

CREATION IN THE BIBLICAL TRADITION

by George J. Brooke

Abstract. This paper summarizes the current state of the debates in biblical criticism concerning the nature of Genesis, the genre and setting in life of Genesis 1:1-2:4a, and the reasons for the continuing significance of creation motifs in the biblical period. In identifying creation as a vital part of the traditions associated variously with the cult, with wisdom, and with prophecy (even in its later scribal and eschatological forms), Genesis 1:1-2:4a is seen to be the necessary description of how the particularity of Israel is dependent on God, of how humanity is privileged, and of how hope is tinged with judgment.

Keywords: Genesis creation accounts; hope; human privilege; intertestamental literature; kingship of God; Old and New Testament traditions.

In the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *The Pirates of Penzance*, written in 1879, the nineteenth-century polymath claims:

Then I can write a washing bill in Babylonian cuneiform,
And tell you every detail of Caractacus's uniform;
In short in matters vegetable and animal and mineral
I am the very model of a modern major-general.

The major-general's expertise in Babylonian script points to one of the major stimulants in the late nineteenth century to the analysis of the biblical creation accounts: three years before, in 1876, George Smith had published the Babylonian account of creation (Smith 1876). The major-general also shows that higher criticism is to be aligned with many of last century's developmental assumptions which were leading to a radical recategorization of the natural world. Thus, inasmuch as this paper stands in the tradition of investigation largely framed by the nineteenth-century masters of biblical criticism, whose work still retains much validity, it is *naturally* biased against what might be carica-

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tured as the approach of the creationists, whose starting point is often the indisputable assertion of the Bible's authority as the revealed Word of God. Put simply, it is certainly the case that biblical scholars over the past one hundred and fifty years have been greatly concerned with asking empirical questions of the biblical texts.

In relation to the creation accounts these questions were initially provoked from three directions. The natural sciences with their supposed objectivity offered an obvious challenge to unquestioned assumptions. In some measure part of the response to that challenge proved just as provocative: the search for objective ancient data to support the veracity of the biblical accounts resulted in archaeological discoveries, especially ancient nonbiblical texts, which showed that Israel was not alone in formulating accounts of the origins of things. Furthermore, close observation of the pentateuchal and prophetic texts disclosed them to be made up of literary strata as complicated as any geological ones. The natural sciences, archaeological evidence, and literary study combined to disassemble widely accepted views concerning the distinctiveness of Israel and the unity of the Mosaic testimony. From the outset this scholarly disassembly was reckoned by some on dogmatic grounds to be mere dissemblance, a hypocritical betrayal of true faith.

It is important to see biblical criticism emerging out of the nineteenth century as fragmentary. Not only were the old monoliths of its study now broken, but biblical studies itself became a fragmented discipline. It was increasingly impossible to be a specialist in biblical studies; rather, some scholars specialized in ancient Near Eastern languages or comparative philology, some in archaeology, others in text criticism or literary criticism, that is, source criticism, and so on. No one could be a master of all these specialties, and few could hold the diversity together at all. From the inside the growing scholarly interdependence was invigorating, but from the outside it looked like a great conspiracy. Perhaps this specialization in the universities is still the major factor responsible for distancing the scholar from the unread believer in the pew, a split which to some extent lies behind the gap between those who might be characterized as the thinking and nonthinking theologians of today.

Fragmentation of knowledge was soon matched by a variety of attempts to hold the whole together. Several Old and New Testament scholars tried the unitive task of reassembling the pieces and discerning a common thread; for the most part these scholars were from Germany or the United States (where the German influence in biblical studies is still strongest). Once the presuppositions of these biblical theologians had been exposed, along with their inability to account for all the

evidence on the basis of any one theological concept or system, then it became apparent that biblical theology was not the necessary goal of biblical studies. In fact it is fair to say that now we are almost beyond the need to ask unitive theological questions, let alone the need to answer them.

As a result it is no longer possible for a biblical scholar to write in relation to creation that the biblical view, or even the Old or New Testament view (singular) is such and such. Of course, that is not to say that there is no longer any contribution the Bible or the modern biblical scholar can make; rather it is to assert that the significance of the biblical contribution will rest in the validity of the questions which are asked of the biblical text. In the last few years biblical studies has become increasingly methodologically self-conscious and significantly interdisciplinary in approach. Not only must the student of the Bible face the challenge of the traditional critical methods (text, source, form, and redaction criticism, and the study of the history of traditions), but also he or she must now face the relevant insights of linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, economic and political theory, structuralism, literary criticism, and so on. Further, each of these disciplines contains a variety of approaches. Thus, the problem for the biblical critic is defining the validity of the questions asked of the text; the critic's initial task is to assemble a set of criteria for assessing the validity of questions asked of the text.

With this methodological preamble in mind we can now discuss some aspects of the book of Genesis, especially Genesis 1:1-2:4a. This text at the start of Genesis is commonly known as the Priestly creation account on the basis of the analysis of the Pentateuch including Genesis into sources which have then been attributed to particular schools or individual authors. In this way the creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:4a is distinguished from the creation material in 2:4b-25. The editing of the Pentateuch as a whole, including the final organization of the opening section, Genesis 1:1-2:4a, is generally attributed to a group with particular priestly and cultic concerns, hence the label P. To begin with Genesis 1:1-2:4a when considering creation is to risk falling into the trap of the motorist who asked a local for directions only to receive the reply, "If you want to get there, I wouldn't start from here." However, since most creationist writing seems to jump in with Genesis 1, that is where the majority of what I shall discuss shall be based. In the rest of this paper I shall ask of the Priestly creation account four empirical questions which I regard as valid, almost self-evidently so; then I will briefly suggest a set of criteria which might be used for assessing the validity of this or any other approach; in conclusion I will try to describe what claim the Priestly creation account, or even more loosely the motif of creation, might still make on us.

EMPIRICAL QUESTIONS

What is Genesis? The first question is as basic as it is bold: "What is Genesis?" The answer can be similarly straightforward: "It is literature." This answer calls for comments concerning traditional literary critical hypotheses, the recent discussion of Genesis as literature and other studies of the final form of the text, the comparative literature of the ancient Near East, and the ambiguity of literalism.

Over the last one hundred years the literary critical hypothesis associated often with the names of Karl Heinrich Graf and Julius Wellhausen has been tuned finely. It is no longer popular to identify precisely four sources in the Pentateuch; in fact, a separately identifiable Elohist source (labelled E because of its consistent use of the Hebrew *Elohim* for God) has few supporters today. Furthermore, there is a much greater appreciation now of the subtleties of literary redaction. Nevertheless, Claus Westerman in his great commentary (1984) talks of J (the Yahwist source) and P as if they were old friends, and a similar assumption is to be found in the more recent work of George Coats (1983) and Bernhard Anderson (1977; 1984).¹ The tendency in source analysis has been to split up the text and distinguish various strands of tradition, and to pay very great attention to details as they might betray the source to the careful reader. The achievement of all this is attractive to many because it is illuminating, but it can become forced. In relation to the Priestly creation story Anderson has argued convincingly from internal stylistic evidence that it is no longer possible to split that story itself into sources; it is a coherent whole (1977, 151, 162).

Indeed neither are Westermann and Coats satisfied with simple repetition of earlier distinctions; their work is to be seen as part of a wider movement to respect the final form of the text. This movement has several facets. Over twenty years ago Edwin Good proposed that the biblical narratives should be read first as literature; the significance of his work can be seen in that it has recently been reissued ([1965] 1981). Good offered some tantalizing glimpses of the dramatic irony of Genesis 1-3 ([1965] 1981, 81-84):² sidestepping the issue of sources, he pointed to the ironic juxtaposition of the sin and failure of man with the "very good" creation; divinely ordained to rule and work in Eden, male and female misrule and deny their servitude. Also, there are details of punctiliar irony: puns are most obvious—the primal couple's nakedness (*'ārûmîm*; 2:25) and the serpent's subtlety (*'ārûm*; 3:1), Man (*'ādām*) and soil (*'ādāmāh*) of which he is made. The puns had been noticed many times before, but the way the subjects punned were turned against one another in the story was highlighted by Good.

Robert Alter's book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981), is now most influential in this approach, although he has been anticipated in most respects by biblical scholars themselves. For the Priestly creation account Alter points to P's paratactic prose, his incremental repetition, and his stylistic and conceptual symmetry of "binary oppositions," inclusion, and balance. For Alter "P's narrative emphasizes both orderly sequence and a kind of vertical perspective from God above all things down to the world he is creating" (1981, 142). Stylistic analysis of this sort leads to theological possibilities, and for some that might be sufficient.

Yet that kind of literary approach is put into a proper context by those who are concerned to treat the final form of the text and the literary unity of the whole. Alongside the "Bible as Literature" school has developed a series of redactional studies concerned to anchor the stylistic appreciation of the text within the bounds of the original intention of the editor of the literature. For example, Westermann is concerned to demonstrate how the whole of Genesis 1-11 must be considered first as a delicate intertwining of narrative and numerative material, before any unit of it can be properly understood (1984, 1-73).³ More broadly Coats argues that indeed the primeval history (Gen. 1-11) must be seen as a unit, but initially it must be understood as a subsidiary part of the whole of Genesis whose *tôlédôt* formulae⁴ are the most obvious example of an overall editing that intends to show that the history of the patriarchs is determined by and determines in turn how the primeval history itself is to be read (1983, 13-39). More widely still others want to describe the overall theme of the Pentateuch. For example, David Clines argues that the whole Pentateuch is about the partial fulfilment or nonfulfilment of the promise to or blessing of the patriarchs: "The promise or blessing is both the divine initiative in a world where human initiatives always lead to disaster and a reaffirmation of the primal divine intentions for man" (1978, 29).⁵ It is easy to see how Genesis 1-3 fits this idea.

Two other redactional approaches are also of note. Anderson has argued that, although the Priestly creation account needs to be interpreted within the whole Priestly work, such consideration reinforces the need to see it as different from, not similar to, what follows, not history but proto-history, the realm of mystery (1984, 14-18). Brevard Childs, whose canonical approach may still need some refinement, brings something of this diversity together: "The canonical role of Genesis 1-11 testifies to the priority of creation. The divine relation to the world stems from God's initial creative purpose for the universe, not for Israel alone. Yet Israel's redemptive role in the reconciliation of the nations was purposed from the beginning and subsumed within the

eschatological framework of the book" of Genesis (1979, 155). In any case, while detailed study of particular units of Genesis continues to flourish, there is also wide insistence on the need to discuss the final form of the text either as literature in its own right or as literature expressive of some editor's deliberate intention.

To assert that Genesis is literature is also to align it with other ancient Near Eastern literature of a similar kind. Indeed many scholars have pointed to the widespread parallels that exist not just in texts from Mesopotamia, but also in those from Egypt, Canaan, and even Greece.⁶ When Hermann Gunkel wrote on *Creation and Chaos* (1895), he argued for the literary dependence of the Genesis narrative on Babylonian sources. In mentioning Near Eastern texts in relation to this first empirical question (what is Genesis?) my purpose is solely to draw attention to the fact that few argue today for any direct literary dependence. Indeed, although certain details, even phrases, may best be accounted for by reference to an ancient parallel, Westermann for one argues that the predominant motifs of Genesis 1-11 (life, death, crime, punishment, etc.) can be found so widely in cultures of all kinds and locations (he especially notes African tribal religions) that it is not appropriate to argue for any one literary source for Genesis 1 (1984, 26-47). Although one can detect an element of German romanticism in this definition of the universal literary expression of humanity's deepest questionings, this approach enables us to make room once again for the idea that there is something distinctive about Israel's expressions of these questionings. Indeed much of the detailed study of ancient parallels has been concerned to do just that.

Finally, under this heading let me make a comment about literalism. Few of any persuasion would argue for every detail in the Genesis accounts to be taken literally, but it is to be noted that where there is a tendency in that direction there is assumed to be a measure of security from the attacks of neo-Darwinianism. In fact, without supportive doctrines of special creation literalism can lead in just the opposite direction.

A little-noticed book makes the point well. In his posthumously published *New Light on Genesis* (1978, 21-28) William Todd argued that the details of the creation accounts must have literal referents. Thus, he described the seasonal life in Mesopotamia in great detail and argues persuasively that Genesis 1 describes accurately the annual appearance of the dry land after its inundation, and then the rapid growth of vegetation and the masses of aquatic life, both fowl and fish. That is what the desert nomads would see and recognize when coming from the dusty hills of their adamic origin. Here is no cosmic creation but a writer recounting what he sees for the instruction of his fellows. Todd's

account is far from atheistic and his geographical comments may well be pertinent; in fairness to P they cannot stand by themselves as sufficient interpretation of the text, for that must be seen in its Israelite exilic and post-exilic context of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E.

What kind of literature? The second basic question to be asked of Genesis, particularly the Priestly creation account, is "If it is literature with a particular author and purpose, then what kind of literature is it?" The determination of literary genres is assumed by most literate people most of the time; however, when the debate is heated, it is necessary to be precise lest we miss the writer's point, for genre and intention often go hand in hand.

Under this heading a few comments about myth are in order. John Rogerson's excellent study *Myth in the Old Testament* (1974) is indispensable, particularly in his criticisms and appreciation of Westermann. Much of his main conclusion, that there are at least twelve definitions of *myth* which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, is summed up by him in a subsequent article (1978). First, *myth* is a term used to imply lack of rationality, in modern terms a defective understanding of scientific causes, in ancient ones the opposite of *logos* or truth. Second, it can be used to describe the deepest creative potentialities of humanity; myths express profound truths about human experience that require symbolic interpretation. Myths so defined assume the objective validity of the truths (namely, God) apart from the myth. Third, *myth* can be used to refer to products of society which embody common values and ideals and express them in activities such as worship; the "Myth and Ritual" school of the earlier part of this century would assign Genesis 1 here. Fourth, *myth* can be defined as in harmony with history, even to history's advantage: if God is at work in the historical process, it will be necessary to present history in mythical ways. Which one of these four definitions is now most suitable for Genesis 1:1-2:4a?

Westermann argues about genre from form and content (1984, 26-41). He proposes that there are four kinds of creation: first, creation by birth or by a succession of births, implied for Genesis 1 in the language encapsulated in the *tôlédôt* formula in 2:4a ("These are the generations"); second, creation as a result of a struggle or victory as in the struggle between Marduk and Tiamat in *Enuma Elish*, but which, argues Westermann on Sumerian evidence, was originally separate from creation motifs; third, creation by an action or activity, most obviously the act of separation or division and the creation of people by forming them out of clay; and fourth, creation through word, which for Israel is best explained by reference to Israel's own prophetic tradition rather than from any ancient Near Eastern (especially Egyptian) parallels.

For Westermann Genesis 1:1-2:4a is a narrative whose content shows almost nothing of struggle-type creation (except the faintest echo in Gen. 1:2), very little of generative creation (especially since there is no mention of the birth of the gods), something of creating by making, effecting by division, and most of creation by word. If that describes its content, its form is a clear adjustment of eight acts into six days, two sets of three parallel days, days five and six also having climactic blessings. The six days are followed by a seventh whose concern is God's rest; God is thus included in the created order and shown to be active in time and place as he is in the rest of Israel's history. For Westermann myth is not an apt classification of Genesis 1, although he might agree with something of Rogerson's fourth category.

Coats has helped the discussion forward. He states bluntly that, "if ancient Near Eastern myths lie behind this unit, it is nonetheless clear that the unit is no longer myth" (1983, 47).⁷ Neither for Coats is it a tale with a plot and resolution of crisis; rather the enumeration of days suggests that the unit has more in common with genealogy, even hymns or wisdom literature. The world view it teaches is in the form of history, not formal history-writing so much as teaching dressed in event. Coats concludes that 1:1-2:4a is a "report" (*Bericht*), a genre that communicates events for the sake of the communication not for the sake of the events. "As a report, the unit can communicate its teaching (about the Sabbath) in terms of event (the first Sabbath) and relate all subsequent events to the power of its position. All orders of creation derive from God. All events of creation derive from this primary event" (Coats 1983, 47). Although a report casts the events it reports as history, it does not guarantee the validity of its reporting.

To sum up for this second empirical question (what kind of literature?): first, discussion of the generic definition depends upon taking Genesis 1:1-2:4a as part of the whole of Genesis, especially chapters 1-11; it must not be classified on the basis of some hypothetical reconstruction of it into sources. Therefore, second, the argument is not to be with the scientists but with mythology, which, Westermann and Coats and others argue, Genesis (or P at least) demythologizes. Third, if we introduce the category of history, we are faced with the old problem that, while English has only one word for history, German has two; and, if Genesis 1:1-2:4a is genealogical history writing in the form of a report, then it is *Geschichte* (history narrated for its continuing significance) and not *Historie* (the straightforward narration of past events for their own sake). Fourth, we are faced with a kind of history writing that attempts to explain the writer's present experiences without suggesting the need to verify the historicity of the description; as such we need to know the historical setting of the writer for our better understanding of his purposes.

What setting in life gives rise to this kind of literature? This third empirical question is suggested, if not required, by the generic classification of the Priestly creation report. It is difficult to be very precise in answering this question, but it is at least plain that no unit of text, no author, belongs in a vacuum, in isolation. So the broader history of Israel and especially the history of Israelite traditions will provide some clues.

A cursory glance at the writings of the Hebrew Bible which a scholarly consensus would date as approximately contemporaneous with the redaction of the Pentateuch (sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E.) shows that there are three main carriers of creation traditions. First, there are the cultic texts. P himself may be the most obvious example of these, but many psalms (which are notoriously difficult to date) are in praise of God the creator and often associate creation with the history of Israel, thus universalizing that history's significance. These cultic poems may reflect a variety of understandings of creation used and worked out over several centuries in association with pre-monarchic covenantal theology (deriving from the twelfth and eleventh centuries B.C.E.) or royal self-assertion (e.g., Ps. 89; ninth to seventh centuries B.C.E.) or basic liturgical celebration (e.g., Ps. 104), but in the early post-exilic period (late sixth century B.C.E.) they give us one likely setting for the use of creation traditions. Though reflecting some elements of other Canaanite cultic literature and practice, these psalms do not seem to use creation as the basis for its reenactment in some unknown Israelite New Year festival such as we know took place in association with the struggle type of creation in other ancient Near Eastern cults. Rather, the lack of reenactment demonstrates how seriously the Israelite cult in the post-exilic period took the once-for-all stress of its creation traditions, which is also represented for us by the way in which P sets his account as the overture for Israel's history.

A second kind of literature that uses and reflects upon traditions concerning creation is the wisdom writings. In Job God's final answer (40:6-41:34) to the questioning Job is a condemnation of human self-righteousness backed up with the argument from the created order: "Behold Behemoth which I made as I made you" (40:15). In the Book of Proverbs Wisdom herself declares her significance and authority: "The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth" (8:22-23). Consequently she can declare, "He who finds me, finds life and obtains favor from the Lord; but he who misses me injures himself; all who hate me love death" (8:35-36)—a clear parallel to Genesis 2-3.

These two literary traditions reflect the two settings most popular among scholars for describing the medium in which the Genesis creation accounts developed and came to their present expression. On the

one hand there is the cult; the interest in blessing and Sabbath reflect this. Yet, let it be noted that Coats raises the question: "The mythological antecedents were preserved and celebrated in the cult but this text (Gen. 1:1-2:4a) shows some interest in breaking those images. Would the change in genre not mean a change in setting as well?" (Coats 1983, 47). Thus, on the other hand the pre-exilic royal court with its wisdom traditions may be a possible setting whose lack P reflects on after its demise. After all the man in Genesis 2:4b-3:24 and in 1:27-28 as image of God is the royal humanity: they have dominion over creation but fail to live up to their calling. Perhaps the J and P accounts both function in their own times (ninth? and sixth centuries B.C.E. respectively) as checks on royal authority, as challenges to monarchical self-assertion, as reminders of the democratic basis of the source of all dominion in God.

Yet there is a third type of exilic and post-exilic literature that uses creation traditions. The prophetic oracles of salvation in Isaiah 40-55, the text that uses *bārā*' ("create") as frequently as the P tradition in the Pentateuch, declares that the redemptive work of God, for which the Exodus is a type, is to be understood in the light of creation. The end of the exile is guaranteed by the Creator, and the act of creation is the determining factor of Israel's history which is yet to come. Creation and Exodus distinguish Israel's God from the idols of the nations; here is another reassertion of the monotheism enshrined in earlier covenants.

This prophetic creation tradition is not a feature of Israelite religion that emerges solely as the exiles in the sixth century B.C.E. rub shoulders with their Babylonian captors, although that may have had a crystallizing effect. Creation material is used against both court and temple in earlier traditions: "Thus says the Lord who gives the sun for light by day, and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the Lord of hosts is his name: 'If this fixed order departs from before me,' says the Lord, 'then shall the descendants of Israel cease from being a nation before me for ever'" (Jer. 31:35-36). This is part of an oracle against the house of Israel and the house of Judah whose context suggests the rebuilding of Jerusalem (a Zion tradition). Other examples of this prophetic use of creation could be cited (e.g., Isa. 11:6-9, 35:5-10; Jer. 4:23-26), but it is frustrating how frequently creation motifs do not prevent a psalm from being given an early pre-exilic date; yet, find such a tradition in a pre-exilic prophet and immediately the proposal is that it is later additional material: the doxologies in Amos are the classic examples of this.⁸ At the least it seems as if creation traditions in prophetic literature are associated particularly with oracles of judgment that leads to salvation. More broadly, Westermann calls upon the prophetic "Thus says the Lord" tradition to explain the type of creation that is creation by word, the predominant type in Genesis 1:1-2:4a.

If these three lines of tradition can be proposed as settings for the traditions which emerge in more explicit form in the exilic and post-exilic period (from the sixth century B.C.E. onward), then it is clear that they are intertwined. The prophets criticize the cult and the monarchy, the cult and the monarchy are interdependent yet somewhat in tension with one another, and each is also self-critical as the J account suggests for the court and the Levitical desire for right order in worship suggests for the cult; indeed the earlier layers of tradition in Leviticus reflect a desire within the cult for an order which with its laws of purity (the separation of clean and unclean) attempts to keep the worship of God in harmony with the natural order without resorting to pantheism.

In answer to the question "What gives rise to this kind of literature?" (referring to Gen. 1:1-2:4a) the point is this. The author writes as the heir of a number of traditions each with its own history of self-expression which can be traced only vaguely. He writes also in reaction against non-Israelite traditions focused in particular aspects of his actual historical experiences. He writes not just with the concern to pass on the tradition intact but with the deliberate intention of shaping the traditions to address his particular concerns. The historical setting of P in the late sixth or early fifth centuries B.C.E. helps us to locate the generalities which can now be stated as his purpose. He intends to proclaim the veracity of God's plans for Israel; in the reordering of Israelite society there is salvation and in its acknowledgment of God's sovereignty there is blessing. To paraphrase Coats's excellent summary: all things originate in God who is the measure of all events. Genesis 1:1-2:4a is a report that demythologizes both the world and its history. By suggesting that the beginning is important to each successive generation, it subordinates the origin of the created order to God's history of the people and so protects the mystery of creation from the abuse that civilization might foist upon it. In such protection the unit of text "facilitates human praise of God as the Lord of Creation" (Coats 1983, 48).

What causes the continuing significance of this kind of literature? The fourth empirical question concerns the continuing significance of creation traditions, especially Genesis 1:1-2:4a. The author or editor or school of redactors labelled P were heirs of a diversity of traditions which they distinctively reshaped in the early post-exilic period. It is important to remember that, while the canonical position of Genesis 1 suggests that in some way it is normative, nevertheless post-exilic Judaism retained a diversity of opinion about the relevance and meaning of the creation material. Indeed this can be recognized in Genesis itself where the final redactor has not eradicated the earlier J account

but has let it stand next to Genesis 1:1-2:4a, both complementing and questioning it.

In the post-exilic period the traditions of the cult, of wisdom, and of prophecy continue; and in reaction to new historical situations and especially as the influences of the East (from the ancient texts to Zoroastrianism) and of the West (in the form of the Hellenistic cultural revolution) were increasingly felt, they became more explicitly diverse. We must doubt whether Judaism was ever a uniform set of beliefs or a monolithic code of practice or even a stereotyped way of worship.

For example, in the Second Temple period the final redactor of the Pentateuch no doubt for the most part represented part of the establishment viewpoint of the hierarchy in Jerusalem (cf., e.g., 1 Chron. 29:10-19); even that contained wisely the variant opinions of earlier generations in complementary tension. However, there seem to have been from earliest post-exilic times (in fact, even before that, if one wants to posit a continuum of disaffection among priests from the Deuteronomic reforms of Josiah onward) various disillusioned priests who to some extent disenfranchised themselves because of the views they took. Most obviously this disaffection is seen in the development of Ezekiel's prophetic priesthood: it is visionary, apocalyptic, though not necessarily eschatological; it claims through certain individuals to have access to heaven and thereby to know the meaning of creation through the knowledge revealed to it. The best witnesses to this viewpoint are the early chapters of 1 Enoch, but it reappears in Jubilees and in the Qumran writings, all of which share a solar calendar. There is a tendency in this tradition to remythologize creation; there is an interest in angels as mediators, in fallen angels to explain the problem of evil; astrology, astronomy, and numerology also play a part which led Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 15:371) to classify the Essenes as akin to the Pythagoreans. In general for these people the Temple and its cult are intended to be the very image of heaven itself, a true microcosm,⁹ but the Temple's current occupants were considered perverse.

In the New Testament these cultic traditions may well give us a better understanding of the creation motifs associated with Zion (and no Temple!) in the concluding chapters of Revelation. Likewise this minority cultic tradition may also explain much of the way Jesus' ministry in the Fourth Gospel is a demonstration of how through glory (death and exaltation) he replaces the Temple and its cult. Furthermore, the Son's eternal priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek in the Epistle to the Hebrews is one example of how Christ is superior to the angels (a common feature of this cultic/apocalyptic tradition)—for of him God said, "Thou Lord didst found the earth in the beginning and the heavens are the works of thy hands; they will

perish, but thou remainest . . ." (Heb. 1:10-11a; Ps. 102:25-26); or again, "God has spoken to us [prophetic creation by word] by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Heb. 1:2). In its adjustment of some of the traditional aspects of the cult, Hebrews appears to some extent as that tradition's own critique. At Qumran, in early Christianity, and in the developing Enoch traditions this apocalypticism became eschatological: there is to be a new creation which will be the cause and subject of the praise of God.

In the wisdom traditions there is a similar diversity. While Job's consideration of the problem of evil is silenced by God the creator, almost as if the problem of theodicy is part and parcel of monotheism, the author of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher, remains skeptical: "Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked?" (7:13). Against such recognition that things are not what they seem can be set something like the Song of Songs, which is as vivid as if a television camera had just been filming Adam and Eve in Eden. The description of the lovers in the Song of Songs is very close to that of Wisdom in Ben Sira 24:13-21; also, though full of practical advice, Ben Sira extols Wisdom as the one who "came forth from the mouth of the Most High and covered the earth like a mist (24:3; cf. Gen. 1:2) but whose universal significance is made particular in her tabernacling with Israel (24:8). With this clear reflection on Priestly creation material it is not surprising to find Ben Sira also extolling Simon the High Priest (chap. 50), again in language reminiscent of creation traditions.

In the Egyptian diaspora the wisdom traditions of Israel interacted most intricately with the speculative, metaphysical stance of Hellenism. In describing Wisdom's hand in testing Israel the author of the Wisdom of Solomon reverts to God, "For thy all-powerful hand, which created the world out of formless matter, did not lack the means to send upon them a multitude of bears . . ." (11:17). Here is a first glimpse of the doctrinal inclination of later generations towards *creatio ex nihilo*. Whereas the P account is most likely to be read in the light of Near Eastern parallels as speaking of "when that which is now was not yet" (to paraphrase a common formula in ancient creation accounts),¹⁰ here in the Wisdom of Solomon and in 2 Maccabees 7:28 are hints of the philosophical way of preserving the unity and distinctiveness of a God who is nevertheless involved in some way with his creation. In 2 Maccabees 7:28 a mother pleads with her son that he should let himself be martyred for the faith: "I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed."

The most conspicuous synthesis of Jewish wisdom traditions with Greek philosophical speculation is in the writings of Philo; he deliber-

ately attempted to put the Pentateuch into a Hellenistic framework. In *De Opificiis Mundi* there is a very definite statement that Genesis 1 is first about God: "He (Moses) says that in six days the world was created, not that its Maker required a length of time for his work, for we must think of God as doing all things simultaneously, remembering that 'all' includes with the commands which he issues, the thought behind them"¹¹—no support for a day-age theory here! Philo is eclectic: he has a Pythagorean interest in the numerology of creation, under the influence of Platonism he describes Man in Genesis 1 as ideal and intelligible, and in Genesis 2 his view of Man is more in line with Stoic thought and ethics. Thomas Tobin has recently argued that it is Platonism that wins in Philo's doctrine of Man (Tobin 1983). Yet Philo's Jewishness should not be forgotten, for while Philo's depiction of Man echoes various Greek traditions, his depiction of the Logos is a mixture of Platonic ideal and the figure of Wisdom, the latter particularly in her mediatorial role.

Again, this diversity of tradition is reflected in the New Testament. Clearly Philo's Logos shares much with the Christological treatment of Genesis 1 in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, although we need not press for any direct literary dependence of that passage on Philo. The universally significant Logos also makes his particular dwelling (tent/tabernacle reflected in the verb in Jn. 1:14) with a certain people in a way similar to Wisdom in Ben Sira 24. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus is also identified with Wisdom, though not explicitly in relation to creation unless in the motif of restoration (eschatological re-creation and blessing) in Matthew 11:5-6: "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear . . . and blessed is he who takes no offense at me." Matthew's use of wisdom traditions echoes that of Ben Sira, practical with cultic overtones.¹² Paul also talks of Wisdom as the expression of God's purposes demonstrated in the folly of the cross (1 Cor. 1) available as the basis of a worthy life for the believer (Col. 1:9-10); here is intriguing speculation with ethical consequences. Paul also has a cosmic dimension to his understanding of Christ; yet, his more explicit use of creation language (e.g., Rom. 8:22; 2 Cor. 5:16-19) takes us towards the third set of traditions in which, in the New Testament, the eschatological consequences of the work of God in Christ are related to the new life of the believer.

As to the third area of tradition, the prophetic, the Second Temple period sees at least two developments. First, there emerges a scribal tradition which, when creative, is in search not of laws or oracles of doom but of the fulfilment of earlier prophecy. To this scribal tradition belongs Josephus. Writing shortly after the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., he knew that, if he were to tell the history of Israel to explain the

destruction of the Temple, he must start with creation. Here he stood true to the intentions of the redactors of the Pentateuch: the particular significance of Israel can only be properly understood in the context of all things and events being recognized as dependent on God. Perhaps influenced by Roman historians Josephus could not resist filling in the gaps somewhat tediously, providing motives for the behavior of the various characters, ensuring that Adam and Even had daughters in time for Cain and Abel to have wives, and so on. His description of the events of Genesis 1 is influenced by Philo, but he nevertheless keeps close to the tradition of P. For example, he depicts no *creatio ex nihilo*: “the earth had not come into sight, but was hidden in thick darkness, and a breath from above sped over it, when God commanded that there should be light.”¹³

Again, this tradition of starting at the beginning when engaging upon a task that to us sometimes looks like history writing can be seen in the New Testament. Both Matthew and Luke contain genealogies, Matthew properly at the start, Luke after his infancy narratives and Jesus’ baptism. Luke, true to his own tendency to universalize, is also true to the model of Genesis and so traces Jesus’ lineage back to Adam.

Apart from what might be labelled the scribal tradition, the prophetic fulfilment motif occurs in eschatological texts. Although I have already mentioned Revelation’s creation material under the cultic tradition, it also belongs here as the counterpart to Ezekiel’s prophecies (Goulder 1981, 342-67); and it describes unforgettably the new creation—language of origins not for the sake of living in the past but to express hope. In the eschatological discourse in Mark 13 there is a gloomier fulfilment: “In those days after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with power and great glory. And then he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of earth to the ends of heaven” (Mk. 13:24-27). Here is the eschatological reversal of creation, “heaven and earth will pass away” (Mk. 13:31), and all this is in answer to the disciples’ wondering about the *Temple’s* magnificence (Mk. 13:1-3). In 1 Enoch too the vision of heaven soon turns to judgment, just as it does also in Genesis, but not totally without hope for the elect or the faithful.

These three intertwining traditions, the cult, wisdom, and prophecy, even in the New Testament with the expected Christological adjustments, show that there is more than one way to read Genesis. The questions the ancients asked of the traditions of creation (often explicitly Genesis 1) arose very much out of a combination of their own historical experiences with an appreciation of the traditions of creation

that did not completely deny those traditions. Although *the* biblical doctrine of creation cannot be given, nevertheless certain motifs recur in various guises throughout these three traditions. The combination of these motifs may fairly be designated "creation in the biblical tradition"; maybe these motifs are the reason for the continuing significance for us of creation traditions, especially Genesis 1.

First, the whole doctrine of God is at stake. To focus on the cultic tradition is to see that, on the one hand, it is tempting to claim that God is on the side of order (Job did that too), order which should be mirrored and sustained by correct cultic practice, especially Sabbath rest. However, on the other hand, God stands above both order *and* chaos; God is the referee rather than or as much as he is a contestant.¹⁴ If the cult lapses into mere preservation of the status quo, the vision of heaven and of God's purposes, particularly his eschatological ones, is presented to prevent idolatry. Monotheism somehow needs to be about the protection of the mystery of the creator through praise; God then draws near to redeem and sustain his creation.

Second, there is the privilege of humanity. To focus on the wisdom tradition is to see that humanity is summoned to pursue Wisdom because humanity is assumed to be capable of sharing Wisdom's universal overview of the world, of standing back from creation and considering the whole, even with a measure of speculation. Yet Wisdom is also practical and down to earth with suggestions for daily living in every particularity, especially the particularity of place. The privilege carries with it the responsibility of exercising dominion over the earth and tilling the garden. With this tradition's concern with such basic issues as life and death, it is not surprising that the modern structuralists, both anthropological (Eliade 1979, 162-65) and literary (Beauchamp 1969; cf. Barton 1984, 122-27), have taken to creation with great voracity.

Third, there is hope tinged with judgment. To focus on the prophetic tradition is to see that humanity is rarely pessimistic enough to deny all meaning and purpose to its experiences. In particular Israel must continuously reconsider her election in light of those experiences, so that frustrated ambitions can be remolded into spiritual aspirations in tune with creation and its eschatological surprise, which the apocalyptists think they know all about. If hope is anticipated now in blessing, it is a share in God's rest only after much travail.

With these three motifs in mind the use of Genesis 1 in various modern theological debates seems quite justified. To begin, the definition of humanity in both P and J is necessary fodder for those engaged in considering the relation of the sexes to one another and to God; it is a pity that Anderson's book (1984) does not contain a chapter on this

topic, although the writing of scholars such as Pieter de Boer (1974), Phyllis Trible (1978, 12-23), and Mary Evans (1983, 11-21) already stands us in good stead. More specifically, if mediation and holding things together are a sufficient definition of priesthood, then discussion of the image of God may well be relevant to the debates concerning the ordination of women in both Judaism and several Christian denominations. Next, humanity's dominion and co-responsibility for the created order is a secure principle upon which the ecological debate can be based. However, despite the work of Odil Steck (1970; [1975] 1981; 1980), Gerhard Liedke (1979), Gerhard Friedrich (1982, 9-28), and Anderson (1984, 152-69), among others, little can be said of ecological practice: how is humanity to get back in favor with the animals? should we all ideally be vegetarians? Further, the repeated connection between creation and redemption also gives grounds for following George Landes's suggestion (1978) and including discussion of creation traditions within the framework of the liberationist theology. Finally, how does the creationist controversy look in light of the various traditions and motifs related to the reading of Genesis 1?

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING THE VALIDITY OF QUESTIONS ASKED OF GENESIS

In relation to creationism, one is tempted to suggest a set of criteria for assessing the validity of questions that can be asked of the Genesis creation accounts. These criteria may also be applied to the answers given those questions. Before briefly attempting this task it is necessary to acknowledge that insight into the meaning and significance of a text does not necessarily depend on correctness of method or even upon intellectual ability; Clarence Snelling has even tried to justify different interpretations of Genesis 2-3 on the grounds of the differing cognitive levels of the text's readers (1980, 149-55). Here are six criteria.

First, it seems only fair that some attempt should be made to understand the text as an object of the past in its broader and narrower historical and literary contexts, and to perceive that, as written, the text represents a moment, or several moments, in the continuous interaction of traditions. Though geared for particular conclusions, at least Henri Blocher is to be commended for his public witness to the need to look at what the text meant (1984, 15-38). Furthermore, if one holds to a belief that God acts in history, then there may well be some significance in past events in themselves, especially the circumstances surrounding the ancient authors; not everything is to be rewritten existentially for us.

Second, it also seems right that the modern person should acknowledge that, although ancient texts sometimes seem to speak with im-

mediacy, there is nevertheless a gap between the reader and the text. Perhaps the desire to squeeze Genesis 1 into a previously conceived metaphysics or system of doctrine is an example of how an issue can be more on one side of the interpretative dialogue than a common cause between text and interpreter (McEvenue 1984, 332). To bridge this hermeneutical gap is the interpreter's task, and several different methods may be required to release the meaning of the text in a satisfying way. A multiplicity of methodologies can indeed reveal much; however, it can also conceal much. Thus, it is worthwhile for the interpreter to step back from any one approach to the creation material to ask for the identity of the issue that is giving rise to the questions that are being asked of the text. To jump to an answer without an appreciation of the nature of the question is immature. My concern in this paper is with meaning, not self-defense.

Third, to help expose the interpreter's predispositions in approaching the text it is a valuable exercise for the interpreter to acknowledge the tradition in which he or she stands. This honesty puts any absolute claims about a text into a healthy perspective and enables interpreters to enter into dialogue with one another as well as with the text. For me this means that Westerners should see beyond any naive association of literalism and inspiration; they should fully acknowledge and negotiate with the history of Western scholarship. Yet to read about the scholarly debate in Nigel Cameron's latest book (1983), for example, is to step back into the late nineteenth century.

Fourth, in order to put into perspective any interpretation of what to many are authoritative texts, that very authority and normativeness needs to be debated. The canon of texts is not so much a stuffed animal as a living example of how theological reflection might be undertaken. The authority of a text does not rest in the text of itself; "I believe in the Bible" is not a recognized credal statement. A look at the use of creation traditions in texts of the Second Temple period (before any text was strictly canonized) shows that from mysticism to law, from history to myth, from cult to court, there was a wide use and enjoyment of creation material, sometimes explicitly in the form of a reconsideration of Genesis 1. For the Christian the New Testament stands as the canonical witness to that diversity. As a result, the relation between the Old and the New Testaments is a more dynamic one than can be restricted in the case of creation to the likelihood that Jesus and Paul thought that Adam and Eve were historical figures (although in using Genesis Jesus was arguing about divorce not history) and that therefore the Christian must view Genesis in a similar historicist way. This historicist viewing of Genesis 1 may be a part of a reconstruction of the use of Genesis material, but it is only a part and not necessarily the most important part.

Fifth, if a certain plurality of approach to the text is to be allowed, then it follows that there is likely to be more than one exclusive interpretation. This pluralism is all the more likely because biblical traditions are complex and varied and religious language is intriguingly symbolic and ambiguous. Plurality of meaning is allowable; but not any meaning. It is as impossible to establish the one true original meaning of a text as it is to argue for only one possible interpretation.

Sixth, the validity of questions asked of the text and of interpretative answers given rests also in matters less tangible: validity is to be seen in the use of common sense with imagination. To argue for common sense: in looking at the creation accounts Steven Brams has wittily and neatly applied modern decision theory to argue that P deliberately describes a God who is rational. God breaks up the job into smaller tasks; after completing each he evaluates the results; as the evaluations are favorable he continues. "God was a rational planner who followed an incremental strategy that did not entail undue risk" (Brams 1980, 12). That reads like a school report, but it is another way of saying that the Priestly creation account is first about God. P gives no reason why God undertook the task in the first place and we supply a reason at our peril, but perhaps he really does describe a God who is rational and acts reasonably. Any interpretation might be at least as rational. To argue for imagination: interpretative questions and answers should give life to the text rather than killing it; they should illuminate the text and encourage honest response in the reader; they should not dictate dogmatically and thereby risk suppressing the reader's own personal integrity.

CONCLUSION

The Priestly creation account speaks of the universal significance of God: all is dependent on him. To praise this God and to recognize his divine sovereignty is to live within his blessing, not in terms of cause and effect but as the expression of the meaning of all things. The account of creation is not simply about order against chaos, but it is a balancing act described in the very structure of the text and hinted at in the significant acts of separation. To put God on the side of order alone is to risk dualism. After all, if everything were perfectly ordered, there would be nothing left for humanity to subdue as it shares in God's dominion (Gen. 1:28).

Humanity is a reflection of God at work, able to be part of that work, yet able to stand back from it and say "it is very good." Humanity is thus able both to formulate a unitive vision of creation and also to act as mediator between the creator and the created order. This is humanity's present distinctiveness, its royal priesthood, and the measure of its

spirituality (Phillips 1983, 12-20). Perhaps this is at the heart of Paul's understanding of Christ as the second Adam whose failure in vocation Christ more than reverses. In Christ are both universal (cosmic) Man and particular Man, a vision restored and God's righteousness towards humanity demonstrated once for all, death and life.

Because of the universality of its referent, creation language provides a set of concepts that enable us to speak about the past, which has its ultimate reference point in God, to speak about the present, that same God at work, rest, and play with humanity in creation now, and to speak about the future, that is, our hope that beyond any divine judgment the ultimate unity of all things rests in God. Creation language nearly always turns the scholar into a preacher.

NOTES

1. Some of Anderson's stylistic remarks are echoed in the work of A. di Marco (1980).
2. This has been further elucidated by A. J. Hauser (1982, 20-36).
3. For further bibliography see Coats (1983, 39).
4. "These are the generations of" Gen. 5:1; 10:1; 11:10; 25:12, 19; 36:1; 37:2.
5. Y. T. Radday, H. Shore, M. A. Pollatschek, and D. Wickman have tried to demonstrate the unity of Genesis through a computer analysis of its style (1982, 467-81), but their argument cannot hold for the whole book since they only consider what they think are prose passages and so exclude Gen. 1:1-2:4a; their work has been justifiably criticized by S. L. Portnoy and D. L. Petersen (1984, 421-25).
6. Comparative materials are available in the collections of S. G. F. Brandon (1963), C. H. Long ([1963] 1983), and J. O'Brien and W. Major (1982).
7. That Gen. demythologizes creation myth is supported by F. R. McCurley (1983, Part 1). Furthermore, P. Gilbert has argued that it was Gunke's stress on *Ursagen*, primordial legends, that pointed towards this understanding of Genesis 1 as other than myth (1979, chap. 18).
8. Amos 4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6. Among those regarding these verses as later additions are W. Rudolph (1971, 183) and J. L. Mays (1969, 83-84); H. W. Wolff (1969, 254-56, 263-65) considers them not original to Amos; among the minority who consider them original to Amos is E. Hammershaimb (1970, 74-75).
9. This point is often adduced as evidence for the cultic setting of Gen. 1:1-2:4a; e.g., recently by M. Weinfeld (1981, 501-12).
10. As discussed by Westermann (1984, 43-46); for Westermann discussion of whether or not P conceived of creation as *ex nihilo* is irrelevant, reflecting a causal way of thinking alien to Gen. 1 (1984, 108-10). Against *creatio ex nihilo* and to be added to Westermann's bibliography on this topic (1984, 75-76) are A. Angerstorfer (1979) and W. Gross (1981, 131-45).
11. *On the Account of the World's Creation by Moses*, Section 13 (Whitaker 1929, 13).
12. Also Matt. 11:18-19, 28-30; 23:34-39; e.g., with Matt. 11:28-30 compare Ben Sira 51:23-30. For further discussion see the work of M. J. Suggs (1970, 31-61).
13. *Jewish Antiquities* 1:27 (Thackeray 1930, 15).
14. Herein lies the significance of A. S. Kapelrud's challenge (1980, 1-11) that the motif of ordering through battle and building is not sufficient to show that there was a myth of a cosmogonic creation at Ugarit. While comparative materials would lead many to dispute Kapelrud's conclusion, he may well be right to distinguish between ordering and creating.

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