explored, and the arguments presented in this paper add further weight to the overall position for both a historical and figurative sense of the "Fall."

⁴²*Ibid.*, 48.

⁴³"Federal Headship" is the term used by *ibid.*, 42–4.

⁴⁴Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 1:65.

⁴⁵See Graham J. O'Brien, "Perfecting Not Perfect: Christology and Pneumatology within an Imperfect Yet Purposeful Creation," *Theology and Science* 7, no. 4 (2009): 409–10, footnote 15. Also see —, "The Story of Our Creation," 158.

⁴⁶—, "A Theology of Purpose," 69–70. For a comprehensive discussion on the emergence of humanity and the unique ability to transcend biological origins, resulting in science and religious imagination, see J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006). For a discussion on human evolution, see Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, 214–43.

⁴⁷Berry, "Adam or Adamah?," 44–8.

⁴⁸C. J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 164.

⁴⁹Berry, "Adam or Adamah?," 33–9.

⁵⁰O'Brien, "Perfecting Not Perfect," 409–10.

Article

What on Earth Is God Doing? Relating Theology and Science through Biblical Theology

⁵¹For a discussion of theodicy and God's response, see O'Brien, "Perfecting not Perfect."

⁵²Also see Berry, "Adam or Adamah?," 39–42.

⁵³O'Brien, "Perfecting Not Perfect," 409–10.

⁵⁴N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (London: SPCK, 2006), 27–8.

⁵⁵The language of "blessing" and "being blessed" here indicates more than receiving some goodness from the hand of God—it indicates the realization of (at least in part) all that is promised in creation. The blessing of the nations through God's covenant with Abraham ties the later covenants to the fulfillment of the great creation project. A significant feature of the writings in Genesis is how the author or redactor has arranged the material to tell the family history of the patriarchs, beginning each section with "This is the family history of ..." See Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 1:xxii.

⁵⁶Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 104.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 106.

⁵⁸Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁵⁹See Berry, "Adam or Adamah?," 35–6, 41. *Homo divinus* is a term borrowed from J. R. Stott and used to describe "the ape that bears the image of God." See Graeme Finlay, "Homo divinus: The Ape That Bears God's Image," *Science and Christian Belief* 15, no. 1 (2003): 17–27.

⁶⁰O'Brien, "A Theology of Purpose," 71–2.

⁶¹The distinction between "ultimate" (activity of God) and "penultimate" (human activity) was made by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith (London: SCM Press, 1971), 98–119; Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Creation and Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, ed. Gilbert Meilaender and William Werpehowski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7–9.

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