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Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us . . . fix our eyes on Jesus, . . . who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. — Hebrews 12:1, 2, NIV.

“The Fall”

Digest

John Polkinghorne, “The Fall,” in *Reason and Reality: The Relationship between Science and Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International: 1991), pp. 99-104.¹

Editorial Note: In previous digests *Outlook* has addressed biblical issues that are based on the assumption that the traditional Genesis account of the Creation and Fall should be understood literally. Traditionally, it has been believed that Genesis addressed a fiat Creation in six literal earth-days that included the creation of Adam and Eve along with their Edenic home. It further has been assumed that Genesis affirmed the covenantal rest of the Creator God with mankind on the seventh day of Creation week. This account is followed by the serpent’s temptation of Adam and Eve to become “as gods” (Genesis 3:5). The subsequent “Fall” of Adam and Eve has been regarded as the “original sin” for which mankind has long been cursed with evil, suffering and death and from which God alone can redeem the human race and inaugurate a wholly new Creation.

Previous digests also have focused on an opposing view of the Genesis Creation.² This opposing view is known as “Gnosticism.” For over 2,000 years Gnosticism has claimed to possess the secret knowledge that the “Genesis Fall” was not the fall of mankind but the fall of the Creator God himself (YHWH, the “Demiurge”). In this Gnostic view the inner, uncreated, unfallen self, spirit or “divine spark” of mankind is simply imprisoned by the Demiurge in a created body and soul during earthly life. It only can be liberated by true knowledge (Greek, *gnosis*) so that it can return to its original Cosmic Oneness at death. Those who reject true knowledge (apostates) and those who remain ignorant of true knowledge (psychics) must face repeated bodily reincarnation(s) until they achieve that knowledge (Gnostics).

Of course, other views of Creation also have been promoted. They include the self-creation of the universe through an evolutionary process as well as the self-existence of the universe through the immanent omnipresence of a Creator God (panentheism – God is in everything, everything is in God; pantheism – God is everything, everything is God). In these views the “Fall” is a “fall upward” to an ever higher, brighter future in which mankind will ultimately achieve full and complete union with the cosmic God – just as in Gnosticism.

The purpose of the following digest is to explore a startling new view of Creation and the Fall, based on a contemporary understanding of science and a new understanding of the Genesis account. Recent Hebraic research has shown:

The Torah [in Genesis] opens . . . in past tense. “*Bereshit Bara Elohim . . .*” (Initially created God . . .) but immediately it adopts a present continuous tense “ . . . *veRu’ah Elohim merahefet al pnei haMayim*” (and the spirit of God is hovering over the face of the Deep . . .).

And from there onwards, in all the chapters of the **Humash** Pentateuch – the writing is future tense, “*va ’yomer Elohim . . .*’ (and God would say . . .). It is true that no translation paid attention to this, and many generations of linguists regarded that form as “inversion” (*vav haHipukh*), but this is just a name that does not explain any thing. It is much more accurate to regard this letter **vav** (translated as “and” in English) as “**vav haHibur**” (the joining of times) . . .

It is therefore valid to read the entire **Torah** as written in a prophetic tense . . .³

The Genesis account, therefore, is the *divine promise* of a completed Creation and of God’s covenantal future for and with mankind.

The following digest, drawn from John Polkinghorne, addresses the Creation and Fall in light of the divine promise. Polkinghorne reconciles both the scientific and biblical views of origin and destiny and provides a foundation for further, fruitful biblical study.⁴ John Polkinghorne “worked in theoretical elementary particle physics for 25 years and was Professor of Mathematical Physics at Cambridge University, 1968-79. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society (the British National Academy of Science) in 1974. In 1979 Polkinghorne resigned his chair to study for the Anglican priesthood. He was ordained in 1982. After some years in parish life he returned to Cambridge to work on issues in science and theology . . . In 1996 he retired from being President of Queen’s College, Cambridge, and he was knighted in 1997.”⁵

The Presence of Evil

“We have . . . to make a clear distinction between the presence of physical evil and the presence of moral evil. The former is the inevitable consequence of a world exploring and realizing its . . . potentiality. . . . That world must contain impermanence as the

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ground of change, death as the prerequisite of new life. Its blind alleys and malfunctions will produce what humans perceive as the physical evil of disease and disaster. In that sense the universe is everywhere 'fallen' and it has always been so. The goodness of creation, seven times reiterated in Genesis 1, is to be understood in terms of fruitful potentiality . . . rather than initial perfection. Evolutionary cosmology is consonant with an Irenaean picture of growth into fulfillment, rather than an Augustinian picture of decline from paradise. Once such a world evolves to the point of containing self-conscious freely-choosing beings, it faces the possibility of a further 'fall into moral evil, exemplified by lives of selfishness and rebellion. This, when it occurs, is then a new development in cosmic history, consequent on the new emergence of self-consciousness. . . .

"The fundamental aspect of the Fall is the moral act of the rebellious refusal of creaturely status, the desire 'to be like God' (Genesis 3.5). How that came about we do not know. It is clearly present in us today, transmitted culturally and even, conceivably partly genetically (sociobiology is not the whole human story but it may be part of that story). On the view I am proposing, the whole universe is fallen physically but only part is fallen morally. . . .

Issues of the "Fall"

"Is all this over-ingenious eisegesis, the reading in of what was never there in an unnecessary attempt to reinterpret an ancient tale that would be better discarded? . . . [Nevertheless, w]restling with the early chapters of Genesis has been going on for centuries with varying results — in Paul, in the Fathers, and so on to the present day . . . There are two further issues it must face.

"The first is the extent to which the Fall has defaced the image of God which Genesis 1:26-7 pictures as the Creator's gift to humanity. The question is one that has given rise to much exegetical dispute, concerning the nature of the 'image' and the 'likeness', and also concerning the degree of their defacement. . . .

"The second issue . . . [involves the] biblical tradition [that] speaks not only of a Fall but also of its reversal, a time when 'the wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid' (Isaiah 11.6) in a return to Eden. This prophetic theme is taken up in the New Testament concept of a 'new creation' (2 Corinthians 5.17), 'a new heaven and a new earth . . . where death shall be no more, neither

"Men and women are given the Christian hope of resurrection, a destiny beyond death . . . , but within a new environment of God's choosing."

shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain, any more, for the former things have passed away' (Revelation 21:1-4). In language appropriate to their times, these verses are expressing a hope extended beyond humanity to assume universal proportions. . . . Men and women are given the Christian hope of resurrection, a destiny beyond death involving the re-embodied existence necessary for psychosomatic unities like ourselves

but within a new environment of God’s choosing. That environment — the new heaven and the new earth — must surely be envisaged as being the destiny also of the whole universe, otherwise condemned to collapse or decay. . . .

The New Creation — A Reversal of the “Fall”

“The problem that we face is, how could this hope be a coherent hope? How could the new creation avoid being at least a partial rerun of the old? We can just imagine . . . [that] God’s grace will bring to an end human sinfulness by the creation of a redeemed community in Christ, so that moral evil is excluded from the world to come . . . But how could such a world be free from physical evil? . . . How can there be a world with no more pain or death? . . .

“ . . . [T]he answer lies in that patient *creatio continua*, creation-through-process, which is the way of a loving Creator in his dealings with a creation to which he has give the gift of freedom. The pattern of present physical process represents that good which God in his wisdom bestows on a universe allowed to exist over against him and permitted to make itself through the realization of its own fruitful potentiality. The good that is possible in the new creation is a different good, for it is based on the coming-to-be of a different relationship between God and the world. . . .

“The new creation represents a state attainable only through that act of the return by the present creation. It represents, not the replacement of the world, but its redemption. Gabriel Daly says: “The word “new” could mislead here. It does not imply an abolition of the old but rather its transformation. It is a “new

creation” but, unlike the first creation, it is not *ex nihilo* [“out of nothing”]. The new creation is what the Spirit of God does to the first creation. The new creation is not *ex nihilo* but rather *ex vetero* [“out of the old”]. . . . In Christ there is a destiny not only for humanity but also for matter. In fact, the emptiness of the tomb is . . . the anticipation within history of that which awaits all beyond [present] history. It is no arbitrary act but it is of a piece with the purposes of God. Christ is “the first born from the dead” (Colossians 1.18), “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15.20).”⁶

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Conclusion

By viewing the Genesis account of Creation as a prophetic statement of God’s intended destiny for mankind and the universe, we are allowed to harmonize the biblical history of Creation and the Fall with scientific cosmology. This provides a further opportunity to critically examine the Old Testament as the essential historical background to the awesome implications of the Christ event.

Endnotes

1. John Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality: The Relationship between Science and Theology*, is available from the booksellers listed in Bookfinder www.bookfinder.com/book/9780281064007.
2. See “*Who Is Man?*” *Outlook* (Prequel 2001.7); “*Man Is Not Alone,*” *Outlook* (Prequel 2001.8); “*The Creatureliness of Mankind,*” *Outlook* (Prequel 2001.9); “*The Great Divide,*” *Outlook* (Prequel 2001.10).
3. Yitzhak Hayut-Man, “*The Book of Genesis as a Redemptive Scenario and Guide for Re-Biography,*” at thehope.tripod.com/TORENOWo.htm. Quoted in part by Worldview Publications in *Outlook*, “*Origins*” (September 2001). The author responded by letter: “*Yours is a wonderful and serious Website. I arrived at it as to an oasis after making a search for my name on the Internet and finding some really hysterical sites. You were kind enough to put a reference to my writings on Genesis right at the first of your article on “Origins.”* — Dr. Y. Hayut-Man, The Academy of Jerusalem.
4. John Polkinghorne, “*The Fall,*” in *Reason and Reality: The Relationship between Science and Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), pp. 99-104. Copyright 1991 by John Polkinghorne.
5. “*Biography: Sir John Polkinghorne,*” at counterbalance.org/bio/sirjo-body.html.
6. Polkinghorne, loc. cit.

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