

Reading Genesis 1:2

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[I would like to dedicate this essay to the memory of my great mentor and friend, the Very Reverend Professor Thomas F. Torrance, without whom I could never have written it down in words on paper.]

Karl Barth once wrote about Genesis 1:2, “This verse has always constituted a particular *crux interpretum*---one of the most difficult in the whole Bible---and it is no small comfort to learn from Gunkel that it is a ‘veritable mythological treasure chamber.’”¹ After a rather thorough examination and analysis of the history of the exegesis this verse the great Swiss theologian concluded, in a fine print section of his work, “Our only option is to consider v.2 as a portrait, deliberately taken from myth, as the world which according to His revelation was negated, rejected, ignored and left behind in His actual creation.”² Barth’s understanding of *Das Nichtige*, then, is developed as entailed by the mystery of evil in the Biblical World, world very different from the one with which we are all only too familiar. His interpretation of v.2 is then very much dependent upon his understanding of the ‘*chaos*’ (והת) and *emptiness* (והב), ‘*darkness*’ (רשח) and ‘*deep*’ (מוהת) of the ‘*waters*’ (מים) over which the Spirit of God ‘*broods*’ (תפחרמ), as read from the Hebrew text of Genesis 1:2.

This essay will attempt to show that Barth’s understanding of the significance of the verse as *Das Nichtige* and that which contradicts God’s will is only partially true. We will argue that this understanding belongs to the influence of a consensus that modern or post-modern criticism of the Old Testament has developed, when historical-critical methods became more comfortable with ‘creation out of chaos’ and so forth, divorcing the meaning and significance of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* as traditionally articulated among the fathers of the early Church. We will argue that the modern mind’s grasp of the concept of ‘creation out of something or other’ rather than wrestling with the problems implicit and explicit in the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*, perpetuates a reading that, while readily able to compare with other Creation Epics found commonly in the Ancient Near East, loses touch with the polemical power that is inherent in Moses’ confession of the Beginning of the Creation, a Creation whose cosmos depends upon the prophetic power of Israel’s great prophet to confess the whole of Israel’s history within the real history of the Universe as God’s Creation. We will argue that the confession of the Beginning against the idols of all mythologies, belongs to the Revelation of the Great I-AM the Lord God is in His divine freedom to be the One He truly is against all other gods of the peoples of the world as understood in the light of Israel’s Exodus from Egypt

¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III.1, p. 102. By 1946 in American scholarship, Jack Finnegan could compare Genesis 1 to Babylon’s *Enumah elish* and refer the terms of Genesis 1:2 to the Tiamat of that mythology, while recognizing that differences ought to be considered more important than similarities (*Light From The Ancient Past*, Princeton University Press, p. 53.) Thus, the difficulties are introduced into the interpretation of the verse.

² CD, pp. 102-110. Along with most modern critical Old Testament scholars, Barth comes to believe that the ‘rudimentary’ conditions laid down in v.2 posit that which the will of the Creator opposes. He must contradict its contradiction of Him.

The Revelation that informs the form and content of the Exodus of Israel's witness among the nations to the Creation belongs, glove in hand, to the power of God, His Spirit's interaction with the Creation out of nothing in the Beginning, and His Speaking as the Redeemer-Creator that He is against all idols and all idol-making prevalent among the ancient peoples of this world. It is the power of the truth of this faith that we are reading when we read Genesis 1 and the Beginning.

Barth could readily find support for his position from modern critical scholars of the Old Testament. When Bernard W. Anderson collected together essays about the Creation from eight other theologians, we can readily view the exegetical environment influencing his thought.³ Hermann Gunkel believed that the *chaos and so forth* of v.2 'belongs to mythology and cannot be viewed as the invention of an author, least of all the person of P'.⁴ Gerhard von Rad, who worked with the deep separation between redemption and creation in modern analytical views, thinks that the Creation, as read in texts other than Genesis 1, in the Old Testament demands that the exegete take seriously the role of the Wisdom Tradition in Israel, a tradition much influenced by Egyptian Wisdom.⁵ The Jesuit Father Dennis McCarthy believes we ask the wrong question when we think Genesis 1 means to contend for the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.⁶ The text is rather more concerned with what German scholars have named *Chaoskampf*, 'war on chaos', with the Creator being the warrior at war with the chaos and emptiness and the dark depths of the primeval waters. Against the separation of redemption from creation, Westermann argues that Genesis 1:1-2:4a reflects a long history of composition in which we may read the struggle to relate the confession to the mythologies in such a way that we come to appreciate its lasting value even with the developments of the cosmologies of the Western World, the Ptolemaic Cosmos, the Newtonian system of the World, and perhaps also Einstein's Universe. What is the relationship of the chapter to all of these?⁷ Reminding his readers that the confession must possess in this sense some eschatological significance, H.H. Schmidt believes that the 'righteousness' of the Creator must belong to the significance of its texts, without commenting upon the specifics to be heard in v.2.⁸ Working with the assumptions of both Zimmerli and von Rad, H.J. Hermission is still unable to understand the *chaos and emptiness and so forth* of Genesis 1:2 as a part of the Creation, something that must have been done perfectly in the beginning.⁹ All of these scholars are affirmed with Anderson's assertion about the *Chaoskampf* to be heard in our understanding of the *chaos and emptiness* of v.2 as pre-creation.¹⁰ Among these scholars, only Walter Eichrodt¹¹ and G.M. Landes¹² want to argue for the values of the doctrine of

³ B.W. Anderson, *Creation in the Old Testament* (Fortress Press and SPCK, 1984). He is aware of the chasm created between science and theology in our times created by these Biblical scholars.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 26-52.

⁵ Ibid, pp. 62-63, when Yahweh as the Creator absorbs Egypt's ancient mythologies and enters in this way into the confession of the Elohim of Genesis 1.

⁶ Ibid, p.75

⁷ Ibid, pp. 90-101.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 102-117.

⁹ Ibid, p.130. 'The world well ordered, chaos excluded, the world therefore comprehensible within limits: this fits in very well with the concept of wisdom.'

¹⁰ Ibid, p.18.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 65-73. But with no comment on v.2.

¹² Ibid, pp.135-151, where Landes rightly connects the whole movement up with freedom.

creatio ex nihilo as cogent for our reading of Genesis 1:1. But only Landes can write about v.2 that ‘At the beginning of its creation, the earth is empty, enclosed by waters in total darkness. But when God’s Spirit moved over the waters to separate them, the earth can be born, so to speak, i.e. it can emerge from its primordial darkness into the light of time, its surrounding waters filled with plants, animals, and humanity.’¹³ With all of this interpretation, we can read the study of a great Old Testament, R.C. Clements, in which the history of the development of the covenanted relationship from Abraham to David is investigated, without any mention of Genesis 1 or the participation of Creation in Israel’s Covenant with God.¹⁴ It is no wonder that Barth, with his rejection of any ‘natural theology’ as an antecedent conceptual conception for the formation of theology and his opposition to Nazi Socialism can come under the spell of the consensus that v.2 is that which belongs to a world in opposition to God’s Creation in the Beginning.¹⁵

Thus, after observing possible interpretations of v.2 according to the investigations of Augustine and Luther, Barth sides with Zimmerli on the ‘rudiments’ of the verse and thinks it possesses no positive connection with v.1.¹⁶ He then contends for the position that v.2 belongs to a past that God never willed, to a time the Creator never fashioned. The *tohu and bhohu*, ‘chaos and emptiness---‘unformed and unsubstantiated’---mean to point the reader to that ‘rudimentary’ condition of the Creation that existed outside of the time when the Spirit of God ‘...is not known in His reality and therefore hovers and broods over it impotently or wordlessly.’¹⁷ The speaking of the Word of God against this condition does what the Spirit could not accomplish---posits an order of time and times in the ‘light’ of the speaking of God. The argument then follows that the views of the ‘Priestly Writer’, the ‘Yahwist’, and the prophets of Israel on the Creation on the ‘things’ over which the Spirit of God once brooded impotently in Genesis 1:2 are the ‘old things’, ‘the things that have passed away’, according to 2 Corinthians 5:17. Such ‘rudimentary things’ belong to a past that has been superseded by the time of light.¹⁸ Genesis 1:2 deposits therefore that which can only be found outside of God’s will for His Creation from the Beginning.

With this position, Barth has embraced in our times the most common rendering of the text’s meaning. When the Old Testament scholar, Brevard Childs, on the other hand, addressed these problems, he concluded that there was and must be a real connection between v.1 and v.2 and that the ‘brooding’ of the Spirit of God in v.2, the power of God

¹³ Ibid, p. 138

¹⁴ R.C. Clements, *Abraham and David* (Studies in Biblical Theology: SCM Press,1967.)

¹⁵ See the account of T.F. Torrance’s meeting with Barth over this point in his *Space, Time, and Resurrection*, (Eerdmans, 1976), pp. ix-xiii. Torrance argues that it is ‘a sovereign freedom and lordly authority’ that must judge the beginnings made by the Lord God and His Self-Revelation in space and time.

¹⁶ Ibid p. 103-4. “The decisive objection against this exposition (Luther’s contention that the verse explained the primal condition of God’s Creation in the Beginning before its light was spoken into existence), which Zimmerli rightly calls a ‘desperate expedient,’ is as follows.” Barth goes on to explain that, with the connection between v.1 and v.2 as inadmissible, we must face the fact that God did not will the ‘things’ of v.2. He quotes Isaiah 45:14 as evidence the world was meant to be inhabited right the beginning and never meant to be chaos and void, dark and deep, with waters the Spirit of God must control against the will of the Creator to create a heavens and an earth of light.

¹⁷ CD, Ibid, p.108. The Silence of God is not necessarily the Time of Judgment.

¹⁸ CD, Ibid, p. 110. As if the future will possess no chaos and so forth.

in v.1, and the speaking of God in v.3 must be heard to resonate with one another for any full appreciation of the confession. In this way, the full chord that is struck in the Beginning must be heard with the divine intention and authoritative purpose the confession would affirm against the mythologies advanced outside of Moses' prophecy. It is this resonance that allows the exegete to hear the uniqueness of Moses' contention. It is this resonance that allows the interpreter to hear the prophetic power of Moses' affirmation. It is this resonance that allows the I-AM who is the Lord God of the Exodus to be understood as the Creator of the Beginning and the One Israel shall love with all of her heart and strength and might (Deuteronomy 6:4). The One who is Lord of Israel's redemption is none other than the Creator of '*the heavens and the earth.*'¹⁹ The emphatic use of the verb 'to be' in v.2, rather than signifying a disconnect with v.1, affirms that the whole of the Creation is with the particular reality of 'the earth', that 'the earth' is what it is according to the power of the Spirit of God's embrace from the Beginning of these condition in which the world is what it is.²⁰ It is this world, before the time when 'light' was spoken into existence, that the clause intends to signify. It is the condition of the earth under the heavens in a span of time before the speaking of God caused light to appear in His Creation. The emphatic use of the verb 'to be' signifies the dynamical nature of the relationship between God, His Spirit, and His Speaking in the Beginning. The '*dark*' then continues to exposit this signification of the '*chaos and emptiness*'. Yet Childs can consider meaning as closely related to what death is, opposed to the '*light*' and the life of the world. For Childs, then, the '*deep*' (tehom) belongs to the primordial waters where the Spirit of God possesses both negative and positive power (Deuteronomy 32:11). This is no 'wind' of God but real power that, when resonated with the meaning of '*create*' (bara), removes the confession from anything but polemical relations with the gods and the cosmogonies of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and so forth. For Childs, the confession is to be read as transforming the language found commonly among the assertions of the ancient mythologies of the ancient polytheism of the peoples in the nations of the Ancient Near Eastern world. But Childs, still embracing the notions that a priestly writer of the post-exilic period in Israel's history and the Yahwist of the same writing sometime during the Monarchical period, need be read as two separate and different accounts of the Creation, can finally write: Both accounts (P= 1:1-2:4a, J=2:4b-25) begin according to an ancient convention by describing the effects of creation in contrast to a condition which prevailed previously (1:2, 2:5-6).²¹

¹⁹ B.S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (SCM Press, London, 1960), pp. 30-42. "It will be the purpose of this chapter to show the problem which was caused within the Biblical tradition when mythical material entered." He focuses his argument on the relationship between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. He suggests three choices for interpretive speculation: 1) There was a time when 'chaos and emptiness' and so forth was the heavens and the earth. 2) Darkness exposit death and the deep belongs to that over which the Spirit broods for life. 3) There is a real resonance between this 'rudimentary' stuff that transforms any use of the terms found in the ancient mythologies into service of Moses confession, or P's, of the Beginning. Thus, we need to come to a new understanding of their meaning in real time and not in mythical time.

²⁰ I believe that the Beginning of Genesis 1:1 is to be thought out as rooted in the ground of the 'beginningless-beginning' of the Living Being of the God who is the God of the Creation, a category that cannot be reduced up or down into any philosophical arena of thought. Neither necessary nor arbitrary connections may grasp the real relations between the Creator and His Creation.

²¹ B.S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Fortress Press, 1993), p. 107. It seems evident to me that these scholars are more at home with the evolution of things more than they are with things created out of nothing and sustained for purposes that belong only to the One who is who He is.

Even among the more conservative exegetes of v.2 we continue to read a level of comfort that does not reach into the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. While not identifying v.2 with the mythologies found among the polytheists of the Ancient Near East and while understanding the terms of the verse to speak of the actual Creation in the Beginning without contradiction of v.1, Bruce Waltke makes no mention of ‘creation out of nothing’ as significant to the confession.²² The Jerusalem Bible can still translate v.2: ‘*And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was on the surface of the deep. And a wind of God moved over the surface of the waters.*’ We remain a long way from taking seriously for the Judeo-Christian tradition the significance of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* in the Beginning according to the divine words of Moses’ prophetic and polemical confession in the light of the Great I-AM the Lord God is with Israel as His People in His Creation.

When we read older exegetes on v.2, we find no sense of the influence of mythologies upon what we ought to read as ‘The First Day’ of the Creation Week. Also, unlike most modern or post-modern exegetes, we find a willingness to argue for the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.²³ Go back even further to John Calvin, and we can read the Reformer’s belief that v.2 intends to signify the ‘confused’ place of the Creation the status of which is sustained for the purpose of the speaking into existence of the ‘light’ and its orders as the heavens and the earth. We also read that the wholeness of this created reality is a result of the dynamical actions of God, the Spirit of God, and the Speaking of God in the Beginning of the heavens and the earth. V.2 may then be read as rightly a part of the prophetic power of Moses’ confession, far from any embrace of the mythologies of the Ancient Near Eastern peoples.²⁴ If we go even further back to the early fathers of the Church, we find an even greater grasp of the polemical nature of Moses’ confession and the prophet’s power to grasp the wholeness of creation out of nothing, creation out of the sustained original conditions of the world, and the creation of light as a result of the speaking of God, when we read as a whole the existence of the heavens and the earth with all appropriate differentiations in the dynamics of an integration dependent upon God, the Spirit of God, and the Speaking God as the Creator of the Creation.²⁵

²² B.K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Zondervan, 2001), p.p. 58-60. He simply refers to אָרַב (create) as a ‘telic verb’, encompassing the ‘All’ that is the Creation, without further explanation. The implication is, of course, that time possesses times as times are possessed of time even before the time of light.

²³ See C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume I, The Pentateuch* (Eerdmans, 1973 reprint), pp. 46-52. The verb ‘create’ signifies that which is ‘divine creation’. The terms of v.2 mean the condition of the creation before the time ‘light’ was spoken into existence. The author is aware that others seek to rid interpretation of the doctrine of ‘creation out of nothing’ (p. 46).

²⁴ John Calvin, *Genesis* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1554, 1975), pp. 69-78. Calvin is the only theologian I have found willing to understand the ‘brooding’ of the Spirit of God as that ‘cherishing’ necessary to ‘sustain’ the world before ‘light’ was given existence in it (p. 74).

²⁵ I have in mind an exegetical line of thought that we may trace from Athanasius (in works from AD 325-381), through Basil of Caesarea (in works from AD 329-379), and others to the works of John Philoponus in Alexandria (AD 517-560), with whom the doctrine of ‘creation out of nothing’ is steadily championed. It is through the actuality of the Incarnate Word that we are given to understand the Word or Speaking of God in the Beginning and His relationship to ‘light’ in the Creation. Thus, the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Spirit throws light upon the I-AM the Lord God is as God, the Spirit of God, and Speaking of God for the formation of the First Day of the Creation Week and the Sabbath Blessing.

It is not often that I have been compelled to differ from Barth. But his embrace of the common consensus achieved by modern critical scholarship on the meaning of the text seems to be a lapse of the intention the great theologian displays throughout his *Church Dogmatics*---to understand the texts as witness to the Revelation of the Word of God to a world that is His Creation. In this case, I would like to argue against the consensus of our times. Genesis 1:2 is better read by early exegesis. Modern critical-historical scholarship may possess sensitivities unknown to the early fathers of the Church, but in this case I would argue that, for all our technical progress, we have lost the power that early concepts developed in order to be faithful to the divine words of the Holy Scriptures. The ‘Very Good’ Creation God, the Creator, has blessed as the completed work of Himself, His Spirit, His Speaking from the Beginning, as His Self-Revelation with Moses is that for which the Creation has been intended and purposed. Moses is the prophet of Israel’s past and future in a present that has compelled his confession of the I-AM the Lord God is as the One Redeemer-Creator of Israel and the heavens and the earth. There is nothing in Genesis 1 that is to be confessed as ‘evil’. Nothing is to be understood as against or a contradiction of God’s free will for the world He has caused out of nothing to be. Genesis 1:2 ought to be thought of as laying down that condition, cherished by the Spirit of God, into which the Speaking of God has spoken the orders of light experienced by mankind upon the earth as the ‘day’ and ‘night’ of the first ‘evening and morning’ we experience still today. The created reality of the heavens and the earth with its mankind during the work of the Creation Week possesses an objectivity the contingency of which does not allow the phenomenal-empirical realities of the confession to become divorced from the invisible dimensions inherent in what the Beginning is. That ‘light’ is the source of the orders of the time and space, energy and matter, experienced by the life of mankind as the Image and Likeness of this God confronts the reader with no myth, but the reality of the heavens above the earth that is the place where the Creator’s ‘Very Good’ work was indeed begun with a freedom and wisdom we ignore not without consequence. I believe every educational institution ought to offer a course on this ‘Beginning’, in which the Fall of the First Adam might be grasped in the ‘light’ of ‘Very Good Beginning’ confessed by Moses.

Perhaps a short survey of the work of John Philoponus, the great Alexandrian theologian and physicist, will suffice to draw out the great contrast between the modern and the patristic views on Genesis 1. Even though the ‘Grammarians’ have recently begun to get the credit he deserves as the forerunner in the ancient world to the science of Galileo and so forth,²⁶ much of our appreciation of him does not shake itself loose from his condemnation by the Sixth Ecumenical Council of the Church in AD 680.²⁷ No one has championed Philoponus, not just as a commentator in his time on the works of Aristotle,

²⁶ See R. Sorabji, ed., *Philoponus and the rejection of Aristotelian science* (Cornell University Press, 1987), followed by a number of translations of Philoponus’ works by a team of translators under Sorabji’s supervision.

²⁷ See my *The Setting in Life of ‘The Arbiter’ by John Philoponus* (Wipf and Stock, 1999), where I argued that his Anathema was a mistake of tragic proportions and consequences for the history of the relationship between Christian Theology and the development of our scientific culture. S.L. Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God*, (University of Chicago, 1978) p. 39, reminds us that Aquinas knew Philoponus only for his heretical monophysitism and not for his critic of Aristotle and his contributions to Western science

yet as the theologian of the early Church to penetrate most deeply into the relationship between the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer-Creator of the world and the foundations of empirical science.²⁸ Philoponus needs to be given credit for his contributions not only to the developments we have experienced with Galileo, Newton, and even Einstein, but the further penetration we seek to make with our modern physics and cosmologies. The secret to the ‘thought-experiments’ of this revolutionary lies with his belief in the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* in the light of the Incarnation for progress to be made in our empirical-theoretical science. Because of it, Philoponus was able to articulate theories of impetus and light rooted in the power of the Logos Incarnate against Aristotle and Greek mythologies about the world. Perhaps we can say that what Moses was to the gods of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Canaan, Philoponus became to the gods of the Greeks. The polemical nature of his science was thus met with some rather fierce opposition.²⁹ We would argue with Philoponus and the fathers of the early Church against the modern or post-modern trends in our interpretation of Genesis 1:2. In the light of the Incarnation of the Great I-AM the Lord God has revealed Himself to be with His People in His Creation, we are to read Moses’ confession as the prophecy it is of both Israel and the heavens and the earth with a world that comes from the Power, the Spirit, and the Speaking of the One who is who He truly is with us in the Divine Wisdom and Sovereign Freedom of the Authority of His Being and Nature as the Living and Almighty One.

I believe it is Philoponus’ theory of created time that can throw light upon his dynamical and kinetic contemplation in those ‘thought-experiments’ that produced with him his theories of the impetus and light in the Beginning. The Grammarian liked to reflect upon created things (time) as both invisible and visible realities, when their whole participated dynamically in its parts and the parts of a whole were what they were as they participated in their wholeness. He thought of them as ‘composite things’, such as we are taught when we would think as one the Word of God become the flesh that the man Jesus Christ is in space and time.³⁰ Genesis 1:2, read with some real and strong resonance with 1:1 and 1:3-5, is meant to establish with us an understanding that affirms both the transcendent and

²⁸ Among his many references in his books to Philoponus, see especially T.F. Torrance, *Theological and Natural Science* (Wipf & Stock, 2002), especially chapters 4-7. Torrance echoes Shmuel Sambursky’s, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity* (Basic Books, 1962, p. 158) with the contention that Philoponus possessed ‘... the reasoning of a man carried away by his revolutionary zeal and the momentum of a new and irresistible conception.’ The fecundity of this revolution is still to be appreciated.

²⁹ As a contemporary of Philoponus, a man called Simplicius could consider the Grammarian as doing less than his duty in the common effort seeking to harmonize Plato and Aristotle as Masters of the field of origins in their times. Simplicius wrote: ‘But one of our contemporaries, i.e. the Grammarian, a hunter of fame, as it seems, who has passed off some of Xenarchus’ objections as his own and collected other, similar ones, has sprung up to criticize Aristotle, aiming at the objective, as he says, of proving the whole world perishable, as if he would receive a big reward from the Creator if he proved him <to be> a creator of perishable things only, but not of imperishable.’ See C. Wildberg, *Philoponus, Against Aristotle on the Eternity of the World*, (Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 39. The whole of the debate was about the nature of the Beginning that had been confessed by Moses.

³⁰ I owe this insight to L.S. B. MacCoull, who in her translation of *De Opificia Mundi* by John Philoponus, understands that Christology informed the cosmological considerations of the Grammarian. The ‘hypostasis’ of created time existed as a whole entailing the ‘hypostases’ of times past, present, and future, all of which belonged as one created reality to the power of the freedom of God to be the Redeemer-Creator He actually is with us. Thus, the empirical and the theoretical are integrated substantially in all of his speculations about the physics and cosmology of the Creation (private correspondence).

phenomenal dimensions of the elements of the Day One, against all mythologies, especially those that see angels as authorities with the lights of the heavens, the sun, the moon, and the stars. Thus, much of Philoponus' commentary argues against astrological speculations about super-natural creature governing the created realities mankind experiences with the heavens and the earth.³¹ Genesis 1:2 ought to be read in relationships with both 1:1 and 1:3-5 in the light of the freedom and authority that is possessed by the Redeemer-Creator alone. We cannot understand the text without grasping its connection both the Beginning we read in 1:1 and with the Speaking of God we read in 1:3, when the 'evening' and 'morning' (a 24 hour period of time) of Day One is confessed as established by the Creator, where the differentiation of things and the naming of things mark the boundaries at work as His Creation, which He 'sees' as 'good' (1:4-5). There exists no evil on this Day.

It is true that Genesis 1:1 may be read as a subordinate clause: '*When in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was formless and emptiness and darkness was upon the faces of the deep and the Spirit of God brooded over the faces of the waters, then God said...*' v. 1 and 2 are both governed by the first independent clause of the text and subordinate to the positing in the Beginning of the 'light' that marks the world with the phenomena of day and night, when a specific order of times is given to be experienced by Mankind. Or it may be read as the first independent clause of the pericope of a text that marks with a general assertion for the whole of the Creation Week and its ending in the Sabbath Blessing of God. '*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*' entails a view whose horizon is the finished work of His creative activity in relationship with the whole of created reality. Morphology cannot determine for the reader what she reads. She is free to choose the way she shall read the opening words of the Bible.

I do not like to translate the Hebrew *bara* ' (אָרַב) with our English 'create' (The Alexandrian Jews of the Septuagint Jews no better with their Greek ἐποίησεν!). Among English speaking peoples the verb 'create' can have as its subject all kinds of persons, places, and things. Because I teach among Koreans, I understand that the Korean Bible translates with a Korean word that has for its subject only ever God. That is the way it is in the Hebrew Bible. Only God can act with Himself in such a way that there is caused to exist a reality that is not Himself, a reality that is quite independent of His Being and yet dependent upon Him for being what it is in its independence of His Reality. Only the freedom of this God to become the Creator and do what only He may do, as the One who is who He is, may *bara* '. This is a vital point that we fail to grasp not without consequence. The verb *bara* ' signifies in this way the source of the doctrine of creation out of nothing in the Beginning that is, uniquely, God's Creation. Understood in this way, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, as it is named in Latin, is to be understood as inherent in the confession of the Creation Week of Genesis 1, a Week whose space and time and

³¹ Philoponus has a long section on angels with reference then to Genesis 1:2, yet for the sake of making the point that the 'hypostases' with which we have to do in the physical world are contingently related to the power of the free God whose wisdom only is the source of their existence. It is in this discussion that the Grammarian can refer to other views of the Creation read in the Scriptures, Job, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and so forth.

light shall be blessed by the Free Creator. The first verse of the first chapter of Moses' confession of the primordial and ancestral generations of Israel as prophecy of the time and times past of the People of God among the nations in God's Creation lays it down that in the Beginning God *bara'* out of nothing all that exists outside of the life of God Himself. Only this God can and did *bara'* the Beginning of the heavens and the earth.

It is to the reality of this divine action taken with divine freedom that the concept of the contingency of the world, common to the Judeo-Christian tradition, would refer the reader of the confession. This concept has not enjoyed an easy time of it across the centuries of the development of thought in the Western world.³² Against all necessity and arbitrariness, the world as God's Creation is a result of the freedom of God to choose to become the Creator and *bara'* into existence His Creation. As such, the world is a reflection of the love and wisdom and freedom of God to be and to become the God that He is with us. For this reason, the Judeo-Christian tradition has had to seek to distinguish its way of carving up the reality of the world from the various attempts to marry the teaching to Aristotle's Cosmos or any form of Neo-platonic mysticism often thought to integrate the transcendent and the immortal with the immanence and mortality experienced by the race upon the earth of this world.³³ Stanley Jaki has put it well: "The contingency of the universe obviates an *a priori* discourse about it, while its rationality makes it accessible to the mind through only an *a posteriori* manner".³⁴ It is the dynamical nature of this concept and its relationship with the freedom of God in the Beginning that captured the attention of the early Church fathers and was given place in the physics of the universe by the great John Philoponus.³⁵ We do not have room here for a more thorough discussion of the concept. But we need to claim that it is implicated with what Genesis 1:1 means to signify as the *creatio ex nihilo* and this Creation's independence of the Nature of God as being dependent upon Him for being what it is with the particular beginning that is the Beginning.

We want to argue that the relationship of Genesis 1:2 to 1:1 possesses a conjunctive connection in apposition to the assertion that 'the heavens and the earth' is an object whose wholeness and whose particulars are the result of the *bara'* that only God can do. The emphatic use of the verb 'to be' in 1:2 means to say that, as a part of the whole of the Creation, the earth is 'formless and void' with 'darkness over the depth' where the Spirit of God 'cherishes',³⁶ like an eagle her eaglets (Deuteronomy 32: 11), the things that

³² See T.F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford University Press, 1981) for a fully developed argument on the cogency and fecundity of the concept in both science and theology.

³³ See S.L. Jaki, *Genesis 1* (Thomas More Press, 1992)) for an account that argues for the reality of the chapter as against all mythologies from time to times and so forth. Moses was successful with his confession against the idols of the nations among the peoples of God's Creation.

³⁴ Again S.L. Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God*, *Ibid*, p. 39. An historian of science, the Benedictine scholar knows, for instance, the concept of the contingency of the creation may become lost upon Aquinas and the Middle Ages and the arguments for the existence of God mere sophistry.

³⁵ See my *The Setting in Life of 'The Arbiter' by John Philoponus* (Wipf & Stock, 1999), especially chapter three, for my account of the contingent rationality, unity, and freedom of the Creation against Aristotle's physics and cosmology.

³⁶ I have found the translation of *merachephat* ('brooding') read by Syriac speaking Christians, found still today in Iran and Iraq, rendered as 'cherished', even as a wave offering (P. Smith, *Syriac English Dictionary*, Oxford, 1902) p. 538) Evidently, the power of the Spirit of God in the Beginning embraced

belong to the waters the belong to the Beginning, made out of nothing according to the nature of the Creator's freedom to act as He has with Moses. In this case, the formless and emptiness with the darkness of the depths belongs to the primordial waters that is God's Creation from the Beginning and as such await, as the Spirit of God 'cherishes' them the Speaking of the God who *bara* 'the Beginning into existence out of nothing. This is the created reality the heavens and the earth is before the time when light had been spoken by God into existence, a time that cannot be divorced after the time when light had been spoken into existence.³⁷ The time past of the Creation and the time present in the 'new' light of the Creation as home for mankind is confessed with an eye for time future with Israel's Moses.

With the same freedom that He takes action (*bara*) to realize the Beginning of 'the heavens and the earth' (a merism), He sustains (*merechephat*) with His Love and Wisdom and Uncreated Light that which must await His Speaking into existence of the created light of the 'All' that is the heavens and the earth. It is the wisdom of His power to sustain what has been caused to exist out of nothing that provides the foundation in the ground that makes the Creation the home it is meant to be for Mankind, when the male and the female will be established as His Image and Likeness among things created, both then and now. Genesis 1:3 thus reads: '*And God said, "Let there be light!" and there was light.*' Out of the primeval stuff out of the nothingness of His created Beginning, out of the formlessness and emptiness and darkness of the deep that covers the waters of this Creation, is given to exist, by the power of the Word of God, the light of the universe that makes the heavens and the earth a home for our kind. The 'light' of the Speaking of God, who is the Light of the World, is posited as a Cosmos with a freedom in the Beginning that is the same freedom with which Moses experienced in the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. The world, made out of nothing, belongs to the Mighty Hand and the Spirit of the Speaking of God, who sustains His People and His Creation with an intent and for a purpose we are given to read as Moses' confession.³⁸ The universe that is the heavens and the earth is made to possess the created light, not only seen by God as 'Good', but in which the meaning of all things may be seen. The world of light is established both out of nothing and out of the something-ness we may associate with a world of time's space before light existed in the light posited by the uncreated Light the Word of God is in the Beginning.

with Love and Wisdom and Divine Freedom what had been the object of His action (*bara*) in His Beginning, not out of Himself but out of nothing with a will He alone can exercise.

³⁷ The Grammarian assumed the 'hypostasis' and 'hypostases' of time and times as the uncreated time that belongs creatively to God's Eternity. It was this kind of relational thinking that we read everywhere with the development of the thought of John Philoponus.

³⁸ Philoponus believed that, whatever Plato or Aristotle got right about God and the Cosmos, they got from Moses. The Grammarian wrote at the beginning of his treatise on the Creation of the World: 'That Plato too, in his treatise on the coming into being of the cosmos, imitated Moses.' This Moses wanted to implant knowledge of God with his confession of the Great I-AM the Lord God is with Israel, a confession not about science but about the world the race experiences as a phenomenal reality whose explanation must be found with its Creator. It was this Judeo-Christian tradition that laid down the foundation for the empirical science we exercise today, and not Greek philosophy.

It is under the impact of the power of this Word in His Sovereign Freedom and Divine Authority that we may learn to read the rest of Day One: ‘*And God differentiated between the light and the dark, and God called the light ‘day’ and the dark He called ‘night’ and there was evening and morning---Day One.*’ This is the First Day of the Creation Week that Moses confesses under the compelling power of the providence, presence, and prophecy of the Lord who is God with Israel. It is the confession of a phenomenal world that has nothing to do with idols and myths and everything to do with the Word that God is as the Lord, the Redeemer-Creator who is the Great I-AM of the Revelation with Israel.

Colin Gunton is worth quoting here: ‘The latter (Barth) tends to minimize the part played by the Holy Spirit in the act of creation, refusing an explicitly pneumatological reading of Genesis 1:2 because of his concern to see in the verse the promise of the eschatological defeat of *das Nichtige* (3/1, pp. 108-10). Pannenberg, however, in another contribution at once interesting and questionable,³⁹ couches the creating act of the Spirit in language borrowed from cosmological theory.’⁴⁰ Surely Professor Torrance’s doctrine of the contingency of the creation out of nothing, affirmed as it is, by the Incarnation, needs to be understood here. It is this One as the Great I-AM who is who He truly is as the Lord of the Covenant and the God of the Creation whose Spirit’s work we are reading in v.2. It is this who spoke His Word as Light for the created light of the world. It is this One who is then the ‘beginningless-beginning’ of the Beginning viewed in the light of the Great I-AM of the Exodus in the history of the People of God from Egypt and the gods, who is the source of Moses’ confession. It is this One who is the Servant of the prophecy of Israel’s history among the nations in this Creation. It is the Sabbath Blessing of this One as Great I-AM the Lord God is that we may learn to hear with the world, when we read the Bible from the Beginning to the Apocalypse of the One who creates and sustains and speaks with us in our times in the Name of Jesus Christ. It is this One who is the Revelation the Church knows as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, King of the Universe, the Redeemer-Creator of Israel and all that created reality is in time and space and so forth. It is His Voice to whom we are bound. It is with His Freedom and Wisdom that we are with our freedom and wisdom bound. It is His Voice that is this One who justifies and sanctifies, as the Great I-AM He is, what He began and what He sustains and what He purposes as the King of His Kingdom. We need to hear Him in Genesis 1:2 as blessed with His Sabbath Blessing in His Light with the New Creation, when and where out of nothing and out of time past and time present and time future we understand our lives as creatures of His Will, healed in the Light of His Divine Freedom and Eternal Love, healed with His Primordial Light and His Ancestral Light shining presently upon all of our times. It may not be a common way of seeing things today, but it is no myth either.

³⁹ The questions arise from the too immediate identification of the Big Bang Beginning and modern or post-modern Cosmologies with the Doctrine of Creation. The quantum vacuum cannot be confused with the *nihil* of the doctrine of creation out of nothing. The Lord that God is as the Creator must mediate the relationship.

⁴⁰ C.E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator* (Eerdmans, 1998), p. 160. Again, see T.F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* for the challenge with which this argument faces both scientist and theologian in our times.