Jonathan Andreas
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Edinburg Theological Seminary
Dr. John Van Dyk
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The Pentateuch: Earthy or Ethereal?

Introduction

Nearly four decades ago, H. Evan Runner wrote, "Much of the literature that circulates in evangelical circles is concerned with limited topics such as angels, demonology, the return of the Jews to Palestine as a fulfillment of prophecy, or with the gifts of the Spirit…. Moreover, almost all evangelical literature limits itself to a concern for the salvation of lost sinners…while failing to penetrate behind the fall and redemption to the order of creation and the covenant character of religion…."[1] Angels and demons, prophecy and gifts, eternal salvation. Nothing has changed. Except the fact that the 1970s were a high-water mark for ecological awareness in the US, from the establishment of Earth Day to the installation of solar panels on the Carter White House, whereas the 1980s began a swing of evangelical voters to the politics of environmental exploitation and destruction[2] (which has only been slowed, but not stopped, since Barack Obama took office in 2008). A "fail[ure] to penetrate behind the fall and redemption to the order of creation" indeed. Christianity in the 1960s and '70s, for all its frivolity, was an experiment in the oneness (interconnectedness, interdependence) of all things, a monist idea imported from Eastern religion as an attempt to understand covenant differently from the neoplatonic conception that has plagued Christianity for most of its history. "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?" has become "What has heaven to do with earth?"

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[1] H. Evan Runner, "Translator's Introduction," in S. G. De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, vol. 1, *From Creation to the Conquest of Canaan* (1977; repr., St. Catharines, ON: Paideia Press, 2012), xiv.

[2] President Ronald Reagan's environmental policy, arguably the worst in American history, is typified by his removal of those White House solar panels.

It might be said that God's people have always had trouble keeping their eyes on target. After all, the Old Testament is full of people chasing after false gods. Are today's Christian mammon-chasers—gambling on the stock market, riding investment bubbles, etc.—any different? I would suggest they are. At first glance, an ancient Israelite begging Baal for a good harvest and a modern Christian investment banker consulting his Wall Street oracle both seem very interested in *this* earth, *this* life, and to some degree they are. However, the former's success is intimately connected to the health of the land, whereas the latter typically gives nary a thought to environmental costs. And why? Because the Israelite sees her land as a gift from God in perpetuity, for countless generations to come. The modern Christian sees his world as temporary, even disposable, because it is assumed Jesus will surely return before things get too bad (e.g., the earth becomes overcrowded or we run out of energy). The Israelite finds "eternal life" in her progeny who will walk with God on the land till the end of time.[3] The modern Christian evacuates the earth and, depending on his theology, returns only to live in luxury in the city.

And the land? How did we go from treasuring the gift of the land to abandoning it? How did we go from God-and-land (*eretz Yisrael*) to God-in-heaven, from God-with(in)-creation (*Emmanuel*) to God-coming-to-take-us-away-from-it? The evangelical overemphasis on things supernatural—angels and demons, saving souls for heaven, etc.—comes at the very real and present danger of neglecting the creation. It is a form of dualism. Gordon J. Spykman defines dualism as that which "gives the spiritual antithesis ontological status by defining some parts…of life (the ministries of the church) as good and others (politics) as less than good or even evil."[4] For the supernaturally-minded,[5] heaven is good and earth (this present age, the *saeculum*) is evil. But, as Spykman points out, this is "a confusion of structure and direction."[6] All of creation (structure) was created good and remains so; evil "is a directional antithesis which runs through all the structures of life."[7] And this antithesis "represents a spiritual warfare between good and

[3] In ancient Judaism, there was no individual "salvation" in the sense of "eternal life." We return to the earth (dust) from whence we came. We go underground (*sheol*).

[4] Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 67.

[5] Of all faiths. Consider the escapist (creation ignoring) tendencies found in many forms of mysticism (Eastern and Western) as well as much of New Age spirituality and fringe science (from transhumanism to UFOs).

[6] Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 67.

[7] Ibid., 66.

evil which knows no territorial boundaries. *It is not geographically, locally, or spatially definable*. The enmity between these two hostile forces does not coincide with two parts of reality, as though one sector of life were holy and the other unholy, or one bloc righteous and the other unrighteous."[8] The fact that evil knows no structural boundaries does *not* equate to all things being evil. Spykman is differentiating between, on the one hand, creational structures (things: humans, trees, galaxies, etc.) that are not neutral but by their very existence declare God as their maker, and, on the other hand, the very real presence of sin, not in the abstract, but concretely present wherever, e.g., humans choose death instead of life (Deut. 30:19).

In order to root out the insidious dualism that plagues the Church, that keeps us from engaging in contemporary ecological and economic crises as leaders, I will, first, briefly follow its traces to early Christianity; second, skip to the opening documents of our shared/adopted Jewish (i.e., prechristian) faith, the Pentateuch, to test for dualism there (and in the surrounding cultures); and finally, consider how what we learn affects our reading of all of Scripture.

Traces of Dualism

Just as a trident's tines originate from a common metal collar, so the three dualisms impaling contemporary Christians ultimately share a common root. From one point of view, we are an unstable admixture of premodern, modern, and postmodern sensibilities. Herman Dooyeweerd, predating postmodernism, identified two of the dualisms at work in twentieth-century Western (secular) culture, one (or both)[9] of which eventually gave birth to postmodernism. Think of it this way: "secular" (nonchristian) Western culture—individuals, groups, societal structures—left the medieval (premodern) way of life (beliefs, actions) behind them when they accepted the new ideas of classical humanism (modernism). Over time, people reacted against the aridity of this overly rational (empirical, scientific) way of life by swinging to the "opposite," the irrationalism

[8] Ibid. (emphasis added).

[9] Humanism's ground-motive of nature and freedom (in Dooyeweerd's terms) could be understood as a classical (rationalistic) humanism leading to a romantic (irrationalistic) humanism, the latter laying the foundation for postmodernism. Calvin Seerveld sees a direct line from classical humanism's modernism to late twentieth-century postmodernism, or, as he calls it, hypermodernism (Institute for Christian Studies lectures, 1994-95). They are both rooted in individualism.

(aestheticism) of romantic humanism (which later gave rise to postmodernism).[10] Today, *secular* Western culture remains split between the two forms of humanism, science and technology firmly rooted in modernism, and popular culture pulling in the other direction.

Alternatively, today's *Christians* share in the tensions of secular culture (we have always been good accommodationalists) as well as, for most Christians, cling to the beliefs of the medieval (premodern) world. In other words, while nonchristians are typically pulled two ways, most Christians are pulled three. *Premodernist* contemporary Christians are typified by emphasizing the "fundamentals," usually defined in terms of naive-literalist readings of the New Testament in search of "primitive" beliefs and actions. *Modernist* Christians, a dying breed, are usually found in liberal, mainline denominations, applying empirical methods to biblical and extrabiblical tests, and rejecting the supernatural. *Postmodernist* Christians, found in emergent, progressive, and nondenominational settings, are often reacting against their (grand)parents' churches by creating a kind of "pop" Christianity. The problem is that no one, not even our Amish brothers and sisters, can live in utter cultural isolation. Fundamentalist Christians, for instance, may eschew evolution, but they depend on modern biology (e.g., going to the hospital) which, in turn, is firmly based on Darwin's theories.

Dooyeweerd skillfully cuts through all this confusion by identifying the common underlying dualism that cloaks itself in these various dialectical guises. Today's postmodern (hypermodern, neoromantic) way of life, an outgrowth of what Dooyeweerd, in the middle of the twentieth century, called romantic humanism, is merely another specter of the overemphasis on the *freedom* motive of the nature-freedom dialectic. When the world is reduced to two primary elements, such as the dualism of nature and freedom, it is inherently unstable, unable to find equilibrium, and generates unending extremes (overemphases, antinomies). To the freedom side we find holism, communalism, and historicism: the whole is greater than the parts, the community is more valuable than the individual, and historical progress is celebrated while stagnation is vilified.[11] The very terms *post*modernism and *post*structuralism, for instance, belie the

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[10] There is a fascinating correlation between (1) classical (rational) and romantic (irrational) humanism, and (2) left- and right-brain predominate functions, respectively. For an outstanding explication of this idea, see Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

[11] Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*, trans. John Kraay, ed. Mark Vander Vennen and Bernard Zylstra, newly ed. D. F. M. Strauss (1979; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Paideia Press, 2012), holism 182-4, communalism 179ff., historicism 183.

fact that these are reactions *against*, a moving beyond. Beyond what? Holism is against atomism, communalism against individualism, and historicism against conservatism. These exaggeratory extremes explain much of today's world: holistic (homeopathic) vs. mainstream Western (allopathic) medicine, socialism vs. capitalism, and progressives (Democrats) vs. conservatives (Republicans). Dooyeweerd pleads with his fellow Christians not to join these extremes, for any such allegiance ultimately reduces all of reality to that one aspect, allowing its laws to usurp all the others: "If we carry the idea of Christian acceptance of [any of these extremes] to its logical conclusion,…the principle of [that extreme becomes] the true law for every specific life-sphere."[12] Don't fall for it! God's creation is far more diverse than that—while finding its root-unity in God.

So if postmodernism is a reaction against modernism, where did modernism come from? Was it a reaction against something? First, we must remember that what I am calling postmodernism has not replaced modernism. Far from it. The practical benefits of modernism (classical humanism, rationalism, atomism, scientism)—modern technology (AKA "high tech")—continue to reign supreme in our world. Some, like Jacques Ellul and Neil Postman, insist that technicism (*technique*, for Ellul) controls us.[13] The practical benefits of postmodernism (romantic humanism, irrationalism)—e.g., doctors interacting with patients as whole persons instead of merely isolated medical issues—remain a minority force struggling against the hegemony of scientism-technicism in the corridors of power. Remember, what I am calling postmodernism is merely the swing of the nature-freedom dualism to the freedom side; and what I am calling modernism is the nature side. Predating the nature-freedom dualism, in Dooyeweerd's model, is the medieval, scholastic dualism of nature-grace. The movement from nature-grace to nature-freedom was not so much a swing as a major paradigm shift. "Roman Catholicism underwent a severe crisis at the close of the Middle Ages. The power position of the church, which embraced the whole of medieval society, began to fall apart. One life sphere after another wrested itself loose from the church's power."[14]

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[12] Ibid., 180-1.

[13] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, compiled, edited, and translated by Willem H. Vanderburg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) and Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

[14] Dooyeweerd, *Roots*, 149.

Even though Dooyeweerd uses the word "nature" in both dualisms, they represent two very different conceptions. "Nature" in the medieval usage was a theologized accommodation of the Hellenistic "low" view of nature; it was considered radically depraved. In contrast, "modern humankind saw 'nature' as…a field of infinite possibilities in which the sovereignty of human personality [i.e., freedom] must be revealed by a complete mastery of the phenomenon of nature."[15] For premoderns, nature is a temporary (temporal) steppingstone to grace (eternity). For moderns, nature is embraced as a tool for the flowering of human culture. It must be said that, in the end, the two concepts of nature are not so far apart. Whether one abandons nature or offers it up as a sacrifice to the god of Progress, its creaturely reflection of the Creator, and thereby its true value and meaning, goes unheeded. Even with the seismic shift from premodern "nature" (steppingstone) to modern "nature" (tool) and from the church's ideal of "grace" to the secular idea of human "freedom," the dualistic template obtains.

How did the medieval church get caught up in a dualism (nature-grace) in the first place, and why co-opt the Greek "low" view of nature (or any pagan view at all)? Christianity, of course, was birthed in the midst of Hellenic culture, the late-Greek world of thought. "Already in the first centuries of its history," Dooyeweerd reminds us, "the Christian church fought a battle of life and death to keep its ground-motive free from the influences of the Greek…and [other]… near-eastern religions…."[16] Those religions' "ground-motives," their fundamental way of relating to the world around them, were dualistic. The Church's scholastic (medieval) dualism of nature-grace was an accommodation of the Greek matter-form dualism and the Zoroastrian dark/evil-light/good dualism: [(matter + dark/evil) vs. (form + light/good)] x Christianity = nature-grace dualism. The practical outcomes of such a compromise include the dualisms of body-soul, earth-heaven (as well as the chthonian purgatory and hell), and perhaps the most pernicious of all, the God of the Old Testament vs. the God of the New Testament (cf. Luther's law and gospel dialectic).

So has Christianity been forever tainted by pagan ground-motives? The Reformers did not think so. Their "dissatisfaction with Hellenistic anthropologies," Spykman tells us, led them to

[15] Ibid., 151.

[16] Ibid., 111.

"repudiat[e]…the tendency to read Greek philosophical ideas into the New Testament."[17] Maintaining the duality of the Creator-creation distinction, Spykman, in the Reformational tradition, sees biblical revelation as presenting (also present-ing, gifting) a "holistic world-view and life-vision"[18] based on covenant and kingdom: "in creation God covenanted his kingdom into existence. After the fall, God renewed the covenant with a view toward the coming of his kingdom. The ultimate goal is the restoration of all creation in the renewed earth. Thus, *the original covenant stands forever as the abiding foundation and norm for life in God's world*."[19] We should be reading the New Testament and kingdom-building in light of that original covenant. With that in mind, let us turn to the Pentateuch.

Introductory Confession

I do not pretend to approach the Old Testament autonomously. No one can. I bring with me an agenda (as well as a history), namely to root out the dualism that I believe is destroying our only home. I work on the assumption that Dooyeweerd and Spykman *et alia*, representing the Reformational tradition, are correct when they say that the biblical Word is not dualistic but summed up in the creation-fall-redemption formula (hereafter CFR). I must admit to finding this a bit odd. It seems that comparing an ontological expression like nature-freedom to a narrative expression like CFR is like comparing apples and oranges, i.e., a categorical error. Christian orthodoxy is neither monist (all is one) nor dualistic. It begins with the duality of Creator and creation, the latter dependent on the former, and then finds its ultimate meaning in the Christ that redeems and restores the fallen creation to its rightful place. So, CFR is a kind of integral narrative ontology, an ontology (structure) that refuses to be separated from its epistemology and ethics (direction).

That being said, I approach the Creator through the creation, for I know no other way. God, outside of creation, has no number (God is not one or three), takes up no space, has no body, etc. for all such properties are created. God has no essence, no existence, and is not a

[17] Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 11.

[18] Ibid., 15.

[19] Ibid., 11 (emphasis added).

ghostly spirit, for all such terms are creational. As Ellul says, "There are simply no words or images to render God, if God is God. Hence the biblical authors were compelled to take detours, to use images and otherwise use what was available, and to do so in the most careful and intentional manner; and even then it had to necessarily remain indirect as the only way of transmitting a part of what might be the revelation of God."[20] We are not left with a God who is merely precreational, totally and utterly Other. Even a clay pot is not mute. Art reveals much about the artist.[21] And the Christian tradition, originally the Jesus sect of Judaism, is a Way with a long history of Creator-creation interaction (interconnection; Heb.: *yada*). The flowers shout, "God made us!" The burning bush says, "Take off your shoes." The still, small (inner) Voice says, "Follow me." The Way.

I cannot help but partially agree with liberal theologian Don Cupitt's conclusion that Christianity has outlasted its usefulness, that secular culture now continues the work of liberating the marginalized (the political momentum toward equal rights), healing the broken (e.g., rehabilitative prisons in Scandinavia),[22] and stewarding the creation (the environmental movement).[23] Jacques Ellul, a Christian scholar, is no more supportive of institutionalized religion. In the introduction to one of Ellul's books, Willem H. Vanderburg writes, "if churches meet your needs, this book is not for you."[24] I believe that religion is inescapable (cf. Runner) and that Christianity as the Body of Christ is necessary, but that the legacy of dualism has rendered much of the Church's witness ineffective. Ellul writes, "The Bible is not dualistic."[25] It is time for us to (once again) recalibrate to its nondualistic CFR motif. *Semper reformanda*.

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[20] Ellul, *On Freedom*, 12. Cf. Calvin Seerveld's work on allusivity in, e.g., *Rainbows for the Fallen World* (Toronto: Tuppence Press, 1980).

[21] Often more than the artist is comfortable with.

[22] Cf. Jessica Benko, "The Radical Humaneness of Norway's Halden Prison," *New York Times*, accessed March 30, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/29/magazine/the-radical-humaneness-of-norways-halden-prison.html?smprod=nytcore-ipad&smid=nytcore-ipad-share&_r=1.

[23] Don Cupitt, *Reforming Christianity* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2001), 104f.

[24] Willem H. Vanderburg, introduction to *On Freedom*, by Jacques Ellul, viii.

[25] Ellul, *On Freedom*, 155.

Ellul on Genesis 1-3

Ellul prefaces his interaction with the creation accounts in Genesis by assessing the doctrine of direct inspiration. He posits that "there has never been an equivalent Jewish interpretation" and finds it appalling that God would "mechanize human beings," that biblical authors would be reduced "to a kind of dictaphone."[26] "Instead," he says, "…we see human authors who used their culture and all its means, and who therefore would make the 'intellectual errors' of their culture and time" (5). When Ellul asks, "What does all this mean when we encounter contradictory accounts?" (12), he is not questioning the authority of Scripture; he is emphasizing the importance of plurality. *Contra* Hellenism, "This God of the Old Testament is neither the God of philosophy nor of metaphysics, but a God who enters into the history of people…" (5). Not a God of transcendent Forms but a God who walks in the garden and wrestles with man, flesh on flesh. Ellul warns us that "the infusion of Greek philosophy toward the end of the third century via the theologians" can lead us to ask "questions to which the Bible does not in the least seek to reply," and that "Greek concepts, such as objective knowledge,…[are] entirely foreign to Jewish thought" (8-9).

One of the questions the Bible does not intend to answer, according to Ellul, is the origin of the world: "this text is not a cosmogony" (18) and not an argument for *creatio ex nihilo*. "We are not told what went before the creation because that cannot be expressed in words. Nor are we told that God begins from zero, as it were, to make this creation" (21). The text is about the *relationship* between God and not-God, like the *ruach* brooding over the waters (Gen. 1:2), like the *tohu wabohu* which, according to Ellul, has no meaning, no linguistic roots. Instead of translating it into "chaos" or "abyss," perhaps we should be a little less Greek (looking for definite terms) and relax into the Hebraic trust-relationship (troth) with the ineffable God who takes the inexpressible (*tohu wabohu*)[27] and forms creation (us!). Ellul makes six additional observations to distinguish Jewish from Greek (and other) worldviews.

First, the Hebrew word *dabar* means both word (to speak) and action (to do). "In Hebrew, the word is a power that has the double effect of bringing order and establishing a

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[26] Ibid., 4. Subsequent references to this volume will be made parenthetically in the text.

[27] Perhaps it is a nonsensical wordplay like "gobbledy gook" or a snide pun against Tiamat, the Babylonian goddess of the waters/chaos, like "Tia? Not Momma Mia!"

relationship" (21). Speaking implies a conversation. In this sense, "Creation and revelation are the same" (22). Words are not objective entities floating out there unconnected or listed in a dictionary (as with the Greeks) but interactional, breathy, fragile things.[28] The very act of creation, which continues around and within us, *is* our interactional dialogue with God.

Second, whereas the Greeks and Chaldeans had a more objective, descriptive view of the cosmos, "the Jews had no general theory of creation" (22). "Everyone else began with space, but the Jews began with time" (23), and their sense of time is a message of hope. For everyone else (including us today), the day begins with light (life) and ends in darkness (death); but for the Jews, the day begins in the evening with the darkness (death, *tohu wabohu*) and ends in light (life, creation). Whether or not Genesis was written/edited during the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, *every day* is a symbol of hope.[29]

Third, Ellul states that a "major error has been made…by translating the Hebrew word *torah* with 'law' in the meaning this word has today, because modern law has become something objective, theoretical, and abstract" (32). Torah, rather, is a teaching, the opening of a conversational space, an intercoursery overture anticipating a response. This relational emphasis extends to our epistemology: "For example, the Greek invention of universal knowledge and what it implies for what it is to be human is in complete opposition to the Jewish view of being God's creatures, which gives all human activities a relative character."[30]

Fourth, we regularly define "eternity" as time extending onward forever, but Ellul says that "in the Bible there is no relation between time and eternity"; he is adamant that we "put aside our time-related notions of eternity" (44) and realize that it refers to the *place* where grace comes from. It is related to the idea of east (*qedem*), the place where, every morning, light-life-grace originate.

Fifth, there is no abstract good and evil as in Greek philosophy, "no 'good' in its self…. The Bible is much more radical: 'the good' is simply what God says and does" (45). And evil is defined by humanity's attempt to wrest control from God, to go in a different (not-God) direction.

[28] In a separate chapter, Ellul writes, "I believe there are very good reasons why God chooses what is the most fragile to reveal himself to people, namely, the Word. If God revealed himself in all his power, we would be annihilated" (105).

[29] A motif that continues throughout Scripture in, e.g., the several "dark" wombs that are opened to life.

[30] Vanderburg, editorial footnote in *On Freedom*, by Jacques Ellul, 34n9.

Similarly, "In Hebrew thought there are no such things as a fallen humanity or fallen angels…. Nothing is said about Satan aspiring to dominate God. This is also Greek mythology" (46). Also, for Ellul, "there is no such thing…[as] original sin" (70),[31] only "an original weakness in the sense that human beings are finite…" (75).

Finally, "the Bible has no notion whatsoever of an immortal soul" (84). It is a Greek invention. "When a Jew dies, this Spirit [of God] in him or her returns to God, and the rest disappears" (85).

To sum, Ellul encourages us to rid ourselves of Greek notions and rediscover these Hebraic, biblical categories:

- No direct inspiration of Scripture, rather the earthy stories of enculturated humans.
- Not a God of transcendent Forms, but an immanent, interactive, historical Being.
- Knowledge is not objective but personal, relational, intimate (*yada*).
- No origins stories but illustrations of God's mastery over history.
- Words/speech are not abstract but concrete acts of creative revelation.
- Not "life leads to death," but "death leads to life."
- Not "Torah as objective law," but "Torah as initiating a loving conversation."
- Eternity is not forever but the origin of grace.
- No abstract good and evil, rather God's concrete, creational ways are good; all else is evil.
- No immortal soul, only a return to God.

If Ellul is correct, several dualisms (e.g., body-soul, earth-heaven) are on the chopping block. The biblical way of relating to reality is far more down-to-earth than is commonly preached from most pulpits.

Keller on Genesis 1:2

Catherine Keller, a postmodern, feminist professor of constructive theology, spends an entire book on one verse.[32] It is a thrilling ride. Similar to Ellul, she does not find *creatio ex nihilo* in

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[31] In a later chapter, Ellul explains, "there is no original sin but there is a perspective of humanity as a whole, in a sense synthesized before God in Adam" (94).

[32] Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003). Subsequent references to this volume will be made parenthetically in the text.

Scripture. She turns to, *inter alia*, Rashi, the highly-revered eleventh-century Jewish scholar, who "argued that the first verse of the Bible is not a sentence but a dependent clause" (114). Keller presents his three-verse (Gen. 1:1-3) structure as follows (114):

(1) *When Elohim began to create heaven and earth*

(2) —*at which time the earth was* tohu vabohu*, darkness was on the face of the deep and the* ruach *was moving upon the face of the waters*—

(3) *then God said, "Let there be light…."*

Rashi reads the first verse as a kind of title or statement of the topic, not as a declaration of absolute origin. Keller reminds us that "Until the late second century, Jewish and Christian interpreters seem to have assumed that the Creator formed the creation from some depersonalized version of this primordial stuff" (15). It was gnostic monism which "shared, indeed exacerbated, the Hellenistic disdain for the material world" (47) that forced the hand of the church fathers toward the *ex nihilo* formula, a "position [that] depended upon platonic metaphysics….[and] locked into dogma a clean and simple form of Hellenistic dualism" (46). "To summarize…: Genesis 1 + omnipotence + ontology = *creatio ex nihilo*" (64).

In lieu of orthodoxy's dualistic tehomophobia, a fear of chaos that comes from a theology of dominance, and steering clear of gnostic (and New Age) monism, Keller suggests a tehomophilia that embraces the chaosmic Christ, "the Word [read] from the vantage point of its own fecund multiplicity, its flux into flesh, its overflow" (19). Turning to Latin American liberation theology, she quotes Vitor Westhelle who accuses Western (Eurocentric) theologies of sacralizing order, whereas "in Latin America nature is not seen as ordered and 'order' is not a positive concept"; in fact, order is "most often an ideological disguise for domination, repression and persecution" (20).[33] We Westerners like our clear-cut categories, our wars against "pure evil," our theological formulations, but Keller wonders "whether precisely the Genesis *tehom*—which implies neither pure evil nor total victimization but something more like the matrix of possibilities in which liberation struggles unfold—would not serve the current context better than the orthodox *ex nihilo*" (21). Keller's postmodern musings are not necessarily new. Christian mysticism and the apophatic tradition have persisted at the fringes of orthodoxy from the start.

[33] Quotes from Vitor Westhelle, "Creation Motifs in the Search for a Vital Space: A Latin American Perspective," in Susan B. Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, eds., *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 131.

An openness to these ideas—along with Judaism's multivalent history of perspectives—could help us hear and live the Scriptures in a more inclusive, ecumenical and less judgmental fashion.

Brueggemann and Linafelt on the Torah

Walter Brueggemann and Tod Linafelt are less eccentric than Keller but not less challenging to some of our inherited Western dualisms. Similar to Ellul, they set the stage by discussing biblical inspiration: "the biblical text itself does not purport to be 'history' in any modern sense of the term.... [It] is not a product of *events*, but a product of imaginative *interpretation*."[34] Brueggemann and Linafelt's "imaginative remembering" (9) may distance itself from historical reportage and acknowledge "the Marxian insight that 'truth' is inescapably filtered through 'interest'" (12), but it confesses with "trembling lips" that "the entire traditioning process continues and embodies a *surplus rendering of reality* that discloses all of reality in light of the holiness of YHWH" (13, emphasis added). To the ongoing dismay of Hellenistic philosophers and scholastic theologians, the Hebrew literary style is an ambiguous one. For example, "divine agency and human agency are almost always imagined in these narratives as being inextricably but ambiguously bound together in such a way that neither is autonomous or effective in and of itself" (25). The Creator-creation distinction is not as clean as Greek thinkers would like. This is not to deny the distinction, but to side step formal logic.[35] Hebrew "logic" is not typified by the principle of non-contradiction (*A* is never identical to *non-A*), for example, but by *yada*: interrelational, intimate, difficult to know where one ends and the other begins, it is less about compartments and more about (the sexual analogy of) intermingling bodily fluids.

Brueggemann and Linafelt refer to the Pentateuch as the Torah but make the familiar point that "to call this corpus 'law,' as Christians are wont to do, is a profound misnomer" (43). "[I]t is better rendered as 'instruction,' that is, a teaching that gives guidance" (36-37). Again, the emphasis is not on the objectified content, like a lawyer's book on a shelf, but on the trusting, personal relationship between teacher and student, a teacher who *inspires* the student and who is

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[34] Walter Brueggemann and Tod Linafelt, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination,* 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 6 (emphasis original). Subsequent references to this volume will be made parenthetically in the text.

[35] Consider the blurred lines between YHWH, "men," and "angels" in Gen. 18-19 (Abraham's three visitors) and man/God (angel, cf. Hos. 12:4) in Gen. 32:22ff. (Jacob's wrestling match).

willing to learn from the student.[36] Brueggemann and Linafelt build on the possibility that the Torah was written for a people in exile[37] by suggesting that it "is peculiarly aimed at the young" (45). We might well imagine the intergenerational crisis of young Jews growing up in the metropolis of Babylon, tempted by the styles and media of the day to ways of knowing/living that were not of YHWH. "It has been a characteristic task of Jewish teaching, nurture, and socialization to invite the young into the world of miracle, and so to resist assimilation" (47), and "to recruit the young into a distinct lore of wonder[,]…*an alternative world* where YHWH lives and governs" (46, emphasis original). This "counterworld" remains our task today, the telling of its lore, the building of its foundations—not in the heavens "above" but here and now.

Genesis, for Brueggemann and Linafelt, is not an origins story. "The question for the text [Gen. 1:1-2:4a] is not so much 'How did the world begin?' but rather 'What *sort* of world do we have?'" (57). In concert with both Ellul and Keller—and the pre-Hellenized Jewish tradition—Brueggemann and Linafelt question the traditional "from nothing" doctrine. This is not a *creatio ex nihilo* story, "but rather God's act of creation consists in the imposition of a particular *order* upon that mass of undifferentiated *chaos*" (54, emphasis original). Another challenge to tradition is the observation that "the Old Testament itself features no such teaching about 'the fall'" of humanity; "nowhere in the Old Testament is that judgment articulated beyond existential disappointment about contemporaries into an ontological principle" (59). To do that it took Paul, or rather later readings of Paul: "since the late twentieth century there have been probes among Christian scholars suggesting that the decisive interpretation of Paul by Augustine and Luther misconstrued Paul's intention…. In any case, it is clear that interpretation is not finished, but is an endless, open-ended project for those who take the text seriously and authoritatively" (60).

Brueggemann and Linafelt read Exodus as an example of the tension between different biblical traditions. "On the one hand, the Torah includes a so-called humanitarian tradition that is concerned for a workable communitarianism that values all members of the community" (84). We can think of the many references to care for the widows, orphans, resident aliens, and the

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[36] Does God learn from us? change? reconsider things? Not the omniscient, omnipotent, ontotheological, neoplatonic God.

[37] "It is a widespread assumption that the Torah reached roughly its final form by the time of the exile or soon thereafter (587-537 BCE)…" (41). "[D]isplaced people need a place from which to validate a theologically informed, peculiarly sense of identity and practice of life. The traditioning process that produced the Torah thus strikes us as a remarkable match for a displacement, so that we may understand 'the Torah of Moses' as a *script for a displaced community*" (42, emphasis original).

poor. "On the other hand, there are absolute formulations of law…that rigorously uphold social order in a merciless fashion without any humanitarian qualification. These different accents…[provide a] tension between an absolute commitment to order and a compassion for the powerless" (84). Both emphases—law and order, compassion and mercy—continue into Leviticus as a "religion [that] has to do with [the] *physical* world and not just with what one *believes*" (89, emphasis original). This is a religion that is an earth(l)y *way of life*, that deals with menstrual blood and semen as "bodily fluids [that] are not by any means intrinsically bad" (90). It is a relational religion of "holiness that concerns *every facet of life*" (95, emphasis added).[38]

For Brueggemann and Linafelt, the Torah is comprised of "two distinct literary units: Genesis-Numbers as the voice of the *Priestly* tradition and Deuteronomy as the voice of the *Deuteronomic* tradition" (110). These two traditions offer different interpretations and "theological intentionalities," and the fact that they are placed side by side in the canon reflects the Hebrew acceptance of pluralistic *dunamis* (as opposed to the Greek insistence on unity and *stasis*). Brueggemann and Linafelt conclude that it is the Deuteronomic tradition that "becomes the predominant voice of covenantalism in the Old Testament," and that it "decisively shapes…much of Jewish and Christian theology…" (115). Deuteronomy offers the vision of a different world so radical that it has never been fully implemented: "no permanent economic underclass in Israel," divided "powers of governance…to prevent an excessive concentration of power," "welfare support for the needy" (e.g., orphans, widows, and immigrants), and protection for those "unable to protect themselves" (112-13). Approximately 2700 years later, the closest examples we have to this are the post-Christian, democratic, socialist countries of Scandinavia, and they are far from ideal. "Deuteronomy, in contrast to the Priestly tradition, is concerned for the right ordering of the political-economic life of Israel" (123).

Brueggemann and Linafelt summarize their Torah study with the plot sequence of creation-Sinai tradition-land (124). This, to my eye, closely resembles the Christian formula creation-fall-redemption (CFR). After the creation, they both address the reality that humans need direction to walk in God's ways, and they both have a happy ending. But there are also subtle differences, particularly when the CFR is read through dualistic spectacles. The creation-Sinai tradition-land (CSL) plotline is the one Jesus and his followers grew up with. Why should

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[38] Cf. Abraham Kuyper's famous statement: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!"

we change it? CSL ends (open-endedly) with the *land*, not necessarily the land of Canaan, on my contemporary ecological reading, but *all* land, and particularly the land beneath our feet (in California or Texas or wherever). The promised land, the land of Jubilee, is, by God's grace, right here, right now.

Baxter on Deuteronomy

In his postmodern commentary on Deuteronomy, James Baxter acknowledges that it is based heavily on the work of Brueggeman. Brueggeman's influence is recognizable in the emphasis on the earthiness of the Hebrew narrative style. Baxter writes, "Down-to-earth stories are not [metaphysically] universal. Some forms of Greek and pagan philosophy…chose to speak of human existence without reference to any concrete history. Instead, they preferred to focus on ideas or myths cast in a timeless eternity—not so with the biblical religions of Christianity and Judaism."[39] Like Brueggemann, Baxter believes that Deuteronomy sets the tone for the rest of the Jewish and Christian Bible(s), that its vision for a Torah-based community "is nothing less than radical" (12). And the tone, the radical vision? "All are valuable and equal under God" (24). Deuteronomy is dangerous for—and subversive of—kings, emperors, and multinational CEOs. Free market capitalists and self-interested libertarians had best read no further. Deuteronomy describes a country whose citizens hold all (the most important) things in common, where "economics does not define people; rather, what defines them is a common memory of the Exodus, a common blessing in the land, and a common allegiance to the God of Exodus and land" (60). Memory. Land. God.

"Deuteronomy worries about children" (14). The story needs to be told afresh every generation. The story of our relationship with God. The story of the Exodus, how God saves us (*yeshua*) from that which enslaves us, time and again. The story of the gifts—life, land, shalom—that are showered freely, like manna, on us every day: "Give us today something to eat…." Commenting on the *sh'ma* (Deut. 6:4-7: "Hear, O Israel…"), that we should "recite…to [our] children and talk about" those words wherever we are, Baxter says that "Moses proposes 'saturation education' so that a child's imaginative horizon is completely pervaded by signs and

[39] James Baxter, *The Book of Deuteronomy and Post-Modern Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Resource, 2013), 2n1. Subsequent references to this volume will be made parenthetically in the text.

reminders of this imperative [to love God with all of one's being]" (28). "Amnesia is the great threat" (29) and all too easily occurs in a society where "satiation [e.g., consumerism] banishes the past and obliterates the future. Everything is reduced to an endless present tense, rather like the absence of clocks in the casinos of Las Vegas" (30). In contrast, the Passover seder is the perfect example of reenacted memory, from the hiding of the *afikomen* to the youngest members asking the four scripted questions: why is this night different from all others, etc. May the stories never be forgotten.

Baxter equates the land of milk and honey, or, in the Christian tradition, the kingdom of God, with "God-consciousness" (3). This is his way of emphasizing a Christian identity found in faith, whereas the Jewish identity is more often found in land or ethnicity: "Christians are more like sojourners in history and strangers in every land, every social order" (3). I disagree. Jews have sojourned at least as much as Christians over the centuries and, more to the point here, Christians ought to consider the land wherever they are as the promised land. A *hic et nunc* perspective demands it. And Deuteronomy is wonderfully quotidian in the particulars that Baxter calls distributive justice:

- Regarding Deuteronomy 8: "Creation gives us gifts that allow us to create wealth so that it can be shared equitably by all. A full awareness of God means knowing that all things, all creation, belong only to God" (40).
- Regarding Deuteronomy 10:12-22: "God's will is simply the full caring for the vulnerable in society" (46).
- Regarding Deuteronomy 14:22-29 and 19:14: "[T]ithing reflects that Yahweh is the landlord and owns the land (people only 'rent' it)" (57). "'Personally held land' does not mean 'owned'…. An individual takes care of it on behalf of the community" (85n8).
- Regarding Deuteronomy 15:7-11: "Social transactions in Israel are never between two parties, but always take place in the presence of Yahweh; this third party will powerfully sustain the entitlements of the poor against the rich" (61).
- Regarding Deuteronomy 17:18-20: "Moses asserts that leadership devoted to the accumulation of wealth, power, influence, and prestige, in the public or private management domain, is a way to social disintegration" (77).

The God that we meet in Deuteronomy and the God we meet in Jesus is one and the same. Not unlike Ellul, Baxter sees Yahweh as "outside any normal categories of religion" (18),

i.e., as I understand it, we are not talking primarily about Judaism or Christianity as such but the "secular" (this-age, the here-and-now) world that is not so "secular" (nonspiritual) after all. Can we talk about a secular Christianity, with more emphasis on living moment-by-moment *coram Deo* and less on the typical trappings of religiosity? Deuteronomy does not dismiss the importance of typical religious acts, such as a harvest tithe brought before God (Deut. 14:22-29), but even "the tithe brought to 'the place' is promptly given back to the people of Israel, who are to eat and enjoy the offering that it has brought" (58). Is it possible that our typical communion (Eucharist) service—with its dainty and environment-polluting plastic cups, polished silver trays, and everyone facing forward—is a mockery of the more mundane necessity (command!) to break bread with (feed!) the hungry, face to face? "Worship today is often reduced to therapeutic self-help and self-enhancement. It is offered in simplistic stories and sweetness without any notion of covenantal requirement or rigor…. We maintain class consciousness, self-enrichment, power over others, and retributive justice" (53).

Deuteronomy's teachings—Jesus' teachings—are not just radical. Let us be honest: they are subversive (bordering on traitorous) and revolutionary vis-à-vis The American Way. Deuteronomy's communitarian approach is far too close to commun(al)ism for most American Christians' comfort. And Deuteronomy's (and Jesus') primary emphasis on *this* life and *this* land is far too secular for most heavenly-minded Christians. Deuteronomy is "so simple and yet so profound. Other than some references to ritualistic practice, there are no required beliefs, no miracles. It is just the straight goods, the essence of what we [as a community] can become" (108).

Eliade on *Homo Religiosus*

Mircea Eliade, the twentieth-century University of Chicago professor of religion, begins his multivolume *A History of Religious Ideas* with the statement that for humans, "*living*…is in itself a *religious act*, for food-getting, sexual life, and work have a sacramental value."[40] This is strikingly similar to Runner's maxim, "Life is religion"; indeed, Eliade breaks from his modernist

[40] Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1, *From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), xiii (emphasis original). Subsequent references to this volume will be made parenthetically in the text.

colleagues, who treat religion as a human superstition to be outgrown, and includes the experience of the sacred as "an *element* in the structure of consciousness and not a *stage* in the history of consciousness" (xiii). Runner would go further of course; he would say that religion is not merely an "element" of humanness, but its very being. Not that life is religi*ous* or *has* religiosity as well as economic and other aspects, but that it *is* religion. This is a reflexive statement: life is religion; religion is life. Or, as Dooyeweerd puts it, "*Meaning* [i.e., referring to a divine origin] is the *being* of all that has been created."[41] This integral meaning is what Dooyeweerd and Runner call "religion." Although Eliade sees religion as a core *part* of who we are (*Homo religiosus*), his work on this pistic aspect of being human provides a helpful religiocultural backdrop to the Pentateuch.

Already with prehistoric paleanthropians we have evidence of the "mystic solidarity" between hunter and hunted, a relationship typified by blood sacrifice—the death of one so the other may live. This interchangeability is part of a metamorphic worldview—"they believe that a man can change into an animal and vice versa" (7)—which sees reality as more of a unity-in-diversity than a dualism. With meso- and neolithic peoples, we have evidence of a split between body and soul (or spirit), of eating another's brain to assimilate his or her spirit, of the linguistic connections between spirit/soul and breath (e.g., Gen. 2:7: "then YHWH Elohim…breathed into [the first person's] nostrils the breath of life"). Is this split a dualism, a division of the world "into two mutually irreducible elements" or "two opposing principles [e.g., good and evil]"?[42] Not according to the creation accounts in Genesis. The body is made of earth/mud/dust—neutral in some cultures, "good" in Genesis 1—and the spirit/soul/life force is God's breath (i.e., a part of God, a divine gift, another angle on *imago Dei*). This may be a *duality*—two parts, one from earth, the other from God, neither evil—but not a *dualism*.

In addition, Eliade writes, "according to many traditions, at death the 'spirit' returns to the presence of its celestial creator and the body is restored to the earth. But this anthropological 'dualism' was rejected by the biblical authors, as it was, furthermore, by the majority of their Near Eastern contemporaries" (165n6). What could this mean? In place of a dualism, what do the biblical authors describe? Eliade does not say, but he does compare the Mesopotamian

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[41] Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, vol. 1, *The Necessary Presuppositions of Philosophy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1969), 4 (emphasis original).

[42] *Webster's Third New International Dictionary,* s.v. "dualism" (Springfield, MA: MerriamWebster, 2002).

cosmogony to Genesis, calling the former "pessimist"—where "the world [was] formed from a 'demonic' primordial being, Tiamat; [and] man modeled from the blood of an archdemon, Kingu" (164)—and the latter a place where "[t]he world is 'good' and man is an *imago dei*…" (164). So we have the Spirit of God and the "chaos"/*tehom* (Gen. 1:2), the human's earthbody and Godbreath (Gen. 2:7), a "good" creation spoiled by human sinful actions, and an anthropological dualism rejected by the biblical authors, but how do we end up with "heaven is good and the world/earth is bad" with*in* the Christian tradition? In Sumerian documents Eliade points to the "belief in the preexistence of words…[and its] importance for archaic ontology," specifically its "expression in the Platonic doctrine of Ideas" (62). He assumes this belief traces back to prehistory, is seen in cultures/religions where human acts are considered to be mere imitations/shadows of events in the divine realm(s), and therefore the lower realm is ontologically inferior (derivative, deficient, dependent, even evil) when compared to the higher realm.

As a brief addendum to Eliade, it might be helpful to compare Dooyeweerd's account of the rise of dualistic thought. In his *Roots of Western Culture*, he presents the matter and form motives that showed up in ancient Greek thought (from "pre-Greek and even of foreign origin").[43] The matter motive of the ancient nature religions—"the deification of a formless, cyclical stream of life"[44]—was demonstrated by the faith/trust placed in blind fate (*anangke*) and the cyclical rhythms of Mother Earth (*Gaia*). In contrast, the form motive of the newer culture religion—of order, measure, and harmony—was exemplified in the Delphic god Apollo, the lawgiver. These two motives—*matter* (chaos, passion, Dionysus) and *form* (design, moral standards, Apollo)—were locked in a dialectical tension that was bequeathed to the Romans, who, by sheer force, attempted to control (form) all of nature (matter). Although this is a simplified analysis, it highlights the rise of "good" human culture over "bad" nature and sets the stage for the birthing of a (Roman) Christianity that seeks to unify, define, and control orthodoxy at the cost of the plurivocality that defined Judaism (from the Hebrew language itself to the creative talmudic and rabbinic variety of biblical interpretations) and early Christianity. Dooyeweerd continues by explaining how the Greco-Roman matter-form dualism becomes the scholastic Christian nature-grace dualism, both of which are in contradistinction to the biblical creation-fall-redemption

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[43] Dooyeweerd, *Roots*, 16.

[44] Ibid.

(CFR) motive. The dualisms incorrectly divide created reality into good and evil realms; CFR maintains God's covenant over all of "good" creation, even over all of the "evil" missteps of humankind.

De Graaf on Storytelling the Old Testament

The Rev. S. G. De Graaf (1889-1955), in his *Promise and Deliverance*, intends to continue the CFR tradition by teaching storytellers (e.g., Sunday school and Christian grade school teachers, parents et al.) how to offer the Word of God to the next generation. To that end, he refuses to reduce the stories of Scripture to a pietistic "Jesus and the soul" message,[45] but rather states that God is the main character, the "prime agent" (xxi), throughout.

In his first chapter, commenting on Genesis 1-2:3, De Graaf focuses on "God living in constant communion with the entire creation" (2), what he emphatically restates as the "Main Thought: The Kingdom of God is instituted" (3). I find this restatement troubling. The former phrase—"God…constant communion…entire creation"—is the endearing foundation of all that follows, from covenanting to our creative response(s). The latter is *solo Deo*, sitting on a throne, edificed behind stone walls. Describing God's six-day earthforming, De Graaf writes, "God repeatedly brings forth the higher from the lower and makes the *lower subservient to the higher*" (1, emphasis added). What on earth could he mean? Light and dark: which is higher/better? Sky over ocean: sky is better? Earth and plants versus the seas: which is higher/better? Et cetera. According to De Graaf, at the start of the first day there is "nothing at all. God alone was" (3). *Solo Deo* again. This is not what Scripture says, as we have already discussed above. This is eisegesis. To be clear, I am not suggesting we read *only* Scripture with no commentary (as if such naive literalism is the only safe ground), especially as we storytell it to children, but my overt intention here is to detect unwelcome dualisms. My fear is that De Graaf overemphasizes God's transcendence right from the start, instead of God's hands getting dirty forming the *tohu wabohu* (like Play-Doh, which children would relate to with glee). This could easily lead to a devaluing of the creation, such as we have today, instead of imaging God by creating gardens of biodiversity.

[45] S. G. De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, vol. 1, *From Creation to the Conquest of Canaan*, trans. H. Evan Runner and Elisabeth Wichers Runner (1977; repr., St. Catharines, ON: Paideia Press, 2012), xxv. Subsequent references to this volume will be made parenthetically in the text.

De Graaf titles chapter three, which deals with Genesis 3, "The Covenant of God's Grace," although he is quick to concede that it is not "about the *establishment* of the covenant of grace…[just its] *revelation*" (17). Why the equivocation? There is no mention of a formal covenant in these opening chapters of Genesis, but rather a collage of ancient Near Eastern mythic images that make for wonder-filled storytelling material! And the unfolding message is clear to even the smallest listeners: God is here! God is intimately and caringly involved in all we see around us, from the opening of a flower to the clothing of those left exposed by their mistakes. This is not the time for legal jargon. And why interrupt the imagination with too many explanations? Although there is no mention of Satan in Genesis 3—only the intriguing figure of the serpent, the trickster of Middle Eastern legend—De Graaf definitively states that Satan, the fallen angel, the devil, the one whose "whole existence is hatred of God," whose "sole aim is to destroy everything God has made," "decided to speak to the woman through the serpent" (18). Instead of allowing children to hear these ancient Jewish stories with fresh ears, the way the boy Jesus would have done, De Graaf insists on front-loading them with his interpretation of the New Testament authors' interpretations.

Finally, De Graaf condenses all of Deuteronomy ("the predominant voice of covenantalism in the Old Testament," according to Brueggemann and Linafelt)[46] to only seven pages (covering Deut. 29-34). Despite the short shrift, his summarizing "Main Thought" is one I would say applies to the whole of Scripture: "God will give you everything, and in His covenant He has brought it very near to you: He has put the Word of His grace in your mouth and in your heart" (411). De Graaf reminds us that "[w]hen we read here of 'the word,' we should think also of the eternal Word (John 1), that is, the One who maintains the covenant fellowship between God and His people, the One who led Israel into the wilderness as the Angel of the Lord" (410). I am ill at ease with this equating of the Angel of the Lord with Jesus. Certainly the Jewish perspective was not one of seeing the Angel of the Lord as one "person" of the Trinity. Was Jesus, as "Angel," then directly involved in massacring King Og, "his sons, and all his people, until there was no survivor left" (Num. 21:35)? I would rather De Graaf stay closer to the unfolding covenantal (Old Testament, Jewish) perspective in his storytelling, embellishing with the

[46] Brueggemann and Linafelt, *Introduction*, 115.

cultural-historical context of the time and be less hasty to shoehorn the earthy, multivocal and multivalent YHWH of the Hebrew Scriptures into Christological constructs.

Leder off the Land

Arie C. Leder's book on the story line of the Pentateuch is a contemporary example of latent dualism. Instead of the title *Waiting for the Land*,[47] it should be called *Who Needs the Land?* To be fair, the story line of the Pentateuch only brings God's people up to but not into the Promised Land, and Leder does mention the land often, albeit safely out of arm's reach in its *secondary* role, but his point is clear. What he calls a "desert theology…argues that this world is not the church's home, that she is waiting for…the heavenly Jerusalem,…[that] the only geography that truly matters to the church is the desert,…[and that the] land has no power of itself to give or sustain life" (210-211). This is, of course, quite orthodox, but my point is that orthodoxy is too comfortable spiritualizing the earthy realities of Jewish history. It is too easy to bypass the challenge of Deuteronomy's *topia* (not u-topia, not no-place, but this-place, here and now) and write off the Promised Land as something that merely "anticipates the fullness of life in God's presence, and…is centrally fulfilled through Jesus Christ" (193). That, to my ears, is literally utopia: "a people who have *no soil* of their own to cultivate…[and who are] in transition to the heavenly city" (205, emphasis added); "the truth that home is not defined by a particular physical geography, but a spiritual presence…" (41).

Leder's discussions of land focus on the (spiritualized, metaphorized) desert. "Desert places *represent* the opposite of ordered cultivated land…. [They] are *like* rites of passage" (156-7, emphasis added). They are "uninhabitable" (161), "inhospitable…, hostile and infertile,…[yet] the Pentateuch declares [them] to be Israel's normal earthly home" (196). There are indeed wonderful spiritual metaphors here, but there is also a prejudice against desert beauty and life, and, more importantly, against the *land* (earth) *itself* as a vehicle of God's grace.

Leder does not ignore Deuteronomy's dream for The Good Life (e.g., the Jubilee economy), but turns a critical eye toward those today who follow a "materialist-liberationist reading of Scripture" (190). Unfortunately, he conflates (i) those who deconstruct and rewrite the

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[47] Arie C. Leder, *Waiting for the Land: The Story Line of the Pentateuch* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010). Subsequent references to this volume will be made parenthetically in the text.

Israelite conquest of Canaan as an internal egalitarian revolution, (ii) "socially concerned contemporary Christians" who want to "establish a counter-society" (191), and (iii) supporters of the modern state of Israel as a home for the previously dispossessed.[48] He believes this (singular?) position makes the land primary and the presence of God secondary; therefore "'God' is only a cipher for the process of social liberation" (192). If God's importance fades when God is in second place, what happens when the land is put in second place? This is a fruitless course. It is not God *or* land. It is God and/with/in/through the land. Not just the land of Canaan. All land. Not heaven first, earth second. Heaven *on* earth. As if the presence of God is tangible without land/earth/creation. Leder caricatures the materialist-liberationists by summarizing their position thusly: "There is no waiting [for the land], only the struggle for social transformation and a more humane existence now. In this view, the liberated will build the heavenly city on earth today" (192). Is that not the manifestation, the very definition, of the presence of God (cf. Matt. 25:40)?

On the last page, Leder offers a fleeting acknowledgement of "ecological mismanagement" (212), but only with a defeatist tone: "None of these problems can or will be solved until the Lord returns and scours this earth clean" (212)—as if the earth is the problem.

Van Wijk-Bos on the Torah

Reading Johanna W. H. van Wijk-Bos after Leder is a breath of fresh air. Her approach to Scripture is similar to my own: "Old Testament texts do not stand in need of a text from the New Testament for their interpretation. The Torah does not depend on the New Testament for an exploration of its theological importance and relevance for the Christian life today."[49] Instead, "texts from both Testaments are brought together into conversation with each other…[for] mutual illumination" (70). For example, van Wijk-Bos considers Paul's words in Romans 5:18-19 in light of its reference to the Genesis 2-3 story of the first sin. Interestingly, in Romans 5:18, Paul

[48] I have no doubt that there are those who vigorously support all three views. I am not one of them. I find (i) to be interesting at best and (iii) to be a horrific mess with no easy answers on either the Israeli or Palestinian side. Of more concern to me here is (ii).

[49] Johann W. H. van Wijk-Bos, *Making Wise the Simple: The Torah in Christian Faith and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 69. In her Introduction, van Wijk-Bos explains that *Torah* means "teaching" and can refer to all the Jewish teachings, both written and oral, but that she is using it, when capitalized, in its most common usage, i.e., as referring to the Pentateuch.

says one *person's* wrongdoing is acquitted by one *person's* (Jesus') righteousness. In Genesis, the first wrongdoer is, of course, Eve, but in verse 19 Paul is more specific: one *man's* (Adam's) disobedience is corrected by one *man's* (Jesus') obedience. What if Jesus had been a woman? "To make his argument work, Paul has to ignore the fact that the garden story presents two human beings rather than one and that one of these [i.e., the woman] is the initiator in the act of disobedience" (120). In other words, Paul does what we all do; by focusing on one aspect, he inevitably leaves out others. He is a child of his time, borrowing from current rabbinical ideas to form a message for his (patriarchal) Gentile hearers.

More broadly, van Wijk-Bos sees the central teaching of the Torah God's "burning love for those on the underside of…society" (31), a love that "can be understood only from within the experience of covenant" (1). Perhaps Leder would label van Wijk-Bos a liberationist; after all, the latter says that "ancient Israel understood itself as a people liberated by God" (15) and "a 'realm of priests' [where] all have equal access to God" (17). Whereas Leder emphasizes God's presence without the land, van Wijk-Bos points out that "when God closes the door to the garden of Eden, God is outside and not inside the garden," i.e., "God is…directly involved in the nitty gritty of human life" (247) and is in the business of healing the "fissures [that] have opened up in God's creation, between God and creature, between creature and creature and between creature and creation" (229). God's here-and-now interaction with, investment in, creation is illustrated in van Wijk-Bos's explanation of three terms: goodness, holiness, and righteousness.

All three of these "nesses"—good, holy, and right(eous)—are most often "delivered to us via the medium of Greek language and concepts" (4).[50] In my experience, goodness, or The Good, is often thought of as a transcendent category that is either part of God (God is good), which makes no sense if God is outside of creation and "good" is an aspect of creation, or a part of the "law" that mediates between God and us, which is merely a limbo between God and not-God, or perhaps some sort of "higher" level of creation. This is not the way the Torah talks, van Wijk-Bos reminds us. When God declares creation "good" in Genesis 1, it "may also be

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[50] Another example of "the contributions of Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought," of a Greco-Christian philosophical concept, is that God does not change, God is immutable (cf. the Westminster Confession). Yet the Torah describes a God who rethinks, recants, and is "dynamic rather than static" (234; cf. Exod. 3:13-14). Van Wijk-Bos connects this to God's teachings: "Although divine instructions were eventually codified in a text, *torah*, like God, is not conceived of as static and unchangeable, but rather indicates directives, rules, laws, and stories that are adaptable to different situations" (263).

translated 'beautiful'…[or] what is *fitting* and…what *works*" (81-82, emphasis added). Hebraic philosophy, if it can be called that, is earthy, actional, immanent.

Holiness, or being holy, is similarly grounded in bodily doing what God does (which, by Torah definition, is "good") (17). "Without loving the stranger, there cannot exist a dedicated (i.e., a holy) community. Love for the stranger is closest to holiness" (261). Not everyone knows the right thing to do. Those that do know, who do what God does (are God-like, godly, image-bearers), are set apart by their very actions—actions that are often against the status quo, that are destabilizing of the hegemonic powers. Those right actions/relations *are* what makes one righteous. Abraham was considered righteous not because of a "mechanical legalist quality" (248n45) but because he did the right thing, he trusted God in his bodily actions here and now (or then and there). "Righteousness (Hebrew *tsedaqah*) is not an easy word to translate because it includes concepts that we hold to be mutually exclusive, such as justice and charity. *Tsedaqah* means justice that has an eye for inequality and disparity between individuals and groups and aims to redress such differences" (251).

The Torah leaves no room for saving souls for heaven; it demands actions small and large here and now to feed mouths and destabilize systems of injustice. Like it or not, "God in the Torah…prefers the company of those who are, on the face of it, not the most attractive or powerful or rich" (248). On my reading, van Wijk-Bos helps us to avoid the other-worldly, dualistic emphasis within Christianity and to stay focused on what is truly good and holy and right: the healing of creation (*tikkun*) by the correction of injustices against all our neighbors, human and otherwise.

Conclusion

"…they were gazing up…[when] two men in white robes…said,
'…why do you stand looking up toward heaven?'" (Acts 1:10-11a)

How do we go from a God who is locked out of Eden with us, who travels through the desert with us, who cares about our very bodily functions, who eventually shares in those bodily functions, to the Immutable One? How do we go from the mud-splattered arms of the Artist who forms the *tohu wabohu* and shapes the first humans from humus to the First Cause of the *creatio ex nihilo*? How do we go from yearning for the land, caring for the land, and striving for radical

distributive justice to "Drill, Baby, drill" and longing for heaven? Ellul reminds us that Hebraic reality is immanent and concrete, not transcendent (e.g., ethics); relational and interactive, not objective (e.g., epistemology); and integral not dualistic (e.g. anthropology). Keller invites us to embrace the *tehom*, a tehomophilia, to hold things loosely, and, in good postmodern fashion, to be less obsessed with categorizing everything (including God). Brueggemann and Linafelt challenge us to live in the tension between God's compassion, mercy, and love for the outsider on the one hand, and God's demand for holiness (avoiding outside influences) on the other. Baxter continues Brueggemann's work by pressing us to take Deuteronomy's emphasis on social justice to the streets today. We considered Eliade (and briefly, Dooyeweerd) in our search for the origins of dualism but peer into ancient history as though through a haze. De Graaf storytells the ancient Hebrews but leaves our questions unanswered, and Leder merely ends up perpetuating the same dualisms. Van Wijk-Bos, like Ellul, Brueggemann and Linafelt, helps us to see past the dualisms and engage today's world with the earthy Jubilee-style economic and social justice emphasis of the God of our mothers and fathers.

Perhaps excavating the roots of dualism is not so important. Maybe it is enough to bring Deuteronomy's *topia* to bear on our era of Late Capitalism. Or perhaps the roots of dualism are an undiscoverable country, lost in the mists of prehistory, and all we can do is postulate about their origins being found in the upper and lower brain, or a supposed male objectivism vs. female subjectivism. After all, we Deuteronomistic liberationists have plenty to keep us busy. Rabbi Julia Watts Belser, in *Tikkun* (a social-justice-minded Jewish magazine), reminds us that although "then-President George W. Bush famously said of Hurricane Katrina that 'the storm didn't discriminate," disaster almost always intensifies pre-existing social inequalities."[51] Are we prepared to help those who have nothing to fall back on? In a recent issue of *Sojourners*, a similarly-minded Christian magazine, Jim Wallis editorializes on poverty: "the World Bank estimates that 1 billion people worldwide still live on less than $1.25 per day. Push that to a mere $2 per day and the number is 2.2 billion people—almost a third of all the people on Earth." He would like to see us do a better job of sharing the world's resources; unfortunately, he says, "we lack…the moral resolve, the political will, and better strategies to make it happen."[52] The Center

[51] Julia Watts Belser, "Disaster and Disability: Social Inequality and the Uneven Effects of Climate Change," *Tikkun* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 24.

[52] Jim Wallis, "A Turning Point on Poverty?" *Sojourners* 44, no. 5 (May 2015): 7.

for Public Justice, a Christian organization, recently posted an article online referencing Deuteronomy 17 to illustrate that "Scripture has no patience with pretensions to monarchial absolutism," nor does it condone individualism; rather (via the legacy of the Magna Carta) it "calls for protecting the rights of *communities* as well as individuals."[53]

And yet I cannot divest myself from the idea that a nonbiblical dualism continues to wither the mission of the Christian church, a mission of shalomic healing for the socioeconomic injustices around us that go unnoticed beneath Christians' noses turned up to look toward heaven. Some of the Torah's many voices/stories—including *creatio ex tohu wabohu*, relational (*contra* objective) knowledge (*yada*), integral/holistic anthropology (no body-soul split, no immortal soul), and eternity as a place (origin of grace) not time—are fundamentally different from early church doctrine and even, seemingly, portions of the New Testament. Are those differences *in* the New Testament or are some of our orthodoxies a dualistic reading of the New Testament? James K. A. Smith argues for the latter:

> Though the dominant Christian tradition has constantly renounced gnosticism, there is a sense in which it has never freed itself from its shadow, precisely because it is possible—if one is looking through the gnostic lens of a Marcion or reading the New Testament through Platonist eyes, as Augustine did—to see seeds of gnosticism implanted within the Pauline corpus. Gnosticism, Derrida might say, is inside/outside Christianity. While other examples could be cited, I would mention here Paul's notion of absence from the body (2 Cor. 5:1-8), the inauthenticity of concern for the world (1 Cor. 7:25-35), and the relegation of the "world" to depravity (Rom. 1; 12:2). However, neoplatonic and gnostic movements within the Christian tradition read such passages to the exclusion of other aspects of the Pauline corpus and New Testament that point to a creation theology.[54]

For Smith, writing within the Reformational tradition, "[Abraham] Kuyper's retrieval of the goodness of creation and of the world *as* creation stands in contrast to the dominant dualism of much evangelical thought."[55] Smith locates the roots of that dualism in Neoplatonism, where the

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[53] David Koyzis, "Magna Carta at 800," *Capital Commentary* (March 30, 2015), accessed March 30, 2015, http://www.capitalcommentary.com/magna-carta.

[54] James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* (2000; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 140n5 (emphasis original). Regarding Gnosticism, recent scholarship is critical of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century formulation of its existence as a major, unified force. For one, "David Brakke…advocate[s] for a smaller and much less central phenomenon he calls 'gnostics'"; therefore, "Scholarship now needs a less blunt tool/analytical category than gnosticism for examination of the Jesus/Christ(ian) literature of the second and third centuries" (Hal Taussig, "Christian Seminar: A Report on the 2014 Fall Meeting," *The Fourth R* 28, no. 2 (March-April 2015): 21-22).

[55] Smith, *Fall*, 143.

fallen creation (including our bodies) is utterly worthless and we (as souls) "dream of…ascending to the Absolute Infinite Unconditioned, the *Eidos*, or its Christianization as the 'God of metaphysics.'"[56] So what does it look like to read the Torah without the distortion of Christian Neoplatonism? Smith writes, "Redemption, then, is neither the completion of a deficient creation…nor the recreation of an absolutely corrupted 'nature' (Luther), but rather the *restoration* or healing of a broken creation. The Fall, therefore, is historical rather than ontological, accidental rather than essential or constitutive, and ubiquitous rather than absolute or total."[57]

Comparing Hebrew with Greek cultures, David Abram states that "eternity lies not in a separated heaven (the ancient Hebrews knew of no such realm) but in the promise of a future reconciliation on the earth…. It remained for the ancient Greeks…to derive an entirely placeless notion of eternity…. Greek thinkers were the first to begin to objectify space and time as entirely distinct and separable dimensions"[58]—a commonsense experience that remains to this day (despite a century of Einsteinian and quantum physics). Karen Armstrong gives examples of how "Christianity was coming into its own in a world where Platonic ideas predominated."[59] For instance,

> Clement and Irenaeus were both adapting the Jewish God to notions that were characteristic of their own time and culture. Even though it had little in common with the God of the prophets, who was chiefly characterized by his pathos and vulnerability, Clement's doctrine of *apatheia* would become fundamental to the Christian concept of God. In the Greek world, people longed to rise above the mess of emotion and mutability and achieve a superhuman calm. This idea prevailed, despite its inherent paradox.[60]

Likewise Jack Miles quotes Jewish scholar Daniel Boyarin:

> …there were tendencies, which, while not sharply defined, already separated first-century Greek speakers, who were relatively acculturated to Hellenism, from Semitic speakers, who were less acculturated. These tendencies were, on my hypothesis, to become polarized as time went on, leading in the end to a sharp division between Hellenizers,

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[56] Ibid., 138-39.

[57] Ibid., 141-42 (emphasis added).

[58] David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 197.

[59] Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 104.

[60] Ibid., 98-99.

> who became absorbed into Christian groups, and anti-Hellenizers who formed the nascent rabbinic movement.[61]

Armstrong makes a passing comment about "the ancient Iranian belief in an archetypal world by which every person and object in the *getik* (the mundane, physical world) had its exact counterpart in the *menok* (the heavenly realm)."[62] How ancient? Is this where Plato got his ideas? Where did this Iranian belief originate? Armstrong does not say. Throughout this paper we have been looking at the Pentateuch through the eyes of several Old Testament scholars to see if today's dualistic, heavenly-minded Christianity is biblical, is rooted in our shared/adoptive Jewish origins. Although I may have inadvertently stacked the deck, the consensus seems to point to the influences of Neoplatonism as the origin of dualistic thinking within the history of Christianity. As for the human tendency to escape, to denigrate, our current reality in lieu of "the pie in the sky in the sweet by-and-by," who knows? Plato? Ancient Iranians? Whatever the case, let us return to the Pentateuch/Torah, the entire Old and New Testaments with a renewed passion for celebrating, caring for, and healing the creation. We *are* the creation, we always will be earthy, not ethereal, creatures, and God meets us right here, right now—"earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God."[63]

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[61] Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 423-24n200. It has been my experience that, although Hellenization affected Judaism from well before the time of Jesus (e.g., Zodiacal images in the mosaic floors of synagogues), today's Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist) is practiced in a far more here-and-now, down-to-earth way than most Evangelical Christian churches.

[62] Armstrong, *History*, 232.

[63] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Aurora Leigh" (1857).

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