

HANDBOOK ON THE PENTATEUCH

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

SECOND EDITION

Victor P. Hamilton

B
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To my wife, Shirley

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
AnBib	<i>Analecta biblica</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
ASTI	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
ATHR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum louvaniensium
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BRes	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BRev	<i>Biblical Review</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
BT	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>

BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CT	<i>Christianity Today</i>
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
CurBS	Currents in Research: Biblical Studies
EncJud	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>
ERT	<i>Evangelical Review of Theology</i>
ETL	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovenienses</i>
EvQ	<i>The Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ExpT	<i>Expository Times</i>
FOTL	Forms of Old Testament Literature
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IDB	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement.</i> Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, 1962
IDBSup	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume.</i> Edited by K. Crim. Nashville, 1976
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
ILR	<i>Israel Law Review</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
ITC	International Theological Commentary
ITQ	<i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JES	<i>Journal of Ecumenical Studies</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KJV	King James Version

<i>LTQ</i>	<i>Lexington Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>MSU</i>	Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens
<i>NAC</i>	New American Commentary
<i>NASB</i>	New American Standard Bible
<i>NCBC</i>	New Century Bible Commentary
<i>NEB</i>	New English Bible
<i>NIBCOT</i>	New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NICOT</i>	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIV</i>	New International Version
<i>NJPS</i>	New Jewish Publication Society translation
<i>NKJV</i>	New King James Version
<i>NRSV</i>	New Revised Standard Version
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OBT</i>	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OTG</i>	Old Testament Guides
<i>OTL</i>	Old Testament Library
<i>OTS</i>	Old Testament Studies
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>PTMS</i>	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RelSRev</i>	<i>Religious Studies Review</i>
<i>RestQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RSV</i>	Revised Standard Version
<i>SAC</i>	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
<i>SBLDS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
<i>SBLSymS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
<i>SBT</i>	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>SBTS</i>	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
<i>SemeiaSt</i>	Semeia Studies
<i>SJCA</i>	Studies in Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity
<i>SJLA</i>	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SR</i>	<i>Studies in Religion</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
<i>TBT</i>	<i>The Bible Today</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.</i> Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974–
<i>ThTo</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
<i>TOTC</i>	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries

<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTSup</i>	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WBC</i>	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
<i>WBComp</i>	<i>Westminster Bible Companion</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZPEB</i>	<i>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible</i> . Edited by M. C. Tenney. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, 1975

Preface to the Second Edition

In 1982 Baker Book House kindly published the first edition of my *Handbook on the Pentateuch*. Since then the book has been used as a text in Pentateuch classes both at the undergraduate and graduate levels and in educational institutions throughout North America and around the world. It has been translated into Russian and is being translated into Korean. Although the book has gone through some twenty printings and its wide use and usefulness are not waning, Baker and I both agreed that it was time to produce a new edition.

I have, as is standard with new editions, updated the bibliographies. More importantly, however, I have rewritten many sections, substantially adding to or revising what I wrote back in the early 1980s. What the reader will encounter is my own developed and developing thoughts on passages within the Pentateuch, informed and enriched greatly by interaction with scholarly colleagues in the Old Testament part of the biblical academy.

I express my appreciation to Brian Bolger and his colleagues at Baker Academic for their immense help in seeing this second edition through to publication.

Also, I thank Leigh C. Andersen of the Society of Biblical Literature for permission to reproduce the chart of Bernhard Anderson that appears on p. 72. Similarly, I thank Father Peter Brook, SJ, of the Biblical Institute Press, for permission to reprint a chart by Anson Rainey that first appeared in *Biblica*. In this second edition it appears on pp. 356–57.

Once again my wife, Shirley, has taken on an invaluable role. In addition to her assistance in helping to produce the new edition, she constantly helped me with her encouragement, wisdom, and insight.

Finally, all praise goes to our Lord for the privilege of studying and teaching his word in the classroom and in the church. May the thoughts of my mind and the words of my pen be acceptable in the sight of the One who is my Rock and my Redeemer.

Preface to the First Edition

Few sections of the Old Testament have been treated as thoroughly by scholars as has the Pentateuch. A glance at any bibliographical reference volume covering biblical research will reveal immediately the vast amount of material produced in any given year on this portion of Scripture. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that Genesis and Exodus have been studied most copiously, with studies in Deuteronomy running a close second. Articles, monographs, and commentaries on Leviticus and Numbers, by contrast, lag far behind in terms of volume.

In spite of all this research there have been few studies of recent vintage that have tried to put all of the Pentateuch into a one-volume commentary. That is my purpose in the pages that follow. More specifically, I have tried to produce a book that may function as a text in English Bible classes at both the undergraduate and seminary levels.

At no point are my explorations of the biblical text exhaustive. To assist the student who desires to go beyond the reflections in this book, I have placed a bibliography at the end of each chapter. Two guidelines have controlled my selections. First, the entries in these bibliographies are limited mostly to studies that have appeared in the last ten years. Most of them will document more than adequately all previous research in that particular area. Second, I have limited my choices almost exclusively to studies that have appeared in English. The academic journals on the Continent and the European presses are constantly producing much that is valuable in biblical research, but few undergraduate students will be able to pursue and read technical articles in French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Swedish.

Readers will note immediately that I have omitted areas of possible analysis in which they might have great interest. For example, I have not addressed the question of creation versus evolution in my discussion of the opening chapters of Genesis. This exercise I prefer to leave to the scientist rather than to the biblical scholar.

I have not discussed some areas of historical import, such as the historicity of the patriarchs or the date of the exodus. It appears to me that the ground has been well covered here by both the critics and the traditionalists. For that same reason I have not devoted one major section of my manuscript to the question of the “origins” of the Pentateuch. Instead I have limited myself to a study, here and there, of some passages in the Pentateuch that are often cited as parade examples of multiple sources within the books of Moses.

As I wrote this book, I had in mind the student not only as a scholar of God’s Word, but also as a proclaimer of God’s Word. Therefore I have attempted to write something that is as usable in the pastor’s study as it is in the classroom, something that is as devotional as it is scholarly.

I am indebted to a host of biblical scholars from whose wells I have drawn much. Especially I would like to express my appreciation to Professors Brevard Childs and Jacob Milgrom, whose studies in Exodus, and Leviticus and Numbers, respectively, have made a profound impact on my comprehension of the biblical text. Dr. Dennis Kinlaw, formerly my mentor in Old Testament studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, and Dr. Robert Traina, Professor of English Bible at Asbury Theological Seminary, have made decisive contributions to my thought in historical and inductive Bible study.

I would like to express my appreciation to Professor John Hayes, editor of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, and Professor Bernhard Anderson for their permission to reproduce a chart by Dr. Anderson from *JBL* 97 (1978): 38 that appears in ch. 2. I am indebted also to Father Albert Vanhoye, SJ, editor of *Biblica*, for his permission to reproduce portions of a chart by Dr. Anson Rainey from *Bib* 51 (1970): 492–93 that appear in ch. 18.

It is a pleasure for me to thank the Committee on Faculty Research and Development of Asbury College for a work leave and a financial grant, both of which contributed greatly to the implementation of this study.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the indispensable role that my wife, Shirley, has assumed for the last several years, for really we have worked together. In addition to providing constant encouragement and stimulation, she has typed the entire manuscript and has offered many invaluable suggestions.

P A R T O N E

Genesis

1

Creation and the Fall

GENESIS 1–3

There are numerous ways in which the first book of the Bible may be outlined. Perhaps the simplest is:

- I. Primeval history (chs. 1–11)
 - A. The creation (chs. 1–2)
 - B. The fall (chs. 3–11)
 - 1. The cause (ch. 3)
 - 2. The effects (chs. 4–11)
- II. Patriarchal history (chs. 12–50)
 - A. Abraham (chs. 12–25)
 - B. Jacob (chs. 26–36)
 - C. Joseph (chs. 37–50)

This outline accurately reflects the content of Genesis but fails to suggest any relationship between the parts or any progression in emphases. It is preferable to allow Genesis to outline itself and follow the units suggested by the text. These units are readily discernible.

- I. The story of creation (1:1–2:3)
- II. The generations of the heavens and the earth (2:4–4:26)

- III. The generations of Adam (5:1–6:8)
- IV. The generations of Noah (6:9–9:29)
- V. The generations of the sons of Noah (10:1–11:9)
- VI. The generations of Shem (11:10–26)
- VII. The generations of Terah (11:27–25:11)
- VIII. The generations of Ishmael (25:12–18)
- IX. The generations of Isaac (25:19–35:29)
- X. The generations of Esau (36:1–37:1)
- XI. The generations of Jacob (37:2–50:26)

Thus Genesis is composed of an introductory section, followed by ten more sections, each introduced with the phrase “these are the generations of” (*tôlēdôt*). Structurally, then, Genesis divides itself not into two sections (one on primeval history, constituting about a fourth of the book; one on patriarchal history, constituting about three-fourths of the book), but rather into two quite unequal sections: 1:1–2:3 (an introduction) and 2:4–50:26 (composed of ten subsections). And yet the primeval/patriarchal divisions cannot be totally laid aside, for one observes that the first five uses of the *tôlēdôt* formula appear throughout 2–11, and the remaining five appear throughout 12–50 (or to be more exact, in the outline above, II–VI = 2:4–11:26; VII–XI = 11:27–50:26). Although there is no “these are the generations of Abraham,” his appearance at the end of VI (see 11:26) and his dominant role in VII make him a bridge figure between primeval and patriarchal history, between the origins of the nations of the earth and the origins of the chosen nation.

The movement in each of the last ten sections is from source to stream, from cause to result, from progenitor to progeny. That movement is described either through subsequent narrative after the superscription (II, IV, VII, IX, XI) or a genealogy that follows the superscription (III, V, VI, VIII, X).

The result created by this introduction-superscription-sequel pattern in Genesis is that of a unified composition, neatly arranged by the author (or the narrator or editor). Furthermore, the testimony of the text is to emphasize movement, a plan, something in progress and motion. What is in motion is nothing less than the initial stages of a divine plan, a plan that has its roots in creation. From the earth, Adam will come forward. From Adam, Abraham and his progeny will emerge. Eventually, out of Abraham, Jesus Christ will emerge. In the words of VanGemeren (1988: 70), “The *toledot* formula provides a redemptive-historical way of looking at the past as a series of interrelated events.”

Creation (1–2)

The first thing that strikes the reader of the Bible is the brevity (just two chapters) with which the story of the creation of the world and humankind is told. The arithmetic of Genesis is surprising. Only two chapters are devoted to the subject of creation, and one to the entrance of sin into the human race. By contrast, thirteen chapters are given to Abraham, ten to Jacob, and twelve to Joseph (who was neither a patriarch nor the son through whom the covenantal promises were perpetuated). We face, then, the phenomenon of twelve chapters for Joseph, and two for the theme of creation. Can one person be, as it were, six times more important than the world?

Nevertheless, our understanding of the Bible surely would be impoverished—rather, jeopardized—without these first two chapters. What are they about? A skeletal outline of the contents of 1:1–2:3 is helpful, as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1

Day	Day
1 light	4 luminaries (sun, moon, stars)
2 heavens	5 fish, birds
3 earth, edible vegetation	6 land animals, man
Day 7 the Sabbath	

It is obvious that the first six days fall into two groups of three. Each day in the second column is an extension of its counterpart in the first column. The days in the first column are about the creation (or preparation) of environment or habitat. The days in the second column are about the creation of those phenomena that inhabit that environment. Thus, on day one, God created light in general or light-bearers; on day four, specific kinds of light appear. On day two, God made the firmament separating waters above from waters below; on day five, God made creatures of sky and water. On day three, God first created the earth and then vegetation; on day six, God first made the creatures of land and then humankind. The climax to creation is the seventh day, the day of rest for God. The preceding days he called good. This one alone he “sanctified” (the only occurrence in Genesis of the important Hebrew root *q-d-s*, apart from the reference to Tamar, Judah’s daughter-in-law, as a “shrine prostitute” [38:21, 22 NIV]).

In addition to this horizontal literary arrangement, one can observe a fundamental literary pattern throughout all of Genesis 1. Using the language of Claus Westermann (1974: 7), we note this pattern:

1. announcement: “and God said”
2. command: “let there be/let it be gathered/let it bring forth”
3. report: “and it was so”
4. evaluation: “and God saw that it was good”
5. temporal framework: “and there was evening and there was morning”

An alternative pattern is:

1. introduction: “and God said”
2. creative word: “let there be”
3. fulfillment of the word: “and there was/and it was so”
4. description of the act in question: “and God separated/and God made/and God set/so God created”
5. name-giving or blessing: “and he called/blessed”
6. divine commendation: “and it was good”
7. concluding formula: “there was evening and morning”

The Relationship of 1:1–2:3 (or 4a) to 2:4 (or 4b)–25

Genesis 2:4–25 often has been described as a second creation story, although less so among biblical scholars today. Furthermore, it is suggested that not only is this a second story about creation, but also it comes from a different source than that of Gen. 1:1–2:3. Scholars who embrace the documentary hypothesis believe that the first creation story is the work of an anonymous Priestly editor or editors (P) around the time of the Babylonian exile (sixth century) or immediately thereafter. These scholars believe that the second creation story comes from a much earlier writer, usually designated as the Yahwist (J), an anonymous writer or writers from Jerusalem in the time of David and Solomon (the tenth century). Often, therefore, a scholar who subscribes to this hypothesis deals with the texts in their perceived chronological order of production, discussing 2:4–25 before 1:1–2:3.

There are several reasons for making this distinction. First, there is the different and, at points, contradictory account of the sequence of the orders of creation: the first sequence is vegetation, birds and fish, animals, man and woman; the second sequence is man, vegetation, animals, woman. Second, in the first sequence the exclusive name for the deity is “God” (*Elohim*), but in the second sequence it is “Lord God” (*Yahweh Elohim*). Third, in the first sequence God creates primarily by speaking: “and God said, ‘Let there be,’ and it was”—that is, creation by fiat. In the second sequence the emphasis is on God as potter or ar-

tisan: “the Lord God formed man of dust” (2:7 RSV); “out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field” (2:19 KJV); “and the rib . . . he made into a woman” (2:22 RSV). Fourth, in the first sequence the emphasis is on cosmogony: whence this world? In the second sequence the emphasis is on anthropology: whence humankind? Fifth, some interpreters draw a distinction between the poetic features of 1:1–2:3, with its use of stanzas and repetitions, and the narrative prose presentation of creation in 2:4–25.

Thus, the contention is that Genesis presents two originally independent creation stories, about five hundred years apart in origin. This phenomenon of “doublets” we will encounter again in the discussion of the flood story, where the unanimous opinion of literary and source critics is that originally there were two independent accounts of the deluge, again J and P, but with one distinct difference: the redactor (or redactors) of these opening chapters *juxtaposed* the two creation stories but *spliced* the two flood stories. As far as I know, attempts to provide a reason for this redactive distinction have not proved satisfactory.

In regard to the creation narrative, is it necessary to posit two mutually exclusive, antithetical accounts? Could 2:4–25 be a continuation of rather than a break in the creation story, “a close-up after the panorama of Genesis 1” (Ryken 1974: 37), or even simply an extended commentary on the sixth day of creation? The order of events in ch. 1 is chronological; the order of events in ch. 2 is logical and topical, from humankind to its environment. It is unnecessary to posit conflicting accounts about when God created human creatures of both sexes (in 1:1–2:3, at the same time; in 2:4–25, first the male and then later the female). As Barr (1998b) has argued, it is quite possible that in Gen. 1:26 God says, “Let us make a man in our image,” and that is followed by “male and [subsequently] female he made them” in 1:27. This seems to be the reading that Paul follows in 1 Cor. 11:7 when he distinguishes between man being the image and glory of God and woman being the glory of man: “A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man” (NIV). Most of the information in 2:4–25 is an amplification of 1:26–29. Chapter 1 is concerned with the world, while ch. 2 is concerned with a garden; one is cosmic, the other localized. God’s relationship to the world is in his capacity as *Elohim*, while his relationship to a couple in a garden is in his capacity as *Yahweh Elohim*; the first suggests his majesty and transcendence, the second his intimacy and involvement with his creation. Exactly why we must not posit a unity in Genesis 1–2 escapes me.

Theological Themes in Genesis 1–2

What the Themes Teach about God

The most obvious observation is the emphasis in these two chapters on the truth of God's oneness. Instead of encountering a host of deities, the reader meets the one God. Unlike pagan gods, God has no spouse or consort. What is the significance of this? Can this be the Bible's way of saying that God's self-fulfillment requires nothing and no one outside of himself? Indeed, all the resources for self-fulfillment are within him. Everything else in the created order is, on its own, unfulfilled and must look elsewhere for fulfillment. It is God's oneness that alone makes sense of words such as “universe” or “universality.”

A second truth affirmed by these chapters is that there is a line of distinction between God as creator and humankind as creature that is never effaced. Tracing Mesopotamian chronologies back to their furthest point, as is done in, for example, the Sumerian King List (a document produced by Sumerian scribes shortly after 2000 b.c. that lists the names of rulers from the advent of kingship onward), one discovers that the remote ancestors are divine beings. The distinction between divine and human has been erased. Genesis 1–2 traces the human race back as far as possible and still finds Adam/man. Then comes the gulf. Through Hosea the Lord says succinctly, “I am God, and not man” (Hos. 11:9 niv), and it is said in a context of hope not haughtiness. If Israel's salvation is in humankind, there is despair. If salvation is in God, there is hope.

A third truth is that God is plural in his nature. Genesis 1:26 says, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness” (rsv). From an exegetical viewpoint, it cannot be said that this refers to the Trinity. At least six interpretations have been placed on the words “let us” here. One of these is the mythological interpretation. One god, perhaps the chief god, speaks to the other deities and informs them of his intentions or solicits their advice and help in some project, in this case, the creation of humankind as a whole. The contention is that the writer of Genesis 1 failed to expurgate completely the mythological motifs that he was borrowing. Another interpretation is that God is speaking to the creation, the earth. Earth then becomes a partner with God in the creation of humankind and a constituent part of humankind's composite nature, balancing the divine inbreathing. A third possibility is that God is speaking to the angels, the heavenly court, and thus human beings bear certain resemblances to both God and the angels. This view implies that in the creation of humankind God had assistance from his angels. The fourth interpretation is that this is a plural of majesty—that is, God speaks of himself and with himself in the plural (cf. Gen. 11:7, “Come, let *us* go down” [niv]; Isa. 6:8, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for

us?" [NIV]). The very name of God in ch. 1, *Elohim*, is plural, the suffix *-im* indicating masculine plural nouns. A fifth possibility is that the expression can be described as a plural of self-deliberation, as in the English usage, for example, "Let's see, what should I do?" Where we clearly have this, however, the language tends to be first-person singular rather than first-person plural (e.g., "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" [Gen. 18:17 NIV]). Sixth, and most plausible to me, is the explanation that sees in the "us" a plural of fullness or plurality within the Godhead. Perhaps God is addressing his Spirit (already mentioned in 1:2). That God is triune is a fact that awaits the preaching of the New Testament revelation.

A fourth truth is that God is moral and holy. To Adam, God said both "you may eat" and "you may not eat." One of the books most frequently referred to in this area is *The Idea of the Holy*, by the German Protestant theologian and historian of religion Rudolph Otto. Otto's book was first published in 1917 and translated into English in 1923. The essential theme of the book is an emphasis on the "holy" as the distinguishing feature of religious experience. To use Otto's phrase, the "holy" is *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*—that is, that which elicits in the worshiper both fear and fascination, "lashed with terror, leashed with longing," to use the phrase of the poet Francis Thompson.

Important for Otto is his contention that the moral and the ethical are not identical with the holy. What Otto does not address is the fact that God's holiness gives the basis to his moral demands. The purpose of the Decalogue is to show Israel how to live with a holy God. Even in paradise there is the institution of law.

A fifth truth emphasized in these two chapters is God's sovereignty and majesty. Effortlessly he speaks the created order into existence, shaping it as a potter produces a masterpiece from clay. At no point does God encounter antagonism or resistance in his work of creation.

Two illustrations will suffice. One is the way in which the emergence of the sun, moon, and stars is delineated. The order of narration in Genesis is interesting: sun, moon, stars. In the *Enuma Elish* (Creation Epic) the order is stars, sun, and moon. Here, the stars are not created, but are understood to be independent realities; there is a divine aura about them. Another point of interest about the sun and moon in the Genesis account, given the adulation of these luminaries in the ancient world, is that they are simply called "the greater light" and "the lesser light." Furthermore, the stars are treated with the matter-of-fact observation, almost an afterthought, "he made the stars too." A final point is that the function of the sun and moon is explicitly spelled out to emphasize their position as servants, given their orders and duty by God.

A second illustration of divine sovereignty is the lack of any reference to God's confrontation with celestial monsters or opponents, a theme that is prevalent in the *Enuma Elish*. The closest that Genesis 1 or 2 comes is the reference to the "sea monsters" (1:21). What is of interest is the use of the Hebrew word *bārā'*, occurring in 1:1, 21 and three times in 1:27 in connection with the creation of humans to describe their origin. God "created" them. Whenever this verb is used in the Old Testament, God is always the subject. And the verb is never followed by the accusative of material, unlike, for example, the verbs in "[he] formed man of dust" (2:7 rsv) and "the rib . . . he made into a woman" (2:22 nrsv). Although it probably goes too far to say that this use of *bārā'* explicitly teaches *creatio ex nihilo*, it does indeed lean in that direction. We should also note that Genesis 1 uses another verb for God's creating, the verb "make" (1:7, 16 [2x], 25, 26). The verb *āśâ*, unlike *bārā'*, often has a human subject. There is something unique about God's creating (conveyed by *bārā'*), but there is also something similar between God's making and humans' making (conveyed by the verb *āśâ*).

It has long been suggested that the reference in Gen. 1:2 to "the deep" (*tēhōm*) is a veiled allusion to Tiamat of Babylonian fame. Even if that is the case, one would be hard pressed to see any obvious mythic allusions in the use of *tēhōm* by the Genesis author. Absolutely no idea of the "deep" as the enemy of God emerges from the text. Rather, the "deep" is an inanimate part of the created order. In addition, very strong linguistic arguments militate against the equation of Tiamat and *tēhōm*.

And yet there are references in Scripture to God doing battle with the monster. For example, Isa. 51:9 speaks of God cutting Rahab into pieces and piercing the dragon, and Ps. 74:13–14 says that God has broken the heads of the dragons in the waters and crushed the heads of Leviathan. Indeed, Isa. 27:1; 51:9; Ps. 74:13 use the same Hebrew word for "dragon" or "sea monster" as does Gen. 1:21. But the dragon of Isaiah and of the psalm is an adversary of God. The dragon of Gen. 1:21 is created by God and called "good."

What may be said about these references, outside of Genesis, to monstrous antagonists of God? First, the allusions to Leviathan, Rahab, and the dragons would have to have been intelligible to the hearers of these words in order for them to grasp the forcefulness of the speaker's point. After all, would the psalmist's "You crushed the heads of Leviathan" mean anything if the mythical Leviathan was unknown to the audience? We can surmise, therefore, that the people of God were familiar with the mythological literature of their neighbors.

Second, the language and motifs of mythology find their clearest expression not in the opening chapters of Genesis, where one might expect them, but rather in prophetic literature and the Psalter. More

importantly, the context in which these “battles” take place is redemption, not creation. For example, cutting Rahab into pieces and piercing the dragon (Isa. 51:9) are parallel with God’s parting of the Red Sea “for the redeemed to pass over” (Isa. 51:10). Similarly, crushing the heads of Leviathan and breaking the heads of the dragons (Ps. 74:13–14) appear in a psalm of lamentation in which the author prays for deliverance from his enemies; the deliverer is God, who is “working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Ps. 74:12 RSV).

The biblical writers deliberately use these mythical allusions not in the setting of creation, but in the context of redemption. There is no evil inherent in the world that God has made. Where is evil conquered? In creation? No! Rather, evil and chaos and disruption are conquered within time, in the redemption of God’s people.

The climax of creation is the Sabbath (Gen. 2:1–3). This episode likewise may be seen as an extension of the implicit emphasis on divine sovereignty and majesty. God’s rest on this day is not to renew his strength after combat with turbulent forces of evil. The day’s purpose is to provide rest for God after a week’s work of creation. Rest supersedes the act of creation. There is silence before creation, before God speaks. After creation there is silence again. This silence God has sanctified (Gen. 2:3).

What the Themes Teach about Humankind

The pattern of creation mostly by fiat in Genesis 1 is broken by the observation that God’s act of creation of humankind is preceded by a collaborative statement and a statement of divine intention (1:26a).

Specifically, we are told that God created humans in his own “image” and “likeness.” This is the only place in the Old Testament where these two nouns appear in connection with one another, and one immediately asks about their relationship. Are they interchangeable, an example of the pervasive penchant for listing synonyms in biblical Hebrew? Two observations may support this. In 1:26, referring to God’s decision to create, both words are used. But in 1:27, which deals with the actual work of creation, only “image” is used. In 5:1, “he made him in the likeness of God” (NIV), the Hebrew word for “likeness” is translated in the Septuagint not by the usual *homoiōsis*, but by *eikōn*, normally the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew word for “image.”

A second possibility is that the word “likeness” modifies the word “image.” The function of “likeness” then would be to limit the meaning of “image.” Such qualification, it is suggested, helps to avoid the implication that human beings are a precise copy of God. Some credence may be lent to this view by the fact that “likeness” appears in the Old Testament twenty-four times, and fourteen of these are in chs. 1 and 10

of Ezekiel. In these passages the prophet is careful never to say that he saw God or his entourage, but only the likeness of God.

A third suggestion is the reverse of the second one. Thus, “likeness” does not soften the concept about “image,” but rather amplifies it. The human being is not simply an image of God, but a likeness-image. That is, more than simply representative, human beings are representational of the invisible God.

Whatever the best explanation may be on this technical matter, it is plain to see that humankind is set apart from the rest of creation and indeed is placed on a pedestal. Unlike the views of pagan accounts that we will examine, in Genesis humankind neither is created as an after-thought nor is consigned to drudge as a substitute for recalcitrant deities. Manual labor is a God-given privilege, not a sentence or a penalty.

Genesis 1 also affirms that humankind was created to “subdue” and “have dominion” over the earth and over living creatures of the sea, land, and air. Some scholars have suggested, in light of the wording of 1:26, that it is precisely humankind’s domination of the world that constitutes the image of God (although the relation is more a consequence than a definition).

But what does it mean to subdue and have dominion over? The latter verb is used twenty-four times in the Old Testament, normally to denote human relationships: a master over a hired servant (Lev. 25:43); chief officers over laborers (1 Kings 5:16); a king over his subjects (Ps. 72:8); the rule of one nation over another (Lev. 26:17). Several of these passages (e.g., Lev. 25:43; Ezek. 34:4) suggest that dominion is to be exercised with care and responsibility. Nothing destructive or exploitative is permissible. Presumably the same nuance is present in Gen. 1:28. The same verb applied to humankind in 1:28 is applied to the sun and moon in 1:16—“to rule,” respectively, the day and the night—and certainly no concept of indiscriminate or manipulative action is included there. It is not incidental that in Genesis 1 both humans and animals are vegetarians, each being given access to one element of vegetation (1:29–30).

It is remarkable that a large section of the creation story is given over to a separate and distinct account of the creation of woman. By implication Eve is referred to in the “them” and “female” of 1:26–29, with the specific mention found in 2:18–25. Such a separate narration of woman’s creation is without parallel in ancient Near Eastern literature.

The long-overdue emphasis on women’s rights has, in our time, stimulated many scholars to restudy the opening chapters of Genesis for essential clues on the identity of woman and for principles determining male-female relationships. Such a study reveals, as examples, the following. First, both man and woman are made in the image of God (if one reads the creation of the male and the female in 1:27 as synchronous

rather than sequential). Sexual identification is irrelevant, certainly not a qualifying factor. Thus the command to rule and have dominion is directed to both male and female. Second, the origins of both man and woman are similar: both owe their existence to raw material—dirt and rib. Neither is actively involved in the creation of the other. Third, woman is described as a “helper fit” for Adam. What Eve is (2:19), the animals are not (2:20). Interestingly, the writer describes Eve with a word that preponderantly is applied to God elsewhere in the Old Testament. The “helper” par excellence is God. The helper who is invoked for assistance normally is stronger than the one who stands in need. Fourth, upon first seeing Eve, Adam says, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (v. 23a rsv). Similar words appear in Gen. 29:14; Judg. 9:2; 2 Sam. 5:1; 19:12–13, where a case could be made for the fact that the phrase “your bone and your flesh” is an affirmation not simply of kinship but of loyalty. Thus the phrase would be the equivalent of our modern commitment “in sickness and in health.” That is, circumstances will not dictate or determine a relationship previously agreed to by both parties, and certainly adverse circumstances will not undermine it.

The follow-up to this also bears examination. A man is “to leave” his father and mother and “cleave” to his wife (2:24). The verb “to leave” may also be translated “forsake” with God as object (as in Jer. 1:16), meaning to terminate a loyalty. The second Hebrew verb, “to cleave,” may also describe one’s covenantal commitment to God (as in Deut. 10:20; 11:22). The marriage relationship is then an oath, a covenant, never an arbitrary relationship of convenience.

A fifth observation about male-female relationships is that quite clearly Genesis sets subordination of the woman to the man not in the context of creation, but in the context of the fall (see 3:16).

I have already suggested that according to Genesis 1 and 2 human beings are unique, set apart from everything else God created. They alone bear God’s image, and they alone subdue. But the same passage of Scripture that underlines the uniqueness of humankind (Gen. 1:26–31) also modifies that uniqueness (Gen. 2:15–17). Human beings are not autonomous, but live under a divine law. There are boundaries, much as there are for the people Israel, whom God puts in their garden, Canaan. As long as one lives in ways that honor God, one remains in the garden/Canaan. But defiance of the boundaries set by God means expulsion from the garden/Canaan.

The man is placed in a garden, “put” there (Gen. 2:8) by God himself. The location of the garden is not easy to fix, but it is to be found “in the east” (Gen. 2:8), a Hebrew word that could also be translated “long ago.” The presence of the Tigris and Euphrates (Gen. 2:14) suggests Mesopotamia. If that is the case, then the first sin (Genesis 3) and the

last sin of primeval history (Genesis 11) both had their setting in Mesopotamia. Additionally, Eden, if placed outside the limits of Palestine, is a further illustration of the international and universal emphases within Genesis 1–2. Sailhamer (1995) is one of the few commentators on Genesis who does not place the garden of Eden in Mesopotamia, but rather equates the garden with the land that God later promised to Abraham and to his progeny.

In the garden the man has a dual responsibility: till the soil (Gen. 2:15) and abstain from eating of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:17 niv). The penalty for transgressing these commands is death, which in this instance could mean mortality, but not necessarily so. If death equals mortality, then it explains why later in the narrative God prohibits further access by Adam and Eve to the tree of life (Gen. 3:22). But this interpretation can be challenged. A close reading of 3:22 suggests another possibility. In what is God’s only unfinished sentence in the Bible (Humphreys 2001: 49), he says, “And now, lest he reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever. . . .” God expels the man from the garden not because of what he has done, but because of what he might do if allowed to remain: eat from the tree of life and become immortal. This suggests that humankind was already mortal. Other understandings of “die” in “on the day you eat of it you shall die” must be proposed. I suggest that “die” means the loss of a relationship of intimacy with God, replaced by alienation from God. Something in the man and the woman dies that makes impossible the continuation of a vibrant walk with God.

No small amount of debate has centered on the meaning of “the knowledge of good and evil.” What does this phrase imply? Can “evil” be inside the garden too? Does the “knowledge of good and evil” designate either omniscience or sexual awakening? Those are the two interpretations most commonly offered by scholars. But there are problems with both, especially the latter, in light of Gen. 3:22. Passages in which the phrase or a similar one occurs may or may not help us determine its meaning in Genesis 2–3. In Deut. 1:39 Moses refers to the second and younger generation of Israelites as “your children who do not yet know good from bad/evil” (niv); that is, they cannot be responsible for their actions because they lack the moral judgment that one expects of those who have reached the point of accountability. In a similar fashion (i.e., speaking of a very young person) Isa. 7:15 speaks of the promised child who “will eat curds and honey by the time he knows enough to reject the wrong/the bad and choose the right/the good.” In 2 Sam. 14:17 the wise woman praises David as one “like an angel of God in discerning good and evil” (niv). So, what is the meaning of the phrase in Genesis 2–3? If we allow the context, rather than possible parallel passages, to

determine the meaning, then the interpretation must fit with the emphases of Genesis 3, which is about prohibition, enticement, disobedience, falling away, and death of some kind. One might then suggest that “the knowledge of good and evil” is moral autonomy. In deciding for themselves what is good and proper and what is not, the couple are making themselves the final moral authority for their lives (in a diabolical way becoming their own god) and “stepping out of the position of creaturely dependence and trust in the creator” (Moberly 1992: 24).

Perhaps we should limit ourselves to the observation that in Eden God placed limits on human freedom. As we will see shortly, Genesis 3–11 points out that the act of sin often consists of precisely this: overstepping divinely imposed limits.

The First Verse of the Bible

At least two problems form around Gen. 1:1: how should the verse be translated, and what is its relationship to 1:2 and 1:3–31? First, how should the verse be translated? Two possibilities exist. One is to treat v. 1 as a dependent, temporal clause. The translation then could be, “When God began to create the heaven and the earth . . .” or “In the beginning, when God made heaven and earth. . . .” In modern times this translation is as old as Moffatt’s translation (1922), and it is reflected in more recent translations such as the New Jewish Publication Society version, the New English Bible, the translation of Genesis by E. A. Speiser in the Anchor Bible commentaries, and the New Revised Standard Version. Possible support for this rendering appears in 2:4b, which begins with “When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens” (NIV), followed by a description of desolation (2:5–6) and then God’s first creative action (2:7).

The more traditional translation renders Gen. 1:1 as an independent clause: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This is reflected in the KJV, RSV, NASB, NIV, and JB.

If the first possibility is followed, taking 1:1 as a dependent clause, then the additional facts are that v. 2 is a parenthetical comment, set off by hyphens from what precedes and follows, and that the main clause appears in v. 3, “And God said. . . .” The result is an unusually long, rambling sentence, which is not unheard of per se but is quite out of place in this chapter, laced as it is with a string of staccato sentences.

As far as the biblical evidence itself is concerned, the problem of translation originates with the first word of the Bible, *bērē’šît* (KJV, RSV: “in the beginning”; NEB, NJPS: “when”).

In biblical Hebrew nouns are classified, in terms of syntax, as being in either the construct state or the absolute state. For example, in the phrase

“word of the Lord,” “word” is in the construct state because it is dependent upon the next word, “the Lord.” It cannot stand by itself and make any sense. A word in the construct state normally does not take a definite article, although an article may be placed in a translation for sense and smoothness. Conversely, “Lord,” in the absolute state, is independent and stands alone. The question is this: is *bērē’šit* in the absolute or the construct state? If it is absolute, then Gen. 1:1 is an independent clause; if it is construct, then the verse is a dependent clause.

Although this is no relief for the reader, it must be pointed out that grammatically *bērē’šit* can be defined, as it stands, as being in either the absolute or the construct case. The preference should be given, however, to the absolute case. At least, this is how all the ancient versions understood it. Those opting for the temporal interpretation of the verse point out, in protest, that if this were the case, one would expect a reading *barē’šit*. The difference in Hebrew between *bērē’šit* and *barē’šit* is that the latter includes the definite article, “in *the* beginning.” The objection is not fatal, however. The counterargument for the traditional translation is the observation that time designations in adverbial expressions, especially when the reference is to remote time, do not need the article, seldom use the article, and occur in the absolute state.

Gerhard von Rad (1972: 48), in his celebrated commentary on Genesis, maintains that “syntactically perhaps both translations are possible, but not theologically.” Brevard Childs (1962: 41) contends that “to read verse 1 as a temporal clause does not take seriously enough the struggle which is evidenced in this chapter.” Keeping in mind the pagan emphasis on creation out of eternal and preexistent matter (e.g., Tiamat’s corpse), and the emphasis on confrontation, struggle, and manipulation as antecedents to creation, one cannot miss the fact that the Scripture writer in this opening declaration is repudiating that very concept.

Further confirmation of this is found in the verb employed by the writer in 1:1, *bārā’*. It is used again in 1:21, 27 (3x); 2:3; 5:1–2 (3x); 6:7, and elsewhere in the Bible. Two things may be said about this verb. First, the subject of *bārā’* is never anyone but God. Therefore, such activity is exclusively divine. Second, whenever this verb is used, its direct object is always the product created, never the materials used as the means in creation. To quote von Rad (1972: 49) again, “It is correct to say that the verb *bārā’* ‘create’ contains the idea both of complete effortlessness and *creatio ex nihilo*, since it is never connected with any statement of the material. The hidden grandeur of this statement is that God is Lord of the world.” Childs (1962: 41) observes, “The omission of the accusative of material along with the simultaneous emphasis on the uniqueness of God’s action could hardly be brought into a smooth harmony with

the fact of a preexistent chaos. World reality is a result of creation, not a reshaping of existing matter.”

All of this brings us to the second major problem, the relationship of 1:1 to what immediately follows, especially v. 2. At least three major views have been propounded. These are summarized in table 1.

The first view has been called the “gap” or “restitution” theory. An alternate version of this approach is to suggest two distinct creations (without any “gap” or “restitution” emphasis). Verse 1 describes creation out of nothing, the unformed product of which appears in v. 2, and vv. 3–31 describe God’s subsequent creation of the formed world.

Table 1

Verse	Theory 1	Theory 2	Theory 3
1	original creation	original creation	superscription, or summary statement, of everything developed in the following verses. The words “the heavens/the sky and the earth/land” may be a biblical rhetorical device known as merismus, a means of expressing totality through the use of antonyms (e.g., “I’ve been through thick and thin” or “I’ve looked up and down for the paper”). The statement then affirms that all that is owes its existence to God.
2	gap, indeterminable in terms of length—“the earth <i>had become</i> without form and void” (due to Satan’s expulsion from heaven?)	condition of the earth at its inception: formless and void; dark; the Spirit of God moved over the waters	situation before creation, the preprimeval period. Almost cryptically, the words “without form and void, darkness, deep” and “waters” stand alone and without explanation or commentary. F. Derek Kidner (1967: 44) correctly captures the contrast: “The sombre terms of 2a throw into relief the mounting glory of the seven days.” To assume, however, that these terms are reflective of a chaos, outside of God’s creation and antagonistic to his divine plan, finds no justification in the text.
3–31	God’s second act of creation, or the divine act of re-creation	gradual order and symmetry were imposed on the formless cosmos, the movement being from imperfection to perfection, incompleteness to completion	sequential narration of creation

Nonbiblical Creation Stories

Every ancient civilization produced its own corpus of mythical literature in which the general topic was either the origins and behavior of the gods (properly called myths) or the exploits of ancient heroes (properly called legends). In the myths the actors exclusively are the gods. In the legends the actors primarily are people, but the gods also assume major roles in the stories.

Of course, not every piece of ancient literature has survived or has been excavated by archaeologists. It is, for example, a moot question whether there was a strong emphasis on creation theology among the Canaanites. That question arises from the fact that no specific creation story has yet been discovered in the literature from Ras Shamra. Ras Shamra, located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, is the modern Arabic name for ancient Ugarit. From 1929 to the present, large amounts of Canaanite texts, to say nothing of texts in other languages, have been discovered there. The general subject of these texts is either economic or political concerns, but a good number of the texts also have had a religious dimension, either myths (Baal and Anat versus Mot or Yamm) or legends (Daniel and King Keret).

It does not need to be debated whether these myths and legends, those produced both inside and outside of Canaan, were known to God's people Israel. I have already argued that references in the Old Testament to Rahab, Leviathan, and the dragon presuppose an intelligent awareness on the part of the worshipers of Yahweh of the traditions surrounding these suprahuman beings. Furthermore, one section of the Gilgamesh Epic, a Mesopotamian deluge story, has been discovered at the Israelite city of Megiddo.

What do these stories contribute to our knowledge and understanding of the Old Testament? Why should we study them, apart from any information that they may add to our awareness of ancient religions and cultures?

Obviously, one does not need an extensive or even a superficial knowledge of mythology to understand the message of Genesis 1–2. And yet I am persuaded that the implications of the creation story of Genesis emerge most dramatically when it is compared with the creation literature of, for example, Mesopotamia (be that literature Sumerian, Assyrian, or Babylonian). For it is in the comparison of literature having an identical general theme that the distinctiveness of the biblical faith and message appears.

We need to remember that Genesis 1–2 was not produced by the nation called Israel, in the sense that these chapters are the mature reflections of some individual (or individuals) on the questions of origins. Rather,

this material is the result of divine revelation, truth that human beings could not know unless it was revealed to them from above.

A study of mythology helps the believer to see how ancient people tried to answer ultimate questions about life and reality without the light of revelation having dawned upon them. Interestingly, the answers provided to those questions by ancient people are not all that different from the answers provided by modern but unredeemed people.

In the study that follows I limit myself to material from Mesopotamia, the *Enuma Elish* (the first two words in the poem, which may be translated as “when on high”), and pertinent sections of the Atrahasis Epic.

There are several reasons for limiting my study to compositions from that part of the world. First, the stories that I will discuss are among the most remarkably preserved specimens of ancient literature. They are relatively free from problems of translation and from large gaps in the text. Often there are multiple copies, as later generations copied the story out for themselves.

Second, it is precisely these stories from Mesopotamia that are thought by many scholars to provide the source of the biblical material in Genesis 1–2 and 6–9. The scriptural stories, according to this theory, are adaptations of pagan myth with appropriate editorial revisions and deletions. I will respond specifically to this in my discussion of the flood episode.

Third, we know that Abraham came from Ur of the Chaldeans. It is more than likely that the stories that I am about to discuss were part of his upbringing. If nothing else, a knowledge of these particular myths and legends will help us to understand something of the world out of which God called Abraham. The shift was nothing short of radical. That shift was as much theological and philosophical as it was geographical.

The *Enuma Elish*

As I have noted, there are two stories from Mesopotamia in which creation is a prominent theme. Since its publication in the nineteenth century, the better-known one is the *Enuma Elish*. Two critical questions, apart from interpretation, are open to debate in any discussion of the *Enuma Elish*. One is the date of composition, and the other is the degree to which the epic is typical of Mesopotamian (a period covering some three to four thousand years) belief about creation. Is it normative or is it exceptional? Concerning date, two opinions exist. Although no extant copies of the epic are earlier than the first millennium b.c., cuneiform specialists such as E. A. Speiser and T. Jacobsen believe, on the basis of internal evidence, that the epic was first produced in the Old Babylonian period, meaning the early part of the second millennium b.c. (Speiser), or sometime during the middle of the latter half of the second millen-

nium b.c. (Jacobsen). On the other hand, another cuneiform specialist, W. G. Lambert, thinks that the story is not earlier than 1100 b.c. He also states that the *Enuma Elish* is not typical of Sumerian or Babylonian cosmology, but rather is a sectarian and aberrant account. The Assyrians in the first millennium apparently did not find it aberrant, and so did not hesitate to borrow the epic from the Babylonians, making only such changes as necessary for the story to fit its new milieu (e.g., the hero is no longer Marduk, but the Assyrian god Ashur).

What of the contents of the story? Before the creation of anything there were two divine beings, Apsu, the male divine personification of fresh waters, and Tiamat, the female divine personification of marine waters. Through their mingling (or mating) a second generation is produced, Lahmu and Lahamu, both perhaps to be associated with the silt produced by these waters. Then comes a third generation, Anshar and Kishar, the horizon. And from them comes Anu the god of heaven, and from him Ea (Enki).

The senior deity Apsu is, however, unable to sleep because these younger deities are making too much noise. Over the protests of Tiamat his wife, but at the prompting of Mummu his servant, Apsu plans to remedy the problem by killing these boisterous gods. But before he can implement his plan, Ea places a magic spell on Apsu and then kills him.

Aroused and indignant over her husband's unfortunate end and spurred on by some sympathetic supporters, Tiamat vows to carry out Apsu's plan of deicide. She takes as her second husband Kingu.

At this point the major character of the story, Marduk the son of Ea, emerges. He is charged with the responsibility of leading and defending those marked for execution by Tiamat, a challenge that he accepts with the qualification that if he is successful, the gods will make him their head. After being suckled by goddesses, he is ready for battle (theomachy).

Marduk swiftly eliminates Tiamat and captures Kingu and the rest of the entourage. Marduk then splits Tiamat in two, making heaven from one half of her cadaver, and the earth from the other half. The imprisoned gods he subsequently charges with the responsibility of building him a permanent home, Babylon.

Further reflection and an outburst of protest by the employed gods lead Marduk to relieve the gods of this manual work by a second creation, the creation of humankind. He does this by having Kingu killed and using his blood to create humankind. The story concludes with a royal banquet at which Marduk formally receives permanent kingship, and finally the listing of his fifty names, each of which extols Marduk.

The Atrahasis Epic

The second account to be considered is the Atrahasis Epic, dating originally to no later than 1700 b.c., from which the earliest surviving copies come. Though dealing eventually and more extensively with the flood, I will limit myself here to those parts dealing with creation. The epic begins with a description of the world as it was before humankind was created. The three supreme gods had partitioned the universe among themselves. Anu rules over heaven, Enlil over earth, and Enki over all bodies of water. The focus in the epic is on the earth, the overseeing of which is a mixed blessing, more to be endured than enjoyed. Specifically, Enlil is in charge of the gods whose primary job is to dig the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. But as is true also in many modern labor disputes, the employees refuse to work, and they rebel against Enlil to the point where even Enlil is alarmed by the violence of these mutineers, even though they are his own children. Observing how intransigent his children are, Enlil starts to weep and threatens to tender his resignation and retire to heaven to live with Anu.

The arbiter is Enki. He is sympathetic to the complaints of the hard-pressed, overworked gods. His suggestion is to create humankind and thus free the gods from their toil. At Enki's suggestion the gods kill one of their own, We-ila (the perpetrator of the rebellion?). From his blood and flesh, along with clay, humankind is created, with the help of the birth goddess Nintu(r)/Mami. In appreciation the gods confer on her the honorific title Mistress of all the gods. In all, seven males and seven females are created.

The Epics Compared

There are, of course, other creation accounts in cuneiform literature. I have outlined the two that best parallel the Old Testament. The following observations may be made.

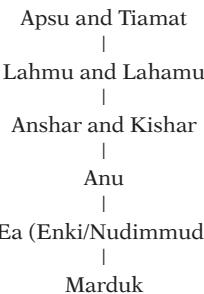
First, the primary function of the *Enuma Elish* is not to describe the creation of the world or the creation of humankind. At best, that is a subplot. Its primary purpose is theogonic—that is, to explain the origin of the gods, and especially Marduk. How did a relatively minor deity (Marduk) climb from virtual obscurity to become the chief god of Babylon? In that sense the story is an etiology of Babylon's patron god.

Second, the epic was composed with religious functions in mind. Evidence indicates that the *Enuma Elish* was recited in Babylon annually at the Akitu festival, the beginning of the new year. Tiamat was associated with the forces of chaos, Marduk with the forces of order. As in the myth Marduk triumphed over Tiamat, so for the coming year the ritual recitation of the text, it was hoped, would go a long way toward

guaranteeing the victory of order over chaos in the unpredictable world of nature. The idea is that the right words in the right places at the right times implement the most desirable results. We ought to observe Lambert's cautious note, however, that too much has been made of the cultic reading of the epic, and that nothing in the content of the story unequivocally implies a specific cultic function.

Third, both stories are set within the framework of a polytheistic system. According to the *Enuma Elish*, in the beginning there were two gods, Apsu and Tiamat. Marduk, the creator god, is a sixth-generation god. See figure 2.

Figure 2



The Babylonians' portrayal of their gods is interesting. Both epics serve as a window into their concept of gods—origin, character, and destiny. Creation is told in terms of procreation. In the beginning there were two, not one. Through the “mingling” of these partners a part of the created order appears. (In Sumerian there is one word for “water” and “semen.”) Anu, the numinous power in the sky and thus the source of rain, has as his spouse Ki, the earth. Through impregnating her, Anu produces vegetation (and a host of demons and gods). Thus the gods are products of sexual activity, and they are subject by their nature to sexual needs. Pagans could see no future for their world and for their gods apart from a sexual relationship.

The needs, characters, and destinies of the gods are not markedly different from those of humans. Apsu is annoyed because he is deprived of sleep. He is also tossed betwixt and between listening to Tiamat, his spouse, who urges against the plan for execution, and Mummu, his vizier and counselor, who urges its implementation. Faced with mutually exclusive advice, Apsu opts for Mummu’s directive over that of his consort. The god, unable to act independently, is swayed by his counselor.

Apsu, although divine, is subject to magic, and he is successfully immobilized by Ea’s spell and subsequently killed. If myth is the poetic expression of pagan religion, magic is its practical expression, and it

can be called on in situations of god against human, human against god, or god against god. The reason for this is the concept in paganism of a realm transcending even the powers of the deities, a realm to which they may be subservient. Israeli scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann called this area the “metadivine.” In this sense no god is sovereign and without limitations, not even Apsu.

Gods can be killed and can attempt to kill simply out of impulsive anger or for self-serving reasons. The attempt to murder may be motivated by revenge (e.g., Tiamat).

Fourth, in the *Enuma Elish* heaven and earth are not spoken into existence by the creative word of one majestic god, but are formed from the corpse of a slain god, Tiamat. The created order is thus divine, more a “thou” than an “it.”

Fifth, both in the *Enuma Elish* and the Atrahasis Epic humankind is created to relieve the gods of the necessity of manual labor, a chore that the gods soon complained about and felt was beneath their dignity. In the *Enuma Elish* humankind is created from the blood of a rebellious god, Kingu; in the Atrahasis Epic it is from the blood of We-ila (mixed with clay). In no sense can the creation of humankind be termed climactic, nor is there any unique dignity conferred on human beings. The human being is created as servant, not as king. Perhaps it goes too far to see a Mesopotamian doctrine of original sin in these accounts, but may not the episodes serve as an etiology to account for humankind’s proclivity to evil? Having been made that way, humankind is therefore the product of an inscrutable determinism.

The Fall (3)

Chapter 3 of Genesis raises tantalizing questions in the mind of the reader, but for these questions an answer is not supplied. For example, no detailed account is given of the serpent at this point. Certainly he is not called Satan. If he is indeed a cosmic antagonist to God, once in the angelic host but now expelled, Genesis 3 does not pause to tell us that. To be sure, the New Testament unequivocally refers to “that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (Rev. 12:9 NRSV; cf. 20:2).

The Serpent

There is uncertainty about the etymological origin of the Hebrew word for “serpent.” The Hebrew word is *nāhāš*. Is it to be related to the Hebrew

něhōšet, “copper, bronze,” suggestive perhaps of something luminous (“an angel of light”)? Indeed, in the wilderness Moses made a bronze serpent (Num. 21:9), only to have it demolished centuries later by Hezekiah when the image became a fetish and an object of worship (2 Kings 18:4). Or is the word for “serpent” to be related to the Hebrew verb *nāhaš*, “to practice divination”?

We should note that information in the Old Testament about Satan, and indeed for the whole world of demonology, is at a precious premium. And for good reason. It is as unlikely that the Old Testament will address itself to this issue at any length as it is that it will address itself in depth to an explication of the Trinity. When one remembers that Israel was surrounded by nations whose religious ideas about supernatural forces included a belief not only in gods but also in hosts of demons, it is easy to see why the Old Testament rarely mentions demonology.

In fact, the word *sātan* is employed in a number of ways (but never in Genesis 3). It refers, surprisingly, to the angel of the Lord, who may be an “adversary” (Num. 22:22, 32); to a person who functions as an “adversary” (1 Sam. 29:4; 2 Sam. 19:22; 1 Kings 5:4; 11:14, 23, 25; Ps. 109:6); to Satan, opponent of God and intruder into the angelic host (Job). In this last category the word occurs eighteen times (fourteen of them in Job 1–2). What is interesting is that in all but one of these eighteen occurrences (the exception is 1 Chron. 21:1) *sātan* has the definite article attached, “the satan.” This indicates that “the satan” is a title, not a personal name. Satan is not *who* he is, but *what* he is. He does not merit a name, and in antiquity, not to have a name was to be reduced to virtual nonexistence.

All that the chapter says, then, about this serpent is that he or it was one of the wild creatures that the Lord God had made. That is, the serpent was a created being, neither eternal nor divine. Also, the serpent was unlike any other animal, “subtle/crafty.” This in itself is not pejorative. The same word is used in Proverbs eight times (12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8, 15, 18; 22:3; 27:12), and translates there as “the prudent [person],” who is contrasted with the “fool” in the first four of these references, and with the “simple” or “naïve” in the remaining four—thus, it suggests a good and commendable quality. It is no wonder that Jesus instructed his disciples to be as wise as serpents (Matt. 10:16).

On the other hand, the word is translated as the “crafty” whom God loathes in Job, another Old Testament wisdom book (Job 5:12; 15:5), the opposite in tone of the passages in Proverbs. Similarly, the feminine counterpart to this word translates as “prudence” in Proverbs (e.g., 1:4), but by contrast in Exod. 21:14 it means “treachery,” or scheming in murder.

It should also be pointed out that the Hebrew word for “subtle” used in Gen. 3:1, *‘ārûm*, sounds very much like the word for “naked” in the last verse of ch. 2—*‘ārûmmîm*. No great theological conclusion should be gleaned from that. However, the use in consecutive verses of two words that are written alike and sound alike but mean two different things is an indication of the author’s use of key words to link the narratives. In this case chs. 2 and 3 of Genesis are nicely linked.

The Temptation

If Genesis 3 is unconcerned with amplification about the identity of the serpent, it is equally unconcerned with answering another question that intrigues the modern reader: why did the serpent tempt the woman and not the man, or both at the same time?

It seems fair to assume that the narrator does not intend to have the reader suppose that Adam and Eve are in two different places when the dialogue is in progress. The “you shall not eat” of vv. 1, 3, the “you shall die” of v. 3, and the “you shall not die” of v. 4 are plural verbs. Adam and Eve are the subjects. Also, the KJV rendering of 3:6b is quite clear: “and [she] gave also to her husband with her.” This is to be preferred over the RSV’s “and she also gave some to her husband.” The NRSV blends both: “she also gave some to her husband, who was with her.”

Answers to the question of why it was Eve who was tempted are legion. At one extreme is the view that the temptation aimed initially at the woman is reflective of women as the weaker sex, the one more inclined to engage in fanciful speculation. Thus, the respected scholar Gerhard von Rad (1972: 90) hastens to generalize that it is women more than men who have “shown an inclination for obscure astrological cults” (biblically, is von Rad referring to texts such as Ezek. 8:14?). At the other end of the spectrum are moderate feminists, such as Phyllis Trible (1978: 110), who suggest that in the story as presented Eve is the more challenging of the two. She is theologian-philosopher, aggressive rationalist, and God’s defense attorney all rolled into one. If the serpent can make her capitulate, then her silent, uninvolved mate will follow suit.

The apostle Paul states, “Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner” (1 Tim. 2:14 NIV). And in that emphasis Paul correctly lists the chronology of the trespass: first Eve, then Adam. She leads, he assents. But the apostle does not raise the issue of why Eve was tempted first.

The prohibition against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was directed to the man (2:16–17). Nowhere are we clearly informed about how Eve learned of the prohibition. Presumably she

learned of it from her husband, as her dialogue with the serpent (3:1–3) makes it obvious that she knows the prohibition well.

Possibly, then, the serpent chose Eve because she received the command from God only through an intermediary, her husband. One who had received God's command directly would be less likely to acquiesce. (As an example of this in another context, note who yielded to the temptation to idolatry and built the golden calf: not Moses, God's spokesman, but the people and Aaron, who received God's word through Moses.)

It is perhaps something of a surprise that the snake and Eve are able to converse at all without an interpreter. This observation is not made tongue-in-cheek. Granted that there are parallels in ancient literature, such as the Egyptian shipwrecked sailor who, being the sole survivor of a wreck at sea and then cast upon an island, finds himself engrossed in conversation with the island's lone occupant, a snake. But is the ability of the woman and the animal to converse simply mythological window dressing? Might our modern ability to communicate with pets be a remnant of a situation that once indeed did exist? Sin caused a rupture of Adam's relationship to God, to Eve, and to the ground. May we include also his relationship to the animal world? How interesting it is that animals are accountable for their actions and behavior (Gen. 9:5). The postdiluvian covenant is made with animals too (Gen. 9:9), not just humankind. Isaiah sees ahead to the messianic age, in which the wolf will become lamblike or the lamb will become wolflike (metaphors for the nations of the world?).

If all of this is incidental, some elements in the text are quite clear and present themselves to the reader with forcefulness and precision. To use J. R. W. Stott's (1965: 741) outline, we find here:

1. a permission to eat from every tree in the garden
2. a prohibition not to eat from one tree
3. a penalty for disobedience

How does the serpent attempt to undercut all of this? What is the essential intent of the temptation, and how far is it paradigmatic for the rest of the Bible, whenever the actions of the evil one are delineated?

The intent of the temptation is twofold. First, the temptation raises questions in Eve's mind about the integrity of God. Her mental image of God is attacked. God is portrayed more as fiend than friend. The method is to twist and misquote God's words in regard to the prohibition: you shall not eat of *any tree* of the garden. How cruel and vicious of God! The serpent implied, "You may observe them with the eye, work among them with the hands, but not partake of them with the mouth." In this context we might change the title of J. B. Phillips's interesting book from

Your God Is Too Small to Your God Is Too Mean. Stott's observation (1965: 743) is perceptive: "God's provision for Adam and Eve was perfect. They lacked nothing in the Garden of Eden. God knew that their happiness lay in enjoying what he had permitted and abstaining from what he had prohibited. His permission and his prohibition both issued from his sheer goodness and love." This is what the serpent must distort.

Second, the temptation encourages Eve to declare autonomy, quite apart from any guidance God may have given, which is to be considered absurd and irrelevant. "You will not die; . . . when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (vv. 4–5 NRSV).

Von Rad (1972: 89) summarizes correctly what these words mean: "The serpent holds out . . . the independence that enables a man to decide for himself what will help him or hinder him. . . . God had provided what was good for man, and had given him complete security. But now man will go beyond this to decide for himself." The temptation, then, is for humankind to overstep its limits. The difference between Adam and Eve in the garden and Jesus in the wilderness is that the former acquiesced to temptation. For Jesus, obedience to the Father's will was paramount.

What is next after Adam and Eve cross their Rubicon? Shame (v. 7), guile (vv. 8–11), and the search for a scapegoat (vv. 12–13). Then God speaks, not in the dialogue of vv. 8–13, but in a monologue: first to the serpent (vv. 14–15), then to the woman (v. 16), climactically and more extensively to the man (vv. 17–19).

It is, I believe, incorrect to see in these words of God to Adam and Eve primarily a punitive message, as if God is speaking only prescriptively, laying down the law, rather than descriptively: pain in pregnancy, disruption in the family, minimal returns for manual labor. The writer is not picturing God as a petulant deity, sulking, determined to teach these rascals a lesson that they will not soon forget. Like a surgeon who cuts with a scalpel only in order to heal, God initiates a means of redemption to reclaim the prodigals. His plan? To place at the respective point of highest self-fulfillment in the life of a woman and man problems of suffering, misery, and frustration. These "sentences" are not prescribed impositions from a volatile deity. Rather, they are gifts of love, strewn in the pathway of human beings, to bring them back to God. One may recall that C. S. Lewis, while reflecting on the ills and problems in the world, came to the conclusion that his reasons for not believing in God were actually much better reasons for believing in God, and thus was begun Lewis's pilgrimage into faith and his being "surprised by joy."

Commentators, in trying to salvage at least a ray of light from this chapter, usually have focused on either v. 21, "the Lord God made for

them garments of skin, and clothed them,” or v. 15, sometimes called the *prot(o)evangelium*, literally, “the first good news.” It is tempting to see atonement in v. 21, or at least to contrast God’s covering with that made by human hands (v. 7). And if this is not atonement, at least it is preservation, a gauge of God’s concern and compassion. Note that God’s act of grace (providing a covering for the delinquent couple) precedes their expulsion from the garden, just as in ch. 4 God’s gracious provision of a protecting mark for Cain precedes his departure from God’s presence.

The First Word of Promise

Genesis 3:15 traditionally has been viewed by Christians as the first word of promise—in a prophetic sense—of deliverance from sin. The provision of a covering for Adam and Eve is immediate atonement. By contrast, v. 15 places atonement in an eschatological context. Its concern is the future, not the present.

Not all commentators, however, endorse the christological interpretation of Gen. 3:15. On the contrary, many biblical scholars eschew any messianic message in the verse. For example, Westermann (1974: 100) attempts to crush under his own exegetical feet all who support the time-honored interpretation, beginning with Luther. For him, such an analysis fails to respect the original meaning of the verse and reads into the text something alien from the author’s intention. For reasons that I will delineate, I find it impossible to follow Westermann and others like him.

The Hebrew verb for “bruise” or “crush” is *šūp*. Outside of Gen. 3:15 it is found only in Job 9:17, “he crushes me with a tempest” (NRSV), and Ps. 139:11, “let only darkness cover me” (rsv). The serpent will crush the heel of the woman’s seed (a temporary and healable injury), but the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent (a fatal injury).

The older versions of the Old Testament have interesting translations of this verb. The Septuagint translates both occurrences with a verb meaning “to watch, guard (lie in wait for?).” The Vulgate translates the actions of the woman’s seed (“she will . . .”) with a verb meaning “to crush,” and the actions of the serpent and his seed with a verb meaning “to lie in wait for.”

In the New Testament this verse does not appear anywhere except in Paul’s comment that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:20 niv). And it is clear in this text that Paul is speaking not of Christ’s feet, but of the feet of those to whom he is writing (“your feet”), the believers at Rome, and by extension, all of Christ’s followers. Key words and phrases are, however, highlighted elsewhere. In the Old

Testament, clustering around David, are the promises of God that David is but the start of something new, something that God will perpetuate through David's "seed" (2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89:4, 29, 36). Anyone who tries to oppose David and/or his seed, God will "crush" (Ps. 89:23, but not the same verb as in Gen. 3:15). In a prayer for the king (Ps. 72:9), the one petition asks that the king's enemies might "lick the dust" (NIV). This is analogous to the king's enemies viewed as the king's "footstool" (Ps. 110:1 NRSV). Jesus, the seed of David (Rom. 1:3), and one "born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4 NRSV), "must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:25 NIV).

There are at least three phenomena in Gen. 3:15 that all too often have been ignored by commentators. And it is precisely the glossing over of these that has resulted in downplaying the messianic import of the verse. First, this is the only place in the Old Testament that the Hebrew word for "seed" or "descendant" occurs with a third-person, feminine, pronominal suffix—"her seed." The uniqueness of the construction becomes even more apparent in the Septuagint, with its reference to the woman's sperm ("her *sperma*")! (Where is the man, the father?)

In the Old Testament descent is virtually always through the male. The son is the seed of his father rather than of his mother. Exceptions are rare, as in the cases of Hagar's seed (Gen. 16:10) and Rebekah's seed (Gen. 24:60), but both references, by context, clearly point to individuals, not an individual. (Eve later will refer to Seth as her "other seed" [Gen. 4:25].)

Second, the Septuagint translation of the "he" in "he shall crush/bruise your head" is the masculine form of the pronoun, whose antecedent is the word "seed," which is neuter in gender, not masculine. Of the more than one hundred uses of the pronoun "he" in the Greek translation of Genesis, this is the only instance where the "he" does not agree in gender with its antecedent where literal translation is involved. That is to say, the translators could easily have used "it" instead of "he," as Greek has three genders, unlike Hebrew, which has only masculine and feminine. The Septuagint, then, emphasizes the "he-ness" of the woman's seed, not the seed's "it-ness" or "they-ness" in some collective sense (Kaiser 1978: 36–37).

Third, the first part of the verse boldly proclaims that this future confrontation is not an accident of history, an event that catches God unawares. He is actually the producer of this warfare: "I will put enmity between you and the woman" (RSV). It is an event that is as foreordained as the incarnation of Jesus. Interestingly, the passage anticipates not the crushing of the head of the serpent's seed, but the crushing of the head of the serpent himself: "he shall crush your head."

For these reasons I believe that any reflection on Gen. 3:15 that fails to underscore the messianic emphasis of the verse is guilty of a serious exegetical error. There is no doubt that the ultimate significance failed to occur to Eve. Did she think that Cain was that promised seed (Gen. 4:1), or maybe Seth (4:25)? Then again, who would care to suggest that Abraham saw the long-range significance of the promise that he was to receive in Genesis 12, a promise that would take at least four hundred years for its implementation, or two millennia for its full implementation? All this is not to say that Gen. 3:15 points to Jesus, and only to Jesus, and leaves out everybody between Eve and Christ when it speaks of “her seed.” The redemptive line of Eve’s seed begins with Seth and climaxes with the Messiah. Alexander (1995: 31) correctly observes that Gen. 3:15 “anticipates the creation of a royal line through which the terrible consequences of the disobedience of the man and the woman in the Garden of Eden will be reversed.”

Thus far I have suggested that in Genesis 3, at least in the second half, God’s concern is redemption. This concern is manifest in the provision of a covering, the promise of a seed of the woman, and the pronouncement of words of judgment that are redemptive and not vindictive in purpose.

Expulsion from the Garden

Is another evidence of this emphasis on redemption to be found in the expulsion of the man from the garden, to which reentry is blocked by cherubim and flaming sword (3:22–24)? Parents are aware that if they have in their home a particularly delinquent youth, say, for example, a son in his late teens or early twenties, perhaps the healthiest thing they can do for that young man, however difficult it may be, is to expel him from the home. Something as simple as a shift in geography in itself can be a motivation for change. Why should we want to abandon our sins if we can retain them and still have the presence of God as well?

So the man is sent out of the garden. But to do what? The answer is provided in 3:23b: “to till the ground from which he was taken” (NRSV). We read in 2:5b that “there was no man to till the ground” (RSV), and in 2:15 we are informed that the Lord put the man in the garden of Eden precisely to fill that void: “to till it and keep it” (NRSV). Thus, we are confronted by a man who is indeed expelled from God’s presence, but who is not barred from continuing the vocation for which he was created. He is still a tiller of the soil, but a soil that now is cursed.

Just prior to the announcement of the expulsion Adam had named his wife “Eve,” a word connected with the Hebrew word for “life” or “living” (3:20). In the context, however, almost every event narrated

points to death. Relationships with God, spouse, and soil are fractured. Nevertheless, here is life. Westermann (1974: 104) comments, “Despite man’s disobedience and punishment, the blessing given with the act of creation remains intact . . . man who is now far from God is always man blessed by God.”

It is interesting that the characters in Genesis 3 are not mentioned again, with the exception of the genealogical reference to Adam in 1 Chron. 1:1, until the New Testament, first in the Lukan genealogy of Jesus (Luke 3:38), then in some of the Pauline Epistles (e.g., Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:22). One might expect the expulsion from the garden to be a paradigm that the prophets would use to drive home their point about the consequences of disobedience, as they did, for example, with the episode about Sodom and Gomorrah. But it was left untouched.

The verses from Paul are, of course, the lynchpin in what is commonly called the doctrine of original sin. Both the Old and New Testaments affirm the doctrine (Gen. 6:5; 1 Kings 8:46; Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:19; Eph. 2:3), but they do not explain it in terms of theological origins. Any-one who is prone to dismiss the idea as medieval, negative, or absurd should recall a comment made by G. K. Chesterton in his biography of St. Francis of Assisi: “There is a bias in man and Christianity was the discovery of how to correct the bias. . . . It is profoundly true to say that the glad good news brought by the Gospel was the news of original sin” (*St. Francis of Assisi* [Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1957], 28). Bad news may be good news!

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