

Creation: *An Introduction*

TYLER R. WITTMAN



SHORT STUDIES *in*
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Edited by Graham A. Cole & Oren R. Martin

“Drawing from the Tolkienian image of creation as song, this book offers an extremely useful and much-needed overview of the doctrine of creation. Whereas much contemporary reflection on creation draws its energy from real or perceived clashes with modern science, Wittman takes us back to the riches of historical theology and Scripture. From this angle, he enlarges our vision to see all that is involved in creation: the Trinity, creatureliness, sin, and the eschaton. Put simply, this book puts the focus where it belongs and does so with a fresh and amazingly well-informed deployment of the Christian tradition. Highly recommended for all Christians. I will certainly be reading whatever Wittman writes next!”

Gavin Ortlund, President, Truth Unites; Theologian in Residence, Immanuel Nashville, Tennessee; Visiting Professor of Historical Theology, Phoenix Seminary

“Creation reflects the musicality of God, and in this wonderful little book, Tyler Wittman equips readers to recognize, delight in, and even join in God’s great song of creation. This song centers on the incarnate Christ and affirms the fullness of God’s creative and redemptive energies. If you have not yet started thinking about the importance of the doctrine of creation, now is the time, and this is a great place to begin!”

Kelly M. Kapic, Professor of Theological Studies, Covenant College

“A substantive introduction to the doctrine of creation. Wittman’s creative use of song sings as he harmonizes the various aspects of creation into a thoroughly biblical and historically grounded analysis. Wittman reminds us that theology should be doxological as it casts our vision to God and his action. Allow this book to tune your heart to sing the new song of grace, giving glory to the God who created all things.”

Kyle Strobel, Director of the Institute for Spiritual Formation, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

“God’s people are meant to praise God not just for *some* of his works but for *all* of them. We worship God not just because he has saved us but also because he has made us. In this work, Tyler Wittman explores the good news of God the Creator. This book will help the church because it is both theologically rich and pastorally accessible.”

J. T. English, Lead Pastor, Storyline Church, Arvada, Colorado; Associate Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Deep Discipleship*

“Tyler Wittman guides us to understand creation aright. He introduces us afresh to what it means to be a creature. He also shows why our creatureliness is gracious good news as he reflects on the wonder of God as our Creator. To know self, world, and God better, take and read this little gem of a book.”

Michael Allen, John Dyer Trimble Professor of Systematic Theology and Academic Dean, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

“As depicted in Psalm 148, creation is a vast yet ordered antiphonal choir, the creatures of the heavens and the earth arrayed in their distinct groups, each with a unique voice, united and harmonizing in a single song of praise. Wittman offers us an exhilarating exploration of this pregnant image for our understanding of creation, Christ’s redemption, and our calling. His stimulating articulation of the doctrine moves his readers seamlessly into doxology.”

Alastair J. Roberts, coauthor, *Echoes of Exodus*; Cohost, *Mere Fidelity* podcast

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Creation

An Introduction

Tyler R. Wittman

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*Poetry is the mother-tongue of the human race,
as the garden is older than the ploughed field;
painting, than writing; song, than declamation.*

J. G. HAMANN, *AESTHETICA IN NUCE*

*Remember to extol his work,
of which men have sung.*

JOB 36:24

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Series Preface

The ancient Greek thinker Heraclitus reputedly said that the thinker has to listen to the essence of things. A series of theological studies dealing with the traditional topics that make up systematic theology needs to do just that. Accordingly, in each of these studies, a theologian addresses the essence of a doctrine. This series thus aims to present short studies in theology that are attuned to both the Christian tradition and contemporary theology in order to equip the church to faithfully understand, love, teach, and apply what God has revealed in Scripture about a variety of topics. What may be lost in comprehensiveness can be gained through what John Calvin, in the dedicatory epistle of his commentary on Romans, called “lucid brevity.”

Of course, a thorough study of any doctrine will be longer rather than shorter, as there are two millennia of confession, discussion, and debate with which to interact. As a result, a short study needs to be more selective but deftly so. Thankfully, the contributors to this series have the ability to be brief yet accurate. The key aim is that the simpler is not to morph into the simplistic. The test is whether the topic of a short study, when further studied in depth, requires some unlearning to take place. The simple can be amplified. The simplistic needs to be corrected. As editors, we believe that the volumes in this series pass that test.

While the specific focus varies, each volume (1) introduces the doctrine, (2) sets it in context, (3) develops it from Scripture, (4) draws the various threads together, and (5) brings it to bear on the Christian life. It is our prayer, then, that this series will assist the church to delight in her triune God by thinking his thoughts—which he has graciously revealed in his written word, which testifies to his living Word, Jesus Christ—after him in the powerful working of his Spirit.

Graham A. Cole and Oren R. Martin

Abbreviations

- CO *Ioannis Calvinii opera omnia quae supersunt*
- FC Fathers of the Church
- LCL Loeb Classical Library
- LNTS The Library of New Testament Studies
- LW *Luther's Works*, American edition, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (Muhlenberg; Fortress; Concordia, 1955–1986)
- LXX Septuagint
- NSBT New Studies in Biblical Theology
- PPS Popular Patristics Series
- WSA *The Works of Saint Augustine: A New Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle et al. (New City Press, 1990–)

Introduction

Creation as Song

What is creation? If asked, many Christians would start listing things that populate our world: birds and bees, lizards and longhorns, fields and forests. Large things like mountains and oceans certainly come to mind. We'd think of the earth and, beyond that, the dancing spheres and burning stars within the great expanse. Eventually we'd think of ourselves and perhaps even our invisible neighbors, the angels and spirits. All of these answers are true, of course, but they don't so much answer the question as restate it. Examples of creatures don't help us define creation itself. So, again, what makes all of these things *creation*? The short answer is that they're all part of the Creator's song.

J. R. R. Tolkien understood that creation is song. Consider his creation myth for the world in which he would place Middle-Earth, found in *The Silmarillion*. Tolkien depicts the Creator, Ilúvatar, forging the world's existence through the music of his angels, the Ainur. Ilúvatar teaches them how to sing and eventually teaches them a "great theme" so they can "make in harmony together a Great Music" kindled by "Imperishable

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Flame.” As the Ainur sing Ilúvatar’s theme, writes Tolkien, “a sound arose of endless interchanging melodies woven into harmony that passed beyond hearing into the depths and into the heights, and the places of the dwelling of Ilúvatar were filled to overflowing, and the music went out into the Void, and it was not void.” The result: “Great beauty has been awakened into song.”¹

However, the mightiest of the Ainur, Melkor, soon devises his own additions to this flawless song.

As the theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself. . . . Some of these thoughts he now wove into his music, and straightway discord arose about him, and many that sang nigh him grew despondent, and their thought was disturbed and their music faltered; but some began to attune their music to his rather than to the thought which they had at first.

Melkor’s discordant variation spreads until Ilúvatar introduces a “new theme . . . like and yet unlike to the former theme, and it gathered power and had new beauty.”²

Eventually, Ilúvatar overtakes Melkor’s music by weaving his own new themes into the chaos, resolving its sorrow and ugliness by subsuming them as counterpoints in a theme of unforeseen harmony, beauty, and strength. Melkor’s music is ultimately undone because it is loud, vain, and repetitive and, writes Tolkien, “had little harmony, but rather a clamorous

1. J. R. R. Tolkien, “Ainulindalë: The Music of the Ainur,” in *The Silmarillion: The Myths and Legends of Middle-Earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 15.

2. Tolkien, “The Music of the Ainur,” 16.

unison as of many trumpets braying upon a few notes.”³ It loses out because it lacks beauty.

The “Song” Metaphor in Christian Tradition

Tolkien’s myth is evocative and draws upon his own Christian tradition. Anticipating Ilúvatar’s “new theme,” Clement of Alexandria speaks of Christ as the “new song” bearing God’s name, a “Levitical song,” which is to say, the fulfilment of the music of the Levites, whom David appointed to sing during worship (cf. 1 Chron. 6:31–48) and who bore God’s name on their foreheads (Ex. 28:36–38).⁴ Clement uses this metaphor to contrast Christian worship and rituals with their opposite, pagan forms. Though Greek myth spoke of Orpheus, who would tame wild animals with his music, Jesus tames the wildest of animals, sinful humans. Clement writes: “See how mighty is the new song! It has made men out of stones and men out of wild beasts.”⁵ Christ’s new song is powerful and always has been. Because David sang prophetically of this new song, his music frightened away harmful spirits (1 Sam. 16:23). Clement continues to argue that Jesus, the Word through whom all things were made (John 1:3), also “composed the entire creation into melodious order, and tuned into concert the discord of the elements, that the whole universe might be in harmony with it.”⁶ The Word is therefore not only the content of the “new song” but the secret of the original “pure song,” who

3. Tolkien, “The Music of the Ainur,” 17. For more on this material, see Jonathan McIntosh, *The Flame Imperishable: Tolkien, St. Thomas, and the Metaphysics of Faërie* (Angelico, 2017), 119–56. In *The Magician’s Nephew*, C. S. Lewis also uses the metaphor of “song” to describe the creation of Narnia. His “space trilogy” is shot through with the metaphor as well.

4. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 1.3 (trans. G. W. Butterworth, LCL 92:7). See here Doru Costache, *Humankind and the Cosmos: Early Christian Representations* (Brill, 2021), 81–96.

5. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 1.5 (Butterworth, LCL 92:11).

6. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 1.5 (Butterworth, LCL 92:11).

created all things “in accordance with the fatherly purpose of God.”⁷ Clement understands that God’s works, from the beginning of all things to their consummation, have a musical quality: The “new song” of redemption presupposes the “pure song” of creation, both of which are centered on the Word, the Son, Jesus Christ.

Clement’s use of the “song” metaphor follows Scripture’s lead, if we pay careful attention. In John’s vision of heavenly worship in the book of Revelation, the angels sing a “new song” about the mystery of Christ’s work:

Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed
people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to
our God,
and they shall reign on the earth. (Rev. 5:9–10; cf. 14:3)

This angelic song recalls a theme throughout the Psalms, where Israel is summoned to sing a “new song” of thanksgiving for something God has done, such as rescuing his people or intervening to bring about a new state of affairs.⁸ Whenever God’s people sing a “new song,” they’re singing of God’s mighty works on their behalf. And importantly, they’re singing about things that anticipate the future fulfillment of God’s promises. Therefore, such new songs anticipate Christ, in whom all God’s promises are “Yes and Amen” (2 Cor. 1:20).

While this theme of a “new song” throughout Scripture looks forward to the fulfillment of God’s promises, it also looks

7. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 1.5 (Butterworth, LCL 92:13).
8. Pss. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; cf. Isa. 42:10.

backward to God’s mighty works in the past, the first of which is creation. In Revelation, the angels sing their “new song” against the background of a song that praises God’s work of creation:

Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.
(Rev. 4:11; cf. Job 38:7)

The new song about redemption follows the first song about creation. Indeed, what makes the new song “new” is the new creation Christ inaugurates: “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev. 21:5); “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17; cf. Gal. 6:15). Just as the new creation presupposes the original creation, the new song presupposes an original one.

It is no minor detail that the angels sing these songs in heaven in response to God’s mighty works. Notice how their song is *responsive*, much like a liturgical chant. And in many Christian churches, liturgical chants respond to chants. So Christian tradition has a place for understanding God’s act of creating to be songlike, since it elicits responsive acts of singing. Of course, this is all metaphor, and it doesn’t line up with Tolkien’s account in every detail—he would not have wanted it so and neither do we. But metaphors help shape our imagination and understanding of things.⁹ As we will see throughout our study, the metaphor of “song” is not only biblical but also, for that very reason, uniquely suited to help us understand the world, ourselves, and all that’s around us as God’s creation.

9. As helpful as metaphors are, they also crumble when pressed too far. They work best when shouldered with light burdens. Such are the burdens placed on the musical metaphors here, especially given the author’s ignorance of music theory’s intricacies and language. If readers fear they know too little about music, they are in good company with the author and need only press forward. If readers fear they know too much about music to forebear the book’s loose metaphors, they need only a little patience and humor.

Creation is sung reality, full of beauty that can be experienced when its harmonies and resolutions are heard. But it has strange notes in it as well. Adam was born into a world of fallen angels, whose chaos intruded into Eden's peace. And creation has stranger notes still. A new song has emerged within the original, drawing it all into one grand symphony whose final movement has not yet finished. Choirs of angels, humans, and other creatures hymn the Creator's glory and wait for his music to bring everything to its rest. The glory and the weight of created life is whether we will wager our voices against the Creator or respond to his song with eternal harmonies.

The Plan of This Book

The doctrine of creation is thoroughly doxological—that is, concerned with worship. With these truths, Scripture teaches us to understand why we praise God as the Creator. The doctrine of creation is therefore about God at every point. And its end is to nourish our worship of God so that we can join the angels as they extol the Creator's glory (Rev. 4:11). Our focus on creation as God's song gives the following chapters their focus, but also some of their limitations. A fuller doctrine of creation would have to consider much more than we can in this book, such as extended treatments of the human person, sin, the natures of angels and demons, heaven and hell and the whole of a theological cosmology, and even the meaning Scripture attaches to created things like rocks, water, and fire. My treatment here is rather more modest, touching on many of these themes but leaving much unsaid. It is meant to teach as much as excite further study.

We begin by looking at the doxological framework for creation in Scripture, before moving on to consider the doctrine within this framework. Hence, the chapters proceed in order by

looking at God and then his works, which includes the purpose of creation, the act of creation, the character of creatures, their variety and order, how God accomplishes all his purposes in creation, and the implications this has for life in God's cosmic household.

Bonaventure likens creation to “a kind of beautiful song” because the creation week is like music, taking time and making rhythm.¹⁰ I will argue something similar in chapter 1 by listening to the creation week in Genesis as if it were a hymn, with defined rhythm and form. Chapter 2 looks at the presupposition of creation as a song, which is the Creator's own musicality. Here we explore the fit between the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of creation, and how this helps us understand creation's contingency and its ultimate goal or end. Chapter 3 continues to look directly at the act of “singing” itself, using this as the occasion to unfold the doctrine of creation “out of nothing” (*ex nihilo*) and its consequences for how we think about creatures. Chapter 4 then turns to the theme of Jesus, God's Word, as creation's melody and the judge of its harmony. This provides us a means to revisit the creation hymn and understand deeper truths about creatures and the created order itself.

Chapter 5 considers creation's “orchestra” of creatures, who are meant to respond to God's singing liturgically, with music of their own. We also explore how this orchestra has suffered disorder because of its human conductors, who turned away from God's Word. Humanity left the song in disarray, needing resolution. When Augustine describes the world as being “like the most beautiful poem, with antitheses of a sort,” he points to how aspects of creation's harmony confuse us in this life and await resolution, even though God knows the song from

10. Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quatuor libros sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi* II d. 13, a. 1, qa. 2, ad 2, in *Doctoris seraphici, Opera omnia* (Quaracchi, 1882), 2:316.

beginning to end.¹¹ Along these lines, chapter 6 looks at how Jesus resolves the creation's tensions. He is at once the fullest revelation and fulfillment of creation's doxological rhythm and form. Jesus is the song's melody become incarnate as the symphony's chief conductor, leading those who respond to God's song with music of their own. Where human conductors have failed, Christ has succeeded and freed the creation through his church to make music before the Lord. Finally, chapter 7 looks at how God's priestly image bearers should conduct the liturgy of creation. This leads us to consider our relation to other creatures and to created goods doxologically, and thus under the categories of gratitude and sacrifice—a misunderstood concept that is at the very heart of what it means to be a creature.

The “coda” is a fresh translation of Psalm 148 that showcases its poetry and musicality, and so highlights Scripture's own teaching about the nature of God's creation. I encourage you to meditate on this psalm steadily, perhaps together with Psalm 104, as you consider the claims of this book.

With all of that said, this work leaves aside questions about which some readers will no doubt expect guidance and which frequently commandeer evangelical accounts of creation. For example, we will not discuss the age of the earth. There is a very simple explanation for this: Scripture is silent on the matter. Indeed, one of this book's arguments is that Scripture shows no express interest in teaching physical cosmology. Its teaching about God and creation has metaphysical consequences for how we receive the findings of physics and biology, ruling out all sorts of false views of God's relation to the world (like deism and pantheism) and of the material cosmos itself (like naturalism and materialism). But Scripture cannot be treated like a science textbook encrypted with prescientific language and

11. Augustine, *The City of God* 11.18 (trans. William Babcock, WSA I/7:17).

categories. Its cosmological language is instead richly symbolic, using pictures to teach us a theological cosmology that reaches higher and deeper than any scientific account can. Readers may judge for themselves whether they are persuaded by this argument, but nothing in the book commits readers to any specific scientific account of origins, even as it rules out many ways such accounts are framed and excludes others along the way.

There are occasions in Christian theology where scientific or natural-philosophical matters should or must be dealt with in more detail, as in Christian anthropology. But the history of Christian accommodation of prevailing scientific theories of the cosmos (and even the human person) is often unflattering. That said, Christian theology is not unique in this shortcoming.¹² For instance, the older geocentric view of the cosmos was widely accepted and taught by more than simply Christians (as were infelicitous views of female dignity). Nevertheless, Christian theologians particularly erred when they mistakenly conflated these dominant views with Scripture's teaching. This conflation made them slow to accept the heliocentric model of the cosmos in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, despite its superior mathematical and observational virtues (not to mention its truth). To be sure, others were slow to accept these same findings. But many theologians cited Scripture in defense of geocentrism. In this, they were simply wrong on exegetical grounds, which raises the whole question of whether we should go looking for "science" and physical cosmology in Scripture at all. Perhaps there are more lessons here for us than we have learned. We will touch on these issues briefly toward the end of chapter 1, but only briefly. The book is a short introduction and more important matters merit our attention, matters that

12. See the (schematic) comments by Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2, *God and Creation* (Baker Academic, 2004), 484.

are rarely, if ever, present in typical presentations of this doctrine. When we are committed to the truth of Scripture, neither authors nor readers need fear being wrong. For when someone shows us a better way of understanding Scripture, we both are led by the Spirit into the truth greater than us all.

Two final notes: (1) The footnotes are for those who need them, so if that's not you, ignore them with a clean conscience. (2) The first two chapters are perhaps the most demanding. Readers who find themselves lost at moments are encouraged to keep moving, since the book is designed somewhat like a song; themes from earlier chapters reappear in later chapters that call back to them, where they are developed and expanded.

The Song's Doxological Nature

The Creation Hymn

Scripture opens with God creating the heavens and the earth in six days and resting on the seventh (Gen. 1:1–2:4). This is an appropriate overture, since creation is the first of God's works and sets the stage for God's covenant fellowship with his people. Christian tradition has often explored the doctrine of creation through extended commentary on the creation week, the garden of Eden, and the fall from grace.¹ In this, theologians follow Scripture's lead, since creation texts often look back to the hexaemeron (Greek for "six-day account") and echo its themes. What takes place in this week is the first word on the doctrine of creation, though it isn't the last.

1. Helpful background to the interpretation of Gen. 1 may be found in Paul M. Blowers, *The Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 101–38; Andrew J. Brown, *Recruiting the Ancients for the Creation Debate* (Eerdmans, 2023).

While the opening pages of Scripture are important historically and theologically for the doctrine of creation, they aren't alone. One might as easily unpack the doctrine of creation from Psalm 104 as from Genesis, for instance. Since the doctrine of creation arises from a comprehensive reading of Scripture, not one or two chapters, we cannot restrict our attention to any single passage. On its own, after all, Genesis is insufficient to teach us about creation. Because Jesus Christ gives us all of Scripture, only when all of it is taken together do we receive "as much as he judged sufficient."² We may nevertheless focus on a part of Scripture, such as the hexaemeron, so long as we relate it to the whole. That said, our first task in this initial chapter is to see how the hexaemeron is like a hymn that announces creation's doxological nature and elicits our participation. This will orient our study in the following chapters as we consider the Creator, his creative act, and his creatures from within Scripture's doxological framework.

Listening to the Hexaemeron as a Hymn

As soon as we turn to the hexaemeron, we must make some decisions about interpretation. Given the amount of attention the opening chapters of Genesis have received, there are many different views on how the text should be read and the meaning of its details.³ It presents too many problems for almost every reader. Why is it silent about the creation of angels? Why does it speak about waters "above" the sky on day 2? Why does it speak of days, of morning and evening, before the creation of the sun and moon? And so on. The one unspoken assumption

2. Augustine, *City of God* 11.3 (trans. William Babcock, WSA I/7:3).

3. For a concise introduction to such debates, see Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Evangelical Theology* (Baker Academic, 2019), 138–46. The careful and charitable reader will notice that the current chapter's argument doesn't necessarily exclude any party in these debates.

almost all interpreters of the hexaemeron share is that this is not the text they would've written.

Good! For this very reason, it keeps us on our toes. Scripture resists every narrow interest, every tidy attempt to bottle it up. There are no good answers to bad questions, and the questions that the answers from Scripture presuppose are not always the ones we initially think to ask. Vigilant against the temptation of clinging to the wrong questions, we must therefore question our questions to see whether they are the right ones.

That said, it's not easy to discern when one's questions are wrong and when they're right. How can we be certain we've captured the right sense of the text? Martin Luther held to what he considered a commonsense approach to the text, for he believed that Scripture's meaning is found in "the simplest language" of its literal sense.⁴ Despite its simple language, however, Luther admitted that the hexaemeron is a difficult text to interpret, so no one theologian is a safe guide to all its particulars.⁵ This is a sage warning: On his own, neither Luther nor Basil nor Augustine nor any other interpreter (the present author included) is a sufficient guide to the whole text. The safest approach to this text, like any other, is to look at it from several angles and with several other interpreters past and present. Such is the approach I will take in this chapter.

In this light, careful interpretation requires at least two things of us. First, we must approach the hexaemeron with a teachable spirit. Christian tradition has long recognized that the most decisive feature of the hexaemeron is that it is prophetic speech: God instructing us through his prophet of things we need to know for

4. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, chaps. 1–5 (LW 1:3). While Luther is right about the simple language of the literal sense, there are good biblical and theological reasons to disagree that he consistently identified the meaning of this language in the hexaemeron.

5. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, chaps. 1–5 (LW 1:4).

our salvation. It might sound strange to call this text prophecy, but we simply mean that it's something God had to teach "Moses, the scribe of truth."⁶ The prophets declare the oracles of God. Prophets do not spend their time satisfying idle curiosities or lecturing on things like physics and biology. The text before us aims at our sanctification. So we must receive it with humility, teachability, and love of God. If our interpretation does not summon these virtues into action and make claims on our lives, we have good reason to question whether we've received God's prophetic speech.

Second, this teachability requires that we attend expectantly, repentantly, and diligently to the text's details and form. Any viable reading must do justice to the creation week's obvious and painstaking literary structure. Typically, this involves questions about the "genre" of the hexaemeron: Is it historical narrative, wisdom literature, "myth," poetry, or something else besides? As most interpreters will agree, the genre is hard to pigeonhole. It shares common features with poetry and with prose, having repetition, silences, and exacting organization, but also a narrative sequence that departs from traditional Hebrew poetry such as one often finds in the Psalms. The hexaemeron is perhaps closer to what we often call prose poetry. Like the function of rhyme in a poem, the days point backward and forward, suspending the march of time to awaken something timeless in the reader.⁷ And like sequence in a narrative, the days build upon one another and lead to a climax.

We can capture all this by likening the hexaemeron to a hymn. Indeed, with Luther we can affirm that Scripture's meaning is found in its simple language. But what language is sim-

6. Jacob of Serug, *Homily on the Fashioning of Creation*, trans. Edward G. Mathews Jr., *Texts from Christian Antiquity* 67 (Gorgias, 2021), 57–58; cf. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* 1.1 (FC 46:4–5).

7. On the function of rhyme in this way, see Brad Leithauser, *Rhyme's Rooms: The Architecture of Poetry* (Knopf, 2022), 138.

pler for teaching little ones than the language of song? With its structure, rhythm, and movement, the hexaemeron works like a hymn to teach us about the orderly work of the Creator in a heavily stylized and memorable form. Much like a hymn, then, the hexaemeron at once praises the Creator and invites the church to join in this praise. In what follows, we will therefore listen to the hexaemeron as a hymn, to perceive its poetic images and feel its rhythm—and to be taught like children.

The Hymn's Doxological Rhythm and Order

The hexaemeron appears like a hymn when we pay attention to two patterns in the text, which concern time and space—two of created life's most inescapable realities.⁸ Both patterns follow clear structures within the text and discern its meaning, while neither on its own exhausts all there is to say. We can understand this if we liken the temporal pattern to the hymn's rhythm and the spatial pattern to the hymn's order. If we only listened to a song's rhythm, we would miss much of what makes the song a coherent piece of music. And without listening to a song's rhythm, we could not join it with our voices or instruments. Looking at both aspects will help us understand creation's context in doxology, worship. We must therefore consider (1) the hymn's temporal pattern as its doxological rhythm and (2) its spatial pattern as its doxological order.

The Hymn's Temporal Pattern, Creation's Doxological Rhythm

Arguably, the main progression of the creation week is concerned with time. This is evident in each of the six days, which

8. Ben C. Ollenburger, *God the Creator: The Old Testament and the World God Is Making* (Baker Academic, 2023), 20–25, discusses the “liturgical” and “spatial” patterns in the hexaemeron. See also L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, NSBT 37 (IVP Academic, 2015), 39–49.

are like verses in a song, all (except for the seventh) ending with the refrain “there was evening and there was morning, the [nth] day” (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). However, it’s especially prominent in the verses sounded at the beginning, the middle, and the end, in the progression from the first to the fourth and seventh days (fig. 1). These three days all share a common theme as well as a common rhythm.

<i>Day 1</i>		Light (sign of God’s glory)
↓	<i>Day 2</i>	
	<i>Day 3</i>	
<i>Day 4</i>		Sun, Moon, and Stars (symbols of God’s glorious presence in worship)
↓	<i>Day 5</i>	
	<i>Day 6</i>	
<i>Day 7</i>		Rest and Perpetual Light (freedom for worship, to glorify God)

Figure 1. Temporal pattern

Like a theme developed in a song, the temporal pattern develops the theme of time within the framework of God’s glory and creation’s doxological purpose. This is why we hear notes of “light” in these days and why they conclude in worship. Throughout Scripture, light is often a metaphor of God’s glory (Isa. 60:1; John 1:9–14; 2 Cor. 4:6), an association that the creation hymn subtly supports. Light arrives on the first day without any physical source. This curious fact grabs our attention and focuses it on God, who is light’s ultimate source, and not on the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars). Light points beyond itself to God: he is robed “with light” (Ps. 104:2); he “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:16); and finally, he “is light”

(1 John 1:5). God speaks and light shines in the darkness, for God's Word is enlightening light (John 1:9; cf. 1 John 2:8). This Word is the Lamb, who will be the only source of light in the new heavens and new earth: "And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 21:23; cf. Isa. 60:19).

Light on day 1 thus foreshadows God's glorious presence. At the center of this temporal pattern is the fourth day with the heavenly bodies, which are deputized to "rule" the passing of time (Gen. 1:16). These lights are described with the same word used across the Pentateuch for the lamps in the tabernacle, which represent God's presence and provision (Ex. 25:30–31; 35:8, 14, 28; 40:4; Num. 8:1–4; 1 Kings 7:49; Rev. 11:4). Like the tabernacle's lamps, then, the "lamps" mediating heavenly light are reminders of the light of God's countenance that shines upon his people when they gather to worship him (Num. 6:24–26; cf. 2 Cor. 4:6). The seventh day, with its mysterious absence of evening and morning, paints a picture of light enduring without these lamps. Again, in John's vision of the new creation and the saints' worship of the Lamb, we read that "night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22:5). Light appears on the horizon of time, followed by the heavenly bodies that run their course, and when they are finished, the light of God's glory will remain forevermore. All this imagery shows us that time itself revolves around the glory of God.

While these three days develop the common theme of light pointing to God's glory, they also share a common rhythm. Just as time is characterized by its movement from and to God's glory, so it exists to facilitate Israel's worship. Time has a doxological rhythm. This emphasis on worship is explicit at the

week's center. The fourth day is central to the temporal pattern, because here the heavenly bodies are introduced with their purpose: They "separate the day from the night" and function to tell of "signs and festivals, and for days and years" (Gen. 1:14).⁹ God delegates created light to the heavenly bodies so that the march of time is measurable in days and years.

More importantly for the hymn's purpose, however, is how time's forward march is tethered to "festivals," Israel's seven religious feasts on which they would celebrate the gifts of their Creator and rest from their labors.¹⁰ These harvest feasts and pilgrimages would celebrate the Creator's goodness in providing food and afford households the opportunities to compare their crops and yields, identifying people who were in need, and share their bounty accordingly. They would remind Israel that the Creator owns his creation, so the gifts of its fruitfulness should be shared with "the poor and the sojourner" rather than hoarded by the cleverest and most ruthless (Lev. 23:22). But these same feasts would point also to God's rescue of Israel from sin and slavery so they might be free to worship him: "Let my people go, that they may serve me" (Ex. 8:1).

The seventh day introduces the first of these feasts, the Sabbath (Gen. 2:2; cf. Ex. 20:8–11). This day is the reason for the

9. A note on the word "festival" (*mo'adim*) is in order. The ESV translates *mo'adim* as "seasons," but the word only possibly (and very rarely) refers to the seasons of the year. Most often it refers to the "appointed time" or "fixed time" that is synonymous with the liturgical feasts (cf. Lev. 23). See Walter Vogels, "The Cultic and Civil Calendars of the Fourth Day of Creation (Gen. 1:14b)," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 11, no. 2 (1997): 163–66. Following Vogels, I have used "festivals" as the clearest translation of the word's meaning in context.

10. The seven annual feasts were Passover (Lev. 23:5), Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6–8), Firstfruits (Lev. 23:9–14), Weeks (Lev. 23:15–22), Trumpets (Lev. 23:23–25), Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26–32), and Booths (Lev. 23:33–44). For a helpful overview of the agrarian function of these feasts, see Michael LeFebvre, *The Liturgy of Creation: Understanding Calendars in Old Testament Context* (IVP Academic, 2019), 38–53, who also reads the hexaemeron as a liturgical calendar in ways suggestive for my approach in this chapter. On the evolution of feasts in early Christianity, see Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts, and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Liturgical Press, 2011).

numbering of the creation week's days in the first place, tying them together into a collective portrait: a miniature liturgical calendar that gathers up the whole cosmos and sets its daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly rhythms, thereby leading it into the blessing of God's presence. It is the Sabbath that unifies the other days, since they count down to it. So, too, Israel's festal calendar counts from one feast to the next (cf. Lev. 23), and the years count to the year of jubilee, in which all things are given rest and a new beginning (Lev. 25:8–55). The Sabbath comes first in the ordering of the feasts in Leviticus 23 because it is archetypal, showing how every religious feast is rooted ultimately in the Creator's bountiful provision in creation, which looks forward to something greater (cf. Heb. 4:9–10). Like creation itself, time is for the benefit of God's creatures and their daily existence, but it also points beyond itself to the Creator and the end of time in his eternity. Creation's doxological rhythm should culminate in gratitude that shares the bounty of the Creator's generosity, and gives all God's people the rest they need to worship him.

Much like a hymn or a call to worship, creation's doxological rhythm orders and governs Israel's worship, and especially its religious calendar. By that same token, it shows how God opens time to himself so that he may meet his creatures there and have time for them. Creation is not trapped by time, so creatures don't need deliverance from it. Rather, created time is part of God's hospitality. The seventh day brings time to rest in God's rest, a sign of how time is supposed to be ordered and inhabited for the flourishing of God's creatures. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27), on account of which it is "a delight" (Isa. 58:13). When God met Israel in their annual cycle of feasts, this reminded them of his provision in and with the rhythm of created time: "While the earth remains, seedtime and

harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22). Time is a fit vehicle for God’s fellowship with creatures. As Israel ordered their lives by the calendar the heavenly bodies regulated, they ordered their earthly lives with the hospitable, doxological rhythm of heaven.¹¹ For this same reason, many churches observe a liturgical calendar that structures the year by festivals and days to remember the Creator’s presence with his creatures in time.¹² Such practices embody the biblical sense that God creates time with purpose, meaning, and order, all of which invite and regulate our worship for our good.

The Hymn's Spatial Pattern, Creation's Doxological Order

Complementing the temporal pattern is the creation week’s spatial pattern. This concerns how God separates spaces within creation and fills them. Broadly speaking, this is one of the most traditional ways of looking at the creation week.¹³ According to this pattern, God “forms” habitats and subsequently “fills” those habitats with inhabitants. At the outset of the week, creation is “without form and void” (Gen. 1:2), hinting at a state of formlessness and emptiness. As the week progresses, God’s creative

11. LeFebvre, *The Liturgy of Creation*, 24. See also Brittany N. Melton, “An Invitation to a New Era of Biblical Theology: Towards an Old Testament Theology of Hospitality,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 74, no. 1 (2023): 113–41.

12. The Christian year is structured around the mysteries of Christ’s life, especially his birth, passion, resurrection, and ascension. This is because Christ embraces in himself everything that the feasts of Lev. 23 point toward; he is the “body” of which the feasts were all “shadows” (Col. 2:17). Israel’s liturgical feasts not only gathered the people together for worship and the celebration of God’s bounty but also gathered time cyclically around the Creator. So, too, Christ “gathers” together all things in himself in the “fullness of time” (Eph. 1:10). Time is created by, through, and for Jesus Christ (Col. 1:16), being thereby structured around him (cf. Rev. 5). We return to this in chap. 6, under “Bringing It All Together,” when discussing how Christ “recapitulates” all things in himself (see p. 123).

13. “Broadly speaking”: While individual authors differ on what exactly is taking place in days 1–3 and days 4–6, they tend to agree in discerning a distinction and stylistic symmetry between the two sets of days. For instance, in book 2 of his *Sentences* (distinctions 12–15), Peter Lombard is representative when he classifies God’s works in the six days of “distinguishing” (days 1–3) and “adorning” (days 4–6). While this classification of the six days is often associated with the so-called “framework view” in contemporary literature, we must not flatten into one monolithic perspective every individual author recognizing this symmetry.

activity remedies this barrenness with acts of “forming” and “filling.” The same distinction is echoed in the week’s conclusion, where “the heavens and earth were finished [formed], and all the host of them [filled]” (Gen. 2:1; cf. Isa. 45:18).¹⁴ (See fig. 2.)

Forming		Filling		Day 7 (Gen. 2:1–3) Sanctification, rest, worship led by God’s image bear- ers, like priests over all creation
Day 1 (Gen. 1:3–5)	Separates light and darkness	Day 4 (Gen. 1:14–19)	Creates sun, moon, stars to help creatures track signs, religious festivals, days, years	
Day 2 (Gen. 1:6–8)	Separates waters above (sky) and below (sea)	Day 5 (Gen. 1:20–23)	Creates inhabitants of the seas and skies	
Day 3 (Gen. 1:9–13)	Separates seas from land (also brings forth vegetation from earth)	Day 6 (Gen. 1:24–31)	Creates insects and beasts on land, but especially humanity	

Figure 2. Spatial pattern

The week’s spatial pattern divides the six days into two halves, whereupon we can see correspondences between the

14. The framework of “forming” and “filling” is sometimes criticized because day 3 seems to cheat with the “forming” of land *and* the “filling” of vegetation. See, for a recent example, Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *Man and Christ* (Crossway, 2020), 98. However, per Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (InterVarsity Press, 1984), 52, this is a feature, not a bug of the spatial structure. Day 3 simultaneously concludes the “forming” days while also pointing forward to the “filling” days. Something parallel happens on day 6: God fills the earth with all sorts of beasts, but he also fills it with humanity. Just as the vegetation of day 3 points us forward to the following days, the image bearers on day 6 point us forward to day 7, for they are the ones invited to rest in God and lead all creation in that direction. Just as day 3 points forward to God’s acts of filling as the completion of creation’s forming, so day 6 points forward to God’s rest as the completion of creation itself. The days of creation are linked together with a clear literary structure, weaving in and out of one another like a good poem or song.

first three days and the last three.¹⁵ In days 1 through 3, God forms spaces by distinguishing and separating parts of the world's unformed mass. On day 1, God separates light from darkness (Gen. 1:3–5); on day 2, it's the waters above separated from the waters below, or heaven from the earth (Gen. 1:6–8); and on day 3, he separates the dry land from the waters, or earth from sea (Gen. 1:9–13). Throughout days 4–6, God respectively “fills” the spaces he previously formed by decorating or adorning them with living things. On day 4, God assigns the phases of light and darkness to the sun, moon, and stars (Gen. 1:14–19); on day 5, he fills the heavens with birds and the waters with aquatic life (Gen. 1:20–23); and on day 6, he decorates the earth with beasts and, above all, humans (Gen. 1:24–31).

One final feature of this pattern deserves comment. God pronounces his creation “good” *twice*, on days 3 and 6, which respectively conclude the days of forming and the days of filling (Gen. 1:10, 12, 25, 31). This pronouncement underscores that God's acts of forming and filling address the problem of creation's barrenness and cultivate it for fruitfulness. Day 7 is the capstone of the whole structure, sanctified and blessed as its fullness (Gen. 2:3). This climactic day and the preceding six days demarcate one week decorated with the freedom to rest and enjoy the Creator's rich bounty.

The spatial pattern of the creation week highlights the Creator's unilateral provision for the structures of life. Creation has not only rhythmic time, therefore, but “structured space.”¹⁶ This is especially visible in the important work of “distinction” or “separation.” God distinguishes the elements of creation so

15. Each set of three days has roughly the same number of Hebrew words devoted to them (207 words in days 1–3 and 206 words in days 4–6), with the words of all six days adding up to a multiple of seven (7 x 59 = 413). See Paul Beauchamp, *Création et séparation: Étude exégétique du chapitre premier de la Genèse* (Éditions du Cerf, 2005), 71–76.

16. Rolf P. Knierim, “Cosmos and History,” in *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method, and Cases* (Eerdmans, 1995), 186.

that they have space to function and then provides for their continued separation and working.¹⁷ Hence, God creates light in distinction from darkness, and then he creates the luminaries to sustain and govern this separation. The sky separates the upper waters from the lower waters and thereby opens space for the flourishing of aerial and aquatic life. The sea's separation from the dry ground opens a space for the vegetation, beasts, and human life that inhabit the earth. It is crucial for the Christian vision of creation to notice that God's distinctions create space for creatures to come together in fertile and life-giving ways.¹⁸ God's distinctions are therefore gifts of order, spaces where God meets his creation and provides for life and fruitfulness. The psalmist therefore praises the Creator's work of establishing boundaries between creation's ordered spaces (Ps. 104:9), since this is the condition for the flourishing of those spaces and their inhabitants (Ps. 104:10–15). The hymn's order thus hints at creation's order, articulated by the Creator's act of distinguishing.

On a deeper level, then, creation's order is doxological. It is the setting for how creatures, especially humans, will glorify God and display his goodness in all of life. Just as the hymn displays doxological order, so too humans are created to display this order in their lives by hearing and obeying God's word with love that is well ordered. We see this in relief against the background of how the hexaemeron's spatial pattern narrates the distinction between Creator and creation: God is prior to all the things he creates, and they are distinct from one another only as the Creator rescues them from their original disorder and sets them in order with his peace. Order is part of God imprinting likenesses of his own goodness and wisdom on creation (Ps. 148:6; Prov. 3:19; 8:22–31).

17. See here Ollenburger, *God the Creator*, 24–25.

18. Ephraim Radner, *A Time to Keep: Theology, Mortality, and the Shape of a Human Life* (Baylor University Press, 2016), 92–96.

That said, likeness to God is not identity with God. The Creator's distinction from creatures is fundamental and inescapable. As the narrative of Genesis 3–11 shows, however, the creature alienates itself from its Creator as it tries to erase these foundational distinctions and therefore tear down the unassailable difference between Creator and creature (cf. Rom. 1:25).¹⁹ Sin manifests itself partly in the drive to neglect the Creator's act of separating: either by obliterating created distinctions, reducing creation's rich diversity to a dismal sameness, or by stretching these distinctions into alienations. Hence, creation's distinctions between spaces are echoed in the distinction between "kinds" of vegetation and animal life (Gen. 1:11–12, 21, 24–25), as well as between the two human sexes (Gen. 1:27). All these distinctions express the shape of the Creator's will, to which Israel is conformed through God's word. "What God has distinguished and created distinct, man ought not to confuse (Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9–11)."²⁰ Lawful worship in everyday life, which touches upon everything from agriculture to marriage, requires careful discernment of how God orders reality for fruitfulness through acts of distinction. Living within God's created order wisely and worshipfully is thus a matter of following the hymn's doxological order.

From Cosmos to Temple: Creation's Doxological Character

Having looked at the creation hymn's musical patterns, we must now grasp the inseparability of Scripture's form for the content of what it teaches us about creation. We will look at this in the next two sections. First, we consider its "liturgical"

19. On this collapsing of distinctions throughout the narrative, see Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 51–74; Edward W. Klink III, *The Beginning and End of All Things: A Biblical Theology of Creation and New Creation*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (IVP Academic, 2023), 54–66.

20. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Thomas Nelson, 1987), 21.

form and then its “poetic” form, each of which have valuable lessons for understanding Scripture’s teaching about creation.

Together, the creation week’s temporal and spatial patterns converge to show us how God disposes creation to sustain creaturely life. More centrally, they teach us that creatures flourish when they organize their life around the Creator worshipfully. The creation hymn’s doxological rhythm and order thus display creation’s character as the place where God’s glory will be manifest and celebrated. That is to say, creation structures and elicits worship of the Creator—hence its form as a sort of “liturgy.”²¹ As we must now see, this form gets to the very heart of the doctrine of creation’s content.

“Liturgy” (from the Greek *leitourgia*) is any form of orderly, corporate religious service. It involves speech and actions structured by consecrated time and space as occasions for fellowship with God. Churches gather on Sundays because they reflect this order, and many churches name the order of their services (or parts of it) as the “liturgy.” In part, liturgy reflects the church’s corporate sense that they are all partaking in an act of service to God that is bigger than individual members of the church body, and especially bigger than anyone’s personal preferences. Since peace is “the tranquility of order,” worship should be orderly because it responds to the God of peace (1 Cor. 14:33, 40).²² The hexaameron offers us a liturgy of creation in at least two ways: (1) in its shape as a hymn and (2) in its temple imagery.

The Hexaameron’s Shape as a Hymn

First of all, liturgical interests saturate the hexaameron’s form as poetic hymn. In the most significant places where Scripture

21. Representatively, see Samuel E. Balentine, *The Torah’s Vision of Worship* (Fortress, 1999), 81–95.

22. Augustine, *City of God* 19.13 (Babcock, WSA 1/7:368). A similar vision animates Gregory of Nazianzus’s *Oration* 6.

teaches about creation, it does so in the context of praise and doxology. Examples abound:

Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe
of him!

For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm. (Ps. 33:8–9)

O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures. (Ps. 104:24)

Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.
(Rev. 4:11)

Even Paul's statement about creation taking place through and for Christ is in the form of a hymn (Col. 1:15–20).

The creation week is not much different in this regard. Before there is a congregation to respond to, God utters his own Word and its response—which is to say, before there is any choir, the conductor raises his own voice. Space for creaturely response arrives in the climax of all the other days, the seventh, which God sanctifies and blesses as the model for enjoying his creation's fruitfulness and for returning it to him in praise. When creation was completed,

the morning stars sang together
and all the sons of God shouted for joy. (Job 38:7)

The liturgical response of the stars and angels is a model for our own. All creatures are summoned to praise the Creator, begin-

ning with angels, the sun and moon, the waters and mountains and others, leading all the way finally to humans (cf. Ps. 148). Hence, God brings about a “sung world—a song not only sung, but a song giving rise to new singers.”²³

As a song or a hymn, the hexaemeron invites its readers to confess the Creator’s majesty, order their lives by creation’s doxological rhythm and order, and praise God for his mighty works. We find this in the great psalm of creation, which begins with confession:

O LORD my God, you are very great!

You are clothed with splendor and majesty. (Ps. 104:1)

This leads into a hymn of creation’s order and artistry, concluding with a vision of creation inhabited only by those who praise God:

I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praise to my God while I have being. . . .

Let sinners be consumed from the earth,

and the let the wicked be no more! (Ps. 104:33, 35)

The reminder that the “way of the wicked will perish” (Ps. 1:6) restates that sin was not part of God’s created order and has no proper place within it. The Creator’s song began without dissonance and will end in pure harmony, when it blends with the “new song” that completes the first: the song of the Lamb slain to reclaim his creation in all its resonance (Rev. 5:11–13; 14:3).

The Hexaemeron’s Temple Imagery

Second, the hexaemeron uses imagery that is evocative of the temple, where Israel would gather to worship God in his

23. William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Blackwell, 2008), 253.

presence. Attuning our ears to the hymn's rhythm and imagery, we discover that the stories of creation and the construction of the tabernacle strike several common notes. For instance, in each account the "Spirit of God," full of wisdom and knowledge, is present and active before the work begins.²⁴ More importantly for creation's doxological character, the number seven and its association with the climax of the hexaemeron loom large. Before Moses receives instructions for the tabernacle, he waits for six days until the Lord finally appears on the seventh (Ex. 24:16). As in the hexaemeron, there are seven commands and acts of response in which God issues a command and then it is done.²⁵ Later in Leviticus, instructions for sacrificial activities are reported in seven speeches, and rituals such as the ordination of priests last for seven days (Lev. 1–7; 8:33).²⁶ Each account includes signal acts of beholding, completing, blessing, and sanctifying the work, and each notably concludes with Sabbath rest.²⁷

Many of these parallels between creation and the tabernacle or temple are allusive and gather their force cumulatively.²⁸ Just as God stretches out the heavens like a tent, so Israel makes "curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle" (Ex. 26:7; Ps. 104:2). God makes the "firmament" to separate the waters from one another, and Israel hangs a veil to "separate" the "Holy Place from the Most Holy" (Gen. 1:6–8; Ex. 26:33). Corresponding to the waters under the firmament on day 2 is the bronze basin filled with water, in which the priests wash their hands and feet before approaching the altar or entering the

24. Gen. 1:2; Ex. 31:3, 35:31; cf. Prov. 3:19–20.

25. Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26; Ex. 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12.

26. Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship*, 64.

27. Acts: Gen. 1:21; 2:1–3; Ex. 39:32, 43; 40:9–11, 33–34. Rest: Gen. 2:2–3; Ex. 31:12–17.

28. For all the correspondences that follow and more, see the collection of essays *Cult and Cosmos: Tilting Toward a Temple-Centered Theology*, ed. L. Michael Morales, *Biblical Tools and Studies* 14 (Peeters, 2014).

tabernacle (Gen. 1:7; Ex. 30:17–21). There are “lamps” in the heavens and lampstands in the tabernacle (Gen. 1:14–15; Ex. 25:31–40), birds flying across the heavens and winged cherubim spread across the mercy seat (Gen. 1:20; Ex. 25:20). As there are priests to lead in the tabernacle’s liturgy, so there are Adam and Eve to lead creation’s liturgy (Gen. 1:27; Ex. 28:1). Acts of “separating” also draw an analogy between the creation and the liturgy around the tabernacle.²⁹ And in imitation of God finishing his work and blessing it, Israel finishes the tabernacle’s construction and Moses blesses it (Gen. 2:1–3; Ex. 39:32, 43). These allusions fuel an analogy between creation and the temple, for which reason creation is compared to a tabernacle (Job 9:8; Ps. 104:2; Isa. 40:22; 66:1–2), or a house in which the heavens, supported by pillars (Job 26:11), have windows and doors (Gen. 7:11; Ps. 78:23). This is perhaps nowhere more explicit than in John’s vision of the new heavens and the new earth as a garden-like city functioning like the temple (Rev. 21–22).

While these parallels strongly point to creation’s doxological character, many of them fall short of strict one-to-one comparisons, so we should not equate creation and the temple. The temple is *like* a small cosmos; and the world, *like* a cosmic sanctuary (Ps. 78:69). The analogy between the two highlights a similarity within a dissimilarity. The creation bends toward the temple; the temple shows what the creation will become: a place where God’s glory resounds with reasonable praise. God intends that the temple’s sacred space expand to include the whole cosmos.³⁰ Creation is not that yet; but, Jesus reminds us, “My Father is

29. Separating in creation: Gen. 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18. Separating in liturgy: Ex. 26:33; Lev. 1:17; 5:8; 10:10; 11:47; 20:24–26; Num. 8:14; 16:9. See G. Geoffrey Harper, “I Will Walk Among You”: *The Rhetorical Function of Allusion to Genesis 1–3 in the Book of Leviticus* (Eisenbrauns, 2018), 128.

30. G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (IVP Academic, 2021).

working until now, and I am working” (John 5:17). One way we see the importance of registering the difference between creation and the temple is in the distinction between God’s “rest” on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2) and God’s “rest” upon entering the temple (Ex. 20:11; Ps. 132:8). They are closely related but nonetheless distinct. The latter rest is tied to Israel’s God-given rest from their enemies.³¹ But of course, there are no enemies from whom God would need rest on the seventh day of creation. The point of comparison between the two is that they both are related to God’s peace, which he grants to creation in the beginning and will secure indestructibly in the end. The movement from cosmos to temple moves from one participation in God’s peace to another, and the vehicle of this movement is God’s covenant. Creation is, from the beginning, built for worship, and it will be consummated in worship. Its character is doxological.

The Importance of Poetry and Symbolism for the Doctrine of Creation

As we have just seen, Scripture routinely teaches us about creation in the form of liturgical texts and liturgical figures, such as the temple. This is not accidental but intrinsic to the lesson we are taught: Creation has a doxological nature. Now we must make a second, complementary observation, which is that Scripture also routinely employs poetry and symbolism when teaching us about creation. In different ways, Scripture is like a book with pictures, using its own form of iconography to teach us larger truths. Literary forms like poetry and hymns employ a rich array of symbolism and metaphor to make their observations, and to make them memorable. What does this form of Scripture’s teaching tell us about the contents of creation? Why not rather just narrate creation to us in the form of a chronol-

31. 2 Sam. 7:1; cf. Deut. 12:9; 1 Kings 5:3–4; 8:56.

ogy, or tell it to us like the modern sciences do, in the form of a physical cosmology?

First, we should recognize that Scripture employs poetic language extensively when talking about creation. For a few examples: God “treads on the heights of the earth” (Amos 4:13); he is the one

who builds his upper chambers in the heavens
and founds his vault upon the earth;
who calls for the waters of the sea
and pours them out upon the surface of the earth.
(Amos 9:6)

God weighs the mountains in scales and collects coastlands in his hand like a fistful of sand (Isa. 40:12, 15); he bottles up the seas in their places with sands (Jer. 5:22); he delivers the sea like a newborn and wraps it in darkness like swaddling clothes (Job 38:8–9); he makes the clouds rain as if he’s tilting heavenly “waterskins” (Job 38:37). And then there are several places where Scripture personifies the sea and the unformed and unfilled state of creation, likening them poetically to mythical dragons and monsters God has conquered (Job 26:12; Pss. 74:13–17; 89:9–10). Such places recall how Scripture elsewhere personifies creation with human affections and agency.³²

Poetic symbolism can easily escape notice or be misinterpreted—it often is. But it bears on what the Spirit is teaching us when he instructs us about creation. Consider the great creation psalm again, where God is “stretching out the heavens like a tent” (Ps. 104:2) and has

set the earth on its foundations,
so that it should never be moved. (Ps. 104:5)

32. Pss. 19:1; 50:6; 65:12–13; 148; Rom. 8:19–22.

It would be a mistake to read this as “primitive” blundering about the physical cosmos before the dawn of modern science. This vivid imagery of the heavens as a tent covering, or the earth rooted on foundations “like a giant oil-rig set up in the midst of the oceans,” shows us rather that “poetry is the proper language of creation.”³³ There may be many reasons for this, some known only to God’s infinite wisdom. But two reasons stand out: (1) poetry can speak to truths like “order” that mere narrative reports threaten to obstruct; and (2) poetry can disclose these truths while also preserving the mystery of creation and its order.

Poetry Teaches Order and Meaning

Poetic language and forms are more transparent for teaching us about creation’s order than would be a mere chronology, like a news report that carefully relays a timeline of events, or a physical cosmology conveying information about physics and biology.³⁴ Whereas chronological or scientific reports primarily consist of descriptive facts, poetry communicates order, meaning, and significance. It tells us about truths that transcend history and narrative, truths that shape history. Such is the truth about creation, since creation is the presupposition of everything that happens in history. The hymn of creation tells us more about the beginning of time and space than about what happens within time and space.³⁵ It instructs us about how time

33. Patrick D. Miller, “The Poetry of Creation: Psalm 104,” in *The Way of The Lord: Essays in Old Testament Theology* (Eerdmans, 2007), 185. For companionable reflections on Gen. 1–2, see Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 42–65.

34. In this connection, compare the critical comments on historicism in Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 1994), 60–63.

35. Scripture’s narration of events within time and space begins after the creation hymn. Right after God’s seventh-day rest, Scripture announces, “These are the generations / of the heavens and the earth when they were created, / in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens” (Gen. 2:4). This is the first in a series of important

and space are ordered for the praise of God, and thus how we should steward these aspects of our existence.

Throughout the Old Testament, the literary structure of prayers, songs, and poetry conveys their authors' inspired perception of creation's order.³⁶ We will return to creation's order in later chapters. But first we must register that when Scripture's stock of symbolism and metaphors is properly understood, it's very difficult to maintain that it misleads us with pseudoscience. Scripture does not teach that the earth is flat, that the sky is a solid structure standing on top of it like a bell jar, or that God somehow lives "up" in the sky.³⁷ Biblical cosmology should not be mistaken for a scientific riddle, or a childlike, prescientific understanding of the world—that way lies the confusion of prophetic discourse with the discourse of modern physics. Nor does Scripture's poetic personification of creation teach that,

"generations" sayings ("these are the generations of x, y, z.") that structure the book of Genesis, signaling important moments in the history of God's covenant fellowship with his people. Sometimes these "generations" sayings will introduce a genealogy (Gen. 5:1; 10:1; 11:10, etc.), while at other times they introduce a narrative (Gen. 2:4; 6:9; 11:27; etc.). In both cases, however, the phrase "generations of x, y, z" points to something that arises from what has preceded. The word for "generations" is associated with the word for "birth." Therefore, according to Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Creation and Contingency in Qoheleth," in *The Identity of Israel's God in Christian Scripture*, ed. Don Collett, Mark Elliott, Mark Gignilliat, and Ephraim Radner (SBL, 2020), 149n19, these sayings communicate something like, "this situation or person was born out of the preceding situation or persons." See, further, Sarah Schwartz, "Narrative Toledot Formulae in Genesis: The Case of Heaven and Earth, Noah, and Isaac," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 16, no. 8 (2016): 1–36; Don C. Collett, *Figural Reading and the Old Testament: Theology and Practice* (Baker Academic, 2020), 9–23; Jean-Pierre Sonnet, "Generare, perché? Una prospettiva biblica," *Anthropotes* 36 (2020): 139–90.

36. Cf. Knierim, "Cosmos and History," 186–87.

37. Among others, see Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer, *Creation: Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East*, trans. Peter T. Daniels (Eisenbrauns, 2015), 78–79; Bernd Janowski, "Das biblische Weltbild: Eine methodologische Skizze," in *Das biblische Weltbild und seine altorientalischen Kontext*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Beate Ego. *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 32 (Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 3–26. As will be clear to readers of these other sources, the argument here presses some of their insights further in a figural direction. The New Testament is similar to the Old in this regard. According to Sean M. McDonough and Jonathan T. Pennington, "Conclusion," in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Sean M. McDonough and Jonathan T. Pennington, LNTS 355 (T&T Clark, 2008), 189, "the New Testament texts do not offer enough information to reconstruct a uniform 'early Christian view' of the physical universe. . . . There is no chapter and verse citation which demands to be read against Galileo or Copernicus."

for instance, God actually killed dragons when creating the world—that way lies the polytheistic myths of Israel's pagan neighbors. Scripture's cosmological symbolism belongs to its religious description of the world as a complex, ordered reality where God is active and humans are touched by forces they cannot always see, prompting them to cast themselves fearfully upon God, cultivating wisdom, humility, and wonder. The symbolic cosmological language of Scripture may often strike us as strange and alien, but in this regard it draws us out of our typically dull ways of thinking about God, the world, and ourselves.

Poetry Both Conceals and Reveals

Poetic images and symbols also describe creation's order in ways that both conceal and reveal. This too illustrates how poetry is the proper language of creation, for two reasons. First, Scripture's poetic forms voice an awareness of creation's meaning as a gift of the Creator's wisdom, power, and righteousness. That meaning, therefore, is always more than we can quite capture. In Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth contrasts the reliably cyclical order of creation with the inconstancy of human life.

A generation goes, and a generation comes,
but the earth remains forever. (Eccl. 1:4)

Day by day, the sun, wind, and waters all move unceasingly within the boundaries the Creator gives them, but the boundaries of human life are written in the dirt. Whatever learning or wisdom someone achieves, it's nothing genuinely "new" for those who live "under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9). This leads Qoheleth to the insight that

all words are full of weariness;
a man cannot utter it;

the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear filled with hearing. (Eccl. 1:8)³⁸

He sees creation, yet he does not see. And this experience frustrates.

Creation's good order and boundaries contrast with the transience of our personal lives. We yearn to speak, see, and hear more than any boundary allows, but no one can exhaustively speak, see, hear, or remember the things of creation and life "under the sun." Life is not wearisome, but our inability to grasp and understand everything can leave us restless unless we make peace with our limits. Job learns this when God patiently questions him about creation, beginning with whether Job knows about the boundaries of the earth and sea (Job 38:4–11). As we will see in later chapters, regardless of our scientific or historical knowledge, we cannot plumb the depths of creation's secrets. The deepest truths about creation and its order come to us in poetic language because poetry preserves their mystery and discourages idle curiosity.

Second, then, just like poetry, creation's order requires careful, loving attention because it does not interpret itself. This means that to learn wisdom, we will have to be studious, attentive to God's book of nature, always mindful that its interpretation is subordinate to the book of Scripture. Nevertheless, we must read both books. Part of the difficulty with science-and-religion debates is that they typically refuse to let these two books speak in their own languages.³⁹ Hence, on all sides of these debates, one readily finds treatments of the Bible as if it were a science book or trying haphazardly to be one. However, Scripture speaks

38. It is not "all things" that are full of weariness (as the ESV has it) but "all words." See Christopher R. Seitz, *The Elder Testament: Canon, Theology, Trinity* (Baylor, 2018), 234–36.

39. Radner, *A Time to Keep*, 246–47.

poetically and doxologically about creation because even as it conceals some of creation's mysteries, what it reveals concerns creation's meaning and order in relation to God. When we try, as we should, to understand how Scripture's teaching relates to contemporary science or the latest archaeological findings from the Ancient Near East, we must avoid "the twin excesses" of veneration and condemnation.⁴⁰ That is, we must refuse the unbelieving temptation that these sources can either vindicate or invalidate God's written word, which is self-authenticating. The doctrine of creation concerns the truth about created reality, which is much broader and deeper than the universe's natural history. Love for this truth must be "patient" (1 Cor. 13:4). Accepting this fact makes us *slow* on the uptake, giving time and space for the joyful work of interpretation, repentant attention to the words of life.⁴¹ We may therefore listen patiently to other sciences, confident that whatever is ultimately true in them will cohere with the correct interpretation of Holy Scripture.

Conclusion

The opening lines of Genesis are unequivocal: "In the beginning." Not *a* beginning, but *the* beginning of all things, the reader included. It summons us to contemplate our past and therefore all the present circumstances of our lives and hopes for the future, all that we see around us in the world and that everyone experiences, in light of what has come before us and none have experienced. Genesis begins as an act of tutored remembrance. We are not our own, but we belong to God and must tune our lives to God's will.

40. Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 24. Somewhat similarly, Johann Auer, *Die Welt, Gottes Schöpfung* (Pustet, 1975), 24, is correct when he observes that for much of its modern history, the doctrine of creation has been distorted by excessive attention to philosophical apologetics and the concern "to understand and parrot the scientific knowledge of the world."

41. Jean-Yves Lacoste, "More Haste, Less Speed in Theology," trans. Oliver O'Donovan, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 3 (2007): 263–82.

Creation's doxological character is taught to us in the hexaemeron and its echoes throughout Scripture. We have seen this in how the hexaemeron functions like a hymn, like a liturgy, and why it speaks to us with poetry and symbolism. There is a valuable hermeneutical lesson in all this: The form in which Scripture teaches us about creation is part of the doctrine's content. We will see later how creatures are whole things, unities of their form and their content. One thing a biblical understanding of creation must affirm is the unity of form and content, even within Scripture. Scripture speaks about creation in doxological tones, liturgical forms, and poetic symbols because creation is ordered to the praise of God, to be used for the praise of God, and points beyond itself to God.

Debates continue about how best to read the hexaemeron, and this too is "nothing new under the sun." According to Augustine's famous advice for reading Scripture, good readings foster the love of God and love of neighbor.⁴² At minimum, poor readings do not tell us how we should order our time and steward the fruits of our labors. The reading in this chapter lays bare some of the claims the doctrine of creation makes upon our lives, possessions, and loves—though what that looks like awaits further development beyond this chapter. This does not make our interpretation inerrant. It will not settle debates about how to read this text, nor need it. All it does is provide us with a pilgrim's grip on the text: one that is traveling a path, going somewhere, but has not yet arrived. Such is the nature of theology! Our first concern is for the truth of Scripture, for which reason we must remain open to better readings, "not insisting on this one in such a way as to contend that nothing else preferable can be found."⁴³

42. Augustine, *Teaching Christianity* 1.35.39–1.40.44 (WSA I/11:123–26).

43. Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 4.28.45 (trans. Edmund Hill, WSA I/13:268).

