


Whence then the mystery of God noted in the title of Kirkpatrick's book? While not deploying eschatological notions, the argument tends precisely in that direction: that, in a Pannenbergian sense, any attempt to grasp divine being and action in the world proceeds not least from a posture of faith, one that is open to confirmation (or not) in the end. From this perspective, one might say that Kirkpatrick provides a primordial theory of divine action that is simultaneously also eschatologically and teleologically oriented according to patterns discerned by scriptural traditions of inquiry. The divine character illuminated in such cases is not uncontested, of course, but such contestation is surely what should be expected when attempting to define personhood from agency. The point is that any primordial divine activity is nevertheless fully intelligible only against an eschatological horizon, or according to the overarching telos or design, to use philosophical terminology.

The Mystery and Agency of God is a sustained argument in philosophical theology while *The Entangled Trinity* is fundamentally a theological reflection approached from various angles (methodologically, historically, and scientifically). If the author of the former might urge the latter to consider more personalistic conceptions of divine agency, the latter might suggest to the former that quantum metaphors and analogies might fill out the mysterious character of such divine being and action. Fortress Press is to be commended for facilitating such potential conversations even if it might be pressured by market demands to publish otherwise.

Reviewed by Amos Yong, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA 91182. 

Letter

Concordism vs. Context

In a recent paper (Harry Lee Poe, "The English Bible and the Days of Creation: When Tradition Conflicts with Text," *PSCF* 66, no. 3 [2014]: 130–9), the thesis is advanced that since the days of creation in Genesis 1 do not have a definite article in the original Hebrew, they should be translated not as "the second day," "the third day," and so forth but "a second day," "a third day," et cetera. Poe says that the "absence of the definite article with the days of creation almost certainly means that the days are meant to be understood as not occurring in immediate succession to one another without any intervening time" (p. 137). In fact, Poe argues that, although the days were

probably 24-hour days, the text allows for "an indeterminate time span between days" (p. 130) which could cover the fourteen billion years which modern science assigns to the age of the universe.

Poe's interpretation is thus concordist: there is concord between the Bible and the findings of modern science. I question some of Poe's grammatical points. For instance, almost all of his examples to show that the word "day," when modified by an ordinal, usually takes the Hebrew article, do not seem comparable to Genesis 1, because unlike Genesis 1 they employ a prepositional phrase (usually "on the ordinal day") while, except for the seventh day, Genesis 1 does not employ a prepositional phrase. But my interest is not in refuting Poe per se but rather in using his work as an illustration of how concordism takes verses of Scripture out of context in order to interpret them as agreeing with modern science.

The first relevant contextual datum for the interpretation of the days of Genesis 1 is Genesis 2:3: "Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." This verse, along with the sequence of six days in Genesis 1, ties Genesis 1 to Exodus 20:9, 10: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work ..." This is a commandment that the Israelites had to obey. How long a period of time did they think the six days of labor covered? Is there any real question that they thought those days covered six immediately consecutive 24-hour days? How long and when did the Israelites think God wanted them to do no work? Was it not for the twenty-four hours of the seventh day which immediately followed the six days of labor?

Having set forth this scenario of seven immediately consecutive 24-hour days, Exodus 20:11 continues with an explanation of why the Israelites were commanded to work six days and rest the seventh: "For (meaning because) in six days (which the context has just defined as immediately consecutive days) Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day ..." The ancient Israelites, to whom all this was addressed, had no problem accepting as fact the creation of the universe in six immediately consecutive 24-hour days, but a modern concordist cannot accept this because it is so clearly contrary to the scientific evidence. So, the modern concordist (apparently unconsciously) ignores the biblical context, sets the offensive biblical passage into the context of modern science, and then figures out a way to make the passage agree with (or at least not disagree with) modern science.

Letter

Poe's interpretation of the days of Genesis 1 relies on the fact that the Hebrew grammar per se in Genesis 1 does not exclude the possibility that the days of creation were each separated by an indefinite period of time. Employing these gaps, he brings the Bible and modern science into concord, and the grammar does not forbid his solution. But, the context does. Not only does the context define the days as immediately consecutive, but also, if there were indefinite periods of time between the days, the Israelites, wanting to rest on the seventh day, would have no way of knowing when that day had arrived.

Paul H. Seely
ASA Fellow



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