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CREATION:

A HERMENEUTICAL STUDY IN GENESIS 1:1 - 2:3

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INTRODUCTION

The Creation Account and the Literary Structure of Genesis

The primary creation story is found in Genesis 1:1-2:3. The account in Genesis 2 is part of a larger unit, Genesis 2:4-4:26 whose beginning is signalled by the formal marker: "These are the generatings of the heavens and the earth . . .". In fact, the book of Genesis (2:4 - 50:26) is divided into eleven literary units, each introduced by this statement. Each unit contains a complex of stories and / or genealogies which represent who or what is generated by the things or person named in the heading. One might paraphrase the heading: "this is the sequel to . . ." or "this is the history that flows from . . ."

The formal structural character of Genesis is important in that it indicates that the writer / editor of the book is carefully and selectively tracing a theme through stories depicting prehistory and the history of Israel's patriarchal forebears. The creation account (Genesis 1:1 - 2:3) must be interpreted with reference to its position and function within the larger framework of the book. Any attempt to isolate it from its context threatens to destroy its meaning and to fracture our understanding of the whole.

The Creation Account *vis a vis* the Creation Accounts of Other Nations

The account of creation (Gen. 1:1 - 2:3) sets out a description of

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God by whose word heaven and earth and everything in them have been called into being. Had Israel not had an understanding of the beginnings of the heavens and the earth she would have been prone to accept the pagan conceptions of the gods and of creation which were represented in the creation accounts of surrounding nations. This was of great significance to Israel because many of the deities of her neighbours were identified with the processes of nature and were seen to dominate different spheres of nature. If Yahweh rather than Baal is to be acclaimed as God of fertility, there must be an explanation of his relation to the natural order. If Yahweh is truly God of *all* men, then there must be a clear indication that he either made all men, or, like Baal or Marduk, gained the ascendancy over the creator-god and rules universally by virtue of his acquired sovereignty.

This approach to Israel's creation account grows out of the awareness of Israel's pagan origin and practices as well as the explicit polemic by her prophets and historians against the pagan conceptions of her neighbours — false conceptions of God, man, worship, justice, kingship, fertility, to name a few — and the resultant practices.

From the patriarchal beginnings, Israel was prone to retain or import pagan thought and practices. Joshua calls attention to Israel's history and association with pagan gods:

Banish the gods whom your fathers worshipped beside the Euphrates and in Egypt and worship the LORD. But if it does not please you to worship the LORD, choose here and now whom you will worship: the gods whom your forefathers worshipped beside the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living Then here and now banish the foreign gods that are among you and turn your hearts to the LORD the God of Israel (Joshua 24:14-24).

One need only mention the teraphim of Laban stolen by Rachel (Gen. 31), the many foreign gods in Jacob's household (Gen. 35), the Egyptian means of divination employed by Joseph (Gen. 44:1-17), the Yahweh-bull identification of Aaron and Israel (Exodus 32), or the fertility cult of Baal-Peor (Num. 24) to realize the relevance of Joshua's demand that Israel reject the religions of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Canaan.

There is little indication in Israel's subsequent history that Israel's oath of devotion of Yahweh, and Yahweh alone, was observed. Israel's desire for a king like that of all other nations is condemned by Yahweh in the words:

They have not rejected you (Samuel), it is I whom they have rejected, I whom they will not have to be their king. They are now doing to you just what they have done to me since I

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brought them up from Egypt: they have forsaken me and worshipped other gods (I Sam. 8:7-8).

The history of the monarchy and the work and messages of the prophets indicate that Israel never freed itself from the gods of Babylon, Egypt or Canaan. Central to an understanding of the prophetic ministry is the recognition that Israel needed to be reminded of Yahweh's claim to exclusive loyalty and be reprimanded and finally judged for her unwillingness to reject the religious systems, practices and conceptions of surrounding nations.

When we transfer the interpretive principle of an anti-pagan polemic to the creation account we must expect the use of structure, concepts and language drawn from the creation accounts of those nations with whom Israel is in religious conflict. But one does not expect *those* elements of the pagan mythology which conflict with the true nature of God and His redemptive work to be incorporated into the normative Israelite revelation and interpretation.

In Israel's history the greatest temptation toward syncretism existed with the religions and cultures of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Canaan. Contacts with Mesopotamian culture and religion existed in the patriarchal period, continued intermittently during the monarchy, and were again continuous from the middle of the eighth century B.C. to the end of the Old Testament era. Israel was intimately acquainted with Egypt from the descent of Jacob to the exodus. Close political ties existed between Solomon and Pharaoh and religious syncretism developed during Solomon's reign. Periodically Egypt tried to assert her control over Palestine during the divided monarchy and political and military links were developed between the last rulers of Judah and the Egyptians. The Judeans who fled and settled in Egypt absorbed Egyptian and other foreign religious components into their faith and, according to letters found in Elephantine, remained in close contact with their Palestinian brethren. The Old Testament also reflects (on almost every page) a polemic against the Canaanites, their religion and their culture. The example of the contest on Mt. Carmel indicates the nature of that conflict and the way in which it is described.

We must read the creation account in the light of Israel's continuing conflict with other religious cultures. Her faith was formed on the basis of God's self-revelation and the election of Israel as his people. Yet her beliefs, faith and experiences were also formulated over against those of her neighbours in the thought categories of the day and of the culture. The inspiring work of the Holy Spirit ensured that the limitations of language would not pervert the knowledge and will of God but would faithfully express His intentions. But we cannot be positive when the Genesis text was composed or which particular religion(s) and culture(s) is / are in focus in the creation account. The creation accounts

of Egypt and Mesopotamia (Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian) and the creation language and themes of the Ugaritic literature have all been examined for parallels, correspondences and divergences.¹ The Babylonian parallels appear closest to Israel's account and will therefore be used as a primary reference. It may happen that some of the 20,000 tablets recently discovered in the ancient city of Ebla (Syria) will provide more light on this theme. But we cannot wait with formulating the specifics of an approach until "all the evidence is in." Our knowledge and insights will always be partial so we must not suspend our interpretive search until the "ultimate answer" is at hand.

GENESIS 1:1 - 2:3 : AN ACCOUNT OF ORIGINS

Introduction to the Account (1:1-2)

At the center of creation is God. Israel shared with her polytheistic neighbours the deep conviction that all life has its origin in divine activity. The Near Eastern societies were all deeply religious. Existence apart from God or gods was unimaginable. Israel, however, set herself apart from her neighbours in declaring that all that exists comes from the eternally existent God who has revealed himself to and through his people. God's existence is never argued in the Old Testament.

The first two verses of Genesis contain a grammatical and interpretive problem. Either the beginning mentioned in verse 1 is the absolute beginning or we are introduced to a beginning in which matter already exists.

I interpret Genesis 1:1 to be an anticipatory summary of the creation story. As such, it does not refer to the ultimate origin of matter, since the existence of some primal stuff (water) is assumed in verse two and in the second day of creation. No account is given of the creation of this primordial sea in the Israelite, Babylonian or Egyptian creation stories. But since the Old Testament writers do not conceive of God sharing eternity with matter one should not press this text to argue for the pre-existence of matter and a resultant duality. The writer of Genesis probably does not feel any need to comment on ultimate origins because that was not a point of contention. The central truth — that all that exists comes from the hand of God — is unequivocally stated and remains irrefutably at the heart of the biblical teaching on creation.

The three clauses of Genesis 1:2 introduce the reader to the three most significant themes of the creation account.

1. "The earth was uninhabited and desolate"²

As it existed, the world was uninhabitable and yet, as Isaiah 45:18 indicates, God's design for the world was that it should be inhabited. Crucial to the view of creation is the question of purpose, the relation-

ship of the existence of created beings to the Creator and the processes involved. By indicating that the creation acts about to be described have the function of showing that there was a divine purpose in filling the earth, this statement also paves the way for the distinctive role of man, the supreme creation, in his task of filling and ordering the world in which he is placed.

2. “Darkness was upon the face of the deep”

The reference (deep) is not to the oceans but to the primeval sea of which the world was thought to consist. It corresponds to the Babylonian term *ti'amat*. In the Babylonian creation account, known as the *Enuma Elish*, *Ti'amat* is identified as the progenitress of heaven and earth. In contrast, the biblical writer ensures that nature will not be divinized. The deep has no power to shape or fill the earth since it lies lifeless, passive and subject to the control of God.

Darkness is here not a force for evil. Though man fears darkness, God dwells in darkness (Ps. 18:9, 12; Exod. 20:21; I Kings 8:12) and speaks his mysteries from thick darkness (Deut. 5:22). So the divine work of creation contains a mystery and a degree of incomprehensibility. What is hidden before man lies open before God.

Could the reference to darkness also be a refutation of the Egyptian concept of the sun-god Re whose words are quoted and explained in the “Book of the Dead?”

I am Atum when I was alone in Nun (the primeval ocean). I am Re in his first appearance when he began to rule that which he had made. (Gloss): What does that mean? – This “Re when he began to rule that which he had made” means that Re began to appear as a king, as one who existed before Shu had even lifted heaven and earth.³

The sun-god, Re, is said to be present with the primeval sea (Nun). Clearly, if darkness covers the deep, Re is not present. He has no role in this work of creation.

3. “The Spirit of God hovered over the waters”

The term *ruach 'elohim* has been interpreted both as “a mighty wind” and “the spirit of God.” Grammatically, either translation is possible but I favor the latter. D. Winton Thomas, investigating the use of the divine name as a superlative, concludes that he could find no single unambiguous instance in the Hebrew Bible where the divine name is used merely as an intensifying epithet.⁴ A second argument in favor of the meaning “the Spirit of God” is that the participle *merachepet* is not appropriate as a description of a strong wind.⁵

These words confirm the divine authority and control over nature. There is no sign of a cosmic battle here as in the Babylonian creation

myth. God exercises undisputed sovereignty over the natural sphere. There are no other deities in heaven or on earth with whom God vies for dominion. This theme is prominent in the subsequent description of creation.

The Six Days of Creation (1:3-31)

The creation account is a careful and symmetrical work of literary art. It is frequently described as semi-poetic because of the patterns of repetitive phrases, parallelism being the most prominent device in Semitic poetry.

Creation is described in two triads of days related to one another in each of the four creative works (Chart A).⁶

CHART A

Relationships Between the Two Triads

of Creation Days in Genesis 1

Day	Works	Ordering of	Appointments of	Works	Day
1st	1	Light created. Separation from darkness (day and night) (3-5)	Sun (for day) and the moon and the stars (for the night) (14-19)	5	4th
2nd	2	Firmament to separate upper waters (sky) from lower waters governing the earth (6-8)	Birds (for the sky) and fish (for the waters) (20-23)	6	5th
3rd	3	Gathering the waters to create dry land and seas (9-10)	Animals occupy the earth (24-25)	7	6th
	4	Production of plants (11-13)	Man to rule over all organic life (26-31)	8	

The first three days describe stationary components in the world; the second triad records the creation of the mobile elements, including the sun, moon and stars which daily move across the firmament. The first three acts of creation have the expressed purpose of separating contrasting spheres such as day and night, upper and lower waters, or dry land and the seas, whereas the corresponding created elements in the second triad fill and rule over those spheres for which they have been prepared.

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The schematic use of numbers supports the artistic arrangement of Genesis 1. Three times names are given (1:5, 8, 10); three blessings are conferred (1:22, 28; 2:3); there are three kinds of plants (1:11, 12) and three kinds of animals (1:24, 25), and three times *bara'* ("create") is used of the creation of man. The accumulation of triadic elements is certainly due to design.

A more crucial matter concerns the seven day work-rest pattern in the divine creative activity. Cassuto claims that "Akkadian and Ugaritic literature . . . prove that a series of seven consecutive days was considered a perfect period in which to develop an important work, the action lasting six days and reaching its conclusion and outcome on the seventh day."⁷ The tension in accepting the 6-1 day pattern as part of the literary framework arises out of two texts in Exodus (20:9-11 and 31:12-17) which use the creation pattern as the reason for the sabbathic pattern of man's work and rest. There are three arguments which may be advanced to validate the sabbath as the appropriate pattern, even though Genesis 1 is viewed as a literary framework:

1. The Genesis text does not develop a precise *ratio* of man's work to rest since the "days" are not of equal length, the seventh "day" being ever-lasting.⁸

2. In Exodus 31:17 one reads: "In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested *and refreshed himself*." The verb *napash* means "to catch one's breath" (cf. Ex. 23:12; 2 Sam. 16:14) suggesting an anthropomorphism. No one would argue that God was exhausted by His work of creation and was in need of refreshment. If this part of the verse is an anthropomorphism, should not the immediately preceding words about the day be understood in the same way?⁹

3. The repetition of the sabbath law in Deuteronomy replaces the reason for the 6-1 sabbathic pattern with the reminder:

"Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God brought you out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and for that reason the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day" (Deut. 5:15).

The sabbathic law derives from a pattern of human experiences and divine activity. The work-rest model is supported by a number of different analogies and arguments, one of which is the pattern described in the creation story.

The literary pattern reinforces the view that the creation account should be approached not as a scientific treatise but as an artistic story depicting God as Creator, his purpose in creating all things, and the distinctive role of men in the divine economy.

The Meaning of Creation

The Creator. The Genesis creation account says much about the Creator. The heavens and the earth and everything in them exists because God made it. Of his own sovereign will God determined to create and to populate this planet with vegetation, animals and man. We cannot know more about his purposes in creation from this text. There is inscrutability in the divine will (He dwells in darkness), an inscrutability which we would love to probe but which is closed to men. Given the created and populated world, God's purposes as pertaining to the sphere of man's existence are more fully delineated:

“There are things hidden, and they belong to the LORD our God, but what is revealed belongs to us and our children for ever; it is for us to observe all that is prescribed . . . ” (Deut. 29:29).

The Creator is distinct from his creation. In the accounts of surrounding nations, part or all of creation emanates from a god (the gods) or is to be identified with deity. Here there is no trace of emanation or pantheism. God does not become an extension into the material realm. He is wholly other. And yet He is immanent, personally giving shape to this material universe.

The Genesis account leaves no room for an ultimate dualism. The Babylonian account pictures Marduk in conflict with Tī'amat. When Tī'amat is defeated her body is sliced in two to form the sky and the earth. Genesis 1, in carefully setting the scene (v. 2) and avoiding any semblance of the mythological language in the description of the creation of the firmament and separation of the waters, affirms the unity and oneness of the Creator. There are no divine challengers to God's kingly power and authority.

The Creative Word and Acts of God. The word *bara'* is reserved in the Hebrew Bible for God's creative work. It does not mean *creatio ex nihilo* (cf. 1:20, 21) but it does indicate that there are aspects to the divine creative activity which fall exclusively into God's domain. The word overlaps in meaning in Genesis 1 with *'asah*, “to make, or do,” as in the parallel:

“Let us make (*'asah*) in our image . . . ” (1:26).

“So God created (*bara'*) man in his own image” (1:27).

That the divine creative activity is an expression of God's will is evidenced by the use of the “word” as a creative force. In Hebrew thought word was an expression of will and, once spoken, came into effect if the speaker possessed or had access to power and authority. That is, the word extends itself into the act. So the word is not a combination of sounds but one's will being actualized in the plane of history. God literally wills the world into existence. The focus is on the relationship

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between purpose and realization, not on the process of creation. There are indications (verses 7, 16, 21, 25, 26) that there was also a process ("God made") through which the divine will was realized.

The creativity of the sovereign also is expressed by the process of naming and of blessing. Both acts represent sovereignty, responsibility, and an understanding of the nature and purpose of the thing named. When parents name a child they identify with it as their child and accept responsibility for it. When God or king renames people (Abram, Sarai, Jacob, Daniel and his friends, Simon, the saints being given a new name) he asserts his authority over and close association with the one named. So also in Gen. 2:19-23 Adam names the animals as well as Eve, indicating he has recognized and accepted his responsibility and his relationship to the other created beings. He also understands them and their functions.

It is a comfort to realize that those things which are inscrutable to man lie open to the mind and control of God (day and night, heaven and earth). Those which are open to man's investigation (plants, animals and man) are blessed to ensure their sustenance and preservation and assure man of the divine care.

The Nature of Creation. The created order is described phenomenologically by the Genesis writer. Our understanding of the world has been informed and shaped by millenia of observation and, in the last few centuries, by greatly refined methods and tools of investigation. We should not fault the writer for conceiving of the world as flat or the firmament as a fixed structure containing tracks for the sun, moon, and stars and windows through which the sweet water (rain) pours. The description is not false; it is time- and culture-bound, as are our present, phenomenological and scientific descriptions of the world we perceive. The writer of Genesis 1 is not addressing the question of the relation between science and religion as we perceive the problem but rather as he perceived it.

The religion-science question to which the account addresses itself is: must man and nature create fertility? must he duplicate the process by which the gods of Canaan and Babylon are said to have produced life — by ejaculation or copulation — or is fertility inherent in the created order? Genesis 1 affirms that all organic life has been empowered by the Creator to reproduce. Indeed, the Creator has added special blessings on plants, fish, birds, animals and man to ensure their fecundity and preservation. There is no need to engage in sacred prostitution or to sacrifice humans to ensure the coming of spring and the fertility of the soil. The God of Israel is the Creator of all living things. Appeal to Baal or Dumuzi or participation in their sacred rites is meaningless since they have no control over rain, fertility or life.

Nor should man doubt the regularity of the seasons. Spring will come, day will follow night. As proof, God has placed lights in the heavens which act as signs of divine providence, means of calculating the occurrence of festivals and seasons, and ways to order day and night (Gen. 1:14). The Creator has assured man that nature will not act irregularly or independently of God. This means, then, that in “natural” calamity and prosperity man is to look beyond nature to a providential and moral God under whose will he exists.

The description of nature as ordered is communicated also by the divine command that all living things are to produce “after their kind.” Even a cursory examination of Near Eastern art gives meaning to this command. The gods created hybrid beings, some part-god and part-man or part-animal, others were combinations of different animals. By describing the reproduction of life “after its kind” the Genesis writer describes God’s work as orderly and denounces the pagan concepts so prevalent and so visible across the Near Eastern world.

An ordered creation is also accessible to man’s understanding. The scientist of that day – the wise man – as in ours required observable patterns from which he could deduce the nature of the universe and its functioning. By creating “kinds” and patterns God declares the world of nature to be the proper province of man’s investigation and understanding. The oriental wise man indicated his perception of the nature of that world by classifying objects, plants and animals in long lists (cf. I Kings 4:33-4). Adam was the first scientist who, when he recognized the nature of the animals, gave them names which corresponded with their essences (Gen. 2).

The question naturally arises as to what Genesis 1 has to say to the issue of creationism vs. evolution. I suggest that we should not look to Genesis 1 for a description of the mediate means or the process. The principle is clear: all that exists in the space-time universe derives its existence from God. Any attempt to interpret creation apart from God or from his purposes is counter to the principles of the text – principles which underlie and transcend the phenomenological description of the Hebrew writer, his use of pagan mythological elements to refute the cosmological views of his day, and the recognition of a providential ordering of the affairs of this universe by the Creator-God. One must also take seriously the present accomplishments of men in hybridization, cybernetics, cloning and other genetic engineering, weather control, space exploration, and the use of fission and fusion fuels to realize that the issues are much broader than the question of process of creation. By focusing on process we have depreciated or ignored the more fundamental factors of divine purpose and providence.

God’s creative results are “good” (*tob*). That means well designed and proportional, beautiful, harmonious and efficiently functional.

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Westermann remarks on the implication of this statement:

Because everything that God created was good, the history of the cosmos and of mankind has been given an indestructible meaning, inasmuch as it is good in the eyes of God.¹⁰

The good is the proper sphere of inquiry and investigation. Man must plumb its depths and probe its secrets in order to praise its Creator. So that which is good becomes, for the one who knows the Creator, a magnificent occasion for wonder, praise and thanksgiving.

The Creation of Man

Man is other than the animal in both nature and purpose. This is indicated in Genesis 1 in the words:

- 1) "Let us make man in our *image and likeness*,
- 2) to rule the fish . . . birds . . . wild animals, domesticated animals, and reptiles."

The description of man in Genesis 2 reinforces and expands the unique nature and work of man by 1) revising the order of the creation of man to show his priority among all living things, 2) placing him in the garden, the divine model which man should follow in the task of ordering his work under God, and 3) having Adam name the animals — created after man — to show his superiority over them and his relationship to them.

Man's Purpose. Man is a creature of God. He shares with the animals a blessing which confers the power of fertility, the capacity to beget, conceive and bear, the whole process of propagation, the choice of a partner and the care and education of the child. It is precisely in this area that many of the sins of pre-historic man are pictured as occurring: the polygamy of Lamech (4:19), the sins of the dynastic rulers or "sons of gods" (6:1-8), and the sin of Canaan (9:20-27). This part of man's existence has, in many periods of his history, been regarded as the realm of sin and uncleanness rather than as a blessing. There is no trace of this negative attitude toward sex, sexuality and propagation in the Creation story.¹¹

Man's purpose and calling relates to the blessing. He is to rule as a monarch. The language of dominion, "subdue" and "rule," denotes total control. It is the language used to describe a conqueror who exercises firm control over those whom he has conquered. Man is to subdue the earth, the inanimate world, as well as rule over the animate order.

His purpose is significantly different than that conceived of by the surrounding nations. The Sumerian-Babylonian narratives picture the creation of man for the purpose of relieving the gods of their daily drudgery by providing food for the gods, maintaining the temples, and

servicing the gods' every earthly need.

God creates man, not to minister to him in the cult, but to civilize the earth. The cult in Israel was never at the heart of man's calling and work. His work remained to order his world. The fall of man does not annul the creation mandate nor relegate it to a secondary role. The meaning of man's existence is intimately associated with his task of bringing all creation into subjection to God. Even today man battles with the tse-tse fly and the microbes, viruses, and chemical and hormonal imbalances which give rise to cancers, physical deformations and a variety of mental and emotional illnesses.

This lordship over creation must be clarified by the concept of kingship in antiquity. As lord of his realm man is responsible for his realm and bears and mediates blessings for the realm entrusted to him. Man must learn to understand and to use the resultant control that knowledge gives him over his world. That means that concern for food production, the condition of our air and water, and the use of our natural (particularly non-renewable) resources, is part of the divine calling and should not be shunted aside as peripheral. Neglect of the commission to order the world and rule it with responsibility is a serious neglect of God's calling.

The failure to pursue the implications of the creation mandate and to formulate a more adequate understanding of its relationship to the great commission is, in my appraisal, one of the continuing sources of our schizophrenic attitude toward "missions" and "services," the Gospel and social responsibilities. It is also a fundamental reason for the loss of meaning in our daily work. If the believer's work is not part of his calling, the sphere in which and through which he is to exercise faith and godliness, then his life develops a secular-sacred division which is reflected in a divided set of values and ethics. The creation and redemption mandates cannot be separated nor can the one be subsumed under or absorbed into the other.

Man's Nature. Man is created in the image (*tselem*) and likeness (*demut*) of God. These terms are roughly synonymous.¹² While they are used elsewhere in the Old Testament primarily to denote a physical representation or similarity, that meaning does not apply here. The Genesis account comes through Israel and is an interpretation which presupposes an acquaintance with God and his self-revelation. That divine self-disclosure repeatedly and forcefully impresses upon Israel the non-corporeality of her God. A second reason for the divine likeness as a spiritual rather than a physical one is that the following clause is purposive,¹³ indicating that the image of God is that which permits man to fulfill the divinely-ordained purpose of ruling over the created order.

The Genesis account at this point develops the Near Eastern theme that the kings were the "images" of their gods. Genesis, depicting man

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as king, uses the “image of God” concept to indicate that man’s authority is conferred on him by God. This concept of the “image of God” and the subsequent description of man’s task have a number of implications for our understanding of the nature of man.

In order to exercise dominion man possesses creativity. Unlike the Babylonian god’s assignment of menial tasks to man, God assigns man the responsibility of fulfilling tasks which require ingenuity, insight, organizational skills, adaptability and innovation. Man is no caretaker of a world fully ordered and rigidly controlled. The task of bringing all created things into proper relationship to one another is patterned after the task God performed in bringing everything into being from the primeval sea. What was said of God’s work (“It was good”), should also be said of man’s — it is harmonious, beautiful, ordered and functional. That task calls for an abundance of creativity and skill.

This means, for us, that creativity needs to be encouraged rather than suppressed. Education must be an enlarging and a freeing experience rather than a process of propagandizing the next generation. This covers the whole range of spheres of daily life — painting, cooking, philosophizing, and cabinet making. It also means that all creativity should lead to the praise and worship of the Creator. That which deflects from the glory of God represents a misuse of the divine gifts and a tarnishing of the image of God.

Dominion and creativity imply optionality. That is, to have dominion requires choices among alternatives. Determinism and creativity are incompatible. Some today see man as beyond freedom and dignity. The biblical text does not allow for either genetic or environmental determinism. Man is a creature with the capacity to fulfill his task in the pattern of God’s own creativity and free will. In Genesis 2 the factor of optionality is extended to the moral sphere.

When God deliberated the creation of man he said,

Let us make man in our image and likeness . . . So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (1:26-7).

The use of the plural verb (*Let us create*) and pronoun (in *our image and likeness*) is difficult to account for. Whatever the origin of the plural it is used only when describing the creation of man. There appears to be a relationship between the fulness of the divine image and 1) man as a sexual being and 2) man as a social creature. Man’s sexuality is specifically referred to. Man was not created husband and wife but male and female. That is, one’s existence is colored and shaped by his sexuality. Every relationship, male-male, male-female, female-female, is affected by this feature of his being. The impact of one’s sexuality extends far beyond marriage and procreation. It includes the particular

make-up which causes relationships and attitudes to be significantly shaped by distinctive maleness or femaleness.

The creation of man as male and female implies complementation. The creation mandate applies to man as a social creature, suggesting cooperation and exercise of distinct gifts. Not only is solitary man incapable of fulfilling the mandate (and therefore it requires co-operative effort) but the process of *sharing* in the divinely-ordained task brings out more of the fulness of the image of God in him.

This complementation exists between contemporaries but extends beyond. One of the distinctives of man is that he is able to accumulate the experience and the wisdom of the past. He is a creature of culture. In assigning the task to mankind (*'adam*) man is seen in his historical and cultural perspective. Therefore the task of communicating the divine will, and the accumulation of wisdom and experience, is a direct implication of the biblical description of the nature of man.

Only after man has been created does God see the world as very good (v. 31). Man is the capstone of creation. Without him the several parts are good in themselves but lack that focal point which relates them to one another and orders the whole. The creation is very good inasmuch and as long as it remains within its place in the created order. Man's task is to shape it and rule it through the changing processes of time so that it will always reflect the greatness and high purpose of the Creator.

God's Rest. The Babylonian lesser gods were tired of the drudgery and menial tasks. The creation of man relieved them of their burdens and allowed them to rest. God ceases his work (rests) because it is complete, that is, as complete as he wishes it to be when assigning other, comparably creative tasks to man. In blessing the sabbath God was affirming that man's work was not meant to be drudgery. It was tiring but not tedious, demanding but not debilitating. And man too is to reflect on his work with deep satisfaction and a great sense of accomplishment. Man's task is not solely one of work. One is also to enjoy the blessings of his work and to enjoy the Creator by and under whom he exists.

FOOTNOTES

1. Cf. Klaus Koch, "Wort and Einheit des Schöpfergottes in Memphis and Jerusalem; zur Eigenartigkeit Israels," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 62 (1965), 251-243; F. Hvidberg, "The Canaanite Background of Gen. I-III," *Vetus Testamentum* 10 (1960), 285-294; Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation* (2nd ed.; Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1951); S.G.F. Brandon, *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East* (London: Hodder & Stoughton; 1963).

2. Cf. E. J. Young's analysis of *tohu wabohu* in "The Interpretation of Genesis 1:2" *Westminster Theological Journal*, 23 (1960-61), 169-70.

3. Cited in Henry Frankfort's *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1948), pp. 52-3.

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4. D. Winton Thomas, "A Consideration of some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew," *Vetus Testamentum*, 3 (1953), 209-224.
5. Cf. Jer. 33:9; Deut. 31:11; E. J. Young, *op.cit.*, 1972-3; Islwyn Blythin, "A Note on Genesis 12," *Vetus Testamentum*, 12 (1962), 121.
6. Following Walter R. Roehrs, "The Creation Account of Genesis: Guidelines for an Interpretation," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 36 (1965), 320.
7. V. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1961), p. 13.
8. Meredith G. Kline, "'Because It Had Not Rained' (Gen. 2:5)," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 20 (1957-8); 154-5.
9. Roehrs, *op. cit.*, p. 321.
10. Claus Westermann, *Creation* (Trans. J. J. Scullion; Philadelphia; Fortress Press, 1974), p. 64.
11. Westermann, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.
12. Samplings of major twentieth century interpretations of these terms and of Genesis 1:26-27 are cited and discussed in two recent articles: Trygve N. D. Mettinger, "Abbild oder Urbild?" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 86 (1974), 403-424, and J. Maxwell Miller, "In the 'Image' and 'Likeness' of God," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 91 (1972), 289-304.
13. This analysis is the product of a survey of two texts (Jer 37-45, Esther). It was observed that imperatives, jussives, or waw consecutive perfects with imperatival function, when followed by a perfect or imperfect verb preposed by a simple waw which has a different subject than the preceding prescriptive verb, are purposive or, occasionally, resultative.

Response

Walter Unger*

A number of important hermeneutical principles clearly surface as one reads this paper. My purpose is to point out what these principles are and then briefly evaluate some of the content of this study.

The contextual principle is stated at the outset, with the warning that any attempt to isolate Genesis 1:1-2:3 from its larger context "threatens to destroy its meaning and to fracture our understanding of the whole." The overarching theme of Genesis, redemption, must be the basic interpretive key for every passage in the book.

A collateral principle clearly evident is that the purpose of a given passage must be the center of hermeneutical focus and not questions of mechanics or methodology. In the paragraph under "The Second Creation Account" (2:4-25) the author broaches the source question,

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