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## THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES AND THE THEOLOGY OF CREATION\*

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**AN IMPRESSIVE VARIETY OF PEOPLE TODAY are asserting in different ways** the central importance of the biblical doctrine of creation: fundamentalists seeking court-ordered public-school instruction in Genesis, feminists revising patriarchal interpretations of creation texts,<sup>1</sup> systematic theologians reassessing the traditional place of creation in the Christian synthesis.<sup>2</sup>

Old Testament scholars themselves are dissatisfied with the exposition of the doctrine found in the standard biblical theologies. Gerhard von Rad's influential 1936 essay, which forcefully declared that the biblical doctrine of creation never attained to the status of an independent doctrine but was generally subordinated to soteriological considerations,<sup>3</sup> as been vigorously criticized. The omission of creation from Israelite confessions of faith is not a sign of its unimportance; creation of the world by the gods was so much part of the ancient Near Eastern world

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\* A version of this paper was read to the Catholic Biblical Association at its annual meeting in August 1983. The Psalms are cited according to the Hebrew verse numbers, which may vary slightly from the English versions. MT = Massoretic text.

<sup>1</sup> Two good examples of exegesis with feminist concerns are Phyllis Bird, "Male and Female He Created Them: Gen 1:27b in the Context of the P Account of Creation," *HTR* 74 (1981) 129-59, and Phyllis Trible. "A Love Story Gone Awry," in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 72-143.

<sup>2</sup> The fall 1984 issue of the Lutheran journal *Word & World* was entirely devoted to creation. Edward Schillebeeckx has stated memorably how important a correct understanding of creation is to theological anthropology: "If man is left alone with a world for man which is not at the same time and more fundamentally the world of God, the assurance of faith remains in the subjectivity of man and is therefore constantly exposed to the suspicion of being a pure projection" (*Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* [New York: Seabury, 1980] 530).

<sup>3</sup> "The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 142. The German version was published in 1936. Von Rad later qualified his views, but not before his early statement had influenced a whole generation of scholars. Rainer Albertz has suggested that von Rad sharply distinguished redemption from creation in his 1936 article to counter the National Socialist manipulation of the doctrine of creation; he denied any independent status to the doctrine and subordinated it to the doctrine of election in *Weltschöpfung und Menschenschöpfung untersucht bei Deuteronomus, Hiob und in den Psalmen* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1974) 174.

view that it was not an explicit item in the Israelite creed.<sup>4</sup> Biblical scholars are also increasingly sceptical that the much-used catechetical sequence creation-fall-redemption and its conventional biblical illustrations (e.g., Genesis 1 and 2-3, Exodus 1-15, Rom 5:12-21) fairly represent the biblical doctrine.<sup>5</sup> Finally, comparative evidence, new in its application if not in its discovery, has forced reassessment of the cosmogonies in the Bible. The definitive publication in 1969 of the second-millennium Akkadian cosmogony Atrahasis, which resembles Genesis 1-11 in plot and details, has enabled us to appreciate the plot of the Genesis cosmogony.<sup>6</sup> The Ugaritic texts, a product of Canaanite culture of the 14th and 13th centuries B.C., offer many linguistic and thematic parallels with the biblical texts, though some parallels remain disputed.<sup>7</sup> The time is ripe for reassessment of the biblical evidence.

This article seeks to contribute to the discussion of creation in the Hebrew Bible in two ways. First, I point out some of the differences in the definition of creation in ancient Near Eastern and biblical literatures and in contemporary usage; insensitivity to the differences has led to modernizing ancient texts. Secondly, I review the main sources for creation in the Hebrew Scriptures—Psalms, Second Isaiah, and Genesis—to see how creation functions and to learn whether it is subordinated to “redemption.”

## Differences In Definition Of Creation

It is important at the outset to note the differences between the ancient and modern understandings of creation. Modern common-sense defini-

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tions of creation are inadequate for the biblical texts; they read back into ancient documents the modern spirit shaped by scientific and evolutionary thinking, Arvid Kapelrud’s definition, for example, “Creation is when something *new* which was not there before is produced,”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The criticism is now widely accepted. See, e.g., Claus Westermann, *Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 1-15 and passim; Schillebeeckx. *Christ* (n. 2 above) 516-23; Andreas Angerstorfer, *Der Schopfergott des Alten Testaments: Herkunft und Bedeutungsentwicklung des hebraischen Terminus (bara) “schaffen”* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1979) 170-71.

<sup>5</sup> Westermann has eloquently pointed out in *Creation* (n. 4 above) the narrow horizon that results when Genesis 2-3 is read exclusively through the lens of Rom 5:12-21 without reference to Genesis 4-11. One should consult the author’s detailed commentary *Genesis* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966). An English translation of the first eleven chapters has appeared: *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> The tablets and fragments, some of which have long been known, were assembled in their proper order and published by W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-Hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969). Important commentary on the significance of the texts and its relation to Genesis may be found in William L. Moran, review of Lambert and Millard. *Bib* 52 (1971) 51-61, and in Robert A. Oden, “Divine Aspirations in Atrahasis and Genesis I-II,” *ZAW* 93 (1981) 197-216.

<sup>7</sup> One disputed question is whether the combats and victories of the storm god with Sea and Death in the Ugaritic texts are true cosmogonies. The answer depends on a careful definition of cosmogony—the aim of the first part of this paper. I find there are true cosmogonies in my “Cosmogonies in the Ugaritic Texts and in the Bible,” *Orientalia* 53 (1984) 183-201.

<sup>8</sup> “Creation in the Has Shamra Tablets,” *Studia theologica* 34 (1980) 3.

leaves a crucial question unanswered. Is the “something new which was not there before” the physical universe (as opposed to some kind of prior gaseous state) or is the “something new” structured and secure human society (as opposed to a state where such society is impossible)? The distinction is important.

There are four significant differences between the ancient West Semitic and modern concept of creation: the process, the product or emergent, the description, and the criteria for truth.

First, regarding process, the people of the ancient West Semitic culture of the Bible and of the Late Bronze Age Ugaritic texts frequently imagined cosmogony as a conflict of wills in which one party is victorious.<sup>9</sup> Moderns, on the other hand, see creation as the impersonal interaction of physical forces extending over eons, and reject psychologizing of the process. The ancient Near Eastern texts did not make the modern dichotomous distinction between “nature” and human beings, and sometimes offered psychic and social explanations for non-human phenomena.

The second difference lies in what emerges from the process: the product or emergent. To the ancients, human society organized in a particular place was the emergent. To moderns, on the other hand, creation issues in the physical world, typically the planet fixed in the solar system. Community and culture do not come into consideration. If life is discussed in connection with creation, it is usually life in the most primitive biological sense. The point needs illustration.

The Akkadian epic *Enuma elish* of the second millennium B.C., often held up as “the standard cosmogony”<sup>10</sup> reaches its climax when Marduk, after his conquest of Tiamat, is enthroned as king over the world of gods and human beings. Paralleling the exaltation of Marduk among the gods in tablets vi and vii is the organization of Babylonian society. Men and

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women are created to serve the gods (vi. 5-8, 29-37, 106-20), particularly Marduk himself in the temple at Babylon. The 50 names, bestowed by the grateful gods upon Marduk in tablets vi and vii, glorify the divine sustainer of order and life on earth as well as in heaven. The victory of Marduk establishes the institutions of divine and human governance (Babylonian kingship and related institutions), which a great people required in order to exist.

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<sup>9</sup> Modes of creation other than cosmogonic conflict are often mentioned in ancient Near Eastern texts and the Bible: molding humans out of clay, e.g. Gen 2:7 and Ezek 37:14; sexual generation, e.g. “the children of El,” in the Ugaritic texts; creation by divine word, e.g. Genesis 1, Pss 33:6 and 148:5; and creation by unimpeded construction, e.g. Psalm 19, Job 26, Proverbs 8. In some of these, however, e.g. Genesis 1 and Job 26, there are vestiges of the taming of Sea and Night. Cosmogonic conflict is extremely important and needs emphasis because of its comparative neglect in scholarship.

<sup>10</sup> It is so described by Loren Fisher, “Creation at Ugarit and in the Old Testament,” VT 15 (1965) 320-21; by Kapelrud in “Creation in the Ras Shamra Texts,” *Studia theologica* 34 (1980) 3; and by Baruch Margalit, “The Ugaritic Creation Myth: Fact or Fiction,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 13 (1981) passim. An English translation of the *Enuma elish* may be found in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Pertaining to the Old Testament* (3rd ed.; ed. J. A. Pritchard; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1969) 60-72.

The Bible, too, contains similar cosmogonies by which a society is established in a particular place. Psalm 77, a communal lament, recalls the “wonders of old” that brought Israel into existence.

- <sup>17</sup> The waters saw you, O God,  
the waters saw you, they were convulsed. Yea, the  
deep quaked.
- <sup>18</sup> The clouds poured forth water, the clouds thundered forth.  
Yea, the lightning bolts shot to and fro.
- <sup>19</sup> The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind, your  
lightning lit up the world. The earth quaked and  
trembled—
- <sup>20</sup> In the sea was your way;  
your path through the mighty waters, your  
tracks could not be seen.
- <sup>21</sup> You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and  
Aaron.

Yahweh creates a way through his enemy. Sea, destroying with his storm Sea’s power to keep the people from His land. What emerges from the conflict and victory is a people led by Yahweh to the secure land. Moses and Aaron are appointed as leaders of the people.

In language less suprahistoric, poems like Exodus 15 and sections of poems like Ps 78:41-55 portray the same event: movement from a state of social disorganization because of unrestrained forces to structure arid security in Yahweh’s land.<sup>11</sup> Ancient cosmogonies were primarily interested in the emergence of a particular society, organized with patron gods and worship systems, divinely appointed king (or some other kind of leader), and kinship systems. To give Kapelrud’s words (quoted above) a

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meaning he did not intend: the “something new which was not there before” is not the mere physical universe but the “world” of men and women.

The third difference between ancient and modern definitions is the manner of reporting the process: drama versus scientific report. The difference is a consequence of two essentially different conceptualizings of the process. Much modern conceptualizing of creation is evolutionary and impersonal, and proceeds according to scientific laws. As A. R. Peacocke, a physical biochemist and theologian, pointed out in the Bampton Lecture of 1978, “In religious cosmologies the primary focus is on describing the cosmos from the point of view of what assumptions are necessary if human beings are to live optimally in the world and so

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<sup>11</sup> “In Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and Israel the *Chaoskampf* appears not only in cosmological contexts but just as frequently—and this was fundamentally true right from the first—in political contexts. The rebellion and the destruction of the enemy, and thereby the maintenance of political order, always constitute one of the major dimensions of the battle against chaos. The enemies are none other than a manifestation of chaos which must be driven back” {Hans Heinrich Schmid, “Schopfung, Gerechtigkeit und Heil,” *ZTK* 70 [1973] 1-19, translated and reprinted in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984]}. The quotation is from p. 104 in the Anderson volume.

include a value judgment about what 'living optimally' is. However, the physical and biological scientific enterprise is principally directed to describing and making models of or hypotheses about nature, and so empirical reference and feedback are its main aim; it does not place human concerns at the centre of its attention and intention...,"<sup>12</sup> The ancients saw things differently. Process often meant wills in conflict, hence drama; the result was a story with a plot. The mode of reporting corresponds in each case to the underlying conception of the process.

Each approach advances the thought and resolves problems in a different fashion. Scientists offer new hypotheses as new data have to be explained. Ancients devised new stories, or wove variations into existing ones, when they wished to explain fresh elements of their world. It is not always easy for moderns, for whom a story typically is either entertainment or illustration, to regard story itself as a carrier of serious meanings. Yet to the ancient, who saw creation as involving wills, story was *the* way of reporting the struggle. Emphases and perspectives were conveyed by selection and omission of narrative detail and by development of plot. The ancients' tolerance of several versions of a single basic plot is traceable to this approach.

Drama favors concrete nouns over abstract ideas. The thunder and lightning of the storm expresses the power and the victory of the storm god, as in Pss 18:7-20 and 77:17-21. The palace can stand for royal mastery of hostile forces, as in Ps 29:10 and Psalms 93 and 96.

A fourth major difference is the criterion for truth in ancient and modern accounts. We expect a creation theory with its empirical reference to be able to explain all the data, to be compatible with other verified

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theories and data. Failure to do so makes the hypothesis suspect. There is a tendency toward completeness of explanation,

The criterion for truth for cosmogonies, on the other hand, is dramatic, the plausibility of the story. In one sense it is no less empirical than the scientific account, but its verisimilitude is measured differently. Drama selects, omits, concentrates; it need not render a complete account. The story can be about a single aspect and leave others out of consideration. *Enuma elish* is interested in the divine establishment of Babylonian society; Atrahasis, in the balance of elemental forces necessary for humans to live safely. Cosmogony in Psalm 89 includes the installation of the Davidic regent (see below), whereas in Genesis 1 the focus is on the orientations of the human community as such.

## Sources For Creation In Hebrew Scriptures

Having described four features of ancient cosmogonies that distinguish them from modern accounts of creation, I turn to three relevant groups of biblical cosmogonies: Psalms, Second Isaiah, and Genesis 1-11. We begin with Psalms rather than Genesis, the customary *point de depart* of scholarly discussion, because their range of genres and dates

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<sup>12</sup> *Creation and the World of Science* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979) 32-33. The quotation within the text is from Philip Hefner, "Basic Christian Assumptions about the Cosmos," *Cosmology, History and Theology*, ed. W. Yourgrau and A. D. Breck (New York: Plenum, 1977) 350.

offers a fairer sample of Israelite thought on creation than does Genesis. Second Isaiah develops psalmic ideas but with great originality. Only after seeing a range of biblical views on creation do we approach Genesis.

## **Psalms**

Among the Psalms, communal laments are a good starting point. Several contain cosmogonies, descriptions of the origins of Israel: Psalms 44, 74, 77, and 89. Scholars have long noted that such laments often hymn ancient deeds of Yahweh.<sup>13</sup> The “ancient deeds” (sometimes “deed” in the singular) are the acts by which Israel came into existence. The rhetorical aim of the recital of the ancient deed in the communal lament can be paraphrased: Will you, O Lord, allow your act that brought us into existence to be nullified by the present threat? The community feels itself to be at the brink of extinction as a people in Yahweh’s land; it liturgically remembers the originating act in order to move Yahweh to renew that act today.

In Psalm 77 Israel’s existence is threatened, prompting the Psalmist’s “Has His steadfast love disappeared forever?” (v. 9). The Psalmist then recites “the deeds of Yah..., the deed of old” (v. 12). The redemption of Israel is described as a combat in which Yahweh makes a way through

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the sea, removing the obstacles to entering the land and installing leaders. The psalm recites the founding event in the face of the current threat. Psalm 74 is another lament in which the Psalmist recalls the primal deed in verses 12-17, again in suprahistoric rather than historic language.

- <sup>12</sup> Yet God my king is from of old,  
working salvation in the midst of the earth.
- <sup>13</sup> You divided the sea by your might;  
you broke the heads of the dragons on the waters.
- <sup>14</sup> You crushed the heads of Leviathan,  
you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.
- <sup>15</sup> You cleft open springs and brooks;  
you dried up ever-flowing streams,
- <sup>16</sup> Yours is the day, yours also the night;  
you have established the luminaries and the sun.
- <sup>17</sup> You fixed all the bounds of the earth;  
you made summer and winter.

The verses depict the victory over Sea and his monstrous allies (w. 12-14), the control of those once chaotic waters by means of springs and brooks (v. 15), the regulation of boundless darkness by alternating day and night (v. 16), and the establishment of the seasons of the year (v. 17). As often, the coming-to-be of the world is described by a series

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<sup>13</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Einleitung in den Psalmen* (3rd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977) 129-30; Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* 1 (New York: Abingdon, 1962) 195-218, esp. 205-6; Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: Knox, 1951) 55-57.

of cosmic pairs. The speaker recites the cosmogony in the face of an enemy intrusion into the Temple.

<sup>1</sup> Why, O God, do you forever reject us,  
does your anger burn against the flock you shepherd?

<sup>2</sup> Remember your community that you created of old,  
the tribe of your heritage that you redeemed,  
Mount Zion where you dwell.

<sup>3</sup> Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins (?),  
all the outrage of the enemy in your sanctuary,

Enemies have invaded the Temple precincts, the dwelling of Yahweh and the encampment of Israel. The perennial efficacy of the original act that created Israel of old, the leading of the flock into the holy place, is called radically into question. Vv. 12-17 of this psalm then describe cosmogony as Yahweh's arranging the cosmic elements in beneficial pairs, and vv. 1-2 speak of cosmogony as the Exodus-Conquest; both sections express the one originating act.

Psalm 89, a royal lament, similarly poses the question to Yahweh: Is the promise made when David was installed (the founding event in the psalm) without effect today? Scholars have not generally drawn this conclusion because the psalm has until recently been taken as a composite

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of fragments: an old hymn (vv. 2-3 + 6-19) was joined to a lament (vv. 39-52), the joining being smoothed by the addition of vv. 4-5 and 20-38. James M. Ward and J.B. Dumortier, however, have demonstrated the unity of the poem, laying the groundwork for a reinterpretation: a single event is described, the destruction of the enemies of Israel and its organization in Yahweh's land.<sup>14</sup> Vv. 10-15, beginning "You crushed Rahab like a carcass, you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm..." tell of the victory over Sea. The ordered world then appears (as in Psalm 74) in a succession of cosmic pairs: heaven and earth, the mountains, finally the throne of the palace (v. 15a). The following lines, vv. 16-19, tell of the procession of the people, presumably to the Temple, celebrating the world-founding event. Next comes the installation of David, part and parcel of the same cosmogony. If we take the word *`az* in v. 20 as "then" (not "of old" with RSV), the meaning that it has in comparable narratives, v. 20 must be rendered:

Then you spoke in a vision to your consecrated one, and you said:  
"I have set my servant<sup>15</sup> above the mighty men,  
I have raised up a man of my choice from the army.  
I have found David my servant...."

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<sup>14</sup> For the citation of the articles of Ward and Dumortier and for full discussion of the entire psalm, see my "Psalm 89: A Lament over the David Ruler's Continued Failure," *HTR* 73 (1980) 35-47.

<sup>15</sup> For MT *siwiti* <sup>c</sup>*ezer*, lit. "I have placed a help," commonly emended to *siwiti nezer*, "I have placed a crown," I read the MT consonants but connect <sup>c</sup>*zr* to the root *\*g<sup>c</sup>zr*, which in Ugaritic is an epithet of Mot, Baal, Danei, and Aqht, meaning "hero," "favorite of a deity." The emendation was proposed by H.L. Ginsberg in 1938 and expanded by Moshe Held in 1965. For details see Clifford, "Psalm 89" (n. 14 above) 44 n. 22.

Dumortier has convincingly shown how the victorious Yahweh at this part of the celebration shares point by point with the freshly chosen Davidic regent the authority he has just won. This psalm, like the other laments, describes the founding event as a victory over hostile forces that ends happily, when the politically organized people are secure in their God's land.

It is interesting to compare another communal lament, Psalm 44, which tells as *its* version of the national story, in unadorned brevity and with no reference to cosmic conflicts, the Exodus-Conquest: "the deeds ... in the days of old, you with your own hand drove out the nations and planted them, you brought misfortune on peoples, you drove them out" (vv. 2-3). The national story, invoked in at least some communal laments, is the event by which Israel was founded; it can be told in a suprahistoric mode or in a historic mode, according to the prominence of human or divine actors.

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Other psalm genres contain similar recitals. Psalm 78, the longest review of Israel's historical traditions in the Psalter, contains in w. 42-55 a statement of the national story: the movement of the people from oppression in Egypt through the wilderness to "His holy mountain/the mountain which your right hand created" (v. 54). Though Egypt is mentioned (vv. 12, 43), the perspective is supra-historic; Yahweh (without the mediation of Moses or Pharaoh) assaults Egypt and, again directly, leads the people through the wilderness to settle them on His holy mountain. Psalm 78 resembles Exodus 15, even to vocabulary. The Exodus poem, in two matched panels, w. 1-12 and 13-18, hymns the victory over Pharaoh's army at the sea and the divinely guided procession of the people to the holy mountain shrine of Yahweh. In Psalm 78 and Exodus 15 the national story is portrayed in both mythic and historic colors. Cosmogony is the appropriate word for both accounts of national origins.

Psalms 135 and 136 are hymns that mention the making of the physical world (Pss 135:6-7; 136:4-9) and the making of Israel (Pss 135:8-12, 136:10-22). In Psalm 136, for instance, one reads:

<sup>1</sup> O give thanks to Yahweh, for He is good.

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<sup>6</sup> to Him who spread out the earth upon the waters,  
for His steadfast love endures forever,

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<sup>10</sup> to Him who smote the first-born of Egypt

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<sup>21</sup> and gave their land as a heritage,  
for His steadfast love endures forever,

<sup>22</sup> a heritage to Israel His servant,  
for His steadfast love endures forever.

<sup>23</sup> It is He who remembered us in our low estate,  
for His steadfast love endures forever;



<sup>24</sup> and rescued us from our foes,  
for His steadfast love endures forever;

<sup>25</sup> He who gives food to all flesh,  
for His steadfast love endures forever.

The psalm praises Yahweh who created Israel. The creation involves making the physical universe and then leading the people into their part of that universe, “Creation” is not distinguished from “redemption” here. God’s seamless action, the creation of Israel, is hymned.

Two more hymns must briefly be discussed before we are done with the genre of hymns: Psalms 19 and 104. Both are sometimes said to be the only psalms in which the idea of creation is found as an independent

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(i.e., not subordinate to redemption) theme, that fact being attributed to foreign influence.<sup>16</sup> Yet both are ultimately concerned with human community, how it was “created,” how it was “redeemed” from threats.

In Psalm 19 the fine-tuned regularity of the universe— the firmament now separate from the cosmic waters, primordial darkness properly placed— bespeaks the power of the divine word to make a humanized world. The psalm assumes that once upon a time there was only Night and Rampaging Waters,

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims His handiwork.

Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge,

The sun, tamer of the Night, traditionally connected in the ancient Near East with judging and with law, is an apt symbol for the divine will that the Psalmist prays to receive and obey. The rest of the psalm is concerned that the will of the creator be the basis of the community’s life.

Psalm 104 also tells of the emergence of a people who call upon the name of Yahweh after He controlled all-encompassing Waters and Night. A world comes into being, with the primordial forces arranged for men and women. The water now is friendly because contained: brooks, springs, the ocean for Leviathan to sport in. Darkness is relegated to nighttime, a time for humans to sleep and dangerous animals to feed. Human community is possible.

A representative sampling of the psalms that speak of Israel as a people uses “creation” and “redemption” language for the same act. The perspective differs from Genesis, where the creation of the nations is described before Israel comes onto the scene in the persons of Abraham and Sarah. The description can be predominantly human and earthly, with mention of Moses, Aaron, Pharaoh, the Israelite and Egyptian people, or heavenly, with Yahweh

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<sup>16</sup> Gerhard von Rad singled out these two psalms in his 1936 article (n. 3 above); he is typical.

acting directly, and Pharaoh/Egypt almost cosmic powers on the same plane as Yahweh. Nearly always the portrayal is mixed, with elements of both.

## Second Isaiah

Second Isaiah, the prophet of the 540's B.C., sees the Exodus-Conquest/Cosmogony as the creation of Israel, as do the psalms that we just examined.<sup>17</sup> The famous opening scene blends what I have termed the historic and the suprahistoric modes of expression.

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<sup>3</sup> In the wilderness  
clear the way of Yahweh.  
Make straight in the desert  
the highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley is to be raised up,  
every mountain and hill is to be leveled.  
The broken terrain is to become flatland,  
the steep places, a plain.

<sup>5</sup> The glory of Yahweh will be revealed,  
all flesh will see it together. (40:3-5)

The sterility and impassability of the desert are to be overcome by a divinely commissioned road, a reference at once to the Exodus-Conquest and to the cosmogonic victory over sterility (corresponding to the victory over Sea in the old poetry). Other allusions to the renewal of Israel in exile describe the event explicitly as a new Exodus-Conquest.

<sup>20</sup> Go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea,  
Announce with jubilant voice, declare it.

Publish the word to the ends of the earth.  
Say, "Yahweh has redeemed his servant Jacob!"<sup>rt</sup>

<sup>21</sup> They thirsted not when He led them through parched places.  
Water from the rock He made flow for them.

He split the rock, there flowed out water. (48:20-21)  
You shall not go forth in haste (cf. Exod 12:34, 39; Deut 16:3),  
nor march forth in flight.

For Yahweh walks before you,  
the God of Israel is your rear guard. (52:12)

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<sup>17</sup> For an attempt to see more coherence in Second Isaiah's preaching than most modern commentators, see R. J. Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading: An Interpretation of Second Isaiah* (New York: Paulist, 1984) chaps. 2 and 3. Rainer Albertz, *Weltschöpfung und Menschenschöpfung* (n. 3 above), following a suggestion of Claus Westermann, divides creation traditions in Second Isaiah and elsewhere into traditions of creation of heaven and earth and traditions of the creation of individuals (51-53 especially). Albertz, in our judgment, allows form-critical considerations too dominant a role in his analysis. Moreover, he fails to appreciate sufficiently that a peopled universe is the goal and term of creation.

The same event is also depicted as the victory of Yahweh over the chaotic forces; 42:15-16 and 51:9-11 are the most striking instances. Second Isaiah, however, does more than reflect the Psalms regarding

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cosmogony; he makes cosmogony, the Exodus-Conquest, the cornerstone of his interpretation and preaching. For him, Israel has been called upon to engage in a new Exodus-Conquest, a new cosmogony. To understand his preaching, one must recognize that Second Isaiah, like his prophetic predecessors, periodized Israel's recent history into three stages: Israel's sin (announced by the pre-exilic prophets down to the Exile), its punishment (the Exile from the destruction of the Temple in 587 to Cyrus' capture of Babylon in 539), and its restoration (from the time of Cyrus). The prophet believed that the period of punishment was over ("the time of servitude is completed, her sin is expiated," 40:2), and that he and his fellow exiles in Babylon were now living in the restoration. Cyrus, victor over the collapsing Neo-Babylonian Empire by his entry into Babylon in 539 B.C., signaled to the prophet the divine intent to bring Israel back from Babylon. For Second Isaiah, Cyrus plays the role in the restoration that the Assyrian king played for First Isaiah in the punishment (in Isaiah 10). In order to make his compatriots understand what the times demanded of them—to leave Babylon and to go back to Zion—he preached that they had ceased truly to be Israel because they were living in Babylon, not in Yahweh's Zion. Like their ancestors in Egypt, they must leave Egypt/Babylon and go to Canaan/Zion. Dame Babylon, full of false gods, was as oppressive as ever Pharaoh was (chap. 49).

The historical analogy between the act that brought Israel into existence of old and the new act today is expressed with memorable symmetry in 43:16-21.

- <sup>16</sup> Thus says Yahweh,  
The one who makes a way in the Sea,  
a path in the Mighty Waters,
- <sup>17</sup> the one who musters chariot and horse,  
all the mighty army.
- They lie prostrate, no more to rise,  
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick.
- <sup>18</sup> Recall no more the former things,  
the ancient events bring no longer to mind.
- <sup>19</sup> I am now doing something new,  
now it springs forth, do you not recognize it?
- I am making a way in the wilderness,  
paths in the desert.
- <sup>20</sup> The wild beasts will honor me,  
jackals and ostriches.
- For I have waters in the wilderness,

rivers<sup>18</sup> in the desert,  
to give drink to my chosen people,  
<sup>21</sup> the people whom I have formed for myself,  
to narrate my praiseworthy deeds.

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Vv, 16-17 narrate the old founding event, the defeat of Pharaoh and the way through the Sea- V, 18 declares that this story will no longer serve as the national script; it will be replaced by the new story of the way through the desert. The desert in the poem is not, of course, sandy waste' like the Sahara but sterile and precipitous crags like those of the Judean wilderness and the Negeb, The desert's menace consists in its interposing itself, sterile and impassable, between the exiles and Zion, as did the Red Sea of old. Second Isaiah, like many biblical writers, conceives dominion spatially; the people exist fully only in Zion, the place where Yahweh reigns. The peopled task is to engage in the act by which Israel became a people in the beginning: to embark on a new Exodus-Conquest, to participate in a new cosmogony. The people must leave the domain of Dame Babylon and proceed to Zion, Yahweh's domain. The Isaian servant, the guide, is portrayed, appropriately, with the traits of Moses (cf. Isa 49:1-13).

New creation in Second Isaiah is a renewal of the first act that brought Israel into existence— the Exodus-Conquest, the defeat of Sea. The First creation in the prophet does not, in my judgment, refer to the act that brought the world of the nations into being; that is the perspective of Genesis 1, not of Second Isaiah. Second Isaiah's preaching focuses intensely on Israel. The people do not properly exist scattered in exile, apart from Yahweh, without land and temple, ritual and officials- Their God will create a people a second time.

<sup>3</sup> The first events, in time of old, I announced,  
from my mouth they issued, I declared them,  
suddenly I acted, they came to pass.

.....

<sup>6</sup> I declare new things at the present time,  
well-guarded secrets you did not know.

<sup>7</sup> Now they are created, not in the time of old. (48:3, 6-7)

The perspective differs from Genesis, where the creation of the world took place once and for all. Because Second Isaiah's concern is dominantly Israel that has fallen into nonexistence as a people, he speaks of a new bringing-into-existence of the people, a new Exodus-Conquest, a new creation,

Trito-Isaiah, an anonymous prophet probably of the late sixth or early fifth century, the author of chapters 56-66, develops the concept of new creation. New creation refers to the act by which God will remove injustice from the holy city and bring about a truly just and peaceful society, e.g. 65:17-19.

<sup>17</sup> For behold I will create new heavens and a new earth.

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<sup>18</sup> We read *ntybwt* for MT *neharot*, "rivers," with 1QIsa\* and according to sense.

The former things will not be remembered,  
will not come to mind.

<sup>18</sup> Indeed be glad and rejoice forever in what I create,  
For behold I will create a joy  
and her people a gladness.

<sup>19</sup> I will take joy in Jerusalem, be glad at my people,  
No more shall be heard  
the sound of weeping, the cry of distress.

This text seems to adapt the “new creation” of Second Isaiah for a later situation,

## Genesis

The final part of the paper examines the opening chapters of Genesis. Chapters 1-3 have been the traditional basis for the Christian theology of creation and the fall, which looks toward redemption. When interpreted by Paul’s New Adam Christology in Rom 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15:21-28, 45-47, there has resulted the scheme of creation-fall-redemption, Psalms and Second Isaiah do not use such a scheme. Was Genesis 1-3 intended by its final redactor to be contrasted with redemption?

Before attempting to answer the question about chapters 1-3, we must make some preliminary observations about the early chapters of Genesis. The argument will be made below that chapters 1-11 are a cosmogony according to the meaning of the first part of this paper: the bringing-into-being of a people, here the *goyim*. Cosmogony or creation in chapters 1-11 differs in several ways from creation in Psalms and Second Isaiah. The chapters are composite, the result of a complex transmission generally held to consist of several stages: a lengthy and probably oral composition was put into writing in the tenth century in Jerusalem (= the Yahwist or J version); a century or so later in the north there was another reduction of the oral composition to writing (= the Elohist or E version); J and E were combined sometime after 722 BC. (the fall of Samaria); the decisive Priestly (P) redaction was done for the exiles in the sixth century. The P redaction is our Pentateuch. The intention of the chapter can best be learned from the Priestly edition, the final redaction. Another distinctive feature of Genesis 1-11 is the apparent Babylonian, rather than Canaanite, influence in the chapters, an influence that perhaps accounts for the wide variety of episodes and genres that make up a single cosmogony. The same phenomenon is observable in *Enuma elish* and Atrahasis, both Babylonian works. Also to be noted is the transposition of the conflict of wills (the first of our characteristics of ancient cosmogonies) from that between God and cosmic forces or

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personages like Pharaoh, to that between God and the human beings just created. Humans rebel, whether against prohibitions against eating of the tree of life, against oppressing the neighbor (“violence” of 6:11), or against the command to take possession of the land.<sup>19</sup> The viewpoint differs from Psalms and Second Isaiah.

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<sup>19</sup> Umberto Cassuto has correctly seen that “the principal theme of 11:1-9 is the dispersion of mankind over the

The Priestly redaction intends Gen 2:4—11:26 (we will deal with 1:1--2:3 later) to be a single cosmogony.<sup>20</sup> P has taken the old material of J, added his own, and composed a unified piece of literature by (among other things) the careful use of the *toledot* formula “these are the generations of...” five times in the “primordial history” and five times in the patriarchal stories. The formula occurs in Gen 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:11; 37:2. There is a clean break after the material introduced by Gen 11:10. Gen 11:27 introduces Abram among “the descendents of Terah.”<sup>21</sup> Only after the world of “the nations” (*goyim*) is established does Israel appear. Further support for the literary unity of Gen 2:4—11:26 comes from the Akkadian cosmogony Atrahasis. The plot is the same as Genesis 2-11: the creation of humans, their offense against the gods, divine punishment culminating in a flood from which the hero escapes in a boat, and new creation of humans. The same plot shows up in Genesis 2-11, evidence that the episodes are parts of a unified story known in the ancient Near East.

Another indication of the unity of chapters 2-11 is that Gen 1:1—2:3 is deliberately prefatory to the whole. As the self-conscious beginning of the Pentateuch, the passage adumbrates the major themes to be developed in its sections. It is a preamble not only to the first major section of the Pentateuch, Gen 2:4—11:26, the origin of the nations, but also to the second section, Gen 11:27—50:24, the patriarchs of Israel, and indeed to the entire Pentateuch as a unified work. Analysis of the account shows it to be an overture.

Bernhard W. Andersen has given a convincing rhetorical analysis of the important opening statement of the Priestly redaction, which we adapt here.<sup>22</sup>

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Section One		Section Two	
Day 1	Defeat of darkness by separation of darkness and light into night and day	Day 4	Luminaries in heaven to regulate day and night
Day 2	Defeat of waters by separation of waters above and below the firmament	Day 5	Water creatures (fish and birds)
Day 3	(a) waters, dry land; (b) vegetation	Day 6	(a) earth animals (b) man: male and female
Day 7	God rests		

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face of the whole earth» a matter that God purposed and that was ultimately fulfilled in accordance with the Divine will, notwithstanding human attempts to obstruct it” (*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part II: From Noah to Abraham* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964] 226).

<sup>20</sup> Westermann, *Creation* (n. 4 above) 4, has effectively protested against the restriction of attention to Genesis 1-3.

<sup>21</sup> We make use of the chapter of F.M. Cross, “The Priestly Work,” in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1973) 293-325.

<sup>22</sup> “A Stylistic Study of the Priestly Creation Story,” in *Canon and Authority* (ed. G.W. Coats and B.O. Long; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 148-62.

Days one to three parallel respectively days four to six. Darkness and light are the concerns of days one and four. The waters are the concern of days two and five. There are two events each on days three and six. By mere word, as opposed to the strenuous combat of the common Canaanite cosmogonic tradition, the world becomes habitable for human beings; man, male and female, stands for society *in nuce*. The seventh day, the day of God resting, is the climax of the narrative. We need to comment on vv. 26-28, the delineation of the human community. Clans Westermann's interpretation of v. 26, "in our image, after our likeness," has been widely accepted: "...the sentence means that the uniqueness of human beings consists in their being God's counterparts (*gegenüber zu Gott*). The relationship to God is not something which is added to human existence; humans are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be their relationship to God."<sup>23</sup> Correspondence to God is not static but dramatic; it is shown in action. Human beings are to procreate children and to possess land: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and take possession of it!" The imperatives show the divine intention that defines society.

Having seen God's intent that men and women continue in existence through procreation and that they possess land, we can see how Gen 1:1-2:3 is a fitting preface to all that follows. In Gen 2:4—11:26 people procreate (note P's genealogies), "spread abroad," and come into possession of their God-given land (note the Table of Nations, chapter 10). Chapter 1 is a perfect preamble also to the next section, 11:27—50:24, the patriarchal stories; the main problem of Abram and Sarai, and of the other patriarchs as well, is precisely progeny and land. Gen 1:1—2:3 is thus not simply a first creation account, saying the same thing as the second account of 2:4—3:24; it serves as preface to the two separate and parallel sections of the Pentateuch, preparing the reader for the major issues in those sections.<sup>24</sup>

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I have already proposed that Gen 2:4—11:26 is a single cosmogony because of the function of the five *toledot* formulae, and because of the similarly-plotted Atrahasis. The chapters narrate the coming-to-be of "the nations" always seen by the biblical authors as a group distinct from Israel. The coming-to-be of the nations parallels the story of Israel's coming into being in later chapters, first with the patriarchs, then more surely with the Exodus and procession to Canaan. The nations are a foil. Israel acting *in its own way*, differently from the nations, will be an image and likeness of God, will be concerned with its continued existence through progeny, will be busied with possessing the land. As the ancient poem had it, "Lo, a people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations."<sup>25</sup> Hebrew rhetoric loves dramatic contrast. Here the contrast is between the nations and Israel.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Genesis* (Eng. tr.; n. 5 above) 158.

<sup>24</sup> Gen 1:1-2:3 is also an admirable preface to the whole Pentateuch, concerned as it is with the exilic problems of possession of the land and of Israel's continued existence,

<sup>25</sup> Num 23:9.

<sup>26</sup> There are important continuities between Israel and the nations. The aspirations of both groups are the same, land and life; their purpose, too, is to reflect God's glory through carrying out their vocation. The two groups differ not in the *quod* but in the *quo*. Israel fulfils its purpose through encounter with Yahweh explicitly

*Ressourcement* is called for at a time of renewed study of the theological topic of creation. I have tried to emphasize some forgotten truths about creation in the Hebrew Scriptures, and also to examine afresh the three sets of texts most frequently adduced. By discussing Psalms and Second Isaiah before Genesis and at greater length, I have sought to give these texts more attention than they often receive. Even regarding Genesis 1-11, more can be said than Westermann in his fine commentary has brought forward. The limited scope of this article prevents me from doing more than raising questions and inviting fresh attention to this important topic.