

God of Days, God in Days: An Exercise in Biblical Dogmatics

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I. INTRODUCTON

In an essay on creation, the late John Webster comments on the relationship between Scripture and “dogmatic reasoning”:

Dogmatic reasoning is a further act of following in which, directed by the prophetic testimony and with the aid of the Spirit's sanctifying grace, theological reason endeavors to build a conceptual account of the matter that the scriptural words present, to elaborate or enlarge on the scriptural res. Because it attempts to reconceive what it hears in Holy Scripture, dogmatics does not necessarily retain the rhetorical sequence of particular biblical texts, or the narrative-dramatic order of the canon as a whole, or the soteriological idiom of a good deal of the biblical creation material. Rather, as reconception and enlargement, it seeks to display the anatomy of the prophetic words by transposing it into a conceptual idiom, ordering it systematically so that its unity and interconnections become more immediately visible. Dogmatic reconception gives formal clarity to what is usually informally or occasionally expressed in Scripture by elaborating, for example, the identities of the agents or by tracing its metaphysical implications.¹

¹Webster, “Creation,” in Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, eds., *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 134–35.

He adds, importantly, “dogmatics is not improving on Scripture, which retains its primacy as prophetic instruction.” Dogmatics must always lead back to the *verba* of Scripture. . . . No doctrine of creation out of nothing can retain its Christian character unless it cleaves to the words of the prophets and expects these words to decide matters.”

What Webster advocates seems to be exemplified in the controversial work of the Lutheran theologian Robert Jenson.² Jenson’s treatment of creation is a dogmatic elaboration of the creation account of Genesis 1. He highlights the “drumbeat rhythm” of what he calls the “priestly creation account,” which reveals that God speaks a “let there be.” Creation means that “there is other reality than God and that it is really other than he”; thus fall all emanationist cosmologies, ancient and modern. This other reality *is* because God *speaks*. Jenson insists on taking the Hebrew *dabar* (and LXX *lego*) as divine utterance, distancing himself from those in the Christian tradition who treat *logos* as divine “concept” or, as in Augustine, an inaudible spiritual word. Jenson takes note of the imperative mood of the verbs, and concludes that “God *commands* the world to be, this command is obeyed, and the event of obedience is the existence of the world.” He takes note of the present tense of the verbs to argue for a notion of continuous creation, that “the world would not now exist did not God now command its existence.” From God’s declaration that creatures are good, Jenson concludes that creatures have an end in God. Perhaps most strikingly of all, he does not attempt to move past the narrative sequence to a static doctrine of creation, but takes the narrative form as dogmatically *essential*: “the world God creates is not a thing, a ‘cosmos,’ but is rather a history. God does not create a world that thereupon has a history; he creates a history that is a world, in that it is purposive and so makes a whole.”³

Jenson works out a conceptual formulation of creation, making use of what scientific, philosophical, and other resources are to hand. Yet in the course of doing so, he constantly reverts to the *verba* of the creation narrative. This is evident, to take but one instance, in his critique of Henri de Lubac’s theology of nature and grace. According to Jenson, de Lubac is wrong to presume that a distinction between natural and supernatural must be maintained, a distinction that renders God’s grace “double,” the grace of bringing man into being and the grace that calls a man already brought into being. Jenson admits that “most theology Protestant or Catholic” shares this presumption “that creation is itself effected not by a divine call but by a prior divine act of another sort. God’s personal call to us, when it happens, deals with an ontological situation otherwise originated.” When theology makes this assumption,

²I have elaborated on Jenson as a “biblical” theologian in Steven Wright and Chris Green, *The Promise of Robert W. Jenson’s Theology: Constructive Engagements* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 45–57.

³Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2: The Works of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5–15.

“we will eventually be brought to one or another ‘semi-Pelagianism.’” This is true whether we follow de Lubac and assume that “a human nature itself uncalled is antecedently apt for the call of grace” or follow de Lubac’s opponents and assume “a nature itself uncalled is antecedently neutral to the call of grace.”

The solution, he argues, is to recognize that “our being as such” is “accomplished by God’s address.” Jenson goes back to the creation narrative as a starting point: “nature and grace are aspects of one conversation conducted by God with us.” More biblically framed, “‘Let there be . . .’ and ‘Christ is risen’ are but two utterances of God within one dramatically coherent discourse. A creature who exists by hearing the first is indeed open to the second, in a straightforward way that requires no dithering about ‘aptitudes.’” De Lubac fails, in short, because his theology of nature and grace does not remain intimate enough with the biblical account of creation as a call to being by which creation has being, because he does not take seriously enough the Bible’s claim that the creation has its being in its being addressed.

Webster elaborates the theology of creation in a very different idiom. A few pages after his discussion of Scripture and dogmatic reasoning,⁴ he discusses the theology proper that must be assumed in a Christian account of creation. Creation does not require any “effort” from God, and it is enacted “instantaneously.” He quotes Ambrose’s insistence on the “incomparable swiftness of God’s action as creator, that there is ‘no succession in the action,’” and adds that God’s creative act is not “an element in [a temporal] sequence or its first event.” In short, “creation is not protracted toil but an act whereby ‘at the will of God the world arose in less than an instant’” (quoting Basil’s *Hexameron*).⁵ From Webster’s description, one would not be able to draw the inference that Genesis 1, Scripture’s primary creation text, records God’s actions through several days.

Webster is hardly the only theologian to delete temporality from the creation account. Among Evangelical biblical scholars, “framework” interpretations of Genesis 1, which treat the temporal sequence as a poetic device, have been popular for a generation. Philosophical theologians have defended the coherence of the claim that the eternal God can, by an eternal act, create a temporal world with its temporal effects.⁶ Defending a traditional view of timeless eternity, Paul Helm concludes that creation

⁴Webster, “Creation,” 140.

⁵Ibid.

⁶See, for instance, James E. Dolezal, *All That Is In God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 96–103.

is an eternal act of God: “from the Creator's standpoint the universe comes about by one eternal act.”⁷

On the face of it, Webster's and Helm's summaries do *not* follow the *verba* of Genesis 1. To be sure, a dark *tohu-w-bohu*, a dark and formless void, comes instantaneously into being in the beginning, the product of a single creative act (Gen 1:1–2), but that does not qualify as a “world.” Only after a series of six evenings-and-mornings does a cosmos come to be, a “completed” heavens and earth (Gen 2:1), with a sky heaven, a fertile earth, and teeming seas.⁸ During the intervening days, Genesis 1 ascribes a variety of actions to God — saying, making, naming, placing, seeing, commanding, creating, blessing — enacted on a variety of different objects. Following the *verba* on the page, we are led to conclude that, Webster to the contrary, world-making takes time, for God.

That suggests the prospect that Genesis 1 gives foundational insight into a perennial theological problem, the relationship between God and time. This paper is an initial exploration of that suggestion.⁹

II. GOD OF DAYS

Genesis 1:1 has sometimes been construed as a title to the entire creation account, sometimes as the first act of creation. Taking it in the latter sense,¹⁰ the result of the initial creative act (*bara'*) is an earth that is formless, void, and dark (1:2). We are not told of the medium for the production of earth (there is no “God said”) and there is no temporal indicator (unless we can take “one day” in 1:5 to include 1:1–2). It appears to be an instantaneous product of God's creative action. Whatever the origin of earth in this form, it provides the foundation for the creation acts of the days of the creation week. It is not an ordered cosmos but the opposite; yet it is the raw material from which Elohim

⁷Helm, “Eternal Creation,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 45, no. 2 (1994), 338. Such interpretations of creation go back at least to Augustine. While claiming to offer a “literal” reading of Genesis, Augustine scours Genesis 1 of time references.

⁸Admittedly, Webster's comments come in a brief essay on a big topic. Webster may have believed that what Genesis 1 recounts is *actually* timeless, despite the temporal structure, and he may have defended that belief elsewhere. It appears to me, though, that he fails to bring his dogmatic reasoning back to the words on the page.

⁹God-and-time has been a topic of significant recent debate among Evangelicals. In addition to Helm and Dolezal (notes 6–7 above), who defend traditional views of timeless eternity, see the somewhat revisionist accounts in William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001) and John Frame, *Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002). This paper cannot address all the literature on the subject, nor offer a complete response. It is an initial exploration, and an effort to submit dogmatic questions to the content and form of Scripture.

¹⁰For the view that Genesis 1:1 describes an act of God, rather than serving as a title for the account, see Vern Poythress, “Genesis 1:1 Is the First Event, Not A Summary,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 79, no. 1 (2017), 97–121. See also James B. Jordan, *Creation in Six Days: A Defense of the Traditional Reading of Genesis 1* (Moscow: Canon, 1999).

forms the cosmos. Over the course of that week, the Creator dispels the darkness, orders the formlessness, and fills the void.

Before the Creator speaks light into being, the Spirit-wind (*ruach*) of Elohim is active in the region of the watery earth. Darkness is over the face of the deep, but the Spirit is also over the face of the waters, “hovering” like a mother bird over an egg or chicks (cf., Deut 32:11). Already we have an indication that the God who created heaven and earth acts *within* creation that He makes out of nothing. He is, already at the very beginning, the only recognizable something *within* the realm of earth.

Day 1 provides God’s “solution” to the “problem” of darkness. By His first recorded verbal act, He speaks light into being. The source of light is not indicated, and the light sources with which we are familiar—sun, moon, stars—appear only in Day 4. When they appear, the temporal sequence has already been in place for several days, and the rulers of the sky are established in “day” and “night,” conceived as realms.

Beyond the radiation of light, Day 1 sees the separation of day and night. “Separating” (*badal*) is a distinct divine act from “saying” (*amar*), though perhaps we are to understand that God separates by speaking (cf., 1:6). Again, the text highlights God’s involvement with earth. Light invades the darkness, and God acts within the earthly realm to separate the two. After separating, He names the now-separate entities; light becomes *yom*, darkness *layil*. And these now-separated, now-named entities are placed into an orderly sequence of evening and morning, which together form a *yom*.

Elohim follows a similar pattern on Day 2, separating the waters above and below and inserting a firmament between them. Once again, the Creator acts *within* the creation, speaking and separating to give form the formless watery material of earth. More centrally to my thesis, the creation of the firmament and the separation of the waters is described as the work of “a second day” and so distinguished from the light-creating work of Day 1. The evening-morning sequence, the separation and ordering of darkness and light, is as much a creature as light itself. Elohim formed that sequence. As Lord and Creator, He is not subject to that sequence, yet He does one thing on Day 1, another on Day 2, another on Day 3, and so on. Having created light and ordered the sequence of darkness and light, the Creator works within the confines of that sequence, doing *this* now and *that* later.

It seems significant that Genesis describes this evening-and-morning pattern without reference to the category of “time.”¹¹ As far as Genesis 1

¹¹John Frame writes, “the biblical writers did not have in mind our modern, scientific concept of time, or even (most likely) the Platonic philosophical distinction between time and eternity. Their understanding of time was more immediate and practical. They understood that God gives us a certain number of years of life before we die, but that his years never fail. There is no reason to suppose that they thought much about the ‘nature’ or ‘essence’ of time, or the relations sustained to time (so defined) by God and man. Certainly

is concerned, what exists is not “time” but “light” and “darkness,” separated and renamed as “day” and “night.” “Time” suggests a homogenous, undifferentiated sequence of moments, but day and night have different qualities (at least: being light and dark, respectively), and the light and dark are ordered to move from darkness to light, evening to morning, as the creation itself began in darkness before being brightened by divine *fiat*. In the light of Genesis 1, the God-and-time question may be reconceived more concretely: Does the God who spoke light, separated it from darkness, and ordered light and dark into a recurring sequence then speak, do, make, and create according the rhythm of days that He inaugurated? He is God the Creator of Days. Is He also God *in* days?

Day 3 introduces a further variation of the pattern. For the first time, God speaks twice, first to separate the waters below so that dry land can appear (1:9), and then to command earth to sprout grasses and fruit-bearing trees (1:11). Both follow the pattern established in Days 1–2: God speaks . . . and it was so. That double command marks the shift from “forming” to “filling,” from Elohim’s response to the *tohu* to a response to the *bohu*. The first speech of Day 3 completes the three-decker cosmos of the Bible—heaven/firmament above, dry land below, and waters under the earth. With the second speech, the middle zone, earth, begins to be filled, first with vegetation.

The shift to filling marks a shift also from monergistic creative activity to a synergism of Elohim and creation. There is another “let there be” on Day 4, as Elohim fills the firmament with heavenly lights. During most of the last half of the creation week, however, the Creator creates by empowering creation to bring forth new things. Earth brings forth the vegetation not because Elohim says “Let there be vegetation” but because Elohim says “Let the earth sprout vegetation” (1:11–12). Waters teem because He says “Let the waters teem with swarms of living things” (though the *tannanim* are created [*bara'*] directly by God, 1:21). Creatures spring from earth like plants because Elohim says “let the earth bring forth living creatures” (1:24). Man, made in the image of God, is another special creation (*bara'*), but we learn in Genesis 2 that the creation of man as male and female was the product of a sequence of actions—forming *‘adam* from the *‘adamah*, then the woman from the man.

Left to itself, earth and water are inert, unproductive. Empowered by the Word of God, earth sprouts plants and living animals, and water teems swarms of fish. God creates by bestowing the power to bear fruit on His creation. (As Athanasius said, God is not enviously protective of His power.) These mediated, synergistic acts of creation are included in the summary of Genesis 2:1–3. These are among God’s works, among the

they did not see time primarily as a kind of ‘box’ that a person can be either inside or outside of” (*Doctrine of God*, 554). Frame goes on to enumerate the various senses in which the biblical God is free from the limitations of our experience of time.

things “which He had done,” among the work that “God had created and made” (2:2–3). Though *earth* produced plants and creatures, plants and living things are among God’s works. *He* made them, albeit through the agency of Word-empowered earth and water.

If we take Genesis 1 as a general model for God’s relation to creaturely action, we can tease out some further implications for our understanding of God and time. Perhaps plants sprang up instantaneously. Yet, the language suggests a duration of time (“sprout”). Perhaps already in creation week, the production of vegetation took time: God spoke to the earth, and grain-grasses and fruit trees sprang up, not instantaneously, but with time-lapse speed. In any case, grasses today yield grain and trees bear fruit only by growth and fruition over a period of time. Yet Scripture tells us that *God* feeds the animals and birds who eat these grasses and fruits. The grain on the voluptuous fields of northern Idaho is as much a result of God’s “doing” as the first grain plants that sprang up on the fourth day of creation. That grain too is a product of divine word that empowers created earth, water, and light to turn seeds to more seeds. God’s works are, in short, works that take place over time.

The most dramatic indication of God’s immanence to the created pattern of evening and morning is the repeated “say-see” sequence that structures most of the creation days. God says “Let there be light” and then sees that the light is good (1:3–4). God says, “Let the waters below the heavens be gathered” and sees that it is good (1:9–10). He speaks again, “Let the earth sprout grasses,” and when it does he sees that it is good (1:11–12). He speaks and makes and places the lights of heaven, and sees that it is good (1:14, 16–18). He calls the waters to teem with creatures and the sky with birds, and sees that it is good (1:20–21). He speaks “Let the earth bring forth living creatures,” and when it does, he sees that it is good (1:24–25). When all is said and done, He sees that it is all “very good” (1:31). In the Bible, eyes are organs of evaluation and judgment. Each day of creation week (except the second) is judgment day, in which God inspects and declares His favorable judgment of the creation.¹²

Say-see is an irreversible sequence. It would make no sense for God to “see” what is good, and then to “say” it into existence. He must say and *then* see, act *then* judge, *do* then *evaluate* what has been done. Creation is, as we have seen, involved in its own completion, but that involvement is

¹²Perhaps we should take this as simple divine self-approval, God ending each day with a hearty pat on His own back: Well done, Self! Within the canon as a whole, it seems rather that we should read this as one of several hints of a plurality of speakers, makers, and doers within Elohim (one of the hints, of course, being the plural name). Augustine asks whether the creation account points to the Trinity in the sequence of “God said,” “God made” and “God saw.” Is “the Father giving a kind of order to the Son” and does the Holy Spirit see and pronounce good? (*Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2.11, in Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill [Hyde Park: New City Press, 2006], 197). Augustine dismisses the suggestion that the Father commands the Son as incompatible with “the unity of the Trinity.”

overarched by, embedded between, God's word of command and His subsequent word of judgment. Creation's self-formation originates from God's word and moves toward God's word. God says to the land "sprout plants" and then "sees" that it was good; He speaks to the waters to teem, and judges that the resulting teeming is good. God's originating speech enables the creation's liveliness, and God's concluding speech evaluates creation's fruit. Creation's contribution is enclosed within two acts of divine speech, one prospective and one retrospective, one enabling and the other evaluative.

God's saying-and-seeing occurs within the frame of evening-and-morning. On the other hand, it is also true that creation's evenings-and-mornings take place in the time and space opened between God's saying and seeing. God initiates and completes within the creation; His initiation and completion also encloses creation. God acts within the evenings-and-mornings, and yet evenings and mornings occur within the action of God. God is really responsive to the events that take place within the creation (he *sees* and pronounces good), including the actions of creation itself (e.g., the sprouting of plants, the teeming of seas). Yet in responding to the events of creation, He is ultimately responding to the success of His own initiative. The say-see pattern is God's evaluation of God, God judging God, God's seeing and testing the quality of God's saying and making. It is quite literally, as Jenson says, a preview of the resurrection, the Father's enacted approval of the Word's obedience to death.

To this point, I have done little more than paraphrase the creation account of Genesis 1 and draw a few fairly straightforward inferences. To grasp the dogmatic import of that text, we need to see how radically it challenges the normal science, metaphysics, and theology of the ancient world.

III. YAHWEH AND THE GODS

Timelessness is the essence of pagan religion, theology, and philosophy. As Jenson puts it, the "normal gods" transcended time "by immunity to it." Gods are distinguished from men by their "immortality, immunity to destruction." Change and decay are the crucial problems of Greek mythology. The myths are haunted by the question, "Can it be that all things pass?" The answer is No: Chronos (Time) devours his children, but Zeus overthrows Chronos, providing security against time's ravages and establishing justice, order, fixity, which amount to the same thing.¹³ Greek religion is a protection against "mysterious power and inexplicable

¹³Jenson nicely puts it: "Their religion was the determination that 'Time' not be supreme, that he be overthrown by a true 'Father of gods and men.' Greek religion was a quest for a rock of ages, resistant to the flow of time, a place or part or aspect of reality immune to change," (Jenson "The Triune God" in Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, eds., *Christian Dogmatics*, 2 vols., rev. ed. [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011], 116).

contingency,” that is, against surprise.¹⁴ For many ancients, the gods are beings who surprise, who escape predictability, but the Greeks rationalized and cleansed the mythologies they inherited from the Ancient Near East, subjecting the gods to predictable motivations and reasons.¹⁵

Though Greek philosophy uses a different idiom and operates in a different conceptual framework, it arises from the same desperation to escape time and death. Aristotle assured Athens that “Being as such neither comes to be nor perishes.” Beneath the very-changing accidents of things, there is a persistent substance that ensures identity through time. For the Greeks, “the divine” was “a unitary abstraction of godly explanatory power in and behind the plural gods of daily religion.”¹⁶ According to Aristotle, “The Unbounded has no beginning . . . but seems rather to be the Beginning of all other realities, and to envelope and control them. . . . This is the Divine.” Sometimes this divine reality was called Zeus, and he was defined as the “true religious object: timelessness as such.”¹⁷ Being timeless, eternity is changelessly static.¹⁸

We never encounter timelessness directly. Everything around us passes away, and so the quest for eternity takes us “above or behind or beneath or within the experienced world” to “the bed of time’s river, the foundation of the world’s otherwise unstable structure, the track of heaven’s hastening lights.”¹⁹ We discover that one can apprehend God only “by penetrating through the temporal experienced world to its atemporal ground.” As a result, “theology is . . . essentially negative. The true predicates of deity are negations of predicates that pertain to experienced reality by virtue of its temporality.”²⁰ God’s relationship to time is purely negative. Eternity = atemporality. Since the world is entirely temporal, God’s relationship to the world is negative. God *is* whatever the world is not.

¹⁴Jenson, “Triune God,” 116.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Plato’s *Timaeus* famously described time as a “moving image” of an eternity that “itself rests in unity.” As Plato puts the point, “there were no days and nights and months and years before the heaven was created, but when he constructed the heaven he created them also. They are all parts of time, and the past and future are created species of time, which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to eternal being; for we say that it ‘was,’ or ‘is,’ or ‘will be,’ but the truth is that ‘is’ alone is properly attributed to it, and that ‘was’ and ‘will be; are only to be spoken of becoming in time, for they are motions, but that which is immovably the same for ever cannot become older or younger by time; nor can it be said that it came into being in the past, or has come into being now, or will come into being in the future; nor is it subject at all to any of those states which affect moving and sensible things and of which generation is the cause. There are the forms of time, which imitates eternity and revolves according to a law of number,” (37d, quoted in Adrian Langdon, “Confessing Eternity: Barth and the Western Tradition,” *Pro Ecclesia* 21, no. 2 [2012], 127.)

¹⁹Jenson, “Triune God,” 117.

²⁰Ibid.

Genesis 1 directly opposes this common ancient theology. Nothing opposes God; creation is not combat, since He brings all things into being. The darkness, formlessness, and emptiness of Genesis 1:2 are immaturities, incompletions, that are overturned during the course of the week, not by battle but by the peaceable utterance of God's word and the fluttering of His Spirit. The Creator does not have to negotiate with primordial energies or powers outside his control. He does not have to allow "formless emptiness" to take a place in His world. Unlike the gods of ancient myths, he does not achieve a partial, tenuous victory over an opponent. He is not a second-generation deity who has to overthrow the first generation to establish peace. He is, from beginning to end, Lord of Days.

The Creator is not immune to time; instead, He both forms temporal sequences and acts within them. One need not escape time to find Him; His hovering Spirit is over earth before earth is ordered. Because He is operative in time, initiating and judging, making and remaking, the Creator is not bound by the established order of the past. At the end of Day 1, God judges the alternation of light and darkness "good." At that point, it is still formless and empty, still a watery deep. Yet the creation of light and the ordering of days is work enough for Day 1; God considers it good to dispel the darkness and establish a temporal sequence of evenings and mornings. On Days 2–3, however, a lighted-but-formless world is no longer good enough, though it is a product of His own work. On Day 2, He separates the waters above and below and inserts a firmament between, lending shape to the formless waters. In the first act of Day 3, He adds a further boundary to separate the waters below so that dry land appears. At the end of a day and a half of hydraulic engineering, He "saw that it was good" (1:10). For a day, a lighted-but-shapeless world was good; but over the following two days, He made it better yet, giving form to the waters and making a world that is both lit and shapely.

Yet this "good" world is still *empty*, and so on the second half of Day 3, the Creator begins to fill the spaces that He has formed — the earth, the firmament, the seas, and then again the earth. He calls on the *eretz* to sprout grasses, makes lights in the firmament, orders the waters to teem with living things, and summons beasts, cattle, and creeping things from the earth. At each point, He pronounces the filling and the things that fill to be "good." Plants from the earth are good (1:12). Lights in the firmament that rule the day and night, mark seasons, function as signs are good (1:18). Waters that teem with living things and great sea monsters, and the teeming things and monsters themselves, are "good" (1:21). When earth squirms with creepers and wild beast and livestock, that too is good, very good (1:31). Each day's work is good, and yet the next day is a day of innovation, a day of mercies new. For God to be God of days is for Him to be a God who reorders what *is* to refresh it. He is a God who calls things that are not as though they were, and in calling them they

come to be.²¹ The world is not fully the world it will be until the end of the week. It is not fully world until God enters Sabbath enthronement and rest. Each day, one might ask, “Is it world yet?” Each stage of advance is “good,” and might mark and end. But then God does something new. What appeared to be end is not end.

Creation week moves from glory to glory. A lighted world is more glorious than a dark one, an ordered world more glorious than a shapeless one, a world full of teeming creatures more glorious than an empty one. The creation week is oriented toward a fulfilled and “finished” future, and indicates that God Himself is oriented toward the future. He is eternal not because He prissily protects Himself from the contaminations of time, but because He always has the power to make new, always has power of the future; this makes the world radically future-oriented. He is eternal because the temporal order He makes poses *no* obstacle to His almighty creative action.

In Genesis 1, then, we have the rudiments of an eschatological ontology, according to which the fulfillment, the full being, of all existing things lies ahead in the future. Again, this is radically distinct from the apparently common-sense assumptions of both ancient and modern religion and philosophy. For Greeks, nature determines the future; *telos* is already pre-contained in *physis*. Nature limits what a thing might become, and nature is determined by *natus*. Such ontology is past-oriented, identity in time, a matter of consistency with and persistence from an origin. From Genesis 1 through Revelation 22, though, the Bible insists on turning this ontology upside down. What is *first* is not determinative, but what is *last*. It is the last Adam, not the first, who determines the future of the human race, and a new rather than old Jerusalem that is the form of the final creation.

IV. CONCLUSION

Boethius offered this classic definition of time in *The Consolation of Philosophy*:

²¹Throughout biblical history, the Creator who is not satisfied with the achievements of Day 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. continues to be jarringly free of the past. He arranges an “eternal covenant” with Moses, but then sends the Philistines in to rip the tabernacle to shreds. Instead of ordering a re-erection of the tabernacle, Yahweh shows David a new blueprint for a new sanctuary, a temple. He sends in Nebuchadnezzar to break and burn that house. When the Jews return from exile, they build a new temple that does not replicate Solomon’s. Circumcision is required as a mark of inclusion in the old covenant; it is prohibited as a marker of inclusion in the new covenant. Animal sacrifice is the way to God in the old world, but after the final sacrifice Christians stop offering the blood and flesh of bulls and goats. The Creator is not on the side of established order. He is not a slave to the past. He is a God who does new things. As Jenson puts it, “Israel understood itself not by an established order but by rescue from oppression under the archotypically standing order, that of Egypt. . . . Yahweh remained free to undo the standing order of his own people” (“Triune God,” 103).

Eternity, then, is the complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of everlasting life; this will be clear from a comparison with creatures that exist in time. Whatever lives in time exists in the present and progresses from the past to the future, and there is nothing set in time which can embrace simultaneously the whole extent of its life: it is in the position of not yet possessing tomorrow when it has already lost yesterday. In this life of today you do not live more fully than in that fleeting and transitory moment. Whatever, therefore, suffers the condition of being in time, even though it never had any beginning, never has any ending and its life extends into the infinity of time.²²

I do not pretend I have refuted the Boethian definition of eternity, or provided an adequate alternative account. My aim has been more modest, to suggest that such definitions create problems for Christian theology of which Genesis 1 is quite innocent. For the writer of Genesis, God “lives in time,” does this today and that tomorrow, says and then sees. Yet He does not “suffer” temporality but, as the Creator and Lord, rules and shapes it from within. Whatever direction theology goes in expounding on God’s relation to time, it will only provide *Christian* answers by diligently, doggedly following the *verba*, no matter where they may lead.

²²*Consolation* 5.6, quoted in Langdon, “Confessing Eternity,” 133–34.

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