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# **The God who became human**

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NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 30

*Series editor: D. A. Carson*

# **The God who became human**

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF  
INCARNATION

*Graham A. Cole*



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To Isaiah and Louka, who  
bring me such joy



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# Series preface

*New Studies in Biblical Theology* is a series of monographs that address key issues in the discipline of biblical theology. Contributions to the series focus on one or more of three areas: (1) the nature and status of biblical theology, including its relations with other disciplines (e.g. historical theology, exegesis, systematic theology, historical criticism, narrative theology); (2) the articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer or corpus; and (3) the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora.

Above all, these monographs are creative attempts to help thinking Christians understand their Bibles better. The series aims simultaneously to instruct and to edify, to interact with the current literature, and to point the way ahead. In God's universe, mind and heart should not be divorced: in this series we will try not to separate what God has joined together. While the notes interact with the best of scholarly literature, the text is uncluttered with untransliterated Greek and Hebrew, and tries to avoid too much technical jargon. The volumes are written within the framework of confessional evangelicalism, but there is always an attempt at thoughtful engagement with the sweep of the relevant literature.

Books on the incarnation tend to deploy, early on in the discussion, the categories of systematic theology. The biblical proof texts that are adduced are mostly from the New Testament; much less effort has been poured onto tracing incarnation theology right through the canon. Although considerable effort in biblical theology has been devoted to such messianic themes as the Davidic monarch, the priesthood and the temple, relatively little has been devoted to the incarnation. This book by Dr Graham Cole takes steps to fill the need. Undoubtedly more can be said, but it is immensely satisfying to find an able systematist wrestling with the biblical texts – as it is to find biblical scholars tracing the lines from exegesis towards biblical and systematic theology – not least on a topic as central to Christian faith as this one. As I write these words, the world

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approaches the Christmas season, and around the globe, in their own languages, Christians will sing,

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see;  
Hail th' incarnate Deity!  
Pleased as man with men to dwell –  
Jesus our Emmanuel.

*D. A. Carson*  
*Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*

# Author's preface

This study has surprised me. In contributing to a series of biblical theology studies rather than to a systematic theology one, I expected to trace a biblical theme from Genesis to Revelation in biblical theology style with careful attention to the unfolding biblical plotline, and then to tease out some larger theological implications of the text.

What I found was that the incarnation per se was not explicitly part of the Old Testament hope, but if certain Old Testament texts are read with a subtle typological method, then arguably the idea is there in a hidden way. Augustine's argument that what was latent in the Old Testament becomes patent in the New comes readily to mind. This should not surprise, as Paul teaches us the incarnation is a mystery – something hidden in the plan of God that now stands revealed once Jesus has come.

Even so, there is a background in the Old Testament without which the incarnation would be unintelligible. Here is yet another instance where Christology needs to be done from behind in the light of God's dealings with Israel. The incarnation is a stupendous divine deed. To think that God incarnate wept human tears at the tomb of his friend Lazarus is astounding. There is continued debate as to whether suffering may be ascribed to the God of the Bible, but there is no debate that in classical Christianity Christ suffered in his human nature.

I am grateful to my graduate assistant at Beeson Divinity, David Matlak, who did so much fetching of material for me. I am also in the debt of Dr John Momson for alerting me to some important Jewish literature pertinent to this study. Dr Peter Adam and I spent more than one breakfast in Melbourne, Australia, talking on this theme. And I am thankful to him for his insights. The astute series editing and criticisms of D. A. Carson are always appreciated, as is the patient publishing editing of Philip Duce of Inter-Varsity Press. Eldo Barkhuizen did a superb job of copy-editing and I am grateful to him. My wonderful wife, Jules, has been as supportive as ever. This study has made me appreciate even more the wonder that we live on

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a visited planet and that the Father sent no surrogate to share our human lot but sent his Son, who, as the ancient Nicene Creed says, 'For us and for our salvation . . . came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became truly human.'

*Graham A. Cole*

# Abbreviations

1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i> (Dead Sea Scrolls)
4QFlor	<i>Florilegium</i> (Dead Sea Scrolls)
ACC	<i>Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament 1</i> , ed. Thomas C. Oden, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001
BBCNT	<i>IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament</i> (EIRC)
BBCOT	<i>IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament</i> (EIRC)
CD	<i>Damascus Document</i> (Dead Sea Scrolls)
CD	K. Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics</i> , ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 4 vols., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936–77
<i>Chm</i>	<i>Churchman</i>
CJCC	<i>The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection</i> , Rio, Wis.: Ages Software, 2002, CD-ROM version
CNTUOT	<i>Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament</i> , ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; Nottingham: Apollos, 2007
DBI	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Imagery</i> , ed. L. Ryken, J. C. Wilhoit and J. C. Longman III, Downers Grove: IVP Academic
DFTIB	<i>Dictionary of the Theological Interpretation of Scripture</i> , ed. K. J. Vanhoozer, London: SPCK; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005
DPHL	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> (EIRC)
EBC	<i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> , ed. F. E. Gaebelin, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, CD-ROM version, 1976–
EIRC	<i>The Essential IVP Reference Collection</i> , Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001, CD-ROM version
ERT	<i>Evangelical Review of Theology</i>
ESV	English Standard Version

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<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
fl.	flourished
<i>Gen. Rab.</i>	<i>Genesis Rabbah</i>
Hebr.	Hebrew
<i>HSOB</i>	<i>Hard Sayings of the Bible</i> (EIRC)
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JANT</i>	<i>The Jewish Annotated New Testament</i> , ed. A. Levine and M. Z. Brettler, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSB</i>	<i>Jewish Study Bible</i> , ed. A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004
Lat.	Latin
lit.	literally
LXX	Septuagint
<i>NA</i>	<i>New Advent: Featuring the Catholic Encyclopedia</i> , Pennsauken, N.J.: Disc Makers, 2007, 2nd ed., CD-ROM version
NBC	New Bible Commentary
n.d.	no date of publication given
<i>NDBT</i>	<i>New Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i> (EIRC)
<i>NIB</i>	<i>New Interpreter's Bible: Complete Twelve Volume Commentary</i> CD-ROM, New Interpreter's Bible Commentaries, by L. E. Keck, 2002
<i>NIBD</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> , ed. K. D. Sakenfeld, 5 vols., Nashville: Abingdon, 2009
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> , ed. W. A. VanGemeren, 5 vols., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, CD-ROM version
NIV	New International Version
NIVACNT	NIV Application Commentary, New Testament
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBC	Oxford Bible Commentary
<i>OGB</i>	<i>The Oxford Guide to the Bible</i> , ed. B. M. Metzger and M. D. Coogan, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993
P	Papyrus
pl.	plural
Q.	Question ( <i>Summa Theologica</i> )
sg.	singular

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
tr.	translated, translation
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>



# Introduction

## Why this book?

The discipline of biblical theology reads Scripture with attention both to its unfolding plotline from Genesis to Revelation and its accent on Christ as the fulfilment of the antecedent hope of Israel. The study of themes therefore is a major part of the undertaking. For example, take the theme of the leadership of God's people as in prophet, priest and king. Each category finds its apogee in Jesus Christ, as Calvin among others has seen. Any number of biblical theologies, as their tables of contents and indexes often show, trace the story of prophethood or priesthood or kingship as it canonically unfolds. But what of the incarnation? Here the treatment, if any, is sparse. Other great pivotal events in Christology, such as atonement or roles Christ assumed (e.g. servant of the Lord), can be successfully placed in a promise–fulfilment framework. Is incarnation an anomaly? Put another way, was incarnation part of the hope of Israel? This study attempts to address this question among others.

For years I have been intrigued by a quotation in one of Terence E. Fretheim's books. In his book on the suffering of God, Fretheim quotes Old Testament scholar E. Jacob. In the quotation Jacob connected the anthropomorphic language of the Old Testament and the incarnation of Christ. Eventually I was able to secure Jacob's book for myself and found that his point was made even more richly than Fretheim's brief quotation suggested. Jacob wrote:

The God of the Old Testament is a God who seeks to manifest his presence in order to be recognized as the sovereign Lord; that is why the fear of God is at the basis of all piety and all wisdom. But God also and especially seeks to manifest his presence in order to save man. A line not always straight, but nonetheless continuous, leads from the anthropomorphisms of

the earliest pages of the Bible, to the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Could it be that Old Testament language about God's eyes, ears, arms, hands, fingers and so forth prepare the way somehow for the incarnation of God the Word become flesh?<sup>2</sup>

Kierkegaard famously said, 'Life lived forwards but understood backwards.'<sup>3</sup> Perhaps something similar may be said of God's providence: 'Life is lived forwards but providence is understood backwards.' Once the canon of Scripture was completed, God's people could read it in such a way as to see how rich it is in intra-textual allusion and reference, and with it see the exhibition to divine providence that led to an incarnation. Thomas F. Torrance puts the point this way:

The background for Christ the Son of God can only be the background which the fact of the incarnation creates for itself out of the world. . . . [T]here is a long prehistory to Jesus, but theologically we must say that when the Son of God breaks into that historical development, he throws it all into critical reorientation. The prehistory is critically and creatively re-interpreted by the incarnate Word, and it is only in that light that we must look at the prehistory of the incarnation in Israel.<sup>4</sup>

To use Hendrikus Berkhof's helpful phrase, God's people can now do 'Christology from behind'.<sup>5</sup> (Torrance is one example.) That is to say that with reference to Jesus 'we see him in the line of redemptive history, how he arises out of the Old Testament problematic, and gives and is the answer to it'.<sup>6</sup> Again, Berkhof rightly contends, 'the appearance of Jesus Christ is no isolated epiphany'.<sup>7</sup> A surprising voice adds to the chorus. Rabbi Jacob Neusner writes:

<sup>1</sup> Jacob 1958: 32. See also the briefer quotation of Jacob in Fretheim 1984: 6.

<sup>2</sup> Berkhof (1979: 20) seems to think so: 'The very personal coming of God to man in the Old Testament, to the point of being anthropomorphic, is here immeasurably intensified [the Christ event], and thereby given a completion as well: he comes to men in a man, in one who as "the Son" stands in a unique relationship to him as "the Father".' This is an insightful statement, but not as helpful if read in the context of Berkhof's lack of a robust doctrine of the essential Trinity (cf. 1979: 20, 330-337).

<sup>3</sup> Kierkegaard 1941b.

<sup>4</sup> Torrance 1992: 38.

<sup>5</sup> Berkhof 1979: 267.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 221.

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On the basis of a large number of stories along these lines [with anthropomorphic descriptions of God], we might well contemplate composing the story of God on earth – a kind of gospel of God incarnate, walking among human beings, talking with them, teaching them, acting among them, just as, for the evangelists as the church received and venerated their writings, Jesus Christ, God incarnate, walked on earth, taught, and provided the example for humanity of the union of humanity and divinity. That is hardly to suggest that the Judaism of the dual Torah [the Hebrew Bible and those rabbinic works that reduced the oral Torah to writing] and the Christianity of Jesus Christ as God incarnate are to be matched. But they assuredly sustain comparison.<sup>8</sup>

Neusner recognizes that very often the God presented in the Old Testament is presented as though incarnate.

In this present work my aim is to explore this idea of how the incarnation was prepared for. However, every exploration is shaped by certain assumptions. To these assumptions we next turn.

### Assumptions

Assumptions play a role in every claim to knowledge. For example, if I claim to know X, I express that claim in some language. In so doing I am assuming that language can convey thought from one mind to another. That is to say, I am assuming that language is a vehicle for communicative action. Part of my job is not only to read books and articles but to help students to do so intelligently. More often than not, writers do not make their assumptions visible. Consequently students need some help in detecting a given writer's assumptions. For example, if I read Scripture with materialist assumptions, then I need to explain – explain away? – any references to the supernatural.<sup>9</sup> In this view Saul of Tarsus did not meet the risen Christ

<sup>8</sup> Neusner 1992: 17–18.

<sup>9</sup> According to Halverson (1981: 414–415), the divide between naturalistic and non-naturalistic world views is the fundamental one. He contends, 'It may be helpful to bear in mind from the beginning, however, that one theme that underlies nearly all philosophical discussion is the perpetual conflict between *naturalistic* and *nonnaturalistic* world views. A *naturalistic* world view is one in which it is affirmed that (a) there is only one order of reality, (b) this one order of reality consists entirely of objects and events occurring in space and time, and (c) this one order of reality is completely self-dependent and self-operating. . . . Any world view that denies any of the above-stated tenets of naturalism, then, may be termed *nonnaturalistic*' (original emphases).

on the road to Damascus. Rather he had an epileptic fit or some other aberrant neurological episode.<sup>10</sup> The Christ he met was the Christ of a fevered imagination. So what assumptions underlie this work?

A key assumption is that there is a living God who is a personal agent. Walter Brueggemann captures the essence of the biblical testimony to this living God in a fine way. He is writing of the God revealed in the Old Testament, but what he writes is true of both testaments: “‘God’ as rendered in the Old Testament is a fully articulated personal agent, with all the particularities of personhood and with a full repertoire of traits and actions that belong to a fully formed and actualized person.”<sup>11</sup> It is this God who providentially orders human affairs. Nature and history are thus open to divine action.

According to Huston Smith, both moderns and postmoderns would have problems with such openness. He offers this analogy by way of explanation:

If we think of traditional peoples as looking out upon a world through the window of revelation (their received myths and texts), the window that they turned to look through in the modern period (science) turned out to be stunted. It cuts off at the level of the human nose, which (metaphysically speaking) means that when we look through it our gaze slants downward and we see only things that are inferior to us. As for the post modern window, it is boarded over and allows no inclusive view whatsoever.<sup>12</sup>

In contradistinction to the above, this work assumes that God has provided Holy Scripture so that his people are not left in an epistemological black hole from which no epistemic light can escape. In other words this work assumes that there is a revelation of the character, will and ways of God to be found in the church’s inspired Book. Holy Scripture – God’s words in human words – exhibits an amazing unity of storyline in its diversity of genres. There is a metanarrative.<sup>13</sup> Or put another way, in the words of Augustine Scripture presents ‘one discourse’ (*unus sermo*) and from many mouths emanates ‘one word’

<sup>10</sup> The classic attempt of such explaining away in relation to the apostle Paul is Sargent 1957.

<sup>11</sup> Brueggemann 2009: 2.

<sup>12</sup> Huston Smith in Anderson 1995: 206.

<sup>13</sup> That Scripture presents a metanarrative is ably brought out by both Carson 2010 and Webber 2008.

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(*unum verbum*).<sup>14</sup> That one discourse found in Scripture tells of the triune living God who speaks and acts, creates and recreates, saves and judges in a narrative that moves through creation, Fall, redemption and consummation as the story unfolds from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22.

### *Praeparatio evangelica*

The phrase *praeparatio evangelica* means ‘preparation for the gospel’.<sup>15</sup> This concept featured early in Christian thought to explain how pagans got so much right about God. For example, Augustine wrote in his celebrated *Confessions* of the philosophers he had read:

And therein I read, not indeed in the same words, but to the selfsame effect, enforced by many and various reasons, that, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.’ That which was made by Him is ‘life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehends it not.’ And that the soul of man, though it ‘bears witness of the light,’ yet itself ‘is not that light; but the Word of God, being God, is that true light that lights every man that comes into the world.’ And that ‘He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.’ But that ‘He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God even to them that believe in His name.’ This I did not read there.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly Augustine thought that he found Johannine-like ideas in the writings of the philosophers (Platonists). Significantly, though, he also said he did not find the idea that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us in the pagan thought he knew. For early Christians *ex hypothesi* this preparatory work among the pagans was done by the Logos. This work paralleled that of the work of the *logos asarkos* (‘Word without flesh’ or *logos incarnandus*) with Israel in Old

<sup>14</sup> Wilkens 2003: 326, n. 9. Wilkens cites Augustine’s *Exposition of Psalm 103.4.1*.

<sup>15</sup> This was the title of the fifteen-book work by Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 263–339), the first important early church historian.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine 2007b: 7.9.

Testament times in preparation for the incarnation, when *logos asarkos* became *logos ensarkos* ('Word enfleshed', or *logos carnatus*).<sup>17</sup>

This work is in the tradition of *praeparatio evangelica* with its focus on how the revelatory work of providence in Old Testament times 'represents a foreshadowing of incarnation'.<sup>18</sup> In pursuit of this aim, as discussed above, typology plays its part as does analogical correspondence. Both are important conceptual tools. Another tool employed in this study is 'descriptor fittingness', for want of a better phrase. This phrase refers to how Old Testament language provides apt descriptors for understanding incarnation as the quintessential expression of divine presence in the midst of God's people. T. F. Torrance in his work *The Mediation of Christ* offers a helpful insight regarding such descriptors when he writes, 'They constitute the essential furniture of our knowledge of God even in and through Christ. If the Word of God had become incarnate among us apart from all that, it could not have been grasped – Jesus himself would have remained a bewildering enigma.'<sup>19</sup> In another work, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, Torrance points out that if you need to make something, you need tools. Likewise if you are to understand something, you need conceptual tools. God provided those conceptual tools in his revelatory and redemptive dealings with ancient Israel.<sup>20</sup> There is a famous Bill Cosby skit in which the comedian plays Noah. God commands him to build an ark. Cosby asks what an ark is. Next God tells him to get wood to build the ark so many cubits in length, height and width. To which Cosby asks what a cubit is. The relevant point is that revelation is unintelligible without the requisite categories already being in place. So too the Christ event.

## The plan of the book

Chapter 1 explores the purpose of creation in terms of God's creating and fashioning a palace-temple as his habitation for dwelling with the creature made in the divine image. In particular how God prepared the way for his ultimate incarnate concomitance by revealing himself in anthropomorphic, anthropopathic and anthropopraxic ways is canvassed. In this chapter these latter three crucial terms are defined.

<sup>17</sup> Muller 1986: 152, 238.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 152.

<sup>19</sup> Torrance 1992: 18.

<sup>20</sup> Torrance 2008: 41.

## INTRODUCTION

Also in this chapter I argue that a third category is needed in discussing God's relation to the world. The idea of concomitance (the God-with-us motif) needs to be added to the traditional categories of transcendence and immanence. In so doing I hope that the reader of Scripture may take away a more sophisticated set of categories by means of which to understand the portrayal of God in Scripture than the general categories of anthropomorphism *simpliciter* and transcendence or immanence to understand how God relates to creation with its culmination in the incarnation. An excursus is attached to the chapter that addresses a long-standing question that still attracts debate today: Would the incarnation have taken place if there had been no Fall?

In the second chapter the biblical portrait of God is amplified as he acts in Israel's history to redeem a people of his own among whom he can dwell. Once more God's anthropomorphic, anthropopathic and anthropopraxic ways are reviewed as we follow the biblical plotline. In particular the theophanic language of the patriarchal, Mosaic, former and latter prophetic periods is examined. God is rendered as a person who speaks, acts and feels as though embodied. In two places at least the Lord is rendered in human terms as someone who eats and wrestles, and does so in history (e.g. Gen. 18 and 32 respectively). In other places the experience is visionary, more fragmentary and heavenly (e.g. Isa. 6). We follow James Barr in describing such phenomena as anthropomorphic theophanies. However, there is no incarnation of deity as such in view.

The third chapter explores Israel's hope and the promise of the divine presence with his people in the midst of the created order. For B. B. Warfield – as we shall see – the keeping of the promise meant that the Messiah to come would be divine. R. C. Ortlund, Jr., argues similarly. This contention is examined. In chapter 3 particular attention is given to some key Old Testament texts (Pss 45:6; 110; Isa. 9:6; Dan. 7:13) that both Warfield and Ortlund, Jr., employ to argue for the deity of the Messiah. The question is whether these texts demand such a reading. Certainly the Old Testament expected human agents or even divine agents of the divine purpose to come to Israel's aid at some juncture in its future: a prophet like Moses, a Davidic king, the heavenly Son of Man, the child born bearing the names 'Immanuel' and 'mighty God'. Moreover the Old Testament writers also expected God himself to come. But an incarnate, divine-human deliverer? That's the key question. The section on typology goes some of the way in addressing that question.

In chapter 4 the preparatory gives way to the actual. The testimony of the New Testament now comes into full view as we continue to follow the biblical plotline. God stooped and entered the arena of human affairs in the most personal of ways. Concomitance is now enfleshed. Matthew's testimony to Jesus as both the truly human Davidic king of promise (Matt. 1) and as Emmanuel ('God with us', Matt. 1:23), Mark's presentation of Jesus as the one in whom God comes to Zion (Mark 1 – 2) and the writer to the Hebrews' account of Jesus as both deity and humanity (Heb. 1 – 2) are considered along with the Johannine witness that Jesus is the Word become flesh who dwelt among us (John 1:14). The implicit incarnation theology of Matthew and Mark becomes more explicit in Hebrews and patent in John. What could be seen in retrospect after the coming of Christ and what could be seen in prospect are not to be confused, however. In Pauline terms the incarnation is a mystery that in Old Testament times was a hidden part of the divine plan. Also in this chapter, philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff's theory of theories is drawn upon to provide an important conceptual tool to analyse how the anthropomorphisms, anthropopathisms and anthropopraxisms of the Old Testament together with other Old Testament testimonies might point to incarnation and contribute to the intelligibility of the idea. An excursus is attached that treats the question of whether the Christ per se was known by Old Testament saints to be active in their history.

Chapter 5 addresses the question raised by Anselm of Canterbury in the Middle Ages: Why did God become human? Unlike Anselm, however, we seek New Testament answers to the question, rather than speculative ones. The appeal is to Scripture, not to reason with the Bible shut. Happily there is an abundance of New Testament testimonies that address the question. Christ's revelatory, representative, substitutionary, defeating the devil and moral modelling roles are predicated on his assuming a truly human nature. An excursus is attached that treats the question of whether the divine Son assumed fallen or unfallen human nature in the incarnation.

Chapter 6 considers the significance of the incarnation in two aspects: theological and existential. It explores the value of the incarnation for theological method, for the doctrine of God and change, for the affirmation of the created order, for the valuing of human life, for our understanding of mission, for the encounter between Christianity and other religions with special reference to Islam, for the question of theodicy and defence, given evils, and for matters of dogmatic rank. This chapter also explores the value of the incarnation

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at the personal or existential level. The incarnation matters with regard to our appreciation of the depths of the divine love and our cultivating a sense of wonder.

The last chapter draws the threads of the argument together in summary form and is followed by an appendix that addresses the question of how biblical theology interfaces with systematic theology in the theological interpretation of Scripture.

My hope is that by the time the reader closes this study he or she will have a deeper sense of the astonishing providence of God that subtly prepared the way for the mystery of the incarnation, a greater appreciation of the magnitude of the divine stooping that in the incarnation saw God weep human tears, and a profounder joy at the depth of the love of God that sent no surrogate as the final revelation but the beloved Son who became flesh.



## Chapter One

# God prepares the way from the beginning

Origins are fascinating. At present I am doing some research on my Jewish grandfather on my mother's side of the family. He was known to the press as a flamboyant character who had emigrated from the Crimea after the First World War. He called himself a professor and ran a dance studio in Sydney, Australia, in the first half of the twentieth century. Some of the dances he invented and put into print are in the National Library of Australia and are also listed in a Stanford University catalogue that begins with Domenico da Piacenza in 1425 and concludes with Elizabeth Gibbons in 2007. I learned that one of the dancing teachers he employed, Nellie Cameron, was a notorious character in the underworld of Sydney. He died when I was two so I have no memory of him, only a photo or two.

Origins matter to individuals and indeed to an entire people. They mattered to Israel. Genesis as the name implies is about origins. The most basic of questions are addressed in the text: Where does humanity in general come from and where does Israel in particular come from? Why is the world so broken and we with it? Do we have a future?

In this chapter we consider how from the beginning the Creator prepared a way to be present among his creatures. As Thomas F. Torrance rightly says, 'The incarnation of the Son of God has a pre-history, a background or hinterland of preparation and significance which we must not overlook.'<sup>1</sup> In addition an excursus will address a venerable question: Would the incarnation have occurred irrespective of the Fall? But first, who is this God who prepares the way and who not only has his own glory but has humanity's best interests at heart?

## God and God's image

The God who comes into majestic relief in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 is the creator of all things who acts with purpose and not caprice. The

<sup>1</sup> Torrance 1992: 37.

language is simple, the thought profound.<sup>2</sup> God is pictured in terms any Israelite would understand. He is the great worker who does six days on the job and then comes rest. The first three days see the creation of environments: day one, the heavens (Gen. 1:3–5); day two, the waters (Gen. 1:6–8); and day three, the earth (Gen. 1:9–13). Each day is pronounced as good and the presentation of each day’s creative work has an evening-and-morning formula attached to it. If the first three days represent the forming of three different environments, the next three days articulate their filling with different kinds of creatures suitable for them. And so on the fourth day the heavens are populated with sun, moon and stars (Gen. 1:14–18). The fourth day is pronounced good and God applies the evening-and-morning formula. The fifth day sees the waters populated with all sorts of sea creatures and the air with winged creatures. Both the populating of the sea and earth are thematized. It too is good and once again the evening-and-morning phrase is in evidence (Gen. 1:20–23). On the sixth day God focuses on the earth and the creatures suitable for inhabiting it. It is on this day that a unique creature appears, humankind (more anon). The creation of various earth creatures is good, according to the text, but there is a qualitative leap in relation to the creature uniquely in the image of God. Now we read that the creation is very good (Gen. 1:24–31). And once more the evening-and-morning formula is in view. The seventh day moves the reader onto a different plane. Here is the climax of all the events that have gone before. The language of holiness is used in the Bible for the first time, as this time ‘frame’ itself is hallowed. Significantly the evening-and-morning phrase drops from view. There is something very different about this end point. Chaos has thus given way to cosmos. The process has been an orderly one.

The nature of those days is controversial still. Richard Dawkins is not the first person to raise questions. Aquinas (1225–74) in his era

<sup>2</sup> For a brief discussion of various Christian approaches to reading the Genesis creation account see Carson 2010: 14–15. Carson’s own view (15) is that ‘the Genesis account is a mixed genre that feels like history and really does give some historical particulars. At the same time, however, it is full of demonstrable symbolism.’ Thus for Carson (30) the serpent of Gen. 3 ‘may be the embodiment of Satan, or he may be the symbol for Satan, and the Bible doesn’t really care to explain which’. My own view is similar. Real events are narrated, albeit in a highly stylized and symbolic way. It is no accident in my view that both protology (‘first things’, as in Gen. 1–3) and eschatology in the narrow sense (‘last things’, as in Rev. 20–22) are both presented in Scripture with a great deal of symbolism. Both paradise lost and paradise regained lie beyond our experience, so this should not surprise the sensitive reader.

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was faced with multiple ways of understanding those days, as can be seen in Paul J. Glenn's paraphrase of part of the *Summa Theologica*:

There are different interpretations of the term day as used in the scriptural account of creation. Some say the six days of active creation are not periods of time but a listing of the order in which creatures were made. Others think these days have time significance, but hardly in the sense of our twenty-four hour day, for that is measured by the sun, and the sun was not created until the fourth day. In any case the six days of creation and the seventh day of rest give an adequate account of the works of creation and their sanctification. St. Augustine makes the days of creation into one period in which God manifests worldly creatures to the angels in seven ways. It must be acknowledged that Scripture uses suitable words to express the works of creation, and to suggest or imply the operation of the three persons of the divine Trinity in these works.<sup>3</sup>

So what we have seen is how Aquinas explores the options: six days of revelation to the angels (Augustine), an orderly listing (others) and special days (still others). He concludes that, whichever it was, God created in an appropriate manner. Wise words.

On the way to the Sabbath God created creatures to image his ways (Gen. 1:27):

So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

The divine intent is stated in the previous verse (Gen. 1:26): 'Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."' God exercises dominion. They exercise dominion. He subdues. They subdue. The notion of humankind in the image of God (*imago Dei*) is also an essentially contested concept to this day. Are human beings images of God like the image of President Lincoln stamped on an American coin? Is the image ontological or substantial? Or are human beings images of God like the image we

<sup>3</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.a, Q. 74, in Glenn 1963: 59–60.

see of ourselves in a mirror? What we do, so the image does. So is the image functional?<sup>4</sup> Or is it neither but rather a relational idea? Just as male and female are the image of God, so there is something relational about God on the inside (*ad intra*). Ultimately the doctrine of the Trinity lies behind our being the images of God in this view. C. John Collins wisely suggests, ‘Scholars will advocate one of these three over the others, but we will note that they need not be mutually exclusive. Perhaps none is right, or some combination is right, or maybe we simply cannot come to a firm conclusion.’<sup>5</sup> Following Aquinas here one could say whatever ‘image’ means, it is an appropriate way to describe who we are as creatures, *vis-à-vis* God. What is clear is that on this sixth day the creature is to act in Godlike ways in the created order. Furthermore Genesis 2 and 3 make plain that this creature can be God’s speech partner. These three foundational chapters merit closer attention from this angle of vision. What portrayal of God is found in them? How is God rendered?

## The portrayal of God in the beginning

The word to sum up the God of Genesis 1 is ‘transcendent’. This God has no rivals. He stands on the other side of the ontological ledger to creatures. He is beyond creatures. Creation is spoken into being by God. God’s repeated speech acts are causative. As we observed previously, over the first three days various environments are formed: sky, next the waters and finally earth (Gen. 1:2–13). Over the remaining three they are filled: sun, moon and stars, next come the sea creatures and lastly the animals and humankind (Gen. 1:14–31). God is like a great emperor. His word works and is enough. Divine action is speech action. His words do things. And with that speech the Spirit also is at work. Indeed spirit or breath is the vehicle for the spoken word with us and with God.

In Genesis 2 God not only speaks but he fashions. Like a potter with clay Adam is formed from the earth: ‘Then the LORD God formed

<sup>4</sup> Dearman (2002: 39) favours the functional view in the light of ‘the discovery in 1979 of a statue of an Aramean king with a bilingual inscription (Assyrian, Aramaic), where the statue is referred to as the “image” and “likeness” of the king. According to the inscription, King Hada-Yithi placed the statue of himself in a city to remind his subjects of him and his rule when he is physically absent from them.’ Dearman does not tease this out at any length. But in this view Adam and Eve arguably are living ‘statutes’ representing the living God and marking the rest of the created order as belonging to God.

<sup>5</sup> Collins 2006: 63.

a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being' (Gen. 2:7).<sup>6</sup> God commands Adam regarding the task to control and care for the garden sanctuary: 'The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it' (Gen. 2:15). If Genesis 1 presents humankind in royal terms as rulers, Genesis 2 renders Adam as a priest who is to relate to the garden zone like the later Levites are to relate to the tabernacle and temple. Gordon J. Wenham comments:

Similarly, [*šmr*] 'to guard, to keep', has the simple profane sense of 'guard' (4:9; 30:31), but it is even more commonly used in legal texts of observing religious commands and duties (17:9; Lev 18:5) and particularly of the Levitical responsibility for guarding the tabernacle from intruders (Num 1:53; 3:7–8). It is striking that here and in the priestly law these two terms are juxtaposed (Num 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6), another pointer to the interplay of tabernacle and Eden symbolism already noted (cf. *Ber. Rab.* 16:5).<sup>7</sup>

Significantly the garden sanctuary does not appear to constitute the geographical limits for the Adamic task. Following the logic of the narrative that begins in the previous chapter, humankind is to exercise dominion over the fish of the sea. This is hardly satisfied by a horticultural existence. In other words, the garden sanctuary is best seen as a staging post for the task of Edenizing the entire world. William J. Dumbrell makes the point well: 'As a paradigm of the end, Genesis 2 thus displays the harmony that humankind's dominion was to secure the world at large. Adam's role in Eden was to extend the contours of the garden to the whole world.'<sup>8</sup>

Clearly in Genesis 2 God is portrayed as transcendent once more. What the human experience of being so commanded by God sounded or felt like is not explored. The text has little interest in human psychology per se. Moreover this chapter presents God as a farmer who planted the garden that became the Adamic responsibility: 'Now the

<sup>6</sup> Dunn (2008: 32) fancifully argues that 'In a not improper sense the account of the man's creation in Gen. 2:7 is an incarnation – God breathing the breath of life into the human shape formed from the clay of the ground so that man comes to be as a living being.' Dunn admits (31) that he has difficulty in distinguishing 'a person inspired to the nth degree by the spirit of the deity and one who incarnates the word of that deity'.

<sup>7</sup> Wenham 2004, comment on Gen. 2:15.

<sup>8</sup> Dumbrell in Hafemann 2002: 62.

LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed' (Gen. 2:8).

As literary scholar Leland Ryken suggests, the scriptural story is a comedy in literary terms. He writes regarding comedy that it is 'a work of literature in which the plot structure is U-shaped, with the action beginning in prosperity, descending into potentially tragic events, and ending happily'.<sup>9</sup> The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* amplifies his point in relation to the Bible per se:

The overall plot of the Bible is a U-shaped comic plot. The action begins with a perfect world inhabited by perfect people. It descends into the misery of fallen history and ends with a new world of total happiness and the conquest of evil. The book of Revelation is the story of the happy ending par excellence, as a conquering hero defeats evil, marries a bride and lives happily ever after in a palace glittering with jewels. From Genesis to Revelation we see the U-shaped structure working itself out: from the harmony of Genesis 1 – 2 through the disharmony of Genesis 3 – Revelation 20 to harmony again and albeit of a higher kind in Revelation 21 – 22.<sup>10</sup>

This is a refreshing way to view the biblical accounts. Clearly Scripture seen in these terms is no scientific monograph.<sup>11</sup> Its interests lie elsewhere.

In Genesis 3 the comedy takes its dark turn in what Augustine famously termed 'the Fall' and more recently Jacques Ellul 'the Rupture'. Importantly for our purposes in this section the transcendent God of Genesis 1 and 2 is also now to be understood as concomitant as well. God comes alongside his creature made in his image, as Genesis 3:8 shows. This God walks in the garden: 'Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.'

<sup>9</sup> Ryken 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Interestingly the comedic curve is seen in the story of Christ's incarnation and exaltation, as in Phil. 2:5–11. The state of glory gives way to the state of humiliation, which in turn gives way to the state of glory regained.

<sup>11</sup> That Scripture is not a scientific text has not always been appreciated. The so-called Mosaic Science of the seventeenth century comes to mind and those on the continent and England who wanted to found cosmology, astronomy, physics and chemistry on the exegesis of Scripture in conscious opposition to the 'heathenish' philosophy of Aristotle. See the discussion in Cole 1990: 22–23.

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The idea of divine concomitance adds an important nuance in understanding the divine relation to creatures. The traditional categories are transcendence and immanence. Transcendence has been thematized earlier in the discussion. Immanence refers to God's indwelling creation and working within it. Concomitance adds to these categories the notion of alongsideness or God with us. The notion of the divine alongsideness is important in both Old Testament and New. For example, Moses pleaded for the divine accompaniment in Exodus 33:15–16: 'Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"' And Jesus promised it to the eleven disciples in Matthew 28:18–20 in the famous Great Commission passage:

Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Indeed Jesus arguably is entrusting to the disciples the Adamic task that Adam and Israel failed in, namely to be fruitful and multiply.<sup>12</sup>

Process theologian Norman Pittenger articulates these categories clearly when he writes:

This God, who is the one and only God, is above and transcendent to the creation – inexhaustible and beyond our human grasping. This God is active within the creation, enabling its response to the divine intention – here is the divine immanence. This God is also alongside the creation too, disclosed by act in the affairs of the world; here is what I like to name the divine concomitance.<sup>13</sup>

The supreme instantiation of divine concomitance is the incarnation of the divine Son of God (John 1:14), as I shall argue in a later chapter.

<sup>12</sup> Beale 2004: 198.

<sup>13</sup> Pittenger n.d. One does not need to buy into Pittenger's process metaphysic to appreciate his insight on this particular point.

Importantly divine transcendence allows no room for pantheism. The Creator–creature distinction is the most basic metaphysical one in Scripture. The divine immanence and concomitance leave no room for deism as though the Creator has lost interest in creation.

Another significant question arises from reviewing the early chapters of Genesis. How are we to understand the language of speaking and seeing of Genesis 1, of resting, planting and commanding in Genesis 2 and walking in Genesis 3? The traditional way of addressing the question is to view this language as anthropomorphic.<sup>14</sup> An anthropomorphism (*anthrōpos*, ‘human’; *morphē*, ‘shape’) is a description of God in human terms.<sup>15</sup> R. T. France makes an important observation in relation to biblical anthropomorphisms when he writes:

It is one of the marks our departure from the biblical way of thinking about God, as the living God, that we are inclined to be ashamed of anthropomorphism. . . . We pass it off as a rather regrettable primitive phase in the evolution of thinking about God, just a step higher than sheer idolatry, a crude and unsophisticated language which our more advanced and respectable theology has translated into abstract concepts.<sup>16</sup>

Herman Bavinck, for one, felt no such embarrassment. As he put it, ‘If it is improper to speak about God in anthropomorphic language, the only logical alternative is not to speak about God at all.’<sup>17</sup> For him biblical anthropomorphisms as a category covers the application to God of language about ‘human organs, members, sensations, affections . . . human actions, a certain office, profession, or relation. . . . [and even] language derived from the organic and inorganic

<sup>14</sup> The theological defence of such a term is to argue that it is predicated on an even more profound proposition, namely that humankind – according to Gen. 1 – is theomorphic (God shaped).

<sup>15</sup> Ironically what has become a technical term in theological discussion was first propounded by an eighteenth-century atheist, Paul Henri Thierry, Baron d’Holbach (1723–89). Baron d’Holbach (2007: 124) argued, ‘Thus, in truth, the moral qualities with which he has clothed the divinity, supposes him material, and the most abstract theological notions, are, after all, founded upon a direct, undeniable *Anthropomorphism*’ (original emphasis). According to d’Holbach, theologians could not do otherwise because they themselves are material beings who project on the deity human qualities carried to perfection by a process of abstraction. For a handy discussion of d’Holbach’s views see Banks 2011: 56–58.

<sup>16</sup> France 1970: 17.

<sup>17</sup> Bavinck 1977: 90.

creation'.<sup>18</sup> Useful though this conventional approach is, I believe that more precision would be clarifying. But what would more precision look like? Terence E. Fretheim offers some clarifying distinctions regarding categories of anthropomorphic speech: '(a) form, with its function (mouth, speaking, Num. 12:8); (b) emotional, volitional and mental states (rejoicing, Zeph. 3:17); (c) roles and activities, within the family (parent, Hos. 11:1) or the larger society (shepherd, Ps. 23.1)'.<sup>19</sup> With debts to Fretheim, I propose that when Scripture speaks of divine action in a way that is analogous to human action and roles such as 'speaking', 'seeing' and 'walking', the descriptor to employ is 'anthropopraxism'. However, when Scripture uses terms of God that have their analogues in human emotion, then 'anthropopathism' is the more precise descriptor.<sup>20</sup> Lastly, when Scripture ascribes human organs to God or facial features or limbs, then 'anthropomorphism' is the appropriate term.<sup>21</sup> In fact this last category admits of further refinement. When the text speaks of an appearance of God in human form per se, then we are dealing with an anthropomorphic theophany.<sup>22</sup> (In scholarly discourse, a theophany is an appearance of a god.<sup>23</sup>) Genesis 6 is a case in point: 'The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 86–88. His is the most expansive view of biblical anthropomorphism that I have encountered. To include 'language derived from the organic and inorganic creation' I find puzzling.

<sup>19</sup> Fretheim 1984: 6.

<sup>20</sup> For a more sophisticated taxonomy see Hamori 2008: 26–34. Her categories include, in order of discussion, concrete anthropomorphism, envisioned anthropomorphism, immanent anthropomorphism, transcendent anthropomorphism and figurative anthropomorphism. It is worth noting that some scholars reject the attempt to refine the category of anthropomorphism. For example, Caird (1980: 173) does not accept the distinction between anthropomorphism and anthropopathism. His main argument is that these two categories do not cover the range of biblical materials. What is needed is coverage of 'metaphors of activity and relationship'. My category of anthropopraxism addresses precisely that desideratum.

<sup>21</sup> Fretheim 1984: 6.

<sup>22</sup> 'Anthropomorphic theophany' is borrowed from Barr 1960: 34. I prefer Barr's 'anthropomorphic theophany' to Terrien's (1978: 68) 'epiphanic visitation'. Terrien argues that theophany involves natural phenomena (e.g. light, darkness, whirlwinds, lightning, thunder, smoke, *inter alia*). However, I believe that the qualifier 'anthropomorphic' is precise enough to aid, not hinder, discussion of certain biblical accounts (e.g. Jacob and the wrestler in Gen. 32:22–32).

<sup>23</sup> Niehaus (1997: 1247) points out that the Greek term *theophaneia* lies behind our word 'theophany' (*theos*, 'god', and *phainō*, 'I appear'), and 'was used to describe a festival at Delphi at which images of the gods were shown to the people'. The whole article is an excellent treatment of theophany in brief compass. For a more sustained treatment of theophany and one that Niehaus heavily draws upon see Kuntz 1967, esp. ch. 1.

become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled' (Gen. 6:5–6). The Lord sees human wickedness (anthropopraxism). He is grieved and has pain (anthropopathism). This pain fills God's heart (anthropomorphism).

## Some early Christian commentary

Early Christian commentators and preachers had to face the challenge of anthropomorphisms, anthropopathisms and anthropopraxisms. The depiction of God's walking in the garden in Genesis 3:8 provides a case in point. Ephrem the Syrian (born c. 306; fl. 363–373) comments:

It was not only by the patience he exhibited that God wished to help them [Adam and Eve]; He also wished to benefit them by the sound of his feet. God endowed his silent footsteps with sound so that Adam and Eve might be prepared, at that sound, to make supplication before him who made the sound.<sup>24</sup>

This early church poet seems to be working with some notion of divine accommodation to human need to account for the language.

John Chrysostom (344/354–407; fl. 386–407), the famous early church leader and preacher, wrestles with the question 'Does God have feet?' There were some in his context who appeared to take Genesis 3:8 with a naive literalism. Chrysostom asks:

What are you saying – God strolls? Are we assigning feet to him? Have we no exalted conception of him? No, God does not stroll – perish the thought. How could he, present as he is everywhere and filling everything with his presence? Can he for whom heaven is his throne and earth a footstool be confined to the garden? What right minded person could say this?<sup>25</sup>

Having dismissed literalism, what positively can be said according to Chrysostom?

<sup>24</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Genesis 2.24.1*, quoted in Louth 2001: 82.

<sup>25</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 17:3–4*, quoted in Louth 2001: 82.

So what is the meaning of this statement, ‘They heard the sound of the Lord as he strolled in the garden in the evening?’ He wanted to provide them with such an experience as would induce in them a state of anguish, which in fact happened: they had so striking an experience that they tried to hide from the presence of God.<sup>26</sup>

Significantly Chrysostom’s doctrine of God trumps a literalist hermeneutic: ‘Have we no exalted conception of him?’ He seeks to protect the idea of the divine transcendence with his question. This insight will prove important, for, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, the biblical writers were very much aware that God belongs to a different order of being to ourselves.

## God prepares the way to what end?

More than once in this chapter thus far the notion that God has prepared the way from the beginning has been thematized. The question now must be put as to the end in view. Hints have been given. The Adamic task is royal and priestly. Recent scholarship throws great light on the question, and for the purposes of this chapter I shall follow John H. Walton’s discussion.<sup>27</sup> In a nutshell God from the start has created with the end in view of living with the creature in his image. Put another way, the purpose of creation is divine habitation in a cosmic palace-temple. This is such a crucial point that elaboration is needed.

According to Walton, Genesis 1 is a temple text. The accent in the chapter is not on the material origins of the universe but on how God prepares a habitation for himself. In the ancient Near East such a habitation is a temple. He sums up his argument in the following way: ‘In summary, we have suggested that the seven days are not given as the period of time over which the material cosmos came into existence, but the period of time devoted to the inauguration of the functions of the cosmic temple and . . . the entrance of the presence of God to take up his rest that creates the temple.’<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Beale (2004: 81–121) also provides an excellent discussion of this idea. He acknowledges his debts to Walton.

<sup>28</sup> Walton 2009: 92. Fascinatingly the making of the creation, the tabernacle and the temple is structured around seven successive divine acts or a time period involving seven. See the fine discussion in Beale 2004: 60–61.

Walton's thesis needs amplification in that the early chapters of Genesis not only present the making of a temple but a palace-temple.<sup>29</sup> Rikki E. Watts asks a crucial question:

But is there any evidence of this notion in the Bible? The data is overwhelming. . . . In fact, the Hebrew Bible is awash with architectural imagery when describing creation. It speaks of the foundations of the earth (Ps 18:15; 82:5; 102:25; 104:5; Prov 8:29; Isa 51:13, 16; 2 Sam 22:8, 16; Zech 12:1; cf. 2 Sam 22:8), the pillars of the earth and of the heavens (1 Sam 2:8; Job 9:6; Ps 75:3; Job 26:11), the heavens' windows (Gen 7:11; 8:2; Isa 24:18; Mal 3:10; 2 Kgs 7:2; Ps 104:2), the stretching out of the heavens like a canopy/tent (Isa 40:12, 22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 48:13; 51:13; Jer 10:12; 31:37; 32:17; 51:15; Amos 9:6; Zech 12:1; Job 9:8; Ps 102:25), and storehouses (Deut 28:12; Jer 10:13; 50:25; 51:16; cf. Ps 33:7; 135:7; Job 38:22).<sup>30</sup>

He asks a further question:

But what kind of building is this? As Isaiah 66:1 makes clear, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?' Where does one find a throne and a footstool if not in a palace, and what is the palace of Yahweh if not a temple? And note too the image of resting in his house (= Temple) in the light of Yahweh's resting in his completed abode on the seventh day of Genesis 1. In this sense, the whole of creation is seen as Yahweh's palace-temple, and hence the reason for his Jerusalem temple itself being a microcosm, a mini universe: it serves to remind Israel that the whole world is Yahweh's. Granted, Genesis 1 does not explicitly describe Yahweh as actually rolling up his sleeves and 'building' why should it when a truly Lordly Yahweh would merely have to give the word? But given the rather widespread Ancient Near Eastern notion linking creation, defeat-of-chaos, and temple-building, and the thorough-going architectural imagery which characterizes the biblical conceptualizing of creation, it would be very odd if Genesis 1 were not

<sup>29</sup> Walton (2009: 75) touches on the palace idea but does not develop it. He writes, 'In the same way, temple is built in the ancient world so that deity can have a center for his rule. The temple is the residence and palace of the gods.'

<sup>30</sup> R. E. Watts 2002.

to be understood along the lines of cosmic palace-temple building. As the Great King, Elohim, naturally creates realms for the lesser rulers (cf. Gen 1:16) as he forms his palace-temple out of the deep and gives order to and fills it. And as the Great King, having ordered his realm, he now rules over all in ‘Sabbath’ rest (see Exod 20), sitting in the great pavilion of his cosmos-palace-temple (cf. Ps 93).<sup>31</sup>

The idea of Emmanuel, ‘God with us’, is there in the biblical account from the very beginning.

### God prepares the way by promise

As mentioned previously, in the divine comedy the harmonies of Genesis 1 – 2 with God and humankind at peace, humankind and the rest of creation at peace, humankind and the environment at peace give way in Genesis 3 to discord and fracture. As Thomas F. Torrance argues, ‘It belongs to the nature of sin to divide, to create disorder, to disrupt, to destroy fellowship.’<sup>32</sup> In Genesis 3:1–5 we learn that the catalyst comes from outside the garden sanctuary in the guise of the serpent armed with dark innuendo:

Now the snake was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden”?’

The woman said to the snake, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.”’

‘You will not certainly die,’ the snake said to the woman. ‘For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Dumbrell (in Hafemann 2002: 58) adds a further insight: ‘The placement of humankind in the garden as God’s image furthers the analogy to the temple, with its image of the deity, drawing together the motifs of kingship and the temple at the beginning of the Bible.’ Watts (2002) points out that the last act in temple construction was the placement of the image of the deity in the sacred space. In the light of the temple idea, theological reflection suggests that only a living image is able to be the image of a living God. This may be another reason why idolatry is such folly in biblical perspective.

<sup>32</sup> Torrance 2008: 38.

The character of God cannot be trusted. His word is not to be believed.<sup>33</sup> Something good is being held back from the man and the woman. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not to be resisted but embraced. After all it is so alluring, a sensual delight (Gen. 3:6): ‘When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.’<sup>34</sup> The results of the disobedience are catastrophic. No longer is there the fellowship between God and his image. Fellowship gives way to fear and flight from the presence (Gen. 3:8): ‘Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.’ Meredith G. Kline offers an intriguing interpretation of this episode:

We may then translate Genesis 3:8a: ‘They heard the sound of Yahweh God traversing the garden as the Spirit of the day.’ The frightening noise of the approaching Glory theophany told them that God was coming to enter into judgment with them. The sound of judgment day preceded the awesome sight of the parousia of their Judge. It was evidently heard from afar before the searching, exposing beams of the theophanic light pierced through the trees in the midst of the garden. Momentarily, then, it seemed to them possible to hide from the eyes of Glory among the shadows of the foliage. Thus, inadvertently, they positioned themselves at the place of judgment in the midst of the trees of the garden, at the site of the tree of judicial discernment between good and evil.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> For a brief but very useful treatment of Gen. 3 and how to understand the account as well as the catastrophic entailments it delineates see Carson 2010: 29–34. Beale (2004: 396) comments, ‘Adam and Eve did not remember God’s word, and they “fell”, and they failed to extend the boundaries of God’s Edenic temple.’ The first part of the comment is hardly strong enough. The second part is extremely insightful.

<sup>34</sup> Some argue that Adam and Eve stand for every man and every woman. Thus Gen. 3 is the story of each one of us told in a highly symbolic way. In this view Adam and Eve were not historical individuals. Guinan (2008) argues, ‘The man and woman of Genesis 2–3, as well as other characters of the primal stories, are intended to represent an Everyman and Everywoman.’ But as I have written elsewhere (Cole 2009b: 57), ‘logically speaking, if the Genesis stories are about all of us *ex hypothesi*, then they are about the first of us, and consequently belief in real personages and a real space-time fall is unavoidable even on the parabolic or mythic view’.

<sup>35</sup> Kline 1977–8.

In brief Adam and Eve meet with God's Spirit in judicial mode. Hence they hide. There is merit in his argument. The questioning is indeed confrontational in Genesis 3:9, 11 and 13. Furthermore in verse 24 the man and the woman are sent out of the garden and not simply led out. Even so, there is grace in the provision of a better and more permanent covering in Genesis 3:21 to address their nakedness.<sup>36</sup>

The cascading consequences of the primordial disobedience are manifold. The rupture is not simply an external one between God and humankind, but an internal one. There is shame at one's nakedness. Adam answers God, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid' (Gen. 3:10). Consciousness of the other has become self-consciousness. The first pair has entered the dungeon of self-preoccupation. Furthermore there is not only the vertical relational rupture with God but a horizontal one between the sexes. The will to relate, exemplified in the one-flesh union of Genesis 2:24, becomes the will to blame ('the woman you put here with me') and the will to dominate ('he will rule over you'). Lastly, the downward relation to the rest of creation is disrupted such that ultimately the environment triumphs over us and back to dust we go. The world of Genesis 1 – 2 is no longer accessible. The cherubim with the flaming swords exclude the possibility of a simple return to paradise (Gen. 3:23–24): 'So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life' – paradise lost, as Milton wrote. And yet there is evidence of mercy in the midst of judgment. The man and woman attempted to cover their nakedness with fig leaves (Gen. 3:7). The text does not elaborate but clearly they were no Versaces. And so God provides (Gen. 3:21): 'The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.' Indeed as I have written elsewhere, 'Even the banishment from the garden zone may have been a mercy, given

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Some of his interpretation is more eisegesis than exegesis though: 'It was evidently heard from afar before the searching, *exposing beams of the theophanic light pierced through the trees in the midst of the garden*' (my emphasis). Matthews, Chavalas and Walton (2000) in their comment on Gen. 3:8 lend some independent support to Kline's view: 'Akkadian terminology has demonstrated that the word translated "day" also has the meaning "storm." This meaning can be seen also for the Hebrew word in Zephaniah 2:2. It is often connected to the deity coming in a storm of judgment. If this is the correct rendering of the word in this passage, they heard the thunder (the word translated "sound" is often connected to thunder) of the Lord moving about in the garden in the wind of the storm. In this case it is quite understandable why they are hiding.'

the narrative logic of the account. Man and woman are prevented from eating of the tree of life and thus kept mercifully from being locked into their alienated state.<sup>37</sup>

By the end of Genesis 1 – 3 we see that the creation purpose to provide a dwelling place for God with humanity is challenged by both human and angelic sin. But there is light in this darkness: in the midst of judgment the text of the *protoevangelium* comes into view. God will remove the challenge but at a cost. He addresses the serpent as follows:

So the LORD God said to the snake,

‘Because you have done this,  
“Cursed are you above all livestock  
and all wild animals!  
You will crawl on your belly  
and you will eat dust  
all the days of your life.  
*And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel.”*’

(Gen. 3:14–15, my emphasis)

The blessing language of the creation account in Genesis 1 is now counterbalanced by the words of cursing in the Fall narrative of Genesis 3 (cf. Gen. 1:22, 28; 2:3, 14, 17). According to Gordon J. Wenham the reference to the serpent’s eating dust is full of significance: “‘Eat dust.’ The serpent will experience abject humiliation. Metaphorically eating dust is what happens to one’s enemies (cf. Ps 72:9; Isa 49:23; Mic 7:17).”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the ‘enmity’ in view suggests a long period of conflict rather than a short one (cf. Num. 35:21–22; Ezek. 25:15; 35:5).<sup>39</sup>

C. John Collins, in a careful discussion of Genesis 3:15, captures the programmatic nature of the Genesis text:

Hence, this is in fact a promise that God will act for the benefit of mankind by defeating the serpent (really the Dark Power that used

<sup>37</sup> Cole 2009b: 57.

<sup>38</sup> Wenham 2004, comment on Gen. 3:14.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., comment on Gen. 3:15.

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the serpent as its mouthpiece) in combat and defeat him, thus bringing benefits to mankind. That is, he is a champion. We are further entitled to say that he will be a human (an offspring of the woman), but one with power extraordinary enough to win. . . . The rest of Genesis will unfold the idea of this offspring and lay the foundation for the developed messianic teaching of the prophets. We must remember that an author put this text here, and we suppose that he did so with his plan for this unfolding in mind; hence for us to ask whether this is messianic may mislead us: instead, we may say that Genesis fosters a messianic expectation, of which this verse is the headwaters.<sup>40</sup>

There is admirable caution here in not overstating the case. It is in the retrospective light of the canonical unfolding of the biblical story that the programmatic nature of the *protoevangelium* comes into view. Hence the coining of a term meaning ‘first gospel’, which presupposes the gospel that came much later.

Genesis 3 does not make clear in any deep way just how the serpent’s fate will be sealed. What is clear is that a male descendant of the woman will be involved. Triumph will come through suffering and that suffering will involve both the male offspring and the serpent:

he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel.  
(Gen. 3:15)

The serpent will lose definitively, a crushed head, while the seed of the woman will sustain a struck heel. A subsequent book in the Torah underlines the nature of the challenge posed by the divine to human life in the new normal or abnormal (the post-Fall world). Leviticus reads strangely to modern Western ears: priests, sacrifices, blood and ritual. However, once the issue comes into view, namely of how a holy

<sup>40</sup> Collins 2006: 157. According to Dumbrell (2001b: 27–28), ‘Such [interpretation], in fact, is found in the Septuagint, a very early witness to a traditional interpretation, where the neuter noun seed of verse 15 is treated syntactically as masculine to refer to the messiah. In the Palestinian Targums, Aramaic translations of the Hebrew noun *‘āqēb* (heel, end) leads to a messianic understanding. The verse is taken to mean that the serpent and his descendants will bite the woman’s descendants on the “heel” but also that there will be a remedy at the “end,” in the day of the messiah. (Interestingly there is no evidence in later rabbinic sources of a messianic interpretation.) According to Irenaeus and the early church fathers, the woman’s seed refers to humankind generally and then to Christ specifically.’

God can be present in the midst of an unholy people, then the logic of Leviticus becomes much less opaque. Ultimately atonement is needed, and at a cost.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored the idea of preparation from the beginning. That preparation is for the dwelling of God with humankind in a sacred space that is a palace-temple. The six-day process is best seen in architectural terms. God is building a habitation for himself. The divine largesse is shown in the way God creates a creature as his image with whom he can dwell. This is sheer grace in that there is no hint in the Genesis text that there was divine necessity to so create. Creation is an expression of divine freedom and generosity. However, discord entered the scene with devastating consequences for the habitation of God with humankind. Even so, the divine project is not abandoned. There is not only judgment but also the promise (the *protoevangelium*) of the world set right. The divine comedy will reach its harmony once more, the serpent will be defeated and a male descendant of the woman will be the key to the resolution of the conflict. The depiction of God in these early chapters is filled with anthropomorphism, anthropopathism and anthropopraxism. This depiction we shall continue to explore as we follow the biblical plotline.

## Excursus: Would the incarnation have taken place irrespective of the Fall?

The question is whether the incarnation would have taken place irrespective of the Fall of Genesis 3. In other words was an incarnation of deity always the divine intention? It is not a new question.

The major figure in the early church period who turned his mind to the question was Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662). Maximus argued that the incarnation would have taken place irrespective of the Fall. The incarnation of the Logos was always the divine intention and the grand eschatological goal of creation.<sup>41</sup> The question received more attention in the medieval period in the Western church.<sup>42</sup> (According to Meyendorff it was never a major question of interest in the Byzantine church.) In the West, Honorius of Autun (fl. c. 1106–35) believed that

<sup>41</sup> Meyendorff 1975: 160–161.

<sup>42</sup> For a useful discussion of how the medieval Christians addressed the question see Sheppard 2005: 61–76.

the incarnation was always the divine intention, as did Rupert of Deutz (c. 1075–1129). Aquinas (c. 1225–74) was more cautious than Honorius and Rupert. Aquinas was well aware of differences of theological opinion on the question, but on balance thought that the incarnation was God’s remedy for sin and presupposed the Fall. Aquinas argued:

Some say that the Son of God would have become incarnate, even if humanity had not sinned. Others assert the opposite, and it would seem that our assent ought to be given to this opinion. For those things that originate from God’s will, lying beyond what is due to the creature, can only be known to us through being revealed in Holy Scripture, in which the divine will is made known to us. Therefore since the sin of the first human being is described as the cause of the incarnation throughout Holy Scripture, it is more in accordance with this to say that the work of the incarnation was ordained as a remedy for sin, so that, if sin had not existed, the incarnation would never have taken place.<sup>43</sup>

Even so, Aquinas had a healthy respect for the freedom of God: ‘Yet the power of God is not limited in this way. Even if sin had not existed, God could still have become incarnate.’<sup>44</sup>

Among those who believed that the incarnation would have taken place irrespective of the Fall, two main rationales for the divine purpose were suggested. Both Maximus the Confessor and Honorius of Autun saw deification as the key. The divine purpose was to make humanity divine through union with the divine-human Son.<sup>45</sup> Rupert of Deutz suggested another reason: ‘he [Christ] had no necessary cause for becoming man, other than that his love’s “delights were to be with the children of men”’.<sup>46</sup> For Rupert the incarnation was the climax of concomitance.

The medieval debate may seem particularly esoteric to those whose high view of Scripture makes them cautious about going beyond what is written. However, it does raise the importance of having some concept of dogmatic rank. Dogmatic rank is the idea that not all doctrinal claims stand on the same level. As we saw above, Aquinas was sensitive to the fact that ‘those things that originate from God’s

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in McGrath 2011: 282. McGrath offers no opinion of his own on the question.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Sheppard 2005: cf. 288–299 and 354.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 361.

will, lying beyond what is due to the creature, can only be known to us through being revealed in Holy Scripture, in which the divine will is made known to us'.<sup>47</sup> The Christian past is indeed helpful here. In the Reformation era the early Lutherans and later Reformed divines posited three levels of theological claim. Fundamental articles are those doctrines 'without which Christianity cannot exist and the integrity of which is necessary to the preservation of the Faith' (e.g. the resurrection of Christ).<sup>48</sup> Secondary fundamental articles are derived from the primary ones (e.g. how Christ is present in the Lord's Supper). The Lutherans argued that Calvinists were Christians because they held the primary fundamental articles but were clearly not Lutherans because of their view of the Lord's Supper. The Calvinists denied the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation.<sup>49</sup> Non-fundamental articles were those theological claims that did not affect one's salvation and the maintenance of the faith (e.g. the exact identity of the Antichrist).

In the light of the above I would assign the answer to the question of whether there would have been an incarnation irrespective of the Fall to the non-fundamental article category. The ever-present danger to the evangelical movement is to confuse these categories. The main thing is to make the main thing the main thing. This wisdom also applies to doctrine. Even so, if John H. Walton is correct, then Old Testament scholarship and ancient Near Eastern analogies throw fresh light on this old question. If Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 is a temple text, then the divine design was always to establish the divine presence on earth among God's creatures in a cosmic temple, which the Garden of Eden anticipates. This thesis, in my view, tips the speculative balance in favour of Maximus the Confessor, Honorius of Autun and Rupert of Deutz. The incarnation is no afterthought.

In terms of dogmatic rank, both the question and my answer are speculative and to some presumptuous.<sup>50</sup> Even so, Colin E. Gunton wisely argues, 'Would Christ have come even had there been no fall? Hypothetical questions are dangerous in theology, because it [theology]

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in McGrath 2011: 282.

<sup>48</sup> Muller 1986: 45. For the substance of this paragraph I am indebted to Muller's work, 45–46.

<sup>49</sup> McGrath (2011: 467) sums up the Lutheran doctrine in these terms: 'The theory of the real presence especially associated with Martin Luther, which holds that the substance of the Eucharistic bread and wine are given together with the substance of the body and blood of Christ.'

<sup>50</sup> For example, Calvin (2002b: 2.12.4) argues, 'But since all Scripture proclaims that to become our Redeemer he was clothed with flesh, it is too presumptuous to imagine another reason or another end.'

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is concerned with what God has done, not what he might have done instead. But in this case the question enables us to bring out the point of what has happened.<sup>51</sup> He maintains – following Edward Irving – that sin and evil may have dictated the form of Christ’s coming but not the fact that he would come.

<sup>51</sup> Gunton 2002: 67–68.