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CHRIST AS CREATOR

Origins of a New Testament Doctrine

SEAN M. MCDONOUGH



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Preface

The topic of Christ and creation has occupied my thinking one way or another for the past decade. I had the opportunity to pull these thoughts together during a sabbatical leave granted to me by Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 2006–7. I am grateful to the Trustees and administration for their generosity in offering the sabbatical, and to my colleagues for covering my course load in my absence. The research was carried out at St Mary's College in the University of St Andrews in Scotland. My thanks to all the staff and students of St Mary's (particularly my associates in the Black room) whose hospitality made the year so delightful for myself and my family.

Special thanks to Richard Bauckham, who supported this project throughout and commented extensively on the manuscript, and to Larry Hurtado, who offered many critical insights on my argument. The research would have been impossible without the assistance of the invaluable James Darlack, reference librarian at Gordon-Conwell, with assistance from Christopher Weaver. I am equally indebted to my research assistant, Elisa Stern, for her painstaking labors in preparing the manuscript, and to Elizabeth Robottom of Oxford University Press for her continual help throughout the publishing process.

My greatest debts are to my family, whose support made my labor possible: my parents and siblings, my children, Siobhan, Patrick, Keanu, and Daniel, and above all my wife Ariana, without whose help none of this would have been possible.

Finally, it is only fitting in introducing a book of this nature to acknowledge that all our creative activity is in fact (to use Tolkien's term) *subcreation*; and so I conclude with thanks to the God who is 'over all and through all and in all' (Eph. 4: 6).

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Abbreviations

GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

1Q, 2Q, 3Q, etc.	Numbered caves of Qumran
1QH	1Q Hodayoth (Thanksgiving)
BDAG	Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, <i>A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd edn. (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2001)
ESV	Bible: English Standard Version
<i>Exod. Rabb.</i>	<i>Exodus Rabbah</i>
<i>Gen. Rabb.</i>	<i>Genesis Rabbah</i>
HALOT	Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, Academic, 2000)
<i>Irenaeus</i>	
AH	<i>Adversus Haereses</i>
<i>Demonstration</i>	<i>The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching</i>
<i>Josephus</i>	
Ap.	<i>Contra Apionem</i>
<i>Justin Martyr</i>	
<i>Apol. 1–2</i>	<i>First/Second Apology</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
KJV	Bible: King James Version
LAB	<i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i>
LX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	Bible: New International Version
NRSV	Bible: New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament

Origen

<i>Comm. in Joh.</i>	<i>Commentarius in Evangelium Johannis</i>
OT	Old Testament
RSV	Bible: Revised Standard Version
Sanh.	Sanhedrin
ShirShab	Song of the Sabbath Sacrifice
SVF	<i>Stoicorum veterum fragmenta</i>

CLASSICAL TEXTS**Aetius**

<i>Plac.</i>	<i>Placita philosophorum</i>
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Aristotle

<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metaphysics</i>
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Cicero

<i>De nat. deorum</i>	<i>De natura deorum</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>On the Republic</i>

Diogenes Laertius

<i>Vit.</i>	<i>Vitae et sententiae philosophorum</i>
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Eusebius

<i>Praep. Ev.</i>	<i>Praeparatio Evangelica</i>
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Hesiod

<i>Theog.</i>	<i>Theogony</i>
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Homer

<i>Il.</i>	<i>The Iliad</i>
<i>Od.</i>	<i>The Odyssey</i>

Lucretius

<i>De rerum nat.</i>	<i>De rerum natura</i>
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Ovid

<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metamorphoses</i>
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Philo

<i>Abr.</i>	<i>De Abrahamo</i>
<i>Cher.</i>	<i>De Cherubim</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>De confusione linguarum</i>

<i>Cong.</i>	<i>De congressu eruditionis gratia</i>
<i>Det.</i>	<i>Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat</i>
<i>Deus</i>	<i>Quod Deus sit immutabilis</i>
<i>Ebr.</i>	<i>De ebrietate</i>
<i>Fug.</i>	<i>De fuga et inventione</i>
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Legum allegoriae</i>
<i>Legat.</i>	<i>Legatio ad Gaium</i>
<i>Migr.</i>	<i>De migratione Abrahami</i>
<i>Mos.</i>	<i>De vita Moysis</i>
<i>Mut.</i>	<i>De mutatione nominum</i>
<i>Opif.</i>	<i>De opificio mundi</i>
<i>Plant.</i>	<i>De plantatione</i>
<i>Post.</i>	<i>De posteritate Caini</i>
<i>Prob.</i>	<i>Quod omnis probus liber sit</i>
<i>QG</i>	<i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim</i>
<i>Sacr.</i>	<i>De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini</i>
<i>Somn.</i>	<i>De somniis</i>
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>De specialibus legibus</i>

Plato

<i>Crat.</i>	<i>Cratylus</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Republic</i>
<i>Tim.</i>	<i>Timaeus</i>

Plutarch

<i>De def. orac.</i>	<i>De defectu oraculorum</i>
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Proclus

<i>In Plat. remp.</i>	<i>In Platonis rem publicam commentarii</i>
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Seneca

<i>Nat. quaest.</i>	<i>Naturales quaestiones</i>
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline oracles</i>

Xenocrates

<i>Xen. Fr.</i>	<i>Xenocrates, Fragments</i>
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BIBLICAL AND APOCRYPHAL TEXTS

<i>1 Chr.</i>	<i>1 Chronicles</i>
<i>Col.</i>	<i>Colossians</i>
<i>Cor.</i>	<i>Corinthians</i>

Dan.	Daniel
Deut.	Deuteronomy
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes
En.	Enoch
Eph.	Ephesians
Exod.	Exodus
Ezek.	Ezekiel
Gal.	Galatians
Gen.	Genesis
Hab.	Habakkuk
Hag.	Haggai
Heb.	Hebrews
Isa.	Isaiah
Jas.	James
Jer.	Jeremiah
Jos. Asen.	Joseph and Aseneth
Jub.	Jubilees
Kgs.	Kings
Lev.	Leviticus
Macc.	Maccabees
Mal.	Malachi
Matt.	Matthew
Mic.	Micah
Num.	Numbers
Pet.	Peter
Phil.	Philippians
P. Man.	Prayer of Manasseh
Prov.	Proverbs
Ps(s).	Psalms(s)
Ps. Sol.	Psalms of Solomon
Rev.	Revelation
Rom.	Romans
Sam.	Samuel
Sir.	Sirach
Test. Abr.	Testament of Abraham
Test. Dan	Testament of Dan
Test. Jud.	Testament of Judah
Thess.	Thessalonians
Wis.	Wisdom of

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1

Introduction

Of all the statements made about Jesus Christ in the New Testament, the assertion that God made the world ‘through him’ (1 Cor. 8: 6; Col. 1: 15–20; John 1: 1–3, Heb. 1: 2) is surely one of the most enigmatic.¹ It is a difficult task to think together a Jewish craftsman from Nazareth and the creator of the cosmos. It becomes more difficult still when the passages in question give very little hint as to how the belief arose, or precisely what it was thought to mean. Like Melchizedek, the doctrine emerges ‘without father, without mother, without genealogy’ (Heb. 7: 3), and seems to disappear almost immediately after its introduction.

Yet the doctrine has an importance that far outweighs its relatively scant appearances in the New Testament. The teaching appears across a wide range of New Testament texts, and the very fact that it emerges without explanation indicates that it was almost taken for granted as an integral part of the gospel proclamation. Depending on what one makes of the structure and provenance of Col. 1: 15–20, it may even have formed part of the early Church’s hymnody. Most importantly, placing Christ in the role of creator was one of the most dramatic ways early Christians could include Jesus within the divine identity and distinguish him from created beings.² It is little wonder that Jesus’ role in creation has sparked

¹ Biblical translations are my own unless specified.

² See esp. Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 1–22; cf. Martin Hengel, *Der Sohn Gottes* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1975), 118–19.

ongoing reflection in systematic theology throughout the history of the Church.³

The goal of the present study is to reconstruct the theological framework within which such an extraordinary assertion could be made. Most scholarship has been content to say that Christ was for a variety of reasons equated with Wisdom, and that the creative role of Wisdom came along as part of the package. But granted the (possible) role of Wisdom speculation in the history of the doctrine, the bare statement 'Christ is Wisdom' raises as many questions as it answers. Precisely how, and why, would a Galilean rabbi be so definitively linked with the Wisdom of God? How does one easily slide from an abstract principle to a human being of the very recent past? If one is inclined, as I am not, to believe that early Judaism widely embraced a 'hypostatic' figure of Wisdom, what happens to this shadowy figure after she, or it, is replaced by Jesus?

To answer these questions we must return to Jesus himself, and to the memories of his ministry preserved in the early Church. The mighty works of Jesus, his proclamation of the kingdom of God, and the climatic events of the crucifixion and resurrection, clearly marked him as the definitive agent of God's redemptive purposes. But these mighty works could scarcely be divorced from God's creative acts. The memories of Jesus preserved in the gospels depict a man who brings order to the threatening chaotic waters, creates life out of death, and restores people to their proper place in God's world. In Jürgen Moltmann's elegant formulation, 'Jesus' healings are not supernatural miracles in a natural world. They are the only truly "natural" thing in a world that is unnatural, demonized, and wounded'.⁴ Reflections on these memories of Jesus, coupled with the experience of forgiveness and renewal on the part of the early Church, led to a startling but elegant (theo-)logical conclusion: If the one true God had sent Jesus the Messiah as the definitive agent of redemption, and if this redemption was at one level simply the

³ Colin Gunton's *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998) both provides a survey of the history of the doctrine of creation (with an emphasis on Christology) and makes a major contribution to its elucidation.

⁴ *The Way of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1990), 69.

outworking of the project of creation (a view with ample precedent in the Hebrew Bible and indeed the Ancient Near East in general), it must be that the Messiah was the agent of creation as well.

Placing such a priority on the memories of Jesus has profound consequences for our methodology. Many studies assume that the most important building blocks for Christology must be antecedent theological or philosophical structures (Philo's Logos, Jewish Wisdom speculation, and so on) which are brought more or less en bloc into the early Church's affirmations of Jesus. It is hardly illogical to look to the past for elements of Christology: the present study will make ample use of such materials. But our point of departure is Jesus himself, and his radical redefinition of what Messiahship means. If the early Church to some extent used prior theological concepts to help them make sense of Jesus, all the more emphatically they used Jesus to make sense of prior theological concepts.

Of course, the statement that Jesus was the agent of creation had to be substantiated, and it could be articulated and developed in a variety of ways. It is at this point that early Christians would have turned to the Scriptures as the lens through which the fundamental insight of Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* must be viewed. This was not simply a question of finding references to creation in the Bible and inserting Jesus into them. Rather, the evaluation of texts took place within what we might call a 'messianic matrix' of interpretation. To take one significant example, Jesus could 'take over' the functions of Wisdom because as the messianic king he could be presumed to be in possession of God's Wisdom to the utmost degree.⁵ Numerous Ancient Near Eastern, biblical, and early Jewish parallels will serve to reinforce this point.

Finally, articulating this in the Hellenistic world inevitably brought the doctrine of Jesus' agency in creation into contact with Greek

⁵ On Messiah and Wisdom see esp. A. van Roon, 'The Relation Between Christ and the Wisdom of God According to Paul', *Novum Testamentum*, 16 (1974), 207–39. While van Roon does not develop these insights in depth with respect to Christ and creation, he remains one of the few authors who thinks thoroughly through the relationship of Messiah and Wisdom. Martin Hengel is another who pays attention to this critical theme; see e.g. his 'Jesus as Messianic Teacher of Wisdom and the Beginnings of Christology', in his *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1995), 73–117.

religious and philosophical conceptions. While the teaching was rooted in Jewish messianic categories, it was articulated in terms reminiscent of the 'prepositional metaphysics' of the Hellenistic world. At the very least, it would have been heard by many in the Hellenistic context against the background of philosophical views of mediation and agency. As we examine the New Testament texts closely, we must therefore ascertain to what extent the writers formulated the doctrine of Jesus' agency in dialogue with the teachings of Hellenistic philosophical schools.

PRIOR RESEARCH

The three most extensive studies on the topic of Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* are Harald Hegermann's *Die Vorstellung vom Schöpfungsmittler im Hellenistischen Judentum und Urchristentum*,⁶ Hans-Friedrich Weiss's *Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie des Hellenistischen und Palästinischen Judentums*, the second half of which is devoted to the question of *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*,⁷ and most recently Ronald Cox's *By the Same Word: Creation and Salvation in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity*.⁸ All three share an interest in exploring conceptual backgrounds in Hellenistic philosophy and Hellenistic Judaism, and all are marked by careful assessments of the primary source material.⁹

Hegermann, while ostensibly writing about the general idea of *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* in early Judaism and Christianity, in fact

⁶ Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, ed. O. Von Harnack and A. Von Gebhardt, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 82 (Berlin: Akademie, 1961).

⁷ Weiss, *Kosmologie*, ed. O. Von Harnack and A. Von Gebhardt, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 97, (Berlin: Akademie, 1966). Weiss also has a much briefer treatment which deals primarily with some of the theological issues surrounding the New Testament doctrine of creation: 'Schöpfung in Christus', *Die Zeichen der Zeit*, 31 (1977), 431–7.

⁸ (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007).

⁹ There are, of course, studies too numerous to mention devoted to the exegesis of individual texts, with the literature on Col. 1: 15–20 and John 1 being particularly extensive. We will note these when we turn to the texts in question.

focuses almost exclusively on two things: Philo (and ‘his circle’, i.e., the Hellenistic synagogue traditions he is thought to have drawn upon), and the Colossians hymn. He has an extensive discussion of Philo’s relationship to the mystery religions and Greek cosmology, followed by a detailed treatment of the Logos in Philo. As for the Colossians hymn, he sees it as the result of the collision between a ‘Palestinian’ kerygma of world change and judgment, and an earlier Hellenistic world conception with concerns to bring the transcendent into contact with the immanent.¹⁰ Especially noteworthy are his arguments that the first strophe of the hymn is pre-Christian, probably stemming from Hellenistic Jewish circles. Thus, for example, the words *τῆς ἐκκλησίας* in Col. 1: 18a are a Pauline interpolation; the original hymn would have spoken of the figure in question as ‘head of the cosmos’.¹¹

Weiss sees the New Testament texts on Christ and creation as a relatively straightforward adaptation of contemporary Jewish ideas of mediation: ‘Insofern stellt die Vorstellung von Christus als “Schöpfungsmittler”, wie sie im frühen Christentum ausgebildet worden ist, nur den Endpunkt einer geschichtlichen Entwicklung dar, indem Christus nunmehr die kosmischen Funktionen der “Weisheit”, des “Logos” und der “Tora” übernimmt und an deren Stelle tritt.’¹² Accordingly, he has extensive discussions of the mediating roles in creation of Wisdom, Logos, and Torah, assembling a massive amount of information from Greek philosophy, Hellenistic Jewish writers (Philo in particular), and rabbinical material. His treatment of the New Testament texts, by contrast, is extremely brief: he touches upon them for about eight pages before moving on to the views of the early Church. This is in keeping both with his stated purpose—he is investigating the cosmology of Hellenistic and Palestinian Judaism, not early Christianity—and with his supposition that explaining the background to the New Testament texts is tantamount to explaining the texts themselves.

Cox’s argument runs on similar lines, though he sees Middle Platonic intermediary doctrine in particular as the fountainhead of New

¹⁰ Hegermann 50–3, 109.

¹¹ Hegermann 100, 170.

¹² Weiss, *Untersuchungen*, 7.

Testament teaching on Christ's role in creation.¹³ This intermediary doctrine was itself mediated to the early Church by Hellenistic Jewish speculation, with the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo being especially vivid appropriations of the Greek viewpoint. The New Testament texts, then, are 'a fusion of these Platonized Jewish traditions with Christian eschatological conviction.'¹⁴ Such a fusion is not necessarily an elegant one: for Cox, the joints are visible between, for example, Col. 1: 15–18a and 1: 18b–20, which he terms a 'relatively uncritical combination of two different religious traditions, one stemming from philosophically oriented Greek-speaking Judaism, the other coming from an eschatologically oriented early Christian milieu.'¹⁵

We are very much indebted to Hegermann, Weiss, and Cox for their treatment of the Hellenistic and Jewish philosophical milieu. They have certainly demonstrated interesting verbal and conceptual parallels between Greek philosophy, the Wisdom tradition, and the New Testament texts. Their detailed and balanced scholarship will permit us to move more swiftly over some material (e.g. the Middle Platonists and Philo) in order to pursue our own thesis. Given the paucity of helps within the New Testament texts themselves, their account of the origins of the doctrine cannot be dismissed out of hand.

But there are major issues that these books leave unaddressed. The first involves the scope of what we might call 'concerns for cosmic connection' in the ancient world. One might get the impression from these works that a need for mediation between the divine and human realms was first addressed by Greek philosophers, with Jewish thinkers then following in their train. In fact, as we stress in Chapter 3, such concerns run deep throughout the Ancient Near East.¹⁶ Thus, the fact that two texts exhibit a general concern with bridging the gap

¹³ The contours of Cox's argument follow those sketched out by Gregory Sterling in his essay 'Prepositional Metaphysics in Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Early Christian Liturgical Texts', in *Studia Philonica Annual*, 9 (1997), 219–38. We will not treat Cox's final section on Gnostic appropriations of Middle Platonism (pp. 276–351).

¹⁴ Ronald Cox, *By the Same Word: Creation and Salvation in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 354.

¹⁵ Cox 193.

¹⁶ Cox, it should be noted, begins his book (p. 1) with a reference to the 'Chaoskampf of pre-Yahwistic West Semitic religion', but quickly narrows his focus to Middle Platonism.

between God and man hardly demonstrates a genetic relationship. Rather than imagining that the conceptual stream narrowed from mediation to Wisdom/Word to Christ, or that Christ was somehow exchanged for the Word or Wisdom, we must reckon with the possibility that the New Testament writers were thinking (relatively) independently about matters of universal concern. Equally troubling is the central role played by Philo in each of these investigations, even if 'Philo' becomes shorthand for Hellenistic Jewish synagogue traditions or philosophically informed Judaism in general. Philo's philosophical and exegetical approach has such marked differences to that of the New Testament writers that one wonders whether he could really hold the interpretive key to the doctrine of Christ's role in creation.

The final, and most critical, problem is the relative absence of Jesus Christ from their discussions. By this, I mean precisely the neglect of the stories about Jesus as the *impetus* for the doctrine, and the neglect of Christ/Messiah as the *matrix* within which the doctrine was developed. All of the authors make at least a passing mention of the 'Christ event', and all affirm the unique twist put on the material by the New Testament.¹⁷ But Jesus the Messiah is not the focal point of their investigations. The calculus for the present work is almost precisely the reverse of that found in Hegermann, Weiss, and Cox. The formal correspondences with Hellenistic and Jewish literature are of some interest to us, especially as a way of accounting for the language of the New Testament formulations. But the bulk of our attention will be devoted to the distinctiveness of the early Church's conceptions, as we address what is to me the most pressing question: How could the role of creator be attributed to Jesus the Messiah?

Some of the themes we will pursue have been sketched out in shorter works, two of which deserve special mention. The first is Hugolinus Langkammer's brief but seminal article, 'Der Ursprung des Glaubens an Christus den Schöpfungsmittler'.¹⁸ Langkammer

¹⁷ Note e.g. Cox's comments on the Incarnation on p. 275, and his mention of messianic expectation and Hebrews (p. 219); and Hegermann's notes on the early Church's experience of Jesus as Messiah (p. 124).

¹⁸ *Liber Annuus* (Annual of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum), 18 (1968); 55–93. Even briefer, but still very suggestive, is Franz Mussner, 'Schöpfung in Christus,' in Johannes Feiner and Magnus Löhrer (eds.), *Mysterium Salutis: Grundriss*

seeks to give a comprehensive account of the teaching of Jesus as *Schöpfungsmittler*, taking as his point of departure Jesus himself, and particularly his self-understanding as the Son of God. While he admits that philosophical and Wisdom traditions influenced the outer form of expression (this is for him 'selbstverständlich'), he concludes: 'Der Glaube an Jesus den Gottessohn ist also älter als der Glaube an Christus den Schöpfungsmittler und war seinerseits das ausschlaggebende Motiv für die Entstehung der Schöpfungsmittlerproklamation'.¹⁹ I would question whether the bare predication of Jesus' sonship is sufficient to account for his role in creation, but Langkammer's instinct to trace the doctrine back to the accounts of Jesus' ministry is of foundational importance, as we will argue in detail later.

The work perhaps closest in outlook to our own is R. S. Barbour's 'Creation, Wisdom, and Christ'.²⁰ Barbour admirably balances biblical theology, reflections on Jesus' ministry, and systematic reflections in offering what he modestly calls 'our hints and guesses' on the topic. Even more than Langkammer, Barbour roots the doctrine of Christ's *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* in the memories of Jesus' deeds and words and his current activity in the Church: 'Through Him they had been born anew, through Him there was a new creation; but the agent of the new creation must be none other than the agent of the first creation, namely the Wisdom of God'.²¹ Provided we bracket out the questionable phrase 'namely the Wisdom of God', this sentence captures as well as any one of the central thrusts of my argument.²²

Heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik, ii, Die Heilsgeschichte vor Christus, 2 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1967), 455–61. Hartwig Thyen offers numerous helpful insights in "In ihm ist alles geschaffen, was im Himmel und auf Erden ist": Kosmologische Christushymnen im Neuen Testament', in Gerhard Rau, Adolf Martin Ritter, and Hermann Timm (eds.), *Frieden in der Schöpfung: Das Naturverständnis protestantischer Theologie* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1987), 73–91. His comments on the futility of seeking to reconstruct the 'original' hymns behind the NT texts are especially helpful.

¹⁹ Langkammer 78.

²⁰ Richard W. A. McKinney (ed.), *Creation, Christ, and Culture: Studies in Honour of T. F. Torrance* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1976), 22–42.

²¹ Barbour 31.

²² For a more general reflection on the relationship of new and old creation see N. A. Dahl, 'Christ, Creation, and the Church', in W. D. Davies and D. Daube (eds.),

While our focus is on Christ's role in primal creation, we cannot ignore broader Christological discussions. To begin with, the center of gravity in much 'historical Jesus' research has shifted back towards the Jewish roots of the Jesus movement, with a concomitant increase of interest in messianic thought in early Judaism and early Christianity. We will not tackle the question of Jesus' messianic self-awareness in this study, but the work of scholars like Martin Hengel, Ben Meyer, and N. T. Wright encourages us to think more carefully about the explicitly messianic nature of early Christian belief. Of even more direct relevance are books which bridge the gap between the life of Jesus and the witness of the early Church. Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* argues forcefully for the reliable, controlled transmission of the gospel stories. If he is correct, and I believe he is, we may rightly see the Gospels as part of the raw material of Christian reflection on Jesus, and not merely the finished theological product.²³ James Dunn, while pursuing a somewhat different track from Bauckham, affirms the importance of the Church's memories of Jesus in his *Jesus Remembered*.

Recent decades have also witnessed an increased willingness to question whether 'high' Christology must necessarily be late Christology. C. F. D. Moule calls into question the 'evolutionary' model of early Christology (which 'starts with a Palestinian Rabbi and ends with the divine Lord of a Hellenistic Saviour-cult') and suggests a development model in which 'the various estimates of Jesus [are], in essence, only attempts to describe what was already there from the beginning'.²⁴ Larry Hurtado has argued that the worship of Jesus goes back to the earliest days of the Church; and that in the context of Jewish monotheism such worship is the clearest sign of a very high Christology.²⁵ Bauckham has affirmed and developed this idea,

The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology, In Honour of Charles Harold Dodd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 422–43.

²³ See Ch. 2, below.

²⁴ Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 2–3.

²⁵ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003); *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1988).

speaking in terms of Jesus sharing the 'divine identity'.²⁶ He notes particularly how the ascription of creation to Jesus was one of the surest ways to locate Jesus on the Godward side of the line separating God from all created reality.²⁷

We may also note specialized studies on 'Wisdom Christology'. One of the aims of this study is to question the hegemony of Wisdom as the defining category for Christ and creation, and I would thus highlight two strong critiques of Wisdom Christology: Gordon Fee's essay, 'Wisdom Christology in Paul'²⁸ (the subtitle of which could be, 'There is None'); and Aquila Lee's monograph, *From Messiah to Preexistent Son*.²⁹ At the same time, we recognize that Wisdom speculation may have contributed in some ways to the doctrine of Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*, and there is much to be gained in the balanced treatments of Feuillet, Dunn, and Witherington.³⁰

Although our emphasis will be on the historical roots of Christology, in the concluding chapter we make a brief foray into the treatment of our topic in dogmatic theology. This survey of six theologians past and present (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Athanasius on the patristic side; Pannenberg, Moltmann, and Barth for the modern period) provides insight both into hermeneutical questions of how the New Testament texts are to be approached, and into how the doctrine can function in the ongoing life of the Church.

²⁶ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, p. viii.

²⁷ This in contrast to the assumption of, e.g., Frances Young, that at the time of the New Testament and patristic periods 'there was . . . a common fuzziness about the distinction between God and everything else'; this alleged 'fuzziness' applied equally to Jews and Christians (Young, 'Christology and Creation: Towards an Hermeneutic of Patristic Christology,' in T. Merrigan and J. Haers (eds.), *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 193).

²⁸ In his *To What End Exegesis? Essays Textual, Exegetical, and Theological* (Cambridge: Eerdmans/Vancouver: Regent College, 2001), 351–78.

²⁹ *Wissunt zum Neuen Testament*, 2/192 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

³⁰ A. Feuillet, *Le Christ, sagesse de Dieu: d'après les épîtres pauliniennes* (Paris: LeCoffre, 1966); James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 2nd edn. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003) and *The Christ and the Spirit: Collected Essays of James D. G. Dunn, i. Christology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998); Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2000).

APPROACHING THE QUESTION

There is a need, then, to reexamine the question of Jesus' role in primal creation. As in any act of New Testament interpretation, one's point of departure tends to determine one's destination. This is particularly true with respect to Jesus' role in creation. The 'prepositional theology' of the Hellenistic world may yield parallels to the 'in him' and 'through him' formulas, and conceptual similarities may be seen as far back as the creation literature of the Ancient Near East. One can therefore make something of a case that the New Testament writers were taking preexistent categories of creation mediation and placing them onto Christ in an attempt to quickly capture the cosmological high ground. If this seems too radical, Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon provide a kind of halfway house, a place where Jewish and Graeco-Roman concepts of creation had already met and could thus be appropriated for use by other Jews interested in articulating their faith in the broader intellectual milieu. Still others may feel that the texts can be adequately explained with reference to the Bible itself, with only a minimum of 'interference' from the outside world. A defense of the particular line of development I am suggesting is therefore in order.

As noted above, we will begin by looking at Jesus himself, or, more precisely, the memories of Jesus in the early Church. This may seem to some to be a fairly self-evident place to start, but the fact that numerous studies begin and end elsewhere with little or no mention of Jesus' public ministry indicates that even this move requires some justification. Questions still arise, for instance, as to the extent that Paul had any interest in the 'historical Jesus'. It is easy at the remove of two millennia to imagine that he was free to take Christ as a mere brand name, and then fill it with whatever content might be thought to sell best in the Mediterranean marketplace. But it is very doubtful that such a move could be made so easily when the predicates of this Messiah were inextricably linked with a known figure who had lived only a few decades before.

What, for example, did Paul teach during his months and years ministering in Corinth or Philippi or Thessalonica?³¹ Certainly he taught the significance of Christ's death and resurrection—but even this has an inescapably narrative aspect to it. Paul must have spent a significant amount of time rehearsing the stories of Jesus for his audience. Accounts of Jesus' wonder-working activities would have been a critical part of any early Christian apologetic strategy, and Jesus' distinctive teachings on Torah (see esp. Rom. 12–15) would have been indispensable for Paul's dialogue with diaspora synagogues. As James Dunn says:

But if the Gospels tell us anything they surely tell us that the first Christians felt the need to explain themselves by telling stories about Jesus, what he said and what he did . . . Paul was careful to refer his churches back to such foundation traditions on several occasions; the evidence is hardly to be explained as references solely to kerygmatic or confessional formulae. Rather, we find that it includes community tradition . . . teaching on how the new converts should live . . . and traditions of Jesus in accordance with which they should conduct their lives³²

Jesus was the Christ, and the Christ was Jesus. Whatever one wished to say about Christ as the heavenly Son of God had to be spoken in conjunction with the earthly history of Jesus, and it was this earthly history of Jesus that served as the ground for subsequent Christological reflection. A more thorough defense of the use of the four canonical gospels will follow in the next chapter. Suffice it to say for now: If there are in the tradition memories of Jesus' deeds and

³¹ See e.g. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 184: '[W]e have to assume a wider knowledge of the Jesus story among the recipients of Paul's letters, which his auditors would be able to draw upon to bridge the "gaps of indeterminacy" in his letters'. Dunn argues that Jesus traditions are typically not labeled in early Christian letters because they form an 'insider's language' in which it is precisely the 'recognition of the code word or allusion which gives the insider-language its bonding effect' (p. 183).

³² Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 176; cf. pp. 174–84. See also e.g. Christian Stettler, *Der Kolosserhymnus*, Wissunt zum Neuen Testament, 2/131 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 335: 'Die (heils-)geschichtliche Erfahrung von Leben, Sühnentod und Auferstehung Jesu gehe der Erkenntnis über seine Präexistenz und Schöpfungsmittlerschaft voraus . . . Dann wäre die erste Strophe ein Beispiel für das von Martin Hengel formulierte Prinzip: "Nur wer über den Anfang verfügt, hat das Ganze. Der Anfang mußte daher vom Ende her beleuchtet werden"'.

words which relate meaningfully to his agency in creation—and there undoubtedly are—these should form the most natural point of departure for all subsequent investigation.

These traditions take on added importance in light of the magnitude of what was being ascribed to Christ: the very creation of the cosmos. It seems incredible to me that Paul and others could make this claim about a figure of the very recent past without producing considerable evidence to back it up. We might indeed wish to have more overt references to Jesus' public ministry in the epistles; but the idea that they proclaimed Christ as creator to these congregations with no mention of his mighty works and his ongoing ministry through the Spirit seems to me untenable.

Naturally linked with this would be the early Church's experiences of Jesus as exalted Lord.³³ First-century Christians clearly believed themselves to be experiencing through the Spirit of Christ the same dynamic work of renewal that characterized Jesus' own ministry, replete with prophetic speech and deeds of power. This, too, would form part of the raw material for thinking about Jesus' role not only in eschatology, but also protology.

The idea that this thinking should primarily take the shape of biblical reflection should likewise be readily acceptable. A vast and growing body of scholarly literature has shown the pervasive use of the Old Testament in the New. While the particular exegetical methods employed may often differ from contemporary ones, there can be little doubt that early Christians felt compelled to defend and explain their affirmations about Jesus by means of the Scriptures.

This general principle takes on a special sharpness in the case of the texts concerning Jesus as agent of creation. It is critical to note that the Graeco-Roman formulas adduced as parallels are themselves summary statements, or even slogans, for particular religious and philosophical views. This means that they cannot be understood without careful reference to the intellectual systems out of which they emerge. In the same way, the terse New Testament statements about Jesus' agency in creation must first be read against the background of the religious community in which they emerged.

³³ See esp. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*.

More debatable, perhaps, is the contention that this biblical reflection centered precisely on Jesus' status as Messiah. This can hardly be proved beyond refutation, but taking Messiah as the starting point has much to commend it. One often overlooked point is the sheer number of times Jesus is referred to as Messiah or *Χριστός* throughout the New Testament. Such regular and explicit designations far outweigh, to take one significant example, the few, cryptic, or even dubious, allusions to Jesus as Wisdom.

Many, of course, will assume Christ had long since become a mere name by the time the New Testament was written.³⁴ But this seems exceedingly unlikely. Consider again the case of Paul. The idea that a Pharisee (or ex-Pharisee) could casually employ the term Messiah without importing much theological significance into the designation beggars belief. It is equally doubtful that this same Pharisee could invite Gentiles to give worship to, and to risk their reputations and their lives for, 'the Smeared One' (as Hengel renders *Χριστός*), with no particular explanation as to what this strange title might imply. It does not follow that every time Paul employs the term *Χριστός* we need to scramble to find some relevant 'messianic' proof text from the Old Testament or early Judaism. It does mean that Paul's theological reflection would be thoroughly messianic, and that he wished his readers to see the center of history in the life, death, resurrection, and return of 'Messiah'.

For the reasons noted above, I have placed the discussion of the Graeco-Roman material after the Jewish and Christian chapter. This does imply that there is a fundamental integrity to the early Christian proclamation of Jesus' agency in creation which distinguishes it from its Hellenistic counterparts. It should not imply that the doctrine only emerged into the wider world after a pristine gestation in a Jewish-Christian matrix unaffected by Hellenism. Debates may exist as to the *extent* to which Palestinian Judaism was shaped by forces in the Hellenistic world, but few would deny that there was some effect.

³⁴ See recently Magnus Zetterholm, 'Paul and the Missing Messiah', in Zetterholm (ed.), *The Messiah in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2007), 33–55; e.g. p. 37: 'To be sure, Paul frequently uses the word *christos*... but there is almost complete unanimity among scholars that this expression has become a proper name and that it has lost its messianic overtones almost entirely'.

Any reading of the Septuagint, or any attempt to put the principles of the gospel into Greek, automatically involved a degree of engagement with Hellenistic thought and culture. The engagement might be polemical, or receptive, or anywhere in between, but such an encounter was inescapable.

After exegeting the relevant passages in detail, we will conclude, as noted above, with some gestures towards the significance of our investigation for systematic theology. The literature on the topic in dogmatics is in some ways far richer than it is in New Testament studies, and I do not pretend to have mastered it to the point where I can adequately account for the historical and theological discussion that has unfolded in the life of the Church. But it seems fitting to at least address some of the issues involved as a way of bridging the gap between the first century and subsequent ones.

Memories of Jesus: Creation in the Gospels

I have argued in the introduction that it is logical to begin with the Church's memories of Jesus as we investigate his role as agent of creation. Even if this logic be granted, however, there remains the problem of where to find those memories, and what to make of them once they are found.

The shape of my argument does not necessarily depend on a particular reconstruction of the 'historical Jesus'. The historicity of the miracles is indeed important in deciding whether or not the doctrine is credible. Furthermore, those who on philosophical or historiographical grounds reject all accounts of the miraculous in the gospels will no doubt be more inclined to see the stories as later fabrications of the Church, while those who accept them as accounts of actual events will be more inclined to see them as formative for later theology. Nonetheless, our focus here is on the shape of early Christian theology; we are primarily concerned at this point with what the Church believed rather than what may or may not have happened. While it would no doubt be salutary to integrate such concerns into our discussion, the *prologoumena* involved make it doubtful we would ever make it past Galilee, let alone back to the creation of the world.

Even with this caveat, it might be felt that the gospels are too late, and too theologically loaded, to constitute any sort of 'raw material' for subsequent theological development. But these are not fatal objections. First of all, if we are interested in learning anything about this Jesus whom the early Church quickly identified as cosmic

Lord, there is little choice but to turn to the canonical Gospels. They may indeed be later than Paul's epistles, but on most accounts they were still written within living memory of the events they record,¹ and they are certainly earlier than other claimants.² One must of course acknowledge that the gospels are shaped by theological concerns; but the presence of theological interest hardly necessitates that the gospel traditions were wholly the product of decades of tertiary theological work by the early Church. It is important to remember that the events surrounding a religious figure like Jesus would have been interpreted in a theological matrix *the moment they happened*, let alone the first time they were passed along from one tradent to another. There is no question that at some point a symbiotic process would have emerged, in which the stories which had provided the impetus for the theology were in turn shaped by that same theology. But the memories of Jesus remain prior both temporally and in terms of the development of the doctrine of Jesus as agent of creation.

This is borne out by the gospel passages we will examine below. The miracle accounts in the Synoptics, not simply those in John, give every evidence of a 'high' Christology. The disciples and the crowds may speculate as to Jesus' identity, but the writers themselves are firm in their conviction that he is the Christ, the unique Son of God. To this extent, one may speak of them as finished theological products rather than raw material. But with respect to the precise matter of Jesus' agency in the creation of the world, they still serve as foundation rather than superstructure. The stories and attendant commentary by the gospel writers never make this teaching explicit (John 9 comes the closest) as they do in the more general cases of Jesus' divine sonship or his consequent authority over the Church and the

¹ For the dating of the Gospels, and their generic quality as eyewitness accounts, see esp. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006).

² I remain dubious about the Gospel of Thomas, despite recent attempts (e.g. by the Jesus Seminar) to raise it to the status of the fifth Gospel; nor am I persuaded by Crossan's attempt to prioritize, e.g., the passion narrative of the Gospel of Peter. Thomas, in any case, lacks much in the way of Jesus' deeds, which are our chief concern here, and the statements in it which are perhaps relevant to creation (11, 22, 56, though all are obscure) seem patent attempts to put second-century Gnostic doctrine on the lips of Jesus.

world. The formulations of Colossians and the rest remain on the other side of Jordan.

Some recent studies on the nature of the Gospels further recommend using them in the way we are proposing. Richard Bauckham, following Samuel Byrskog, has argued at length for the historical and theological validity of taking these gospels as *testimony*, rooted in eyewitness accounts of the ministry of Jesus. He emphasizes that relying on eyewitness testimony was 'best practice' in ancient historiography, and he draws upon considerable internal and external evidence to the effect that the Apostles would have exercised a controlling influence on the formative memories of Jesus in the early Church. Bauckham concludes:

The eyewitnesses were still around. They remained the authoritative source of their traditions. And the impact of the past itself, along with a conviction that the past history of Jesus mattered as past event, gave stability to their memories long after the crucial theological developments that took place in the earliest Christian circles.³

Bauckham is careful to say that this does not imply that what we have in the Gospels is unprocessed material, the equivalent of a videotaped courtroom testimony. He acknowledges the presence of intertextual allusion (especially to the Old Testament) and literary artistry in the gospel accounts. His account of the stilling of the storm in Mark 4: 35–41 is relevant to us both by way of methodology and for its thematic concerns:

This is more than direct memory in that Jesus' pacification of the storm is couched in terms that allude to passages in the Hebrew Bible about God's subjugation of the waters of chaos (Jesus 'rebuked' the wind and said to the sea 'Peace! Be still!'). These allusions (Pss. 89: 9–10; 104: 7; 107: 25–29; Job 26: 11–12) place the story in a wider symbolic field of resonance, identifying Jesus' command of the destructive power of nature as that of God the Creator . . . Concrete experience and mythic resonance here converge naturally. So the interpretation does not come in between us and the realistic character of the story, as interpretation can. The authenticity of the

³ Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses* 354.

eyewitness memory, if that is what it is, is not compromised or obscured by literary contrivance.⁴

I find his arguments convincing; in any event they pose a serious challenge to the dogmatic skepticism that has dominated much study of the Gospels. They provide considerable support for what is, in my opinion, the intuitively sensible starting point for unearthing the early Church's Christology—the memories of Jesus the Messiah.

IN THE BEGINNINGS

Before we turn to the Gospels' accounts of Jesus' public ministry, it will be helpful to acknowledge up front one critical aspect of their theological orientation. Each of the evangelists arguably begins his Gospel by connecting the beginning of Jesus' ministry with the beginnings of the cosmos. (We include in 'beginnings' here everything up through the temptation in the wilderness, and prior to the beginning of the ministry proper in Galilee.) Highlighting the theology of the evangelists in this way might seem to undercut fairly completely our assertion that the gospel stories lie at the foundation of the doctrine of Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* rather than representing the end of the process. But this is not the case. The key for our argument is that the evangelists saw the doctrine of creation as meaningfully tied to the stories of Jesus that follow. They could conceivably have entered into the gospel-writing process with a preexisting theology of Wisdom or cosmic mediation they wished to impose on the tradition, such that the stories are selected, arranged, doctored, or even invented to comport with the philosophical presuppositions. But this again begs the fundamental question: Why would all of this have been attached to *Jesus* in particular? It is vastly preferable to see the creation theology as the flower of meditation on the stories of Jesus' wonder-working activity. This does not mean the stories might not be told in such a way as to bring out various aspects of Wisdom teaching or even, in theory, some Middle

⁴ Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses* 504.

Platonic view of cosmic mediation (though I find that exceedingly unlikely). But it is the stories that prompt the theology, and not the other way round.

John's connection of Jesus and Genesis is so plain as to hardly need emphasis: *Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος*. We will return to this text towards the end of our study, but suffice it to say for now that the mentions of the Word, the creation, life, and light all draw the reader back to the early chapters of Genesis, and invite him or her to read Jesus' story in light of God's larger purposes in creation.

Matthew's introduction makes a similar point, in a somewhat subtler fashion.⁵ He begins with the words *Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ*, usually translated (quite reasonably) as 'the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ'. But it is hard to miss the association of *γενέσεως* with Genesis, especially when *Βίβλος γενέσεως* is most naturally seen as an allusion to Genesis 5: 1: *αὕτη ἡ βίβλος γενέσεως ἀνθρώπων ἥ ἡμέρα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν Ἀδὰμ*. This at least suggests an Adam Christology in which Jesus represents a new beginning for humanity.⁶ But Gen. 5: 1 itself harks back to Gen. 2: 4: *αὕτη ἡ βίβλος γενέσεως οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὅτε ἐγένετο ἥ ἡμέρα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν*. This would suggest that for Matthew, Jesus' role in the renewal of humanity is predicated upon his role as cosmic lord. If this seems too obscure, it should be noted that this is the first in a series of Old Testament allusions in Matthew where a 'high Christology' is revealed only to those who take the time and effort to investigate the Old Testament texts (see discussion below).

Mark and Luke arguably make similar points, albeit in still less overt ways. Mark begins his gospel simply enough: *Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*, 'the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ'. Unlike John, Mark does not provide us with the full Septuagint phrase *Ἐν ἀρχῇ*; nonetheless, the use of *αρχή* does catch one's attention. It is

⁵ See Grant Macaskill, *Revealed Wisdom and Inaugurated Eschatology in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, supplements to the *Journal for the Study of Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 119–23.

⁶ The absence of an explicit mention of Adam in the genealogy (contra Luke) does not argue against this view; Matthew may have deliberately avoided Adam to highlight the fact that Jesus' beginning is genuinely *de novo* and not absolutely dependent on Adam.

likewise noteworthy that this (possible) allusion to Genesis 1 is immediately followed by a compound quotation of Exod. 23: 20, Mal. 3: 1, and Isa. 40: 3. The Isaiah quotation is particularly important, as Isaiah's new exodus forms one of the chief themes of the Gospel of Mark,⁷ and images of original and new creation permeate Isaiah 40–66. The allusions to creation continue with the mention of baptism in *water* and by the *Spirit* (1: 8), a connection that is enhanced by the emergence of Jesus out of the water followed by the appearance of the Holy Spirit as a *dove* (noting the avian language of Gen. 1: 2, and the dove in the account of Noah). Finally, Jesus' temptation is likely brought into association with Adam with the mention of the wild beasts (1: 13). The dominion exercised by Adam before the fall returns with the advent of the Messiah.

Luke's fairly straightforward dedicatory preface would seem to be an extremely unlikely place to find allusions to creation. But note the use of the phrase ἀπ' ἀρχῆς in verse 2: 'those who *from the beginning* were eyewitnesses and servants of the word'. This has the surface meaning of 'from the beginning of Jesus' ministry' (perhaps by way of elaborating Mark. 1: 1), and is readily explicable from Hellenistic literary conventions.⁸ Nonetheless, it is at least worth noting ἀπ' ἀρχῆς was a common way of referring to the beginning of the world (e.g. Eccles. 3: 11; Wis. 6: 22; 9: 8; 14: 13; Sir. 16: 26; 24: 9; Isa. 43: 13; Matt. 19: 4, 8; 24: 21).⁹ Most striking is the use of the phrase in the Johannine epistles, where a fixed distinction between the beginning of the world and the beginning of the gospel seems deliberately set aside.¹⁰ It would be too much to claim that Luke evinces a full-blown Johannine theology of the preexistent Messiah in his introduction, especially since a reference to 'from the beginning' would be expected in a work such as Luke's. But it would be equally mistaken to ignore the fact that an allusion to Genesis by means of

⁷ See esp. Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000).

⁸ Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses* 116–24.

⁹ The messianic prophecy in LXX Mic. 5: 1 (MT 5: 2) is especially striking: αἱ ἔξοδοι αὐτοῦ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἐξ ἡμερῶν αἰῶνος—though it is uncertain whether Luke is making a direct allusion to this text (but cf. the use of Jesus' ἐξόδον in the transfiguration account; 9: 31).

¹⁰ See e.g. 1 John 1: 1; 3: 8, 11.

αρχή would fit squarely within early Christian tradition in general, and gospel writing in particular. That this ‘beginning’ is related to the ‘word’ (αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρεται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου, 1: 2) makes it possible that Luke is making just such an allusion. The life-giving Word of creation and re-creation is a commonplace in New Testament writings, from James (1: 18, 21) to Paul (Phil. 2: 16) to Peter (1 Pet. 1: 23) to the Synoptics (esp. the Parable of the Sower). The beginning of Luke’s Gospel goes back to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, but it may point us back further still to the beginning of all things.¹¹

This may still seem some distance from ‘Jesus is the one through whom all things were made’. But, like much else in the Gospels, the ‘beginnings’ (in every sense of the word) are questions to be pondered as much as they are statements to be affirmed, and insight may only emerge after multiple readings or hearings. The gospel stories of Jesus’ redemptive acts prompt the question ‘Who is this man?’. The gospel introductions serve to underscore the point: ‘Who indeed?’.

What, then, had been reported about Jesus that made them frame their gospels this way? Foremost would be the accounts of his mighty works: ‘Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God through mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know’ (Acts 2: 22). The terms ‘mighty works’, ‘wonders’, and ‘signs’ embrace a wide range of phenomena, from healings to exorcisms to the so-called nature miracles, but common to them all is Jesus’ remarkable power over the created order. One can further say that in every instance, save the cursing of the fig tree, the mighty works serve to restore the creation to its intended role as a source of blessing. But we cannot confine ourselves to the works as isolated incidents, dramatic as they may have been. All of this is remembered to have happened in an atmosphere charged with eschatological expectation.

¹¹ Simon Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 221–7, following Feuillet, believes that there may be a λόγος theology at work in Luke–Acts, though he notes that most scholars have been unwilling to accept this.

A WAY IN THE WILDERNESS

We have already touched on the narratives of Jesus' baptism and temptations in our earlier section, since many would regard these as more oriented towards theological instruction than historical memory. Nonetheless, we can hardly isolate the inauguration of Jesus' ministry from his initial encounter with John the Baptist, and John's evocation of the eschatological re-creation promised in Isaiah 40–66. The critical text is of course Matt. 3: 3 and parallels, citing Isa. 40: 3: 'A voice crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths'. While this verse in and of itself does not evoke the creation account, it is clearly meant to signal the beginning of the fulfillment of the whole cluster of promises in Isaiah 40–66—passages which are saturated with creation imagery. One could argue that the appearance of Isa. 40: 3 is purely redactional, since only the fourth gospel has these words directly on the lips of the Baptist. But there is every reason to believe that John saw himself as initiating a radical renewal of Israel, and that Isaiah 40: 3 would have provided an important point of departure for his wilderness-based ministry of baptism and repentance.¹² Baptism in the Jordan would have evoked motifs of exodus and conquest, but even that would be rooted in the primeval emergence of dry land from the chaos waters. Whatever we make of the particulars of the story of Jesus' baptism by John, Jesus clearly embraces the vision of renewal offered by John and makes it his own.¹³ In all the Gospels, we are meant to see that Jesus is in agreement with John's basic proclamation, even if he may modify or advance it in certain ways (e.g. deferral of fiery judgment).

The significance of Isaiah 40–66 and its theme of renewal for Jesus' public ministry is enhanced when we see how Isaiah 61 becomes the point of departure for Jesus' kingdom proclamation in Matthew and Luke. The programmatic importance of Isaiah 61 for the latter

¹² See e.g. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1996).

¹³ R. T. France makes a good case that water baptism continued to be the means of initiation into the 'Jesus movement' even during Jesus' public ministry; see France, 'Jesus the Baptist?', in Joel Green and Max Turner, (eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.I: Eerdmans, 1994), 94–111.

is self-evident: the citation in Luke 4 forms the basis for everything that follows. Matthew's use of Isaiah 61 is more subtle, but scholars have long recognized the influence of Isa. 61: 1–10 on the Beatitudes, which in turn form the basis for the Sermon on the Mount. The parallels include: good news to poor (Matt. 5: 3/Isa. 61: 1); blessed are mourners (Matt. 5: 4/Isa. 61: 3); called servants/sons of God (Matt. 5: 9/Isa. 61: 6); inheriting the land (Matt. 5: 5/Isa. 61: 7); response of joy (Matt. 5: 12/Isa. 61: 10). The fact that Isaiah 61 shapes these two Gospels so profoundly, yet in such formally distinct ways, strongly suggests that it has its roots in Jesus' own self-understanding and kingdom proclamation.

NATURE AND NATURE MIRACLES

Before we turn to the nature miracles, it is worth commenting on the synoptics' portrayal of Jesus and the natural world.¹⁴ There is of course some danger in looking down the well of history and seeing Jesus as the glad, green Galilean skipping through the lilies of the field in hemp-cloth robes. But it is even more misleading to imagine him as the pale Galilean, devoid of interest in the physical world and draining others in turn of their zest for living. There is in any case no mistaking the earthiness of his public ministry. His penchant for drawing illustrations from nature is well-documented: seeds are sown, flowers grow, birds have nests and foxes have dens. God's kingdom is like a vineyard, and a tree, and the fish in the sea. Jesus himself spends much of his time in close connection with nature: he stoops and makes mud to heal the blind, feeds people sitting on green grass (Mark. 6: 39) and teaches them on mountains and lakesides. He drinks the fruit of the vine with his disciples, and looks forward to drinking it again in the kingdom of God (Matt. 26: 29; likely an allusion to Amos 9: 13: 'the mountains will drip with sweet wine'). Jesus' God likewise is intimately involved with the world he has

¹⁴ We include within 'the natural world' the interstices of humanity and nature, e.g. vineyards and wine and fields and bread. Our main goal is to see that Jesus affirms creation as such, rather than opting for a superior, invisible, purely 'spiritual' realm.

created. God is active in bringing the sun and rain on the just and unjust alike (Matt. 5: 45). He watches over the sparrows and clothes the flowers of the field, and he will provide for his people as he does for the whole creation (Matt. 6: 25–34; 7: 7–11; 10: 29).

None of this means that Jesus necessarily put himself forward as cosmic sovereign in an easily recognizable fashion. What it does suggest is that he affirmed the value of the created order, and that he looked forward to a renewal of that order rather than its annihilation. The caricature of Jesus as a world-denying ascetic owes more to the desire to make Christianity a Platonism for the masses than to what we find in the gospels themselves. It would be strange indeed for the Church to posit Jesus as the creator of a world he thought was essentially useless.

A Jesus who affirms the natural world, however, is a long way from a Jesus who created the natural world. It is the memory of Jesus' mighty works in the world that spurred the development of the doctrine of his agency in creation. Nowhere is this clearer than in the accounts of the so-called nature miracles.

We may return first to the story analyzed above by Bauckham: the stilling of the storm. This illustrates Jesus' control over nature in particularly dramatic fashion. While it takes place on the relatively small scale of the Sea of Galilee, the cosmic implications of the event become evident in the concluding question of the disciples: 'Who is this, then, that the wind and the sea submit to him?' (Mark. 4: 41). The suppressed answer, as has often been noted, lies in a cluster of Old Testament verses: God is the one who stills the sea, whether at the exodus (Ps. 105: 9 LXX), or in his ongoing maintenance of the created order (Pss. 65: 8; 107: 25–32). Ps. 89: 8–9 puts the backdrop of Jesus' storm-stilling in the sharpest relief, asking, 'Lord God of hosts, *who is like you* . . . you rule over the rising of the sea'. Echoes of the creation of the world may have been heard by some, since the controlling of the chaos waters was an integral part of the initial ordering of the cosmos. But the synoptic authors do not make the equation explicit.

Jesus' other sea miracle, walking on the water, may seem at first a pale counterpart to the stilling of the storm. Apart from generically revealing his 'superhuman powers', the account does not at first seem to serve any obvious purpose. But scriptural allusion again reveals

hidden depths in this story.¹⁵ Here the clearest parallel is LXX Job 9: 8: ‘the one who stretches out the heavens alone, and walks on the sea as if it were dry land’ (ὁ τανύσας τὸν οὐρανὸν μόνος καὶ περιπατῶν ὡς ἐπ’ ἐδάφους ἐπὶ θαλάσσης; cf. Mark 6: 48 περιπατῶν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης). That this precise verse from Job may be in view is supported by the further allusion to Job 9: 11: ‘If he were to go beyond me, I would not see, and if he passed me (ἐὰν παρέλθῃ) by I would not know’. This helps explain the curious note in Mark 6: 48, ‘and he meant to pass them by’, ἥθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς. With these allusions in play, the identification of Jesus with YHWH becomes evident. This is a theophany every bit as much as the storm-stilling. The fact that several verses in this chapter of Job, including 9: 8 itself, speak of God’s power as creator enhances its value for our study.

The feeding of the five thousand, recorded in all four gospels, functions in a very similar way to the sea-miracle accounts. Again, we have an account of a dramatic but localized miracle, whose deeper implications emerge only after reflections on Scripture. The feeding miracle has obvious affinities with Elisha’s activity in 2 Kings 4: 42–4, though on a grander scale. But it is likely that associations with the story of the manna would also have been heard here, even before John made the connection plain (John. 6: 26–71). If so, another question from the Psalms can hardly be avoided: ‘Can God spread a table in the wilderness?’ (Ps. 78: 19). Who, then, is Jesus? As with the stilling of the storm, the echoes of Scripture are clearest from the stories of God’s interventions to save his people Israel. While working with a few loaves and fishes does not strictly speaking constitute *creatio ex nihilo*, it is not far off.

HEALINGS

In contrast to the relatively scarce accounts of nature miracles, the healings of Jesus constitute a large proportion of the Gospel narratives. In addition to detailed stories, we have summary statements

¹⁵ See the synopsis in Gathercole, *Pre-existent Son*, 63–64.

like Matt. 4: 23: 'And Jesus went about all of Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every illness and debility among the people'. Healings were clearly a central part of Jesus' public ministry, and even the most skeptical observers tend to explain them as psychosomatic experiences rather than to expunge them from the record entirely. The healings are interesting for our purposes because explicit ties with creation are generally lacking in the texts. They represent the inbreaking of the kingdom, and so their eschatological import is made known (e.g. by reference to Isa. 61), but they are not directly related to texts in Genesis or the psalms of creation. At the same time, one can see how the circulation of such stories would have pushed the Church to begin thinking of Jesus in terms of protology as well as eschatology.

Among the myriad examples, we may begin with the intertwined narratives of Jairus' daughter and the woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5, one of the literary and spiritual highlights of the Gospel. Both focus on characters at the periphery of the social order: both females, both nameless in the narrative, the woman excluded by her (presumably vaginal) discharge of blood, the girl on the cusp of womanhood excluded more definitely still by death. There are contrasts as well: the girl, whose life began just as the woman's was beginning to fall apart, has a family, and an advocate of high status in her father; the woman is alone and impoverished. They converge as recipients of the power of God working through Jesus. They are restored not only to health, but also to family: the woman receives the name 'daughter' from Jesus; the girl returns to the intimate fellowship of eating and drinking.¹⁶

The healing of the leper in Mark 1: 40–5 is another vivid illustration of the restorative mission of Jesus. The leper's presenting problem is not his disease per se, but the uncleanness that necessarily attends it: 'If you are willing, you are able to *cleanse* me'. In addition to pragmatic concerns for public health, the Levitical code is evidently rooted in the desire for Israel to reflect insofar as is possible the pristine conditions of the original state of creation. Wholeness and order are set against mixture and chaos. Thus bodily fluids which

¹⁶ We may compare this with the healing of Peter's mother-in-law in Mark 1: 30–1: after she was cured of her fever 'she served them'.

escape outside their normal confines (semen, menstrual discharge, etc.) must be regulated, but a body *wholly* covered with leprosy is acceptable (Lev. 13: 13).

The accounts of Jesus healing on the Sabbath are particularly important for us. Sabbath controversies in general play a major role in the Gospels, and appear to have been a major bone of contention between Jesus and his opponents. Sabbath healings were often a trigger for their debates. The interplay with creation themes comes out most clearly perhaps in the story of the woman who had been bent over for eighteen years (Luke 13: 10–17). Jesus frees her from the spirit of infirmity (vv. 11–12), but the synagogue leader protests that she ought rather to come on some other day to be healed. Jesus' response is, I believe, constructed quite carefully. Not only does he make use of the familiar argument that people routinely rescue their animals on the Sabbath; he says precisely; 'Since this is a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has bound for eighteen years, should she not be loosed from this chain on the Sabbath day?'. The point is not simply that it is permissible for the woman to be healed on the Sabbath; rather, it is that the Sabbath is the best possible time for her to be healed. As long as she is bound by her infirmity, she is unable to fully participate in the joyous celebration that should mark the commemoration of God's completion of creation (cf. Exod. 20: 11). Now that Jesus has brought her back to her intended place in the created order, she can at last resume genuine Sabbath worship.¹⁷

Equally important is Matthew's account of the corn-picking incident with its climax, 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath' (Matt. 12: 8). This statement is intentionally ambiguous, indicating at one level that the Sabbath was created for people (collectively 'the son of man'), and at another that Jesus as the ultimate Son of Man has the prerogative to interpret the Sabbath ordinances as he sees fit. This is high Christology indeed. But Luke's point, while not as explicit, is equally radical. Not only is Jesus deciding what activity may or may not be permitted on the Sabbath; he is acting as the agent of the creator God who brings things to their completion so that they might share his Sabbath rest.

¹⁷ See Darrell Bock, *Luke 9: 51–24: 53* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996), 1218–19.

Taken together, the miracle accounts also address the deeper question of Jesus, the Mosaic Law, and creation. In the first three instances Jesus' encounter with the sick person represents a potentially damaging encounter with impurity. The woman with the discharge is subject to the laws of *niddah*; the girl has corpse impurity; and the leper is the parade example of the unclean Israelite (Lev. 13: 45). One might imagine, then, that Jesus' holiness will be compromised by contact with these people. But the re-creative power of God working through Jesus reverses the usual dynamics. Rather than their impurity tainting him, his holiness sanctifies them. In the same way, Jesus' decision to heal on the Sabbath brings him into a vulnerable position. But how could it be wrong to do right even—especially—on the Sabbath?

None of this in and of itself negates the Mosaic Law. Jesus explicitly instructs the leper, as we have seen, to show himself to the priest in accordance with the Law. The woman healed on the Sabbath, far from being freed from the Law, is at last genuinely able to keep it. But the dramatic inbreaking of God's power through Jesus does change the calculus of how to follow God's ways. No longer is it simply a question of properly managing life's ills in a hopelessly broken world. It is instead a matter of cultivating an openness to receiving new life. Creative restoration of bodies and relationships trumps mere containment strategies. In a sense, the words of Jesus in Matthew are borne out by every layer of the gospel tradition, and particularly by the healing accounts: 'I did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them' (Matt. 5: 17).¹⁸

None of the accounts of Jesus' healings make sense as a later invention tailored to induce belief in Jesus as agent of creation. But they could certainly open up in that direction for theologically aware readers. Wonder-working activity might take many forms. The depiction of Jesus as a healer draws the reader inevitably into the story

¹⁸ We might include here Jesus' strictures against divorce, which again pit the concessions of the Mosaic Law against the ideal of the original creation, *which Jesus is in the process of restoring*. Indeed, in my opinion the premise of the entire Sermon on the Mount is that because God's creation project is being put back on track through Jesus, people are now liberated to live in accordance with God's original purposes and do not need to limit themselves to the remedial measures available in the Law or later tradition. For some interesting thoughts in this regard see Macaskill 181–95.

of the creating and redeeming God of Israel. He is not simply calling attention to himself, or producing a persuasive advertisement campaign for his ethical program or political platform. He is putting things back to the way they were supposed to be in the beginning. As R. S. Barbour says:

[B]ut if those very words and deeds which brought God's astonishing grace into the lives of men also corresponded, strangely, with what ordinary men considered to be natural, normal, and right, and in accordance with the true constitution of things, then we have the basis for something less questionable and no less arresting [than mere preexistence]. This man, it might have been said, not only brings the marvellous newness and freshness of God's coming Kingdom (already mysteriously present); he also brings the original, primal, rightness of things, which any man who is really human can recognize, into focus once more. In Him the old and the new become one without confusion and without separation; and that is the secret of the Kingdom.¹⁹

EXORCISMS

As with the healings, Jesus' exorcisms were an essential feature of his public profile.²⁰ Indeed, it is at times hard to distinguish between the two. This goes not only for those instances, such as the case of the, apparently, epileptic boy in Luke 9, where moderns see a medical issue and ancients a spiritual one. There is also ambiguity within the texts themselves, as in Luke 4: 39. When Jesus 'rebukes' (ἐπετίμῃσεν) a fever, does this mean the fever is the work of malevolent spirits, since the same word is used in Luke 9: 42 for the rebuking of the evil spirit tormenting the epileptic boy? I would say not, since spirits are not mentioned here; the gospel writers could distinguish lexically between healings and exorcisms; and ἐπιτιμάω can be used for any number of things other than exorcism. But many would disagree.

¹⁹ Barbour, 'Creation, Wisdom and Christ', in W. A. McKinney (ed.), *Creation, Christ, and Culture: Studies in Honour of T. F. Torrance* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1976), 31–2.

²⁰ See esp. Graham Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993).

What matters for us is that there was no unbridgeable gulf between healings and exorcisms in the ancient world. Both signaled a unique authority over threatening forces in the world.

God's power in creation is linked with his power over demons in some Jewish texts. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide salient examples. We may highlight the following text from 11Q11 col. 2: 12:

1 [And you shall say to him: Who] 2 are you? [Did you make the heavens and] the depths [and everything they hold,] 3 the earth and every[thing there is upon the] earth? Who has ma[de these portents] 4 and these wonders upon the] earth? It is he, yhwh, [the one who] 5 has done a[ll this by his power,] summoning all the [angels to come to his assistance,] 6 every [holy se]ed which is in his presence, [and the one who judges] 7 [the sons of] heaven and [all the] earth [on their account,] because they sent 8 sin upon [all the earth,] and [evil] upon every ma[n]²¹

The story of the Gerasene demoniac in Mark 5 stands as the consummate illustration of Jesus' powers over the demonic in the Synoptics and will serve as our primary point of reference.²² By any account, the man described in Mark 5 is in a situation of absolute disaster. Without importing foreign concepts into the text, we may say that he has been completely engulfed by the forces of chaos. He is outside the bounds of religion (the spirit/s possessing him is *ἀκάθαρτος*), outside the bounds of his community, and one might even say outside the bounds of life itself (living among the tombs). All of this changes after his encounter with Jesus.

As in the case of the nature miracles and healings, the story in Mark makes no attempt to persuade the reader that Jesus is the primordial *Schöpfungsmittler*, and so we need not suspect it was invented or embellished to establish such a claim. At the same

²¹ *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, trans. Florentino Garcia Martinez 2nd edn. (Leiden: Brill, 1996). 4Q511, fr. 30 begins with a mention of God 'sealing' (סָתַם) the heavens and the abysses, almost certainly in the act of creation (ll. 1–3) and goes on to speak of the author's ability to frighten 'all the bastard spirits' (l. 7). In LAB 60 David's exorcism song is permeated by creation motifs: the demon is enjoined to remember that he is a created being, subject to God's all powerful command. Cf. Testament of Adam 2: 10, 4: 5.

²² For a lively discussion see Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (NY: Doubleday, 2000), 347–54.

time, the story inevitably causes one to think about Jesus' role with respect to the cosmos. The Gerasene demoniac sits amidst a perfect storm of human misery in the world; within him there is an almost unfathomable concentration of malign spiritual influence. Yet Jesus not only confronts the surface ills that plague him, but strikes to the very root of the problem. The implications of all this are put in especially suggestive fashion in Luke's account, where the demons implore Jesus not to send them 'into the abyss' (8: 31). The inclusion of the cosmologically freighted word ἄβυσσος indicates the scope of what is going on in this encounter. The close associations of the ἄβυσσος with *water*,²³ meanwhile, assist Luke in explaining the puzzling fact that in Mark's account Jesus appears to accept the demons' plea bargain for a lighter sentence. In Luke's account Jesus does in fact judge them, sending them into the symbolic 'abyss' (the lake) as a sign of their ultimate consignment to the abyss of God's judgment.²⁴

The theological concerns of the story are enhanced by its redactional setting in the gospels. It is hardly a coincidence that this exorcism comes hard on the heels of the stilling of the storm. Jesus is able to deal with chaos at every level, whether natural or supernatural. We will explore in the next chapter the deep connections between natural order and social order in the ancient world. Suffice it to say here that the evangelists were well aware of this way of viewing reality. We can see a similar juxtaposition of elements in the demon-possessed boy in Mark 9: 14–29. The 'spirit' is the most obvious threat here, but it is important to note that the spirit attempts to destroy the boy by throwing him into 'fire and water'. These are the most threatening elements in the creation, the ones most liable, so to speak, to lapse back into the service of chaos. Jesus' powerful intervention in the spiritual realm saves the boy from inner turmoil, but it also serves to make him safe in the creation again.

²³ This can be traced back into the ancient Greek literature, where it is used exclusively as an adjective, but often in association with water (e.g. Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 137, *Suppliant Women*, 470; Herodotus, 2: 28), and more importantly in the LXX, where every use of the word arguably refers to water, whether of springs or the primordial ocean. Luke plays between this sense of abyss and the contemporary nuance of holding-tank of evil spirits (e.g. Rev. 9: 1–11; 11Q11, fr. a, 1. 2–6).

²⁴ See Darrell Bock, *Luke 1: 1–9: 50* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994), 775.

JOHN

Concerns about ‘theological interference’ in the stories of Jesus multiply when we turn to the Gospel of John. Even if one puts considerations of bare historicity aside, we are left with a Gospel that wears its theology on its sleeve, where virtually every act of Jesus receives a corresponding theological discourse. The three miracles that will most concern us—the transformation of the water into wine, the healing of the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus—are absent from the synoptic tradition and thus might be suspected to be later accretions rather than primitive stories of the early Church. Finally, John’s Gospel begins with a bald assertion of Jesus’ agency in creation. The Gospel, in its final form and taken as a whole, represents the culmination of the early Church’s reflections on Christ and creation, rather than the inception.²⁵

The problem is not easily resolved, and those disinclined to see anything by way of historical memory in John are free to regard what follows as a proleptic appearance of later discussions on the fully-formed doctrine of Jesus’ *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*. Indeed, it will be difficult to discuss the stories without involving to some degree John’s theological interests. But, without pressing the point too hard, there remain good reasons to take the stories of Jesus’ mighty works in John as part of the impetus for this doctrine, not just the fruit of it. To begin with, I must reiterate the more general point made earlier: each of the evangelists ties his Christology to memories of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. John does this no less than the synoptists. As always, he exhibits a unique perspective on matters; but it is a perspective that is no less rooted in the historical, social, and geographical world of first-century Palestine. Jesus spends time at Capernaum, which we knew from the Synoptics, and at Cana, which we did not. He engages with named figures (Nathanael, Peter, Caiaphas, Pilate) in known places (the pool by the sheep gate in Jerusalem, Pilate’s praetorium). Even the event which causes John the most problems with modern-day historians, the raising of Lazarus, is

²⁵ The point is strengthened, of course, if one accepts the usual dating of the Gospel in the nineties.

put squarely on the map of Judaea: it happens in Bethany, right next to Jerusalem, with named figures who would have been well known in the early Church. Far from shrinking back into the ethereal realm, John puts this most startling of signs at the center of the events leading up to Jesus' very public execution.

There seems to be little question that, whatever others might make of his account, John thought himself to be writing about events that had actually happened. This is the key for the present argument. The miracles, as signs, are one of the chief means by which Christ's messianic glory is made known in the world. If at the literary level we move from the Prologue to the events of the recent past, the logic of John's theological development is from past to Prologue. John wishes his readers/hearers to believe that Jesus is the Christ (with all that entails, including his creative activity) by means of his recitation of Jesus' words and deeds (20: 31). It would seem plausible that his own spiritual journey proceeded on a similar path.

Whatever one makes of the foregoing, we can turn to the stories themselves with the recognition that their Christological significance should not be far below the surface. We can begin with the Wedding at Cana. At a basic level, the transformation of water to wine, like the synoptic nature miracles, demonstrates Jesus' unique control over the natural order. Placing it as the first of Jesus' signs, however, indicates that something more is in mind. Jesus is inaugurating the new creation, replete with a messianic banquet (cf. Amos 9: 11–15).

The healing of the man born blind in John 9 likewise has obvious similarities to the healing miracles in the Synoptics and thus carries the same formative theological content. But John makes the overtones of re-creation unmistakable in his detailed recitation of the event. He sets up the reader for this with Jesus' declaration in 8: 12, 'I am the light of the world,' such that the healing of the blind man in chapter 9 becomes the proof of this assertion (note the reiteration of the statement in 9: 5). The allusion to Genesis 1 is of paramount importance for us. Strictly speaking, the identification of Jesus with the light does not necessitate that he is the creator. There are a number of exegetical and theological steps which need to be traversed before that conclusion can be drawn. Since the same issue surfaces in all its complexity with the juxtaposition of light and *λόγος* in the

Prologue, we will reserve that discussion for our detailed exploration of John 1 in chapter 10 below.

There is, however, an underappreciated allusion to creation in the *mud* used to heal the blind man. Few modern commentators have been comfortable following Irenaeus' assertion that the passage casts Jesus in the role of creator.²⁶ The chief problem is that the creation of Adam in Genesis 2 uses 'dust' (χούς/עֶפֶר) rather than 'mud' (John 9: 6: πηλός/חֹמֶר). But a look at the use of πηλός in both biblical and extra-biblical literature shows that it would have been readily understandable as the stuff out of which humanity was made. As far back as Aristophanes humanity could be described as πηλός.²⁷ In the Bible, πηλός is the 'clay' in the repeated assertion that God as creator is the potter, with humanity being the clay (Isa. 29: 16; 45: 9; Jer. 18: 6; Sir. 33: 18; Rom. 9: 21; cf. Job 10: 9; 33: 6). The lexical analysis supports Irenaeus: John portrays Jesus as standing firmly in the place of the creator God, fashioning from the earth new eyes for the man born blind, bringing his portion of the creation to its intended fullness.

We have already mentioned some of the historical issues surrounding the resurrection of Lazarus. It stands as in many ways the centerpiece of the Gospel, bringing to a climax Jesus' wonder-working ministry, and triggering the events leading up to the crucifixion. As with the other mighty works, the clearest markers within the text point towards the eschatological intrusion of God's kingdom into the world. Martha affirms that Lazarus will rise on the last day; Jesus counters that this future reality is already incipiently present in himself, the resurrection and the life (11: 24–5). Jesus' call to the entombed Lazarus is a clear echo of the prophecy of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37 (underscored by the prior allusion to Ezekiel in John 5: 28–9). But the magnitude of this miracle demands that the reader probe more deeply into Jesus' identity and his relationship with the creator God. Lazarus has been dead four days, and so his call from the grave is virtually a *creatio ex nihilo*. Again, chapter 5 of John provides the appropriate commentary: 'Just as the Father has life in

²⁶ *Adv. Haer.* 5. 15. 2, in C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 2nd edn. (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1978), 358 (though Barrett himself finds the suggestion 'improbable').

²⁷ *Birds*, 686; cf. Herodes, *Odes*, 2. 29.

himself, so he has given to the Son to have life in himself.' We are drawn thence back to the Prologue: in him was life (1: 4).

JESUS' WORDS

According to Luke 24: 19, Jesus was remembered as being powerful not only in deed, but also in *word* (δυνατὸς ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ). While the memories of his deeds were, I believe, the major impetus behind the development of the doctrine of Jesus' agency in creation, some mention must be made here of the role of his words in that process. On the surface, the notice in Luke could indicate nothing more than that Jesus was an effective speaker in the public square, as evidenced by, for example, his repartee with the Pharisees and Sadducees in Luke 20. This would of course be essential for any leader in the ancient world. But Luke, like Matthew and Mark, emphasizes that Jesus' speech had a weightiness that transcended mere rhetorical flourish: he speaks with an authority (ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ ἣν ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ; Luke 4: 32) that astonishes people. Such 'authority' could refer to the sheer emotive force of his wise words upon his hearers (as in Luke 4: 32), or to the fact that Jesus spoke definitively without reference to prior authorities (the likely meaning of the contrast between him and the 'teachers of the law' in Matt. 7: 29 at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount). Such authority would certainly tie Jesus ever closer to God, and thus in a very indirect way lead to speculation about Jesus' role in creation.

But Jesus' ἐξουσία was demonstrated above all by the fact that his words were not empty. He speaks, and things happen; and this brings us much closer to the idea of his *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*. 'What is this? A new teaching, and with authority. He commands the unclean spirits and they obey him!' (Mark 1: 27). As often as not, Jesus does his mighty deeds through his words. He rebukes demons, commands the winds and waves, speaks words of healing face to face, or at a distance. There is no gap between his word and his deed. On the one occasion where it is noted he could do no miracles (Mark 6: 5; more delicately, 'he did not do . . .', Matt. 13: 58) we are immediately told it

was the result of the people's lack of faith. There is no description of his word returning to him void.

This remarkable confluence of speech and act may recall the biblical prophets, and Moses in particular. But the synoptic writers, no less than John, clearly want the reader to see that it recalls most clearly God himself. Yet we must reiterate what was said above: Jesus' words, like the deeds to which they are inextricably tied, are presented as historical memory. People were powerfully affected by what he said as well as what he did. The Synoptics only hint at the fact that the words of Jesus may have been active long before he appeared proclaiming the kingdom of God in Galilee. John, meanwhile, does far more than hint at Jesus' role in creation, and the reader is left in no doubt as to Jesus' exalted status.

JESUS' WISDOM

Jesus' words include his wisdom, but a separate section is appropriate in light of the obvious relevance of wisdom to the topic at hand. It is regularly suggested that Jesus' cryptic allusions to himself as Wisdom incarnate led, via Proverbs 8, to the belief that he must therefore have filled Wisdom's role in the creation of the world.²⁸ If it could be demonstrated that Jesus clearly identified himself during his public ministry with God's Wisdom, or at least that people remembered him as having done so, then this could indeed have played some part in shaping the thinking about Jesus and creation. If, on the other hand, one believes the Church foisted Wisdom upon Jesus, we are left with the familiar question of why such a remarkable identity should be attached to an otherwise unassuming Galilean.

In any case, it is difficult to see that much can be made of the few and obscure statements about Wisdom in the Gospel records.²⁹

²⁸ See e.g. Martin Hengel, 'Jesus as Messianic Teacher of Wisdom and the Beginnings of Christology', in his *Studies in Early Christology*, trans. Rollin Kearns (Edinburgh: Clark, 1995), 75ff.; Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2000).

²⁹ See esp. the detailed critique of Wisdom Christology in the Gospels by Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son*, 193–209; see also e.g. the comments of Fee, in 'Wisdom

There is no question that Jesus is presented as a ‘Wisdom teacher’ in the technical sense of the term: he uses a variety of aphorisms, parables, and other forms of speech associated with the Wisdom tradition.³⁰ Historical Jesus scholars of various stripes would even be willing to say that this is not mere gospel portraiture, but accurately reflects the proclamation of Jesus himself. Furthermore, it is entirely possible that thoughts of Jesus and Wisdom took a similar trajectory to Jesus and God’s Word: Jesus’ Wisdom is not only superior to that of the ancients (like Solomon: Matt. 12: 42/Luke 11: 31), it is in fact the undiluted Wisdom of God himself, fully present in the Messiah. Jesus could thus be brought in close conjunction with Wisdom, though this is not quite saying Jesus simply is God’s Wisdom incarnate, as John says he is the Word incarnate.³¹ Suffice it to say for now that seeing Jesus as filled with God’s Wisdom involves far fewer conceptual difficulties than seeing him as the equivalent of, or the replacement for, the figure in Proverbs 8.

In any case, the Gospels give us very little to go on when it comes to making an absolute equation between Jesus and Wisdom, especially an allegedly ‘hypostasized’ Wisdom, such that the words of Jesus himself would form the basis for later reflections on Proverbs 8. The explicit uses of *σοφία* in the Gospels are remarkably uninformative in this regard. Jesus’ wisdom is assuredly noted (Mark 6: 2/Matt. 13: 54) even from his youth (Luke 2: 40–52), but it is not his exclusive property: it can be shared with his disciples (Luke 21: 15). The two accounts sometimes adduced to support the proposition ‘Jesus is Wisdom’, Luke 11: 49 and Matt. 11: 19/Luke 7: 35, are very slender reeds indeed. The first—‘On account of this the wisdom of God says, I will send to you prophets and apostles . . .’—presumably refers to a

Christology’ in Paul in his *To What End Exegesis? Essays Textual, Exegetical, and Theological* (Cambridge: Eerdmans/Vancouver: Regent College, 2001) and W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (London: SPCK, 1948), 155–8. In this we run counter to, e.g., Hermann Von Lips, *Weisheitliche Traditionen im Neuen Testament*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn and Odil Hannes Steck, *Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament*, 64 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 265–90.

³⁰ See e.g. Martin Hengel, ‘Jesus as Messianic Teacher’, 90–93.

³¹ We will argue in detail in Chapter 4 why this distinction is important.

general scriptural principle that God's prophets are persecuted. It might possibly be a prophetic idiom for Jesus' own Wisdom-inspired words, as Matthew's use of 'I' for 'the wisdom of God' suggests. But this is still a considerable distance from equating Jesus and Wisdom. The second—'But wisdom is justified by her works/children (Matt./Luke)'—appears to be simply a proverbial expression meaning, 'The wisdom of what I am doing [namely, eating with tax collectors and sinners] will be shown by the results'.

Wisdom motifs have been discerned in other passages where σοφία does not explicitly appear. The lament over Jerusalem in Luke 13: 34–5/Matt. 23: 34–9 has been interpreted by Bultmann as a speech by 'a supra-historical entity, namely Wisdom'.³² But, despite the presence of bird and nest imagery in Wisdom traditions, it is just as likely that Jesus speaks here as the definitive representative of a God who manifests tender, mother-bird-like care towards his people.³³ Similarly, the assertion that Jesus' statement about his homelessness is an allusion to Wisdom's failure to find a home among men is tenuous. Surely an itinerant ministry marked by rejection was a feature of the biblical prophets from Moses on down. At most, we may affirm with Hengel that Jesus has here picked up on 'the wretched lot of the homeless exile [as] a favourite Wisdom theme'.³⁴

Connections with wisdom are somewhat clearer in Jesus' 'Come unto me . . .' saying in Matt. 11: 27. This does have formal affinities with Wisdom's invitation in Prov. 9: 1 ff., and even more directly with the words in Sir. 51: 25–6 (cf. 6: 18–30): 'I opened my mouth and said, Acquire wisdom for yourselves without money. Put your neck under her yoke, and let your souls receive instruction; it is to be found close by'. We must first point out that this is not a self-predication of Wisdom, but rather a statement by Sirach about the wisdom he has found and is now sharing with others. Thus, while it is possible Jesus is identifying himself as the Wisdom mentioned by Sirach, it is at least as likely that he is making only an oblique reference to Wisdom by way of antithesis to the tradition. Rather than going

³² Quoted in Hengel, 'Jesus as Messianic Teacher', 84.

³³ Noted in Hengel, 'Jesus as Messianic Teacher', 84–5.

³⁴ Hengel, 'Jesus as Messianic Teacher', 91–2.

to the sages and becoming involved with their tradition, Jesus seems to be saying, come directly to me.³⁵

To sum up, Wisdom tradition in general is surely important for understanding the contours of Jesus' teaching, and specific details from Proverbs 8 may have been a component of later theological reflection on Jesus' role in creation. But while it is possible that Jesus' words might have hinted at an intimate association between himself and God using Wisdom language and themes, the evidence from the Gospels is too unclear to state this with confidence. As we will see in later chapters, Wisdom is only one way of expressing the more fundamental reality of *God's self-communication to the world*.

JESUS AS SON

H. Langkammer believes that the Church's understanding of Jesus as God's Son is the most important foundation for later protological speculation: 'Der Glaube an Jesus den Gottesohn ist also älter als der Glaube an Christus den Schöpfungsmittler und war seinerseits das ausschlaggebende Motiv für die Entstehung der Schöpfungsmittlerproklamation'.³⁶ He goes on to argue that this understanding of divine sonship may be traced back to Jesus himself. Langkammer makes some interesting observations along these lines, and he would hardly be alone in claiming that Jesus saw himself as having a unique filial relation with God. Surely the Gospels themselves see Jesus' sonship as an integral part of his self-understanding. Furthermore, Langkammer is not suggesting that this alone led to the doctrine in question. To the extent that he wishes to trace the teaching back to the memories of Jesus rather than to Hellenistic speculations, I am fully supportive.

The bare predication of Jesus as Son in the Gospels, however, does not lead directly to the doctrine of Jesus as *Schöpfungsmittler*. The sonship language might be derived from the royal psalms, or from

³⁵ Macaskill, 147–9.

³⁶ Langkammer, 'Der Ursprung des Glaubens an Christus den Schöpfungsmittler', *Liber Annuus* (annual of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum), 18 (1968), 78.

Jesus' role as the leader of a renewed Israel, but neither of these categories directly involves the creation of the world. The most that can be said is that Jesus' assertion of sonship brought him into a close association with God, so that it might in a very general way lead one to speculate as to how his works relate to the works of God. But in and of itself it is difficult to see how it could produce the doctrine. There are a number of intermediate exegetical and theological moves that had to be made before the teaching could emerge, and it is precisely those intermediate moves that concern us.³⁷ Sonship alone says too little, because it says too much.

RESURRECTION AND NEW CREATION

The idea of Jesus as agent of creation is of course unthinkable without belief in the resurrection. One would not be inclined to envision the Messiah as existing before the creation if he did not possess ongoing life in the present. But again, the resurrection per se hardly necessitates that Jesus created the world in the first place. In keeping with our earlier arguments against a world-negating Jesus, the gospel stories of the resurrection affirm that the risen Jesus remains engaged with the creation (speaking, eating, susceptible to touch and sight), even if he transcends its present limitations. He also exercises eschatological authority over it (see esp. Matt. 28: 18–20). As we will see, this latter point is a crucial point of departure for Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*. But it remains a point of departure rather than the final destination.

There is one passage, though, that does give us more to work with: the raising of the saints in Matt. 27: 50–4. As is the case with the story of Lazarus, the historicity of this admittedly strange account has been widely questioned, and its theological *Tendenz* becomes evident on

³⁷ One such move, for instance, would be teasing out the allusion to the Danielic Son of Man in Jesus' confession before Caiaphas (Mark 14: 62 parr), which Langkammer sees as a critical piece of the puzzle (pp. 68–74). Langkammer does not develop what strikes me as the most significant part of the allusion: the fact that the Son of Man gains (or regains?) dominion over the beasts. Such a clear reference to the key dominion motifs of Genesis is surely of interest for Jesus' role in creation.

close inspection. Nonetheless, it presents itself as historical memory, and circulated as such (presumably) before and (necessarily) after the composition of Matthew's Gospel. We will need to forgo consideration of some of the myriad issues that dominate the discussion of the text, particularly the vexed question of the timing of the saints' resurrection, and concentrate our efforts on the interplay with Ezekiel 37.

The influence of Ezek. 37: 12 on Matt. 27: 52 has been widely noted, but few commentators have reckoned with the many and detailed parallels between the two passages. The main connections may be delineated as follows³⁸:

1. In his description of Jesus' last breath, Matthew changes Mark's ἐξέπνευσεν (Mark 15: 37) to ἀφῆκεν τὸ πνεῦμα, thus bringing the Spirit to the fore. It is hardly a coincidence that the πνεῦμα is a focal point of Ezekiel 37, occurring no less than nine times in the Greek.
2. The great cry (φωνῇ μεγάλῃ) of Jesus in Matt. 27: 50 is matched by the 'noise' in Ezek. 37: 7 לִי-יָהּ. This is a minus in the Greek, but the obvious Greek equivalent for לִי would be φωνή.
3. Ezekiel's prophesying is followed by an earthquake in the Greek: καὶ ἰδοὺ σεισμός. Likewise Matthew twice highlights the earth-shaking effect of Jesus' death: ἡ γῆ ἐσεισέσθη (v. 51); ἰδόντες τὸν σεισμόν (v. 54).
4. The opening of the tombs in Matt. 27: 53 (ἐξεληθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ) is an obvious allusion to Ezek. 37: 12 (ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀνοίγω ὑμῶν τὰ μνήματα καὶ ἀνάξω ὑμᾶς ἐκ τῶν μνημάτων ὑμῶν).
5. Equally clear is the parallel between the raised saints entering the holy city (Matt. 27: 53: εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν) and the exiles entering into the land of Israel (Ezek. 37: 12: εἰσάξω ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν γῆν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ).
6. This remarkable work of God in Ezekiel will lead the nations 'to know that I am the Lord' (37: 28), while in Matthew the events surrounding Jesus' death also inspire a confession that Jesus is God's son from the pagan centurion (27: 54).
7. Finally, on a slightly more speculative note, it is certainly of interest that Ezekiel *as son of man* is a key actor in the raising of the dry bones. While Matthew does not use the expression Son of Man in chapter 27, it is

³⁸ Note that I freely draw upon both the Greek text of Ezekiel and the MT, since we cannot be sure that our present 'LXX' is precisely what Matthew would have had before him. For further discussion see Donald Senior, 'The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Mt. 27: 51–53)', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 38 (1976), 312–29.

pervasive in his Gospel, and it is particularly as the Son of Man that Jesus is 'handed over' to death (26: 2, 24, 45, 64).

The formative influence of Ezekiel 37 on Matthew's presentation of the raising of the saints can hardly be doubted. The purpose of the allusions, I believe, is to demonstrate that Jesus brings about the fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision, and that through his death he releases the life-giving Spirit that triggers the end-times cataclysm and the end-times resurrection. What Ezekiel did as son of man in the visionary state, Jesus does in actuality. The local and provisional phenomena of earthquakes and the raising of certain saints anticipate, and indeed inaugurate, the new age which is incipiently present in the world even as it awaits its full expression at the return of Christ. For our purposes, the key is that Christ is the Spirit-bearer through whom God begins the new creation. Whether this story in particular served as a primary spur to reflection on Jesus as agent of creation may well be questioned. But it is, if nothing else, a dynamic narrative expression of the same theology that arguably drives much of New Testament thinking in this area: Jesus' radical agency in eschatological renewal opens the way for thinking of his agency in creation. It is thus both a fitting conclusion to our discussion of the Gospels, and a fitting introduction to the subsequent experience of Jesus in the Church and the development of the doctrine in the New Testament.

THE WORK OF JESUS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The memories of Jesus' mighty deeds of re-creation form the foundation for the doctrine of his agency in creation. But the ongoing work of Jesus' Spirit in the early Church was also critical in laying the groundwork for later theological thinking. Whatever one makes of the claim in absolute terms, the first generations of Christians viewed themselves as experiencing the cosmic reign of Christ through the Spirit he had sent into their midst. Since an essential premise in New Testament thought is that the Spirit is sent by Christ and does his

work, there will be considerable conceptual overlap between the public ministry of Jesus and the work of the Spirit in the Church, and thus we may restrict ourselves to a few brief observations.

First and foremost, the eschatological work of re-creation continued through the Spirit. Paul virtually takes the miraculous for granted when writing to his churches. 'The one who supplies the Spirit and does mighty works (*δυνάμεις*) among you—does he do it by works of the Law or by hearing with faith?' (Gal. 3: 5). 'For to one is given through the Spirit a word of wisdom . . . to another gifts of healings by the one Spirit, to another the doing of mighty works . . .' (1 Cor. 12: 8–10).

James fully expects the prayers of the elders to bring about healing for sick members of the community (Jas. 5: 14–16). Both the language used for the healing and the theological framework of James 5 indicate that these healings are seen as eschatological works of renewal. The prayer of faith will 'save' (*σώσει*) the sick person, and 'the Lord [presumably Jesus, as in 5: 7] will raise him up' (*ἐγερῇ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος*). Taken alone, the words used could simply indicate healing and restoration to normal life; taken together, they have unmistakable overtones of 'salvation' and 'resurrection'. The temporal healing of individuals in the Church is a sign of the greater renewal to come. The passage begins in verse 7 with unmistakable language concerning Christ's return, comparing the saints to a farmer patiently awaiting the 'precious fruit of the earth' (*τὸν τίμιον καρπὸν τῆς γῆς*). The imagery recurs during the discussion of the eschatological figure par excellence, Elijah, whose three-and-a-half-year drought (Dan. 7; Rev. 12) ends with *the earth* (*ἡ γῆ*) giving forth *its fruit* (*τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς*). The parallels to verse 7 are obvious, and put all that lies between in an eschatologically charged atmosphere.

The stories in the book of Acts give graphic illustrations of the continued work of the risen Christ, particularly in his restoration of the created order. The theme of eschatological renewal is sounded clearly in Peter's citation of Joel's prophecy about the last days, which admittedly leans more heavily on de-creation than re-creation: 'And I will give wonders in heaven above and signs on earth below, blood and fire and vapor of smoke; the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood' (2: 19–20). But there are allusions back towards Genesis as well, with the gift of tongues at Pentecost reversing the

Babel curse. Jesus is addressed in 3: 15 as the 'leader' or even 'originator' of life (τὸν δὲ ἀρχηγὸν τῆς ζωῆς).

We find accounts of miraculous healings (3: 1–10), and even resurrections (9: 36–43; 20: 9–10), all done in the name and by the power of Jesus.³⁹ The watchword is found in 4: 30: 'while you stretch out your hand to do healing and signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant (or child; παιδός) Jesus'. Of the specific accounts, we might mention the lame man in Acts 3 who is restored to 'wholeness' (τὴν ὁλοκληρίαν) according to 3: 16; and the raising of Tabitha/Dorcas in Acts 9, with its deliberate echoes of the raising of Jairus' daughter in Mark 5.⁴⁰ The life-giving power of Jesus is now operative among his followers.

SUMMARY

If the hope of the coming messianic kingdom pushed the early Christians towards the future, the memories of Jesus' wonder-working deeds pulled them at the same time back towards the past. And not only the recent past: Jesus' mastery of the natural world, and his power over all the ills besetting humanity, inevitably drew them back further still. One can already detect, albeit faintly, echoes of Genesis in the gospel accounts; hints are offered, and questions raised, about Jesus' role in the creation. But how did these distant rumours come to sound clearly in the assertion that Jesus was the one through whom all things were made? To that story we now turn.

³⁹ As with the Gospels, the historicity of the accounts is not our first concern. Those inclined to date the book to the mid-second century may of course have no use for Acts even as testimony to the memories of early Christians, but I concur with those scholars who date it to the end of the first century at the latest. See e.g. the brief but insightful discussion of Hans Conzelmann, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1987), p. xxxiii.

⁴⁰ See Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 332–3.

Creation and Moral Order

We have argued that memories of Jesus' wonder-working ministry and the experience of similar phenomena in the early Church provided the impetus for thinking of him as the agent of creation. But we have also seen that these mighty works were done in the context of an eschatological renewal which included not only physical restoration, but also the reparation of the relationship between God and humanity. When we turn to the actual language of the doctrine of Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*, it becomes immediately apparent that it is formulated primarily by way of analogy with this relational aspect of Christ's redemptive work. Just as God saves people 'through Christ', so he created the world 'through Christ'.¹ After reviewing the evidence for this in the New Testament, we will go on to ask the more fundamental question of why such a move would make sense to the early Christian writers.

The first evidence that creation language was shaped by redemption language comes in our central texts. The two are intertwined in 1 Cor. 8: 6: 'and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we [come to God] through him'. Col. 1: 16 first affirms of Christ that τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται and then that God chose δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν (1: 20). Hebrews

¹ We might cite among many witnesses R.S. Barbour: 'There is of course the closest connection in the New Testament between the assertion that Christ is the agent or mediator of creation and the assertion that he is the agent of redemption; creation and new creation belong together' ('Creation, Wisdom, and Christ', in W. A. McKinney (ed.), *Creation, Christ, and Culture: Studies in Honour of T. F. Torrance* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1976), 23); cf. Hans-Friedrich Weiss, 'Schöpfung in Christus: Zur Frage der christologischen Begründung der Schöpfungstheologie im Neuen Testament', *Die Zeichen der Zeit*, 31 (1977), 434.

1 follows the note on the Son's agency in creation (1: 2) with an elaborate statement on his atoning work (1: 3), and in the same way John moves quickly from the creation of the world 'through him' (1: 3, 10) to people gaining the right to become children of God by his gift (1: 12).²

If one were inclined to suggest that the agency-in-creation language came first (not that many actually do), it is worth recording again how pervasive the language of Christ's agency in salvation is in the New Testament.³ We may briefly look at the use of *διά* and the genitive, since this is the standard form of expressing Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* in the New Testament.⁴ The New Testament writers often look back to Jesus' life and death as the revelation of God's saving presence. God did mighty acts through Jesus (Acts 2: 22). We have peace with God *διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*. To put it slightly differently, Jesus is the one *δι' οὗ* we have received reconciliation (Rom. 5: 11; 2 Cor. 5: 18), or the one through whom comes the inheritance as sons (Eph. 1: 5). We died to the Law through the body of Christ (Rom. 7: 4), and saving faith comes by hearing 'through the word of Christ' (Rom. 10: 17).

Christ's agency in salvation continues in the ongoing life of the Church: Jews and Gentiles alike have access to the Father through him (Eph. 2: 18); comfort abounds through him (2 Cor. 1: 5); through him we offer spiritual sacrifices to God (1 Pet. 2: 5). In sum, God works in us what is pleasing to him through Christ (Heb. 13: 21), and so it is fitting that thanks are offered to God through him (Rom. 7: 25; cf. 2 Cor. 1: 20).

Many of the 'through Christ' statements have a future focus. We have eternal life *διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν* (Rom. 5: 21); we are saved from wrath through him (Rom. 5: 9; cf. 1 Thess. 5: 9; Titus 3: 6; Jude 25); we have victory over death through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15: 57), as God will raise up the 'sleepers' through

² Cf. John 3: 17: 'that the world might be saved *through him*'.

³ See e.g. W. Thusing, *Per Christum in Deum* (Munster: Aschendorff, 1965).

⁴ We will deal with the most significant exception to this, the 'in him' of Col. 1: 16, in our chapter on Colossians. Suffice it to say that the uses of 'in Christ' or 'in him' to express Jesus' work of salvation are at least as numerous as the 'by him' statements. Thus whatever the precise meaning of creation 'in Christ' might be, the basic move from salvation statements to creation statements is still secure.

Jesus (1 Thess. 4: 14). In the end God will judge the secrets of humanity *διὰ Χριστοῦ* (Rom. 2: 16) and receive glory through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 4: 11).

The sheer weight of the numbers does not demand that the salvation statements came first, but it does strongly suggest that this is the case. The epistles are primarily concerned to help people understand God's saving work through Christ, by way of both present obedience and future hope. This was of course grounded in God's initial creation of the world, which was regularly affirmed, but the details of the act of creation did not seem to be a topic of great independent interest in the early Church. Larry Hurtado summarizes the matter succinctly:

Convinced as early believers were that Jesus has been sent from God, and that final salvation is to be realized through Jesus, it was, in the logic of Jewish apocalyptic, only a small and very natural step to hold that he was also in some way 'there' with and in God from before the creation of the world.⁵

But if this critical step is 'small and natural' in the logic of Jewish apocalyptic, it is not necessarily so for people in the modern world. If we wish to make sense of this logic, it is necessary to go into some detail on the biblical and broader cultural assumptions about creation and salvation that undergird it.

The first, rather obvious, point to be made is that blessings in the material or created realm were not seen as absolutely distinct from blessings in the 'spiritual' or redemptive realm. It is true that the peculiar shape of Christ's ministry did tend to sharpen the distinction. Followers of a crucified Messiah had to learn to live with the paradox that prosperity in the physical realm did not guarantee that all was right in the spiritual or relational realm: blessed are the poor. Nonetheless, material blessings were seen as part of God's overall redemptive thrust. We have already seen how stories about Jesus' control over the natural order (the stilling of the storm) were read in close connection with stories about his control over the spiritual order (the Gerasene demoniac), and how all of this was part and

⁵ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

parcel of God's reconciliation of humanity to himself (as illustrated most pointedly in the healing and forgiveness of the paralytic in Mark 2).

More importantly, the basic categories of creation and redemption were explicitly and inextricably linked in the biblical tradition. The pattern of salvation as a kind of new creation occurs at every turn in the Old Testament; indeed, it is so common it did not necessarily make its way to overt expression by the New Testament writers. As often as not it is part of the unspoken backdrop against which all of their thinking takes place. Such an assertion is in the nature of the case difficult to prove; but a brief survey should reveal how fundamental this connection was to the Old Testament writers, and hence how it would have been a part of the intellectual furniture of devout readers of Scripture in the first century.

We can begin with the narrative of Noah's ark, which makes the connections with the earlier chapters of Genesis in the starkest terms. The waters which had formerly been parted to permit habitable land to appear now converge again to return the world to primeval chaos. (Hence the emphasis not just on the falling of the rain, the 'waters above', but also on the rising up of the deep, the 'waters below': Gen. 7: 11). Noah, meanwhile, who holds the hope of creation within the ark, hovers over the waters until they recede and the dry land appears.⁶ Like Adam and Eve, he is commissioned to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

The seminal event of the exodus is also portrayed in terms reminiscent of the creation. This begins as far back as the birth of Moses in Exod. 2: 2, when his mother looks at him and (literally) 'sees that he was good' (וַתֵּרָא אֶת־כִּי־טוֹב הוּא). Moses may indeed have been a 'fine' (ESV) or 'goodly' (RSV) or even 'beautiful' (NRSV) child, but these translations obscure the patent allusion to Gen. 1: 4ff. in the text. Associations with the account of Noah, and thus obliquely to the creation, are made by means of Moses' 'basket'—in Hebrew, תִּכְהָ. This word refers to only one other thing in the

⁶ Cf. the description of Noah's ark in 4 Macc. 15: 31: 'Like the ark of Noah, carrying the universe (κοσμοφορεῖσα) in the worldwide cataclysm' (trans. H. Anderson, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ii, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 560).

Hebrew Bible: Noah's ark. Moses in his ark, floating above the chaos waters, is the hope of new life, of new creation, for the people of Israel. The creation motifs become all the clearer in the climactic crossing of the Red Sea, where the *ruach*, the breath or Spirit, of God blows upon the waters that threaten doom, and the dry land appears for the salvation of the Israelites.⁷

We can conclude with a look at some well-known prophetic texts. The most obvious allusions to creation and redemption are found in Isaiah 40–66, a mother lode of New Testament theology. References to God as creator, and to 'the days of old' or 'the foundation of the world' are scattered throughout these chapters (e.g. 40: 12, 28; 41: 4, 22, 26; 42: 5, 9; 48: 12–13). The conjunction of creation and redemption is likewise pervasive. We may take two texts as representative. In 43: 1 God declares: 'And now thus says the Lord, the one who created you, Jacob, and formed you, Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name, you belong to me'. The language of Genesis is even more evident in 60: 1–2: 'Arise! Become light, because your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has shone upon you. For behold, darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but over you the Lord will shine, and his glory will appear over you'. Especially relevant for our purposes is the statement in 42: 6 that the Servant should be a 'light to the nations' (cf. 49: 6). The context is so suffused with creation imagery that it would be quite natural for later interpreters to associate this light with the light of Genesis 1:

Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it . . . See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them. (42: 5, 9 NRSV; cf. John 1: 4–5)

Isaiah is not alone in conjoining creation and redemption. Jeremiah speaks of the desolation of Jerusalem in 4: 23 as being 'without form and void', *תֵּהוּ וְרֵקָה*. It does take considerable time for Jeremiah

⁷ Note the language of the Wisdom of Solomon (19: 6) concerning the Exodus: *ὅλη γὰρ ἡ κτίσις ἐν ἰδίῳ γένει πάλιν ἄνωθεν διετυπούτο ὑπηρετοῦσα ταῖς σαῖς ἐπιταγαῖς ἵνα οἱ σοὶ παῖδες φυλαχθῶσιν ἀβλαβεῖς.*

to get to the redemptive or re-creative part of the divine plan, but when he does it is firmly rooted in the creative power of God.

Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day, and the fixed order of the moon and stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea and its waves roar—the Lord is his name! If this fixed order departs from before me, oracle of the Lord, then will the seed of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever (Jer. 31: 35–6).

The horizons of creation and redemption converge so dramatically, in fact, that some scholars quite plausibly see the two as facets of the same reality.⁸ God's management of the 'chaotic' elements in the creation is part of his creative glory. He exercises his omnipotence not simply by one absolute stentorian call to cosmic order, but by a persistent combat against threats to that order. In a similar vein, Martin Metzger has drawn attention to the close connection in the Hebrew Bible between creation and ownership.⁹ The psalms in particular contain numerous associations of God's possession of the earth and his creation of the earth.¹⁰ He concludes that these descriptions are tantamount to a title for God: 'Jahwe, der höchste Gott, der Besitzer, weil Schöpfer vom Himmel und Erde'.¹¹

The fact that creation and redemption were so linked in the Old Testament is perhaps sufficient to explain why the New Testament writers in their turn could move from Jesus' agency in redemption to his agency in creation. But we have still not fully accounted for the logic of what justified this connection in the first place. To discover this, we must delve deeper into widespread ancient assumptions about the interplay of cosmic or natural order on the one hand and moral or social order on the other. A recognition of the broader forces at work will not only help us address the theoretical origins of

⁸ See esp. Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁹ 'Eigentumsdeklaration und Schöpfungsaussage', in *Schöpfung, Thron und Heiligtum: Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments*, ed. Wolfgang Zwickel, *Biblisch-Theologische Studien*, 57 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2003), 75–94.

¹⁰ e.g. 24: 1; 89: 12; 74: 16; 95: 5; cf. Ezek. 29: 3; Metzger 76 ff.

¹¹ Metzger 94. Cf. also the Pseudo-Orphic verses quoted in Pseudo-Justin *De Monarchia* 2: 'If anyone says, "I am God," apart from the One, he should set up a world equal to this and say, "This is mine"' (trans. H. Attridge, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ii, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 824).

the link between creation and redemption, it should also help us in making sense of how Jesus' agency in creation would have fit with alternate cosmologies in the Hellenistic world.

We may begin within the biblical canon, with the much-discussed Psalm 19. The psalm quite clearly breaks down into two major parts, the first (vv. 1–6) concerning the created order, the second (vv. 7–14) concerning the Law of God. This has led to much speculation as to the provenance of the respective pieces, none of it issuing in any definitive results. The challenge is rather to see why someone—whether a single author, or an editor of two originally disparate pieces—would have thought it helpful to put them together. Systematic theologians have of course tended to answer this by debating the relative merits of a general or natural revelation (vv. 1–6) versus special revelation through Torah (vv. 7–14). This psalm is no doubt a helpful resource for this important topic, but it is not clear that revelation *per se* is the centerpiece of the composition. It is rather the content of this revelation that matters.

The flow of the thought in the psalm may be paraphrased as follows. 'Look at the world, and particularly at the starry heavens, and you will see that it shows God's marvelous wisdom and power. To take but one example, the sun makes its course through the heavens with remarkable regularity, and with awesome splendor...and all of that is under God's control. Now consider the Law. Just as God has splendidly ordered the heavenly world, so he wants human life to show that same beauty. He has given us commands in the Law, just as he has given commands to the sun. Of course, we humans run the constant risk of deviating from our course, and we need to pray for God's assistance as we try to live a life that mirrors the beautiful arrangement of the cosmos.'

Psalm 19 well illustrates the point made by Douglas Knight in a slightly different context (his discussion of the OT conception of 'righteousness'): 'Humans are expected to act in harmony with this order, and a system of rewards and punishments awaits their actions. "Righteousness" for humans is thus not fundamentally a stance of piety but a pattern of behavior which supports rather than subverts

the cosmic and moral order'.¹² Several centuries earlier Philo made the same point in his treatise *On the Creation* (3):

And his [Moses'] exordium, as I have already said, is most admirable; embracing the creation of the world, under the idea that the law corresponds to the world and the world to the law, and that a man who is obedient to the law, being, by so doing, a citizen of the world, arranges his actions with reference to the intention of nature, in harmony with which the whole universal world is regulated.¹³

As we turn to extra-biblical sources, we must begin with the recognition that ancient expositors of world formation were not necessarily looking to explain a sudden burst of what we would think of as 'creativity'; rather, they conceived of this process as the management of heretofore recalcitrant elements into some coherent system. Scholars continue to debate whether Genesis 1 teaches, or at least opens the way for, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, but in most other accounts of world formation the question does not even arise. There is assumed to be something there to work with; the problem is finding someone with enough wit and power to make this primal stuff into something useful. The best example is perhaps the *Enuma Elish*, where we find a host of embodied gods already on the scene, with the body of Tiamat destined to become the substance of the present-day earth. The analogies with human craftsmanship are evident, and from there it is but a small step to see the affinities with all the products of culture, including government. One might well argue that the historical development of the mythology is precisely the other way round: humans arrange things in the world around them, and create stories where the same process obtains in the cosmos as a whole. Whatever the historical or philosophical merits of such a view might be, in the ancient perspective the divine order is always primary.

¹² Knight, 'Cosmogony and Order in the Hebrew Tradition', in Robin W. Lovin and Frank E. Reynolds (eds.), *Cosmogony and Ethical Order* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 140. See also William Allan, 'Divine Justice and Cosmic Order', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 126 (2006), 1–35.

¹³ Translations of Philo are in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993).

We should also point out that the relationship of earthly and cosmic order could take at least two forms—and these forms were not mutually exclusive. In the first form earthly order is a direct product of cosmic order. Numerous Indo-European myths speak of the heavens and the earth being created at the same time out of the body of a vanquished enemy, with particular attention devoted to the way individual parts of the human being correspond to elements of the cosmos.¹⁴ In more prosaic fashion, the agricultural cycle was quite understandably seen as being governed by the movement of the heavenly bodies.¹⁵ It could also be taken in a more thoroughgoing manner in astrology, such that the movements of the heavenly bodies (conceived of as gods) determined individual and national destinies.

In other instances cosmic order is seen as the *model* for an earthly order which must be achieved by human beings (albeit often with the assistance of the same divine beings who achieved the initial cosmic order). The heavens are seen as the epitome of beauty and order, and it is the task of humanity to mirror this harmony in their societies. Human rulers naturally played a critical role in establishing social order. Plato's world of ideas is in this sense a philosophical refinement of a widespread ancient conception: ideal 'celestial' realities provide the blueprint for an order which must be realized on earth.

Examples of both patterns abound. In a Sumerian hymn to Enlil, the god sits on his cosmic throne and through his word rules not only the heavens, but also the fertility of plants and animals on earth (ll. 117–24), and indeed human civilization: 'Without Enlil, the Great Mountain | No cities would be built, no settlements founded, | No stalls would be built, no sheepfold erected' (ll. 109–11).¹⁶ Here there

¹⁴ See Bruce Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos, and Society: Indo-European Themes of Creation and Destruction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 1–40.

¹⁵ See e.g. Strabo, *Geography*, 1. 1. 12–15; cf. the argument of Cleombrotus concerning the interplay of small and great things, in Plutarch *De def. orac.* 415c-f. The bulk of Hesiod's *Works and Days* depends on aligning one's earthly (typically agricultural) activity at the proper time as demarcated by the heavenly bodies (e.g. ll. 597–8, 609–11, 765 ff.).

¹⁶ Trans. Kramer. For more on Enlil's ruling word see the text at <<http://www-etcs1.orient.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcs1.cgi?text=t.4.05.1#>> in the invaluable *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (J. A. Black et al.), Oxford 1998–2006, at <<http://etcs1-orient.ox.ac.uk/>>.

is a very tight connection between cosmic and earthly order: both come from the hand of Enlil. Similar dynamics may be traced in the account of Ishtar's descent to the netherworld, and indeed in any of the ancient nature myths. When Ishtar journeys to the dark land below, 'the bull springs not upon the cow, the ass impregnates not the jenny, in the street the man impregnates not the maiden'.¹⁷ The parallels with the Persephone story are obvious, as are the connections of both with the cycle of the seasons of growth and dormancy. A sophisticated ancient hearer could see in the myth simply a poetic expression of the way things are. But the *prima facie* lesson is that the natural order on earth is intimately entwined with activities in the heavenly (and, in this case, sub-earthly) realms.¹⁸

In some Ancient Near Eastern texts we see the work of creation handed over to an authorized agent. These are clearly of interest in light of our emphasis on Jesus' *messianic* role in the formation of the world. The idea of designated agency in creation was known before the first century (quite apart from the mediating principles of the Hellenistic world which will be discussed later). In the *Enuma Elish* (2: 120–9) Marduk is deputized by his father to create the world, and a similar motif may be found in the Sumerian hymn 'Enki and the World Order'.¹⁹

In the 'Code of Hammurabi', meanwhile, we see the earthly king as the deputized 'ordering' agent on earth of the divine figure who has already ordered the universe. Hammurabi's ordering of his kingdom imitates Marduk's ordering of the cosmos. But, as the epilogue makes clear, his rule can also be seen as an extension of Marduk's own rule. Hammurabi's supplicants (it is hoped) will declare:

Hammurabi, the lord, who is like a real father to the people, bestirred himself for the word of Marduk, his lord, and secured the triumph of

¹⁷ 'Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World', reverse l. 9, trans. E. A. Speiser, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 108.

¹⁸ The connection of heavenly and earthly order can also be illustrated from the well-known (if much later) Isis aretology; e.g. 'I divided the earth from the heaven | I showed the path of the stars . . . I brought together woman and man | I appointed to women to bring their infants to birth in the tenth month' (trans. F. C. Grant, *Hellenistic Religions* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), 131–3).

¹⁹ At <<http://www-etcs1.orient.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcs1.cgi?text=t.1.1.3#>>.

Marduk above and below, thus making glad the heart of Marduk, his lord, and he also ensured prosperity for the people forever, and led the land aright²⁰

Especially noteworthy is the fact that Hammurabi's rule is linked with *wisdom*: Hammurabi rules through 'the wisdom Marduk gave me' (epilogue).²¹

In a similar way, Peter Machinist has noted that the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta could be called 'Šamaš of all the people' because 'he displays, in clear and public manner, his sovereign control and order over the known world, just as the god manifests the light of his rule over the world'.²² In the Tukulti-Ninurta epic, meanwhile, the king, who bears the *image* and *glory* of Enlil, is described as the one 'who controls the entire four directions'.²³ (The language of image and glory is of obvious interest for Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1, and we will return to this Assyrian text in the next chapter.) Machinist summarizes the Assyrian royal texts thus: 'What these usages reflect is a view of the king as the primary nexus between heaven and earth: the lynchpin that allows the two realms to communicate with and sustain each other'.²⁴

Turning to the Greeks, the connection of cosmic and social order is presupposed in the famous depiction of the Shield of Achilles in Homer (*Il.* 18. 478–607).²⁵ Hephaestus begins the decoration with images of the orderly, starry heavens, and the account ends with

²⁰ Epilogue, ll. 20–39, trans. Meek, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. Pritchard.

²¹ See also *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*, 2.8.2.2, 'A Prayer to Marduk (?) for ammu-rabi': 'May he reward you with wisdom and intelligence'. This, too, is part of a broader Ancient Near Eastern motif. See e.g. 'The King of the Road: A Self-Laudatory Shulgi Hymn', ll. 20–2, trans. S. N. Kramer, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. Pritchard, 585.

²² Machinist, 'Kingship and Divinity in Imperial Assyria', in Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis (eds.), *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 172.

²³ Machinist 161.

²⁴ Machinist 186.

²⁵ Trans. Samuel Butler (NY: Black, 1942). Note the comment of Thomas Johansen (*Plato's Natural Philosophy: A Study of the Timaeus–Critias* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)): 'As readers [of the *Timaeus*] we are placed in the position of observers of a cosmos which, like that famously presented on the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18 . . . invites us to understand our role as human beings and citizens by inclusion in a world order'.

another reference to the great cosmic framework: 'All round the outermost rim of the shield he set the mighty stream of the river Oceanus'. People on earth, meanwhile, find themselves struggling to mirror this celestial harmony in their own communities. On what must have been a very busy shield indeed, detailed scenes of pastoral peace and plenty are set alongside scenes of judicial strife and open war. The point may be that peace is only gained and preserved by the sword; or by contrast that we enjoy times of peace despite the sword. In either case, the desire to have earthly harmony match heavenly harmony is evident. The role of the gods in securing this earthly order is not in evidence on the shield, though one would assume from the rest of the *Iliad* that they take an active, if unpredictable, interest in human affairs. Yet the idea of humans attempting to imitate a divine pattern seems stronger in this section than the idea of active divine agency.

Hesiod gives voice to the common belief that Zeus was the guarantor of justice not only in the divine realm but among humans as well. He bears the heavenly weapons of the 'thunder and lightning and the smoking bolt' and 'with these to rely on he is lord of mortals and immortals'.²⁶ But human kings play a crucial role as well: 'As for those who give straight judgments to visitors and to their own people and do not deviate from what is just, their community flourishes, and the people blooms in it. Peace is about the land, fostering the young, and wide-seeing Zeus never marks out grievous war as their portion'. Contrast this with the lands of wicked rulers: 'But for those who occupy themselves with violence and wickedness and brutal deeds, Kronos' son, wide-seeing Zeus, marks out retribution... From heaven Kronos' son brings disaster upon them, famine and with it plague, and the people waste away'.²⁷ Failure to do justice in the social arena leads to a divinely sanctioned breakdown of the natural order.²⁸

²⁶ *Theogony*, ll. 503–6, trans. M. L. West, in *Theogony, Works and Days* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); cf. *Works and Days*, ll. 276 ff.

²⁷ *Works and Days*, ll. 225–9; 238–43, trans. West.

²⁸ In his commentary on the *Works and Days*, West compares this section to Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 (*Works and Days: Edited with Prolegomena and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 213).

Centuries later Plutarch could still speak of the human ruler as an ‘image’ of the gods:

δίκη μὲν οὖν νόμου τέλος ἐστί, νόμος δ’ ἄρχοντος ἔργον, ἄρχων δ’ εἰκὼν θεοῦ τοῦ πάντα κοσμοῦντος, οὐ Φειδίου δεόμενος πλάττοντος οὐδὲ Πολυκλείτου καὶ Μύρωνος, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸς αὐτὸν εἰς ὁμοιότητα θεῶ δι’ ἀρετῆς καθιστὰς καὶ δημιουργῶν ἀγαλμάτων τὸ ἥδιστον ὀφθῆναι καὶ θεοπρεπέστατον.

Now justice is the aim and end of law, but law is the work of the ruler, and the ruler is the image of God who orders all things. Such a ruler needs no Pheidias nor Polycleitus nor Myron to model him, but by his virtue he forms himself in the likeness of God and thus creates a statue most delightful of all to behold and most worthy of divinity. (*Ad principem ineruditum*, 780e 5–f2)²⁹

Plutarch goes on to say that the likeness to God consists not in the raw exercise of power (represented by scepter, thunderbolt, and trident) but in ‘having the word (λόγον) of God’ and demonstrating goodness and mercy to all (780f–781a). The language of ‘image’ and ‘word’ is striking, but we must again emphasize that these were widespread attributes of kings in ancient thought.

Not surprisingly, wisdom plays an important role in Greek ideas of ordering the cosmos and society. In the *Theogony* Zeus’ first wife is Metis, which indicates ‘simply knowledge and the practical wisdom that is based on knowledge’.³⁰ He ends up swallowing her to prevent threats to his rule, but also ‘so that the goddess could advise him of what was good or bad’ (West trans. l. 900). The picture of a ruler assimilating understanding to himself could hardly be more graphic.

The desire to see the heavenly world as the model for the human community did not disappear with the rise of philosophical thinking. If anything, the links became stronger and more visible. The most obvious case is that of Plato. In the *Timaeus* the human soul is said in mythical terms to come from the same ‘mixing bowl’ (κρατήρα) in which the Demiurge had mixed the Soul of the Universe (41d), albeit

²⁹ *Moralia*, trans. H. N. Fowler, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

³⁰ *Theog.* 886; West, *Commentary*, p. 403. Cf. *Theog.* 81–92; cf. also *Od.* 8: 170–3; Derveni papyrus, 18: 9–10, in Gábor Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

with a 'second and third degree of purity'.³¹ Each soul is assigned to a star and is shown the 'nature of the Universe' and the 'laws of destiny'. The introduction of the soul into bodies causes all sorts of disruptions in human life, but the virtuous strive to remember their heavenly origins and pattern their lives after the example of the stars. He summarizes:

But the cause and purpose of that best good, as we must maintain, is this,—that God devised and bestowed upon us vision to the end that we might behold the revolutions of Reason in the Heaven and use them for the revolvings of the reasoning that is within us, these being akin to those.³²

Part of Plato's argument for legislating reverence to the gods in the *Laws* book 10 is that Soul (*ψυχή*) 'drives all things in Heaven and earth and sea by its own motions'.³³ But Plato's general concept of Soul includes at once both the orderly revolutions of the heavens (897b) and the emotional or ethical acts of 'wish, reflection, forethought, counsel, opinion true and false, joy, grief', and so on (897a). The 'good' (*ἀρετή*) or best (*ἄριστε*) Soul drives the heavenly orbits, as evidenced by their regularity; thus the heavenly bodies are rightly called 'gods'.

When Plato argued further in the *Laws* that all things, even the smallest details, are ordered for the good of the whole (903bff.), he was reflecting a widespread assumption about reality in the Greek world. The author of the pseudo-Aristotelean *De Mundo* speaks the philosophical koine of Hellenism when he defines *κόσμος* thus: *Κόσμος μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ σύστημα ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς καὶ τῶν ἐν τούτοις περιεχομένων φύσεων* (391b).³⁴

This system, of course, includes moral life as well as physical processes. The Stoics incorporate this view most clearly in their doctrine of the *λόγος*, and the related sentiment that a virtuous life was one lived in accordance with nature. 'Again, living virtuously is

³¹ In *Timaeus*; *Critias*; *Cleitophon*; *Menexenus*; *Epistles*, trans. R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

³² *Tim.* 47b, trans. Bury.

³³ 896e, in *Laws*, trans. R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968–9).

³⁴ Cf. a few lines later in 391b: *Λέγεται δὲ καὶ ἐτέρως κόσμος ἢ τῶν ὅλων τάξις τε καὶ διακόσμησις, ὑπὸ θεοῦ τε καὶ διὰ θεὸν φυλαττομένη.*

equivalent to living in accordance with the experience of the actual course of nature, as Chrysippus says . . . for our individual natures are parts of the nature of the whole universe'.³⁵ A quote from Cicero may drive the point home: 'The same honor is bestowed . . . with good reason upon knowledge of nature, because he who is to live in accordance with nature must base his principles upon the system and government of the entire world'.³⁶ The teaching could be put in political terms, which is important for us because of the centrality of Jesus' messiahship for our argument. The Stoics 'hold that the universe is governed by divine will; it is a city or state of which both men and gods are members, and each one of us is a part of this universe; from which it is a natural consequence that we should prefer the common advantage to our own'.³⁷

Given the frequent invocation of the Stoics in discussions of early Christian views of creation, and particularly of the *λόγος*, it is crucial to recall that the Stoics were merely giving precise philosophical expression to an extremely common understanding of the cosmos that predated them by millennia. Practically everyone seems to have believed that the beautiful arrangement of the heavenly bodies served as a model for human behavior. The Stoics were simply speculating (with a significant debt to Heraclitus) as to the mechanism through which that modeling worked.

Ovid's account of the creation in the first book of the *Metamorphoses* forms a fitting analogue to the philosophical material, as he

³⁵ SVF III. 4, trans. Jason Saunders, *Greek and Roman Philosophy after Aristotle* (NY: Free Press, 1966), 112.

³⁶ SVF III. 282, trans. Saunders, p.124.

³⁷ SVF III. 333, trans. Saunders, p.125. Cf. Dio Chrysostom, iii. 50, discussed in Michael Lapidge, 'Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature, First to Third Centuries A.D.', *Antstieg und Niedergang der römische Welt*, 2/36/3 (1989) 1416; and Aristocles (ap. Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 15. 14. 2) discussing the reconstitution of the cosmos after the conflagration: 'In this way everything in the world is excellently organized as in a perfectly ordered society' (trans. in A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley (eds.), *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, i (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 276). See also Dream of Scipio, 15, and the comparison of civil war and cosmic destruction in Lucan, discussed in Lapidge, 'Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature', 1405, and more extensively by the same author in 'Lucan's Imagery of Cosmic Dissolution', *Hermes*, 107 (1979), 344–70, esp. pp. 360 ff.

draws upon still-potent mythological imagery, with gestures towards the insights of the philosophers (*Met.* 1: 3ff.):

But God, or kindly Nature, ended strife—
he cut the land from skies, the sea from land,
the heavens ethereal from material air;
and when were all evolved from that dark mass
he bound the fractious parts in tranquil peace.

But one more perfect and more sanctified,
a being capable of lofty thought,
intelligent to rule, was wanting still
man was created! Did the Unknown God
designing then a better world make man
of seed divine? or did Prometheus
take the new soil of earth (that still contained
some godly element of Heaven's Life)
and use it to create the race of man;
first mingling it with water of new streams;
so that his new creation, upright man,
was made in image of commanding Gods?³⁸

The comparisons with Genesis are evident, from the shaping of primordial chaos to the notion that mankind is in some sense an image of the divine.

We conclude with a cluster of Hellenistic texts where a ruler is singled out as the critical agent in bringing celestial harmony to earth. According to one report, mermaids during a storm ask 'Where is Alexander?'. Captains answer: 'Alexander the Great lives and rules, and keeps the world at peace'.³⁹ In the 'Dream of Scipio' the (deceased) elder Scipio tells his namesake in a dream:

all those who have preserved, aided, or enlarged their fatherland have a special place prepared for them in the heavens, where they may enjoy an eternal life of happiness. For nothing of all that is done on earth is more pleasing to that supreme God who rules the whole universe than the assemblies and gatherings of men associated in justice, which are called

³⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Brookes More (Boston, Mass.: Cornhill, 1922).

³⁹ Trans. in Michael Grant, *From Alexander to Cleopatra* (NY: Scribner, 1982), 5.

States. Their rulers and preservers come from that place, and to that place they return.⁴⁰

Augustus, as the archetypal Roman emperor, represents a particularly important point of comparison for New Testament messianic conceptions.⁴¹ In the first book of the *Georgics* the poet Virgil issues a lengthy invocation of various gods, and brings the list to a climax with Augustus:

And you above all, Caesar, whom we know not what company of the gods shall claim ere long; whether you choose to watch over cities and care for our lands, that so the great globe may receive you as the giver of increase and lord of the seasons . . . whether you come as god of the boundless sea . . . or whether you add yourself as a new star to the lingering months⁴²

What is especially striking is Caesar's future supervision of the natural order: his precise role may be in question, but Virgil is confident that death will not stop his supervision of at least part of the cosmos.

D. T. Runia finds a perhaps even more startling example of Augustus' role in world-ordering in Philo, *Legat* 147. Philo 'describes the Emperor Augustus in terms worthy of (and derived from!) the Platonic demiurge'.⁴³ The text reads:

οὗτος ὁ τὰς πόλεις ἀπάσας εἰς ἐλευθερίαν ἐξελόμενος ὁ τὴν ἀταξίαν εἰς τάξιν ἀγαγὼν ὁ τὰ ἄμικτα ἔθνη καὶ θηριώδη πάντα ἡμερώσας καὶ ἀρμολύμενος . . . ὁ τὰς χάριτας ἀταμιεύτους εἰς μέσον προθείς ὁ μὴδὲν ἀποκρυψάμενος ἀγαθὸν ἢ καλὸν ἐν ἅπαντι τῷ ἑαυτοῦ βίῳ.⁴⁴

This is he who gave freedom to every city, who brought disorder into order, who civilized and made obedient and harmonious, nations which before his time were unsociable, hostile, and brutal . . . the man who proffered to all the citizens favors with the most ungrudging liberality, who never once in his

⁴⁰ Cicero, *Rep.* 6. 13, in *On the Republic; On the Laws*, trans. C. W. Keyes, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

⁴¹ As evidenced, e.g., by the implicit contrast of Christ and Caesar in Luke 1–2.

⁴² *Georgics*, in *Eclogues; Georgics; Aeneid* 1–6, ll. 24–32, trans. H. R. Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁴³ David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 140–1.

⁴⁴ Editing and underlining of text in Runia, *Timaeus*, 141.

whole life concealed or reserved for himself any thing that was good or excellent.

The emphasis on order as *τάξις*, which occurs elsewhere in Philo (*Spec.* 4. 210; *Sacr.* 82), bears special relevance to 1 Corinthians 15, where the word and its cognates are repeatedly used of God's rule through Christ. This in turn may shape our understanding of the *Schöpfungsmittler* formula in 1 Cor. 8: 6. Equally relevant is the metaphor used by Philo a few lines earlier:

οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Καῖσαρ, ὁ τοὺς καταρράξαντας πανταχόθι χειμῶνας ἐνδιάσας, ὁ τὰς κοινὰς νόσους Ἑλλήνων καὶ βαρβάρων ἰασάμενος,

This is Caesar, who calmed the storms which were raging in every direction, who healed the common diseases which were afflicting both Greeks and barbarians (*Legat.* 145)

It is hard to read this and not think of the storm-stilling, disease-healing ministry of Jesus the Messiah. But the point is not that the evangelists or Paul were necessarily cribbing from Virgil or other Roman propaganda in their presentation of Jesus. The burden of this chapter has been that such shuttling back and forth between heavenly and earthly realities, between cosmic and social order, was a commonplace in antiquity. The biblical tradition is a recognizable species of this genus, though it had its own distinctive take on the matter. God had created in a definitive act, and had done mighty works of salvation or re-creation in the history of his people Israel. In the eyes of the early Christians these mighty acts had reached their climax in God's work through his Messiah Jesus.

While the Church may have been primarily interested in the work of Jesus to reconcile humanity to God, we have seen that this moral or relational ordering of life would not have been conceived in isolation from the ordering of the physical universe. In such an environment, one can see how the activity of God through Christ in the (recent) past, present, and future would have led to an almost inevitable momentum to consider Christ's role in the more distant and even primordial past. If the Messiah were God's consummate agent of renewal now and forever, it stood to reason that he had been God's agent from the very beginning. God was, as 4Q Ages of Creation states (4Q180), the one who 'made the ages' (הקצים). It

was evident to the early Christians that he had ‘made’ the age to come through Jesus. Could he have made the prior age, and all that is within it, any other way?

If the mighty works of Jesus planted the seed for the doctrine of his agency in creation, the soil on which it grew was this nexus of cosmic order and social order, of creation and redemption, of heaven and earth. For the early Christians, Jesus’ life-giving ministry in Galilee and Judaea must be meaningfully related to God’s own life-giving purposes in the cosmos at large.

4

Creation: The Beginning of Messianic Dominion

We have seen that the memories of a wonder-working and now resurrected Jesus would have provided a powerful impetus towards speculation about his role in primal creation. This momentum would have been affirmed and directed by a worldview which saw the closest connection between creation and redemption/re-creation, and between cosmic order and social order. But something more was needed if these primal insights were to reach concrete expression in phrases like ‘in him all things were created’, and if they were to be defended in debate with Jewish and pagan interlocutors. There was a need for a conceptual framework within which such insights could coalesce; or, to shift the metaphor, some kind of highway to manage the theological traffic from *Endzeit* to *Urzeit*.

Various proposals have been made over the centuries for this framework. The two most popular suggestions are Jewish Wisdom speculation, and mediating principles in Hellenistic philosophy (with the first often being seen as a subcategory of the second). While these cannot be casually dismissed, it is my contention that a more likely candidate lies closer to hand: the category of Messiah. The central thesis of this book is that early Christian teaching on Jesus’ role in creation emerged within a messianic matrix of reflection. Creation marks the beginning of his messianic dominion; he rules the world he made.

In theory, of course, everyone makes a gesture towards Messiah in discussing this doctrine: we speak of Wisdom *Christology* or Logos *Christology* or the Cosmic *Christ*. But the interest is typically on the

first element of the formula: Wisdom or Logos or cosmos. Christ, Messiah, tends to be an afterthought—, a dull, all-purpose receptacle within which the really interesting things are stored. I am suggesting that the really interesting thing, particularly for the question of creation, is precisely the Church's conscious reflection on the role of God's anointed king. The central question is always: What does it mean for Jesus to be the Messiah? A variety of resources (including Wisdom, Word, and so on) might be marshaled to help answer that question, and its implications might reach out in any number of directions (including, at least in theory, responding to Hellenistic questions about the nature of ultimate reality). But everything is subsumed under the basic issue of Jesus' messianic identity.

There are several strong supports for employing such a messianic matrix for examining Jesus' role in creation in the New Testament. We have noted in our opening chapter the importance of the title Messiah/*Χριστός* in the New Testament; indeed, it is so fundamental it could be said to hide in plain sight. In sharp contrast to the few (if any) and obscure references to Jesus as Wisdom, and even to the more numerous and clearer associations of Jesus and God's Word, he is always and everywhere termed the Messiah. If there is an explanation of his role in creation that makes sense within the framework of this ubiquitous title and role, it is to be preferred. Furthermore, we can fairly include within the category of messianism the many references to Jesus as Son or Lord or King.¹ All are different ways of articulating Jesus' messianic rule.

¹ Contra e.g. Maguns Zetterholm, 'Paul and the Missing Messiah' (in Zetterholm (ed.), *The Messiah in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress, 2007)), who argues that Paul's use of Lord is a way of shrouding Jesus' status as Messiah of Israel and emphasizing his status as universal ruler (see esp. pp. 37–40). He can even say (p. 37): 'In Paul's letters . . . any tendency to stress the messiahship of Jesus has vanished into thin air'. Yet he concedes a few sentences later that Paul uses *χριστός* over 200 times—which is hardly vanishing into thin air. If by 'Messiah' we mean 'a political deliverer exclusively for Israel, conceived in strict conformity to prior Jewish conceptions', then such a critique may hold. But Paul's entire theology is predicated on the proposition that the Messiah of Israel is precisely Lord of all nations. (Zetterholm also asserts (p. 37) that 'the traditional messianic texts from the Hebrew Bible do not play any essential role in Paul's letters', which ignores the foundational role of Psalm 110 in 1 Corinthians 15).

Second, the idea of the anointed King authorized to act on God's behalf makes the best sense of the agency language in the 'all things were created through him' statements. In the most well-known messianic psalms, Psalm 2 and Psalm 110, deputized authority constitutes the heart of the Messiah's identity: 'I have installed my king upon Zion, the mountain of my holiness' (Ps. 2: 6); 'Ask of me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance' (Ps. 2: 8); 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet' (Ps. 110: 1). God appoints the Messiah to rule on his behalf. The New Testament teaching on Jesus and creation does not disrupt this basic dynamic; it only expands the purview of the Messiah's authority to include primal creation.²

Working within a messianic framework also allows us to maintain the vital link between Jesus' deeds and the later Christological assertions of the early Church. At the risk of repeating ourselves, *Jesus* was the Messiah, and the Messiah was Jesus. If our argument in Chapter 2 has any merit, the Church was pushed to consider the Messiah's primordial role in creation not primarily by theoretical concerns, but by the shape and scope of the Messiah's mighty works of recreation. As we have seen, this does not necessitate the existence of a widespread early Jewish belief in a creating Messiah. Jesus and his disciples radically rethought numerous aspects of the Messiah's work, and there is no reason that they might not have done so with respect to the Messiah's role in creation. Prior Jewish support would of course have been welcome on the part of the New Testament writers, and we will see some indications that the Messiah's involvement in creation made sense in that context; but our argument does not stand or fall on the basis of such evidence.

But the most important rationale for proceeding in this way is the fact that the central passages concerning Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*

² Compare the remark by Douglas Knight with respect to creation and order in ancient Egyptian texts (italics mine): 'No distant rubric, *ma'at*—hence order—is directly and repeatedly associated with six spheres of life: law, wisdom, nature and fertility, war and victory, cult and sacrifice, and kingship. *Royalty, in fact, is the bracket that holds the other five areas together inasmuch as the king is charged to maintain the order in all*' ('Cosmogony and Order in the Hebrew Tradition', in Robin W. Lovin and Frank E. Reynolds (eds.), *Cosmogony and Ethical Order* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 139).

all arguably focus on the theme of messianic lordship. Let me briefly anticipate some of the exegesis in Chapters 7–10 to make the point.

1 Corinthians 8–10 is not simply about the question of eating meat sacrificed to idols. It is about loving your neighbor and acknowledging that Jesus alone is Lord, the authorized mediator between God and humanity. The latter point explains Paul's vehement denunciation of attending meals at pagan temples, and his curious insertions about Christ as agent of creation, the Israelites 'tempting Christ', and Christ 'being' the rock in the wilderness. He is trying to impress on the Corinthians that from the beginning of the world God has always mediated his presence to the world through the Messiah, not through idols. While the messianic motif appears in chapters 8–10 somewhat subtly in the designation of Jesus as Lord, it surfaces dramatically in the climax of the letter in chapter 15, where Psalm 110 plays a central role.

Colossians 1: 15–20, meanwhile, has understandably been viewed in Wisdom terms both because of its internal content and the mentions of wisdom and philosophy in the near context (1: 28; 2: 1–8). But I will argue in detail that there are at least as many references to themes of *dominion* in Colossians as there are to Wisdom. The reference in Col. 1: 6 to the gospel 'bearing fruit and multiplying in all the world' (ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον; cf. 1: 10, and 1: 23, where the gospel is preached 'in all creation', ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει) is a patent allusion to Genesis 1, and makes best sense as a reference to the spread of Christ's messianic dominion over the creation. The repeated use of the 'fullness' motif (1: 9, 19, 25; 2: 9, 10) can likewise be understood within the rubric of messianic rule. Col. 1: 13 speaks explicitly of the 'kingdom of his beloved Son' (cf. 3: 1, 'seated at the right hand of God', the classic messianic text from Psalm 110). The hymn itself stresses Christ's preeminence and authority over all other beings rather than his wisdom per se (cf. 2: 10). Moreover, Paul makes it clear that Wisdom is *in* the Messiah (2: 2–3), rather than that Wisdom *is* the Messiah.

But the most persuasive support for our thesis comes in the note in Col. 2: 15 that Christ 'disarmed the rulers and authorities, and publicly shamed them, triumphing over them by the cross' (ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παρρησίᾳ

θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ). The precise meaning and mechanics of this triumph have been much debated, but it can certainly be subsumed under Christ's redemptive work. If our thesis is correct, we might expect to find an analogue to this in Christ's role in creation; and we do. Paul has already noted five verses earlier that Christ is the head over every ruler and authority (ἀρχή and ἐξουσία), but the reason Christ is their head was given in the hymn of chapter 1: he rules because everything was created by him, including ἀρχαί and ἐξουσίαι (1: 16). Jesus' eschatological triumph over the powers does not come *ex nihilo*, it is rather the reassertion of the messianic prerogatives that are his by virtue of his role in creation.

Hebrews 1 fits precisely the same pattern. The multitude of scriptural quotations and allusions are designed to demonstrate that Jesus as Son is the supreme authority, superior even to the glorious angels. That 'Son' is 'Messiah' is abundantly clear from the citations of the messianic psalms, with Psalm 110 being especially prominent. Creation, no less than redemption, is messianic work.

John 1 might seem the exception to the rule, since the λόγος theology is so clearly central to the Prologue. It must be admitted that issues of authority are only implicit in the Prologue proper, though the subordination of John the Baptist functions in a remarkably similar way to the discourse on the angels in Hebrews 1. Reading the Word as the Messianic Son depends on the remainder of John's Gospel (which, it bears remembering, is the only actual context we have for interpreting the Prologue). The Gospel is relentlessly messianic.³ The transliterated Μεσσίας appears in 1: 41 to establish the Jewish provenance of the title, and it is followed by fifteen uses of χριστός. The latter is often used in questions or denials, such that John's Gospel poses precisely the same question as the Synoptics: Could this Jesus really be the Messiah—and if so, why does he behave in such a peculiar fashion, and end up in such apparent misery? The positive confession of Jesus as Messiah is given by Martha in the crucial episode of the raising of Lazarus (12: 34), and it is included in the summary statement in 20: 31: 'These things are written in order

³ See e.g. Klaus Scholtissek, 'Ich und der Vater, wir sind eins', in G. van Belle, J. G. van der Watt, and P. Maritz (eds.), *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 321–3.

that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and in order that believing you might have life in his name'. The Son is the Messiah, and as Messiah he speaks—as Messiah he is—God's first and final Word.

This brief survey also reveals where we ought to look first to uncover how the New Testament writers thought through the question of Jesus the Messiah and primal creation; namely, the Scriptures. Paul takes the Shema in Deuteronomy 6 as his point of departure in 1 Cor. 8: 6; John 1 is saturated with the language and imagery of Genesis 1; Hebrews contains a catena of Old Testament messianic texts; and Colossians combines imagery from Genesis and the messianic psalms. Rather than turning in the first instance to Hellenistic philosophy, we ought first to see how the early Church rooted its understanding of Jesus and creation in scriptural interpretation.

One question to which we can give only the briefest of references is that of the Messiah's preexistence, the fairly obvious prerequisite for the job of creation. The topic has been treated at length elsewhere, indeed in far more detail than the topic of Christ's creative activity.⁴ But while it is true that agency in creation logically presupposes preexistence, we should not imagine that at the historical level a fully-orbed doctrine of preexistence had to be in place before Jesus' role in creation could be affirmed. It was the staggering nature of the remembered deeds and words of Jesus as the definitive agent of God's recreating purposes that retrojected the early Christians back in time to consider his role in the beginning. The early Christians did not necessarily need a pre-existing pre-existent figure like Wisdom, nor even a tradition of a pre-existent Messiah, onto which they could attach Jesus. This Messiah could, as it were, preexist on his own two

⁴ See e.g. Simon Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006); R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, *Pre-existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man: A Study of the Idea of Pre-existence in the New Testament*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Gottfried Schimanowski, *Weisheit und Messias*, Wissunt zum Neuen Testament, 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985); James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd edn. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003); Fred B. Craddock, *The Pre-existence of Christ in the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1968); Aquila Lee, *From Messiah to Preexistent Son* Wissunt zum Neuen Testament, 2/192 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); William Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM, 1998), esp. 91–102.

feet.⁵ This is not to deny that the biblical texts about God's Word or his Wisdom might have assisted the New Testament writers in conceptualizing how it is that Jesus could somehow have been around in the beginning—the speaking of God in Genesis 1 clearly served that purpose for the author of the fourth Gospel. Nor is it to deny that texts such as Mic. 5: 2 or Psalm 110 might have led to speculation about an eternal Messiah in Judaism, or that Jesus himself may have indicated that his goings forth were indeed from of old. It is simply to say that the New Testament texts on Christ and creation assume rather than argue for his existence as a responsible agent at the creation. Hence we will focus precisely on the background of his creative activity, rather than on general questions of preexistence.

GOD, MESSIAH, CREATION, SCRIPTURE

How did God create the world? The New Testament answers, at least in part, 'through the Messiah'. The Old Testament, meanwhile, employs a number of different images. God can be said to create by his Word, or by his Wisdom (or insight), or by his Spirit. Later Jewish writers went on to develop these themes in a number of different directions. Since the New Testament writers could hardly make such a bold assertion of Jesus without scriptural support, it falls to us to reflect on how they might have read the Bible such that the biblical statements on creation could be seen in harmony with the affirmation that the Messiah was God's agent in creation.

We may begin by recognizing the complexity resident within the question 'How did God create the world?'. Consider these three simple English sentences: 'I made this with my own two hands'; 'I made this with skill'; and 'I made this with a hammer and nails'. The first sentence is a virtual circumlocution for 'I made this myself'. The second is adverbial: 'I made it skillfully'; the work reflects the fact that I am a skillful person.

⁵ Cf. C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 138: '[I]t is arguable that when Paul . . . and John articulate the belief in the preexistence of Christ, they are only drawing out the implications of their experience of him as transcending the temporal'.

The third speaks of literal instrumentality; I used something extrinsic to myself. Even as we note the obvious differences in usage, however, we must recognize that these categories tend to bleed into one another. 'My own two hands' may in one sense be another way of saying 'myself', but in another sense the hands are genuine instruments—though, critically, instruments that are a part of me. Likewise the adverbial use we cited implies that there is some skill resident within me that I have managed to communicate to the material. Even the purely instrumental use of external tools can be seen as a means of self-expression.

I believe this modest illustration provides a helpful model for how the New Testament writers could think of the Messiah together with the various statements on how God created the world in the Old Testament. To the extent that some type of instrumentality is in view in the Old Testament texts, the Messiah may be said to possess the qualities that make creation possible. The Messiah *has* God's Wisdom, his Spirit, and his Word. To the extent that the Old Testament affirms that God himself is the creator, the Messiah is held forth as the one who shares the divine identity; in the words of Hebrews, he *is* 'the effulgence of his glory and the stamp of his essence'.

We will take each of the various scriptural images of God and creation in turn and reflect on its relationship to the Messiah, culminating with what I consider to be the most comprehensive categories, those of image and glory. We will begin, as Scripture does, with the Spirit.

THE SPIRIT IN CREATION

'And the Spirit/Wind of God was hovering over the face of the waters' (Gen. 1: 2). While the precise role of the Spirit here is not clear, Gordon Wenham is likely correct that it is meant to 'express the powerful presence of God moving mysteriously over the waters'; it is an 'image of the Wind of God, hovering and ready for action'.⁶ We find something similar in Psalms 33 and 147, where the role of the

⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1987), 17.

Spirit is linked to the role of God's Word. Ps. 33: 6 reads: 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their hosts'. God likewise maintains what he has made by his Spirit. Ps. 147: 15–18 reads: 'He sends his word to the earth; his word runs swiftly, sending snow like wool and scattering hoarfrost like ashes; he sends ice crystals like crumbs, who can stand before his chill? He sends his word (דְּבָרָיו) and they melt; he makes his wind (רוּחוֹ) blow and the waters flow'. Word and Spirit may be functional equivalents in these passages, in that they are both broadly speaking 'exhalations'. It may be, though, that God's speaking represents his directive intelligence, and God's Spirit the motive power. The association endures in later Jewish writing, as evidenced by Judith 16: 14 (NRSV): 'Let all your creatures serve you, for you spoke, and they were made. You sent forth your spirit, and it formed them; there is none that can resist your voice'. Not surprisingly, the Spirit is associated especially with the creation of animate life. Thus, speaking of the animals, Ps. 104: 30 says: 'You send forth your Spirit, and they are created (יִבְרָאֵין)' (using *bara*, as in Gen. 1: 1).

There is of course an intimate association between the Messiah and the Spirit throughout both the Old and New Testaments. The idea of the Spirit-filled leader of God's people goes back to Joseph (Gen. 41: 38), plays an important role in the story of Moses (Num. 11: 17–30), and becomes a leitmotif in the books of Judges and 1 Samuel. The most directly relevant texts come from Isaiah:

Isa. 11: 1–2: And a branch will go forth from the stump of Jesse, and a shoot from his roots will be fruitful. And the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and insight, The Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of YHWH. (cf. Ps. Sol. 18: 7)

Isa. 42: 1: Behold, my servant whom I uphold; my chosen one, with whom my soul is pleased; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice for the nations.

Isa. 48: 15–16: 'I, even I, have spoken and called him, I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way. Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.' And now the Lord GOD has sent me and his Spirit.

Isa. 61: 1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, he has sent me to bind up the

broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release for the prisoners.

Texts such as these are bulwarks of New Testament Christology. Isaiah 61 forms the point of departure for Luke's account of Jesus' public ministry, and it likewise is the backbone of the Beatitudes in Matthew's first extended account of Jesus' teaching. This at the very least indicates its significance for the evangelists, and arguably its significance for Jesus' own self-perception. While the Spirit is not explicitly invoked as agent of creation in Isaiah 40–66, the section as a whole is saturated with creation and new-creation language. It could hardly have been missed by early Christians poring over these verses as they tried to make sense of the life and ministry of Jesus.⁷

We conclude this section with a quotation from *Genesis Rabbah* 2. 4. Commenting on Gen. 1: 2, R. Simeon b. Lakish is credited with saying, "And the Spirit of God hovered": this alludes to the "spirit of the Messiah", as you read, "And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him" (Isa. 11: 2).⁸ The quote, striking as it is for our thesis, hardly serves as proof that an identification of the Messiah as agent of creation was readily available from prior Jewish sources for early Christian theological reflection (even irrespective of its late date). In context, R. Simeon is not affirming the Messiah as agent of creation per se. The comment is part of an extended allegoresis of the text in which *tohu* symbolizes Babylon, *bohu* symbolizes Media, 'darkness' is Greece, and 'the deep' is 'this wicked state' (likely Rome).⁹ The Messiah's future triumph over the wicked nations by means of the Spirit is analogous to YHWH's past conquest of the hostile elements at the creation.¹⁰

⁷ Cf. the intriguing suggestion by Michael Daise that the Teacher of Righteousness may be viewed as the agent of new creation in 1QH 16: 4–5a (Daise, 'Biblical Creation Motifs in the Qumran Hodayot', in Lawrence H. Schiffman, Emmanuel Tov, and James C. VanderKam (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years After Their Discovery* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society/Shrine of the Book, 2000), 293–305, esp. p. 304).

⁸ *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, i, trans. H. Freedman, ed. H. Freedman and M. Simon (London: Soncino, 1939), 17; cf. Martin Hengel, *Der Sohn Gottes* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1975), 110–11; Horbury, *Messianism*, 101.

⁹ Cf. Freedman's p. 17 n. 5.

¹⁰ This is not to say I see the conflict motif within the Genesis account itself. But the rabbis do seem to have at least in this case read Genesis 1 with the assistance, e.g., of Ps. 75: 12–18, in a way that fits well with Levenson's central thesis in *Creation and*

If *Gen. Rabb.* 2. 4 thus differs significantly from John 1 or Colossians 1, it nevertheless reflects a way of thinking about Scripture which would have been quite at home in the early Church. Both the rabbis and the early Christians were committed to Scripture as the final authority, and both sought to view it as a harmonious whole. As we have seen, there was ample scriptural precedent for connecting events in 'salvation history' with events of the creation. While Daniel 7 uses the imagery of true humanity (= Israel) ruling over the beasts (= the nations) in the manner of Gen. 1: 26–30, this same relationship could with justification be mapped onto the beginning of the chapter in Genesis. Bringing together Isaiah 61 and Genesis 1 would have been a perfectly natural move both for the rabbis and the early Christians. The difference is that the early Christians' intimate identification of Jesus and the Spirit led them to align such texts in much stricter fashion. Jesus was so definitively the Spirit-bearer that it became difficult to imagine a time when he would not have been the means by which God's life-giving Spirit was mediated to the earth. In light of the importance of the Spirit in the Church's memories of Jesus and their ongoing corporate life, it is likely that Christ's role as Spirit-bearer provided the first bridge from *Endzeit* to *Urzeit*.

WORD

While the Spirit is introduced in Gen. 1: 2, in the remainder of the chapter it is God's *act of speaking* that orders the world. 'God said . . . and it was . . .'. This is far from a hypostatic word, but it may properly be deemed a 'speech act' on the part of God, rather than a mere principle of order underlying reality.¹¹ The same dynamic is

the Persistence of Evil (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). Van Roon notes that in Jewish tradition Isa. 11 'interferes' with creation myths in Gen. 1: 26–7 and Ps. 8: 7–9 ('The Relation between Christ and the Wisdom of God According to Paul', *Novum Testamentum*, 16 (1974), 21–3).

¹¹ See Hans-Friedrich Weiss, 'Mit diesen Aussagen ist noch keineswegs der Weg zu einer Hypostasierung des "Wortes" beschritten; das Wort Gottes hat hier noch keinen statischen Charakter, sondern ist vielmehr dynamisch im Sinne des "Sprechens"

evident in the verses cited above from Psalm 33 and Psalm 147.¹² Subsequent Jewish thinkers took up creation by the Word with great enthusiasm.¹³ By sheer volume, it may have been the most popular creation motif in early Judaism, appearing in, for example, Jub. 12: 4, Sib. Or. 3: 20 (cf. Sib. Or. 1: 19), 2 Baruch 14: 17, Jos. Asen. 12: 2, LAB 60: 2, Prayer of Manasseh, 3, and Test. Abr. 9: 6.

In all the above cases the Word of God may be considered broadly instrumental; God creates by commanding that things be so. While it is more difficult to prove that the Messiah possesses God's Word than that he possesses God's Spirit, there are some suggestive texts, especially if one is willing to accept Deut. 18: 18 as broadly 'messianic':¹⁴ 'A prophet I will raise up for them from the midst of their brothers, a prophet like you, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I command him'. The Servant in Isaiah 50 can declare (NRSV): 'The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward'. (Isa. 50: 4–5). The latter text

Gottes verstanden'. (*Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie des Hellenistischen und Palästinschen Judentums*, ed. O. von Harnack und A. von Gebhardt (Berlin: Akademie, 1966).

¹² See Weiss, *Kosmologie*, 219.

¹³ We may mention briefly here the idea that God created the world through the Torah; see e.g. *Gen. Rabb.* 1: 1: 'Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world, while the Torah declares, "In the beginning God created (1: 1)", "beginning" referring to the Torah, as in the verse, "The Lord made me as the beginning of his way (Prov. 8: 22)". The evidence is late, and scholars have largely, and justly, dismissed W. D. Davies's suggestion (in *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1948), 150–69) that the connection between Jesus and Torah accounted for the doctrine of Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*. Rabbinic texts like these seem to regard Torah as a kind of blueprint for the creation, and thus as a deliberate counterpart to the Platonic view of the Eternal Living Creature (see Ch. 5, below). If there are difficulties with identifying Jesus and Wisdom, the difficulties of identifying Jesus and a blueprint for creation are even greater. To make such an identification, one would have to have a massively developed theology of Christ as God's λόγος, in the strict sense of God's mind or the repository of his ideas (i.e. well beyond anything we get even in the fourth Gospel), coupled with a highly personalized view of Plato's Eternal Living Creature. It seems eminently unlikely that such a refined conception would have formed the basis for Paul's view of Jesus and creation.

¹⁴ Cf. Acts 3: 22; John 7: 40–1.

would surely have attracted the interest of New Testament writers, given that the following verse reads, 'I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting'. Taking a broader view, Ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament thought practically demands that the ruling king possess the divine word in a special way. How else could he effectively order his kingdom in sympathy with the divinely ordained cosmic order?

In both the Old Testament and early Judaism, however, the Word of God could be seen not only as an instrument, but as a way of describing the self-communication of God. Philo represents this in its most extreme form, but his use is so tied to his Middle Platonist outlook we reserve it for special treatment in a separate chapter. One especially noteworthy example of the Word as divine self-expression is the *Memra* in the Targums, which some have suggested lies behind the Word of John 1. Robert Hayward has demonstrated that the *Memra* is not a hypostasis, but is rather 'a means of speaking about God, whose Name is the Tetragram 'HYH, as I WILL BE THERE, demonstrated as His presence with His people in past and future, in creation and in history. *Memra* is the consequence of combining the attributes of the verbs 'mr and hwh to give a shorthand term for theology'.¹⁵ The problem with the Targums, of course, is whether the traditions in them can be reliably dated to the first century CE.¹⁶ The specific influence of *Memra* theology on the New Testament can only remain an intriguing possibility.¹⁷ But the natural connection of

¹⁵ Hayward, *Divine Name and Presence: The Memra* (Totowa, NJ: Allanhead, Osmun, 1981), 20.

¹⁶ Hayward 115–37 adduces evidence he believes speaks to the presence of the 'theology associated with the *Memra*' in some early Jewish texts. But this '*Memra* theology' so broadly follows the OT conception of God (he is present in creation and redemption; he remembers his people in mercy; his name is upon his people; etc.; see e.g. p. 116) that it is hard to see how references to these phenomena elsewhere must be related to the *Memra* in particular.

¹⁷ We may note here the related extra-biblical notion that God creates through His 'name' or his 'oath' (see P. Man. 3; Jub. 36: 7; 1 En. 69: 13–14). Jarl Fossum is almost certainly correct when he suggests that the oath in question is יְהִי, the 'let it be' of Genesis 1. This in turn has an obvious connection to the Tetragrammaton יהוה. Since one possible translation of the Tetragrammaton is 'he who causes [x] to be', the association of the oath 'let it be' and the name of God was a perfectly natural one. But while Jesus receives 'the name' in Phil. 2: 9, this is after his ascension, and 'the name'

God's speaking as an expression of his identity was no doubt a live one in the first century.

WISDOM

Wisdom has enjoyed pride of place in modern discussions of Jesus' role in creation. Yet the case for its centrality is not nearly as self-evident as is sometimes supposed. Some Jewish writers used Wisdom as a way of describing God's creative activity, but just as often they used Word or Spirit to speak to the same reality. The Church Fathers made a direct connection between the creating Christ and the figure of Wisdom in Proverbs 8,¹⁸ which might lead one to surmise that they were merely picking up an exegetical tradition already latent in the New Testament. But we might equally well ask why the New Testament writers did not make the equation between Christ and Wisdom explicit, if it seemed like such an obvious move to make. The vocabulary of 'image' and 'effulgence' from Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1 has significant affinities with Wisdom of Solomon chapter 7, yet it can equally be traced to Messianic imagery, particularly when it is read against views of royalty in the Ancient Near East.

We will try to keep our discussion here brief. In part, this is because so much attention has been paid to Wisdom by other scholars, and we do not need to rehearse the texts elucidated elsewhere. More importantly, I do not wish by an overly lengthy discussion to contribute to the perception that Wisdom was the sole, or even the chief, way in which early Jews and Christians thought through the problem of God and creation. We will therefore restrict ourselves to passages where Wisdom is mentioned directly, rather than assume that any passage concerning creation must necessarily

and creation are never brought into association in the NT. For discussion see Sean McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 128–31; Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 82 ff., 245 ff.

¹⁸ See e.g. Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 126; Origen, *Comm. in Joh.* 1. 19, cited in David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1997), 256; Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, 3. 40. 5.

involve Wisdom traditions. While there was undoubtedly a degree of *Weisheitspekulation* by Jews in the Second Temple period, there has been far more *Spekulation* about Wisdom in the modern academy.

In keeping with many scholars, I am convinced that the much-discussed figure of Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is nothing more than a literary personification of the fact that God's wisdom is evident in the creation.¹⁹ The best commentary on Proverbs 8 is in fact Prov. 3: 19–20: 'YHWH established the earth by wisdom [בְּחִכְמָה], he founded the heavens by understanding [בְּתִכּוּנָה] and the abysses were cleft open by his knowledge [בְּדַעַתוֹ]'. We must either imagine that God needed a trio of hypostatic heavenly helpers to make the world, or concede that all of these are figures of speech for the reality that the created order displays God's thoughtful handiwork at every turn. Later Jewish writers likewise understood this personification as a literary device, and felt free to intersperse Wisdom with parallel terms. We read in 11Q5. 26: 14, 'Blessed be he who made the earth with his *strength* | establishing the world with his *wisdom*. | With his *knowledge* he spread out the heavens'.²⁰ Ben Sira had quite a bit to say about Wisdom, but he can still speak of God's creative acts in a multitude of ways; in 43: 26 he can write: 'Because of him each of his messengers succeeds, and by his word (λόγος) all things hold together'. He can also speak of God hastening on the snow by his command (πρόσταγμα: 43: 13) or causing the abyss to rest by his reasoning (λογισμός: 43: 23). Even the author of the Wisdom of Solomon, who extols Wisdom in the most dramatic terms, reports that God holds things together by his Spirit (1: 7); then that God made all things through his λόγος (9: 1); and finally that he made them by his almighty hand (ἡ παντοδύναμός σου χεὶρ) (11: 17). As for the question of personification, the author obviously does not believe rulers will literally find Wisdom sitting at their gates (6: 14), any more than he thinks 'sickly envy' is a potential traveling companion (6: 23).

¹⁹ See e.g. Roland E. Murphy, 'The Personification of Wisdom', in John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson (eds.), *Wisdom in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 225. Compare esp. the clear personification of the parallel figure, Lady Folly, in 9: 13–18.

²⁰ See e.g. 1QH 9. 13–15.

Ben Sira does say in the well-known song of self-praise by Wisdom (24: 1–22) that Wisdom goes forth from God’s mouth and settles on the earth like a mist (24: 3). This may suggest that the author can sometimes conceive of Wisdom as a force emanating from God, though it is just as likely that it serves as a vivid metaphor for the fact that God’s knowledge penetrates every facet of creation. More pointedly, Ben Sira concludes the self-praise of Wisdom with the remarkable statement: *ταῦτα πάντα βίβλος διαθήκης θεοῦ ὑψίστου νόμον ὃν ἐνετείλατο ἡμῖν Μωυσῆς κληρονομίαν συναγωγαῖς Ιακωβ*, ‘All this is the book of the covenant of God Most High, the law which Moses commanded us, an inheritance for the synagogues of Jacob’ (24: 23). This is not a clumsy interpolation (though the preceding material may well have been adopted from earlier sources); it is the chief point of the whole book. If one is looking to find God’s elusive Wisdom, one should look no further than the Law of Moses. This is God’s definitive self-revelation.²¹

As for the author of the Wisdom of Solomon, it is evident that he sees Wisdom as far more than an abstract principle. Consider 7: 24–7:

For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things.²⁵ For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.²⁶ For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness.²⁷ Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets (NRSV)

*πάσης γὰρ κινήσεως κινητικώτερον σοφία διήκει δὲ καὶ χωρεῖ διὰ πάντων διὰ τὴν καθαρότητα*²⁵ *ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστιν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμεως καὶ ἀπόρροια τῆς τοῦ παντοκράτορος δόξης εἰλικρινῆς διὰ τοῦτο οὐδὲν μεμαμμένον εἰς αὐτὴν παρεμπίπτει*²⁶ *ἀπαύγασμα γάρ ἐστιν φωτὸς αἰδίου καὶ ἔσοπτρον ἀκηλίδωτον τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνεργείας καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ*²⁷ *μία δὲ οὖσα πάντα δύναται καὶ μένουσα ἐν αὐτῇ τὰ πάντα καινίζει καὶ κατὰ γενεὰς εἰς ψυχὰς ὁσίας μεταβαίνουσα φίλους θεοῦ καὶ προφήτας κατασκευάζει*

²¹ Wisdom had of course been equated with the Law in Deut. 4: 6: the statutes and ordinances ‘will be your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the people’; thus Sirach’s formulation does have some precedent. Cf. also Baruch 4: 1.

The author here has moved beyond the mere assertion that the world reflects God's Wisdom and speculates as to the mechanics of how this Wisdom gets to the world and works upon it. The sensibility shows the clear influence of Hellenistic philosophy with the logos-like penetration of Wisdom into all things and the neat solution of the problem of the One and the Many in verse 27. Wisdom is here a kind of force from God, or an emanation of God, the means by which he brings the world to its desired order. The description of Wisdom as the one who *χωρεῖ διὰ πάντων*; as an *ἀπαύγασμα γὰρ ἐστὶν φωτὸς αἰδίου*, and as an *εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ* has at least surface connections with the material in Colossians and Hebrews.

Yet even here we must make some qualifications. First, this Wisdom is clearly God's Wisdom, rather than an independent being; this supposition is confirmed by the author's liberal use of substitute concepts like 'Word' and 'Spirit'. Second, while the Wisdom of Solomon is assuredly Hellenistic in flavor, its basic message remains thoroughly Jewish. This is most clearly in evidence in the rehearsal of the Exodus story at the book's climax, with its graphic descriptions of the punishments sent upon the Egyptians. With respect to creation, the author is aware of current philosophical discussion, but he remains rooted in a very traditional reading of Israel's story of the world. The beauty and harmony of the universe is not due to impersonal forces, still less to the gods of the pagan world; it reflects the outworking of the Wisdom of the God of Israel, the same Lord who blesses his people and curses the wicked. The book's last words indicate his central concern: 'For in everything, O Lord, you have exalted and glorified your people, and you have not neglected to help them at all times and in all places' (19: 22).

I would argue even more strongly that the much-discussed description of Wisdom as a 'Savior' in chapter 10 is less revolutionary than it might first appear, and was unlikely to have a significant role in early Christology.²² Since Wisdom is regularly equated with the Spirit in Wisdom of Solomon (e.g. 1: 7; 9: 17; 12: 1), one might see how all God's acts of power could be attributed to his Wisdom.²³ But

²² Contra e.g. Ronald Cox, *By the Same Word* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 83–4.

²³ See e.g. Michael Kolarcik: 'Each saving moment is a recreation. Wisdom saves because she was present at creation, and therefore knows how to restore the

the introduction to the passage in 9: 17 makes it clear that what is in view here is that people who heed God's Word prosper, and those who do not suffer: 'Who has learned your counsel, unless you have given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high?' (NRSV). The chief function of Wisdom/Spirit here is not to save per se, but to direct people in the paths of life; 'counsel' (*βουλή*) is what God provides through his Wisdom/Spirit.

The examples that follow in chapter 10 bear this out. Cain foolishly kills his brother and perishes (10: 3). Wisdom 'saves' the world at the flood only because Noah wisely heeds God's call to build the ark (10: 4), just as Lot was wise to flee the judgment on the five cities (10: 6). The one seeming exception to this pattern is the description of Wisdom as the cloud and pillar of fire which leads the people through the Red Sea and drowns their enemies (10: 17–19). This may indeed stem from an equation of God's glory and his Wisdom, such that for this one episode Wisdom is envisaged as directly engaged in the salvation of God's people. But it seems at least as likely that even here the cloud and fire are taken to symbolize God's guiding directives: those who are wise follow the cloud and pillar and are saved, those who do not perish.²⁴ I am loath, therefore, to assume that the Wisdom of Solomon provides a template of a 'creating and saving Wisdom' which became the basis for the New Testament portrait of Christ.

WISDOM AND THE MESSIAH

None of this is to deny that some Wisdom vocabulary—particularly from Wisdom 7—may have influenced the choice of words in Colossians 1 or Hebrews 1. We have seen in the previous chapter how

conditions of creation for the just' ('Creation and Salvation in the Book of Wisdom', in Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins (eds.), *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series, 24 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1992), 104.

²⁴ Note that in 18: 3 the pillar of fire is a 'guide' (*ὁδηγόν*), and Wisdom is not mentioned at all in the context.

wisdom was seen as an essential attribute for rulers in the Ancient Near East. The same wisdom that enabled the god to order the cosmos would enable the ruler to extend that order in the terrestrial realm. It is thus not surprising to see that the expected anointed ruler of God in the Old Testament would likewise be marked by wisdom. The foundational text for Jewish exegetes in this regard would be Isa. 11: 2: 'And the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and insight, The Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of YHWH'. That wisdom should be listed as the first endowment of the Spirit is not surprising in light of the Ancient Near Eastern background. Later Jewish writers naturally followed suit and highlighted wisdom among the traits of the coming Messiah. Psalms of Solomon 17: 37 paraphrases Isaiah 11: 'for God made him powerful in the holy spirit and wise in the counsel of understanding with strength and righteousness'.²⁵

We would expect, then, that some attributes of Wisdom—including its role in creation—would have been picked up in early Christian reflection on Jesus. Yet if they were, I do not think this stemmed from a (very well-hidden) *equation* of Christ and Wisdom. It is far more likely that the early Christians were working with a conceptually simpler formula: as Messiah, Jesus *possessed* God's Wisdom; indeed, he possessed it to the full. This critical distinction has not been made in most discussions of Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*, but it has been noted by a few. A. van Roon writes after a lengthy and cogent argument: '[Paul's] christology is not based on an identification of Christ with the wisdom of God which is described in the wisdom literature. He is familiar only with the traditional relation between the Messiah and the wisdom of God'.²⁶ Martin Hengel also notes the Old Testament passages where the Messiah is to be 'not only righteous judge and sinless ruler, but also, as the custodian of God's law, the *teacher* of his people, whose administration of justice attains independent significance as teaching'.²⁷ The supposition that Jesus

²⁵ trans. R. B. Wright, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ii, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 668. Cf. Ps. Sol. 18: 7.

²⁶ Van Roon 238.

²⁷ Hengel, 'Jesus as Messianic Teacher of Wisdom and the Beginnings of Christology', in his *Studies in Early Christology*, trans. Rollin Kearns (Edinburgh: Clark, 1995), 97.

has God's Wisdom to the full is supported, most notably, by Col. 2: 3: 'in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'.²⁸

But what of the more dramatic statements about Wisdom as God's image and agent on earth? Here we must remember that Wisdom was only *one* figure used by *some* Jewish writers *at certain times* to deal with the fundamental problem of God's relationship to the world. If 'Wisdom speculation' is shorthand for the problem of divine self-communication,²⁹ this is surely relevant to the development of Christology. But the Wisdom tradition, strictly speaking, is just one tributary of the river of Christology. To the extent that Wisdom 7, for instance, describes Wisdom as the image or effulgence of God, it may have provided the proximate source of vocabulary for Colossians or Hebrews (though other possible sources exist). But this only worked because the early Christians had already identified Jesus as the one who shared the divine identity.

In sum, we can account for traces of Wisdom language in the New Testament texts without imagining that the writers were expecting the readers to slot Christ into the world-creating spot now vacated by Wisdom. In contrast to the Fathers, they avoided making a direct equation of Christ and Wisdom, perhaps because they recognized the conceptual and theological difficulties of using passages like Proverbs 8 in such strict fashion. Yet they could draw on some of the language from that tradition (as well as others) to illuminate the Messiah's primordial work. On the one hand they recognized that the Messiah was the preeminent recipient of God's Wisdom, and had presumably been so from all eternity; and on the other hand they recognized that some of the more dramatic ontological claims for Wisdom (as God's glory or image) had been unduly attributed to Wisdom and belonged rightfully to the Messianic Son as the ultimate bearer of God's image. This need not imply that Wisdom was therefore the focal point of the New Testament writers' attention, whether by way of embrace or

²⁸ As we note in our Colossians chapter below, Col. 2: 3 draws upon the explicitly Messianic text Isa. 45: 3: *καὶ δώσω σοι θησαυροὺς σκοτεινούς ἀποκρύφους ἀοράτους ἀνοίξω σοι.*

²⁹ As it seems to be for James D. G. Dunn ('Was Christianity a Monotheistic Faith from the Beginning?', in his *The Christ and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 329–32).

rejection. It was only one facet of a complex picture whose real goal was to express the glories of the Messiah in creation and consummation.

EXCURSUS: JESUS AS THE BEGINNING?

One particular way Wisdom may have influenced New Testament creation texts has been put forth by C. F. Burney in an enduringly popular article on 'Christ as the *archē* of creation'. He argues that Col. 1: 15 ff. is an elaborate meditation on the בְּרֵאשִׁית of Gen. 1: 1, with Christ himself filling the role of 'the beginning'. This association was facilitated by Prov. 8: 22, which he believes should be rendered, 'The Lord begat me as the beginning of His way, The antecedent of His works, of old'.³⁰ In keeping with rabbinic tradition, the רֵאשִׁית of Prov. 8: 22 would have been read alongside the בְּרֵאשִׁית of Gen. 1: 1. For Paul, this led to the description of Christ in Col. 1: 15 as *πρωτότοκος* and agent of creation. Burney goes on to argue that the descriptions of creation in Colossians 1 as 'in Christ', 'through Christ', and 'for Christ' may all be seen as explications of the *beth* in בְּרֵאשִׁית.³¹

Burney's suggestion is an interesting one (though even if it is true we are left with the problem of why someone would want to thus inject Jesus into Proverbs 8 and Genesis 1 in the first place). But four serious problems may be noted with it. First, both the rabbinic and patristic evidence linking Genesis and Proverbs significantly post-dates the New Testament. Second, the use of ἀρχή in Col. 1: 18 almost certainly refers to Christ's role in the new creation rather than in primal creation, while its use in the (possibly) related text Rev. 3: 14 (ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ) is unclear.³² Third, in both Colossians

³⁰ C. F. Burney, 'Christ as the APXH of Creation', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 27 (1926), 160–8.

³¹ Burney 174–6. He adds that the expressions 'before all things', 'head', and 'first fruits' are also derived from *bereshith*.

³² For the view that Rev. 3: 14 refers to new creation see e.g. G. K. Beale, 'The Old Testament Background of Rev. 3: 14', *New Testament Studies*, 42 (1996), 133–52: Michael Svigel draws a similar conclusion in his detailed study, 'Christ as Arche in Revelation 3: 14', *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 161 (2004), 215–31. L. H. Silberman tries

and Revelation it is possible that ἀρχή bears the meaning ‘ruler’ rather than ‘beginning’. Finally, ἀρχή is used in conventional formulas in both John 1 (ἐν ἀρχῇ) and Hebrews 1 (κατ’ ἀρχάς), with no hint that Jesus was himself widely recognized to be the ἀρχή in question. Burney’s thesis, while clever, cannot be considered proven.

THE CREATOR MESSIAH AS IMAGE AND GLORY OF GOD

The εἰκὼν of Wis. 7: 26 has understandably attracted attention as a key to understanding Col. 1: 15. But another candidate also lies close to hand: Adam. In 1 Cor. 15: 20–8 Paul associates the eschatological work of the Messiah from Psalm 110 with the protological work of Adam in Psalm 8, which indicates that an explicit connection between Christ’s re-creative work and Adam’s work in the garden could be made.³³ The problem, of course, comes when we try to see how Adam could possibly be of any help in solving the question of how Christ came to be understood as creator. What are we to make of the fact, for instance, that Adam as image of God is not only created, but is created at the conclusion of the creation week rather than at the beginning—let alone the fact that Jesus himself only appears on the scene long after Adam has departed?

In order to see how the language of Jesus as the image of God might be associated with primal creation, we may begin by returning to the connection of world creation and world maintenance discussed in Chapter 3. In the Tukulti-Ninurta epic, the victorious Assyrian king is described in terms fit for a god: he shares in the *melammu*, ‘the “effulgence” or “radiance,” which is properly a divine attribute that makes its first appearance with Assyrian human kings

unsuccessfully to link Rev. 3: 14 with Proverbs 8 in ‘Farewell to ὁ ἀμὴν: A Note on Rev. 3: 14’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 82 (1963), 213–15.

³³ The connection, made via the expression ‘under his feet’ (1 Cor. 15: 25/Ps. 110: 1; 1 Cor. 15: 27/Ps. 8: 7), is a pristine example of *gezera shawa*.

in the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta.³⁴ The epic goes on to say the king 'alone is the eternal image of Enlil, attentive to the voice of the people . . . Enlil raised him like a natural father, after his first-born son'.³⁵ The appearance of the king as the 'image' and 'glory' of the divine is striking for the interpretation of Colossians and Hebrews, even at the remove of a dozen centuries. While Tukulti-Ninurta's divine qualities enable him only to conquer, not create, the world, we have seen that these two tasks were closely allied concepts in the ancient world. We are not suggesting, of course, that the New Testament authors were meditating on the Tukulti-Ninurta epic as they wrote. But this text does provide a particularly vivid example of a deeply rooted Ancient Near Eastern conception of divine kingship which is likely embedded in biblical portraits of Adam and the coming anointed king. The point is made all the stronger when we recall that Plutarch could still speak of a ruler bearing the divine image in *Ad principem ineruditum*, 780e5–f2.

Thus Paul's use of Psalm 8 picks up on one of the chief strands in the biblical story, and Psalm 8 in turn picks up on one of the chief strands in Ancient Near Eastern thought. Although God creates the world good, and provides Adam with all he needs, Adam has a meaningful role to play in extending God's rule through the entire world. Of special interest is Gen. 5: 3, where Adam's pro-creation mirrors God's initial creation: 'When Adam was 103 years old he gave birth [to a son] in his image, in his likeness [בְּצִלְמוֹ בְּדְמוּתוֹ], and he called his name Seth'. The parallels to Gen. 1: 2 and Gen. 5: 1 are overt and intentional, and are all the more remarkable for coming after the narrative of the curse and the expulsion from Eden.³⁶

³⁴ Peter Machinist, 'Kingship and Divinity in Imperial Assyria', in Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis (eds.), *Text Artifact, and Image* (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 162.

³⁵ ll. 18, 20, trans. at Machinist 161; note that 'image' is *šalam*, cf. צֶלֶם in Gen. 1: 26. See also Machinist's comments on the wordplay on 'shadow' in a letter to Esarhaddon (p. 175): 'Here, in asserting that the king is "the likeness in every way of (the) god," our writer is saying, I would propose, that the king can function as the "shadow/protection" of humanity, because he gets this ability from (the) god, whose "shadow/image" he is and who is the ultimate source of "shadow/protection" over the human world'.

³⁶ See e.g. Larsson, *Christus als Vorbild* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1962), 117. A similar conflation of creation and procreation seems to be present in Jub. 17: 26.

The human role in the creation project is picked up by Israel, which recapitulates Adam's story in a number of ways. The prophets describe the land (present and future) as being like Eden (Isa. 51: 3; Ezek. 36: 35; Joel 2: 3), and it is difficult to read the various narratives of conquest, sin, and exile without thinking of Adam. The temple in particular picks up the themes of creation.³⁷ William Horbury notes for the second-temple period that 'temple-service stabilizes creation',³⁸ while Jon Levenson says, in a similar vein, 'liturgy [including the temple service] realizes and extends creation through human reenactment of cosmogonic events, such as the divine repose on the seventh day or the process of distinction making and boundary maintenance'.³⁹

The coming Davidic king, then, would not merely serve the interests of Israel, but would push forward God's creation project as a whole. This is evident in the important messianic Psalm 89 (where the king is in fact termed *πρωτότοκος*, 89: 27; cf. Col. 1: 17). There is a consistent interweaving of God's creation and the king's rule throughout the psalm; the theme is captured succinctly in v. 29; 'I will establish his line forever, and his throne as long as the heavens endure'. But this interplay finds its most dramatic expression in verse 25: 'I will set his hand on the sea, and his right hand on the rivers'. This could be taken as simple hyperbole for the king's far-reaching dominion on earth, but the mention of the sea so soon after the

³⁷ The fact that the temple is built by Israel's archetypal king, David, may also have implications for the underlying theology of Jesus and creation. Levenson (pp. 87–8) comments on Ps. 78: 69, ('He built his sanctuary like the heavens, like the earth that he established forever'): 'The foundation of the temple is as unshakeable as the Earth itself because the same agent established them both through an act of the same sort'. The Messiah's work as builder of the eschatological temple could have been read back into the *Urzeit* to the effect that he was the builder of the cosmic temple as well. Indeed, *Gen. Rabb.* 2: 5 reads Gen. 1: 3, 'And God said, let there be light', in light of the temple 'rebuilt and established in the Messianic era', citing Isa. 60: 1.

³⁸ Horbury, *Messianism*, 229.

³⁹ Levenson, p. xxvi; cf. the cosmic symbolism of the temple in Philo, *Spec.* 1: 96–7, and the temple of the cosmos in *Dream of Scipio* 15. See also G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (Downer's Grove, Ill: Apollos, 2004), 66–80. Note, too, Jub. 8: 19, where the temple is related to the garden of Eden; and rabbinic traditions which held that the foundation stone of the temple was the beginning of the creation (see e.g., b. Yoma 54b).

description of God's triumph over the sea (v. 9) suggests something more is afoot. Levenson writes concerning verses 20–8:

That YHWH can make such breathtaking promises follows from his own cosmic mastery, depicted in vv. 10–15 in the familiar imagery of his defeat of the surging Sea, his dismemberment of Rahab, and his subsequent creation of the world. It is now the Davidic throne that guarantees cosmic stability, the continuation of the order established through primeval combat . . . David is YHWH's vicar on earth.⁴⁰

One might take issue with Levenson's assertions that the destruction of Rahab precedes the creation and that it is the Davidic throne *per se* that 'guarantees cosmic stability'. But his views cannot be absolutely refuted, so entangled are the threads of YHWH's creation of the world, his destruction of his enemies as part of the ongoing world-ordering, and the rule of David/Israel in the midst of the nations. Once Jesus as Messiah was seen not merely as one kingly descendant among many (cf. Ps. 89: 29–36) but the consummate Son of David,⁴¹ it would be possible for early Christians to elide his present and future rule as God's anointed king with a prior role in God's initiation and preservation of the world. Jesus was the means by which God was defeating contemporary enemies of his people, including, notably, threatening storm-tossed waters (Mark 4: 39/Ps. 89: 9). In light of the unprecedented magnitude of his mighty works, why might he not have played that role from the beginning?

But one major problem remains. Granted the Adam–Israel–Messiah relationship, and the creative dimension of human dominion in the world, how do we get the Messiah back to the beginning? The Messiah may well fill the earth with peaceable people and subdue it in the name of God, but how does it follow that he created it in the first place? The Old Testament texts give very little direct help in this regard.

To take this step, we need to look more closely at the creation of Adam 'in the image of God', and at the relationship of this 'image of God' language to concepts of God's glory. Indeed, we must first ask whether saying that Christ fulfills Adam's role is, from the

⁴⁰ Levenson, 22–3.

⁴¹ The emphasis on the individual 'David' in vv. 20–8 would encourage this.

standpoint of Colossians at least, putting things the wrong way round. If, instead, Adam's role derives from Christ as its primal source, an entirely new way of looking at the problem emerges. Adam's subcreative role could be seen as patterned after the Messiah's creative role.⁴²

The chief piece of evidence suggesting this might be the case comes, as we have seen, in Col. 1: 15. The best *prima facie* candidate for the source of 'image of God' language would be the creation narrative. An allusion to the creation of Adam in God's image is clearly in view in Col. 3: 10: 'And having clothed yourselves with the renewed man towards knowledge according to the image of the one who created him'. Elsewhere in the Pauline corpus⁴³ εἰκών is consistently used with reference to Genesis 1 (apart from one use in the sense of 'idol' in Rom. 1: 23). The associations are obvious in 1 Cor. 11: 7 (man is the image and glory of God), 1 Cor. 15: 49 (the image of the earthly man and the heavenly man), and 2 Cor. 4: 4 (Christ is called the image of God, followed quickly by an allusion to the light of Genesis 1, in 2 Cor. 4: 6). They are only just below the surface of Rom. 8: 29 and 2 Cor. 3: 18, where believers are said to be conformed or transformed to the 'image of his son' (Romans) or 'the same image' (2 Corinthians). The lexical evidence combined with the obvious contextual references to dominion make the connection between Col. 1: 15 and Genesis 1 almost certain.

An allusion to the creation of Adam, however, is different from a straightforward Adam–Christ typology in a strictly sequential sense. This would leave us with the same problem with which we started. The precise allusion here is not to Adam himself, but rather to the fact that Adam in Gen. 1: 26–7 was created 'in his image' (MT בְּצִלְמֵוֹ) or 'according to the image of God' (LXX κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ). This could be generally understood to mean that Adam is somehow like God (leaving aside the myriad ways in which that likeness might be found). But the grammar can also tolerate some

⁴² Hengel (*Sohn Gottes*, 118–20), while affirming the Wisdom background of Christ as image of God, also seems to affirm that the image language bears some relationship to the 'heavenly Adam'. Van Roon (pp. 234–5) is happy to see the image language in Colossians 1 as hearkening back to Adam.

⁴³ Even those who deny Pauline authorship of Colossians generally believe the author is trying to imitate Paul, so the evidence here is still relevant.

very different lines of interpretation. The *beth* could be taken in an instrumental sense: the image of God (whatever or whoever that might be) was the means by which God created Adam. Or one could take it, with the Septuagint, to indicate the model used by God in creating Adam: he makes him *according to the pattern* of some archetypal image. One can readily see the attractions such an interpretation would have for those inclined towards Platonism, and it is hardly a surprise that Philo took the Genesis narrative in just this direction (e.g. *Opif.* 1: 24–5, discussed below; cf. *Sib. Or.* 23–4).⁴⁴

How are we then to envisage this putative archetypal image? Christian Stettler, in his outstanding study of the Colossians hymn, turns to Ezekiel chapter 1 for a way forward.⁴⁵ There, in verse 26, the glory of God has as its center ‘a likeness according to the appearance of a man’ (כְּמֹרֶאֶה אָדָם דְּמֹוֹת / ὁμοίωμα ὡς εἶδος ἀνθρώπου). This is also captured in the summary statement in Ezek. 1: 28, ‘This was the likeness of the image of the glory of the Lord’ (הוּא כְּמֹרֶאֶה דְּמֹוֹת הַכְּבוֹד־יְהוָה / αὐτὴ ἡ ὄρασις ὁμοιώματος δόξης κυρίου). The image, then, may be seen as the *visible expression of God’s invisible glory*. The relevance for Colossians 1: 15 (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου) is readily apparent.

This glory, moreover, is, according to Ezek. 1: 26, ‘in the shape of a man’. If we read Gen. 1: 26 in association with Ezekiel 1 (as a first-century Jew might have been inclined to do), the Genesis text is not simply affirming that Adam is a visible likeness of God when it says he is created κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν. Rather, Adam is created after the likeness of the man-like, visible glory of God as seen in Ezekiel 1. This glorious form is the original, archetypal Image of God, while Adam is a derivative, a copy, an *Abbild* of the *Urbild* seen in Ezekiel 1.⁴⁶ This of course bears comparisons with Philo’s exegesis of Gen. 1: 26 in, for

⁴⁴ Cf. Horbury, *Messianism*, 101, citing Resh Laqish, who identifies Gen. 1: 2 with the spirit of Adam, connecting with Ps. 139: 5, ‘You have fashioned me before and after’ (Tanhuma Buber, Leviticus 16b, Tazria 2, on Lev. 12: 1–2), and Philo, *Conf.* 1. 62, 146. One might recall as well the Assyrian motif of the king who both is the image of the god and sets up his own image via a statue or stela; see Machinist 173–8.

⁴⁵ Stettler, *Der Kolosserhymns*, Wissunt Zum Neuen Testament, 2/131 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 111–14.

⁴⁶ Cf. Stettler, p. 113: ‘der Mensch ist nach Gottes “Gestalt” (בְּצֶלְמֹוֹ) geschaffen’. Cf. the juxtaposition of ‘glory’ and ‘image’ in 2 Cor. 4: 4–6.

example, *Opif.* 25, where the λόγος is described as the image of God, according to which man is created.⁴⁷ This does not demand that the early Christians were directly dependent on Philo or his precursors for the type of exegesis we are suggesting, but it does show that the phrase ‘according to the image’ was a source of exegetical speculation in early Judaism.

The ideas of ‘image’ and ‘glory’, then, carry within themselves the sense of God’s self-presentation to the world—and this in the fullest sense of the word. It is not merely an aspect or characteristic of God which is present in his glory: it is God expressing himself through the glory. It would not be a conceptual leap to associate this glory with God’s supreme act of self-communication, the creation of all external reality in the beginning. Even in Ezekiel 1, as William Brownlee notes, the vision contains ‘a miniature representation of the cosmos in relation to God’ (though this is strictly speaking evidence of cosmic dominion, and only implicitly cosmic creation).⁴⁸ Of still greater interest is Ps. 104: 1–2: ‘Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent’ (NRSV).

There is evident conceptual parallelism in the use of clothing imagery, ‘clothed with honor and majesty (וְהָדָר וְכָבוֹד)’ and ‘wrapped in light as a garment’. The best explanation for this in my opinion is that these are synonymous expressions: God is wrapped, as in Ezekiel 1, in his glory-light. But the NRSV obscures the *grammatical* parallelism of the participles עֲטָה and נוֹטָה, ‘wrapping himself with light as a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent’. This serves to tie the glory of God more closely to the act of creation. *Genesis Rabbah* 3. 4 plausibly interprets this to refer to the creation of light on the first day.

We may also take it to say, however, that God wraps himself with light antecedent to the act of creation, since he is as it were going outside of himself to stretch out the heavens, just as he must go

⁴⁷ For further discussion see Ch. 6 below.

⁴⁸ William Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1–19*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1986), 18. Note esp. that according to Ezek. 1: 22 God is enthroned above the ‘firmament’, the רָקִיעַ.

outside of himself to communicate with Ezekiel by the Chebar. Whether this precise line of argument inheres in the verses may be debated, but there is no question that the verses juxtapose God's glory and his act of creation; and there is (at least in my mind) little question that the glory-light is in some way an interface between God and creation.⁴⁹

How, then, would Jesus as the Messiah be associated with this creative glory of God? Again, we must go first to the memories of his mighty works and the subsequent interpretation of those works: 'And the word became flesh and dwelt among us; and we have seen his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1: 14). The glory is 'seen', presumably, in the 'signs' done by Jesus, as well as, paradoxically, in the crucifixion. Yet John provides a precise biblical focal point for this glory in chapter 12. After citing the verses from Isaiah 6 concerning the prophet's commission to blind eyes and harden hearts, John writes: 'Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory, and he spoke concerning him' (12: 41). The visible glory seen by Isaiah is, for John, the glory of Christ.⁵⁰ The parallels between this vision and that of Ezekiel are readily apparent.

Of equal interest are texts where the Messiah is associated with or identified with light. Most notable is Isa. 49: 6: 'I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth'. Ps. 132: 17 reads: 'There I will make a horn sprout up for David; I have prepared a light (or lamp) for my Messiah' (though John's Gospel seems to take this of John the Baptist rather than Christ himself: John 5: 35).⁵¹ More relevant perhaps is Ps. 44: 4, which affirms that Israel did not enter the land by its own strength, but by God's: 'For they did not possess the land by their sword, and their

⁴⁹ Cf. 11Q5 26.9–11; see also the Fragmentary Targums to Exod. 12: 42, e.g., Paris MS 110: 'And in His Word he was shining (*hwh nhyr*) and illuminating'. Discussion at Hayward 135 and Martin McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966), 116. Also of interest is Sir. 42: 17 (NRSV): 'The Lord has not empowered even his holy ones to recount all his marvelous works, which the Lord the Almighty has established so that the universe may stand firm in his glory' (στηριχθῆναι ἐν δόξῃ αὐτοῦ).

⁵⁰ See G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 2002), 216.

⁵¹ Ref. in Peder Borgen, 'Logos was the True Light', in his *Logos was the True Light, and Other Essays on the Gospel of John* (Trondheim: Tapir, 1983), 106 n. 2.

arm did not save them, but your right hand and your arm and *the light of your face*. This was ripe for a messianic reading when juxtaposed with the messianic light texts of Isaiah.⁵²

If our interpretation of Psalm 104 and related texts seems overly subtle as a source for New Testament Christology, it must be remembered that Psalm 104 constitutes one of the most extended treatments of creation in the Hebrew Bible, and that it would be thus a natural place to turn to, to reflect on Christ's role in world formation. Ps. 104: 4 is explicitly cited in Heb. 1: 7, while the language of ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης in Heb 1: 3 comes directly after the notice of Christ's role in creation.⁵³ We also have a clear association of 'image' and 'glory' in Ezekiel 1 and 2 Corinthians 4. Nor should we forget that the Prologue to John's Gospel brings the Word and light into the closest juxtaposition: 'The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world' (1: 9).⁵⁴

CONCLUSIONS

The Scriptures spoke in various ways about God's creation of the world, and later Jewish thinkers mirror this diversity. It is perhaps impossible to completely disentangle the threads of Word, Spirit,

⁵² See also Horbury, *Messianism*, 99–100. Recall also the world-conquering 'glory' of the Assyrian king.

⁵³ Hartmut Gese, while affirming much of the traditional Wisdom Christology background, does read Psalm 19 as associating glory with the *Schöpfungslogos*; see Gese, 'Die Weisheit, der Menschensohn, und die Ursprünge der Christologie als konsequente Entfaltung der biblischen Theologie', in *Alttestamentliche Studien* (Tübingen; Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 227–9.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Gen. Rabb.* 1.6. R. Abba of Serungayya says: "And the light dwelleth with him" (Dan. 2: 22) alludes to the royal Messiah'. This is in the context of a discussion of Gen. 1: 2 (and *Gen. Rabb.* 1: 6 in fact concludes with a citation of Ps. 104: 2, 'Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment', though this is in a quote from R. Judah b. R. Simon). R. Abba's view was likely informed by rabbinic teaching on the preexistence of the Messiah and/or his name, coupled with allusions to Gen. 1: 3 and Isa. 49: 6, 'I will make you a light to nations'. As with our citation of *Gen. Rabb.* 2: 4, R. Abba's comment is far too late to be direct 'evidence' for an NT-era equation of God's creating light and the Messiah, but it does betray a way of approaching Scripture which would have been natural enough for NT writers.

Wisdom, and glory. We have seen, for instance, that the early use of *Memra*, with its basic sense of ‘word’, was likely inseparable from God’s name. Light and glory are intrinsically related concepts, while image and glory were brought together in the tradition in important ways. But whatever might be the nuances of each term, and whatever the complex dynamics of their interaction might be, we may say that they are all, in various ways, at pains to affirm that it was the God of Israel who created the world, and no one else. The emphasis may lie on how the world displays God’s amazing intelligence; or how the world order is unfathomable without his power to tame the wild elements; or how the sheer beauty of it all reflects his radiant glory. But in every case the context indicates that it is God who has made all that there is.

One conclusion we can draw from this diversity of expression is that the reflexive labeling of New Testament creation texts as ‘Wisdom Christology’ is inappropriate. Wisdom was one way of speaking God’s activity in the world, and it is possible (though not certain) that Wisdom traditions influenced some of the language in Colossians and Hebrews. We presume they did this because the Messiah had God’s Wisdom, and therefore Wisdom’s instrumental functions in creation could equally be said to belong to Christ. But for sheer number of occurrences, ‘word’ would seem to be the dominant category in Jewish creation theology. Direct associations with the Messiah might lead one to favor the Spirit as the key concept. The divine image and glory for their part provide the most comprehensive terms for thinking about God’s work through Christ, a dramatic way of affirming the fact that Jesus shared the divine identity. It is difficult to justify privileging one term among the many contributory streams of thought.

Second, the myriad interconnections of these concepts mean that a precise account of the process of early Christological creation thought is unattainable. We have insisted that the memories of Jesus were the catalyst for the process, and that ‘Messiah’ was the key organizing principle within which these issues were mooted. But beyond that we can only sketch out what theological backgrounds were in play in the initial development of the doctrine, and make educated guesses at their relative importance in the discussion. I am inclined to think that the early Christians reflected on the

Scripture in light of the Messiah's appearance with some degree of independence, though this hardly means they might not have availed themselves of exegetical traditions surrounding, for example, Gen. 1: 26 or Proverbs 8. We will say a bit more with respect to the *appropriation* of the doctrine in the various New Testament texts in the ensuing chapters, and this certainly gives us some hints at how the basic affirmation 'Jesus is the one through whom all things were made' arose. But ambiguities will remain.

The personal appearance of Jesus as Messiah introduces still more complexity to the problem. He was not an empty box into which one might toss desirable doctrines, but a public figure with a résumé of astounding deeds and provocative words. While the biblical models of Word or Spirit or Wisdom are deployed to help make sense of the Messiah and his work, the Messiah and his work equally help make sense of, and at times radically reshape, the models. We have tried to preserve this dialectic in our discussion.

Finally, we must remember that the small words 'God made the world through Jesus' had a massive theological import, and so it is almost certain that considerable care would have gone into articulating and defending the doctrine. For this reason, I believe it likely that most of the categories mentioned above—Word, Spirit, image/glory, Wisdom—would have come into play as the early Christians developed their intuition that Jesus the Redeemer was also the Creator. A certain degree of redundancy in Old Testament analogues would have enhanced the credibility of the doctrine. Furthermore, the fact that this teaching addresses such a fundamental tenet of Jewish faith indicates that it arose from some very sophisticated biblical/theological reflection, even if that process is largely hidden from view in the texts we possess. We have argued that *creation as the beginning of messianic dominion* provides a suitably comprehensive account of Christ's role in the formation of the world.

Only Connect: Creation and Mediation in the Hellenistic World

Up to this point we have focused on the internal Jewish–Christian dynamics of the doctrine of Jesus as agent of creation. This has been done in the full recognition that Jewish and Christian traditions flowed within the broader currents of Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman thought. Nonetheless, there is a distinctiveness and a cohesion to the Jewish and Christian thoughts on creation which fully justify the shape of the discussion this far. We must now consider how the specific formulations of the doctrine in the New Testament relate to the Hellenistic world in which they emerged. Cosmological questions were a topic of immense interest in antiquity, and the New Testament writers could hardly have made the statements they did about Christ with no awareness that there were rival claimants to the title of universal sovereignty; or, more positively, that there might be models of cosmic rule that could be fitting analogues to the Messiah’s past, present, and future dominion.

We may frame the central question of this chapter with reference to a passage from the second-century-BCE Jewish thinker Aristobulus. After citing Aratus’ *Phaenomena* on the power of God in world, Aristobulus notes: ‘And we have given the true sense, as one must, by removing [the name] Zeus throughout the verses. For their [the verses’] intention refers to God, therefore it was so expressed by us. We have presented these things therefore in a way not unsuited to the things being discussed’.¹

¹ In Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 13. 13. 6–7, trans. A. Yarbro Collins, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ii, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 841.

Aristobulus represents a Judaism that sees in the ‘best’ Greek thought an adumbration of divine truths. The rationale for this is that Plato and the rest studied early translations of Torah (Eusebius *Praep. Ev.* 13. 12. 1), but in practice Aristobulus is just as concerned to reconcile biblical statements with self-evident philosophical truths as he is the reverse. Thus, in an especially relevant example, the speaking of God in Genesis 1 ought not to be taken literally: ‘For it is necessary to take the divine “voice” not as a spoken word, but as the establishment of things.’² As we investigate Greek views of world formation, we must ask to what extent the New Testament texts exhibit the same kind of openness to embracing Hellenistic thought as that shown by Aristobulus.

Even more important, however, is the apparently simple exchange of ‘God’ (*θεός*) for ‘Zeus’ by Aristobulus. As we will see, Zeus was interchangeable with any number of designations: air, fate, nature, as well as God. But Aristobulus represents something somewhat different: ‘God’ is evidently a *better* name than Zeus. This may be nothing more than the common enough philosophical desire to escape from the shadow of the naughty Homeric tyrant Zeus—a desire that would be all the stronger for a pious Jew. But such a name change could also signal something far deeper: an attempt to bring the dimly perceived divine principle of the Greeks into the biblical story of the creating and saving God of Israel. The evidence for Aristobulus is too scanty to make any firm judgment on his intentions, but it does serve as a vivid reminder of the dynamic present in any encounter between Hellenism and Jewish or Christian thought. To what extent could the absolute claims of the biblical God (and, for Christians, of God-in-Christ), particularly with respect to the creation of the world, be ‘translated’ into Greek conceptions? Was there genuine common ground, or were the early Christian statements about creation in Christ forays into enemy territory designed to take, if not ‘every’ thought, at least some thoughts ‘captive’ (2 Cor. 10: 5) and press them into the service of the kingdom of God? To answer these questions we must address not only specific literary parallels between the New Testament and the Hellenistic world, but the broad currents of thought flowing through each.

² Trans. Yarbrow Collins, 840.

These literary parallels have been pointed out often enough.³ Plato makes use of a traditional etymology of Zeus/Dios when he writes in *Cratylus* 396b that God ‘is the one through whom (δι’ ὃν) all things have life (ζῆν)’.⁴ For the Stoics, the λόγος was that ‘according to which’ (καθ’ ὃν) things have their being.⁵ Seneca, as we will see shortly, could piece together a veritable cornucopia of prepositional phrases in the context of world formation. The oft-cited remarks of Philo on the λόγος and related matters are a special case, and hence will be dealt with separately in the next chapter, but they unquestionably bear the imprint of Hellenistic thought at every turn.

PRELIMINARY PREPOSITIONAL PROBLEMS

Before we delve into the depths of Greek views on creation, we must first address the deceptively simple matter of prepositions, which factor so largely in the discussions of creation ‘by’ or ‘through’ or ‘in’ Christ. As we will see, a good deal of Greek thinking about world formation expressed itself in pithy phrases concerning that ‘out of which’ the universe arose, or the one ‘by whom’ things were set in order, or the passive material ‘in which’ or ‘on which’ order was imposed.⁶ It is surely appropriate to see creation ‘in Christ’ or ‘by Christ’ as a part of this general phenomenon in antiquity. But the very ubiquity of similar phrases raises numerous issues, which we may address here only briefly.⁷

³ In addition to the commentaries, see esp. the works of Hegermann and Weiss.

⁴ The etymology maintained its popularity through the Hellenistic age; see e.g. Philodemus *On Piety*, 12; Diogenes Laertius, 7. 147; Ps.-Arist. *De Mundo*, 401a; Letter of Aristeas, 16.

⁵ See e.g. SVF II. 264. 18 ff., II. 273. 26, cited in Hans-Friedrich Weiss, *Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie des Hellenistischen und Palästinischen Judentums*, ed. O. von Harnack and A. von Gebhardt, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Antichristlichen Literature*, 97 (Berlin: Akademie, 1966), 236 n. 1.

⁶ Thus e.g. in Ps.-Plutarch *De placitis reliquiae*, 283–4 Heraclitus has fire as the source and goal of the universe—ἐκ πυρὸς γὰρ τὰ πάντα καὶ εἰς πῦρ πάντα τελευτᾷ—while in Xenophanes this role is filled by earth: ἐκ γῆς γὰρ τὰ πάντα καὶ εἰς γῆν τὰ πάντα τελευτᾷ.

⁷ For detailed discussion see Cox 43–51.

A suitable point of departure is Seneca's sixty-fifth epistle, ll. 8–10:

Accordingly, there are five causes, as Plato says: the material, the agent, the make-up, the model, and the end in view. Last comes the result of these . . . The universe also, in Plato's opinion, possesses all these elements. The agent is God; the source, matter; the form, the shape and the arrangement of the visible world. The pattern is doubtless the model according to which God has made this great and most beautiful creation. The purpose is his object in so doing.⁸

This is a very neat, and obviously traditional, schema, which would have resonated deeply in the taxonomic heart of the Stoic. It corresponds well enough to the scheme in Philo *Cher.* 125: τὸ μὲν ὑφ' οὗ τὸ αἴτιον, ἐξ οὗ δὲ ἡ ὕλη, δι' οὗ δὲ τὸ ἐργαλεῖον, δι' ὃ δὲ ἡ αἰτία.⁹

One might imagine that with this grid in place it would be a relatively straightforward matter to compare and contrast the biblical and philosophical uses of key prepositions. In fact, such comparisons are anything but straightforward.¹⁰ The schemas in Seneca and Philo may be seen as unsuccessful attempts to impose order on a veritable *tohu webohu* of prepositional usage. This is true even for the philosophically inclined Greek literature of world formation, where *διὰ* and the genitive can refer to Zeus as 'the air which goes *through* all things' in a spatial sense, rather than an instrumental one;¹¹ *διὰ* with the accusative can describe Zeus in the famous etymological *τόπος* as the one 'through whom all things have life' (Plato, *Crat.* 396a–b; *Letter of Aristeas*, 16), without any specification that he is 'cause' versus 'goal' or 'source'; and, in an example from Seneca himself, Zeus/Jupiter/Fate can be called *hic est ex quo nata sunt omnia*—and *ex quo* does not appear to signify matter per se (Stoic materialism notwithstanding).¹²

⁸ Trans. R. M. Gummere, in *Seneca: Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* (London: Heinemann, 1917).

⁹ See A. Feuillet, *Le Christ, sagesse de Dieu* (Paris: LeCoffre, 1966), 203. See also Ps.-Plutarch, *De placitis reliquiae*, 287–8.

¹⁰ See e.g. the discussion at Feuillet 203.

¹¹ See H. Hegermann, *Die Vorstellung von Schöpfungsmittler in Hellenistischen Judentum und Urchristentum*, ed. O. von Harnack and A. von Gebhardt, *Text und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Altchristlichen Literatur*, 82, (Berlin: Akademie, 1961), 63.

¹² Cf. *De Mundo*, 399b, where the author states the cosmic God is the one ἐξ οὗ comes all that was and is and will be, and 4 Ezra 6: 6, speaking of God: 'tunc cogitavi, et facta sunt haec per me solum et non per alium, ut et finis per me et non per alium' (cf. Sentences of Syriac Menander, 7).

If such a variety of usage can obtain in the relatively closed system of Hellenistic philosophical discussion, it is difficult to find easy parallels with the New Testament, which has its own universe of discourse. It is always possible that John or Paul might make use of a particular Hellenistic trope, whether by way of criticism or affirmation. But there was no Imperial Commission on Prepositional Usage to dictate what a given preposition and its inflected noun or pronoun must mean at any time. Each case must be decided on its merits, and a proliferation of unexamined 'by whoms' and 'in whoms' will only muddy the waters.

Furthermore, we must emphasize again that terse expressions like 'Zeus is the one through whom all things were made' or 'All things came into being through him' function rather like slogans for their respective religious systems. Prepositional theology was a common way of putting one's religious wares in the marketplace in an easily accessible form. On the one hand, this commonality of style means the Graeco-Roman material is assuredly of interest for a comprehensive understanding of the New Testament writers' articulation of their belief that God made the world through Christ. On the other hand, we must never forget that superficial resemblances may, and almost certainly do, mask radically different conceptions of god and cosmos.

With this in mind we may offer a brief overview of Hellenistic conceptions of 'creation', world order, and mediation as they relate to the New Testament's teaching on Christ and creation. We will address in turn the *process* of creation or world formation; the *persons* (if any) involved in these processes; and the central question of the *connections* within the world, and between the lower, visible cosmos and a higher or invisible aspect of reality.

PROCESS

It is a commonplace of scholarship that the biblical view of creation differs in significant ways from competing options in the ancient world; but it is a commonplace that bears repeating. We may start with the *process* of creation. Scholars continue to debate at what

point Jews and Christians adopted the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* or its functional equivalent.¹³ But with the Greek sources such a question hardly even arises, especially in the philosophical schools where the dictum *ex nihilo nihil fit* was universally acknowledged.¹⁴ It is true that Plato's *Timaeus* depicts a sequential act of creation by a Demiurge with personal, or at least rational, characteristics. The express topic of conversation is τῆς τοῦ κόσμου γενέσεως (27a). But this certainly does not imply *creatio ex nihilo*, and it likely does not even involve a genuine act of 'creation' or ordering. Rather, it is generally understood as a picturesque adumbration of the way things are, and indeed always have been.¹⁵ The world is an eternally ordered system, and thus one can for pedagogical purposes portray it *as if* it had been manufactured just as we manufacture a boat or a house: you have a plan in your head, you have some material to work with, and then you go about setting things in order according to the plan. This 'as if' view is how most later writers interpreted the *Timaeus*.¹⁶ Xenocrates, for example, compared the image of creation in time to the figures drawn by geometers which represent geometrical principles without being the principles themselves.¹⁷ Crantor took 'created' to mean 'dependent on a cause other than itself',¹⁸ while Calvenus Taurus listed no less than four senses in which γέγονεν in *Tim.* 28b

¹³ The classic statement against its appearance by NT times is Gerhard May, *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994); but cf. to the contrary J. C. O'Neill, 'How Early is the Doctrine of *Creatio ex Nihilo*?' *Journal of Theological Studies*, 53 (2002), 449–65.

¹⁴ W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, i 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 454 n. 3.

¹⁵ For discussion see esp. Matthias Baltes, *Die Weltentstehung des platonischen Timaios nach den antiken Interpreten*, *Philosophia Antiqua*, 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1976). For a thorough discussion of the philosophical issues faced by the ancients with respect to causation see Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum* (London: Duckworth, 1983), esp. ch. 20: 'Principles of Causation among Platonists and Christians'.

¹⁶ See Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London: Duckworth, 1977), 1–8. He notes that Aristotle said Plato had a genuine beginning of the world in time, though this was denied by Plato's successors Speusippus and Xenocrates. The dispute, as Dillon points out, indicates Plato himself never made a clear declaration on the matter. Plutarch appears to provide a rare exception to this, believing that Plato really did indicate creation at a point in time; see Dillon 207.

¹⁷ Dillon 33.

¹⁸ Ap. Proclus, in *Tim.* 1. 277.8, quoted at Dillon 42.

could mean something other than actually 'created'.¹⁹ Pliny the Elder could write, perhaps in an Aristotelian vein, that the world was *aeternum, immensum, neque genitum neque interiturum umquam*.²⁰ There is no act of creation per se. There are of course cycles in the sky and on the earth, ebbs and flows in the arrangement of things, but these are just factors of the ways things are; there is no fundamental point of departure.²¹

Epicureans and Stoics, by contrast, like their pre-Socratic forebears, do admit a process of world formation. The Epicureans were indebted to the early atomists like Leucippus and Democritus for the belief that the essential realities of the world were atoms and void.²² Given infinite space and infinite time, the bumping and clustering of these atoms in the void produces the world as we know it.²³ Epicurus himself appears to have added the notion of the 'atomic swerve', which keeps the atoms from simply falling straight down through the void eternally, and which also (though more opaquely) allows for the freedom of the will. Since the atoms currently entangled together will eventually get untangled, world formation has as its inevitable counterpart world disintegration. Lucretius could put this in quite dramatic terms as he critiqued philosophical rivals who believed in the indestructibility of the world. Speaking of the destruction of the sea, land, and sky, he writes: 'these three forms so different, these three textures so interwoven, one day shall consign to destruction; the mighty complex system of the world, upheld through many years,

¹⁹ The four alternative definitions are: being of the same genus as created things; being in theory composite; being always in the process of generation; being dependent for existence on an outside source (as with Crantor); see Dillon 242–4.

²⁰ See Michael Lapidge, 'Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature, First to Third Centuries A.D.', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römische Welt*, 2/36/3 (1989), 1411.

²¹ Thomas Johansen argues for the possibility of 'repeated acts of creation' in the *Timaeus*: 'The *Timaeus* would, then, be a story not just about what a divine craftsman did once upon a time, but also a story about what divine craftsmen do at all times' (*Plato's Natural Philosophy: A Study of the Timaeus–Cretias* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), 87–91, quotation at p. 91).

²² See e.g. Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus, 39, Lucretius, *De rerum nat.* 419.

²³ See Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus, 73–4. The same dynamics could in fact produce an infinity of other worlds; see Epicurus, Letter to Pythocles, 88; both texts in A.A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, i (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 57.

shall crash into ruins'.²⁴ But this is no Epicurean apocalypse: no one, and nothing, is unveiled here except the continual coming and going of atoms in the void.

For the Stoics, the 'designing fire' (*πῦρ τεχνικόν*; SVF 2. 1027) steers all things into their current state. The work of the fire is explicitly stated to be a *γενέσει κόσμου* (again, SVF 2. 1027), so comparisons with the biblical account of *γένεσις* at some level are perfectly in order. There is moreover a rhythm to the process, in that the designing fire eventually consumes the cosmos in a conflagration, the *ἐκπύρωσις*; but this conflagration is followed by another reintegration of the world in an endless cycle of integration and consumption. Thus the singular creation of the world as in seen in Genesis 1 is absent in Stoicism, as is the definitive eschatological restoration of the new heavens and new earth.

PERSONS?

Thoughts about the process of 'creation' in Greek and Roman thought, then, show both similarities and differences to the concepts in early Judaism and Christianity. There are definite parallels at a certain level of abstraction: chaos gives way to order, order can collapse back into chaos; the universe is (in some systems at least) rationally ordained. Those Platonists like Plutarch who accepted a temporal transition from chaotic matter to an ordered cosmos are closest to the Jews and Christians (especially if one does not recognize *creatio ex nihilo* as an established doctrine in New Testament times). On the other hand, most Jews and early Christians (Philo is perhaps an exception) seem happy to affirm the Old Testament accounts of creation at face value, without feeling the need to 'demythologize' the material. This stands in stark contrast to the Greeks, who radically reworked their own traditional accounts of world formation.

²⁴ *De rerum natura*, 5.94–6, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, rev. M. F. Smith, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

A large part of that reworking, of course, involved the agent or agents of creation (here using 'agent' in the broadest sense of any creative entity, not simply a deputized agent in strict parallel to the Messiah). For the purposes of our discussion, we may distinguish the agents into purely physical forces; rational forces which are, depending on one's view, either sub- or suprapersonal; and more or less recognizable persons (speaking and acting, with no recourse to allegoresis or polynymic equivocation). We will find, however, that maintaining strict boundaries here is at times extremely difficult, not least because of the multitude of entities which might be lumped under the word *θεός*.

In the first category we may perhaps put some of the pre-Socratic philosophers. While the precise term *ἀρχή* or 'primal substance' may not have been used by the philosophers themselves, the word pervades the doxographical material and does capture their search for a foundational element to the universe. This *ἀρχή* was often conceived of in material terms, as in the case of water for Thales²⁵ or air for Anaximenes. The theology of the pre-Socratics is generally obscure,²⁶ and we can hardly assume they were atheists. But they do mark a turn towards explaining the origin and arrangement of the cosmos in primarily 'natural' terms. The universe is subject to rational explanation, which may or may not necessitate that a deity be involved in the process.

If the status of the agent of world formation is shadowy for the pre-Socratics, it is not so with the Epicureans. They were not strictly speaking atheists, at least not in public: the testimonies about the gods could be attributed to genuine visions of anthropomorphic beings.²⁷ But the gods lived in the *intermundia*, the regions between the worlds, since entrapment in the world, let alone supervision of its

²⁵ Though he may have meant more precisely that things *arose* out of water (as in Egyptian, Ancient Near Eastern, and biblical accounts) rather than the traditional view that they were *made* out of water. See G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 89–94.

²⁶ For a thoughtful and creative investigation see still Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, trans. Edward S. Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1947); Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, *passim*.

²⁷ On Epicurus and the gods see esp. Long and Sedley, i. 144–9.

processes, could only be an intolerable burden to beings who must by definition be free from care.²⁸ The presence of interfering and fear-inducing deities was also to be rejected as an abomination to human dignity: one of the absolute pillars of Epicurean spirituality was the removal of the fear of death and subsequent divine judgment. The very idea of purposeful creation was mocked both for its conceptual confusion and for the presence of 'design flaws' in a supposedly god-ordained cosmos. The ordering of the world was rather to be attributed to the intrinsic characteristics of atoms and void.²⁹ Neither a fully personal creator nor a rational force is necessary to explain the world as it is.

For many Greek thinkers, however, the boundary between material forces and rational ones is not as easy to draw as may first appear. One might even say that most Greek cosmological discussion is dominated by the need to account both for the 'principal' rationality of the cosmos, and for the fact that this rationality makes itself known in and through matter. This appears, for example, in Anaxagoras, for whom Mind, or *νοῦς*, is the critical factor in cosmology. The fact that the world is permeated by *νοῦς* explains why the universe exhibits the same sort of order we see in our own human creative endeavors. But what precisely is *νοῦς*? Some scholars see it as incorporeal,³⁰ while others believe *νοῦς* for Anaxagoras is still a material entity: it is thin and subtle, to be sure, but it can exercise its power over matter because it is essentially the same order of being.³¹ The same might be said of Heraclitus' *λόγος*. It appears to stand for the measure or proportion in the world as a principal of order. But as fire, it is also the active agent of this proportioning. We might finally mention Empedocles, in whose system the four elements were set in motion and governed by the principles of Love and Strife. The world is alternately more or less 'ordered' depending on the relative strength of Love vis-à-vis Strife.

²⁸ Cf. Velleius in Cicero's *De nat. deorum* 1. 43–53; Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, 123–4; Lucretius, *De rerum nat.* 5. 146–55.

²⁹ See e.g. *De nat. deorum* 1. 19, 20. On the absurdity of Providence and the evident design flaws in the universe see e.g. Lucretius' detailed critique in *De rerum nat.* 5. 156 ff.

³⁰ e.g. Guthrie, ii. 279.

³¹ See Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 364.

As we have noted above, Plato's *Timaeus* is deeply problematic both with respect to the process of creation and with respect to the personages ostensibly involved in the process. Timaeus himself admits the difficulty in the oft-quoted words: 'Now to discover the Maker and Father (ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα) of this Universe were a task indeed; and having discovered Him, to declare Him unto all men were a thing impossible'.³² We may begin with the considerable *prima facie* evidence that Plato did in fact have some sort of personal creator in mind when he wrote the *Timaeus*. First, the designation noted above, *ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα*, is certainly an image drawn from the world of persons, even if the Maker's exact identity is admittedly unclear. This Maker is further said to be 'good' (ἀγαθός) and without envy. These moral qualities are again most easily seen to apply to persons. The fact the creator is called ὁ θεός in 30a does not guarantee a personal being, given the notoriously slippery nature of the word in Greek, but it is at least compatible with the idea of an anthropomorphic deity in the traditional sense. The creator has certain desires, he deliberates, he plans things carefully, and he executes his plan.

But the very familiarity of the imagery here is in fact a strong sign *against* the view that Plato wished this personal craftsman to be taken in a strictly literal fashion. A Genesis-like creator appears nowhere else in his works, where the 'ground of being', if we may call it that, generally appears to be the Forms rather than a personal deity (though see below on the *Philebus*). Indeed, in the *Phaedrus* the gods are accounted gods precisely because they continually behold the ideals of truth, justice, beauty, and so on (247c–e). Timaeus' declaration that he is giving a 'likely account' of things can be taken as a subtle way of saying that his presentation will incorporate mythological elements, the chief of which could be the figure of the Demiurge. Cornford concludes:

[The Demiurge] is mythical in that he is not really a creator god, distinct from the universe he is represented as making. He is never spoken of as a possible object of worship; and in the third part of the dialogue the distinction between

³² *Tim.* 28c; trans. Bury, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

the Demiurge and the celestial gods, whom he makes and charges with the continuation of his work, is obliterated.³³

It does not follow, however, that the (likely) absence of a literal Demiurge means the universe only appears to be established by an intelligent force.³⁴ In the *Philebus* Plato seems to take the presence of an ordering Mind in the cosmos as almost a matter of common sense (28d–e):

Shall we say, Protarchus, that all things and this which is called the universe are governed by an irrational and fortuitous power and mere chance, or, on the contrary, as our forefathers said, are ordered and directed by mind and a marvellous wisdom? (28e)

Protarchus is offended by the mere suggestion that irrational (ἀλόγουν) chance rules the world, and cannot help but affirm the control of Mind.³⁵

Is the precise image of a Craftsman, then, just a metaphor for Plato, even if the presence of rationality in the world remained for him a bedrock belief? Thomas Johansen has made a persuasive case that the Demiurge should be viewed as the representative of *craftsmanship* as an ideal (in the Platonic sense), as opposed to an individual craftsman. This enables us to take the figure of the Demiurge seriously as something more than the internal workings of the cosmos, as Aristotle would have it, while avoiding the textual and logical problems of having a literal craftsman creating at a given point in time. After demonstrating how Plato often depicts ideals as ‘demiurges’,³⁶ Johansen shows how his proposal addresses the especially thorny question of creation in time:

³³ F. C. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1937), 38. Johansen contends that ‘the conflation of these lesser gods with the demiurge is not as extensive as Cornford suggests’ (p. 80).

³⁴ Cornford continues the quotation above by stating that ‘there is no doubt that he [the Demiurge] stands for a divine Reason working for ends that are good’.

³⁵ Cf. also the emphasis on order and the communion of heaven and earth in *Gorgias*, 507e–508a; see Johansen 3–4.

³⁶ Thus e.g. medicine is δημιουργός of health (*Charmides*, 174e) and divination is δημιουργός of friendship (*Symposium*, 188d), (Johansen 84).

This question becomes more urgent if we think of the demiurge as a particular agent. However, if we specify the cause of the cosmos as craftsmanship rather than as a craftsman *qua* individual it becomes clear that it is misguided to expect any biographical or psychological answers to this kind of question. Particular craftsmen may work whenever they happen to have the idea, motivation, or opportunity . . . Craftsmanship, in contrast, creates order wherever it can. Craftsmanship itself, paradigmatically represented by the divine demiurge, will exercise itself whenever the opportunity arises.³⁷

In summary, then, the idea of a fully personal creator strictly parallel to the God of the Bible is probably foreign to Plato. He did, however, affirm with many others that the world was ordered by some type of intelligence. Moreover, the language he employed for world formation, especially in the *Timaeus*, did lend itself to use by Jewish and Christian theologians. And once one assumes that Plato's Demiurge is really just another name for God the Father, the temptation to likewise conflate Christ and the Platonic λόγος becomes almost impossible to resist.

The Stoics attempted to solve the problem raised by Plato by simply eliminating the gap between the supposedly different layers of reality. There are numerous *testimonia* to the material monism of Stoicism. The *Placita philosophorum* is almost certainly not by Plutarch, but it is all the more valuable as an example of the kind of 'textbook knowledge' that formed the koine of Hellenistic philosophical education in New Testament times.³⁸ The *Placita* says plainly *Οἱ Στωικοὶ πάντα τὰ αἷτια σωματικὰ πνεύματα γάρ* (1.11.5). God is not excluded from the material continuum; indeed, one of the foundations of Stoic physics is that θεός must be material in order to shape the cosmos according to his (its?) purposes. Only a body can act upon another body, such that Origen can premise his discussion of the cosmic conflagration with the words 'The god of the Stoics, inasmuch as he is body'.³⁹ It should not be supposed that the materiality of θεός implies anything like the Christian idea of

³⁷ Johansen 86.

³⁸ See John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Black, 1920), 34–5.

³⁹ *Contra Celsum*, 4. 14. 25, ὁ τῶν Στωϊκῶν θεός, ἅτε σῶμα τυγχάνων, trans. at Long and Sedley i. 276. M. R. Wright (*Cosmology in Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 181) puts it neatly: 'The old Ionian theory, long despised by more sophisticated philosophers, of a universal world "stuff", vibrant and deathless, had found a second home in Stoic theory.'

incarnation: for the Stoics, 'god', 'cause', 'Zeus', 'fate', 'providence', and 'nature' are all more or less interchangeable terms.⁴⁰

But even here, with these apparently doctrinaire materialists and relentless logicians, seeming contradictions and qualifications emerge. While the first substance, for instance, is necessarily one, and material, the Stoics had to recognize two 'aspects' to it,⁴¹ the active (τὸ ποιοῦν) and the passive (τὸ πάσχον).⁴² Seneca, as we have seen, speaks of these as 'cause' or 'god', and 'material'. The account of Diogenes Laertius adds a further wrinkle: τὸ δὲ ποιοῦν τὸν ἐν αὐτῇ λόγον τὸν θεόν' (Vit. 134. 2–3). Long and Sedley render this 'that which acts is the reason [λόγος] in it, i.e. god'.⁴³ R. B. Todd notes the challenge inherent in this formulation: 'Now since Stoicism is a monistic system the two first principles must be physically inseparable . . . , so that this duality is reached by a logical, or conceptual, distinction'.⁴⁴ But keeping these principles in some sense corporeal, and separated only at the conceptual level, is a difficult task indeed, especially when one of the concepts is designated by pregnant terms such as 'reason' or 'god'. It is no surprise that someone like Seneca, who prized his intellectual freedom, should be inclined to depart from Stoic orthodoxy and speak of the causal principle as more 'potent and valuable' than the material.⁴⁵ As Lapidge notes, 'although the Stoics considered them [the first principles] to be corporeal, they used their *archai* to some extent as methodological principles like those of Aristotle'.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ See e.g. Seneca, *Nat. quaest.* 2. 45. 2–3, discussion in Lapidge, 'Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature', 1399; see also e.g. Diogenes Laertius, 7.135: 'God, intelligence (νοῦς), fate, and Zeus are all one, and many other names are applied to him'; trans. at Long and Sedley, i. 275.

⁴¹ The English word 'aspects' recurs in almost every contemporary discussion of Stoic cosmology. See e.g. R. B. Todd, 'Monism and Immanence: The Foundations of Stoic Physics', in J. M. Rist (ed.), *The Stoics* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 1978), 139–40; Lapidge, 'Stoic Cosmology', in Rist (ed.), *The Stoics*, 164: 'Logically speaking, Stoic theory would require us to speak of one primal substance with two aspects, one active, one passive'.

⁴² See e.g. Diogenes Laertius, 7. 134. 1: Δοκεῖ δ' αὐτοῖς ἀρχὰς εἶναι τῶν ὅλων δύο, τὸ ποιοῦν καὶ τὸ πάσχον.

⁴³ Long and Sedley, i. 268.

⁴⁴ Todd 139.

⁴⁵ Lapidge, 'Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature', 1399.

⁴⁶ Lapidge, 'Stoic Cosmology', 164.

While the creative force in Stoicism, then, is pronounced to be corporeal and immanent, this could be nuanced in ways that led it towards a more 'idealistic' or even traditionally theistic point of view. A Platonist might object, for instance, that a 'conceptual' distinction between god and matter creates just as much of a gap in the universe as a more colorful metaphorical distinction between 'upper' and 'lower' levels of being, or visible and invisible 'realms'. The problem of distinguishing between god or reason and matter while simultaneously maintaining a meaningful connection between the two does not admit of easy answers.

The polynymy of the Stoic god was not an isolated phenomenon. The Orphic material in particular revels in the different designations that can be given to the motive principle of the cosmos. In the fourth-century BC Derveni papyrus 'Zeus' is equated variously with all of the following: air as the essential 'creating' force in the universe; Kronos; mind; fate; and 'the mother of all things'.⁴⁷ As with the Stoics, however, there are subtleties lying just below the surface. Betegh, for instance, argues against a strict equivalence of Zeus and Moira:

As *pneuma* represents the active, moving part of the air, *phronesis* represents the practical, executive part or function of the mind... Moira/*pneuma*/*phronesis* is not the same as Zeus/air/*nous*, but an aspect or function of it; Moira is the active, executive, practical aspect of the god, that which 'ordains how the things that are and the things that come to be and the things that are going to be must come to be and be and cease'.⁴⁸

In his opinion the diverse names in the Derveni papyrus represent the 'different cosmic functions or activities of the god', or, to put it in slightly different terms, they are 'different powers (*dunamis*) of the one supreme cosmic divinity'.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Gábor Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology, and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 185–93. He notes (p. 193) that Zeus is not even prioritized as a name.

⁴⁸ Betegh 202. He later notes (p. 204) that the identifications are not total 'in so far as different names have the same reference but different meaning'.

⁴⁹ Betegh 204. He compares the latter point to the description of Stoic doctrine; see Diogenes Laertius, 7. 147.

The Orphic hymns represent a similar outlook, now in the context of devotion to the gods. 'King Zeus' is listed first among the gods in the introduction to the corpus, and in the hymn devoted to him he is described as ἀρχὴ πάντων πάντων τε τελευτῇ (15. 7), along with various other splendid epithets. But even the title 'the Beginning and the End' is not his exclusive property in the Orphic hymns. Heaven is also addressed as ἀρχὴ πάντων πάντων τε τελευτῇ as well as κόσμῳ πατὴρ, and παγγενέτωρ (4. 1 ff.). This fits perfectly with the cosmic spirituality of the Hellenistic world, and could be legitimately seen as a continuation of the views on the primacy of heaven in the cosmologies of Plato and Aristotle.⁵⁰ This blurring of distinctions continues in the 'Hymn to the Stars', where now the heavenly bodies are labeled αἰὲ γενετῆρες ἀπάντων (7. 5). The Sun can be extolled as κοσμοκράτωρ (8. 11), and Nature as παμμήτειρα θεά and παντοκράτειρα. Showing that etymology can sometimes trump tradition, Pan is praised as γενέτωρ πάντων, πολυνώμῳ δαίμον, and, yet again, κοσμοκράτωρ.

Sorting through all this is no easy task. It is clearly impossible to draw up a chart of the Orphic celestial bureaucracy, since so many entities seem to be in charge at once, and it is probably best to see it as a particularly florid example of the one cosmic god who appears under a variety of names and dispositions. But this may stand in some tension with the enthusiastic worship accorded to each of these beings in turn. At the very least, the corpus is not simply an extended exposition of a precise philosophical doctrine designed to subvert traditional religion. Rather, it seems to say that the richness of traditional worship (of both anthropomorphic gods like Zeus and Hecate, and cosmic forces like Heaven and Sun) can be happily combined with philosophically sophisticated thought. And while the author or authors would seem to gravitate towards something like a Stoic or pre-Socratic 'rational principle' as the ultimate ground of reality, they were perhaps not as interested as others in neatly deciding the relationship of that entity towards the traditional gods.

⁵⁰ On the cosmic dimension of Hellenistic spirituality see esp. André-Jean Festugière's *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, ii. *Le Dieu cosmique*.

The 'Middle Platonists' may also be helpfully compared with the Stoics, particularly in the question of God and λόγος.⁵¹ While the heirs of the Academy naturally wished to distance themselves from the Stoics on many counts, they nonetheless adopted, and adapted, numerous Stoic ideas into their philosophy. Indeed, given the fragmentary nature of most of our evidence, it is at times difficult to know where to classify certain thinkers. Posidonius, for example, bears some of the traits of a Platonist, but his belief that God is a 'fiery and intelligent *pneuma* penetrating all *ousia*' and that God is the 'active principle' in the cosmos sounds quite like Chrysippus.⁵² Even a full-fledged Platonist like Antiochus of Ascalon (1st–2nd century BCE) sounds thoroughly Stoic when he sets the λόγος at the center of his physical and ethical system. God's providence expresses itself in the world through the λόγος, which governs the natural order and serves as the vital link between God and humanity.⁵³ This λόγος is intimately involved with the human social order (e.g. prohibiting rape, commending patriotism), thus giving it ethical and perhaps even personal characteristics.⁵⁴ Philo, meanwhile, defies categorization to such an extent that we have given him his own discussion below.

Perhaps the most important development in Middle Platonism is the location of the Platonic Ideas in the mind of God. This has important implications for the issue of mediation, which we will discuss in the next section, but it also affects the question of the personhood of God. To the extent that the Ideas are seen as the absolute ground of reality, it becomes that much more difficult to envision a personal creator. Once they are conceived of as thoughts of God, on the model of human psychology, it is far more likely, and perhaps even inevitable, that one will think of God in more personal terms. Since this view of the Ideas is intimately tied in with the

⁵¹ In keeping with Dillon's seminal work, we leave aside the skeptical tradition which dominated the Academy in the second and third centuries BCE. See also Cox 35–43, who believes the Middle Platonists did posit a 'creator god' analogous to the God of the Bible, with the important qualification that he used a 'noetic intermediary' for the ordering of things (p. 37).

⁵² Dillon 108–9.

⁵³ Dillon 52–62, 80–1.

⁵⁴ Dillon 80–1.

question of mediation, however, we will reserve discussion of it until the next section.

We have seen the difficulty in making a clean break between material forces and rational ones in Greek accounts of the cosmos. It is often equally difficult to distinguish neatly between merely rational forces and fully personal agents of world creation. The former provide order to the cosmos, but they are not recognizable as individual persons. One might characterize them as sub personal, in that they do not communicate with humans in the conventional sense; or as supra personal, in that they relate in a more subtle fashion with human reason, and they are unencumbered by human passions which only hinder one's understanding (recall the charioteer in Plato's *Phaedrus*). They do not, in any case, sound very much like YHWH dealing with Israel, or the Ancient Near Eastern or Homeric deities with their very human feuds and foibles. Indeed, much of the religiously oriented philosophy in the Greek world may be seen as a flight from the painfully evident failings of the traditional Olympian gods. But the boundary is easily blurred: one might offer a prayer to Heaven as a god with great fervor; or one might acclaim 'Zeus' in quite traditional fashion, but explain afterwards that the real referent of one's hymn is the universal λόγος. Two examples merit special attention, not least because they furnish several close parallels to the New Testament texts concerning creation through Christ: Cleanthes' 'Hymn to Zeus', and the Pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo*.

It is a simple matter to see that for Cleanthes, Zeus' 'two-tined flaming blast, the ever-living thunderbolt' is not the traditional Olympian weapon, but rather a mythical evocation of the λόγος by which the universe is steered. But what of the lines 'From thee was our begetting, ours alone'? The conception of God here was sufficiently close to the God of Scripture for the author of Acts to quote it approvingly in Acts 17: 28. Cleanthes goes on to exhort his hearers to forsake evil and pursue goodness, obeying the law of God; and he prays that Zeus might save men from their unhappy folly. With a simple change of names, the hymn could be included in a modern-day Christian-worship service with no one objecting (and some deeming it a considerable improvement over their standard hymnody).

How, then, do we assess Cleanthes and his hymn? 'Religious sensibility' is a vague term; it is not as if one could develop a metric to scientifically assess a work's proportion of genuine spirituality. Nonetheless, it would seem churlish to deny that the hymn comes across as heartfelt worship and adoration. Yet it would be equally unwise to ignore the fact that it is rooted in the very particular notions of divinity held by the Stoics. Cleanthes was, after all, no mere private citizen giving expression to his mystical sense of the divine presence. He was the leader of arguably the most significant philosophical movement in the Hellenistic age, and so it is hardly unfair to expect him to hold to the basics of Stoic doctrine. Whether the personal view of God in the hymn can easily be reconciled with the particulars of Stoicism is a difficult question; but suffice it to say they could at least coexist in the life of Cleanthes.

The *De Mundo*, meanwhile, is a parade example of the cosmic spirituality of the Hellenistic period. Neither the date nor the author can be fixed with certainty: it appears to be the work of a Peripatetic open to other influences (especially Stoicism), and was likely written sometime in the first century BCE.⁵⁵ Its value to us lies in its intertwining of cosmology and theology. As D. J. Furley notes, 'nature is explored, not as the object of scientific enquiry, but as the expression of the cosmic deity, and the results are presented straightforwardly as dogma'.⁵⁶ At the start of the investigation 'Aristotle' invites the reader to *theologize* with him (*θεολογῶμεν*),⁵⁷ and even his opening definition of 'κόσμος' shows he is going to follow through on that invitation:

Κόσμος μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ σύστημα ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς καὶ τῶν ἐν τούτοις περιεχομένων φύσεων. Λέγεται δὲ καὶ ἐτέρως κόσμος ἢ τῶν ὅλων τάξις τε καὶ διακόσμησις, ὑπὸ θεοῦ τε καὶ διὰ θεὸν φυλαττομένη.

Cosmos, then, means a system composed of heaven and earth and the elements contained in them. In another sense, *cosmos* is used to signify the orderly arrangement of the universe, which is preserved by God and through God. (*De Mundo*, 391b, trans. Furley)

⁵⁵ For discussion see *Ps.-Aristotle De Mundo*, trans. D. J. Furley, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955), 337–41.

⁵⁶ Furley 335.

⁵⁷ Furley 334.

God, then, seems to be distinct from the cosmos. This impression is reinforced towards the end of the work (397b), where terminology is used that is indistinguishable from the biblical texts: God is the 'Saviour'⁵⁸ and creator of all things' (Σωτὴρ μὲν γὰρ ὄντως πάντων ἐστὶ καὶ γενέτωρ). The author is happy to use traditional images of God enthroned in the heavens, quoting Homer's dictum that 'To Zeus belongs the wide heaven in the clouds and the aether' (400a, trans. Furlley). He rules all things by his almighty power (399b), directing them according to his will (400b). He is the God 'of Supplication and Grace, as the poets say, and in a true sense Saviour and Liberator' (401a).

The author seems sincere in his pious pronouncements about God. But, as with the Stoics, this piety bends back towards something less (or more) than the conventionally personal. The first sign of this comes with the imagery of God as the Unmoved Mover (not surprising for 'Aristotle'), who does not mingle directly with the world, but sends out his 'power' just as a great king sends out his functionaries to administer his realm (398a–399b). (The illustration of God as cosmic puppet-master, 398b17, is even more unfortunate.) The rationale offered is that it is more 'noble and becoming' for God to remain in the highest place and to be unencumbered with the petty details of mundane affairs. The underlying cosmology, however, seems to be the traditional one of a divine power which is most present in the heavenly bodies and becomes attenuated as it works its way down to earth (thus accounting for the relatively more disturbed conditions of terrestrial life). This is spelled out in concrete terms in the celestial and meteorological discussions in books 2–5. As the author puts it somewhat bluntly in 397b, the farther you are from God in the cosmic chain, the less of his help you are likely to receive.⁵⁹

Equally Stoic, and equally problematic for a fully personal view of God, is the repeated and unmistakable equation of God and Fate in

⁵⁸ Furlley quite rightly renders this 'preserver', but we have kept the more 'religious' sense of σωτήρ to highlight the connection with biblical language.

⁵⁹ The author gestures towards the Stoic doctrine of a pervading πνεῦμα in 394b, but quickly adds 'about that there is no need to speak now'. One is reminded of Pascal's critique of Descartes, that he invoked God to get the universe started, but after that had no more use for him (*Pensées*, 77).

the concluding chapter of the *De Mundo*. When God is described as ‘a law to us’ (νόμος ἡμῖν) in 400b, we might take this to mean simply that he directs the processes of the world. But it could also indicate that God is another way of describing ‘the ways things are’. In book 7 (401b) the author equates God with Necessity, Destiny, Fate (or the Fates), Moira, Nemesis,Adrasteia, and Aisa. Each designation is accompanied by an etymology: Necessity (ἀνάγκη) means ‘a cause that cannot be defeated’ (ἀνικητον αἴτιον); ‘Aisa’ (αἴσα) refers to ‘a cause that exists forever’ (ἀει οὖσαν); and so on. These etymologies are perhaps intended to soften the blow of what might appear to be a brutal Stoic fatalism. He may be saying, ‘What you call “Fate” is in fact the purposeful outworking of God’s plan’. But the seven-fold association of God and Fate has still been made. This, coupled with the overtly mechanical descriptions of providence in 398b, offers us a picture of a God who is less than fully engaged with human beings.

In light of all the above, it should be obvious that there can be no one ‘Greek’ view on who, or what, created the world. There were myriad explanations circulating. Some, perhaps many, may have viewed a fully personal Isis or Zeus as the creator of all, while an equal number may have seen the world as the product of blind chance. But we have only scattered accounts of these popular beliefs. When it comes to the better-documented philosophical sources, the situation remains somewhat obscure. It is often difficult to make a clear distinction between mechanical processes and rational forces, and between rational forces and personal agents. Indeed, with the Stoics all three categories tend to blend in with one another.

We may, however, speak about ‘rational force’ as the *center of gravity* in the accounts of the Stoics, Platonists, Peripatetics, and their ilk.⁶⁰ Cleanthes may express genuine devotion to Zeus in his hymn, such that the reader is pulled towards a traditional anthropomorphic conception of deity. But we are clearly meant to understand Zeus not as a bearded Olympian, but as the Stoic designing fire; the conclusion of the poem makes this clear. The reader is drawn back to the rational. The same may be said of the Orphic material,

⁶⁰ The Epicureans are pretty thoroughly ‘materialists’ in the modern sense of the word and thus are much less relevant as background to the NT. The author of Acts, e.g., is not about to quote Epicurus in Acts 17 as he does Aratus.

where the warmth of mysticism is cooled considerably by the equation of the divine with breath or the world or fate; or of the eclectic philosophy of the *De Mundo*, with its similar blending of Zeus and cosmos and logos. At the same time, the materialism of the Stoics never gives way to a simple mechanical process. Even the relentless inevitability of eternal recurring κόσμοι is seen as the purposeful activity of the λόγος rather than simply 'the way it is'. 'The way it is', for the Stoic, is good, and therefore ought to be accepted. This is different from mere resignation. But it is also different from what we might intuitively expect of a creative *Person*. Johansen's insightful words on the *Timaeus*' view of the ultimate good of humankind are equally relevant to the philosophical view of god prevailing in the texts we have studied:

But ultimately the stated aim is to shed these emotions, to identify through astronomy with the rational circles of the heavenly bodies and thus to return to a stellar life of pure reason. If nature offers us guidance here, it is not in the form of emotional consolation, but in that of hard mathematics. *For Plato, to imitate nature is to turn oneself into something at once much more and much less than a human being* (my italics).⁶¹

Judaism and Christianity, by contrast, make the person of God the center of their creation theology. The words and acts of YHWH, from creation on down, were too embedded in the biblical story to permit him to become a generalized 'force' in the world. The author of the Wisdom of Solomon uses the concepts of Wisdom and Spirit to gesture towards the legitimate questions raised by Greek philosophy about the mode of God's interaction with the creation, but God is immediately recognizable as the Old Testament Lord, speaking and working and judging on behalf of his chosen people. With the advent of Christianity, and the affirmation that the Messiah is God's agent in creation as well as redemption, the issue of the personhood of God is put all the more emphatically at the center of the discussion. God, the Father of the Messiah Jesus, is inescapably personal.

⁶¹ Johansen 200.

CONNECTIONS

Given the fully personal nature of the Christian God, the question remains as to why Jesus needs to become involved in the act of creation. One might respond in a few ways, all of which involve the principle of *connection*. God could be conceived of as being *separate* from the world, and thus needing a means of coming into contact with it; there is a gap that wants bridging. This might account for the ‘through Christ’ language in the New Testament creation texts. There is also the problem of internal connections within the cosmos. Whether God is imagined as inside or outside the cosmos, he still needs to somehow permeate the world and keep it from falling apart. Hence we have the language of Christ ‘holding all things together’ in Colossians 1. Both ideas—bridging the gap and holding things together—are widely disseminated in Greek thought and form an important parallel to the New Testament texts. We will treat them each in turn.

The idea of bridging the gap between upper and lower worlds is of course a quite ancient one, as we saw in Chapter 3. The mythological conception of celestial or supracelestial divinities necessitated either a direct descent of the gods to earth (e.g. the disguised Zeus and Hermes wandering among the populous), the employment of intermediary divine figures (e.g. Iris, Hermes), or the deputizing of human agents to act on behalf of the gods (e.g. Hammurabi et al.). The distance was not only physical, but to a certain extent ontological: the gods were the deathless ones, dwelling in bliss far from mortal troubles.

The problem took on a new urgency, however, with Parmenides. As great as the gap between heaven and earth might be, it was still traversable, as Parmenides himself shows in his journey to the ends of the world in the proem to his treatise. The trip is patently a mythologically rendered depiction of philosophical enlightenment, but the truth unveiled to him was not for the faint of heart. Nothing in the visible realm, it turns out, could be trusted. Genuine Being, Real Reality, was fixed and unchanging, not subject to the constant changes that beset the world of Becoming. ‘Was’ and ‘will be’ have no place in the investigation of truth: ‘It is’ is the only valid

philosophical statement, whatever 'it' might be. If this (for Parmenides) logically irrefutable state of affairs threw a wrench into the explanations of the natural philosophers, so much the worse for the natural philosophers. They could offer up various likely guesses for how things proceeded in the world of Seeming—Parmenides offered his own speculations in the second part of his work—but they should never imagine these could attain to any certainty.

Parmenides thus bequeathed an epistemological and ontological chasm to those who followed him, or at least to those like Plato who took his philosophical challenge seriously. As Dillon notes, 'it is common ground for all Platonists that between God and Man there must be a host of intermediaries, that God may not be contaminated or disturbed by a too close involvement with Matter.'⁶² How could the eternal, changeless realm of Being be brought into contact with the changeable realm of Becoming? In some respects this is the central question of all Plato's thinking, and there is little hope we could do an adequate job accounting for it here. We will instead focus on the problem of mediation as it surfaces in the *Timaeus*.

On the 'Being' side of the ledger we have the Supreme Cause or Demiurge, who looks upon the sum total of the Ideas as the model for the world of Becoming which he will create. Thus Plato begins to address the problems raised by Parmenides: we can at least say the visible world is modeled on the invisible, such that it will resemble it in certain respects. There is a meaningful connection between the two by analogy of original and copy. To use the language of *Tim.* 30aff., the world as a visible Living Creature takes as its model the intelligible Eternal Living Creature which is the world of Ideas.⁶³ But how does the connection between these two actually work? Here

⁶² Dillon 47.

⁶³ The world can thus be said to be the *εἰκόνα* of the intelligible realm. The appearance of *εἰκόνα* may excite us for a moment, with its surface connections to Col. 1: 15, and the fact that it can be referred to in *Tim.* 92c as *εἰκὼν τοῦ νοητοῦ θεὸς αἰσθητός*. But the differences in conception are enormous: In Plato, the world as an 'image of God' refers to the fact that the visible cosmos in its totality is a copy of the invisible world of Ideas. Christ as image of God bears the personal likeness to his Father. At best, one might argue that the language of Colossians asserts that Christ is the only entity worthy of the epithet 'God', in contrast to Plato's noetic realm. But the biblical background for the image language is so plain it seems quite unnecessary to invoke the *Timaeus* at this point.

Plato turns to the traditional concepts of Soul ($\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$) and Reason or Mind ($\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$):

So because of this reflection He constructed reason within soul and soul within body as He fashioned the All, that so the work He was executing might be of its nature most fair and most good. Thus, then, in accordance with the likely account, we must declare that this Cosmos has verily come into existence as a Living Creature endowed with soul and reason owing to the providence of God.⁶⁴

What, then, is Soul, such that it can thus connect Being and Becoming? Plato describes it as a kind of hybrid of Being, the Same, and the Other:

Midway between the Being which is indivisible and remains always the same and the Being which is transient and divisible in bodies, He blended a third form of Being compounded out of the twain, that is to say, out of the Same and the Other; and in like manner He compounded it midway between that one of them which is indivisible and that one which is divisible in bodies. And He took the three of them, and blent them all together into one form, by forcing the Other into union with the Same, in spite of its being naturally difficult to mix.⁶⁵

The passage is, to put it mildly, rather obscure.⁶⁶ But we at least have now a name for the point of connection between the Ideas and the world, as well as a principle of cohesion within the cosmos: the World Soul. The World Soul after its creation is parceled out in due proportion and becomes the infrastructure of the visible god that is the universe. It partakes of reasoning ($\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\sigma\mu\omicron\upsilon\ \mu\epsilon\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\upsilon\sigma\alpha$, 36e) and sets the universe in motion.⁶⁷ If the world remains imperfect, this is due to a second principle, Necessity, associated with matter.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ *Tim.* 30b, trans. Bury.

⁶⁵ *Tim.* 35a, trans. Bury.

⁶⁶ For detailed discussions see Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 59 ff., and Sergio Zedda, 'How to Build a World Soul: A Practical Guide', in M. R. Wright (ed.), *Reason and Necessity: Essays on Plato's Timaeus* (London: Duckworth/Classical Press of Wales, 2000), 23–41. Zedda argues that the governing image of this mixture is metallurgy, with the various mixtures involved being modeled on the processing of alloys.

⁶⁷ Left over pieces of the World Soul get remixed to form the human soul, thus providing contact between human reason and the world; *Tim.* 41d; see Zedda, pp. 33–4.

⁶⁸ See e.g. Johansen 16–19.

Aristotle, as evidenced by his rejection of the Platonic Ideas, moved towards explaining nature from within, while not abandoning teleology.⁶⁹ But his discussion of a transcendent Unmoved Mover seemed to preserve the gap between the upper and lower orders of reality. In *Metaphysics* 1072a Aristotle posits a Something lying behind the movement of the visible heavens: 'And since that which is moved while it moves is intermediate, there is something which moves without being moved; something eternal which is both substance and actuality'. The identity of the Unmoved Mover remains uncertain: Aristotle can label it 'God . . . a living being, eternal, most good' in *Met.* 1072b, but the prevailing language is of some impersonal principle—it is in any event even less likely to be a specified person than Plato's Demiurge. But the way the Unmoved Mover is said to initiate the movement is of great interest. If he (it?) were to engage in actual physical contact with even the outermost level of the cosmos, his integrity and unmovability would be compromised. Thus Aristotle hypothesizes that he moves it by 'desire' akin to love: 'and it causes motion as being an object of love (*ὡς ἐρώμενον*), whereas all other things cause motion because they are themselves in motion (1072b)'.⁷⁰ How precisely this was meant to work perplexed even devoted students like Theophrastus, and perhaps Aristotle himself, since he does not appear to have explored the idea further.⁷¹ But bridging the gap in such a nonmaterial way was a bold move that distinguishes Aristotle (or at least the Aristotle of *Met.* 12) from the rest of the cosmologists we have studied.

Later Platonists, as we have noted briefly, read the *Timaeus* with the assistance of Stoic *λόγος* terminology and Pythagorean number theory. This is not surprising, since both of these are present in some sense in the *Timaeus* itself (the former in the aforementioned treatment of Reason/Mind in 30b, the latter in, e.g., 31b ff.). The adoption of *λόγος* terminology was natural enough. By conceptualizing the Ideas as the *λόγος* in the mind of God, one could enjoy the benefits of

⁶⁹ Cf. Johansen 86: 'The main difference between Plato's and Aristotle's ordering principle remains that Plato's craftsman works on nature from without whereas Aristotle's works from within'.

⁷⁰ For a brief but clear discussion see Wright, *Cosmology*, 178–80.

⁷¹ Wright, *Cosmology*, 180.

a fully transcendental first principle which could still shape the world by means of its thoughts. Especially relevant are two passages where the *λόγος* is identified as the entity ‘by which’ things come to be. In Seneca’s Letter 65, which we have already noted above, the *a quo* or τὸ ὑπ’ οὗ is called the *artifex*, corresponding to the *λόγος* or Demiurge.⁷² Varro, for his part, offers an allegory of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva in which Jupiter is God, the *a quo*, Juno is Matter, the *de qua*, and Minerva is the Logos or Ideas, the *secundum quod*. This helps illustrate the complexity of prepositional usage in cosmology, and the dangers of unthinkingly applying apparent Hellenistic parallels to New Testament Christological formulas. In Varro’s scheme, the *a quo* could correspond to the δι’ οὗ statements in the New Testament—but the δι’ οὗ statements are predicated of Christ, not the Father. Likewise while Christ on the surface ought to line up with Minerva/Logos, there is nothing in the New Testament to suggest he is the pattern for creation, the *secundum quod* or καθ’ ὃ.

The concept of the World Soul also helped Middle Platonists bridge the gap between the worlds of Being and Becoming. Again we may cite Dillon: ‘For Xenocrates, as for his predecessors, the soul was the mediating entity *par excellence* in the universe, and it was thus necessary that it contain within itself elements which can relate both to the intelligible and the sensible realm, as well as all the ratios out of which the harmony of the cosmos is constituted’.⁷³

We have the curious appearance in Middle Platonism of a ‘second god’ who creates the world in distinction from the primary god who is above the world. This idea is well known from Gnosticism, but it appears to have sprung from a certain appropriation of Plato’s legacy.⁷⁴ We find Philo describing the *λόγος* as a second god in QG 2.62: mankind is patterned not after God himself, but after his Word: πρὸς τὸν δεύτερον θεόν, ὃς ἐστὶν ἐκείνου λόγος. We will deal with Philo more thoroughly in the next chapter. Suffice it to say for now that the appearance of such a curious designation as τὸν δεύτερον θεόν by an

⁷² Dillon 138.

⁷³ Dillon 29.

⁷⁴ See e.g. Ursula Früchtel, *Die kosmologischen Vorstellungen bei Philo von Alexandria*, Arborten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums, 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 17–8; Ronald Cox, *By the same Word: Creation and Salvation in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 31–8.

avowed monotheist makes one think Philo is following a tradition here (especially since he rarely slips into this sort of explicit mention of another 'god'; 'powers' is the preferred designation). This suspicion is reinforced by the appearance of similar teachings in later Middle Platonism. In Plutarch's *On the E at Delphi* 393a ff. Plutarch's mentor Ammonius states that the vicissitudes of life in the sublunary realm are to be attributed not to the supreme God known as Apollo, but rather to another god or daemon whom he labels Hades or Pluto.⁷⁵ It also fits the neo-Pythagorean distinction of the Supreme Principle, 'the One', and the Monad (= Form) and the Dyad (= Matter).⁷⁶

The second-century thinker Numenius, meanwhile, posits an even bolder distinction between a First God and a Second God. His late date, and the fact that he invokes a variety of traditions including Judaism, makes him a problematic figure for establishing the Greek background to Christian doctrines. Nonetheless, his views on creation are striking:

The First God, existing in its own place, is simple and, consorting as he does with himself alone, can never be divisible. The Second and Third God, however, are in fact one; but in the process of coming into contact with matter, which is the Dyad, He gives unity to it, but is Himself divided by it, since Matter has a character prone to desire and is in flux. So in virtue of not being in contact with the Intelligible (which would mean being turned in upon Himself), by reason of looking towards Matter and taking thought for it, He becomes unregarding (*ἀπερίοπτος*) of Himself. And He seizes upon the sense realm and ministers to it and yet draws it up to His own character, as a result of this yearning towards Matter.⁷⁷

The basic division of first and second gods can perhaps be traced back to the *Timaeus*' distinction between 'the ever-existing God' and 'the god which was one day to be existent' (*Tim.* 34b), remembering that it is the created gods who go on to make mortal bodies (*Tim.* 42d ff.).⁷⁸ But with Numenius we now have a triad of gods, an idea

⁷⁵ Dillon 191. ⁷⁶ Dillon 126–7.

⁷⁷ Fr. 11, trans. at Dillon, 367–8.

⁷⁸ R. W. Sharples, 'Three-fold Providence: The History and Background of a Doctrine,' in R. W. Sharples and Anne Sheppard (eds.), *Ancient Approaches to Plato's Timaeus* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2003), 126.

which he appears to have picked up from the Pythagoreans; and the second god is not the world itself, but the Demiurge.⁷⁹ Likewise there are echoes here of the Old Academy, which postulated two first principles: the Monad, which is the Intellect and principle of unity; and the Dyad, the principle of differentiation which is identified with Matter and the World Soul.⁸⁰ The triadic structure also recalls the notion of three levels or types of providence (*πρόνοια*) that we find in Apuleius (2nd century) and others.⁸¹ Finally, the self-contemplating supreme being has clear affinities with the description of the Unmoved Mover in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 12.

Whatever the provenance of these ideas, Numenius posits an absolutely transcendent supreme being engaged, it seems, in self-contemplation, and a Demiurge of mixed nature (concerned with both the intelligible and sensible realms, see fr.15) who actually steers the world on its course.

As we have noted above, the Stoics sought to eliminate the problem of mediation entirely by a thoroughgoing materialism. Whether they were successful on that score may be debated. If they eschewed the concept of mediation, however, they were deeply concerned to demonstrate the connections between all things. The maintenance of order may be viewed as part of the concept of creation, and relates directly to the aspect of Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* expressed in the phrase 'in him all things hold together' in Col. 1: 17.

The Stoics addressed the (to them) self-evident order of the universe in several ways, and we must reckon both with the fact that the same concepts might be expressed in different terms, and with the fact that different Stoic thinkers might develop things in somewhat different directions. The rationality of the cosmos is accounted for by the immanent 'designing fire', and particularly by the *λόγος* resident within that fire. The *λόγος* seems to function somewhat like the Platonic Ideas, determining the nature of things in the world. Since the *λόγος* is immanent, however, unlike Plato's Ideas, the notorious problem of how to connect the Ideas with matter has

⁷⁹ Dillon 367.

⁸⁰ See Dillon 24–8.

⁸¹ See Sharples 107 ff.

been sidestepped. Aristocles reports that for the Stoics 'the primary fire is as it were a sperm which possesses the principles [λόγοι] of all things and the causes of past, present, and future events'.⁸²

But did even an immanent λόγος step wide enough to avoid the problem altogether? There is evidence it did not. Λόγος remains a principle. It is a principle which could only be conceptually distinguished from matter, true, but it is a principle nonetheless. For this reason, Chrysippus especially appeared to prefer to speak of that which bound the universe together as 'a breath pervading the whole world' (πνεῦμα μὲν ἐνδιήκον δι' ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου).⁸³ The concept of a binding πνεῦμα permeating the world was no doubt drawn by way of analogy with the human constitution—and with some reason, given that humans sustain their lives by taking in the air which does in fact permeate the world.⁸⁴ It had also been considered as a cosmogonical force at least since the time of Anaximenes. But Chrysippus used the concept of a πνεῦμα in a very careful fashion to further elucidate Stoic physics. His πνεῦμα contained both fire and air, 'active' elements which could shape the 'passive' elements of earth and water (the analogies with τὸ ποιοῦν and τὸ πάσχον are evident).

Distinguishing πνεῦμα from λόγος also helps Chrysippus avoid the obvious problem of the status of sticks and stones in a Stoic system. They clearly do not display rationality as an active principle, like human beings. (The rationality of animals was a debated category.) Yet they equally clearly play their part in the divinely ordered world system. The concept of ἔξις, or 'tenor' as Long and Sedley render it, created a middle category in which inanimate objects were indeed 'held together' by the πνεῦμα, but not in the same way as animate beings. This could be pictured as a kind of attenuation of the heavenly fire: Chrysippus believed 'the purest part of the aether . . . as primary god, passes perceptibly as it were through the things in the air and through all animals and plants,

⁸² In Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 15. 14. 2, trans. at Long and Sedley, i. 276; cf. Aetius, 1. 7. 33, where the designing fire ἐμπεριεληφὸς πάντας τοὺς σπερματικούς λόγους.

⁸³ Aetius, 1. 7. 33, trans. at Long and Sedley, i. 275.

⁸⁴ The connection is affirmed by Chrysippus himself, according to Calcidius 220.

and through the earth itself as tenor (ἐξίς).⁸⁵ Presumably, as the aether 'thins out' or becomes less pure the effect on objects in the world correspondingly differs. Note, too, that the aether/*πνεῦμα* is god for Chrysippus, just as the *πνεῦμα*/aether/god is fate, according to the account in Stobaeus: 'C. calls the substance of fate a power of breath, carrying out the orderly government of the all'.⁸⁶

The conceptual parallels of Stoic thought to early Christian views of Christ and the Spirit create quite a tangle. It will be helpful to pause our survey here briefly and consider the implications of all this for the New Testament, since the issues concerning Stoicism simply throw into sharper relief more general concerns with early Christian cosmology and Greek philosophical thought. The appearances of *λόγος* and *πνεῦμα* as world-ordering principles could not help but draw one back to John 1 and the powerful workings of the Holy Spirit throughout the New Testament. One might even say that the status of *λόγος* as ordering principle corresponds rather well with Christ's authoritative role as Messiah, whose commanding word directs all things; while in both Christianity and Stoicism it is *πνεῦμα* that does the actual work 'on the ground'. Can this be pure coincidence?

Before we answer that question negatively, we must again pull back and remind ourselves of the significant differences in the broader conceptual schemes. First, the New Testament shows no desire to move beyond the bare idea that Christ is involved in the creation and maintenance of the world order; there is no discussion whatsoever of the mechanics of how this works. But such mechanics are precisely what Stoic physics seeks to unearth. Detailed interest in the nature of Christ's activity only arises at the relational or ethical level: the same Spirit which empowered Jesus is at work in the Christian community both to alleviate their sufferings and to transform them into holy people. The best illustration of this is in John 1, where mention of the creative work of the *λόγος* is immediately set in the context of moral conflict: 'the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome/understood it'. There is no exploration of how the *λόγος*

⁸⁵ Diogenes Laertius, 7. 139. Long and Sedley aptly summarize: "'Breath", whatever the degree of its tension, is the vehicle of divine intelligence . . . But it only imparts intelligence to specific portions of matter where it is most pervasive' (i. 289).

⁸⁶ Stobaeus, 1. 79. 1–12, trans. at Long and Sedley, i. 337.

created things, or how he sustains them (which he presumably does, though the Prologue makes no explicit mention of it). Later in John, Jesus does breathe his Spirit into the disciples to perpetuate his mission (chs. 13–17). But this too merely assures the disciples that their mission is meaningfully related to that of Jesus, and indeed that they themselves are meaningfully related to the person of Jesus through the Spirit. Beyond the simple fact that he breathes on them, there is no interest in the material or quasi-material or supramaterial processes through which this bonding works.

An even more profound difference, as we have pointed out repeatedly, lies in the inescapably personal nature of Jesus' agency. The element of intelligence or rationality, it is true, never departs from Stoicism. But one can fairly argue that this intelligence runs the risk of being (almost literally) swallowed up in a reality which is ultimately material; you cannot recover a genuine person from the endless material chain of causality. The system as a whole is evidence of a supreme intelligence; but because it is thus the world itself that is god, it is difficult to see how one's praise could be focused in a meaningful way. The situation is exacerbated by (or perhaps more clearly revealed by) the Stoic doctrine of eternal recurrence (see e.g. Nemesius, 309. 5–311. 2). The thought that the designing fire will endlessly remake the world precisely as it was before might strike one as consummately impersonal.

Like the *πνεῦμα* itself, then, Stoic adoration of the divine, intense as it might be, seems destined to be diffused throughout the cosmos. One could still, with effort, maintain something of divine personality within Stoicism, as the example of Cleanthes shows. But even here one wonders if he is being pulled back by an alien force (i.e. the customary worship of personal gods) against the logical outworking of the Stoic system itself. If nothing else, his pietistic fervor seems the exception rather than the rule. It represents the point at which the arc of Stoicism draws closest to that of Jews and Christians (or Isis worshippers, for that matter); but the arc soon curves away to address very different concerns.

Is it, then, mere coincidence that accounts for this perplexing conjunction, in Platonist terms, of the Same and the Different with respect to Stoicism or Middle Platonism and early Christianity? Leaving aside the theological questions of a Eusebian *praeparatio*

evangelium, is there a way to make historical sense of the relationship? An answer to this must begin with a recognition that Greek philosophical activity was never fully removed from the mythological concerns of the past (and present), nor for that matter from everyday experiences of life.

We have already detailed the ways in which the 'sympathy' of the heavenly and earthly realms was a staple of religious thinking long before the pre-Socratics or Posidonius. In the case of the *λόγος*, for instance, there was widespread agreement in the Ancient Near East that the world had every appearance of being the result of someone's *commanding word* (whether of Enlil or Marduk or Zeus or Isis). It operated with regularity like a well-governed kingdom; it held together like a well-made palace or pavement. It could be assumed that there was something that made this sympathy possible. The basic answer would be 'the will of God/the gods'. The Greek philosophers simply tried to answer this at a greater level of specificity. One could argue that the Epicureans did take a novel step in removing the divine element from the system altogether. But the thinkers of greatest concern to us, like Plato and the Stoics, still worked within the basic framework of a divinely established cosmos. There was, no doubt, a revolutionary degree of sophistication in their discussions, particularly with respect to the interaction of material and immaterial entities. But we should not be at all surprised to find positive connections between Greek thought and the early Christians at a certain level of abstraction.

Turning to the question of philosophical vocabulary, a great part of the intuitive force of Greek philosophy lies precisely in its ability to work at the level of abstract principles while using familiar concepts and illustrations. The Stoic *πνεῦμα*, we have seen, was based on a universally shared human experience: the wind without, and the breath within.

The conceptual parallels between the Stoic *πνεῦμα* and *λόγος* and early Christianity can be attributed primarily to a widely shared ancient view of the world. On a few occasions New Testament writers may appear to borrow philosophical turns of phrase; for instance, in the use of *συνέστηκεν* in Col. 1: 17. The word was indeed a commonplace among Stoics and others. But the very ubiquity of the concepts indicates it was part of the intellectual koine of the time, such that the

interesting thing is not *whether* someone thinks the world holds together, but rather how one goes about answering the question of *why* it holds together.

Naturally, the Stoics were not alone in seeking to express and explain how the cosmos was connected. Posidonius is generally credited with developing, or at least popularizing, the idea of universal ‘sympathy’ in which the parts of all are bound together in the whole. But bona fide fragments of Posidonius are elusive, and it is therefore difficult to state his ideas with precision.⁸⁷

The author of the *De Mundo* pictures things rather differently, preserving in important ways his Aristotelian heritage and distancing himself from Stoic immanentism.⁸⁸ While he can describe God as ‘penetrating to all things’ (397b), even here he chooses his words carefully: ἐπὶ πᾶν διικνεῖσθαι is very different from a pervasive λόγος or πνεῦμα; the preposition ἐπὶ seems chosen with special care.⁸⁹ In the same way, in 400a God is the one who ‘maintains the orderliness and preservation of the whole’, συνεχῶν τῇ τῶν ὅλων ἀρμονίαν τε καὶ σωτηρίαν. But it is explicitly said that he is *not* in the center of things (οὔτε μέσος ὢν), but rather ‘high aloft, pure in a pure region’ (ἄλλ’ ἄνω καθαρὸς ἐν καθαρῷ χωρῷ βεβηκώς).⁹⁰

More critically, he offers several images which reinforce his central illustration of God as a sovereign with functionaries spread throughout his empire, the cosmos. Perhaps the most telling is the comparison of God to the keystone of vaults (τοῖς ὀμφαλοῖς λεγομένοις τοῖς ἐν ταῖς ψαλίσιν). He admits this is a humble comparison, but it in fact suits his purposes perfectly. The keystone not only sits atop the arch in the highest place, it works by distributing its ‘power’ to the immediately surrounding blocks, which then distribute it in turn all the way down to the base. It is in this way that God is the αἴτιον of the preservation of the world: not directly, but distributively. Thus

⁸⁷ Dillon 106–13.

⁸⁸ Furley notes that the God of the *De Mundo* is ‘a development, however remote, of Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover’ (p. 336).

⁸⁹ See also *De Mundo* 398b, where similar language is used.

⁹⁰ It is true that at 401a–b he quotes approvingly an Orphic hymn about Zeus which includes the line ‘Zeus is the breath of all things’. But he is only trying to make the general point that God is the αἴτιος of all things (401a), and thus he would not necessarily affirm the hymn in every particular.

when the author writes that God's 'power' (*δύναμις*) goes forth to move the sun and the moon and the heavens and thus cause all things on earth, we should not think in Platonic terms of a second, immanent god who brings into reality the ideals of the invisible god. Rather, the Supreme God sends out his own power to 'start the (heavenly) ball rolling' and things run their course after that. The intellectual, directive sense of God's activity is captured in the images of helmsman, charioteer, chorus leader, law and lawgiver, and commander (400b). The author does not want us to think things are out of God's control once he sets the machine in motion. Nevertheless, even these illustrations serve to distinguish the leader and the led. Pseudo-Aristotle elaborates on the law, demonstrating how the immovable law causes magistrates and judges and politicians to go about their respective tasks. Furley summarizes: '[Ps.-Aristotle's] god is not immanent in the world, interpenetrating all things, but remote, unmoved, and impassive. He maintains the order of the cosmos by means of an undefined "power", which relieves him of the dishonourable necessity of personal intervention'.⁹¹

The final note on the 'dishonourable necessity of personal intervention' (drawn from *De Mundo* 398b) marks a sharp divergence from Christ's exceedingly personal agency in creation. But the *De Mundo* also serves a more positive purpose, in that it demonstrates how a Hellenistic thinker could affirm the existence of a transcendent supreme providential being or force without imagining there was a massive gap between this being and the created order. This does not of course mean the New Testament writers were Peripatetics; but it does mean they were not *of necessity* either Platonists or Stoics, in need of a gap bridger or an immanent *λόγος* to compete in the marketplace of ideas. There was a variety of intellectual models available for thinking through the relation of God and the cosmos, and the New Testament writers were free to avail themselves of any of them, or none of them.

⁹¹ Furley 336.

SUMMARY

Those who privilege Hellenistic backgrounds for understanding Colossians 1 and the rest may feel the very arrangement of my argument unduly prejudices the reader against their importance. The Greek and Roman texts are only brought in after all the theological heavy lifting has already been done. While I would remind such a reader that the actual exegesis of the New Testament texts still awaits us, the charge nonetheless deserves answering. After all, the Greek language is the point of contact between the New Testament writers and their audiences, and there is no denying the formal parallels between numerous Graeco-Roman religious affirmations and the New Testament statements about Christ and creation. Aristobulus and his ilk were surely not completely mad in seeing meaningful connections between the Bible and Hellenistic thought. Why might the same not be said of Paul and John?

It must be conceded that, if nothing else, the New Testament's Hellenistically flavored statements on creation opened the way for later Christian theologians to follow in the footsteps of Aristobulus and Philo, and seek a thoroughgoing fusion of biblical and Greek thought. But the question remains as to whether the texts were ever meant to be taken in that direction. Is the Johannine *λόγος*, for instance, really the 'blueprint of creation'? Does the 'image' of Colossians have anything to do with the 'image' of the *Timaeus*?

In terms of the *process* of creation, we have stressed that Greek philosophical concerns diverged significantly from the concerns of the New Testament writers. The fact that God made the world is affirmed, but the way in which he went about doing that receives very little attention beyond the occasional notices that he did it through Christ. The emphasis is on creation as the basis or model for present and future eschatological re-creation, with Christ the key agent in both. This is not to say that the Greeks and the Christians are in clearly defined warring camps. While early Christians might have seen some Greek views as theologically unacceptable, in general they simply have markedly different interests.

The question of *personal agents* of creation is far more complex. At the popular level, it seems likely that many in the ancient world

would have attributed the cosmos to a personal god or goddess with significant affinities to the God of the Bible. Even in more sophisticated philosophical circles the legacy of personal gods was strong enough that a work like the 'Hymn to Zeus' could form a bridge between biblical witness and philosophical conceptions. But the more self-consciously philosophical the thinking, the more difficult it became to hold onto a fully personal God in charge of the created order. Thus the Greek conceptions of creation tend to orbit around an impersonal force, though this orbit sometimes draws near to a more personal conception of God. Early Jews and Christians, meanwhile, orbit around the personal, speaking God of the Scriptures, with no reluctance to recognize that their theological arc sometimes overlapped with that of the Greeks.

Finally, we have the yet more vexing problem of *connection*. One sometimes gets the impression that the Greeks invented the idea of transcendence, such that any Jewish or Christian discussion of mediation must necessarily be a response to the problems raised by Parmenides and Plato. But the distance of God from the world was a problem for humanity long before the Greeks. As in many things, they only dealt with it in a more technically refined fashion. Indeed, the question of distance and mediation, or transcendence and immanence, arises as a fundamental condition of reality. If we have two distinct entities, the question of how they encounter one another becomes inescapable. This problem becomes more acute in the case of interpersonal relationships, and still more acute in the relationship of divine and human beings.

Suffice it to say, then, that any Christian account of creation was bound to involve questions concerning the means by which God communicated himself to the world, irrespective of Greek philosophical categories. The Old Testament and Jewish tradition offered numerous resources for thinking through this basic problem. We have considerable evidence that the language of Christ's agency in creation was modeled on his redemptive work for humanity, such that the interpersonal relationship of God and his people becomes the point of departure for all subsequent theological reflection. This is all, moreover, filtered through a messianic matrix of thought with debts to both Jewish tradition and Jesus' re-visioning of what the Messiah was to do and be. One of the most significant debts was the

unwavering commitment to a monotheistic faith. It is therefore no coincidence that Christ is never depicted in the New Testament as a 'second god' in the manner of Numenius. There is one God, and Jesus as his agent is enfolded within the divine identity. He is depicted neither as a rival for God's throne, nor a semidivine subordinate.

When we turn to the specific deployment of the motif of Jesus as agent of creation in New Testament texts, we see that the writers use the doctrine to bolster the fundamental messianic claims of Jesus. There may be an implicit engagement with rival cosmologies in the Hellenistic world, something that is only natural given the claims to universal sovereignty predicated of Christ by the early Church. But we should not expect that the New Testament writers felt the need to engage Greek thought purely on its own terms. To say 'Christ is the one through whom God made the world' is not merely a simple substitution of one element for another in a prepositional phrase; it is a gateway to an altogether different way of looking at the world.

6

The Problem of Philo

Where should Philo be placed in our discussion? As a Jewish thinker, he might seem to belong in an earlier chapter alongside Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon. At the same time, treatments of Hellenistic philosophy regularly slot him in alongside other eclectic or Middle Platonist philosophers, while recognizing a few unusual contours deriving from his use of Torah as a source text. But the problem is not simply one of affiliation. We must also ask how significant Philo is for the New Testament's teaching on Jesus as agent of creation. Hegermann sees the material in Philo as vital; others push it to the side. Much depends on one's overall view of the works of this prolific and perplexing thinker.

It is not that Philo is absolutely unique in his profile. The thinker with whom we began our last chapter, Aristobulus, shows many of the same tendencies in reconciling Greek and Jewish thought, most notably in his employment of allegoresis to evade potentially embarrassing bits of the biblical text.¹ It is reasonable to suppose that Philo is only the best-known exemplar of a fairly widespread perspective among Alexandrian Jews. But the sheer volume of his work, and his relentless harmonization of the biblical text and (Middle Platonic and eclectic) Greek thought raise myriad problems. His Jewish commitment is unimpeachable. He defends his people before accusers past and present; he enjoins literal observance of the laws such as circumcision, even if they are symbols of deeper philosophical truths; and he expresses heartfelt reverence for central Jewish institutions like the

¹ See Yarbro Collins's introduction to Aristobulus, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ii, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 834.

temple. Apostasy for the sake of security and advancement was a live option for Philo, as the example of his renegade nephew Tiberius shows, but Philo never took this route.

At the same time, Philo is perhaps the consummate example of the Hellenistic philosophical koine.² In the case of biblical interpretation, when a conflict emerges with philosophy it is the plain meaning of the text that is generally shunted aside in favor of 'deeper' truths that inevitably recall the standard doctrines of Hellenistic thought. Whether it is finding the creation of the intelligible realm in Genesis 1 (*Opif.* 16), or interpreting God's call to Abraham to depart from his land as a call to flee the outward senses for the life of the mind (*Migr.* 1–2), Philo falls into a predictable pattern of subordinating the interests of Torah to the interests of philosophy. It is not an exaggeration to say that he himself flees the text in order to contemplate the musings of his and other minds.

This complex interplay of Judaism and Hellenism arguably reaches its apex in Philo's teachings on God and creation, and on the role of the λόγος in particular. While the details of Philo's allegoresis can strain credulity, he is hardly to be faulted for seeing meaningful connections between Genesis and Plato's *Timaeus*.³ Even at the literary level, the two are quite close: Genesis presents a very elegant and even serene account of the act of creation (certainly by Ancient Near Eastern standards); and the *Timaeus* is quite liberal in its use of 'mythological' imagery. Here, if anywhere, Philo must have believed his seed of reconciliation might find a purchase. The fact that the God of Genesis *spoke* the world into orderly existence provided an invaluable link with the doctrine of the λόγος, which we have seen had become common coin amongst Platonists and Stoics.

We will examine the details of all this in a moment. What we must note now is that the bona fide similarities in perspective between Genesis and Plato would have the effect for Philo of obliterating any line of distinction between the biblical and popular-philosophical accounts of creation. This means far more than that Philo found a

² André-Jean Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste, ii. le Dieu cosmique* (Paris: Le Coffee, 1949), 519.

³ On this, see esp. David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

point of common ground between the Bible and Greek views of creation, or a thread that bound the two together. Rather, the accounts become interchangeable. Thus at any given moment Philo might be inclined to give a more or less straightforward reading of the biblical text (e.g. the creation of plants in *Opif.* 40), or find a happy medium between the two (e.g. the elaboration on plant life in *Opif.* 41), or submit a fully Hellenized allegoresis (e.g. the introduction of the intelligible world in *Opif.* 16ff.). A phrase that might seem on the surface uniquely biblical, for instance God as ‘the maker and father’ of the universe, turns out to be a verbatim citation of Plato.⁴

The implications of this for Philo’s relevance to the New Testament are profound. One can never dismiss his testimony out of hand, since he may well be offering a viewpoint congenial to a wide range of Jewish interpreters. But neither can one unthinkingly adduce alleged parallels without taking seriously the possibility that he is simply repeating a Middle Platonic commonplace about, say, the *λόγος*, in a way which might be quite foreign to the thought of Paul or the author of the fourth Gospel. And one must always keep in mind the significant difference between the overall projects of Philo and the New Testament: the joining together of Jewish and Greek thought versus the proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah.

Philo’s view of creation is of course rooted in his view of God. Not surprisingly, Philo devotes most of his attention to those aspects of God’s character where biblical and philosophical affirmations about the divine overlap.⁵ While Philo can at times speak of God’s Wisdom as having a role in the creation of the world (e.g. *Her.* 199; *Fug.* 1: 109; *Ebr.* 1: 31), he prefers to use the image of the *λόγος*, and hence our attention will focus on this term.⁶

At times Philo can lapse into Hellenistic turns of phrase which would no doubt have offended many of his stricter brethren: he speaks of the stars as ‘visible gods’ (*Opif.* 27; cf. *Tim.* 41a),⁷ and a

⁴ See Runia, *Timaeus*, 108–9. All translations of Philo are taken from C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judaeus* (London: Bohn, 1854–5).

⁵ Festugière 535–6.

⁶ See esp. Ronald Cox’s extremely detailed discussion in *By the Same Word: Creation and Salvation in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 87–140.

⁷ Cf. Festugière 537.

few times casually mentions the virtue of 'piety towards the gods' as indeed the perfect good (*Congr.* 130; *Sacr.* 37). There is also the notorious description in QG 2. 62 of the *λόγος* as a 'second god' (on which see below). But he is not ready to jettison his Jewish monotheistic tradition, and passages like *De ebrietate* 45 are more indicative of his fundamental theological convictions: 'Therefore he would never have ventured to compare the true and faithful God to those falsely named gods, if he had really known him; but ignorance of the one God has caused him to entertain a belief of many as gods, who have in reality no existence at all'.

Where Philo begins to depart from the tenor of the Old Testament is in his radical perspective on God's absolute transcendence, which feeds directly into his views on the mechanics of creation and the need for a mediating figure. As we might expect, there is some biblical ground for Philo's view. Consider his reflections on God's dwelling in the 'thick darkness' at Sinai (Exod. 20: 11; cf. Deut. 4: 11; 1 Kgs. 8: 12): Moses enters the darkness,

that is to say, into those unapproachable and invisible conceptions which are formed of the living God. For the great Cause of all things does not exist in time, nor at all in place, but he is superior to both time and place; for, having made all created things in subjection to himself, he is surrounded by nothing, but he is superior to everything. (*Post.* 14)

It seems perfectly legitimate even by modern exegetical standards to take the darkness as a symbol of the mysterious nature of God. Equally defensible is his understanding of Exod. 33: 23 ('Thus you will see my back, but my face will not be seen by you') in *Fug.* 165: 'For it is sufficient for the wise man to know the consequences, and the things which are after God; but he who wishes to see the principal essence will be blinded by the exceeding brilliancy of his rays before he can see it'.

But Philo addresses the question of God's otherness in a much more rigorous fashion than the biblical texts themselves, and in so doing changes the tone of the discussion. Where the Old Testament seems generally content to let the transcendence and immanence of God peacefully, if paradoxically, coexist, Philo turns to Middle Platonism to make sense of God's relations to the world. To begin with, Philo's God dwells in the same splendid isolation as Aristotle's Un-

moved Mover or the Monad of the Old Academy (see *Post.* 14 cited above). God is as a consequence unknowable as to his essence.

This absolute distinction between God and the world affects Philo's view of creation at every turn. We have already noted the tendentious Platonizing in the *opificio mundi*, with its introduction of the intelligible world before the creation of the visible world. This has the effect, as Colin Gunton notes, of contributing to the denigration of the visible world, since reality lies somewhere beyond the creation as we know it.⁸ This is not just an emphasis on the transcendent God as the ground of all other reality, an assertion implicit in Gen. 1: 1 itself. It is rather a way of saying, in standard Platonic fashion, that the intelligible ideas of things are more real than their visible manifestations. Reality is at one remove from our experience of things. This is in some ways a fairly subtle distinction, and over the centuries a number of 'Christian Platonists' have ended up saying essentially the same thing. More radical still is Philo's take on the creation of mankind. Here he takes the third-person plural in Gen. 1: 26, 'let us create mankind in our image', and uses this slender textual reed as a bridge to the account of the creation of human beings in the *Timaeus*:

It is on this account that Moses says, at the creation of man alone that God said, 'Let us make man,' which expression shows an assumption of other beings to himself as assistants, in order that God, the governor of all things, might have all the blameless intentions and actions of man, when he does right attributed to him; and that his other assistants might bear the imputation of his contrary actions. (*Opif.* 1. 75)

But by far the most relevant problem for our investigation is the *manner* in which God interacts with the world. In Philo's theology God simply cannot in the nature of the case communicate his essence to anything else. No entity external to God could, as it were, bear the sheer weight of his absolute existence. Therefore God must mediate himself to the world through variously named agents. The Bible itself offered up the categories of God's Word, God's Spirit, the Angel of the Lord, and God's Wisdom, while the Greek philosophical

⁸ Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 45–7, 98, 116.

tradition affirmed some of these categories (most notably the *λόγος*) and provided other models such as the 'world soul' or the Ideas. Philo was willing to use all of these in his discussion of the relationship of God to the creation.

We should not expect, nor do we find, absolute consistency in Philo's discussion of these mediating agents. The need for mediation was essential to his philosophical program, but he could reasonably avail himself of, say, *λόγος* in one case and Wisdom in another, depending on the text he was exegeting and the demands of his argument. Nor did he have to use the same word in the same way at all times. Philo may indeed be guilty of inconsistency of thought at times, but he ought to be accorded the same freedom in his language as any other author.

One of Philo's favorite descriptions of God's mediating agents is 'the powers'. It surfaces, for example, in repeated discussions of God's name.⁹ Philo had a keen interest in the revelation of God's name in the account of the burning bush. The Hebrew text of Exod. 3: 14 offers the enigmatic statement 'I am who I am', *אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה*. The Septuagint, with some grammatical and theological justification, renders this *ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν*. In Platonic thought, the world of Ideas was known as *τὸ ὄν*, 'that which is', or *τὸ ὄντως ὄν*, 'that which really is'. Philo was not about to withhold comment on such a self-evident convergence of biblical and Greek thinking; indeed, I suspect it was one of the lynchpins of his entire philosophical project.¹⁰ Thus he comments that the statement in Exod. 3: 14 implies 'that others lesser than He have not being, as being indeed is, but exist in semblance only, and are conventionally said to exist' (*Det.* 160). But he also points out on more than one occasion that this absolute being of God is impossible for humans to perceive: even Moses 'did not succeed in finding anything by search respecting the essence of Him that is' (*Fug.* 165). While The One Who Is must necessarily be the ground of

⁹ See D. T. Runia, 'Naming and Knowing: Themes in Philonic Theology', in R. van den Broek, T. Baarda, and J. Mansfeld (eds.), *Knowledge of God in the Greco-Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 69–91, and Sean McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999). On powers and creation see Ursula Früchtel, *Die Kosmologischen Vorstellungen bei Philo von Alexandrien*, *Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums* 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 18–27.

¹⁰ See McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, 162.

being for everything else, he cannot communicate himself directly to the world, but must do so through the powers.

To make this point, Philo exploits the Septuagint's uses of *κύριος* and *θεός*. Bereft of the documentary hypothesis, Philo concluded that these were designations not of God himself, but of the powers through which he manifested himself to the world. These powers could be understood at one level as an explanation of the balance of mercy and justice God exercises towards humanity, a distinction evident in the rabbis. Thus *Plant.* 86 reads: 'Therefore the appellations already mentioned reveal the powers existing in the living God; for one title is that of Lord, according to which he governs; and the other is God, according to which he is beneficent'. (cf. *Her.* 166; *Abr.* 121; *Mos.* 2: 99; *Mut.* 15ff.; *QG* 2. 16). 'God' is particularly the name of his *creative* power: the passage in *Plant.* 86 continues: 'For which reason also, in the account of the creation of the world, according to the most holy Moses, the name of God is always assumed by him: for it was fitting that the power according to which the Creator, when he was bringing his creatures into the world, arranged and adorned them, should be invoked also by that creation'.¹¹

But the teaching about the powers could take other forms as well. In *Her.* 165–6 Philo labels Time and Eternity as the 'two powers' of God, before moving immediately on to the more familiar distinction between the beneficent and ruling powers, God and Lord. *Spec.* 1. 45–6 associates the glory of God with the powers. In *Fug.* 95, meanwhile, the creative and kingly powers are now joined by the merciful power and the legislative power. More critical, however, is the note in *Fug.* 101 about the relation of the λόγος to these powers.¹² The passage is worth quoting at length:

But the divine word which is above these does not come into any visible appearance, inasmuch as it is not like to any of the things that come under the external senses, but is itself an image of God, the most ancient of all the objects of intellect in the whole world, and that which is placed in the closest proximity to the only truly existing God, without any partition or distance

¹¹ In *Plant.* 50 Philo predictably equates God's creating 'hands' and the powers (τὸ ἡτοιμάσθαι ὑπὸ χειρῶν θεοῦ, τῶν κοσμοποιῶν αὐτοῦ δυνάμεων). This interpretation goes back to Aristobulus (ap. Eusebius *Praep. Ev.* 8. 10. 12ff.); see Früchtel 23.

¹² Cf. *Sacr.* 59–60.

being interposed between them: for it is said, 'I will speak unto thee from above the mercy-seat, in the midst, between the two cherubim' [Exod. 25: 22]. So that the word is, as it were, the charioteer of the powers, and he who utters it is the rider, who directs the charioteer how to proceed with a view to the proper guidance of the universe.

This has, to put it charitably, a tenuous connection with the actual content of Exod. 25: 22, but it bears a remarkable resemblance to the standard philosophical moves of Middle Platonism. This is especially true of the distinction between a transcendent Supreme God and a governing power supervising the material world, and the stoic-like distinction of the rational λόγος from the effective power (e.g. fire, spirit).¹³ The closest parallels lie with Numenius, who wrote of course significantly later than Philo, and who was evidently open to influence from a variety of sources, including Jewish ones. But, as we pointed out above, the dependence of both Philo and Numenius on common Middle Platonic sources seems far more likely than the direct dependence of Numenius on Philo.

Philo's understanding of the divine Word is one of the most complicated aspects of a generally complicated figure. As we have intimated above, Philo could hardly have ignored the convergence of a biblical God who speaks his Word and the Middle Platonist/Stoic conception of the universal Reason that steers the world. The convergence is not happenstance: perhaps the majority of ancient thinkers in the Ancient Near East would have seen the cosmos as the product of a divine intelligence. But Philo, as we would expect, ends up seeing the biblical texts and current trends in philosophy as indistinguishable. Thus I would regard the mention of the λόγος as a 'second god' in QG 2: 62 as a rather unthinking slip (for a monotheist) into Middle Platonic categories which would distinguish the self-contemplating Supreme Cause from other causal forces.¹⁴ For those steeped in polytheism, the multiplication of

¹³ Weiss notes that the powers end up being 'nichts anderes als ein anderer Terminus für die stoischen λόγοι σπερματικοί... Sie die "Kräfte", sind die Teilinhalte des Logos, die in der Welt wirksam, mit ihm selbst jedoch letztlich identisch sind'. (*Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie des Hellenistischen und Palästinischen Judentums*, ed. O. von Harnack and A. von Gebhardt, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Altchristlichen Literatur, 97 (Berlin: Akademie, 1966), 274).

¹⁴ This is, of course, assuming Philo even said this: Weiss (p. 261) points out that the textual evidence lies outside the main corpus of Philonic writing, and Runia

gods to fill various cosmic roles was not a major problem. But many Jews would have seen Philo as sloppy (at best) in saying that mankind is created in the image of the δεύτερον θεόν, ὃς ἐστὶν ἐκείνου λόγος. The sentiment is Philonic enough: the incomparable God himself could not be a pattern for humanity, but only God as he condescends to be made known to the world as his Word. But he is typically more cautious to label the Word as God's power rather than as a 'second god'.

Philo can treat the λόγος in a very traditional fashion as the communication of God to the world. In *Post.* 102, for example, the Word of God is equated with the 'royal road' of Numbers 20: 17, which has already been defined as true philosophy (*Post.* 101). This seems to say little more than that Torah (properly understood through the allegorical method) shows us the proper way to believe and act. Such a belief could be linked with a more elaborate 'λόγος theology', but we need not read this into *Post.* 102 to make sense of the text. The λόγος as divine communication could take the special form of equating the Word of God and the Angel of the Lord.¹⁵ This has led to much discussion among scholars with respect to angelomorphic Christology.¹⁶ Whatever the merits of such a Christology might be, or its putative background in early Judaism, they can find only limited support from Philo. Angels as 'messengers' were ripe for allegorisation as divine communication, and it was almost inevitable that the special figure of the Angel of the Lord would be interpreted with reference to God's Word (cf. esp. *Deus* 182).

When it comes to the role of the λόγος in the creation of the world, however, Philo moves in an unmistakably Platonic direction.¹⁷ At times Philo seems to use λόγος in an unspecified instrumental sense as the 'tool' by which God creates the world.¹⁸ In *Deus* 57 Philo

(*Timaeus*, 443n.) seems to share some of Weiss's skepticism. Runia himself states. 'In fact, Philo *does all he can* to avoid the consequence of a first and second God' (p. 442; his italics).

¹⁵ See e.g. *Her.* 205: τῷ δὲ ἀρχαγγέλω καὶ πρεσβυτάτῳ λόγῳ.

¹⁶ See e.g. Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology, and Soteriology*, Wissunt zum Neuen Testament, 2/94 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

¹⁷ See Weiss, *Kosmologie*, 252–7.

¹⁸ See Weiss, *Kosmologie* 267–72; Runia, *Timaeus*, 174.

writes: δίδωσι δὲ λόγῳ χρώμενος κρᾶν ὑπερέτη δωρεῶν, ᾧ καὶ τὸν κόσμον εἰργάζετο.¹⁹ In *Sacr.* 8 (though using *ῥήμα* rather than *λόγος*) he mentions that Moses διὰ ῥήματος τοῦ αἰτίου μετανίσταται, δι' οὗ καὶ ὁ σύμπας κόσμος ἐδημιουργεῖτο. On more than one occasion he explicitly describes the *λόγος* as an ὄργανον which he used in his work. In *Cher.* 127 Philo defines the *λόγος* as the ὄργανον of creation—ὄργανον δὲ λόγον θεοῦ δι' οὗ κατεσκευάσθη—and we read in *Migr.* 6: ὅτε ἐκοσμοπλάσσει χρησάμενος κρᾶν ὀργάνῳ τούτῳ πρὸς τὴν ἀνυπαίτιον τῶν ἀποτελουμένων σύστασιν.

But before we can determine *in what sense* the Word is God's 'tool' we must look at other relevant uses of *λόγος* in Philo. In *Opif.* 24 and *Leg.* 1. 19 Philo equates the *λόγος* of God with the intelligible world as a whole (τὸν νοητὸν κόσμον). *Opif.* 25, speaking specifically of the creation of human beings 'in the image of God', offers an elaborate explanation:

[T]his is the doctrine of Moses, not mine. Accordingly he, when recording the creation of man, in words which follow, asserts expressly, that he was made in the image of God—and if the image be a part of the image, then manifestly so is the entire form, namely, the whole of this world perceptible by the external senses, which is a greater imitation of the divine image than the human form is. It is manifest also, that the archetypal seal, which we call that world which is perceptible only to the intellect, must itself be the archetypal model, the idea of ideas, the Reason of God.

τὸ δὲ δόγμα τοῦτο Μωυσέως ἐστίν, οὐκ ἐμόν· τὴν γοῦν ἀνθρώπου γένεσιν ἀναγράφων ἐν τοῖς ἔπειτα διαρρήδην ὁμολογεῖ, ὡς ἄρα κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ διετυπώθη. εἰ δὲ τὸ μέρος εἰκὼν εἰκόνας δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τὸ ὅλον εἶδος, σύμπας οὗτος ὁ αἰσθητὸς κόσμος, εἰ μείζων τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἐστίν, μίμημα θείας εἰκόνας, δῆλον ὅτι καὶ ἡ ἀρχέτυπος σφραγίς, ὃν φαμεν λέγω νοητὸν εἶναι κόσμον, αὐτὸς ἂν εἴη τὸ παράδειγμα, ἀρχέτυπος ἰδέα τῶν ἰδεῶν ὁ θεοῦ λόγος.

This is standard doctrine from Plato, as the expressions τὸν νοητὸν κόσμον and ἰδέα τῶν ἰδεῶν demonstrate. Added to this is the Middle Platonic nuance that the ideas are now located within the *λόγος* of God (*Opif.* 20). The result is that, at least in these two passages, the Word of God does not appear as the agent of creation per se, at least

¹⁹ Cf. also *Fug.* 95, which represents a difficult case. Philo says that God creates by his Word, according to the creative power: καθ' ἣν ὁ ποιῶν λόγῳ τὸν κόσμον ἐδημιούργησε.

in the sense of the active force.²⁰ The λόγος is rather the blueprint for creation, or the stamp which prints the ideas onto the visible world. Thus in *Fug.* 12 Philo uses the image of the Word as seal: δὲ τοῦ ποιούντος λόγος αὐτός ἐστιν ἢ σφραγίς, ἥ τῶν ὄντων ἕκαστον μεμόρφωται παρὰ καὶ τέλειον τοῖς γινομένοις ἐξ ἀρχῆς παρακολουθεῖ τὸ εἶδος, ἅτε ἐκμαγεῖον καὶ εἰκὼν τελείου λόγου. The actual work would appear to be done by God himself (with the aforementioned exception of the creation of the 'lower' part of human nature).

To understand precisely what this entails, and how, or whether, the λόγος-as-seal constitutes a 'tool', we need to first look more closely at Philo's teaching that the Word is the *image of God*,²¹ a concept of obvious relevance to Colossians 1. This idea is not only present in *Opif.* 25. In *Conf.* 97 Philo urges those who cannot behold God to at least behold his image, the most holy Word (εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ, τὸν ιερώτατον λόγον), or, failing that, to behold the world itself. This is elaborated on in *Conf.* 147: καὶ γὰρ εἰ μήπω ἱκανοὶ θεοῦ παῖδες νομίζεσθαι γεγόναμεν, ἀλλὰ τοι τῆς αἰδοῦς εἰκόνης αὐτοῦ, λόγου τοῦ ιερωτάτου θεοῦ γὰρ εἰκὼν λόγος ὁ πρεσβύτατος.²² The demiurgic function of the Word, meanwhile, is made explicit in *Spec.* 1. 81: λόγος δ' ἐστὶν εἰκὼν θεοῦ, δι' οὗ σύμπας ὁ κόσμος ἐδημιουργεῖτο. The use of δι' οὗ is classic agency language, and since Philo does not elaborate on what this means here, it may be he is reverting to a generalized understanding of Genesis 1: God speaks, and the world is formed, with the Word as the effective force, as well as the organizing principle.

But the conjunction of Word, image, and creation is one we have already seen in *Opif.* 25. Thus I believe it is more helpful to read *Spec.* 1. 81 as a summary version of the teaching presented more fully in *Opif.* 25. Philo's reasoning seems to be this. God has within his own

²⁰ This is not offset, I think, by the interesting note at *Sacr.* 65: ὁ γὰρ θεὸς λέγων ἅμα ἐποίει, μηδὲν μετὰξὺ ἀμφοῖν τιθείς· εἰ δὲ χρὴ δόγμα κινεῖν ἀληθέστερον, ὁ λόγος ἔργον ἦν αὐτοῦ. The point is that there was no gap between God's utterance of his Word and the fulfillment of it, since his Word 'can outstrip all things'. It is not necessarily the case that the Word itself is active, it is simply that God's command and its fulfillment are instantaneous.

²¹ See e.g. Früchtel 15.

²² Cf. *Somn.* 1: 239: οὕτως καὶ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰκόνα, τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ λόγον, ὡς αὐτὸν κατανοοῦσιν.

mind the ideas of all the things which are to come into existence. He then puts these into 'transferable form' in the λόγος, a phenomenon well captured by the image of the creation of a seal or stamp. The λόγος then stamps matter with these images of God's thoughts, creating the visible world. In this sense the world in general, and humanity in particular, can be said to 'bear God's image'. The λόγος as stamp is the genuine image of God, with the world being the impression of that stamp.

This interpretation is confirmed by a key passage in *Leg.* 3. 96. Philo is explaining the significance of the name Bezaleel, which he takes to mean 'in the shadow of God'.²³ This 'shadow' is in fact his λόγος, which God used 'like an instrument' in his creation of the world (σκιὰ θεοῦ δὲ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ ἐστίν, ᾧ καθάπερ ὄργανον προσχρησάμενος ἐκοσμοποιεῖ). Whatever we make of the etymology, the picture of the shadow is consistent with Philo's previous descriptions of the λόγος: it is not the ineffable God himself, but an image that corresponds to God. But in what sense is the λόγος the ὄργανον of creation? Philo answers this in the next line: αὕτη δὲ ἡ σκιά καὶ τὸ ὠσανεὶ ἀπεικόνισμα ἐτέρων ἐστὶν ἀρχέτυπον. The shadow/λόγος functions as the archetype of everything else. I am thus in agreement with Theiler and Weiss that there is the closest relationship between the 'instrumental' use of λόγος and the *Urbild-Abbild* schema.²⁴

But the archetypal role of the λόγος does not exhaust Philo's thinking on the matter. In *Her.* 188 he describes the λόγος in a more active sense as the 'glue and chain, filling everything with its essence' (κόλλα γὰρ καὶ δεσμός οὗτος πάντα τῆς οὐσίας ἐκπεπληρωκώς; cf. *Fug.* 112).²⁵ The λόγος not only binds the universe

²³ Cf. the similar discussion at *Somn.* 1.206–7.

²⁴ See Weiss, *Kosmologie*, 269; Runia, *Timaeus*, 174. I believe the λόγος as archetype also helps explain the idea of the 'cutting word', the λόγος τομεύς, e.g. at *Her.* 133ff. (see Runia, *Timaeus*, 145). Philo speaks of God 'sharpening' his Word and then cutting the creation into the appropriate form: οὕτως ὁ θεὸς ἀκονησάμενος τὸν τομέα τῶν συμπάντων αὐτοῦ λόγον διήρει τήν τε ἀμορφὸν καὶ ἄποιον τῶν ὅλων οὐσίαν. Here we have imagined any number of discrete 'cuts' made into matter by God's Word, but the total effect ends up being the same as that produced by the stamp.

²⁵ Cf. also *Cher.* 28, where somewhat more vaguely the λόγος is ἐπὶ πᾶσι φαινόμενον. In *Plant.* 8 it is the 'eternal law' which serves as the δεσμός binding all things together. This is hardly solid early evidence for the later rabbinic view that God created the world through Torah. It seems to me Philo is simply saying that God's

together, however; it could also be said to knit God to the creation. In *Her.* 205–6 he speaks of the Word along the lines of the World Soul of the *Timaeus*:²⁶ ‘And the Father who created the universe has given to his archangelic and most ancient Word a pre-eminent gift, to stand on the confines of both, and separated that which had been created from the Creator’.

This is precisely the line of reasoning we have seen from (at least) Xenocrates on down. There needs to be a mediating entity between uncreated divinity and the created world, one which partakes of the nature of both and thus can communicate divine reason to the visible world. Perhaps in keeping with this, Philo can also speak of the λόγος within humanity as the guide to right conduct. *Prob.* 62 says of the wise men of old: ὅτι καὶ πάλαι τινὲς ἦσαν οἱ τῶν καθ’ ἑαυτοὺς ἀρετῇ διέφερον, ἡγεμόνι μόνῳ θεῷ χρώμενοι καὶ κατὰ νόμον, τὸν ὀρθὸν φύσεως λόγον, ζῶντες.

This may or may not have something to say to the Christian doctrine of incarnation and *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*. But the precise form this ‘λόγος doctrine’ takes in *Her.* 205–6 arises squarely from Middle Platonic concerns. Unless one can demonstrate that an early Christian writer shared those same concerns, one will be at pains to argue this particular view of the λόγος influenced New Testament conceptions.

Philo’s God, then, is unmistakably the creator. But he is not, we must remember, the creator of *everything*. We saw that in the *Opificio* the creation of mankind had to be outsourced to other heavenly beings lest God be held liable for creating sinful beings. Philo adopts a similar line of thought in *Leg.* 1. 41, but this time he enlists Hellenistic prepositional theology to assist him:

For of all created things some are created by God (ὑπὸ θεοῦ), and through him (δι’ αὐτοῦ): some not indeed by God, but yet through him: and the rest have their existence both by him and through him. At all events Moses as he proceeds says, that God planted a paradise, and among the best things as

decree or command is that all things hold together (cf. *Her.* 236, where the δεσμός of the universe is now the will of God). In *Conf.* 136 and *Migr.* 181, meanwhile, the ‘powers’ constitute the bonds of creation.

²⁶ Cf. *Tim.* 36e–37a; see Runia, *Timaeus*, 207–8. Runia notes that this role of the λόγος stands in tension with its role as archetype.

made both by God and through God, is the mind. But the irrational part of the soul was made indeed by God but not through God, but through the reasoning power which bears rule and sovereignty in the soul

The last line is an excellent example of the slipperiness of prepositional usage in Hellenistic thought. The Greek reads τὸ δὲ ἄλογον ὑπὸ θεοῦ μὲν γέγονεν, οὐ διὰ θεοῦ δέ, ἀλλὰ διὰ τοῦ λογικοῦ τοῦ ἄρχοντός τε καὶ βασιλεύοντος ἐν ψυχῇ. Philo's meaning is clear enough: we might paraphrase that God *permits* the creation of the irrational (ὑπὸ θεοῦ) but he does not himself create it as he does others things (διὰ θεοῦ). By Philo's own definition in *Cher.* 125, however, δι' οὗ ought strictly speaking to refer to the instrument (ἐργαλεῖον) of creation. This works well enough for the 'reasoning power'. (Is this the λόγος or something else which is merely λογικός?) But the discussion is premised on the fact that many things are created διὰ θεοῦ. This would seem to make God himself a mere ἐργαλεῖον. Likewise the use of ὑπὸ should properly signal the 'cause' of something; and even if one defines this as the ultimate cause rather than the proximate cause, it is hard to see how making God τὸ αἴτιον (*Cher.* 125) of the irrational significantly advances Philo's apologetic interests. The lesson is not that Philo is (necessarily) hopelessly muddled. He is dealing on the one hand with a genuine problem of theodicy (Is God responsible for evil?) and on the other hand with a genuine problem of causation (What is the role of secondary and tertiary agents in world formation?). The lesson for us is that the prepositions employed bear little relation to the ostensible guidelines provided by *Cher.* 125.

PHILO AND NEW TESTAMENT CONCEPTIONS OF 'AGENT OF CREATION'

What, then, can we glean from Philo? On the one hand, he provides a particularly thorough treatment of the widespread Hellenistic concern with mediation between the divine order and the visible world. The fact that he does this in the context of the Hebrew Bible brings him that much closer to the thought world of the early Christians.

His intense concern with God's *λόγος* provides an obvious point of contact with the fourth Gospel. Also of interest is his treatment of the image language in Gen. 1: 26ff. This is not just a general reference to the fact that Adam is like God: the image, equated with the Word of God, is a preexisting model upon which Adam is based. This has at least a surface resemblance to our reading of the image language in Col. 1: 15.

But the idea that Philo's writings contributed directly to the doctrine of Jesus' agency in creation cannot be proven. For one thing, Philo says so many different things about the *λόγος* (not to mention the Powers and Wisdom) that some parallels with New Testament texts are bound to appear, if only by the law of averages. The specific idea that the *λόγος* as the image of God creates the world might seem too close to New Testament conceptions to be mere coincidence. But assuming such a use of Philo depends either on a conflation of John 1 (*λόγος*) and Colossians 1 (image), or on a prior theological synthesis of the two, from which John and Paul isolated different elements. Furthermore, we have seen that God's speaking was a foundational component of Jewish creation theology from the beginning; indeed, it was embedded in Ancient Near Eastern thought in general. It would not be surprising that Jewish, or Jewish-Christian, writers speculating on aspects of creation would be drawn at various times to notions of God's Word, and notions of God's image drawn from Gen. 1: 26.

If the biblical texts on creation formed a common point of departure for Philo and the New Testament authors, however, the constraints of their intellectual systems caused them to travel from that point in almost completely opposite directions. Philo is notorious for his distaste for anthropomorphism, and indeed for any direct involvement of God with the world. The early Christians, by contrast, were compelled by their experience of Jesus as Messiah to move in a relentlessly anthropomorphic direction, with a God so fully engaged with the world that he sent his Son to take on flesh and dwell in the midst of it. The mediating agent was not a power or a principle, but a recognizable person.

Through Whom? Messianic and Demonic Mediation in 1 Corinthians 8–10

With the interpretive background now in place, we can at last turn to the actual New Testament texts concerning Christ's role in the creation of the world. We will begin with 1 Cor. 8: 6: ἀλλ' ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν, καὶ εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ.¹

Before we turn to the question of what this phrase is doing in its context in chapters 8–10, we can make a few preliminary remarks. Certainly 1 Cor. 8: 6 affirms a very high Christology, particularly if one sees the formula as a Christian reworking of the Shema. Much attention has been devoted to the question of whether Paul is here making use of an already existing confession or acclamation. As in most such discussions, it is virtually impossible to come to any meaningful conclusions; there is simply not enough data to make a decision. The formula, with its careful parallelism and devotional flavor, would certainly fit in a worship setting, but this does not mean Paul could not have written it. Finally, as we saw in Chapter 5, 1 Cor. 8: 6 fits squarely in the Hellenistic tradition of 'prepositional theology'.

As for the grammar, several comments are in order. We have noted numerous times that one should resist the temptation to assume that Paul's prepositional usage is dictated by parallel phrases in the ancient world. We may concede that the pithy expressions are styled in Hellenistic fashion. Paul was aware of how to frame cosmological state-

¹ A fairly literal translation would be: 'But to us there is one God, the father, from whom are all things, and we to him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him'. See discussion below.

ments with the appropriate mix of minimalist grammar and maximalist content. But there is no reason to imagine he felt compelled to let his $\epsilon\gamma\varsigma$ and $\delta\iota\varsigma$ be determined by Seneca or Plato, while there is every reason to think he used them in a way consonant with his view of Scripture and the story of God's Messiah. This does not eliminate all the problems occasioned by, for instance, the absence of verbs in the formula. But it does considerably narrow our focus as to where we expect the answers to be found.

The statement that God is the one 'from whom' are all things is the easiest to unpack. Paul would have found considerable support both inside and outside Jewish circles for the proposition that God is the source of all things. If more precision was desired, Paul would doubtless have turned first to Genesis to explain what 'source' meant. God called all things into being through his Word. Paul would certainly not object in principle to the idea that God continues to uphold all things, and this may well be encapsulated in $\epsilon\gamma\gamma\alpha\gamma\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\ \tau\alpha\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha$ along with the primal act of creation.

The next phrase, 'and we to him', $\eta\mu\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}\nu$, is more obscure, but not hopelessly opaque. If we take the spatial metaphor of 'towards him' as a point of departure, we might say that human life is oriented towards the purposes of God; or, with more overtly religious language, we exist for his glory. As with the idea of God as source, this would likely be congenial to many in the Hellenistic milieu. The distinctive Christian contribution to the phrase is its implicit eschatology. The letter to the Corinthians is driving towards the consummation of chapter 15, and it is appropriate to read the 'to him' as the eschatological goal of God's people. God is working through his Messiah and his Spirit to establish a people for his glory.

The statements about the 'one God, the Father' are now balanced by statements about the 'one Lord, Jesus Christ'. Most commentators are agreed that 'through whom are all things' refers to Christ's agency in primal creation. What this agency entails goes well beyond grammar, and it cannot be adequately assessed without the discussion below of Christ's mediating role in 1 Corinthians 8–10. The ellipsis in 'And we through him' represents the most difficult hole to fill in 8: 6, at least in terms of translation. The focus is clearly on people, and Christ's engagement with them, but beyond that things become murky. One might argue that Paul is making the specific affirmation

that Christ created people as well as everything else, but this seems redundant. It also fails to match the eschatological orientation of its matching phrase that we are 'towards' God the Father. Thus the standard translations, which are variants of 'through whom we exist' (cf. NRSV, NIV, NASB, ESV), are perhaps overly cautious, and leave the reader with the impression that the emphasis is on the initial creation of individual human beings. I take the actual meaning to be something like, 'We are saved through him', or 'We come to eternal life through him', or even 'We are brought to our eschatological goal of entry into the presence of God through him'. This is quite a bit to swallow, however, and the best move for popular translations is to follow the Greek and omit the verb altogether (KJV, Münchener NT).

If we are to understand this verse more clearly, however, we will need to determine what function, if any, it has in 1 Corinthians 8–10. The specific notice of Christ's *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* is seldom related to what follows by scholars. I will argue that 1 Cor. 8: 6 does in fact play an important role in laying the groundwork for Paul's exhortations to the Corinthians concerning idol food. In brief, Paul wishes to tell them that Christ has always been God's means of mediating blessings to the world, in contrast to the proffered mediation of idols/demons. This helps explain, among other things, the curious expressions in chapter 10 'Christ was the rock' (v. 4) and 'let us not tempt Christ, as some of them did' (v. 9). It also helps propel the reader towards the discussion of the Lord's Supper in chapter 11: fellowship with God and with one another is to be found exclusively in Christ. It may even undergird the concluding discussion of eating idol meat under certain circumstances 'because the earth is the Lord's'; that is, the world has been created through the Lord Christ, and therefore we must not imagine it is genuinely under the control of evil spirits.

This line of thinking, of course, assumes that Paul is pursuing a coherent argument in these chapters.² Partition theories have enjoyed moderate success over the years, though most contemporary

² Jerome Murphy-O'Connor's argument (in '1 Cor. 8, 6: Cosmology or Soteriology?', *Revue Biblique*, 85 (1978), 253) that Paul is not even talking about creation in 1 Cor. 8: 6 has justly been dismissed by most commentators.

commentators seem to lean towards affirming the unity of the chapters. Perhaps the strongest proposal for coherence is that of J. F. M. Smit, who sees 8: 1–6 as a rhetorical *partitio* which introduces the essential elements which follow up to 11: 1.³ 1 Cor. 8: 1–3 introduces the problem of the Corinthians' 'knowledge', which is taken up in the rest of chapter 8 and chapter 9. Paul reframes the question in terms of love rather than knowledge, and then holds himself forth as someone who in love forgoes his rights for the benefit of others. 1 Cor. 8: 4–6, meanwhile, introduces the theological issues involved in food sacrificed to idols. These are elucidated in 10: 1–22, where the Corinthians are reminded that the exclusive lordship of Christ means that he requires exclusive cultic devotion. The question of eating idol meat in private homes is a separate one, and forms a positive conclusion to what has up to this point accented prohibitions.⁴

With Smit's basic approach as a guide we may offer a more detailed account of the argument of 8–10. Ben Witherington is one of many who have made the argument that the key issue in Corinth is eating idol food in idol temples; as Witherington says, 'venue' is more critical here than 'menu'.⁵ Paul is unequivocally opposed to such activity. No matter what one's supposed state of knowledge is, eating idol food in idol temples is rank idolatry, whether 'one's fingers are crossed' or not. The fact that such behavior *also* jeopardizes the faith of one's fellow believers hardly means that if 'the weak' were not around it would somehow be acceptable. The final portion (10: 23–33) does acknowledge that the meat *per se* is not tainted and thus could be eaten in a private home. But even here the imperative of love demands one abstain for the sake of the host. Chapters 8–10 form a complete argument.

What that argument consists of has occasioned much discussion even among those who hold to the essential unity of the chapters. Rather than detailing the myriad proposals one by one, I will simply

³ Smit, '1 Cor 8, 1–6: A Rhetorical *Partitio*', in R. Bieringer (ed.), *The Corinthian Correspondence* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 577–91.

⁴ Smit 590.

⁵ Witherington, 'Not so idle thoughts about *eidōlothuton*', *Tyndale Bulletin*, 44/2 (1993), 237–54.

present my own conclusions, which will have significant affinities with those of scholars like Thiselton, Witherington, Fee, Smit, and Gooch. Paul begins by saying that ‘concerning food sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge’ (v. 1). Whether this is strictly speaking a ‘Corinthian slogan’ is immaterial. It clearly represents the position of at least some in Corinth, and it is equally clearly dripping with irony. This is evident from the statement that immediately follows: ‘Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up’. The contrast in values represented by *φυσιῶ* and *οἰκοδομέω* is one of Paul’s most important thrusts in 1 Corinthians (cf. 4: 6, 18, 19; 5: 2; 10: 23; 13: 4; 14: 4, 17), with ‘knowledge’ and ‘wisdom’ coming in for a particular beating. Thus whatever we make of the assertions about idols that follow, they remain under the suspicion of being mere ‘knowledge’ and may be highly qualified in Paul’s own mind. The important thing is not to know, but to love God and to be known by him.

In verse 4 Paul goes on to say just what it is that ‘we know’; namely, ‘that an idol is nothing in the world’⁶ and ‘there is no god but one’. Paul naturally agrees with this at some level, but he immediately qualifies this by saying that there are ‘so-called gods either in heaven or on earth, just as there are many “gods” and many “lords”’. What does Paul mean by this? He surely does not mean that there are no other personal entities in the cosmos except for the one true God and human beings (a view many modern people equate with ‘monotheism’). Paul believed in angels and demons, as his reference to the demons in chapter 10 shows easily enough. Nor is he disputing that there are in fact statues of ‘gods’ all over the world; that was self-evident. Paul rather is stating that none of these entities—whether the dumb wood or stone of the idol, or the nonhuman spiritual forces in the world—can lay claim to the status of the one true God or his Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul does not lose track of his ontology from chapter 8 to chapter 10. The idols are not genuine gods, they are just pieces of trees and rocks, but they may be linked with actual spiritual beings. Yet even the latter are fully under the

⁶ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor gives a persuasive case for this translation in ‘Freedom or the Ghetto (1 Corinthians 8: 1–13; 10: 23–11: 1)’, in Lorenzo di Lorenzi (ed.), *Freedom and Love: The Guide for Christian Life* (Rome: St Paul’s Abbey, 1981), 10.

control of the true and living God, and can lay no claim to the loyalty and worship that belongs to God alone.

Christians are those who recognize that ‘there is only one God, from whom are all things, and we exist for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we exist through him’ (8: 6). God’s reality is demonstrated by his creation of the world (through Christ) and his salvation of the world (through Christ). This means on the one hand that all things created by him should be enjoyed by his people. They must not imagine that food as such is bad, or that the demons have sovereign authority over certain portions of the creation—as if God owned the cattle on a thousand hills, but not on hill number one thousand and one. This helps explain the rationale for permitting meat-market food in 10: 23 ff. On the other hand, the exclusive rule of God-through-Christ means that absolute loyalty must be shown to him. There can be no compromise of allegiances, no suggestion that the Christians serve several masters or acknowledge several lords.

In this first section, then, Paul does establish common ground with the knowledgeable Corinthians. There is indeed a sense in which idols *qua* divinities do not exist; whatever beings may be involved with pagan cults, they do not deserve the name of gods, since they are created by and utterly under the control of the one true God and his Messiah. Does it follow, then, that eating food in idol temples (8: 10) is of no consequence? Paul gives a lengthy two-part answer to this, so lengthy that many have failed to follow his train of thought and have introduced various theories of interpolation or logical inconsistency. But his rhetoric is quite clear: he wants the Corinthians to *love* one another, and to show unwavering *loyalty* to Christ. Paul begins by addressing the question of how eating in idol temples affects one’s neighbor (8: 7–13), since he wants the Corinthians’ behavior to be driven by love, not simply by a list of prohibitions. He then holds himself forth as an example of someone who operates in just such a spirit of love (ch. 9). Only after the signal imperative of love is well grounded does he go on to counter the Corinthians’ gross misappraisal of idol food.

Love, then, dominates the argument from 8: 7 to 9: 27. ‘Let us assume’, Paul is saying, ‘that *your* (not necessarily *my*) definition of the “nothingness” of idols is correct. Still, not everyone can operate at

that level of theological finesse. Some of your brothers and sisters in the faith really believe that there are powerful forces in those idol precincts, and when they see you eating in there, they are going to assume that there is some genuine religious transaction going on. This is going to lead those same people—these brothers and sisters for whom Christ died!—to go and eat in temples also. But when they do it, they will actually believe they are eating in the presence of another god. Such an act of spiritual adultery, such a level of betrayal, is going to pierce their hearts, and who knows whether their faith in Christ will ever be made whole again? Do you really want to be the one who sets that process in motion? Is eating some meat really worth the spiritual death of your family members in Christ? I would rather never touch another piece of meat if it meant destroying my brother.’

This last statement is no idle boast for Paul. In chapter 9 he goes on to describe to the Corinthians some of the rights he has forgone in order to bring the gospel to people like them. No wife, few comforts, much suffering, and, above all, no financial profit from his gospel preaching. Not that he is complaining; he realizes that he is not going to get any special approval from God simply for preaching the gospel. He is obliged to do that, and the dramatic circumstances of his call mean he has no excuse for not discharging his obligation. He can, however, get ‘extra credit’ by preaching *free of charge*. This lies within the realm of choice, not obligation, and thus constitutes a gift of love, a gift that God will gladly receive and richly reward. All sorts of athletes compete in all sorts of games, but there is special recognition for those who go above and beyond the call of duty, the ones who put in such rigorous training that they stand out from the rest. Paul wants the Corinthians to have the mind-set of those who want to excel in love, and not simply meet the minimum requirements.

It is at just this juncture that Paul makes one of his most powerful but least noticed rhetorical moves. Let us again paraphrase his words (with some liberty) in order to catch the intended effect in the transition from chapter 9 to chapter 10: ‘So, you ought to love one another. Be like the runner who takes the crown. And while I am on the subject of people moving about and separating themselves from others, let me remind you of another story where people start out towards a goal . . . except this one does not have a happy ending. In

this story, the Israelites in the wilderness see God's mighty hand active in amazing ways, as he blesses them through Christ again and again. But they do not get a crown; they don't even get to the finish line. They die in the desert. Why? *Because they participate in idol feasts!* Wake up, Corinthians! You claim to "know" so much—do you honestly think you can stroll into the temple of Asclepius, or Demeter and Kore, enjoy a meal in the temple precincts, and get away with it? That is insane! God has not changed, and God will strike you down as surely as he did those Israelites if you persistently flout his grace and betray your loyalty to the only true and living God. "Idols are nothing"? Perhaps, but you are still making a public declaration of solidarity with spiritual forces of wickedness when you participate in these feasts. There is no middle ground: you either show loyalty to Christ or you do not'.

The introduction of the wilderness idolatry marks a deliberate transition from Paul's example of love to the looming judgment on those who participate in idol feasts. The intricate thematic connection between the athletic metaphors at the end of chapter 9 and the wilderness narrative in chapter 10 is a brilliant strategy to turn the topic of conversation from love to loyalty: the similarities help the hearer follow the argument, but the picture of bodies strewn in the wastelands serves as a grim counterpart to the victorious athlete. It is a shocking contrast, yet Paul has built up to it with the utmost care.

Not that he is done with love. 1 Cor. 10: 23–11: 1 does serve as a kind of coda to the main argument, but it is meaningfully related to what has gone before. Is there real spiritual power in the food itself, one might wonder, in light of Paul's ferocious discourse in the earlier part of chapter 10? Do the demons irrevocably contaminate everything they touch? Paul's answer returns to the touchstone of the theology of creation put forward in 8: 6. God has created the world through Christ, and one ought not to act as if the demons have rights over certain parts of that creation. For this reason, meat of suspect origin may be eaten without reservation, in gratitude to the God who created it. But if its idolatrous provenance comes to light in the context of a communal meal, even in a private home, the Christian ought to abstain. 'But why', the (hypothetical?) Corinthian responds, 'should my freedom be hemmed in by someone else's conscience?' Paul's answer is again love: you should not act in such a way as to

confirm your host in his idolatrous convictions. Eating in a home does take away the explicitly religious nature of the meal, which is no small thing. One who eats the idol meat is not making a public declaration of solidarity with a pagan god. One who eats is, however, at least appearing to accept the existence of such a god, and implicitly encouraging the host to continue in a devotion to demonic forces which will prove his ruin. Despite the physical pain of forgoing meat, and the social pain of risking the anger of the host, love dictates that the Christian should abstain.

How, then, does 8: 6 fit into all this? Virtually all commentators recognize that this monotheistic confession draws a cultic boundary for the Corinthian community. The worship of the one true God through his son Jesus Christ forbids the veneration of any other god.⁷ This worship is grounded in the fact that God has created the world through Christ, and redeemed it through Christ. One's knowledge of the precise ontological status of the false gods and their idols is not of the first importance. What matters is that God alone is honored. Smit's suggestion that 8: 4–6 sets the stage for the discussion in 10: 1–22 is correct. Cultic loyalty to God is paramount.

More may be said, however, about the particular theme of *mediation* in these chapters. Paul takes pains in 8: 6 not only to unite God and the Messiah as the only objects of true veneration, but also to distinguish their respective roles vis-à-vis the world. God is the source and goal of all things, Christ is the one through whom God brings all things to pass. The mediating role of Christ is highlighted in 10: 4 and 10: 9 and continues on through the rest of 1 Corinthians until it reaches a climax in 15: 20–8. Moreover, the contrast in 10: 1–22 is not simply between the worship of God 'in general' and the worship of pagan gods: it is specifically between participating in *Christ's meal* versus the meals of the demon-idols. The central issue is not only *who* is to be worshipped but, even more pressingly, *how* God is to be worshipped. Who, or what, provides the nexus between heaven and earth? Paul holds Christ forward as the genuine mediator

⁷ See e.g. Johannes Woyke, *Götter, Götzen, Götterbilder: Aspekte einer paulinischen 'Theologie der Religionen'*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, 132 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 254–7.

between the divine and human worlds, in absolute distinction from the proffered mediation of idolatrous cults.

To demonstrate this, we need evidence that idols, or the demons who lie behind them, were viewed in antiquity as offering such a connection with the divine. In the case of idols, one might say that mediation is their entire *raison d'être*. The gods are generally unseen, and the most powerful dwell in unapproachable splendor on high, or dreadful gloom below. Devotees wish for some more concrete and proximate presence of the god—and hence the manufacture of idols. How this mediation worked could be parsed in a number of different ways. For many people the idol quite simply was the god: It had the name of the god; it was treated with the reverence due to a god; it even worked wonders as only a god could.⁸ Consider the language of an inscription in Magnesia on the Maeander dedicating a statue to Artemis (c.150 BCE):

Therefore let the Council and the People decree that the temple warder and the priestess of Artemis shall on the sixth day of the month Artemision effect the removal of the goddess to the Parthenon, with the most splendid offerings . . . and that there shall be a procession of women to the temple, and they shall tarry there and present to the goddess the proper honors and attentions.⁹

This view could be nuanced to counter the obvious critiques that these 'gods' were manufactured by humans out of earthly materials and were subject to decay and danger: the god could be genuinely present in the statue without being absolutely bound to it.¹⁰ Mediation of the divine presence could be maintained in a still more

⁸ See Tanja S. Scheer, *Die Gottheit und ihr Bild*, Zetemata, 105 (Munich: Beck, 2000), 301–3.

⁹ Translation in F. C. Grant, *Hellenistic Religions* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), 19; cf. another inscription (Grant 120); '[o]n the eleventh of Artemision, the god Helios Sareptenos came from Tyre by ship to Puteoli; Elim brought him by command [of the god]'.

¹⁰ Scheer 304; cf. the discussion by Burkhard Gladigow of a vase painting in which the 'real' Apollo is depicted close by his cult image 'Präsenz der Bilder—Präsenz der Götter: Kultbilder und Bilder der Götter in der griechischen Religion', in H.G. Kippenberg, et al. (eds.), *Visible Religion: Annual for Religious Iconography, iv–v. Approaches to Iconology* (Leiden: Brill, 1985–6), 120.

attenuated fashion if one viewed the statue as a reminder of the invisible deity it evoked.

The matter of demons and mediation requires more detailed attention. First, one has to ascertain why Paul would associate idols and demons in 10: 19–22. As so often with Paul, the Old Testament is the point of departure. Several texts could have played a formative role here. Septuagint Ps. 95: 4–5 reads: ὅτι μέγας κύριος καὶ αἰνετός σφόδρα φοβερὸς ἐστὶν ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς θεούς⁵ ὅτι πάντες οἱ θεοὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν δαιμόνια ὁ δὲ κύριος τοὺς οὐρανούς ἐποίησεν.¹¹ Given that 1 Corinthians 8–10 focuses on the exclusive worship of the one true God, and that 8: 6 explicitly cites his creation of the world as the basis for this exclusive worship, it is likely that Paul had Septuagint Ps. 95: 4–5 in mind when composing 1 Cor. 10: 19–22 (or at least he was referencing a traditional critique of idolatry in which Ps. 95/96 had a key role). The case for his dependence on the Psalm may be strengthened when we consider that the Hebrew word behind the Septuagint δαιμόνια is אֱלִילִים. This has the primary meaning of ‘vain, insignificant, worthless’ (HALOT) and was used pejoratively of the idols of the nations (e.g. Isa. 2: 8; Ezek. 30: 13; Hab. 2: 18). This fits perfectly into Paul’s denigration of the idols in 8: 1–3 and 10: 19. The true God, אֱלֹהִים, is contrasted with the useless אֱלִילִים of the nations (which are in a further wordplay אֵלִים, ‘dumb, mute’; see Hab. 2: 18; 1 Cor. 12: 2). He appears to use both the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text traditions as part of his critique of the idol cults.

The second text is Deut. 32: 16–17 (cf. Lev. 17: 7; Baruch 4: 7): παρώξυνάν με ἐπ’ ἀλλοτρίοις ἐν βδελύγμασιν αὐτῶν ἐξεπύκνανάν με¹⁷ ἔθυσαν δαιμονίοις καὶ οὐ θεῷ θεοῖς οἷς οὐκ ᾔδεισαν καινοὶ πρόσφατοι ἤκασιν οὓς οὐκ ᾔδεισαν οἱ πατέρες αὐτῶν. The Song of Moses was a favorite reference for New Testament writers, and it could hardly have been out of Paul’s consciousness as he recited the history of the wilderness generation to the Corinthians: God, the Rock, provides miraculously for his people (Deut. 32: 4/1 Cor. 10: 4), but they indulge in idolatry (Deut. 32: 15–19/1 Cor. 10: 7) and incur his wrath (Deut. 32: 20–42/1 Cor. 10: 5–10). The critique of idolatry in the Song is familiar enough, but the mention of demons, אֱלִילִים/

¹¹ For discussion of all the following texts see e.g. Woyke 225–6.

δαιμονίοις, is of obvious interest. Here, as in Psalm 95/96, the so-called gods are denigrated: they are not-God. The note of *sacrifice* assures the relevance of Deuteronomy 32 for 1 Corinthians 10. It also connects this verse with Septuagint Psalm 105: 37 (MT 106: 37): καὶ ἔθυσαν τοὺς υἱοὺς αὐτῶν καὶ τὰς θυγατέρας αὐτῶν τοῖς δαιμονίοις (Heb. דַּיְמוֹן).

An even more important connection, however, is with Septuagint Isa. 65: 11: ὑμεῖς δὲ οἱ ἐγκαταλιπόντες με καὶ ἐπιλανθανόμενοι τὸ ὄρος τὸ ἅγιόν μου καὶ ἐτοιμάζοντες τῷ δαίμονι τράπεζαν καὶ πληροῦντες τῇ τύχῃ κέρασμα. The ‘table for demons’ (τῷ δαίμονι τράπεζαν) quite clearly forms the background for Paul’s phrase τραπεζῆς δαιμονίων in 1 Cor. 10: 21. This in turn is dependent on an earlier reference to demons in Septuagint Isa. 65: 3: illicit worship is offered τοῖς δαιμονίοις ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν. The appearance of this last phrase in the Septuagint (it is missing in the MT) is difficult to account for except as a theologically inspired gloss, derived perhaps from Isa. 65: 11 via Deut. 32: 17. Although at face value 65: 3 could be taken to mean demons simply do not exist, such a view would ill suit a Hellenistic context in which the vast majority of Jews and Gentiles alike believed in various spirit beings. It is far more likely that the Septuagint is making the same point as Paul in 1 Cor 8: 1–3: whatever existence the demons/false gods may have, they are unworthy of worship or the name ‘god’.¹² To the extent that ontological issues may be in view, the verse would affirm that these spirits have a completely derivative, contingent existence which is wholly dependent on the creative power of the living God—an existence which can and will be taken away when their fraudulent claims to deity are exposed. This appears to be the point of Ps. 82: 6–7, ‘I said you are gods . . . but you will die like men’. It also bears resemblance to the description of the beast in Rev. 17: 8, 11; in contrast to God, the one who is and was and is to come, the beast ‘was and is not (οὐκ ἔστιν) and is about to ascend out of the abyss and

¹² Cf. *Testament of Job*, 3: 3, (trans. R.P. Spittler, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, i, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983)): ‘This one whose whole-burnt offerings they bring and whose drink offerings they pour is not God. Rather, his is the power of the devil by whom human nature is deceived’.

goes to destruction'.¹³ As Johannes Woyke writes with regard to 1 Cor. 8: 5 and Gal. 4: 3:

Die, welchen die Heiden aufgrund gesetzlicher Vorschriften oder allgemeiner Konvention dienen—die [*thesei theoi*]—, haben keinen anteil an der göttlichen Wirklichkeit; sie existieren in Wirklichkeit nicht bzw. nicht wirklich. Gegenüber dem, dessen Name *ὁ ὢν* ist (Ex 3,14 LXX) wird also *der ontologische Hintergrund dieser sogenannten Götter* (vgl. 1 Kor 8,5) *als Mächten, die in das Weltgeschehen schöpferisch und erhaltend eingreifen, negiert*.¹⁴

Are the demons for Paul, then, simply the gods of the nations, stripped of their pretensions and revealed as subservient little spirits? Such a connection is explicit in Septuagint Psalm 95, and the same idea could underlie the Septuagint text of Deuteronomy 32, where verse 8 reads *ὅτε διεμέριζεν ὁ ὑψιστος ἔθνη ὡς διέσπειρεν υἱοὺς Ἀδαμ ἔστησεν ὄρια ἔθνων κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ*. The final note of the *ἀγγέλων θεοῦ* may well come from a Hebrew original *בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים* rather than the Masoretic Text *בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*. This would fit the thought world of Gen. 6: 2 (assuming the 'sons of God' there are 'angels', i.e. superhuman beings ultimately under God's control) and especially Psalm 82, where God appears to hold *אֱלֹהִים* in judgment for failing in their commission to superintend the nations. Unfortunately, the Old Testament gives us only subtle hints as to whether God in fact subcontracted the rule of the nations to other heavenly figures, or precisely what that entails, and the predominant biblical motif is God's right to rule over all the nations, not just Israel.

In any case, whatever the relationship between the demons and gods might be, we are still left with the problem of what 'demons' would have meant to Paul and his hearers in Corinth.¹⁵ In Jewish and early Christian communities demons were viewed in an unremittingly hostile way, in keeping with the biblical tradition.¹⁶ Their

¹³ While this likely refers at some level to the myth of Nero's current absence and future 'return' (from the East), the ontological implications are hard to ignore. See Sean McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 227–9.

¹⁴ Woyke 449.

¹⁵ Woyke again has a most helpful discussion, at 220–35.

¹⁶ See e.g. 1 En. 19: 2; Jub. 1: 11; discussion at Woyke 228–32. The aid rendered by demons in building the temple in Testament of Solomon is under compulsion and

association with idolatry is frequent (e.g. Test. Jud. 23: 1; Test. Dan. 5: 5 ff.) and no doubt informs Paul's perspective in 1 Corinthians 8–10. The opposition of the demons to God's kingdom is of course a staple of the gospel tradition.

The word *δαίμονιον* had a wide range of meaning in the wider Greek-speaking world.¹⁷ In Homer the word can serve as a synonym for 'god', as in *Il.* 1. 222 where Athene goes back to Olympus to Zeus 'and the other gods (*δαίμονας*)'. Such usage continued down through the Hellenistic age.¹⁸ Hesiod writes that the men of the Golden Age became 'demons' upon their death. These are subordinate spirits, to be sure, but nonetheless beneficent ones: 'they are called pure spirits (*δαίμονες*) dwelling on the earth, and are kindly, delivering from harm, and guardians of mortal men' (*Works and Days* 122, LCL). Walter Burkert addresses another aspect of the word: '*Daimon* is occult power, a force that drives man forward where no agent can be named. The individual feels as it were that the tide is with him, he acts with the daimon, *syn daimona*, or else when everything is against him, he stands against the daimon, *pros daimona*, especially when a god is favouring his adversary'.¹⁹ Socrates could speak of his *δαίμων* as a kind of guardian angel.²⁰ Burkert concludes that '*Daimon* is the veiled countenance of divine activity'.²¹ Some demons could also be associated with the darker spirits. In the Derveni papyrus (c. 5th–4th century BCE) we read that 'the enchanting song of the magi is able to remove the daimones when they impede. Impeding daimones are

hardly redounds to their credit. We might add that such a negative view of demonic spirits likely has deep roots in Mesopotamia; see Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins, 1985), 165.

¹⁷ For an overview with texts in translation see Luck 163–225; see also A. D. Nock, 'The Emperor's Divine Comes', in Zeph Stewart (ed.), *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* ii (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), esp. pp. 664–8.

¹⁸ See Woyke 223–4.

¹⁹ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 180. It is easy to see how this bleeds into a conception of the *δαίμων* as (in Burkert's words, p. 181) 'something like fate'. This may explain the juxtaposition of demons and Fate in LXX Isa. 65: 11: *ἐτοιμάζοντες τῷ δαίμονι τράπεζαν καὶ πληροῦντες τῇ τύχῃ κέραςμα*.

²⁰ See e.g. *Phaedo*, 107d; cf. *Rep.* 617d, 620d–e; discussion at Luck 171.

²¹ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 180.

avenging souls. This is why the magi perform the sacrifice, as if they were paying a penalty'.²²

Hesiod already points towards a mediating function of demons which is developed in two important texts from Plato and Plutarch. The first comes from Plato's *Symposium*:

'What then is Love?' I asked; 'Is he mortal?' 'No.' 'What then?' 'As in the former instance, he is neither mortal nor immortal, but in a mean between the two.' 'What is he, Diotima?' 'He is a great spirit (δαίμων), and like all spirits he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal.' 'And what,' I said, 'is his power?' 'He interprets,' she replied, 'between gods and men, conveying and taking across to the gods the prayers and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands and replies of the gods; he is the mediator who spans the chasm which divides them, and therefore in him all is bound together, and through him the arts of the prophet and the priest, their sacrifices and mysteries and charms, and all, prophecy and incantation, find their way. For God mingles not with man; but through Love, all the intercourse, and converse of god with man, whether awake or asleep, is carried on. The wisdom which understands this is spiritual; all other wisdom, such as that of arts and handicrafts, is mean and vulgar. Now these spirits or intermediate powers are many and diverse, and one of them is Love.'²³

Several things catch the eye. Note that Diotima seems to work with a widespread understanding that demons by their very nature are intermediate beings: *πάν τὸ δαιμόνιον μεταξύ ἐστὶ θεοῦ τε καὶ θνητοῦ* (202e). The mediation of the demon Love is associated particularly with prayers and *sacrifices* (*θυσίας*). He is in the middle (*ἐν μέσῳ*) of

²² Derveni papyrus, 6. 2–5, trans. Betegh, in *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology, and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15.

²³ *Symposium*, 202e–203a, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Dialogues of Plato* (NY: Random House, 1937), who best captures the idea of mediation here. See also the *Epinomis*, 984d–e: 'But as our visible gods, greatest and most honorable and having keenest vision every way, we must count first the order of the stars and all else that we perceive existing with them; and after these, and next below these, the divine spirits, an air-born race, holding the third and middle situation, cause of interpretation, which we must surely honor with prayers for the sake of an auspicious journey across' (trans. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library). It is not certain whether Plato actually wrote the *Epinomis*, but it is a good indication of the cosmic spirituality of the age. For extensive discussion, see André-Jean Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, ii. *Le Dieu Cosmique* (Paris: LeCoffre, 1949), 196–218.

the gods and men, and fills up the space between them ὥστε τὸ πᾶν αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συνδεῖσθαι. The idea that Love is a demon may well be Diotima's own, though its world-binding powers are likely derived from Empedocles, in whose cosmology Love played a major role. Nonetheless, the text remains important background for 1 Corinthians. The dialogue depends on a fairly well-established role for demons as intermediary spirits, and we should not underestimate the influence Plato's works had for later generations.

Plato's student Xenocrates developed the medial status of demons in his own work, which is available to us only in fragments. According to Aetius (*Plac.* 1. 7, 30; *Xen. fr.* 213), Xenocrates' theology listed first the heavenly gods, then beneath the moon unseen demons (ἐτέρους ὑποσελήνους δαίμονας ἀοράτους).²⁴ Proclus reports that Xenocrates used the illustration of a triangle to represent the position of demons midway between gods and men.²⁵ It may be that Xenocrates was using the triangle to give a simple illustration of the mixed nature of demons. But it seems more likely in view of the testimony in Aetius that they played a critical role in his ontology, forming a bridge between the heavenly, divine realm and the earthly, human realm.

The durability of this view of demons is demonstrated by its appearance centuries later in Plutarch. In a discussion of the obsolescence of oracles, Cleombrotus makes the point that the invocation of the demons as mediating beings was a stroke of genius: ἐμοὶ δὲ δοκοῦσι πλείονας λῦσαι καὶ μείζονας ἀπορίας οἱ τὸ τῶν δαιμόνων γένος ἐν μέσῳ θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων τρόπον τινὰ τὴν κοινωνίαν ἡμῶν συνάγον εἰς ταῦτ' καὶ συνάπτον ἐξευρόντες' (*def. orac.* 415a). This intermediate category of beings helps explain how God can communicate to people through oracles without indecorously entangling himself in human affairs (*def. orac.* 414e). Cleombrotus goes on to say he does not know where this innovation arose, whether amongst the Zoroastrians, or in Thrace, Egypt, or Phrygia; this seems to

²⁴ See Margherita Parente, *Senocrate, Ermodoro: Frammenti* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1981), 130–1, with commentary on pp. 400–6; cf. John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London: Duckworth, 1977), 31–2.

²⁵ Proclus, *In Plat. remp.* II, p. 48, 4ff. (*Xen. Fr.* 223), at Parente 133–4, commentary at p. 414.

indicate the belief was imagined to be very widespread. Nor does he know the exact constitution or origin of the demons themselves: they may be Hesiod's spirits of departed Golden Age men, or they may emerge from heroes in a quasi-material type of transformation. They are particularly associated with the Mysteries, and bad demons may be the recipients of certain uncouth sacrifices.²⁶ Whatever speculations Plutarch's friends may have engaged in, the salient points of *association with sacrifice* and *mediation between the human and the divine* are secure, and their relevance for interpreting 1 Corinthians 8–10 is profound.²⁷

The association of demons with mediation should not be downplayed. Martin Nilsson sees demonology as playing an increasingly important role in Greek religiosity down to the Hellenistic period; he can even speak of the 'daemonizing of religion'.²⁸ His conclusions speak directly to the world of Paul and his Corinthian readers. As intermediaries,

Daimones filled the gap lying between gods and humanity, as mediators and Intermediate beings . . . They also filled the gap in cosmology between earth, the habitation of men, and the superlunary world, which is populated by gods . . . As the gods were deposed from the highest place by reason of the

²⁶ Cf. also the lengthy discussion of demons in *De Iside* 360d–361d, where Plutarch notes that some say the stories of Isis, Typhon, and Osiris concern not gods or men, but 'great demons' (δαίμόνων μεγάλων) intermediate between the two. Their intermediate nature allows them to be of mixed disposition, and further permits categories of good demons and bad demons.

²⁷ Cf. also the conjunction of idols and demons in the tomb inscription of King Antiochus I of Commagene (c.50–35 BCE), 'that the divine representation of the manifest deities [δαίμονες] might be consecrated on the holy hill and that this place might likewise not be lacking in witness to my piety' (trans. at Grant 21), and the mention by Varro (ap. Augustine, *City of God*, 7. 6) of 'aerial souls' between the moon and clouds, whom he terms 'heroes and *lares* and *genii*'. Dillon (pp. 90–1) notes that the latter two words 'are plainly attempts to find native Roman equivalents for the Greek term *daimones*'. Apuleius (c.160 CE) cites Plato's words about the δαίμονες being guardians and interpreters for men (*De Platone*, 1. 12, text in R. W. Sharples, 'Three-fold Providence: The History and Background of a Doctrine', in R. W. Sharples and Anne Sheppard (eds.), *Ancient Approaches to Plato's Timaeus* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2003), 107–8).

²⁸ Nilsson, *Greek Piety*, trans. H. J. Rose (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948), 170–5. See also the comments of W. Bousset on 1 Cor. 8: 4–6, where he highlights the mediating role of demons in the ancient world, in Johannes Weiss (ed.), *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, ii (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1908), 108–9.

conception of a one and only supreme God, ruler of everything and everyone, they came dangerously near the daimones, an idea which Christianity followed to its logical consequence by transforming heathen gods into evil daimones.²⁹

Nilsson further argues that the demons were not simply a tidy theoretical construct. Their power was believed in and relied on. The traditional gods may have been losing ground,

[b]ut the daimones, whose importance continually increased and who were credited with supernatural interventions in human life on the widest scale, possessed precisely that supernatural potency which was believed in; their names and pictures flood the magical papyri and the amulets. The result of this connexion was that religion was, so to say, daemonized more and more, and this is a conspicuous phenomenon in the religion of late antiquity.³⁰

I would suggest that Paul exploits both the biblical backgrounds of demons and popular Hellenistic understanding as he attacks the problem of idolatry at Corinth. Texts like Septuagint Psalm 95 laid the groundwork for trivializing the gods of the nations as nothing more than subservient spirits whose very existence depends on the will of the true and living God. (This is not to mention the cult statues themselves, which had been critiqued by Jews and pagans alike as human fabrications with no intrinsic divinity whatsoever.) Jewish tradition and the stories of Jesus' exorcisms would have reinforced the overwhelmingly negative associations of demons in the early Church community. They are destructive, deceiving spirits whose claims to authority on earth have been utterly revoked by the advent of the Messiah. All of this would have been fundamental to Paul's view of the world. At the same time, the close associations of demons and the cult in Hellenistic society, and their status as mediators between the divine and human realms, set them in clear antithesis to the God-mandated messianic mediation of Jesus. The flash point for these rival means of mediation becomes the sacred meal.

²⁹ Nilsson, 171.

³⁰ Ibid.

The introduction of Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* at the beginning of the argument in chapter 8 is not haphazard, nor is it only a way of demonstrating Jesus' supreme authority. It is Paul's way of saying that the Messiah has always been God's means of mediating his presence to the world. God does this not through some subordinate class of created beings, but through one who shares his very identity, someone who can be enfolded within the definitive confession of Jewish monotheism, the Shema. God's mediation through Christ continues through the history of Israel, as Paul details in chapter 10. Paul may or may not be familiar with Philo's interpretation of the Rock as God's Wisdom; its absence in the Wisdom of Solomon makes one wonder if it is Philo's allegorizing at work here rather than evidence of a well-known Jewish tradition. But he is surely aware of the Song of Moses and its repeated designation of God as the Rock (vv.4, 15, 18, 30–1), and that is the most important background for 10: 4: ἡ πέτρα δὲ ἦν ὁ Χριστός. The Song itself would have led Paul to make the connection, with its admittedly difficult note in verse 13: ἐθήλασαν μέλι ἐκ πέτρας καὶ ἔλαιον ἐκ στερεᾶς πέτρας. Whatever the source of this tradition of the honey and oil may be, Paul could easily have overlayed it onto the story of the water from the Rock, which perhaps accounts for his somewhat vague term, πόμα, 'drink', rather than water.³¹

Just as he did with the Shema earlier, so here Paul juxtaposes the Song of Moses and the miraculous drink from the Rock to make a very refined Christological assertion. The Messiah shares God's nature as 'the Rock'; but the Messiah is more precisely God as he reaches out towards the creation to give of himself to humanity. It is perhaps not coincidental that in this case Christ is the mediator of material blessings to God's people in 10: 4. Not that he is necessarily filling the role of a Platonic intermediary between Seen and Unseen, like the Eternal Living Creature of the *Timaeus*. Rather, Paul is reminding the Corinthians that just as God made the world in the first instance through Christ, so he continues to mediate all his blessings, including material ones, to humanity through Christ.

³¹ The use of πόμα would also enable an easier association with the Eucharist later in the chapter and into chapter 11.

Paul underscores the point in 10: 9: *μηδὲ ἐκπειράζωμεν τὸν Χριστόν, καθὼς τινες αὐτῶν ἐπείρασαν καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ὀφείων ἀπώλλυντο*. I believe the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA²⁷) is correct to adopt the reading *Χριστόν*, despite the slightly better external evidence for *κύριον*. *Χριστόν* is much the more difficult reading, and *κύριον* may be explained by its ease of reading, by attraction to ἡ παραζηλοῦμεν τὸν κύριον in 10: 22, and by reference to Deut. 6: 16. Even if one preferred *κύριον*, the reference could still be to Christ based on the *θεός/κύριος* distinction in 8: 6. If we accept *Χριστόν* as original, this is a striking assertion that the Messiah has always been God's presence for his people. Deut. 6: 16 reads, again with reference to the account of the water in the wilderness: *οὐκ ἐκπειράσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ὃν τρόπον ἐξεπειράσασθε ἐν τῷ Πειρασμῷ*. To test God is to test Christ; to test Christ is to test God. For a third time now, Paul has read the Old Testament in such a way as to include Christ within the divine identity. Each time he specifically notes Christ's role as the one who mediates God's blessings and God's presence to the creation in general and to his people in particular.

One further point of clarification is necessary. To the extent that Paul may be equating the gods of the nations with the demons, or recognizing that some see the statues themselves as gods, some may feel the language of mediation is not the most appropriate: the gods/demons are themselves the desired object of worship, rather than a means to reaching that object. In that case, it may be better to speak of the demons and idols as the *manifestation* of the divine rather than the mediating agents of the divine. This would still form a meaningful counterpart to Christology, since Christ may be seen as the manifestation of God on earth as much as the mediator. In the end there is little difference between the two terms, particularly in the bubbling pot of Hellenistic spirituality, where there was a general recognition of 'divinity' which could manifest itself to, or mediate itself to, humanity in any number of ways.

Before we leave 1 Corinthians entirely, we may take a moment to consider whether the formula in 8: 6 ties into the epistle beyond chapters 8–10. I doubt that the formula has any direct connection with the 'wisdom' discussions in chapters 1–2. God's 'wisdom' in

those chapters does not refer back to the creative activity of Proverbs 8, but rather to the perplexing work of Christ on the cross, an act of humility and service that stands in judgment on the self-inflated 'wisdom' of the Corinthians.³² There are no verbal or strong thematic links with chapter 8. One might make a better connection with the general theme of creation assumed by the phrase τὰ μὴ ὄντα, ἵνα τὰ ὄντα καταργήσῃ, in 1: 28, but this does not explicitly invoke the mediating role of Christ. Given the constant interplay of creation and redemption in the Old and New Testaments, one could fairly say that at a deep theological level Christ's agency in redemption presupposes his agency in creation; but Paul does not make the connection clear in these early chapters.

There is evidence that he exploits it later in 1 Corinthians. At the beginning of chapter 11 Paul sets up a very complex analogy between relationships between men and women (perhaps more precisely husband and wife) and relationships within the Godhead: Christ is the head of every man, the man is the head of the woman, God is the head of Christ (11: 3). We will bypass the innumerable theological and ecclesiological questions this verse raises and focus solely on the analogy suggested here between the role of Christ vis-à-vis God and of the woman vis-à-vis the man. In 11: 12 Paul picks up on this comparison and uses the same ἐκ/δια model he employed in 8: 6: ὥσπερ γὰρ ἡ γυνὴ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός, οὕτως καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ διὰ τῆς γυναικός· τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ. Just as God is the origin of all things, the one from whom everything emerges, and Christ is the agent of all things, the one through whom everything arrives at its goal, so the man is the origin of the woman (in her initial creation; Gen. 2: 21–3), and the woman is the agent through whom all subsequent men have their being.

³² See esp. the critique of 'Wisdom Christology' in 1 Corinthians by Gordon Fee ('Wisdom Christology in Paul', in his *To What End Exegesis? Essays Textual, Exegetical, and Theological* (Cambridge: Eerdmans/Vancouver: Regent College, 2001), 355–62). The argument is strengthened if one sees the focus on Paul's discussion in these chapters as not wisdom in general, but 'clever speech' in particular, as argued eloquently (!) by Stephen Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, 134 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1992).

THE CONTRIBUTION OF 1 CORINTHIANS 8: 6

In 1 Cor. 8: 6 Paul weaves Christ into the traditional Jewish monotheistic confession, the Shema. This alone would make it a remarkable contribution to Christology. But it is of a piece with Paul's equally remarkable assertion that Christ participated with God in the act of creation. For the ancient Jewish hearer, this signaled in unmistakable fashion that the Messiah was on the divine side of the fault line that separates God from everything else.³³ However Paul or his Christian forebears may have come up with the teaching in the first place, it serves here to reinforce the overwhelming power and authority of God's Christ. If the Corinthians had trouble recognizing that power and weakness can coexist, they should consider Jesus. He shared in the supreme divine act of creation, yet reclaimed that creation in the supreme act of humiliation, death on a cross.

Christ, then, shares in the divine identity. But his particular role is mediating God's presence to his people. Even this may be seen as part of a broader project to bring all of creation into conformity with God's plan through the agency of his Messiah, as Paul explains in chapter 15. Demons and idols may appear to bring worshippers into an experience with God, but for Paul this is just another iteration of the age-old deception that laid low the wilderness generation. God has ever and always communicated himself and his blessings to the world through the Messiah. The mediation offered by Christ is an active expression of God's love and concern for his people, not an ontological stopgap.

³³ Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 37–40.

Old Dominion: Creation in Colossians

The ‘hymn’ of Colossians 1: 15–20 presents perhaps the most extended and theologically dense treatment of the theme of Christ as agent of creation.¹ Virtually every term in the poem has been subjected to intense scrutiny, as has its overall structure and purpose. We will attempt to make as straight a line as possible to matters directly related to the creation theme.

This means first bypassing the question of authorship, both of Colossians in general, and 1: 15–20 in particular. Most people who deny the letter is by Paul still hold that it was written by a disciple of his, or someone hoping to be mistaken for him, such that it is broadly ‘Pauline’. At the same time, most who affirm Pauline authorship would acknowledge that it is different enough from Romans or Galatians that one needs to assess it on its own without viewing it through the lens of the *Hauptbriefe*. Since we will be viewing it against the backdrop of early Christianity in general, and do not need to reconstruct an independent ‘Pauline theology’, those who view the letter as pseudonymous should not be put out. At the same time, I will refer to the author as Paul, since I have not been convinced he could not have written the epistle. As for the hymn (if that is what it is) in chapter 1, it is entirely possible it could have been part of pre-Pauline worship, but it is hardly provable. We are concerned in any case with what Paul does with it in the setting of Colossians.

¹ For an overview, and review of previous research, see esp. Christian Stettler, *Der Kolosserhymnus*, *Wissunt zum Neuen Testament*, 131 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

Questions about the structure of the passage cannot be dodged so easily, but we do not need to replicate the many detailed analyses available elsewhere. Where such details impinge on the theme of creation, we will address them below. Suffice it to say for now that the passage is rife with verbal and thematic parallelism. Among the most obvious examples of this are:

- ‘First born of creation’ (v. 15) and ‘first born out of the dead’ (v. 18)
- ‘All things were created through him and for him’ (v. 16: τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται) and ‘to reconcile all things to himself through him’ (v. 20: δι’ αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν)
- ‘And he is before all things’ (v. 17: καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων) and ‘in order that he might have preeminence in all things’ (v. 18: ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων)
- ‘Who is the image of the invisible God’ (v. 15: ὃς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου) and ‘Who is the beginning (or ruler)’ (v. 18: ὃς ἐστιν ἀρχή) (note especially the verbal parallel of ὃς ἐστιν)

At this point the most important thing to observe is that the first half of the poem (vv. 15–17) affirms that Christ is the one through whom God made the world in the beginning, and that the second half of the poem (vv. 18–20) affirms that Christ is the one through whom God reconciled the world to himself. We have argued at length that this is a pristine example of a much wider association between social order and cosmic order in biblical and Ancient Near Eastern thought. Taken together, the two halves of the poem assert that redemption is a new creation, and that Jesus is the agent of both primal creation and eschatological re-creation because he is the image of God.

Finally, we must assess the many and varied proposals for the provenance of the hymn. From a methodological standpoint, source criticism is useful either when the source can be positively identified (as with Philo’s use of Plato) or when a source can be deduced from a parallel account elsewhere (as with the Synoptic Gospels). Only then does one have a point of comparison for the author’s reworking of the material. Neither of these obtains in the case of Col. 1: 15–20. The situation is made worse when putative sources only emerge after

various excisions have been inflicted on the text as it stands. I see, therefore, no need for detailed refutations of proposals that Col. 1: 15–20 originated as a Gnostic or pre-Gnostic hymn, or a Wisdom poem, or a Stoic meditation on the cosmos.² It presents itself as an affirmation of Christ and must be read as such.

The question of where the ideas within the hymn came from, however, is a different one; it is both more susceptible of an answer, and far more relevant to exegesis. While we cannot deduce from the text of Colossians some preexisting poem-behind-the-poem, we may well find allusions to other texts which might shed light on Paul's concerns. Here we may begin by relying on the work done in previous chapters. We can acknowledge, for instance, that the repeated use of 'all things' has certain affinities with Stoic *τόποι*, without supposing that means Paul is a closet Stoic. If he wanted to express the universality of Jesus' messianic rule, which in the nature of the case he could hardly avoid doing, it would be rather difficult to do so without using some variation of 'all things'. Even if one feels the style is too close to Stoicism to be coincidental, the terse phrases of the hymn need to be read against the backdrop of Paul's messianic theology, just as the statements about the divine in the 'Hymn to Zeus' need to be read against the background of Cleanthes' Stoa. The reference to avoiding 'philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition' in 2: 8 may indicate that 1: 15–20 constitutes at some level a critique of Graeco-Roman views on the nature of the cosmos. If so, I do not think it is possible to isolate a specific philosophical or theological target for the polemic. Paul is simply asserting that Christ trumps the claim of universal sovereignty of any other person or force.³

² For discussion, detailed structural analysis, and an affirmation of taking the hymn as it stands see Jean-Noël Aletti, *Colossiens 1, 15–20: Genre et exégèse du texte; Fonction de la thématique sapientielle* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 1–47. On the general question of using the texts as they stand see the pertinent comments of Hartwig Thyen ("In ihm ist alles geschaffen, was in Himmel und Erde ist": Kosmologische Christushymnen im Neuen Testament', in Gerhard Rau, Adolf Martin Ritter, and Hermann Timm (eds.), *Frieden in der Schöpfung: Das Naturverständnis Protestantischer Theologie* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1987), 77–9).

³ The same holds true for the much-discussed 'Colossian heresy'. The Colossians were liable, as was everyone else in the early Church, to be led astray by rival philosophies based on merely human wisdom (2: 8); and as Gentiles adhering to a

As for sources that might make a more constitutive contribution to the hymn, the chief claimants have been Wisdom and Adam. We have adduced a considerable body of evidence to the effect that one need not *assume* Wisdom speculation is in play simply because a reference to creation is made. But neither does it mean motifs from Proverbs 8 or Wisdom traditions might not be present in Colossians 1. Similarly, we have shown that a type of ‘Adam Christology’—or, more properly, an ‘Image Christology’—can be read off the broad sweep of the biblical narrative. It remains now to examine in more detail the relative merits of these two streams of thought for understanding the hymn. A certain degree of repetition from the earlier discussions is inevitable, but worthwhile in light of the importance of Colossians 1 for our thesis.

We begin with Wisdom. Since creation motifs do not demand a derivation from Wisdom speculation, we must begin by seeing if the overall thrust of Colossians invites us to posit Wisdom influence on chapter 1. The word *σοφία* occurs in the letter six times, and it is distributed across every chapter: 1: 9, 28; 2: 3, 23; 3: 16; 4: 5. It is certainly a significant theme of the letter. Paul wants the Colossians to be filled with wisdom (1: 9; 3: 16; 4: 5)—the same wisdom Paul himself exhibits (1: 28), whose ultimate source is Christ (2: 3). This wisdom is contrasted with the so-called wisdom of human philosophy, tradition, and ‘home-made religion’ (2: 8, 23). One might then argue that allusive references to Christ as the creative Wisdom of God in the hymn fit his rhetorical purposes perfectly: seek Christ, who is God’s Wisdom, and you will find the wisdom you need to live a life pleasing to God in a deceived and deceiving world.

The contextual evidence may be taken in quite a different direction, however. Col. 2: 3 is critical: Christ is the one ‘in whom all the

movement based on Judaism they naturally had to wrestle with questions of food laws and Sabbaths (2: 16). Asceticism and ‘the worship of angels’ (either worshipping angels or, more likely, participating in the heavenly worship session of the angels as in 4QShirShab) were also issues of concern (2: 18–23). Any of these might be based on visionary experiences (2: 18). I am not certain we can say much more about the Colossian heresy, which strikes me as a flirtation with mystical-flavored Judaism, with possible influence from unspecified Hellenistic philosophies. Even if the heresy could be diagnosed more exactly, Paul’s prescription is still generic Christology: Christ is superior to any other proffered benefactor.

treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden'. Wisdom, once again, is *in* the Messiah, which is not the same thing as saying Wisdom *is* the Messiah.⁴ This verse gives us Paul's explicit declaration of the relationship between Wisdom and Messiah. It indicates that the creator Messiah in 1: 15 cannot be reduced without remainder to Wisdom. Subordinating Messiah to Wisdom (i.e. the 'preexistent' Messiah is really just an expression for God's Wisdom) reverses the relationship defined in 2: 3. In the same way, the call to 'walk in wisdom' is not simply a way of saying 'walk in Christ'. Wisdom is something Christ gives to his people, just as he gives them his peace and love (3: 14–15).

Invoking Messianic categories in 2: 3 is not merely predicated on the appearance of 'Christ' in the verse. Paul's language here is clearly indebted to Isa. 45: 1–3, where the prophet describes God's promise to his 'messiah', Cyrus (Isa. 45: 1: τῷ χριστῷ μου Κύρω/לְמֶשִׁיחַי לְכֹרֶשׁ). One of these promises is that God will give him *θησαυροὺς σκοτεινοὺς ἀποκρύφους ἀοράτους*. This is the source for Paul's language in 2: 3: ἐν ᾧ εἰσιν πάντες οἱ *θησαυροὶ τῆς σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως ἀπόκρυφοι*.⁵ The supreme 'treasure' given to Christ is the Wisdom of God. (We find a precise parallel to this reading of Isa. 45: 1–3 in 1QH, where the Teacher of Righteousness declares: 'And I, the Instructor, have known you, my God, through the spirit which you gave to me, and I have listened loyally to your wonderful secret, through your holy spirit. You have opened within me knowledge of the mystery of your wisdom, the source of your power'.⁶)

If Wisdom language is indeed to be detected in the hymn, then, it should be seen as an attribute of the Messiah, not a replacement for him. Is such Wisdom speculation present in the hymn? The general tenor of the hymn would not especially lead one in that direction. With respect to creation, we do not find the expected Wisdom

⁴ On this point, and on its implications for Col. 1, see esp. Van Roon, 'The Relation between Christ and the Wisdom of God According to Paul', *Novum Testamentum*, 16 (1974), 231–9.

⁵ It is also possible that Paul has Prov. 2: 4 in view as well, since Wisdom is described there as a 'treasure'; but note that it is not explicitly said to be 'hidden', as in Isaiah and Colossians.

⁶ 1QH xx. 11–13, trans. Garcia Martinez; see discussion in Sean McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 146–8.

emphasis on the magnificence of the mountains and streams and stars that God has created through his understanding. The only specifically named created things are the ‘thrones and dominions and rulers and authorities’ in verse 16. The latter portion of the poem concerning Christ’s redemptive work shows no trace of interest in Wisdom themes.

The specific vocabulary of the hymn is somewhat more promising, though this too is riddled with ambiguity. The roots *πρω/πρω*, ‘prior’ and/or ‘first’, for example, are used frequently both in Col. 1: 15–20 (4 times) and Septuagint Proverbs 8 (6 times in vv. 23–5). But in Proverbs the emphasis is on temporal priority: Wisdom was created or possessed by God *before* he made the abysses or springs of water or mountains or hills. This is a logical necessity, since God as it were needed to ‘get’ or ‘lay hold of’ Wisdom to complete these intricate projects. This is comparable to human beings who similarly need to get wisdom as they set out on their own life project (the same verb, קנה, is used with חכמה in Prov. 4: 5, 7 and in Prov. 8: 22). In Colossians the *πρω/πρω* roots serve to underscore Christ’s supremacy. While the expression ‘he is before all things’ in verse 17 could merely signify that Christ existed before everything else, *πρωτότοκος* (vv. 15, 18) surely implies more than this: as cosmic lord he exercises all the rights of the firstborn. This is even clearer in the use of the verb *πρωτεύων* in verse 18. This must mean, to quote Bauer (BDAG) ‘to hold the highest rank in a group’.

As it happens, *πρωτότοκος* itself has been seen as a link between Wisdom and Christ. Burney, as we have seen, argues at length that קנה in Proverbs 8 should be translated ‘begat’; in any case, he only needs to demonstrate that it *could* be understood that way to open up the possibility of a connection with Colossians 1. This yields ‘The Lord begat me the beginning of his way, before his works of old’ for Prov. 8: 22, a close conceptual parallel to ‘firstborn’. Burney finds further support in Philo’s use of *πρωτόγονος* for God’s divine, creative Word (e.g. *Somn.* 1. 215; *Conf.* 146). One might also recall our prior discussion of ἀρχή in chapter 4. The presence of ἀρχή in Prov. 8: 22 and Col. 1: 18 could be seen as a further sign that Paul has Wisdom in mind in the poem.

None of this is thoroughly compelling. Philo’s evidence is inadmissible, both because *πρωτόγονος* is not quite *πρωτότοκος* and,

more critically, because God's Word cannot be equated with his Wisdom without further ado. While there are no doubt conceptual parallels between the two, when Philo actually provides us a list of interchangeable terms for God's Word, Wisdom is not there. Instead we find 'the great archangel', 'the name of God', 'the man according to God's image', and 'he who sees, Israel' (*Conf.* 146). The connection with Prov. 8: 22 would be more plausible if Col. 1: 15 stood alone; but it is difficult to see how Prov. 8: 22 helps clarify the use of *πρωτότοκος* in 1: 18, 'firstborn from the dead'. If eschatology forms the basis for protology, one could argue that the protological *πρωτότοκος* is derived from the eschatological *πρωτότοκος*: because Jesus has become the firstborn of the new creation, it stands to reason he was *πρωτότοκος* of the first creation, with all the rights and privileges appertaining thereto. This circumvents the need to pass through Proverbs 8, especially if a more likely candidate emerges for the origin of the *πρωτότοκος* language. We will argue in a moment that there is such a candidate.

The description of Christ as the 'image of the invisible God' is also a dubious path to Wisdom. Wis. 7: 26 does speak of Wisdom as 'the image of his goodness' (*εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ*), but it should be remembered that Wis. 2: 23 draws on the much more prevalent idea that humankind is made in the image of God (specifically, people are made 'the image of his eternity', *εἰκόνα τῆς ἰδίας αἰδιότητος ἐποίησεν αὐτόν*). The use of *εἰκὼν* in these two settings may be the outcropping of a larger thought structure comparable to Philo, for whom the image of God is the *λόγος*; but such a connection in Wisdom of Solomon is difficult to see. We have already noted that *εἰκὼν* is typically, and predictably, used in the New Testament by way of allusion to Gen. 1: 26 (e.g. in Col. 3: 10). If a plausible explanation of Colossians 1 can be offered by direct reference to Gen. 1: 26, it is to be preferred.

Two more words with possible links to Wisdom may be considered. The 'fullness' motif (to be discussed in detail below) might remind one of Wis. 1: 7, 'the Spirit of the Lord has filled the world' (*πνεῦμα κυρίου πεπλήρωκεν τὴν οἰκουμένην*). But while Wisdom is described in the previous verse as a kindly spirit (*φιλόανθρωπον* . . . *πνεῦμα*), it is not clear that Wisdom is simply another name for the Spirit of the Lord. Similar things are said directly of Wisdom in Wis.

7: 24, where Wisdom ‘pervades and penetrates through all things on account of her purity’ (διήκει δὲ καὶ χωρεῖ διὰ πάντων διὰ τὴν καθαρότητα). But we do not find the *πληρ-* root here. In addition, the author at this point draws closest to assimilating Wisdom to the type of world-forming force we have seen in the Stoic *λόγος* or Anaxagoras’ concept of Mind.⁷

The same may be said for the verb *συνέστηκεν* in the note that ‘all things hold together in him’ in Col. 1: 17 (τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν). This too lacks a verbal correspondence in the Wisdom literature.⁸ Wis. 1: 7 goes on to speak of ‘that which holds all things together’ (τὸ συνέχον τὰ πάντα), which is similar in flavor, but this presumably refers to the Spirit mentioned in the first part of the verse. Closer parallels may be found in the Greek philosophical tradition (e.g. Plato, *Rep.* 530a).⁹ The only comparable biblical use of the word is in 2 Pet. 3: 5, which states that ‘the heavens and earth were long ago established (*συνεστῶσα*) out of water and through water by the word of God (τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγῳ).’¹⁰ Whether we accept direct Stoic influence here or not, we observe that the constitution of the world is not through God’s Wisdom, but through God’s Word.

Despite widespread assumptions to the contrary, it is thus difficult to prove that Wisdom motifs in particular have had an influence on the hymn in Colossians 1. Precise verbal parallels are thin on the ground, and broader conceptual parallels may equally well be derived from traditions about God’s Word or Spirit (where precise verbal parallels are in fact more forthcoming). The latter point does suggest that general reflections on divine self-communication have helped shape the passage. The language of ‘all things’ and especially ‘holding all things together’ indicates that Paul also wished to address the pervasive Hellenistic (and, indeed, Ancient Near Eastern) interest in how the world held together.

⁷ The mention of the ‘purity’ of Wisdom that enables it to penetrate all things is especially reminiscent of the characterization of Anaxagoras’ Mind as ‘thin and subtle’; see our discussion in Chapter 5.

⁸ See A. Feuillet, *Le Christ, sagesse de Dieu: d’après les épîtres pauliniennes* (Paris: LeCoffre, 1966), 214–17.

⁹ Feuillet 214.

¹⁰ On which see Edward Adams, “Where is the Promise of His Coming?” The Complaint of the Scoffers in 2 Peter 3: 4, *New Testament Studies*, 51 (2005), 106–22.

To determine how Paul answered that question, however, we need to establish what is in fact driving the hymn. We have already indicated the answer in Chapter 4: Jesus' messianic lordship drives the hymn, just as in Paul's view it drives the cosmos as a whole. It remains to bolster our earlier arguments to that effect.

The most critical point to recognize for our purposes is that the association of Jesus and the Genesis creation narrative in 1: 15 is not an aberration in Colossians.¹¹ Creation imagery pervades the letter and arguably forms one of the most important strands in Paul's argument. The theme emerges first in 1: 6 (cf. 1: 10), where Paul says that the gospel ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον. It is difficult not to see here an allusion to the commissioning of Adam and Eve in Gen. 1: 28: καὶ ἡθλόγησεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς λέγων αὐξάνεσθε καὶ πληθύνεσθε καὶ πληρώσατε τὴν γῆν καὶ κατακυριεύσατε αὐτῆς καὶ ἄρχετε τῶν ἰχθύων τῆς θαλάσσης κτλ. Paul is not slavishly dependent on Septuagint Gen. 1: 28. His use of καρποφορούμενον nicely captures the sense of the Hebrew יָרָב, while παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ speaks to the universality of Christ's rule more effectively than τὴν γῆν. The language of 'filling' (πληρώσατε) or 'fullness' (πλήρωμα), meanwhile, is picked up repeatedly by Paul in Colossians (1: 9, 19, 25; 2: 9, 10; 4: 17).

This was clearly a formative passage for many readers of Scripture in antiquity, and the fact that the theme is reinforced at critical points in the primeval history and the narratives of Israel makes its use here all the more likely.¹² A few texts in this tradition stand out as most critical for Paul's usage. The promise to Abraham in Gen. 17: 6 is foundational: καὶ αὐξανῶ σε σφόδρα σφόδρα καὶ θήσω σε εἰς ἔθνη καὶ βασιλεῖς ἐκ σοῦ ἐξελεύσονται. This brings into the original command in Gen. 1: 28 the idea of *kingship*, which would be ripe for later messianic reading, and it is followed in verses 7–8 by mention of the *covenant* with his *seed* and the conquest of the *land*. The kingship theme recurs in the standard messianic text Septuagint Num. 24: 7

¹¹ In all this I am greatly indebted to my discussions with Jonathan Dodson, whose MA thesis, 'Creation in Colossians' (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2006) contains a wealth of stimulating material.

¹² See e.g. the command to Noah after the flood: Gen. 8: 17; 9: 1, 7; the promise to Abraham: Gen. 17: 6, 20; Israel in Egypt. Gen. 47: 27; 48: 4; Exod. 1: 7; Israel in the land: Lev. 26: 9; of David's kingdom: 1 Chr. 14: 2 LXX.

ἐξελεύσεται ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτοῦ καὶ κυριεύσει ἐθνῶν πολλῶν καὶ ὑψωθήσεται ἢ Γωγ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐξηθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ. In Exod. 23: 30, a text looking forward to the conquest of Canaan, the idea of multiplication is linked with the idea of *inheritance*: κατὰ μικρὸν μικρὸν ἐκβαλῶ αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ σοῦ ἕως ἂν αὐξηθῇς καὶ κληρονομήσῃς τὴν γῆν. This may well inform Paul's use of τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου in Col. 1: 12 and τὴν ἀνταπόδοσιν τῆς κληρονομίας in Col. 3: 24.

Judging by the 'availability' of Gen. 1: 28,¹³ and the precise verbal allusions to this and related texts throughout Colossians, Paul was keenly aware of the tradition of 'Be fruitful and multiply' as he wrote Colossians. But given the presence of the Scripture, what is its function? I would contend that Paul is reading Gen. 1: 28 through the lens of the progress of the gospel of Jesus the Messiah. A messianic reading of the commission to Adam and Eve not only made sense in the atmosphere of Adam typology in the early Church,¹⁴ it was practically demanded of a follower of Jesus as Messiah in light of the development of the 'multiplication' tradition within the Old Testament itself. The juxtaposition of Gen. 17: 6–8 and Num. 24: 7 in particular invited early Christian theologians to think of the stories of Adam and Israel as reaching their fulfillment in the story of Israel's Messiah.

Much, if not all, of the content of Colossians can then be subsumed under the rubric of a messianic reading of Gen. 1: 28, and of creation language in general. (We will deliberately bypass 1: 15–20 for the time being.) The gospel is 'bearing fruit and multiplying', first in the quantitative increase of disciples around the world (1: 6), and second in the qualitative increase in holy living by those disciples (1: 10). This is evidence that Jesus is providing the definitive fulfillment of the dominion Adam was to exercise over all creation (cf. 1: 13, 'the kingdom of his beloved Son', and 1: 23, 'in all creation': ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει). It is not surprising that the Messiah should do this, since 'all the fullness of deity' is resident within him (2: 9), and he is

¹³ Using Richard Hays's terminology.

¹⁴ Cf. Romans 5, 1 Corinthians 15, and, arguably, Mark 1: 13 in the reference to Jesus being 'with the animals' in the temptation.

enthroned with all power at the right hand of God (3: 1; cf. Ps. 110: 1).¹⁵ Other attempts at achieving mastery over the world, whether through human wisdom (2: 8) or even through the Law (2: 11–15), are thus doomed to failure.¹⁶

The distinction between light and darkness in the original creation is now played out at the moral level in the lives of the Colossians (1: 12, 21–3; 3: 1ff.). They are to live as people of the new creation, ‘being renewed towards knowledge according to the image of the one who created him’ (3: 10, with clear allusion to Gen. 1: 26ff.). Their commitment to gospel praxis and propagation will enable them to help extend Christ’s kingdom (as Justus does, 4: 11) and thus fulfill God’s original mandate to Adam and Eve. (Note the calculated use of *πληροῖς* in the closing word to Archippus: 4: 17.)¹⁷

The immediate context helps establish the hymn’s thoroughgoing emphasis on Jesus as ruler: the Colossians have been transferred from the *authority* (*ἐξουσία*) of darkness into the *kingdom* (*βασιλεία*) of God’s beloved Son (v. 13), through Christ’s redeeming work (v. 14). The following verses then reflect on the nature and scope of Christ’s kingship. The repeated use of ‘all things’ would be immediately recognizable as claim to universal sovereignty, a point reinforced by the frequent invocation of words beginning with *προ/πρω*. The phrase also hearkens back to the repletion of *πᾶς* in Gen. 1: 26. The only listed created beings in verse 16 are ‘thrones and dominions and

¹⁵ Cf. Ps. 23: 1–2 LXX: ἡ γῆ καὶ τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῆς ἡ οἰκουμένη καὶ πάντες οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐν αὐτῇ αὐτὸς ἐπὶ θαλασσῶν ἐθεμελίωσεν αὐτὴν καὶ ἐπὶ ποταμῶν ἠτοίμασεν αὐτήν (cf. Ps. 49: 12 LXX; Ps. 88: 12 LXX).

¹⁶ Col. 2: 7 may also contain messianic motifs: believers are to be ‘rooted and built up’ (*ἐρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ*) in Christ. It is of note that the image of the ‘root’ is present in the classic messianic text Isa. 11: 1, the shoot from the *root* (*ρίζης*) of Jesse; while the equally crucial passage in 2 Sam. 7 focuses on God *building* a house for David (e.g. 7: 27: *οἶκον οἰκοδομήσω σοι*).

¹⁷ The dominance of the dominion motif should also put to rest questions as to whether Colossians exhibits a purely realized eschatology operating solely at the spiritual level. It is true that in Colossians Christ’s dominion works primarily at present in the moral sphere, in the paradox of suffering and opposition. But the idea of fulfilling the creation mandate would be gutted if this dominion never extended beyond the invisible realm. This is particularly true in light of the strong affirmation of Christ as agent of creation in 1: 16. Colossians must be read against the backdrop of the early Christian hope in Jesus’ return to usher in the fullness of the messianic kingdom in the new heavens and new earth.

rulers and authorities’—precisely the sorts of beings who have heretofore kept the Colossians in thralldom. Jesus rules over these powers so that the Colossians need no longer fear their former spiritual masters. Christ’s sovereignty by virtue of his role in creation is then paralleled with the sovereignty he exercises by virtue of his role in redemption. Just as he has created all things, so he has laid the foundation for bringing all things back to their intended goal.

The vocabulary of the hymn undergirds the theme of messianic dominion. The language of God’s *image* cannot help but recall Adam’s call to exercise dominion over the creation, especially coming after the ‘fruitful and multiplying’ language in the earlier verses. While a simple correspondence between Adam and Christ fails to explain the agent-of-creation motif, the idea that Christ is the archetypal glory/image of God in whose likeness Adam was created opens up a fresh biblical–theological avenue. According to the author of our poem, Adam’s dominion was from the beginning derivative. Adam himself was a copy of Christ, the genuine image of God, and thus his dominion was a copy of the absolute dominion exercised by God’s anointed one. ‘The kingdom of the beloved Son’ is founded on the Son’s role in creating all that is. We have seen in Chapter 4 that viewing Christ as the archetypal ‘image’ of God was not simply a piece of esoteric exegesis of Gen. 1: 26ff. Ezekiel 1 presents the man-like image as God’s glorious self-communication to the prophet. It is, moreover, a picture of God enthroned over the firmament on high.¹⁸

Romans 8: 29 provides an interesting analogue to Col. 1: 15, since here we also find *εἰκών* and *πρωτότοκος* together: ‘for those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be similar in form to the image of his son (*συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνης τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ*), in order that he might be the first-born (*πρωτότοκον*) among many brothers’. Romans 8 is of course saturated with creation imagery, though it is driven by the eschatological renewal of creation in Christ. Thus it is likely that the transformation in view here is transformation into the glorious image of the resurrected Christ, who is the firstborn of the

¹⁸ For an analogous emphasis on Christ as image being God’s representative see Dahl, ‘Christ, Creation, and the Church, in W. D. Davies and D. Daube (eds.),’ *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology: In Honour of Charles Harold Dodd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, Press, 1956), 434.

renewed people of God. But it is equally clear that the language is rooted in the Genesis accounts, and for this reason was ripe for a protological reworking along the lines of Colossians.¹⁹

The phrase 'firstborn of all creation' takes us on a similar road back to and beyond Adam. While Adam is not explicitly called *πρωτότοκος* in the Old Testament, the term certainly applies to him in some sense,²⁰ and, by the same logic we have seen above, if it applies in some sense to Adam, how much more does it apply to the one in whose image Adam was made; namely, the Messiah? This identification is facilitated by two further considerations. There is a clear connection between 'firstborn of all creation' in verse 15 and 'firstborn from out of the dead' in verse 18 (cf. the almost identical expression in Rev. 1: 5). If our general line of argument is correct, the Church's experience of Jesus as risen, redeeming Lord would have set the terms for speculation on his role in creation. Since Jesus was for the Church demonstrably firstborn from the dead, by the logic of *Urzeit gleich Endzeit* he must also be firstborn with respect to creation. The situation is complicated by the use of *πρωτότοκος* as a messianic title in Septuagint Psalm 88: 28: 'I will set him as firstborn, exalted over the kings of the earth'. The parallel with the exaltation of Christ over 'the powers' is evident: once again, the historical dynamics of messianic triumph over the nations have been read back into the original creation and been given cosmic scope. But they are still recognizably messianic motifs. For early Christian thinkers, the convergence of creation themes and messianic themes would have been readily understandable.

The theological significance of the statement that Jesus is firstborn of all creation is profound. The phrase was understandably a flash point of Christological controversy in the early Church.²¹ Taken in isolation from the rest of the New Testament, the phrase might seem liable to an Arian reading, but this is hardly the most natural one in light of the fact that Jesus' primacy is grounded in the next verse by

¹⁹ We may reiterate here that while this makes good sense as a development within Paul's thought, those leery of ascribing Colossians to Paul could take it as a development within 'the Pauline school', or early Christianity in general.

²⁰ The only explicit reference I have found for Adam as *πρωτότοκος* comes in the fourth-century theologian Adamantius (*De recta in deum fide*, 194. 7).

²¹ See Feuillet 178–85 for a survey of 'firstborn' in the Church fathers.

his role in creating all things.²² As Bauckham in particular has stressed, involving Christ in the act of creation was one of the surest ways to affirm that he shared the divine identity.²³ The question of whether Paul intended the full-blown doctrine of the procession of the Son in his use of *πρωτότοκος* need not detain us, but the expression 'firstborn of all creation' does not demand that he is to be slotted in among other created beings. The scope of *πρωτότοκος* and the grammar of the genitive allow us to translate the phrase 'firstborn with respect to the created order'. He is the one who exercises sovereignty over all else.

Nonetheless, it remains the case that Christ is being defined *with respect to* the created order. Even before the Incarnation, Christ is particularly seen as God's self-expression to the world. Just as he is the communicable image of the invisible God, so he is constitutionally ruler of what he is to create. At the risk of *petitio principii*, 'firstborn of all creation' does seem to speak to the inextricable link between Messiah and creation. Jesus does not simply happen to take over the lordship of creation because the rest of humanity failed. He was always its intended ruler. It was made for his purposes, according to his specifications. It belongs peculiarly to him. This makes the usurpation of the principalities and powers an offense not only against God in general, but an offense against Christ in particular.

We can now focus at last on the explicit mention of Jesus as agent of creation in verse 16. The precise meaning of the phrase *ἐν αὐτῷ* has been much debated.²⁴ While *ἐν* can denote agency, and may be nothing more than a stylistic variant for *δι' αὐτοῦ*, it does seem peculiar that Paul would not employ the more familiar *διὰ* up front. A mystical interpretation that the world is created within Christ, even to the extent that the world is his body, is supported

²² This assumes, of course, that 'firstborn of all creation' refers to the preexistent Christ and not to his incarnation. Some Church fathers avoided an Arian reading of 1: 15 by taking *πρωτότοκος* to refer to the Incarnation (see Feuillet, previous note). While this is just possible, it seems almost certain from the context that *πρωτότοκος* here refers to Christ's protological status.

²³ Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 1–22.

²⁴ See Aletti 52–8.

nowhere else in the text.²⁵ The problem is solved, I believe, by reading the *ἐν* in close conjunction with the statements at the end of the verse that all things were created *δι' αὐτοῦ* and *εἰς αὐτόν*. The parallelism to the beginning of the verse is obvious, and so there is a reasonable presumption the two strophes ought to be read together. If *δι' αὐτοῦ* signifies that God made the world in the beginning through Christ (and there is little disputing that), and *εἰς αὐτόν* signifies that the world is somehow created with Christ as its goal, or for his purposes, or, more pointedly, as its *end*, *ἐν αὐτῷ* would form the comprehensive term for his role in the beginning and the end. Such a three-part formula would be common enough in biblical and pagan literature.²⁶

If we wished to further elucidate the *ἐν αὐτῷ*, we might say that the world is created *within the sphere of his messianic authority*. While we might typically expect the *εἰς* clause to refer to God the Father (see e.g. 1 Cor. 8: 6), a messianic reading of the passage fits well with frequent Jewish assertions that the world was created 'for the sake of' Moses or whomever.²⁷ Christ can rightly be seen from one perspective as the beginning point and the end point of creation, even if the ultimate origin and destiny of all things is God the Father.²⁸

²⁵ For the most recent attempt to make the cosmos the body of Christ see G. H. van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School*, Wissunt zum Neuen Testament, 2/171 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). Van Kooten performs a valuable service by collecting innumerable cosmological texts from the Hellenistic world, but the parallels alone cannot demonstrate that the author of Colossians believes the cosmos is Christ's body. Only an arbitrarily edited hymn can make the body in chapter 1 refer to anything but the Church. Furthermore, it is almost impossible to see how *τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ χριστοῦ* in 2: 17 could refer to the cosmos: the author is contrasting present-day feasts and Sabbaths, which are 'shadows of the things that are coming' (and which are, of course, part of the present cosmos), with the substantive realities of Christ's kingdom. Thus the traditional translations, 'the substance belongs to Christ' (RSV) or 'the reality . . . is found in Christ' (NIV), are correct.

²⁶ A suitable counterpart would be Rev. 1: 4, 'the one who is and was and is to come', where 'the one who is' arguably stands for the plenitude of God's being through time, with 'was' and 'is to come' designating extension into the past and the future. Cf. also Josephus, *Ap.* 2: 190, where he describes God as the 'beginning, middle, and end of all things'.

²⁷ Cf. e.g. b. Sanh. 98b, where the world is variously said to be created for David, Moses, and the Messiah.

²⁸ Cf. in Col. 1: 22 the statement that Christ 'will present [the saints] before God holy and blameless'. This illustrates with respect to human beings the more general

But the phrase must also be read in light of the statements in verse 17—‘in him all things hold together’, τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν—and verse 19: ‘God was pleased to have his fullness reside in him’, ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι. The first is again susceptible to a reading where Christ is the cosmic glue binding all things together in the manner of the Stoic logos. But to make such an assertion we need far more than some textual affinities with Stoic writers. As we argued previously, a terse formula such as ‘in him all things hold together’ only makes sense when it is read within the larger philosophical or religious system within which it is embedded. I find no hint elsewhere in the New Testament that Christ is materially diffused through the universe (which the language of the cosmos as Christ’s body seems to imply). It is much more in keeping with the New Testament to say that as God’s authorized ruler over the creation Christ’s powerful command is what orders the world.²⁹ To put it as plainly as possible: things hold together because he wants them to hold together; and he wants them to because God wants them to.

The smooth transition from ‘in him all things were created’ to ‘in him all things hold together’ reinforces the seamless integration of world formation and world maintenance in ancient thought. Colossians preserves the Old Testament distinctive of creation at a given point in time, and it is equally happy to preserve the concomitant teaching that God’s creative activity in some sense extends into the present. While in 1 Corinthians Paul underscores Christ’s mediating role in dramatic events of salvation history, here Paul affirms that the constant, necessary work of maintaining cosmic order is likewise done by God ‘in Christ’.

As for verse 19, its position in the hymn suggests it is related specifically to Christ’s eschatological role, rather than being a bare ontological proposition. Two options present themselves. If we connect the ὅτι clause with the following verse, ‘and through him to reconcile all things to himself’, Paul would be intimating that Christ’s redemptive work is predicated upon God putting his fullness into Christ. Because he shares the divine identity, he is able to secure

principle that Christ will present the entire cosmos to God for God’s glory (esp. in 1 Cor. 15; cf. also Phil 2: 11).

²⁹ Cf. esp. Heb. 1: 3: ‘bearing up all things by the word of his power’.

universal reconciliation. If instead we read it with the affirmations of Christ's primacy in verse 18, the meaning changes slightly. God wanted Christ to reign over all things, therefore he poured his fullness into him. This fits well with the reading we have offered for verse 15, and with the thrust of the hymn as a whole, and I would prefer it to the first option.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF COLOSSIANS 1
TO THE DOCTRINE OF JESUS'
SCHÖPFUNGSMITTLERSCHAFT

If Colossians 1 is, as most scholars believe, an early Christian hymn (or part of one), it shows that an affirmation of Christ's role in creation formed a part of early Christian worship. This is understandable, since the praise of God as creator was likewise a standard part of Jewish liturgy. Whether this implies that the doctrine originated in worship is much more difficult to determine. It certainly could have: the formulas throughout the New Testament, and not only in Colossians, are pithy and may have first taken shape in poetry. This does not mean, however, that they arose spontaneously in an outburst of stereotypical 'poetic genius'. The Colossians hymn not only shows careful literary composition, it presupposes a very refined theology of creation and redemption, and Christ's central role in both. The hymn is more likely the end point of a lengthy process of theological reflection rather than the beginning.

But the hymn itself only hints at that process. It is more difficult to discern a 'Wisdom Christology' or an adapted Hellenistic cosmology than is often supposed. At best, the hymn shows that Jesus' role in creation could be put in terms congenial to the Hellenistic mind-set. Phrases like 'in him', 'through him', and 'for him' are at one level instances of the prepositional theology that formed part of the religious koine of Hellenism. But the very popularity of the idiom makes finding meaningful parallels difficult. They are the shop windows of Graeco-Roman religion: the interesting thing is not the shop window itself, but rather what is on display there. For Paul, it is Jesus

the Messiah; and if some aspects of Wisdom tradition may be used in the depiction, the picture is clearly of Jesus as Lord of all creation.

Colossians 1 provides the clearest evidence that Christ's role in creation was developed in light of his role in redemption. Immediately before the hymn begins, we are informed that 'in him we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins' (v. 14). Statements that Christ is the one through whom God made all things are carefully balanced by statements that Christ is the one through whom God reconciled all things to himself. The stream of universal reconciliation at the hymn's conclusion (v. 20) is swiftly channeled to the spiritual restoration of the Colossians, which dominates the remainder of the epistle. In this sense, the doctrine of creation serves to undergird the doctrine of redemption. While the doctrine of Jesus' role as creator does assist Paul in combating asceticism (2: 18–23), its primary thrust is to underscore the fact that the religious life of the Colossians must be ordered by the word of the Messiah, not by any competing Jewish or Gentile ideology.

If Paul's focus is on overtly relational and 'religious' matters, however, we must not assume that 'saving souls' is the only thing in his purview. The structure of Colossians 1 equally demands that 'redemption' be viewed as re-creation. Far from being a mere platform for genuine spiritual salvation (like the booster rocket that drops off once the lunar module reaches a sufficient altitude), Jesus' role in creation is the indispensable foundation for all that follows. God has created all things through Christ, and therefore all things must be reconciled to God through Christ (v. 20). If eschatology precedes protology in the development of the doctrine historically, protology precedes eschatology theologically. It is not simply that there must logically be something there for him to save: the salvation is itself the full flowering of what was made in the beginning.

The hymn presents a terser version of the same vision of cosmic renewal put forward by Paul in Romans 8. The relationship of humanity to God remains at the core, as it does in Romans. Since the cursing of the ground in Genesis is the direct result of the breach in divine-human fellowship, the reconciling work of Christ on the cross is the basis for the flourishing of the cosmos. This, I believe, makes the best sense of Col. 1: 20: 'And through him to reconcile all

things to himself, having made peace through the blood of the cross, whether things on earth or things in heaven'. The blood of the cross remains the means by which God reconciles humanity to himself; but here the cosmic ramifications of that reconciliation are teased out. While the use of 'all things' in verse 20 can tolerate the exclusion of some reprobate beings from the blessings of the *eschaton*, it cannot tolerate the absolute removal of material reality as such. Christ has made the universe in all its diversity, and the renewal of that universe is the ultimate goal of his saving work.

Colossians also provides for an active role for the Church in the reclamation of the cosmos. Paul applies the Adamic language of 'bearing fruit and multiplying' to the Colossians (1: 6, 10), and he himself participates in Christ's mission of cosmic renewal through his suffering proclamation of the gospel (1: 23–9). The description of the creator Christ as the image of God is the seed from which all things spring. The Messiah creates what he will rule, but Adam's redeemed descendents, those re-created in Jesus' image, are still commissioned to exercise dominion over God's creation under the headship of the Messiah. The command to fill the earth and subdue it is not grounded first and foremost in the garden of Eden, such that one might view it as 'earthly', or provisional, or subject to revision in light of the Fall. It is rather embedded within the eternal nature of Christ as God's image. One could imagine the Messiah commissioning his image-bearers to do more than Adam—but not less.

Again, it is not surprising that this language of filling and bearing fruit is applied in Colossians to things traditionally subsumed under 'redemption': the forgiveness of sins, increase in holiness, growing love for God and neighbor. We have seen that the divine-human relationship is the crux of re-creation and thus receives the greatest attention. Colossians likewise shares with the rest of the New Testament the perspective that present existence is characterized by paradox. One's abiding hope and thus one's 'real' life are dependent on one's connection with Christ, which can be talked about either in spatial terms (the risen Christ is above, in the heavenly throne room) or temporal terms (Christ will return to transform us). In either case, existence in the present, earthly sphere is no longer determinative for the believer.

But the entire thrust of the New Testament is that God's will *will* be done on earth, as it is in heaven; and that 'the present evil age' will soon give way to the glorious 'age to come'. Paradox must give way one day to Paradise. Paul's statement in 1: 23 that the gospel has been proclaimed 'in all creation' is no mere hyperbole, but an affirmation of the world-changing implications of the message he is presenting. The marginalized community in Colossae may at first seem called to work within a limited sphere of proper worship and ethical excellence; but they must see this call as part of a greater project that involves all of earth and heaven.

‘In the beginning, Lord . . .’: The Contribution of Hebrews

BACKGROUND

With its polished Greek, its elaborate rhetorical structure, and its consistent contrast of heavenly archetypes and earthly antitypes, Hebrews is understandably regarded as one of the high-water marks of Hellenism in the New Testament. One might imagine, then, that here if anywhere we might find traces of philosophical influence on the doctrine of Jesus’ *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*. Before we draw such a conclusion, however, we need to consider the substantial evidence that the book’s teachings about Jesus are drawn primarily from messianic categories, and that this should therefore form the interpretive matrix for its teaching on Jesus’ agency in creation.¹

The epistle’s first sentence contains an allusion to the messianic Psalm 2: the Son who is heir of all things (ἐν νύμφῃ, ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων) corresponds to Ps. 2: 7, υἱός μου εἶ σύ ἐγὼν σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε, and Ps. 2: 8, καὶ δώσω σοι ἔθνη τὴν κληρονομίαν σου. This comes immediately before the note that the Son is the one through whom God made all things. In verse 3 we have reference to another classic messianic text, Ps. 110: 1 (LXX 109): ‘The Lord said to my Lord, *sit at my right hand* (κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου; cf. Heb. 1: 3: ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ) until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’. The catena of Old Testament quotations that dominates

¹ Special thanks to Jon Laansma and Edward Adams, whose papers on the cosmology of Hebrews at the 2006 St Andrews Hebrews conference greatly stimulated my thinking on creation in the epistle.

the rest of the chapter is likewise rife with messianic references: Ps. 2: 7 appears again in the first half of verse 5, while the second half of verse 5 quotes the promise to David's seed in 2 Sam. 7: 14. The mention of the 'firstborn' in verse 6 is also a Davidic allusion, this time from Ps. 89: 28, while verses 8–9 quote from the royal psalm Septuagint Ps. 44: 7ff. The Son's role in creation is dramatically depicted in verses 10–12 (see below), before the catena is rounded off with an explicit citation of Ps. 110: 1 (109: 1 LXX).

Chapter 2 continues with the theme of messianic dominion, this time drawing upon Psalm 8 as the central text. The underlying theology is similar to what we have already seen in our discussion of 1 Corinthians 15: Psalm 110 and Psalm 8 coalesce, in that the Messiah as the ultimate Son of Man exercises the dominion over creation which had been entrusted to humanity in the beginning. The discussion of house-building in chapter 3 arguably falls into the same pattern. The covenantal promise in 2 Samuel 7 focuses precisely on house-building. David offers to build God a house, and God counters that he will build David's house, and that any literal house-building will be done by David's son, not David himself. Jesus' establishment of the Church (Heb. 3: 6) represents the initial fulfillment of this promise. The consummation will come after the greater Joshua definitively conquers his enemies and gives his people their rest (ch. 4).

The central chapters on Melchizedek constitute the most sustained messianic motif in the book. While the emphasis of the comparison of Christ and Melchizedek obviously lies on priestly activity, it is the appearance of Melchizedek in Psalm 110 as priest-king that forms the basis for the author's argument. The Messiah is by definition God's chosen king, and Hebrews is filled with proof texts affirming Jesus' kingship. But Psalm 110 tells us that priesthood is also a part of his messianic mission. Thus the Son who abides permanently as the Creator and Lord of all things (1: 8, 11) also abides permanently as high priest (*υἱὸν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τετελειωμένον*). Just as all things are made through him (*δι' οὗ*, 1: 2), so it is through him (*δι' αὐτοῦ*) that Christians come to God (7: 25).

Even the lengthy exposition of Jer. 31: 31–4 in chapters 8–10 can justly be subsumed under Jesus' role as Messiah. The word *διαθήκη* appears first in the epistle in 7: 22: Jesus is the guarantor of a better

covenant because of his eternal priesthood, which the Lord gave him with an oath. The proof text for this (Heb. 7: 21) is Psalm 110: 4: 'The Lord has sworn (ὥμοσεν) and will not change his mind: you are a priest forever'. Thus the discussion of Jeremiah 31 in chapters 8–10 is an elaboration of the covenant made with Christ in the quintessential messianic text: Psalm 110. Given the citations of Psalm 89 in Heb. 1: 6 and 11: 26, it is also likely the author of Hebrews would align Jeremiah's new covenant with the covenant made with David: 'I have made a *covenant* (διαθήκην) with my chosen one, I have *sworn* (ὥμοσα) to David my servant' (LXX Ps. 88: 4).

The final chapters of the book feature two more clear allusions to Ps. 110: 1, in 10: 12–13 and 12: 2, but the point has been made long before then: Psalm 110's depiction of the priest-king seated forever at God's right hand forms the centerpiece of Hebrews' Christology. Covenant and creation alike are to be understood within the messianic framework provided by the psalm.

We may still ask whether Hellenism impinges at all on this central theme of messianic mediation. The mere appearance of polarities such as heavenly/earthly and type/antitype is not sufficient to demonstrate 'Platonic' thinking, since these divisions go far back in the Ancient New East.² Further, the distinctions in Hebrews between 'shadow' and 'reality' focus largely on the provisions of the Old Testament cult, not on the world as a whole, as in Plato or Philo. It is true that the heavenly realm is depicted as enduring, in sharp contrast to the impermanence of existence on earth, such that the heavenly city will remain stable while the current world order will be shaken to bits (12: 25–8, discussion below). But even here the emphasis is more on temporal distinctions than spatial ones. The eschatological scenario assumed by Hebrews is remarkably similar to the remainder of the New Testament: Christians are exhorted to hold onto their faith despite persecution (Heb. 10: 32–6; 12: 1–13), since Christ will return (9: 28; 10: 37), raise them from the dead even as he was raised (Heb. 6: 2; 11: 19; cf. 1 Thess. 4: 13 ff.; Rev. 20–2), and bring them into the eschatological Jerusalem for an eternal reward (Heb. 10: 36; 11: 10; 12: 22). If the writer of Hebrews meant anything

² See esp. L. D. Hurst, 'Eschatology and "Platonism" in the Epistle to the Hebrews', *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, 23 (1984), 41–74.

radically different by these things than other early Christians, he does not say so. There is no allegorizing of these elements in the manner of Philo.³

The rival mediators, meanwhile, are not the *λόγος* or *πνεῦμα* or anything of that sort, but rather traditional figures from the Jewish cult. The contrast between the ongoing, and for the author of Hebrews futile, mediating work of the priests in the temple and the permanent work of Christ is clear enough. Mediation also seems to be at issue in chapters 1–2. The statements on Christ's superiority over the angels are not merely designed to maximize his ontological status. They are there to ensure that the readers know that Christ's word is weightier than that spoken through angels (*ὁ δι' ἀγγέλων λαληθεὶς λόγος*, 2: 2)—presumably a reference to the Law. It is also worth noting that the work Christ has done to secure redemption for his people is work carried out in the sphere of the created order. His sacrifice in the body God prepared for him (10: 5, 10) has sanctified believers.

We may also point out that the basis of the author's argument is scriptural exposition. That is true of Philo as well, of course. But Hebrews' exegesis is driven by the desire to show that the Old Testament promises have been fulfilled in Christ, not by a desire to show that an allegorical reading of the Old Testament text reveals a philosophy fully compatible with Middle Platonism.

To summarize, it is perhaps reasonable to describe Hebrews as 'Platonish' rather than genuinely 'Platonic'.⁴ The contrast of heavenly permanence and earthly 'shakability', the language of 'shadows' and paradigms, and even the elegance of the Greek prose all serve to

³ On this see above all C. K. Barrett, 'The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews', in W. D. Davies and D. Daube (eds.), *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology: In Honour of C. H. Dodd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 363–93. Cf. his introductory sentence (p. 363): 'The author of Hebrews, profound theologian as he was, stood perhaps nearer to the main stream of Christian tradition, and drew more upon that stream and less upon extraneous sources, than is sometimes allowed.'

⁴ See again Barrett, 'Eschatology', 293: The author of Hebrews 'had seized upon the idealistic element in apocalyptic, and he developed it in terms that Plato—or, better, Philo—could have understood. But his parables are parables for the present time—eschatological parables... In all this the eschatological imagery is primary, as it must always be in any Christian approach to philosophy'.

present the Christian message in a way congenial to refined Hellenistic sensibilities. Jesus and his kingdom consistently fall on the right side of the classic Platonic dualities. On closer inspection, however, the author puts forward a recognizable version of early Christian eschatology, replete with a returning Christ, final judgment, and eternal blessings for the faithful.

WISDOM?

If direct Platonic influence on Hebrews' view of creation remains difficult to trace, there is still the possibility that Hellenistic Jewish literature in general, and Jewish Wisdom speculation in particular, has contributed to the creation Christology of Hebrews. Lane's comments are representative of many:

Although Jesus is introduced as the divine Son (v 2*a*), the functions attributed to him are those of the Wisdom of God: he is the mediator of revelation, the agent and sustainer of creation, and the reconciler of others to God. Each of these christological affirmations echoes declarations concerning the role of divine Wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon (cf. Wis 7: 21–27). Once the categories of divine Wisdom were applied to Jesus, his association with the creative activity of God was strengthened (cf. Prov 8: 22–31; Wis 7: 22; 9: 2, 9).⁵

Before we attempt to determine how much, if at all, Wisdom traditions have affected Hebrews' Christology, we must affirm yet again that the most obvious and pertinent category of interpretation offered within the text itself is that of Messiah. The Messiah was the consummate wisdom-bearer, and thus I might be happier with Lane's formulation if he had stated '*Because* Jesus is introduced as the divine Son, the functions attributed to him are those of the

⁵ W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 2002), 11. Cf. the very balanced comments of Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1989), 39–47, who acknowledges the background of Heb. 1: 2–3 in Wisdom tradition without letting that putative background dominate his exegesis.

Wisdom of God', rather than 'Although Jesus is introduced as the divine Son . . .'.⁶

But should we be looking at Wisdom in the first place as a primary background? Wisdom is certainly seen as involved in creation in Jewish tradition, but we have argued that in almost every instance this is simply a way of saying that the created order reflects God's Wisdom. Wisdom was hardly the only word used to describe God's creative activity. Hebrews has a penchant for the word *λόγος* (used twelve times in the book), and so it would seem *prima facie* far more likely that the author would be employing a theology of God's creative Word rather than his creative Wisdom, especially since *σοφία* does not occur in the book at all. It is also worth noting that verse 2 emphasizes that 'in these last days God has *spoken* to us in a Son . . . through whom he made the ages'.

Heb. 11: 3 states plainly that *Πίστει νοοῦμεν κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ*. The parallels with 1: 2 are clear. Whether the use of the dative *ῥήματι* signals something different from *διὰ* and the genitive may be questioned; we have seen that cases and prepositions can be used more or less interchangeably even by authors who might elsewhere take pains to define their 'proper' use. In the same way *κατηρτίσθαι* is probably the functional equivalent of *ἐποίησεν* in 1: 2.⁷ The formal similarities between the two verses are not so striking as to demand an absolute equivalence, as if the writer were

⁶ Cf. Lane's more persuasive follow-up comments: 'The conviction that Jesus was the pre-existent Son of God encouraged the identification of him as the one through whom God created the world. Conversely, since Jesus was the one through whom God created the world, he must be the pre-existent Son of God' (p. 12).

⁷ Why, then, use *κατηρτίσθαι* at all, aside from stylistic variation? It is probably done to bring the creation into connection with the two other verses in which the verb is used: 10: 5, *σῶμα δὲ κατηρτίσω μοι*, and 13: 21, *καταρτίσαι ὑμᾶς ἐν παντὶ ἀγαθῷ εἰς τὸ ποιῆσαι τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ*. God, who prepared the world, and prepared Christ for a life of incarnate service, will likewise prepare believers for their own service in the world. The association of the covenant with David's seed and the creation of the world, using *καταρτίζω*, is already made in LXX Ps. 88: 34–8 (note that the seed is explicitly called *τὸν χριστόν σου* in v. 39), and it is likely this portion of the psalm has influenced the author of Hebrews' word choice in 11: 3. In addition to the overt messianic reference and the link with Ps. 40: 7/Heb. 10: 5, LXX Ps. 88: 34ff. contains mention of David's seed *remaining forever* (v. 37: *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα μενεῖ*; cf. Heb. 1: 8; 7: 28) and his *throne* abiding like the sun (v. 37; cf. Heb. 1: 8); an *oath* (v. 36; cf. Heb. 7: 20–1); and a *covenant* (vv. 36, 40; cf. Heb. 8: 8ff.).

finally revealing in 11: 3 that the *ῥήμα* in question is ‘really’ Jesus. That may be the case, but we can at least say that when the author thinks about the creation of the world, he chooses to associate it with God’s speaking rather than with God’s Wisdom. This is fully in keeping with his desire to hold forth the message of the Messiah as God’s definitive communication to humanity (e.g. 1: 2; 2: 1–4; 3: 7–8; 4: 2, 12–13; 6: 1; 12: 18–29, esp. v. 25).

One might argue that the writer deliberately eschews using Wisdom, to keep the spotlight on Christ himself, but this does not comport with his rhetorical strategy in the rest of the book. Christ is superior to angels, Moses, the earthly high priest, and any number of other things, but unlike Wisdom they are all explicitly named in the text. If the argument is rather that Christ *is* Wisdom, and thus Wisdom can remain unnamed, one wonders why the author did not make the same kind of argument he made with Melchizedek: this Old Testament concept adumbrates the coming work of the Messiah.⁸

The linguistic and theological evidence is similarly indeterminate. Wis. 7: 25 is regularly adduced as a parallel to Heb. 1: 3; and it must be admitted that Wisdom’s *ἀπαύγασμα γάρ ἐστιν φωτὸς αἰδίου . . . καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ* is close to Hebrews’ *ὅς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ*. I would not want to deny that the language of Wis. 7: 26 may indeed have affected the author’s choice of words here. But, in accordance with our discussion in Chapter 4, I would be equally hesitant to reduce his thought to an easily appropriated ‘Wisdom theology’. While *ἀπαύγασμα* only occurs in Wisdom and Hebrews in Greek Scripture, the idea of ‘effulgence’ fits equally well with Christ being God’s light, which appears in the context of creation in Psalm 104 (see below). Philo tellingly uses *ἀπαύγασμα* when speaking of the divine *λόγος* and the human intellect: the intellect is ‘an impression or fragment or radiance of the blessed nature’, *τῆς μακαρίας φύσεως ἐκμαγεῖον ἢ*

⁸ Note the appropriately cautious comments of Paul Ellingworth (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 99): ‘Despite allusions to Wis. 7, Hebrews does not identify Christ with wisdom . . . and indeed avoids the term *σοφία*. The author’s use of Wis. 7 and similar passages such as Pr. 8: 22–31 is an implicit reapplication to Christ of what had been written of the divine wisdom’. He is echoing the sentiments of Casimir Romaniuk, ‘Le Livre de la Sagesse dans le Nouveau Testament’, *New Testament Studies*, 14 (1968), 498–514, esp. p. 513.

ἀπόσπασμα ἢ ἀπαύγασμα (Opif. 146).⁹ Wisdom in Jewish tradition was just one image among many used to express the outpouring of God's self to the creation, and it should only be highlighted as relevant background if there are solid contextual reasons to do so. Judging by Philo's usage, the use of ἀπαύγασμα alone does not constitute valid grounds. Rather than being a technical term for Wisdom, it could serve as a vivid metaphor for any 'outward extension' of God.

As for the assertion that Wisdom is the 'reconciler of others to God', we have seen how even in the Wisdom of Solomon the 'redemptive' activity of Wisdom is usually a way of saying that people who act wisely experience God's blessing. Hebrews' conception of reconciliation, moreover, is firmly tied into cultic atonement imagery. Jesus reconciles people to humanity not in a generalized way, but quite specifically by being both sacrificial victim and ministering priest.

Thus while Wisdom traditions may have influenced the author of Hebrews in his choice of vocabulary, even this is not easily demonstrable. The driving force of chapter 1 is the power and authority of God's Messiah, whose eschatological work is read back to his proto-logical work. If the author consciously sought out biblical traditions to bolster this move, it is just as likely he did so by way of image or Word as by Wisdom.

As we assess the background of Hebrews, then, there is little question that the author of Hebrews was comfortable in the milieu of Hellenistic Judaism. His palette shows marked similarities to the hues of Sirach or the Wisdom of Solomon, and like them he uses Hellenistic rhetorical conventions to depict traditional Jewish beliefs. But Hebrews' focus on Jesus the Messiah as God's final Word leads him in some very different directions. Neither Platonic philosophy nor Jewish Wisdom traditions drive his argument on Christ and creation. Rather, it takes shape around 'Jesus, the founder and finisher of the faith' (Heb. 12: 2) and the Old Testament texts which for the author adumbrate his messianic work. With this in mind, we turn to the relevant passages in the epistle.

⁹ cf. Philo's description of the soul breathed into man by God in Genesis: *τρισμακαρίας φύσεως ἀπάνγασμα* (Spec. 4: 123).

EXEGESIS

1: 2

We have already noted the messianic allusions from Psalm 2 in the phrase ‘whom he appointed heir of all things’ in 1: 2. We may now turn our attention to the explicit statement on Christ’s agency in creation: ‘through whom he made the ages’ (δι’ οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας). The use of διὰ with the genitive is familiar enough, and coming on the heels of the Psalms reference makes good sense: God handed over the work of creation to the Messiah just as he hands over rulership over the nations to the Messiah. What catches the attention is the use of αἰῶνας for the object of God’s creation through Christ.

This may be nothing more than an elegant way of saying ‘the world’. The word generally has a temporal orientation, appearing most frequently in the stock phrases for ‘forever’, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα or εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, but it can certainly bear the sense of ‘the universe’ elsewhere in biblical and extra-biblical literature (cf. Wis. 13: 9). In almost all cases the translation ‘age’ or ‘era’ best captures the meaning. The singular is also far more common than the plural, but the latter does have scattered occurrences in the Old Testament and Apocrypha, typically in phrases like ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων. We have seen that 4Q Ages of Creation (4Q180) can speak of ‘the ages which God has made’.

Nonetheless, the use of αἰών in this context of creation is rather unusual for the New Testament. The other New Testament texts on Jesus’ *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* employ τὰ πάντα. While three verses is a rather small pool of evidence, it does suggest that ‘the one through whom God created *all things*’ was something of a stock phrase which the author of Hebrews may have modified. The use of αἰών in the remainder of Hebrews heightens the suspicion that something more subtle may be at work in 1: 2. The word appears in two of the most important Old Testament quotations in the book: the citation of Psalm 45 in Heb. 1: 8, ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεός εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, and the note on Melchizedek in 5: 6, σὺ ἱερεὺς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ (cf. 7: 17, 21, 24, 28), as well as in statements about the ‘powers of the age to come’ (6: 5), the consummation of the ages

(9: 26), and the eternal nature of the Son and his kingdom (7: 28, 13: 8, 21). If nothing else, the peculiar phrase in 1: 2 would help maintain a literary connection with one of the author's favorite words.

But the reason it is one of his favorite words is that it captures so well the essential contrast between the transitory condition of life in the present world and the enduring glories of Christ's kingdom. While 'all things' might seem restricted to the initial act of creation, or might indiscriminately mix protological and eschatological realities, 'the ages' maintains a clearer distinction between the present age of anticipation and the coming age of consummation.¹⁰

But does Christ's creative work, or God's creative work, for that matter, entail the creation of the age to come as well? The description in 1: 2 suggests this is the case, and we have an explicit statement in 11: 10 that God is the 'designer and builder' (τεχνίτης καὶ δημιουργός) of the 'city which has foundations'.¹¹ The passage noted above from 4Q Ages of Creation specifies not only that God made the ages, but that 'before creating them he determined their operations [according to the precise sequence of the ages,] one age after another age'.¹² Given the general tenor of the Qumran scrolls, the glorious age to come must be included in this creation of 'the ages'.

While one may thus feel that there is no reason to imagine Christ would have been left out of this aspect of creation, we must reckon with the very difficult passage in 12: 26–7:

His voice shook the earth then, and now he has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.' By 'yet once more' he signifies the removal of what can be shaken, as of created things (πεποιτημένων), in order that what cannot be shaken may remain.

At first blush, it seems that the author of Hebrews is making a contrast between things which are created, and are therefore subject

¹⁰ Attridge (p. 41) acknowledges the attraction of the translation 'ages' but believes it is rather used in 'a spatial sense, of the spheres that comprise the universe'.

¹¹ See Jon Laansma, 'The Cosmology of Hebrews', in Jonathan Pennington and Sean McDonough (eds.), *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (London: Clark, 2008), 134. Laansma also cites 11: 16, where God has 'prepared' (ἡτοίμασεν) a city for his people, and 8: 2, where he 'sets up' (ἐπηξεν) the heavenly tabernacle.

¹² Trans. Garcia Martinez.

to 'shaking' and dissolution, and things which are not created, specifically the coming heavenly kingdom. Such a heavenly home would also be a halfway house between Platonism and early Christianity: the current cosmos is subject to the traditional shaking of divine wrath, but the righteous find refuge in the unchanging, uncreated world of celestial ideals.¹³

We have seen that the rest of Hebrews does not inspire us towards Platonic readings as a default setting; but could this verse tip the balance the other way? I do not think so. First, the author does not assert that the coming kingdom is necessarily uncreated; he only says it is unshakable. One could envision a coming kingdom which exists at present only in potential, and which is yet to be fully realized. The current world system, with its dim evocations of the world to come, has come into being and is what it is, and no more. In this sense it is already 'created', *πεποιημένων*, in a way that the new world is not. This would map perfectly onto the rest of Hebrews, where the contrast is always between the present age, which is becoming obsolete, and the age to come, which will endure forever. The description of the current world system in 9: 11 as 'this creation' (*ταύτης τῆς κτίσεως*) can be taken to imply another creation; namely, the world to come.¹⁴

The scriptural background of Heb. 12: 26–9 must also be taken into consideration. The quotation from Hag. 2: 6, 21 confirms for the author of Hebrews that the old cosmos itself is as liable to removal and/or renovation as the old covenant; both must give way to a new order. But where does he find the idea that there is an 'unshakable' kingdom? A. Vanhoye, followed by Lane, has found the answer in the Psalms. Both Septuagint Ps. 92: 1 and Septuagint Ps. 95: 10 contain the phrase 'the world which will not be shaken', *τὴν οἰκουμένην ἣτις οὐ σαλευθήσεται*. In Ps. 92: 1 God 'strengthens' (*ἐστέρεωσεν*) this

¹³ Cf. the Middle Platonist reading of Hebrews in Wilfried Eisele, *Ein Unerschütterliches Reich: Die Mittelplatonische Umformung des Parusiegedankens im Hebräerbrieff* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003). Despite compiling an impressive array of Hellenistic texts, Eisele fails to convince me that the meaning of the Parousia texts in Hebrews ought to be determined by Hellenistic philosophy. It seems exponentially more likely that the author of Hebrews is (perhaps) adopting (some) Middle Platonic tropes in the service of the basic Christian message, rather than vice versa.

¹⁴ Laansma 134.

οἰκουμένη, while in Ps. 95: 10 he ‘sets it straight’ or ‘completes’ (κατώρθωσεν) it.

The writer of Hebrews was thus faced with a classic problem of apparent scriptural contradiction. While he is perhaps not a rabbi, he solves it in good rabbinic fashion. According to the prophets, the world can be shaken; according to the Psalms, it cannot be. Invoking the difference in vocabulary (Haggai uses γῆ and οὐρανός, the Psalms use οἰκουμένη) does not help, since Septuagint Ps. 76: 19 says the οἰκουμένη was shaken during the Exodus (τῇ οἰκουμένῃ ἐσαλεύθη). What is the solution? Simply invoke the common idea of the two ages: there is a world which can be shaken, the present one; and there is one which cannot be shaken, the coming one.¹⁵

Assuming Psalm 92 and Psalm 95 are in play, one may still argue that the aorist tenses of ἐστερέωσεν and κατώρθωσεν suggest that this heavenly world is *already* created. This alone does not tell us much, since the aorist need not imply the action has been completed. Both Septuagint Ps. 92: 1 and Septuagint 95: 10 preface the discussion of the οἰκουμένη by saying ‘The Lord reigns’ using the aorist: ὁ κύριος ἐβασίλευσεν. This cannot mean ‘The Lord reigned, and that is now over’. In the same way, it is perfectly acceptable to translate the other aorists in a similar way: the Lord strengthens or makes complete the world that cannot be shaken.¹⁶

The second chapter of Hebrews also encourages us to extend Christ’s work in creation to the age to come. The author explains in verse 5 that the burden of his chapter is the τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν, and specifically the subjection of this coming world to humanity. He then invokes Psalm 8. While humanity’s attempts to

¹⁵ The influence of the Psalms here is, I think, logically deducible. Further support for this may be found in the use of the relatively rare verb in LXX Ps. 95: 10 for God’s ‘setting straight’ of creation: κατώρθωσεν. It is of interest that Heb. 9: 10 speaks of the age to come as a ‘time of reformation’: καιροῦ διορθώσεως; given the ὀρθός root, we might want to translate, ‘a time of straightening things out’. Similarly, 12: 12 encourages the readers to ‘strengthen’, ἀνορθώσατε, their weakened hands and knees. Neither of these demands the influence of Ps. 95: 10, but there is at least the suggestion that the writer of Hebrews saw the inaugurated end times as a period of ‘straightening out’, and Ps. 95: 10 would provide a sound basis for this conception.

¹⁶ The author may have found support for the creation of the ‘upper level’ of reality in LXX Ps. 103: 3: ὁ στεγάζων ἐν ὕδασι τὰ ὑπερῶα αὐτοῦ; the ‘upper rooms’ (τὰ ὑπερῶα) could be taken as a reference to the world to come.

subject all things to its will may be deemed a failure, the victory of Christ assures believers that the vision of Psalm 8 will be fulfilled in the eschaton.¹⁷

Thus 12: 26–9 does not deviate from the two-ages schema common to early Judaism and Christianity in favor of a timeless Platonist model. The carefully chosen formula of 1: 2 confirms what we would have inferred from the general New Testament premise that Christ is agent of creation: God's agent of creation of the first world order is also the agent of the coming world order. The idea of 'shaking' that which has '(already) been made' (12: 27) may, however, add the wrinkle that God's creation of the heavenly city through Christ should not be seen as a completed act. In some sense, the city must be already there: the saints *have come* (προσεληλυθότες) to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (12: 22). At the same time, their full Sabbath rest is still outstanding, and they must persevere to enter the promised blessing. Only when the first creation is 'shaken' will the world to come be fully realized.

1: 7

'But concerning angels he says, "The one who makes his angels spirits [or winds], his servants a flame of fire"'. The citation from Septuagint Ps. 103: 4 represents the best (and perhaps the only) possible proof text in the Hebrew Bible for the *creation of angels*. While the emphasis in the verse may lie on the mutability of angels, compared with the stability of God and his Messiah, it surely did not escape the author's notice that this reference occurs squarely in the midst of a passage concerning God's creative power (e.g. LXX Ps. 103: 3: ὁ στεγάζων ἐν ὕδασι τὰ ὑπερῶα αὐτοῦ ὁ τιθεὶς νέφη τὴν ἐπίβασιν αὐτοῦ ὁ περιπατῶν ἐπὶ πτερύγων ἀνέμων).¹⁸ The author is thus contrasting the creator Christ of verse 2 with the created angels. There is even the possibility that the author of Hebrews read

¹⁷ See the comments at Lane 49.

¹⁸ Cf. e.g. *Gen. Rabb.* 1: 3: 'When were the angels created? R. Johanan said, They were created on the second day, as it is written, "Who layest the beams of Thine upper chambers in the waters" (Ps. 104: 3), followed by, "Who makest the spirits Thine angels (Ps. 104: 4)"'.

Septuagint Psalm 103 to mean that Christ himself created the angels. I suggest this in light of the careful wording of the Psalmist in the opening verses. God does not simply show up and start creating. Rather, prior to stretching out heaven, he clothes himself ‘with praise and beauty, wrapping himself in light as a garment’ (ἐξομολόγησιν καὶ εὐπρέπειαν ἐνεδύσω ἀναβαλλόμενος φῶς ὡς ἱμάτιον: 103: 1–2). Jesus has already been described in Heb. 1: 3 as the effulgence of God’s glory (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης) and the one through whom God made the ages. In Heb. 1: 6, meanwhile, the author cites Septuagint Ps. 96: 7: προσκυνήσατε αὐτῷ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ. The immediately preceding verse in Septuagint Psalm 96 says that ‘all the peoples see his glory’ (εἶδον πάντες οἱ λαοὶ τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ) as he comes in judgment. Given the widespread association of God’s coming in judgment with the παρουσία of Jesus (e.g. 1 Thess. 4: 16; 2 Thess. 2: 1–2; 2 Pet. 3: 10; Rev. 1: 7), and the citation of Ps. 96: 7, it seems likely the author of Hebrews would have viewed the visible glory of God as Christ himself.¹⁹

1: 10

Heb. 1: 10ff. is perhaps the boldest statement in the entire New Testament concerning Jesus’ role in creation. Quoting Septuagint Ps. 101: 26–8, the author takes the creative act of YHWH and attributes it (seemingly without further ado) to Christ:

¹⁰ ... σὺ κατ’ ἀρχάς, κύριε, τὴν γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας, καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου εἰσιν οἱ οὐρανοί

¹¹ αὐτοὶ ἀπολοῦνται, σὺ δὲ διαμένεις, καὶ πάντες ὡς ἱμάτιον παλαιωθήσονται,

¹² καὶ ὡσεὶ περιβόλαιον ἐλίξεις αὐτούς, ὡς ἱμάτιον καὶ ἀλλαγήσονται· σὺ δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς εἶ καὶ τὰ ἔτη σου οὐκ ἐκλείψουσιν.

You, in the beginning, Lord, founded the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands. They will perish, but you remain, and they all will grow

¹⁹ LXX Psalm 96 also contains the idea of eschatological ‘shaking’, which is such a prominent motif in Heb. 12: 25–8; cf. LXX Ps. 96: 4: ἔφθαναν αἱ ἀστραπαὶ αὐτοῦ τῇ οἰκουμένην εἶδεν καὶ ἔσαλεύθη ἡ γῆ.

old like a garment, and as a cloak you will roll them up, and like a garment they will be changed; but you are the same and your years will not fail.²⁰

This remarkable quotation demands explanation. How could the author so boldly assert that what YHWH did, Christ did? This appears to say much more than that the Messiah was somehow the instrument of creation, the one ‘through whom’ things came into being. One might try to avoid the difficulty by saying that the Messiah should be understood as the ‘hands’ of verse 26, or even the ‘beginnings’ earlier in the verse, though the plural ἀρχὰς ill fits the sort of exegesis of Gen. 1: 1 envisioned by Burney. But this would seem to vitiate the entire point of the citation, which is to contrast the eternality of the Messiah, as evidenced by his creative work, with the createdness of everything else, particularly angels. The Messiah must here be the κύριος, and so the problem remains.²¹

In order to solve it, we must first reckon with the radical assertions the author of Hebrews has made heretofore. As we have noted, the affirmation that God made all things through the Messiah, while familiar enough, still has the effect of putting Christ on the divine side of the divine/everything else divide. If our arguments concerning the author’s use of Psalm 104 are correct, the author had perhaps already attributed the creation to the Messiah as the effulgence of God’s glory. To put it in dogmatic terms, the Messiah is God as he orients himself towards his creation.

But there are some more precise reasons for the author to appropriate Septuagint Psalm 101. The first is that the Greek κύριος could regularly be used as a particular designation of the Messiah in

²⁰ The LXX Ps. 101 differs slightly from Hebrews 1, but this does not affect our discussion.

²¹ Lane has proposed the following solution: ‘In the LXX, however, a mistranslation of the unpointed Hebrew text opened the door for the christological appropriation of the passage. The radicals אָנִיחָה/’-n-h in v.24 (EV v.23), “he afflicted,” were translated “he answered” (ἀπεκρίθη, Vg *respondit*), with the result that vv.23–28 become the response of Yahweh. Consequently, Ps 102: 25–27 must refer to the creative activity of divine Wisdom or of the Messiah, not of God’ (p. 30). (He follows B. W. Bacon: ‘Heb 1, 10–12 and the Septuagint Rendering of Ps 102, 23’, *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 3 (1902) 280–5.) I must confess that I cannot see how this solves the problem. Verses 23–8 depict an interlocutor beset by weakness, who can hardly be YHWH, and thus there is no reason that verses 25–7 cannot refer to YHWH.

distinction from the Father.²² Equally important is the close thematic connection between the prior citation in verse 8 from Septuagint Ps. 44: 7: ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεός εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, καὶ ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου.²³ This is a close parallel to Septuagint Ps. 101: 13, σὺ δὲ κύριε εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα μένεις, as well as the explicitly cited verse 28: σὺ δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς εἶ καὶ τὰ ἔτη σου οὐκ ἐκλείψουσιν. The theme of kingship also informs both psalms (cf. Ps. 101: 23: ἐν τῷ συναχθῆναι λαοὺς ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ βασιλείας τοῦ δουλεύειν τῷ κυρίῳ). Whether the presence of εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα and βασιλείας in both texts is sufficient to constitute a full-blown *gezera shawa* may be debated, but the theme of *eternal kingship* is clearly present.

Finally, there is an intriguing note in verse 14 of Psalm 101 which may have contributed to this daring insertion of Ps. 101: 26–8 into the catena: σὺ ἀναστὰς οἰκτιρήσεις τὴν Σιών ὅτι καιρὸς τοῦ οἰκτιρῆσαι αὐτήν ὅτι ἤκει καιρὸς. The phrase σὺ ἀναστὰς is a straight translation of the Masoretic Text's **וַיִּשְׁתָּחֵל**, but for a New Testament writer the resurrection overtones of *ἀνίστημι* were always liable to be heard (cf. e.g. John 6: 39; Acts 2: 24; 13: 34). That verse 14 may have encouraged the author of Hebrews to identify the creator κύριος with Christ seems at least possible. In Heb. 1: 3, after his resurrection Jesus takes his place as ruler at the right hand of God, presumably in the heavenly Zion of 12: 22. According to 10: 37, Jesus *will come* shortly: ἔτι γὰρ μικρὸν ὅσον ὅσον, ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἥξει καὶ οὐ χρονίσει (cf. ὅτι ἤκει καιρὸς in Ps. 101: 14). If Jesus was understood as the eschatological deliverer of Israel (and the nations), as he surely was by the author of Hebrews, then the logic of the psalm would demand that the eternal, saving Lord of Ps. 101: 13–14 be the eternal, creating Lord of verses 26–8.²⁴

²² See e.g. 1 Cor. 8: 6; Phil. 2: 11; 1 Thess. 3: 11; 2 Pet. 1: 14, 16; Acts 2: 36.

²³ See William Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM, 1998), 148–50 for discussion of Psalm 45 and the equation of Messiah and God.

²⁴ For a similar outlook on the internal dynamics of LXX Psalm 101 which might yield a Christological reading see Ellingworth 125–6. He notes, in addition to the above, verse 19: γραφήτω αὕτη εἰς γενεὰν ἐτέραν. Bacon (pp. 282–5) notes the relevance of the eschatological perspective in Psalm 101 for Christian exegesis, and expresses openness to the idea that a messianic reading of Psalm 101 contributed to the author's view that Jesus was the agent of creation. He acknowledges, however, that

The conflation of Christ and YHWH here may tell against the common assumption that Christ's role in creation is driven primarily by the need to bridge the ontological gulf between God and the world. The author of Hebrews does little to alleviate the anxiety of Christianized Middle Platonists when he states that 'in the beginning you founded the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands'. In this verse at least, the clear intent is to *divide* the Father and the Son from everything else. This is not to deny that mediation forms an aspect of New Testament reflection on the Son's participation in creation. But it does suggest that its roots lay in the desire to elucidate Jesus' status as messianic son, not to solve philosophical problems.²⁵

2: 10

In Heb. 2: 10 God is described as the one 'on whose account are all things, and through whom are all things' (δι' ὃν τὰ πάντα καὶ δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα). This must refer specifically to God the Father, since Christ is the object in the sentence ('It is fitting for the one on whose account are all things and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect through sufferings the author of their salvation'). This illustrates the point we have made earlier about the flexibility of prepositional usage. Here, διὰ and the genitive denote not agency per se, but rather ultimate cause. At the theological level, the statement helps balance out the high-Christological assertions of the first chapter: Christ indeed fully participates in the creation and rule of the cosmos, but he is also in full solidarity with suffering humanity. He is one of many brothers and sisters under the common fatherhood of God (2: 11–18). It is this which enables Christ to be a merciful and faithful high priest, the perfect mediator between God and humanity.

the opposite might be true: the author already believed Jesus was agent of creation, and read Psalm 101 in light of that. I am much more inclined to the latter view, though it is surely possible the author would have seen a happy coincidence of the two in the psalm.

²⁵ Cf. Larry Hurtado's statement to this effect in *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2003), 124.

3: 1–6

The logic of the ‘house’ discussion in 3: 1–6 is very difficult to follow, but it may impinge on our understanding of Christ and creation. The house motif is triggered by Num. 12: 7, where Moses is described, in contrast to the rebellious Aaron and Miriam, as being ‘faithful in all my house’: ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ μου πιστός ἐστιν. (The setting of the scene at the entrance of the tabernacle would no doubt have heightened its attraction to the author of Hebrews.) We then follow a rather circuitous course of argument: Jesus is worthy of more honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house is honored more than the house itself; God is the builder of everything; Moses is faithful in the house as a servant, but Jesus is over the house as a son; and we (the Church) are in fact Christ’s house.

Our attention is drawn to verse 3b, where ‘the builder’ (ὁ κατασκευάσας) is mentioned in the comparison of Jesus and Moses. Is Jesus then seen as the builder of the cosmic ‘house’? The problem with this is not so much that God is described as ὁ δὲ πάντα κατασκευάσας in the next verse; the author of Hebrews can interchange God and Christ rather freely in this regard. Nor is it that the ‘house’ in verse 6 is the Church: a transition from the cosmic house to the human house would not be too surprising. The issue is rather that a strict logical parallelism from 3a to 3b would seem to demand that *Moses* be the house, which is very unlikely. There are undoubtedly loose ends hanging about, and no solution is likely to satisfy all interpreters. Nonetheless, in view of the strong assertions of Jesus’ role in creation in chapter 1, I think it likely that ‘the builder’ in 3: 3 is in fact Christ, the creator of the universe. The note that he is ‘worthy of more honor than the house’ is a broad phrase referring not only to ‘the house’ itself (which might refer strictly to the tabernacle in which Moses served, but could stand by extension for all created reality) but also to those who like Moses operate within it. Taken this way, the juxtaposition of Jesus as builder in verse 3 with God as the builder of all things in verse 4 is yet another instance of Hebrews’ remarkably high Christology.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF HEBREWS

Hebrews significantly illuminates our understanding of Christ's role in creation. Despite its Hellenistic flavor, the epistle gives us the clearest evidence in the New Testament that the doctrine of Jesus' agency of creation was seen as a direct consequence of his messianic status. The catena of quotations in chapter 1 draws heavily on classic messianic texts, and the remainder of the book illuminates Christ's priestly and covenantal work in light of the messianic psalms. As in Colossians, the creation motif serves primarily to reinforce the unquestionable superiority of Christ, though in Hebrews the emphasis lies on Christ as the definitive Word of God more than as the definitive ruler on God's behalf (though this is not of course excluded).

Depending on how one reads 1: 2 in light of the rest of the book, Hebrews may also give us our clearest affirmation of Christ's role in the creation of the world to come. This is counterintuitive, perhaps, since we are accustomed to thinking of Hebrews as one of the more spiritualized books in the New Testament. But Christ's redemptive work is not portrayed as a mere forensic process designed to enable individuals to live forever. The scope in Hebrews is much wider: working from Old Testament models of exodus and conquest, the author depicts Christ opening the way for his people to enter a new city. Through the lens of Psalm 8 he sees Christ fulfilling the creation mandate given to Adam (2: 5–10). Assuming the statement 'through whom he made the ages' is a reference to the present creation and the world to come, the statement that God is the designer and builder of the heavenly city presupposes that Christ is the agent of that process as well. Whereas in much of the New Testament the emphasis lies on Christ's eschatological restoration of people to fellowship with God, Hebrews lays a greater weight on the cosmic dimensions of his redemptive work.

Despite the strong inclination towards eschatology (a trait it shares with the rest of the New Testament), the affirmation of Christ's role in primal creation serves as an important theological foundation for the rest of Hebrews. If the present world order is provisional, as the work of God in Christ it is not illusory, and it is certainly not evil by virtue of its materiality. Rather, it is the essential prototype for the

world to come. And just as the elements in a manufacturing prototype are embedded within future designs, so Hebrews indicates that elements of this first age (e.g. the bodies of Christ and believers; 'Zion') will be glorified and incorporated within the age to come. Paradoxically, the 'city with foundations' is itself founded on the work of Christ done in this shakable world.

Union in Labor: Creation through the Son in the Gospel of John

In the end, there is the *λόγος*. The apex of high Christology in John 1 presents unique challenges, not the least of which is accounting for the reams of commentary that have trailed after the *λόγος* since the early days of the Church. As with the previous chapters, focusing sharply on the issue of agency in creation will clear the path considerably.

The first task is to set the parameters for the interpretive context of John 1: 3, 10. There is little dispute that the Prologue (vv. 1–18) forms a discrete section of John's Gospel and therefore may serve as the primary framework for understanding.¹ As with Colossians 1, however, there have been those who suggest that there is less in the Prologue than meets the eye—that hidden beneath what we have is an earlier hymn to the *λόγος*. The efforts to uncover such a proto-Prologue, in my judgment, have been no more successful than the efforts to uncover a proto-hymn in Colossians. The assertions about John the Baptist, to take one example, are not accretions to the text, but essential elements of any gospel introduction. It would be startling only if John the Baptist were somehow left out of the initial proceedings. The Prologue should be taken as it stands.²

¹ It should be noted, however, that Peter Williams, in a massively detailed (but not yet published) argument from ancient texts and commentaries, points out that a definite marking out of the 'Prologue' did not take place until Griesbach's 1777 Greek Testament. The argument was presented at the 2006 British New Testament conference and the 2006 Johannine Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature.

² In favor of the integrity of the Prologue, and its affinities with the rest of the Gospel, see e.g. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 111–12.

Expanding the interpretive context to include the Gospel as a whole requires more argument. The most persuasive reason for doing so is that there is no evidence that the Prologue, even in its present form, ever circulated independently of the remainder of the Gospel. In order to establish the independence of the Prologue, one would need to make an iron-clad case that the Prologue simply could not have been a part of the original writing. I do not believe this has been done, or indeed can be done.

An ideal starting point for tracing the interconnection of the Gospel and the Prologue is the transition point of 1: 19: 'And this is the witness of John, when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?"'. This fits very nicely with the Prologue in terms of style, with the introductory *καί* matching well with, for example, 1: 5. More importantly, this verse and the pericopes which follow are firmly interlocked with the content of the previous verses. John's calling was to give testimony (*μαρτυρία*) to the Light (1: 6–8), and here we see the historical manifestation of that theological fact. It stands to reason that the remainder of the Gospel should work in analogous fashion with Christ: in the words and deeds of Jesus we see the historical manifestation of the eternal *λόγος*. The only way around this is to imagine, with no support whatsoever, a prologue without John the Baptist, or a gospel without the Prologue.

The lexical and theological ties with the rest of the Gospel go well beyond the witness of John the Baptist. 'Life' (*ζωή*) appears twice in 1: 4 and then appears thirty more times throughout the Gospel. 'Light' likewise appears first in the Prologue (1: 3–5) and remains a significant theme. The same may be said for *κόσμος*. The rejection of Jesus by the Jewish authorities surfaces in 1: 11 and becomes a leitmotif of the narrative (see esp. chs. 8–10). While the connection of *λόγος* itself with the remainder of the Gospel has occasioned much discussion (though too little, I will argue, has been made of these connections), suffice it to say for now that it appears thirty-six times outside the Prologue. This makes for a total of forty uses altogether, a number that may not be accidental. Why the prologue's use of *λόγος* appears to differ from the use in the rest of the Gospel will be discussed below.³

³ The theme of creation, which is a key point of connection between the Prologue and the rest of the Gospel, is of such obvious importance for us that we reserve a separate section for it below.

The demonstrable literary and thematic connections between the Prologue and the rest of the Gospel have significant ramifications for interpretation. Most importantly for us, it means that there is no necessary reason to search for a prior Jewish or Hellenistic 'hypostatic' λόγος to account for John 1: 1. For John, Jesus' words and works in history demonstrate that he shares the divine identity. The union of Father and Son is so complete that it becomes impossible to imagine a time when the Messiah was not one with the Father. John therefore searches for Scriptures which might somehow anticipate this remarkable intrusion of God into human existence. He finds this most concisely captured in the concept of God's creative *speaking*, a comprehensive term for God's self-expression to the world. But he is not looking to the Old Testament to bolster his belief in Jesus' divinity; for him the union of Father and Son is a matter of public record. Nor does he imagine that recourse to Scripture will solve all possible theological problems; he seems quite content to bring problems along with him in the person of Jesus. I do not, in other words, believe he was searching for a perfect, preconceived, and generally accepted scriptural interpretation into which he might easily fit Jesus. Instead, Jesus himself becomes his hermeneutical guide. It is λόγος which must be made to fit Jesus the Messiah, and not the other way round.

But we do not want to overstate the case; there must still be some meaningful connection between what John is testifying to and the intellectual world of his listeners. There is no question, for instance, that the creation narrative in Genesis 1 played a formative role in his thinking, and that a knowledge of that text is necessary to understand what is going on in the Prologue. Is the same true for later Jewish traditions surrounding Genesis 1? And what of the Hellenistic philosophical discussion of the λόγος? Is that also intrinsic to the meaning of the Prologue?

The rooting of the text in Genesis is a secure starting point. While the word λόγος is not used in Genesis 1, it is difficult to think John could write 'in the beginning' and somehow be unaware of the fact that God created in the beginning by speaking. Likewise the imagery of light and darkness hardly appears by happenstance in John 1.

Peder Borgen has argued that the entire Prologue is largely an exposition of Genesis 1, and this seems fundamentally correct.⁴

The influence of later Jewish tradition on John 1 is more difficult to confirm. The *Memra* of the Targumim has perhaps been the most popular scholarly option for such a background.⁵ The *Memra* does give us a noun form of 'speaking' in place of the verbal forms in Genesis, and, as we have seen, it is deeply rooted in meditation on the biblical account of creation. But it is just as easy to account for John's use of *λόγος* with direct reference to Ps. 33: 6 (LXX 32: 6): 'by the word of the Lord (τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ κυρίου οἱ οὐρανοὶ) were the heavens established'. (It must also be said that neither the Psalms nor the *Memra* texts constitute a radical reworking of Genesis 1.) There is likewise nothing else in the Prologue which *demands* a particular Jewish interpretive tradition as its basis; nor do the putative background texts fundamentally alter our understanding of the passage. It is certainly *possible* that John was aware of the Targumic traditions and that they may have shaped the Prologue in some respects. But it is difficult to prove.

Recourse to Philo seems far less likely. Philo was of course keenly interested in the *λόγος*, because it bridged two gaps which were of immense concern to him: first, the gap between an absolute, intrinsically unknowable God and a finite creation; and second, the gap between Scripture and Greek philosophy. John gives no clear indication he is concerned about the latter problem, and he frames the former problem in completely different terms than Philo. People may indeed not know God, and the knowledge of God may only come through the *λόγος*. But the comparison ends there. John's Gospel indicates that the failure to know God is due to humanity's sin-induced blindness, not to the nature of God himself. We come to know God himself through Christ his Word; we do not know Christ *in place of* the 'true' God. Since John and Philo both take Genesis 1 as their point of departure, it is inevitable that there will be some

⁴ Peder Borgen, 'Observations on the Targumic Character of the Prologue of John', in his *Logos was the True Light, and Other Essays on the Gospel of John* (Trondheim: Tapir, 1983), 13–20; and, in the same volume, 'Logos was the True Light', 95–110.

⁵ See e.g. the works of Hayward and McNamara cited in chapter 4.

common elements in their description of the λόγος. But there is no reason to suspect John has read Philo.

As we turn to the broader Hellenistic background, the trajectory of our argument might suggest it is of no relevance whatsoever. At one level this is true. We must reiterate the fact that the Prologue is founded on only three things: Genesis, John the Baptist, and Jesus.⁶ Jewish traditions may have helped shape the language here and there, but even these are not strictly necessary to explain what is in the text. As for philosophical speculation, it is remarkable how little pure philosophy there is in John 1. Thus while the κόσμος in 1: 9–10 must include all created reality, John quickly narrows his concern to humanity as the focal point of that reality ('and the world did not know him'), and then narrows it further still to Israel as the focal point of this human reality ('and he came to his own, and his own did not receive him', v. 11).⁷ The historical and cultural particularity of the discussion, from a philosophical standpoint, seems a significant letdown after the initial claims to a unified field theory: How could the parochial concerns of Israel address issues of cosmic significance? That, of course, is precisely John's point: the inner workings of the cosmos are in fact in the hands of this Jewish prophet Jesus. But this puts things on an entirely different footing than philosophy as commonly conceived.

Nonetheless, one did not need to be a professional philosopher to know that the λόγος was an important part of educated discourse in the Graeco-Roman world. Could John really have used this loaded term with no idea of the associations it held to his Hellenistic neighbors (and, one would presume, many of his Hellenized Christian friends)? He could have done: Psalm 33: 6 ('By the word of the Lord the heavens were made . . .') is proof of that. But it still may seem *unlikely* he did so. Thus many would agree with the conclusion of Beasley-Murray: 'The employment of the Logos concept in the prologue to the Fourth Gospel is the supreme example

⁶ With an assist to Moses for v. 17.

⁷ See Edward W. Klink's essay, 'Light of the World: Cosmology and the Johannine Literature', in Jonathan Pennington and Sean McDonough (eds.), *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (London: Clark, 2008), 74–89.

within Christian history of the communication of the gospel in terms understood and appreciated by the nations'.⁸

Even if John were aware of this wider sphere of use, however, this hardly justifies later assimilations of Jesus to the Hellenistic λόγος. If John does employ λόγος deliberately to draw in philosophically inclined Greek readers, he does so only to define it strictly in terms of the God of Israel and the career of his Messiah. It is *God's Word*, the God who called all things into being, the God who delivered Israel from Egypt and gave them the Law through Moses. In John's day, this word is to be found not in bare speculation about the natural world and its ways, but by paying attention to the stories of Jesus, and by participating in the life of the Spirit he has given to the world. The messianic lordship of Jesus may, and indeed must, embrace all the mysterious workings of nature; but John is not interested in parsing the mechanics of this in anything like the detail of the Stoics. He gives no help whatsoever to those who wish to retrofit Jesus-as-λόγος onto Hellenistic thought; he only sets them innumerable problems.

THE λόγος

Christ brings all things into being as God's Word. We have given our assessment of the relative importance of various proposed background materials. It remains to look in more detail at John's own use of λόγος in the Gospel in order to discern its use in chapter 1 more clearly.

Nowhere is the tendency to dissociate the Prologue from the remainder of the Gospel more evident than in the treatment of the λόγος.⁹ Because of the admitted uniqueness of the 'λόγος concept' in

⁸ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 2002), 10.

⁹ A significant exception is E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, ed. F. N. Davey (London: Faber & Faber, 1940), 129–64: 'The prologue is inseparable from the gospel... No theory which explains the significance of the identification of Jesus with the Word, but which does not at the same time explain the further identifications which are of such importance to the author of the gospel, can be regarded as in the end satisfactory' (pp. 158–9).

John 1, it seems to be assumed that its other uses in the Gospel are not of critical importance.¹⁰ But since, as we have noted, John employs the word a full forty times in the course of his Gospel, it would seem remarkably odd if the uses outside the Prologue did not somehow illumine these earlier verses. We cannot be content to say that these other uses of λόγος are different from its use in the Prologue; the question is why John uses it differently, and what he expects us to glean from that.

Throughout the Gospel the majority of uses of λόγος describe the word(s) spoken by Jesus.¹¹ Related to this is the use of λόγος to describe reports *about* Jesus by others, whether those spring from faith (e.g. the Samaritan woman: 4: 39; the disciples: 17: 20) or hostility (e.g. the Jewish leaders in 19: 8, 13). Apart from one reference to the report about the Beloved Disciple that circulated in the Church (21: 23), the remainder of the instances speak about God's Word, whether directly (5: 38; 8: 55; 10: 35; 17: 6, 14, 17) or by way of the Scriptures (4: 37; 12: 38; 18: 9).¹²

The clustering of λόγος around the words of Jesus and God is not an accident. One could say it constitutes the point of the entire Gospel. Jesus' words are God's words. Nor is it surprising that this fact is revealed most clearly to the disciples in the Upper Room Discourse. The followers of Jesus are those who see that his words are indeed the words of God, just as his deeds are the deeds of God:

¹⁰ Peter Phillips (*The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading* (London: Continuum, 2006), 81–6) gives a fairly thorough account of λόγος in the Johannine literature, and rightly concludes: 'Much more than with the Synoptics, message and messenger are synonymous'. But this insight is swallowed up in the reams of alternative background data that follow. He ends up by saying (p. 141): 'The use of the lexeme is just a way of getting as many readers as possible into the story, a path towards understanding that the focus is on Jesus not actually on λόγος at all'. To the extent that this means, e.g., that the Stoic nuances of λόγος ought not to be read into the rest of the Gospel, this is fair enough. But it hardly seems to justify minimizing the significance of the remaining thirty-six uses of λόγος outside the Prologue. C. K. Barrett, to take but one example, makes no mention of other passages in the Gospel in his discussion of 1: 1 (*The Gospel According to St John* 2nd edn. (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1978), 153–5; but contrast again Hoskyns (pp. 160–1).

¹¹ 2: 22; 4: 41, 50; 5: 24; 6: 60; 7: 36, 40; 8: 31, 37, 43, 51, 52; 10: 19; 12: 48; 14: 23–4 (v. 24, x 2); 15: 3, 20 (x 2); 18: 32.

¹² This assumes 4: 37 is an allusion to, e.g., either Mic. 6: 15 or Job 31: 8, rather than just a popular saying.

'The word which you have heard is not mine, but that of the Father who sent me' (14: 24). The convergence of Jesus' words and the Father's words emerges again in 18: 32: the Jewish leaders are not able to kill Jesus themselves, but must leave him to Pilate for crucifixion 'in order that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled which he spoke signifying by what type of death he must die' (ἵνα ὁ λόγος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ πληρωθῇ ὃν εἶπεν σημαίνων ποίῳ θανάτῳ ἥμελλεν ἀποθνήσκειν). The deployment of the formal phrase 'the word of Jesus' in conjunction with the fulfillment formula indicates that Jesus' words are tantamount to Scripture. The one who has seen Jesus has seen the Father, according to 14: 9; it is equally true for John that the one who has heard Jesus has heard the Father.

E. C. Hoskyns has put it best: 'That Jesus once spoke is more fundamental for the understanding of the Logos than is the history of Greek philosophy, or the story of the westward progress of oriental mysticism, more fundamental even than the first chapter of Genesis or the eighth chapter of Proverbs'.¹³ It is no accident that λόγος occurs repeatedly in the Synoptics and Acts to refer to the message about Jesus.¹⁴ Just as Jesus himself is the ultimate parable (compare the use of Isa. 6: 9–10 in John 12: 40 and the parable of the sower: Mark 4: 12), so he is God's first and final Word to the world. In sum, the studied use of λόγος throughout the Gospel reinforces one of the foundational hermeneutical principles of our investigation: the eternal, creative Word of God is to be understood not by philosophical abstraction, but by reflection on the historical, re-creative words and works of Jesus as witnessed by his disciples.

The association of λόγος and light merits special attention, given the importance of light in the creation narrative of Genesis 1 and subsequent tradition. Peder Borgen even suggests translating 1: 9 'Logos was the true light' (Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν).¹⁵ This is grammatically defensible, as he demonstrates in detail, though 'There was the true light' (NASB) and 'The true light . . . was coming into the world' (NIV) are equally valid. But the relatively unpopular

¹³ Hoskyns 130. Cf. Beasley-Murray 9.

¹⁴ See Phillips 80–1.

¹⁵ Cf. New Jerusalem Bible: 'The Word was the real light'.

rendering 'He was the true light'¹⁶ may capture the subtleties of John's flow of thought most accurately. *Λόγος* does appear to be the most viable antecedent from a technical standpoint, but Borgen's translation seems to be shackled with a certain impersonality which does not comport well with the statements that follow shortly after: 'He came to his own, and his own did not receive him' and 'to those who did receive him, he gave the right to become children of God, even to the ones who believe in his name' (1: 11–12). These are obviously drawn from the historical experience of Jesus; 'the name' in verse 12 seems as if it must be 'Jesus' rather than 'Logos'.

Translating verse 9 with 'He' captures the deliberate ambiguity of John's phrasing: the *λόγος* is always to be thought of in terms of Jesus; Jesus is always to be thought of in terms of the *λόγος*. Long before the formal announcement of the Incarnation in 1: 14, John slides easily between the pre-incarnate and incarnate Word. 'He came to his own, and his own did not receive him' seems one obvious example of this, and we also have verse 5: 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.' This could refer to the light at the creation which 'overcomes' the darkness, or to the general principle of God's light confronting a (spiritually) dark world. But it fits equally well, or better, with the specific rejection of Jesus' light by many who encounter him in his public ministry. It seems likely that John has left the phrase open-ended precisely to invite the reader to erase any absolute distinction between the preexistent *λόγος* and the *λόγος* incarnate in Jesus.

This does not mean that John trivializes the Incarnation. The birth of Jesus is clearly a momentous event, and 1: 14 does mark a climax in the Prologue. The appearance of Jesus in history is a genuine *novum*. At the same time, John's conflation of Christ's heavenly and earthly roles here in the Prologue shows the same pattern of thought we have seen in Colossians, 1 Corinthians, and Hebrews: the works of Messiah in creation are modeled on the works of Messiah in historical redemption. While John may make a finer distinction by his invocation of the *λόγος*, he immediately subverts this by merging this seamlessly with the activity of the historical Jesus.

¹⁶ One must seek it out in, e.g., Young's Literal Translation of 1862–98 and the Münchener Neues Testament (1998).

Whatever we make of this translation issue, the association of the λόγος and the light still requires an explanation. As Borgen notes, Philo equates λόγος and light in *Somn.* 1. 75, 'for the model was the Word of His (God's) fullness, namely light, for He says, "God said, 'Let there be light'"'.¹⁷ Borgen does not demand John's specific dependence on Philo, but he does suggest quite reasonably that the evangelist may be working with 'learned Jewish exegesis' in his juxtaposing of light and λόγος.¹⁸ But this alone does not tell us much: 'word' and 'light' are so close to one another in the text of Genesis 1, and both are so obviously related to the idea of revelation, that it is hardly surprising that Jewish thinkers would have thought of them together before John's time. Nor does their mere association offer insight into our prime topic of concern: the creation of the world. John could just as well have introduced the theme of light solely for the sake of introducing the ideas of revelation and sight/blindness which play such a critical role in the narratives which follow.

The use of light in the rest of the Gospel bears out this suspicion that John does not regard light per se as expressive of Jesus' agency in creation. 'He is the true light', but he and his works cannot be reduced to light. Light is surely *associated* with creation throughout the Gospel. As Sjef van Tilborg writes concerning chapter 9, '[t]he world where Jesus lives and which Jesus gives is a world in which the light of the first day of creation shines. It is the world where the seeing can become blind and the blind can see once more'.¹⁹ He can speak elsewhere of 'the light prior to creation . . . that through Jesus has come into the world in order to enlighten every person'.²⁰ But this primordial light still functions primarily as a means of revelation. Jesus' light serves to reveal men's deeds (3: 20–21), even as it helps guide him through the tortuous path of his public ministry (11: 9–10). As the 'light of the world' he leads his followers on the path that leads to life (8: 12). Ultimately, his disciples can fully assimilate

¹⁷ Borgen, 'Logos was the True Light', 100.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 99.

¹⁹ Van Tilborg, 'Cosmological Implications of Johannine Cosmology', in G. van Belle, J. G. van der Watt, and P. Maritz (eds.), *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 490.

²⁰ Van Tilborg 500.

this light and become 'sons of light' (12: 36). The emphasis lies on light as the means of discernment by which those with spiritual vision may see the straight path of God and avoid the deceptive paths of Satan.

If 'light', then, serves in John's Gospel to reveal the new creation rather than to (strictly speaking) produce it, the closely allied notion of *glory* may do rather more.²¹ We may start with Jesus' prayer, 'Father, glorify me now in your presence with the glory, which I had with you before the world began' (17: 5; cf. 1: 14). Glory here seems a more comprehensive term than light: Jesus is the effulgence of the Father's majesty. His words and works do not merely point to God's magnificence; they are the embodiment of it, the vehicle through which God shares himself with the world. This is illustrated in the Wedding at Cana, where Jesus 'manifested his glory' (*ἐφάνερωσεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ*) by the creative transformation of the water (2: 11); and in the raising of Lazarus, where those present 'see the glory of God' (11: 40).

An allusion to glory and creation may be sheltered within Jesus' prayer in 17: 24: *Πάτερ, ὃ δέδωκάς μοι, θέλω ἵνα ὅπου εἰμὶ ἐγὼ καὶ κεῖνοι ὦσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ, ἵνα θεωρῶσιν τὴν δόξαν τὴν ἐμὴν, ἣν δέδωκάς μοι ὅτι ἡγάπησάς με πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* ('Father, I desire that the ones you have given to me might be with me where I am, in order that they might see my glory which you gave me because you loved me before the foundation of the world'). Is it out of the question that this 'glory' includes the privilege of participating in the creation of all things? Allusions to creation and new creation in John are so numerous that this seems a likely deduction. Just as God honored Jesus the Messiah by making him the agent of his rule on the earth, so he had honored him in the beginning by making him the agent of the creation of the universe.

²¹ See J. Du Rand, 'The Creation Motif in the Fourth Gospel: Perspectives on its Narratological Function within a Judaistic Background', in G. van Belle, J. G. van der Watt, and P. Maritz (eds.), *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 42–3; e.g.: 'In other words, the *δόξα* is the divine glory, revealing the nature of God in creation to be continued in his acts which fill both heaven and earth. The incarnation of the Logos is the manifestation of God's glory, further demonstrated in the acts of the "new creation"' (p. 43).

CREATION IN THE BEGINNING,
CREATIO CONTINUA, RE-CREATION

We may now ask a more specific question: According to John, what does Jesus create, and when?²² The question first arises in the translation of 1: 3. John Ashton wishes to render πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, 'All things happened through him'. The emphasis is on history, rather than creation per se.²³ This is an extreme solution. It is almost impossible to imagine that these words following hard on the heels of 'in the beginning' would not refer to the original creation. Furthermore, the parallel in 1: 10, ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, makes vastly more sense as 'the world came into being through him', rather than 'the world happened through him'. As in our other key New Testament texts, Christ is there in the beginning with God, creating everything else.

This does not mean, though, that the phrase 'all things came into being through him' cannot open up to embrace events beyond the first week of creation. If, for example, we accept the punctuation of verses 3–4 that gives us 'what came to being in him was life', we have (at best) an ambiguous reference to the creation week. Was everything then made 'alive'? This is possible, but it would make better sense as a reference to Jesus' life-giving ministry among human beings as narrated in the Gospel. Such a seamless transition between the dynamics of creation and the dynamics of Messiah's service on earth would fit perfectly in the Prologue.

There is evidence elsewhere in the Gospel that John sees Jesus as God's agent in *creatio continua*. The healing of the paralytic in chapter 5 is the most significant incident. When Jesus' opponents rebuke him for working on the Sabbath, he replies (5: 17): 'My Father is working until now and I also am working'. Jewish thinkers had no doubt long wrestled with the question of what God's Sabbath rest in Genesis implied for his ongoing maintenance of the creation.²⁴ Thus

²² For a general discussion see Du Rand, 'Creation Motif' 21–46.

²³ See Phillips 160–1 for a summary and critique of Ashton's position.

²⁴ Philo, for instance, states explicitly that God never ceases creating (*Leg.* 1: 18: ὁ θεὸς οὐ παύεται ποιῶν).

the following quote from *Exodus Rabbah*, while late, is likely indicative of the type of reasoning employed in earlier times. A sectarian once taunted some rabbis that God himself does not keep the Sabbath. The rabbis replied:

‘Wretch! Is not a man permitted to carry on the Sabbath in his own courtyard?’ He replied, ‘Yes.’ Whereupon they said to him, ‘Both the higher and lower regions are the courtyard of God, as it says, *The whole earth is full of His glory* (Isa. VI,3), and even if a man carries a distance of his own height, does he transgress?’ The others agreed. ‘Then,’ said they, ‘it is written, *Do I not fill heaven and earth?*’²⁵

While John no doubt disagrees with Jesus’ opponents’ assessment that ‘he is *making himself* (ἐαυτὸν ποιῶν) equal to God’ (5: 18), there is no doubt that he affirms that Jesus as the beloved Son and Sent One is availing himself of divine prerogatives by working on the Sabbath.

This one sentence, ‘My Father is working until now and I also am working’, reveals added depths in all the signs in John’s Gospel. We have taken them up to this point as signs of the inbreaking of God’s eschatological kingdom; and this is certainly the most sensible initial interpretive move to make. The curse is being reversed; end-times blessings are beginning to flow in the land. But 5: 17 refutes the false deduction from this that God has been idle from Day 6 until the arrival of Jesus. While it is just possible that ‘My Father is working until now (ἐως ἄρτι)’ means only ‘My Father’s recently inaugurated eschatological work of re-creation keeps going even on the Sabbath’, it seems more natural to understand it as, ‘My Father is always working to maintain his creation, and so it is inevitable that I too participate in that work’.

The signs, then, do not point to the inbreaking of a completely foreign world, absolutely distinguished from the world made in the beginning. Instead, they point to the realization of what God always intended the created world to be. At one level, it is perfectly valid to emphasize the novelty of God’s work through the Messiah. This is

²⁵ *Exod. Rabb*, 30. 9, in *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus*, trans. S. M. Lehrman, ed. H. Freedman and M. Simon (London: Soncino, 1939), 355–6. See Barrett, *Gospel According to St John*, 256.

especially pertinent for John, with his sharp distinctions between the Spirit and the flesh, light and darkness, believers and unbelievers. But at another level there is an unbroken stream from primal creation, through the ongoing maintenance of creation, and on to eschatological re-creation.²⁶

This can be illustrated in a few ways. First, it is important that the paralytic is put back on the normal course of everyday living; he is now able to function well within the borders of the present creation. (He functions well physically, at least; his spiritual performance—he points out Jesus to the authorities, Jesus warns him not to sin—is another matter.) In the ensuing discussion with his opponents Jesus says that he will do *greater* works than this: just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also Jesus will give life to those whom he chooses (5: 21). This is a patent allusion to the raising of Lazarus, which thus represents a much more radical incursion into the world than even the healing of the paralytic. While Lazarus' resuscitation cannot yet be the absolute inbreaking of resurrection life into the world, it is the definitive sign of God's intention to break the power of death in an unprecedented manner.

Jesus' own resurrection is that absolute inbreaking, and we may conclude this section by considering the Gospel's accounts of the risen Christ.²⁷ One of the most remarkable things about these Johannine texts (and those of Matthew and Luke as well) is how unremarkable the resurrected Jesus is in certain respects. Although he is apparently able to walk through walls, he can be mistaken for a gardener (20: 15), or a stranger on the shore (21: 4). He still bears the scars of his humiliating earthly experience (20: 25–7), and he participates in the very ordinary activity of sharing a meal with the

²⁶ Van Tilborg nicely captures at least the two poles of the discussion (and we may well infer the middle element of present sustenance of the creation): 'In the discussed texts, two great biblical themes are brought together. These are, on the one hand, the prospect of an eschatological feast where there is an abundance of food and drink, good food and drink, free, to the point of satiety and without end; and on the other hand, the looking back to the first day of creation, a participation in the light and life as they already existed in the Word of God prior to creation' (p. 491).

²⁷ Chapter 21 is often left out of the discussion as being a later addendum, but see the detailed arguments for its inclusion in Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 363 ff.

disciples (21: 12–15).²⁸ There is more here, I think, than simply a few more examples of the 'Johannine (non-)recognition episode'. The risen Christ is himself the bridge between the now world and the new world. The fact that he participates in everyday activities, and continues to exercise authority over the creation (e.g. the miraculous catch of fish), speaks to a level of continuity between the now and the new which is not always appreciated by commentators on John. Jesus does return to glory with the Father, but he does so in his resurrected body. In keeping with 2: 19, it is 'this temple', Jesus' human body, which has been 'raised up'. Believers likewise may anticipate having future fellowship with Jesus not only in spirit, but in resurrected bodies (5: 28–9).

While John's Gospel does not lay out its final eschatology in as much detail as other New Testament writings, the unmistakable presence of bodily resurrection signals that the Gospel should be read in the context of the general early Christian expectation of a renewed creation, rather than as a purely spiritual experience.²⁹ Since Jesus is the agent of bodily resurrection (5: 28–9), it stands to reason that John would see him as the agent of the cosmic eschatological renewal as well. As God's Word, his Messiah inaugurates, sustains, and completes God's creation project.

AGENT OF CREATION IN JOHN

The doctrine of Jesus' agency in creation is assumed, rather than argued for, in the New Testament. Thus the underlying rationale for

²⁸ John does not tell us explicitly whether Jesus himself ate, but the phrase in 21: 15, *'Οτε οὖν ἡρίστησαν* 'When they had finished breakfast', seems to imply Jesus was eating along with all the rest. In any case, if John wanted to definitively depict in these chapters a Jesus who fully transcended material realities, he did a pretty poor job of it. Cf. also Luke 24: 43, where Jesus assuredly eats (though most scholars would be reluctant to ascribe a knowledge of Luke to John).

²⁹ For a recent, well-balanced perspective on Johannine eschatology see Jörg Frey, 'Eschatology in the Johannine Circle', in G. van Belle, J. G. van der Watt, and P. Maritz (eds.), *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 47–82.

why God hands over the work of creation to Christ is not clearly explained, save for the basic fact that the delegation of lordship to the Messiah in the *Endzeit* becomes the model for the *Urzeit*. The Gospel of John, however, promises a way forward. Agency is a recurring motif in the Gospel, and there are thus plenty of clues from which one might deduce John's views on the matter. Since we have argued that the Prologue should be read in conversation with the remainder of the Gospel, this investigation should shed significant light on the question of why God authorizes Jesus as his agent in creation. Since agency involves both a *commissioning* and a *relationship* with the commissioner, we will need to keep track of both of these threads in the Gospel.

The concept of *sending* is widely recognized as central to John, appearing first in 1: 6 with respect to the Baptist (cf. 1: 33; 3: 28), and implicitly in the 'coming' of Jesus into the world (1: 9–11). The relationship of Jesus to the Father who sent him into the world is arguably the central concern of the Gospel.³⁰ God's sending of Jesus is reiterated so often in the Gospel that it becomes an essential part of his identity.³¹ He does not simply happen to be sent; he is the Sent One.

We may now turn to those instances where sending, and a concomitant emphasis on personal relationship, intrudes into the narrative in more surprising fashion with other characters. Since the agency of others is modeled on Jesus' own agency, we may glean some valuable information about his *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* in this roundabout way.

A fine example of this is the calling of the first disciples in 1: 35–51. The keynote of relationship is struck in verses 38–9 when the two

³⁰ See e.g. Borgen, 'God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel', in Jacob Neusner (ed.), *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*. (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 138–43; E. L. Allen, 'Representative-Christology in the New Testament', *Harvard Theological Review*, 46 (1953), 161–9; Anthony Harvey, 'Christ as Agent', in L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright (eds.), *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 239–50.

³¹ By my reckoning Jesus refers to the Father sending him sixteen times using ἀποστέλλω (3: 17; 5: 36, 38; 6: 29, 57; 7: 29; 8: 42; 10: 36; 11: 42; 17: 3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20: 21), and twenty-five times using πέμπω (4: 34; 5: 23, 24, 30, 37; 6: 38, 39, 44; 7: 16, 18, 28, 33; 8: 16, 18, 26, 29; 9: 4; 12: 44, 45, 49; 13: 20; 14: 24, 26; 15: 21; 16: 5).

disciples of John ask Jesus 'Where are you staying (ποῦ μένεις)?' and then *stay* (ἔμειναν) with him that day. The μένω-root becomes a touchstone for nurturing one's love for Jesus, reaching a culmination in the discourse of the vine and the branches in chapter 15. The identification in verse 40 of one of the disciples as Andrew, the brother of Peter, shows that familial ties are an abiding part of the nascent messianic community. Even more importantly, it is through Andrew that Peter hears the news 'We have found the Messiah!' (v. 41). At this point the stage becomes even more crowded. Jesus, Andrew, and Peter go on to find Philip (vv. 43–4), who is from their hometown of Bethsaida (thus reinforcing the importance of geographical ties between people), and Philip in turn finds Nathanael, and reports to him that they have found the one of whom Moses and the prophets spoke (v. 45). Nathanael's initial skepticism is overcome by a personal encounter with Jesus.

Whatever we might make of the precise historical sequence of these encounters, it seems clear that John's depiction of them is quite purposefully drawn. The importance of go-betweens is unmissable: John the Baptist points his disciples to Jesus; Andrew points Peter to Jesus; Philip is thrown in for good measure; and Philip points Nathanael to Jesus. People find other people, and help them to find Jesus.

Before we draw a conclusion as to why John does this, we need to investigate similar passages elsewhere in the Gospel. The aftermath of the account of the woman at the well in John 4 is especially suggestive. In verses 31–8 Jesus gives a commission to the disciples to work with him in the harvest—a harvest which given the context will clearly include the despised Samaritans. He summarizes: 'I have sent you to harvest where you have not labored; others have labored (κεκοπιάκασιν) and you have entered into their labor (κόπον)'. The 'others' likely includes the biblical worthies, but pride of place must be given to Jesus himself. It is hardly a coincidence that John informs us that Jesus was tired or 'labored' (κεκοπιακῶς) at the beginning of the story in verse 6. His wearisome missionary journey is blazing the trail for the disciples. They are participating in a work greater than their own.

The discussion with the disciples is deliberately sandwiched between accounts of the Samaritan woman herself (vv. 28–30, 39–42).

Given her marital history, Samaritan beliefs, and persistent inability to follow Jesus from earthly to heavenly realities, she seems a very unlikely candidate to serve as an agent for the Messiah. Yet this is precisely what she becomes by verses 28–9, where she returns to town and tells the others to ‘come and see’ (a close conceptual parallel to Jesus’ invitation to the disciples of John in 1: 39), and asks, albeit with some hesitation, ‘Do you think this might really be the Messiah?’. Her witness is effective: the Samaritans believe in Jesus ‘on account of the word (λόγος!) of the witnessing woman’ (v. 39) and their own encounter with Jesus (v. 42). They even ask Jesus to stay (μείναι) with them, and he stays (ἔμεινεν) with them for two days (v. 40). The parallels with the call of the disciples in chapter 1 are evident. But the woman proves to be a far more effective witness to her countrymen than those same disciples, who must be prodded even to see the fruit in the Samaritan fields.

The most thoroughgoing account of human agency in the Gospel, however, is the story of the man born blind in chapter 9. We meet here another potential witness with very dubious credentials: his blindness seems to ensure that he will be unable even to see Jesus, and he strikes the disciples only as an object-lesson in the mechanics of divine retribution for sin. But Jesus, as the light of the world, shatters these expectations by his re-creating power. As in the case of the Samaritan woman, the encounter with Jesus is in some ways only a prelude to the commissioning of the man for witness. Jesus tells him to go to the Pool of Siloam not only to reinforce the Gospel’s emphasis on Jesus as the Sent One, but even more to highlight the healed man’s role as a sent witness to Jesus. This becomes evident in the subsequent dispute with the Pharisees. The man (with no support from his parents) becomes an exemplary witness to Jesus in the face of relentlessly hostile questioning, and his burgeoning faith is rewarded with a fuller revelation of Christ in verses 35–9. It is only after his extraordinary performance in front of the Pharisees that the reader realizes the full significance of the Pool of Siloam, which means ‘sending’: the blind man is following in Jesus’ footsteps as a delegate of the good news.

The account of Lazarus, which forms the climax of the first half of the gospel, fittingly enfoldes elements of relationship and agency into the larger theme of Jesus’ life-giving power. In the prelude to the

miracle at Bethany, Lazarus is described three times as one whom Jesus loves (11: 2, 5, 11). This affirmation forms the counterweight to Jesus' apparent lack of concern in the face of Lazarus' illness, and adds to the emotional drama played out between Jesus, Martha, and Mary in the rest of the chapter. It also serves at a literary and theological level to tie Lazarus to the Beloved Disciple. This hints at Lazarus' own role as witness, which is developed in the aftermath of his raising. While Lazarus is not given a speaking role, he becomes a key figure in the events leading up to the Passion. A crowd of Judaeans gather at Bethany not only on account of Jesus, but also 'in order that they might see Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead' (12: 9). Given the importance of 'seeing' (or not truly seeing) Jesus in John's Gospel, this remark could serve to link Lazarus to Jesus as a visible sign of God's glory, just as the blind man is linked to him as a 'sent one'. This is made more likely by the fact that in the very next verse the chief priests desire to put Lazarus to death as well (v. 10). The crowd at the triumphal entry, finally, is described as 'the one which was with Jesus when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead'; now, they are 'witnessing' (*ἐμαρτύρει*) to Jesus.

The Passion narrative is dominated by the themes of Jesus' present and future relationship with the disciples (chs. 13–17, 20–1), his faithful witness before Jewish and Roman officials, and the abiding love of the Father for him. The disciples, who have had their fair share of difficulties trying to emulate Jesus, are assured of God's love and are commissioned as his agents in the world: 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you', *καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, καὶ γὰρ πέμπω ὑμᾶς* (20: 21). The work that Jesus has inaugurated will be continued by his followers.

We may conclude, as the Gospel itself does, with reflections on the Beloved Disciple. We need not determine his actual identity, nor the precise relationship he bears to the author of the Gospel or the putative 'Johannine community'. There can be general agreement that the Gospel presents him as a key witness to events in Jesus' life and thus an important figure in his own right. But 'in his own right' needs clarification. For he appears in the text only as one loved by Jesus and one who witnesses to him; his personal identity, his very name, is subsumed under his relationship to the Messiah. Far from

diminishing his stature, however, it establishes him as the consummate disciple.

This is shown most impressively neither by his outpacing Peter to the tomb, nor even by Jesus' cryptic message concerning him, 'If I wish him to remain until I come, what is that to you?' (21: 22). Rather, it comes in the introductory description at the Last Supper: *ἦν ἀνακείμενος εἰς ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς*, 'One of his disciples was reclining in the bosom of Jesus, whom Jesus loved' (13: 23). The word for 'bosom' is *κόλπος*, and it occurs only one other time in the Gospel of John, in the description of Christ in 1: 18: 'No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, the one who is in the bosom of the Father (*ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς*), he has made him known'. The Beloved Disciple enjoys with Jesus the same type of intimate fellowship Jesus shares with the Father. The implicit message is that the disciple through his relationship with Jesus thereby shares in the Father's love as well (cf. 17: 23).

The Beloved Disciple's special intimacy with Jesus does assist in solidifying his credentials to bear witness to Jesus.³² But he is at least as much a representative figure as he is a unique one. Another key figure in the Gospel, Lazarus, is also designated as one Jesus loves, with no hint that he is trespassing on the Beloved Disciple's territory. The burden of the Upper Room Discourse is that all disciples are to strive for intimacy with Jesus and thereby intimacy with the Father.

We may now attempt to pull all this together. John's emphasis on personal relationships is so unrelenting that it is manifestly a central part of his theological vision. In the midst of a gospel that abstracts and simplifies all kinds of other things, the web of relationships in the Gospel is allowed great complexity. The relationship of the Father and the Son to one another, and to believers, is parsed with special care. The threads intertwine in the high-priestly prayer of Jesus: 'I in them, and you in me, in order that they might be perfected in unity, in order that the world may know that you have sent me and you have loved them just as you have loved me' (17: 23). It becomes apparent that these loving relationships are not the means to

³² Perhaps especially with respect to Peter, and the Gospel of Peter's disciple Mark; see Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 127–9.

anything else: they are an end in themselves. The culmination of the high-priestly prayer reveals the goal of the Gospel: 'I have made your name known to them, and I will make it known, in order that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I myself may be in them' (17: 26).

If this is true, the matter of agency, as important as it is for John, ought to be viewed under this more comprehensive category of personal relationship. The comings and goings of the various agents in the Gospel are there in the service of love. Witness to Jesus' recreative power draws people into the circle of love flowing between the Father and the Son. More than this, meaningful inclusion in the mission of God may be seen as a part of the Son's gift to the people of God. When Jesus says that the disciples are his friends (15: 14), and not merely his servants, this is hardly to divorce their service from their friendship. 'You are my friends if you do what I command you' (15: 14). This can be taken to mean that the disciples' obedience demonstrates that they are in fact his friends; but it is equally true that participation in Jesus' mission is one of the means by which this friendship is made real. Activity towards the common goal of God's kingdom facilitates the relationship and deepens it; it is the environment in which the friendship flourishes.

In a similar way, the recognition of Jesus' messianic status by others becomes part of the Father's gift to the Son: 'For neither does the Father judge anyone, but he has given judgment over to the Son, in order that all might honor the Son as they honor the Father' (5: 22-3). The Father's love for the Son is not only an abstract experience in the Spirit; it finds concrete expression in the Father's gift of universal rule to the Son. If we ask the further question 'Why does the Father wish to honor the Son?', we may find the answer in 3: 35, the heart of Johannine theology: 'The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand'. This springs directly from Psalms 2 and 110; and in light of 1: 3, 'all things' must include the work of primal creation. Yet if the rest of the New Testament emphasizes the Messiah's power and dominion over all things, John shines the spotlight on the relationship between the Father and the Son (without of course denying the authority of Jesus).

Here at last we have found the Johannine key to Jesus' agency in creation. The point of departure is, as everywhere, Jesus' status as

God's anointed ruler. But John reveals most clearly that the handing over of the act of creation to the Messiah serves the deeper purpose of enacting and nurturing the Father's love for the Son. The logic of 3: 35 is that the Father has given all things over to the Son *because* he loves him. It is in the very nature of the Father to share all things with the Son because of his love for him. The Messiah fully participates in the life and work of God, including the work of creation. Far from being a mere tool in creation, or even a kind of cosmic organizing principle, Christ as *λόγος* is the fully personal executor of God's will. He is the one who brings to realization the desire, 'Let there be . . .' of Genesis 1.

While this precise point is never made explicit, it comes close to expression in a text we have already discussed, Jesus' prayer in 17: 24: Πάτερ, ὃ δέδωκάς μοι, θέλω ἵνα ὅπου εἰμι ἐγὼ κάκεινοι ὧσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ, ἵνα θεωρῶσιν τὴν δόξαν τὴν ἐμὴν, ἣν δέδωκάς μοι ὅτι ἡγάπησάς με πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου. 'Father, I desire that the ones you have given to me might be with me where I am, in order that they might see my glory which you gave me because you loved me before the foundation of the world'. This does not state outright that Jesus' eternal glory included his role in creating the world, but it is a logical deduction from the material in the Prologue and the association of glory and re-creation throughout the Gospel. If this be granted, then Jesus' participation in creation is an expression of the Father's love for him. Rather than hoarding the glory of world formation for himself, the Father invites the Son to share it with him. The Son in turn shares the mission of world completion with the disciples.

The activity of the Son on behalf of the Father, then, must not be seen as something separate from their loving relationship, nor even as a mere by-product of that relationship. It is instead *a constitutive element* of their love for one another. The Father expresses, and perhaps even 'realizes', his love for the Son by opening up room for him to participate in God's supreme act, the creation of the world. The Son expresses his love for the Father by actively creating the world according to the Father's will and rescuing it from its fallen state. The world—in the sense both of the initial creation, and the consummate creation including redeemed humanity—thus becomes at once the Father's gift to the Son, and the Son's gift to the Father.

As the previous paragraphs show, it is impossible to journey through John without veering close to, or indeed intruding over, the borders of dogmatic theology. In the following, and concluding, chapter we step over that border and take a few hesitant steps into the land of the theologians.

Jesus and Genesis: Tentative Steps towards Theology

SUMMARY

We have in some respects reached the end of our journey. I have argued that the doctrine of Christ's agency in creation arose first as a response to the re-creative mighty works of Jesus. If the one true God worked so evidently, and so dramatically, through his Messiah to sustain and re-create the world (both at the physical and 'spiritual' level), there was every reason to believe the Messiah's mediating role reached back to the very origins of creation. For the early Christians the Messiah was not an afterthought, a kind of cosmic bandage to bind up a broken world, he was God's mode of self-communication to the world from the beginning. There was sufficient material in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition to facilitate such a move: indications of the Messiah's preexistence; reflection on how the eternal God could fashion something outside himself; speculation as to how God could bring humanity into relationship with himself. The concepts of God's Word, God's Wisdom, God's Spirit, and God's image all expressed in their diverse ways the fundamental issue of divine self-communication—and all could equally be said to devolve upon God's eschatological agent, the Messiah.

But we need not imagine that there was a ready-made robe of 'creator-Messiah' into which Jesus could be easily fitted. Christ's role in creation was thrust up by the collision of these Old Testament texts with the Church's memories of Jesus himself. If the early Christians needed the Scriptures to make sense of their experience of Jesus, they

also needed their experience of Jesus to make sense of the Scriptures. The living voice of Christ could not be reduced to a force or a particular characteristic of God: he intruded into the creation stories not as a principle, but as a person. The same Messiah who willingly bought back the creation was the one who had brought it into being in the first place.

We have tried to explain the origins of the teaching on Christ and creation within the historical setting of early Christianity. But there is a relentless theological undercurrent to the doctrine which pulls the reader beyond pure historical inquiry. We must therefore cast at least a fleeting glance at the dogmatic implications of Jesus' role in creation.¹ Limitations of space make a full survey impossible; indeed, since it is wrapped up with broader Christological concerns, we cannot give an exhaustive treatment of the theme even in a single theologian. What we will do instead is to take a sampling from six theologians for whom Christology and creation are important themes, and examine them in light of some of the central exegetical concerns of the book: the personal agency of Christ in creation; the role of Wisdom and other putative background sources in the interpretation of texts like Colossians 1; and the inner-Trinitarian dynamics of the creation act, especially as depicted in John's Gospel. In the hopes that *merismus* might help us economically capture something of the whole, I have selected three theologians from the early centuries of the Church—Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Athanasius²—and three German-language theologians from the modern period—Wolfgang Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann, and Karl Barth (reserving Barth for last because of his sterling treatment of the topic). If our very brief survey cannot form a bridge from the New Testament to contemporary Christological concerns, it may at least serve to place a few stepping stones in the water.

The Church Fathers in general have been roundly criticized in modern times for Platonizing the gospel, with their *λόγος* Christology

¹ For an analogous discussion with respect to preexistence see Simon Gathercole, 'Pre-existence, and the Freedom of the Son in Creation and Redemption: An Exposition in Dialogue with Robert Jenson', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 7 (2005), 38–51.

² For a helpful survey of still earlier material see Gösta Lindeskog, 'Schöpfer und Schöpfung in den Schriften der Apostolischen Väter', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 27/1 (1994), 588–648.

at the very heart of the exercise.³ The Prologue of John seemed to provide a secure anchorage for Christians in Hellenistic philosophical waters. Christ-as-*λόγος* gave order and rationality to the world in the beginning, and thus represented the goal of the Platonic and Stoic quest. But had the Christian search to understand Christ really reached its *telos* in a too hasty embrace of Greek metaphysical speculation? Pannenberg captures the dilemma as he compares the biblical understanding of Christ with that of some patristic commentators: 'He is revealed, not as the unchangeable ultimate ground of the phenomenal order, but as the free origin of the contingent events of the world, whose interrelations are also contingent and constitute no eternal order but a history moving forward from event to event'.⁴ Their *λόγος* Christology could never achieve the clarity of the biblical witness, he says, 'because its thought structure was borrowed from philosophical question patterns'.⁵

Such critiques undoubtedly have some merit. Gunton has traced out how the infiltration of these 'philosophical question patterns' tended to undermine the Church's creation theology,⁶ while Pannenberg notes that the assimilation of Christ to the 'Platonically conceived Logos' played into the hands of the Arians.⁷ But it was not all a loss. While we have tended to downplay the direct contribution of Hellenistic thought to the New Testament view of creation, we have seen in Chapter 5 that there are conceptual similarities throughout the ancient world at a certain level of abstraction, not least in the idea of a governing Word of God or the gods. The key question is whether a given author draws the Hellenistic conceptions into the orbit of the biblical God as revealed in Christ, or draws Christ as creative *λόγος* into the orbit of Hellenistic philosophy.

³ For a generally balanced summary and critique of the Fathers' *λόγος* Christology see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 2nd edn., trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1977), 161–6. See also Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 50–64.

⁴ Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 165.

⁵ Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 166; cf. Young, 'Christology and Creation: Towards an Hermeneutic of Patristic Christology', in T. Merrigan and J. Haers (eds.), *The Myriad Christ* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 193–200.

⁶ Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, *passim*.

⁷ Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 164.

Justin Martyr has certainly been accused of doing the latter. In his *First Apology*, 46, for instance, he writes: 'We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that He is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists'.⁸ This may be good news for Socrates, Heraclitus, and other 'Christians before Christ', but it has been judged bad news for a robust theology of creation. In the *Second Apology*, 6. 3, he revises the 'through whom' formulas to align with Platonic vocabulary: δι' αὐτοῦ πάντα ἐκτίσσε καὶ ἐκόσμησε. While this is arguably (and literally) a cosmetic change, Justin himself displays his debt to Plato when he notes in *First Apol.* 20. 4 that people will think he is speaking as a Platonist if he says that all things have been generated and arranged (κεκοσμηθῆναι) by God.⁹

Yet this line of thought in Justin must be balanced by other considerations. While Justin does not often refer to Christ's role in creation,¹⁰ he is fully in line with the New Testament when he explicitly links Jesus' Messiahship and creation: 'And His Son, who alone is properly called Son, the Word who also was with Him and was begotten before the works, when at first He created and arranged all things by Him, is called Christ, in reference to His being anointed and God's ordering all things through Him' (*Sec. Apol.* 6. 3). We may also note his Christological apologetic in the *Dialogue with Trypho*. In chapter 56 Justin gives a lengthy discourse on God's Old Testament appearances to Abraham and Moses. He seeks to persuade Trypho that the figure who appeared to Abraham at the oak at Mamre, and who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, must be someone who both acts as God and yet is somehow ('numerically') distinct from God the Father. He supports this further with a catena of scriptural quotations, including the cryptic words of Gen. 19: 24, 'the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorra sulphur and fire from the Lord out of heaven', and the famous quotation from Ps. 110: 1, 'The Lord said

⁸ Translations for Justin and Irenaeus in *ANFO1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, trans. Philip Schaff, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1866–72).

⁹ Noted by Demetrius Trakatellis, *The Pre-existence of Christ in Justin Martyr* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1976), 22.

¹⁰ See Trakatellis 23–4.

to my Lord . . .'. Later in the *Dialogue* he deploys Gen. 1: 26, 'Let us make man', as evidence of plurality in the Godhead.¹¹

One could question Justin's exegetical moves, and their putative apologetic value, but this should not obscure the Christological point. The pre-incarnate Christ appears on the scene as a personal agent of God's will. He speaks with people, he even walks around with them, and he speaks and acts as one who is God, and who is at the same time numerically distinct from God. The precise question of Christ's role in creation does not emerge in this section of the *Second Apology*, though God is referred to a few times as 'the maker of all things'. One may still have reason to criticize Justin's λόγος Christology. Yet such criticisms must be balanced by the recognition of the personal, speaking Christ of *Dialogue* 56.¹²

While scholars agree that Irenaeus was influenced by Justin, it is equally clear that Irenaeus developed the themes of Christ and creation well beyond anything in his predecessor. Indeed, it is arguable that no theologian in the history of the Church has a more thorough integration of the two, and so our discussion can only touch upon some of the most relevant points of his theology.¹³ Irenaeus repeatedly refers to the Word's role in primal creation, as evidenced, for example, by the frequency of the phrase 'the Word is the artificer of all things' in his writings, and the foundational role played by John 1: 3 in his theology.¹⁴ Section 5 of *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* provides a window into Irenaeus' views on the matter:

And since God is rational, therefore by [the] Word He created the things that were made; and God is Spirit, and by [the] Spirit He adorned all things: as also the prophet says: *By the word of the Lord were the heavens established, and by his spirit all their power* [Ps. 33: 6]. Since then the Word establishes,

¹¹ He is the first, it seems, to do this; see Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria* (London: Routledge, 2000), 240.

¹² See Eric F. Osborn, *Justin Martyr* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1973), 28 ff.

¹³ For the latest and most comprehensive treatment of the topic see M. C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), esp. pp. 61–100; see also Iain MacKenzie, *Irenaeus' Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching: A Theological Commentary and Translation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 81–99; Jacques Fantino, *La Théologie d'Irénée* (Paris: CERF, 1994), 279–300; and Gunton 52–6.

¹⁴ Steenberg 69.

that is, gives body and grants the reality of being, and the Spirit gives order and form to the diversity of the powers; rightly and fittingly is the Word called the Son, and the Spirit the Wisdom of God. Well also does Paul His apostle say: *one God, the Father, who is over all and through all and in us all* [Eph. 4: 6]. For *over all* is the Father; and *through all* is the Son, for through Him all things were made by the Father; and *in us all* is the Spirit, who cries *Abba Father*, and fashions man into the likeness of God.¹⁵

While Irenaeus, in good biblical fashion, regularly attributes creation to the Father in particular, he is equally likely to stress the agency of the Son and the Spirit, as he does here. The unique role of each, however, is difficult to parse in detail—not least because the *Demonstration* survives only in Armenian. The ‘order and form’ given by the Spirit may be traceable to themes in Proverbs 8, given the equation of the Spirit and Wisdom, but the Son’s act of ‘giving body and granting the reality of being’ remains obscure. Perhaps Irenaeus is working precisely with the words ‘Let there be . . .’ of the Genesis text, such that the Son executes the Father’s desire that things be, while the Spirit gives them their particular form of expression.¹⁶ If this reading is correct, the executive role of the Son may be said to be broadly ‘messianic’. In fact, in *Demonstration* 54 Irenaeus picks up Justin’s connection of creation and Messiah: ‘And His name is two-fold: in the Hebrew tongue Messiah Jesus, and in ours Christ Savior. For He was named Christ, because through Him the Father anointed and adorned all things; and because on His coming as man He was anointed with the Spirit of God and His Father’. Irenaeus appears to change Justin’s formula slightly (though the lack of a Greek text makes it difficult to be sure), with Christ taking an active role in the first clause: he pours out the Spirit to inaugurate the first creation, just as the Spirit is poured out on Christ to inaugurate the new creation.

Elsewhere Irenaeus is content to state simply that the Son is the one ‘through whom’ God created all things, with even less elaboration than in *Demonstration* 5.¹⁷ He suggests in *AH* 2. 28. 7 that it is inappropriate to speculate as to ‘whence and in what manner’ God

¹⁵ All translations from *Demonstration* are by J. Armitage Robinson, in MacKenzie 1–28.

¹⁶ Steenberg terms the Son the *agent réalisateur* of the Father’s will (p. 80).

¹⁷ See e.g. *AH* 1. 22. 1; 2. 2. 5; 4. 20. 4; 4. 33. 7.

produced the world, since the Scripture does not address this directly.¹⁸ This is undoubtedly directed primarily against the elaborate schemes concocted by his Gnostic opponents, though it may also include more philosophically informed speculation on the formation of the world.

If the precise activity of the Son in primal creation is only hinted at, however, the fact of the Son's participation lies at the heart of Irenaeus' reading of Scripture. In perhaps his most celebrated passage on creation Irenaeus describes the Son and the Spirit as the 'two hands' of God in creation. God has no need to employ angels in the creation of the world,

as if he did not possess his own hands. For with him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, he made all things, and to whom he speaks, saying, 'Let us make man after our image and likeness', taking from himself the substance of the creatures formed and the pattern of things made, and the type of all the adornments of the world. (*AH* 4. 20. 1)

It is interesting to note that Irenaeus consistently equates the Son and the Word, and the Spirit and Wisdom, but there is no evidence I know of that he does this from misgivings about referring Proverbs 8 to the Son. In any case, the real emphasis here lies on the fact that it is *God* who creates. As MacKenzie says, 'God creates directly by Himself alone; there is neither an agent of creation called into being, nor does anything that is called into being go on to create outside the will and purpose of God that which is in addition to itself. God, as Father, Word and Wisdom, exists and creates'.¹⁹ This of course stands in sharp contrast to the various mediating figures in the Gnostic theologies Irenaeus is combating. Yet if Irenaeus is at pains to argue that God does not need mediators or instruments in order to create, he does not wish to reduce the Son to a mere aspect of God. His strong Trinitarian²⁰ framework will not permit this: 'The creator of the world is truly the Word of God, and this is our Lord, who in the last times was made

¹⁸ See Steenberg 46.

¹⁹ MacKenzie 93.

²⁰ 'Trinitarian' may, strictly speaking, be an anachronistic term for Irenaeus; but, as Steenberg (p. 63) argues, he shows enough affinities with later formal Trinitarian teaching to make it a useful word.

man.’²¹ Like Justin, he uses Gen. 1: 26, ‘Let *us* make man . . .’ as evidence of plurality within the Godhead: the persons speak to one another as they plan the creation of humanity.²² Irenaeus makes his distinctive contribution by showing how the Word’s work in creation both founded and foreshadowed his work in redemption.²³ This is a critical element in his distinctive doctrine of *recapitulatio*.²⁴ Witness the easy elision of Genesis and John’s Gospel in a passage we have already encountered, the healing of the man born blind:

But he, the same one who formed Adam at the beginning, with whom also the Father spoke, saying, ‘Let us make man after our image and likeness’, revealing himself in these last times to men, formed visual organs (*visionem*) for him who been blind [in that body which he had derived] from Adam. (AH 5. 15. 4)

In the same passage Irenaeus poignantly addresses the question of why the man had been born blind in the first place. The answer again lies in the interplay of the beginning and the end:

For that which the artificer, the Word, had omitted to form in the womb [the blind man’s eyes], He then supplied in public, that the works of God might be manifested in him, in order that we might not be seeking out another hand by which man was fashioned, nor another Father; knowing that this hand of God which formed us at the beginning, and which does form us in the womb, has in the last times sought us out who were lost, winning back His own, and taking up the lost sheep upon His shoulders, and with joy restoring it to the fold of life. (AH 5. 15. 3)

For Irenaeus, however, Christ is not merely the creator of humanity, he is humanity’s prototype: ‘Who is superior to and more eminent than that man who was made after the likeness of God, except the Son of

²¹ AH 5. 18. 3; see Steenberg 69–70. For the identification of the pre-incarnate Word and Jesus see also AH 3. 16. 2; cf. 1. 9. 3.

²² Steenberg 74.

²³ For an especially vivid intermingling of creation and redemption themes see AH 4. 20. 2.

²⁴ See e.g. Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, i, 2nd edn., trans. John Bowden (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1975), 101.

God, after whose image man was created?'.²⁵ The bare fact that he sees the archetypal image as Christ is interesting enough for our reading of, for example, Colossians 1; of still more interest is how Irenaeus draws that into his sweeping biblical vision. In terms of the primal creation of humanity, Steenberg writes: 'To call the human creature the "image of God" is primarily to declare that its creation is bound up in the Son's life in the Father, with the Spirit . . . God's chief creative work [i.e. humanity] is that in which his own life may be seen'.²⁶ But this life is only dimly perceived in Adam's fallen race; a clear vision awaits the arrival of the incarnate Son: 'For He made man the image of God; and the image of God is the Son, after whose image man was made; and for this cause He appeared in the end of times that He might show the image [to be] like unto Himself' (*Demonstration*, 22). As Irenaeus explains more fully:

And then, again, this Word was manifested when the Word of God was made man, assimilating Himself to man, and man to Himself, so that by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father. For in times long past, it was said that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [actually] shown; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created, Wherefore also he did easily lose the similitude. When, however, the Word of God became flesh, He confirmed both these: for He both showed forth the image truly, since He became Himself what was His image; and He re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father through means of the visible Word. (*AH* 5. 16. 2)

Thus the Spirit-anointed Word through whom God created humanity in the beginning becomes the reconciler of humanity to God in the end. Steenberg concludes:

²⁵ *AH* 4. 33. 4; Irenaeus at times makes a distinction between the image, *εἰκών*, the exterior, bodily likeness to God in man, and the likeness, *ὁμοίωσις*, the interior, spiritual likeness to God in man. A full exploration of this is beyond our purview. See Anders-Christian Jacobsen, 'The Importance of Genesis 1–3 in the Theology of Irenaeus', *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum*, 8 (2004), 299–316, Julie Canlis, 'Being Made Human: The Significance of Creation for Irenaeus' Doctrine of Participation', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 58 (2005), 443.

²⁶ Steenberg 102; cf. Canlis 434–54.

Protology and eschatology are mutually revelatory... The story of human salvation can be read both ways, for it is an economy of recapitulation in which the ends and the beginnings unite in the person of Christ, through whom the creation of the cosmos and of the child Adam eventually reach perfection in beholding the glory of the Father, Son, and Spirit, 'becoming the perfect work of God'.²⁷

Athanasius deals with Christ's role in creation in similar fashion to Justin, though in much greater detail, particularly in his *Contra Gentes* 40 ff.²⁸ The title of the tract should not obscure the significant debt Athanasius owes to 'Gentile' thought.²⁹ The images of the Word as a pilot steering the universe (40. 2) or a king ruling a city (43. 3) are stock Hellenistic motifs. In the same way, he manages the problem of the one and the many in standard Greek fashion:

while He mingles in one the principles of all sensible existence, heat namely and cold and wet and dry, and causes them not to conflict, but to make up one concordant harmony. By reason of Him and His power, fire does not fight with cold nor wet with dry, but principles mutually opposed, as if friendly and brotherly combine together, and give life to the things we see, and form the principles by which bodies exist. (42. 1–2)³⁰

Athanasius does not hesitate to equate God with the figure of Wisdom in Proverbs 8 (46. 6), an exegetical move that regularly coincides with a diminution of the full personhood of the pre-incarnate Christ. Passages like this might suggest that Christ has become fully transmuted into an impersonal principle of order.

But this is not the case. Athanasius begins his explanation of the Word by explicitly stating that this is *not* referring to the *logos*

²⁷ Steenberg 216; the final phrase is from AH 4. 39. 2.

²⁸ See Jon M. Robertson, *Christ as Mediator: A Study of the Theologies of Eusebius of Caesarea, Marcellus of Ancyra, and Athanasius of Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 137–216, and Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998), which focuses on the relation of God and creation in Athanasius.

²⁹ For the programmatic importance of Platonic categories for Athanasius see J. Rebecca Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 124–59.

³⁰ All translations from Athanasius are from *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Archibald Robertson, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2nd ser.*, iv (Edinburgh/Grand Rapids: Clark, 1891).

spermatikos of the Stoics 'but . . . the living and powerful Word of the good God, the God of the Universe, the very Word which is God, Who while different from things that are made, and from all Creation, is the One own Word of the good Father, Who by His own providence ordered and illumines this Universe' (40. 2). Furthermore, Athanasius' lengthy explanation of the work of the Word is laced with scriptural references to the beauty of God's creation, and the praise that is due him for his astounding work; his discourse is at least as much doxology as it is philosophy. The Greeks themselves, of course, could praise Nature, or the divine element in Nature, with great eloquence; so it is not as if Athanasius' devotional tone is without parallel. But it shows he has not sold his biblical heritage for a pot of hyper-rationalistic stew.³¹

At least two things do make Athanasius' contribution noteworthy. The first is his appreciation of the Word's personal agency in creation. He demonstrates this in different ways. Throughout this section of the *Contra Gentes* the Word is depicted as the active agent of God; among many examples we might choose the words in 44. 3: 'But Himself being over all, both Governor and King and organising power, He does all for the glory and knowledge of His own Father'. The Johannine flavor of the second clause is no coincidence. Athanasius makes no attempt to sever the incarnate Word of John's Prologue from the Messiah of the rest of the Gospel. In his summary statements in 45. 1 ff. he begins with what looks like a move towards a rationalization of the Word: 'for if when a word proceeds from men we infer that the mind is its source, and, by thinking about the word, see with our reason the mind which it reveals, by far greater evidence and incomparably more, seeing the power of the Word, we receive a knowledge also of His good Father' (45. 2). But the sentence concludes with a reference to Jesus' words in John 14: 9: 'as the Saviour Himself says, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"'. As we

³¹ Robertson, *Christ as Mediator*, 148, says of Athanasius' employment of Greek philosophical language: '[H]is use of these sources does not suggest a deep adoption of their underlying philosophies but rather a borrowing of metaphors and illustrations to support a point he is making at the moment . . . There can be little doubt that, in Athanasius' own opinion at any rate, Christian scripture furnished him with the majority of his ideas about the Logos'.

have argued above, this is precisely how the Prologue is meant to be understood.³²

But the most interesting material on the personal nature of Christ's agency in creation comes, paradoxically (from my perspective), from the very passage in which Athanasius equates Christ with the divine Wisdom of Proverbs 8 (46. 4–8). The reference to Wisdom is embedded within a discussion of the curious use of plurals in Genesis 1, particularly in 1: 20: 'Let us make man in our image'. Athanasius explains the matter thus (46: 6):

it follows then that some one was with Him to Whom He spoke when He made all things. Who then could it be, save His Word? For to whom could God be said to speak, except His Word? Or who was with Him when He made all created Existence, except His Wisdom, which says: 'When He was making the heaven and the earth I was present with Him?'

The invocation of Proverbs 8 may create more problems than it solves;³³ and modern critical scholars may put forward any number of explanations of Genesis 1 which do not involve inner-Trinitarian dialogue. But from a purely theological standpoint it is precisely this inner-Trinitarian dialogue that preserves what I believe is the presupposition of the New Testament writers: the Messiah is the active agent of creation who responds to the Father's will when he makes the world.

Perhaps even more important is Athanasius' clarification of what is meant by Christ's 'mediation' of creation. We have used *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* throughout this study as a helpful shorthand for Christ's work in creation, but precisely what sort of *Vermittler* he is might still be open to question. Does he function as God in the act of creation (and if so, does he do so by way of essence, or adoption?), or is he a *tertium quid* embracing God and not-God? The question goes to the heart of Athanasius' Trinitarian theology. In the *Contra Arianos* he cites a passage

³² Cf. *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*: 'the renewal of creation has been the work of the self-same Word that made it at the beginning', in Robertson, *Christ as Mediator*, 197.

³³ Athanasius in fact must expend considerable energy in the *Apologia Contra Arianos* (esp. Disc. 2) trying to defend a reading of Proverbs 8 that supports Christ's role in creation but does not relegate him to created status *per* Prov. 8: 22.

from the 'Eusebians' to the effect that the world could not bear the 'untempered hand' (ἀκράτου χειρὸς) of God, and hence he first creates the unique Son, who in turn becomes the 'medium' (μέσος) for the creation of all other things.³⁴ This is intolerable for Athanasius. Not only does it imply that God is too proud to concern himself with created things, it lodges an insoluble logical dilemma at the center of the Christian view of creation:

And again, if because originate nature could not endure to be God's own handywork, there arose need of a mediator, it must follow, that, the Word being originate and a creature, there is need of a medium in His framing also, since He too is of that originate nature which endures not to be made of God, but needs a medium. But if some being as a medium be found for Him, then again a fresh mediator is needed for that second, and thus tracing back and following out, we shall invent a vast crowd of accumulating mediators³⁵

Athanasius maintains that God himself has in fact created the world, and that world, weak as it may be, bears genuine witness to his glory: 'For what things are the subjects of his providence, of those he is the maker through his proper word (διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου λόγου)'.³⁶ As Robertson puts it: 'The Word does not act as any kind of protecting "medium" between the frailty of the created order and the hand of God, but rather is simply the one through whom the Father is maker'.³⁷ While the Word may indeed 'mediate' the knowledge of God to humanity, the Word 'is mediator not as a third party who comes between God and man, but rather as God himself condescending and communicating his will and making himself known'.³⁸

³⁴ *Contra Arianos*, 2. 24; translation and discussion in Robertson, *Christ as Mediator*, 172–4.

³⁵ This is of course a species of the 'third-man argument' that has been brought against Plato's theory of Ideas since its inception.

³⁶ *Contra Arianos*, 2. 24.

³⁷ Robertson, *Christ as Mediator*, 172–3. Lyman (p. 152) believes that in Athanasius' later works he emphasizes Christ's divinity to the point where it 'overshadows' the genuine agency of the Son.

³⁸ Robertson, *Christ as Mediator*, 176.

THREE MODERN GERMAN-LANGUAGE THEOLOGIANS

Pannenberg

Pannenberg, we have seen, has a very keen assessment of the benefits and shortcomings of the patristic λόγος doctrine in his book *Jesus—God and Man*. We have quoted approvingly his trenchant observation that the Fathers were hindered by the ‘philosophical question patterns’ they inherited from the Greeks. Yet his own reflections on Christ’s *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* demonstrate the difficulty of completely disentangling one’s self from the philosophical, theological, and exegetical question patterns of one’s own age. This is particularly evident in *Jesus—God and Man*. His later treatment in the second volume of his *Systematic Theology*, however, moves forward in very creative ways. The relative strengths and weaknesses of the respective discussions may be traced back, I believe, to different points of departure.

In *Jesus—God and Man* Pannenberg rightly rejects the Gnostic redeemer myth as the background for the Johannine λόγος, though he accepts that Jewish traditions of hypostatic Wisdom and Philonic-style reasoning contributed to the Prologue.³⁹ In and of itself this is not critical. Where the mischief begins, I believe, is in his reading of the creation material in Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1. Pannenberg follows Hegermann in positing a sharp distinction in the Colossians hymn between the ‘Hellenistic’ concepts of image, firstborn, and head in the first stanza, and the eschatological material related to Jesus’ resurrection in the second.⁴⁰ He then goes on to critique the hymn writer (and by extension the author of Hebrews) for, in essence, not following Pannenberg’s theology closely enough: ‘The reconstruction demanded here would have been carried out with the necessary radicality if it had succeeded in understanding the assertions about creation eschatologically in the sense of a creation

³⁹ Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 160–1.

⁴⁰ Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 392–3. He also accepts Hegermann’s excision of τῆς ἐκκλησίας in 18a, such that Christ is assumed to be ‘head of creation’.

occurring and being fulfilled from the *eschaton*.⁴¹ Yet this assertion is only valid if the statements in Colossians and Hebrews are in fact captive to Hellenistic thought forms. We have tried to show in detail that they are in fact messianically conceived images, and are thus equally a part of the biblical witness Pannenberg wants to preserve.

Turning to theology, Pannenberg's Christological outlook in *Jesus—God and Man* is driven by the primacy of the resurrection for our understanding of Jesus. On the one hand, of course, we have argued along similar lines: the early Church's experience of Jesus, culminating in the resurrection and ascension, provided the basis for speculation as to his role in primal creation. But Pannenberg here asserts far more than this with respect to Christ and creation. He writes:

On the basis of the eschatologically oriented Israelite understanding of truth, according to which the essence of a thing has not always existed—even though hiddenly—but is decided only by what becomes of it, the predestination of all things toward Jesus, their eschatological summation through Jesus, is identical with their creation through Jesus . . . Christ's mediation of creation is not to be thought of primarily in terms of the temporal beginning of the world. It is rather to be understood in terms of the whole of the world process that receives its unity and meaning in the light of its end that has appeared in advance in the history of Jesus.⁴²

There is surely something to what Pannenberg is saying here (though we may question whether it is grounded in an unrecoverable 'Israelite understanding of truth'). Whether we speak of Christ bringing the creation project to its fulfillment, or of Christ replicating the work of the *Urzeit* in the *Endzeit*, it is clear that Christ's role in primal creation is conceived by way of analogy with his eschatological work. But this is different from simply collapsing creation in the beginning into the renewal of creation in the end, as Pannenberg seems to do. He must run counter to the *prima facie* reading of the texts, which are precisely interested in the temporal beginning of the world and Christ's role in it. Pannenberg's view on creation is obviously a

⁴¹ Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 393.

⁴² Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 391. Cf. his comment on p. 169: 'What they are is decided by what they will become'.

function of his overarching theological framework, such that the precise details of his exegesis of Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1 are perhaps not critical to his summary statements. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see how his attenuated theological reading of these New Testament texts in *Jesus—God and Man* is facilitated by the standard arguments that they are rooted in Hellenistic thought or Jewish wisdom speculation.

But the discussion in *Jesus—God and Man* is by no means Pannenberg's final word on the subject, as we can see by turning to the radically different treatment of the material in the second volume of his systematic theology. Here he makes only passing mention of the Wisdom and λόγος backgrounds, and while he still affirms an eschatological dimension to the New Testament texts on Jesus and creation, he clarifies that this does not preclude the activity of the Son in primal creation: 'The final ordering of creatures to the manifestation of Jesus Christ presupposes that creatures already have the origin of their existence and nature in the Son'.⁴³ The eternal Son, furthermore, is not to be understood as an abstract principle, but can only be understood in relation to the revelation of God in Jesus: 'The relation to Jesus as Son is intrinsic to the eternal deity of the Father'.⁴⁴

It is this Johannine relationship of the Father and the Son that provides Pannenberg with a new lens through which to examine the question of Christ and creation. His central thesis is that the Son's self-distinction from the Father becomes the basis for the existence of other created beings outside the Trinity. As Pannenberg himself acknowledges, this bears some resemblance to Hegel's speculation about the λόγος as the 'principle of otherness' (a phrase with clear Platonic overtones); but Pannenberg has dramatically altered the shape of the discussion by rooting this in the freedom of the personal Son: 'In the free self-distinction of the Son from the Father the independent existence of a creation distinct from God has its basis, and in this sense we may view creation as a free act not only of the Father, but of the Trinitarian God'.⁴⁵ If the Father, in other words, can

⁴³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, ii, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 25.

⁴⁴ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, ii. 22.

⁴⁵ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, ii. 30.

open himself up to the reality of the Son as a differentiated person, he has thus opened himself up to the possibility of the reality of all sorts of other things as well.

In keeping with this (and, again, in distinction from Hegel), the creation is not the result of cold necessity, but of the mutual love of the Father and the Son: 'The goodness of the Father as Creator, by which he gives and upholds the existence of his creatures, is not different, however, from the love with which the Father from all eternity loves the Son'. The Son is the primary object of the Father's love. In all the creatures to which he addresses his love he loves the Son.⁴⁶ In keeping with Col. 1: 16 ('all things hold together in him'), Pannenberg also affirms that 'the Son is the origin of creaturely existence not only as the principle of distinction and self-distinction but also as the link with that which is thus distinct'.⁴⁷ Here he introduces some of the traditional elements of the world-ordering *λόγος* of the Fathers, while avoiding the trap of having Christ become a depersonalized cosmic principle.⁴⁸

To sum up, when Pannenberg sits with the New Testament texts themselves, he is able to find space within them to engage in incisive and balanced theological discourse that affirms the heart of Christian theological tradition while moving it forward in intriguing ways. It is only when his focus shifts to putative background materials that the message of the texts becomes somewhat overshadowed by his own theological *Tendenz*.

Moltmann

Creation and Christology are of course central concerns in Moltmann's theology, and his comments on Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* are quite stimulating.⁴⁹ Moltmann provides a compelling theological

⁴⁶ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, ii. 21.

⁴⁷ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, ii. 32.

⁴⁸ Pannenberg provides a helpful analysis of aspects of mediation and *λόγος* doctrine on pp. 25–8.

⁴⁹ For an overview of Moltmann's theology of creation see Petr Macek, 'The Doctrine of Creation in the Messianic Theology of Jürgen Moltman' *Communio viatorum*, 49/2 (2007), 150–84.

rationale for the relationship of the *Endzeit* and the *Urzeit*; consider, for instance, his comments on the deductions drawn by the Church from the Easter experience: 'What was "seen" there goes beyond all historical remembrances and experiences, and touches the innermost constitution of creation itself'.⁵⁰ Moreover, the subtitle of his book *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* points to a substantial affinity with another one of our major theses. Moltmann means more than we do when speaking of the 'messianic perspective'; it seems to function for him as a shorthand for the eschatologically oriented theology of hope he has propounded from the beginning of his scholarly career. But this includes an appreciation for messianic categories of thought in the Old Testament and Judaism, and for the life of Jesus as the ultimate revelation of what Messiah means. 'What does christology mean except messianology?', he asks;⁵¹ and I would submit that the exegesis of Colossians 1 and the rest might look very different if New Testament scholars had heeded that simple question. Thus even when Moltmann adopts the Wisdom background for the New Testament creation texts he speaks of the 'Wisdom messiah'.⁵²

Nonetheless, we find a similar bifurcation in Moltmann's discussions of Christ's *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* to that in Pannenberg, and for a similar reason. In *The Way of Jesus Christ* Moltmann grounds his discussion in the figure of Wisdom which is supposed to lie behind the New Testament accounts—precisely what Pannenberg does in *Jesus—God and Man*. The fact that Wisdom is presented in feminine guise and as immanent in the world would certainly make her appealing to Moltmann, with his concerns for feminist theological reflection and the presence of God with his creation.⁵³ Yet it is not clear to me how Moltmann means Wisdom to relate to Christ with respect to primal creation. Moltmann writes that Wisdom is the

⁵⁰ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1990), 281.

⁵¹ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 1.

⁵² Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 281.

⁵³ Cf. his comments in *In the End—the Beginning: The Life of Hope* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2004), 12: 'If we understand wisdom not just as a human virtue, but in the first place as a presence of God in creation, then we understand why Jesus is presented in the New Testament both as Israel's messiah and as the Wisdom of creation, so that the Christ mystery is both male and female.'

'secret bond of creation' and is 'pre-existent in all things'; she is creation's 'mediatrix' and 'sustainer'. But how does this apparently independent figure relate to the Messiah? Moltmann only tells us that the 'creation Wisdom... "appears" in the risen Christ', and concludes: 'Logos christology is originally Wisdom christology, and is as such cosmic christology'.⁵⁴

The Messiah is likewise difficult to discern in Moltmann's elaboration of creation through the Word and the Spirit.⁵⁵ As an exegesis of Genesis 1, it has much to commend it. He recognizes the frequent interchange of Wisdom, Word, and Spirit in Jewish accounts of creation, which provides some balance to his earlier privileging of Wisdom traditions. To the extent we can isolate the function of the Word, it 'names, differentiates, and appraises'. Yet because it is *God's* Word, it can serve at the same time as the ground of unity for all things. Again, this is true; but, again, it is unclear precisely how this fits with the person of Jesus Christ.

It is not as if Moltmann, of all people, has abandoned the idea that creation is the work of the Trinity. He prefaces his discussion by citing 1 Cor. 8: 6 and speaking straightforwardly of Christ as 'the mediator in creation'.⁵⁶ He makes no effort in his ensuing comments to qualify this and suggest that it was not 'really' Christ who created, but it was *only* God's Word or Wisdom. His reflections on the differentiating function of the Word in Genesis 1 are at once innovative in expression and well in keeping with the theological tradition. But he does not adequately explain here how the putative backgrounds in Wisdom or Word Christology relate to the figure of Son.

Moltmann's discussion in *The Trinity and the Kingdom* has a very different tone.⁵⁷ Like Pannenberg (whom he cites approvingly in this regard), Moltmann reads primal creation in light of eschatological consummation: 'If Christ is the foundation for the salvation of the

⁵⁴ All quotations in this paragraph are from Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 282.

⁵⁵ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 288–90.

⁵⁶ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 280.

⁵⁷ While *The Trinity and the Kingdom* is chronologically prior to *The Way of Jesus Christ*, I have treated it second because it is in my opinion a much fuller and more satisfying treatment of the topic.

whole creation, then he is also the foundation of creation's very existence'.⁵⁸ He goes on, as he does in *The Way of Jesus Christ*, to explain the historical origins of the doctrine by recourse to Wisdom traditions. Moltmann seems to appropriate it here in the manner of the Church Fathers: the Old Testament figure of Wisdom, which he says 'is one with God and yet confronts him independently' and is described in Jewish writings 'in a more and more personal way',⁵⁹ becomes a kind of type of Christ, a way station on the road back to the beginning.

Moltmann does not hesitate, then, to reflect on the theological significance of Christ's work in the *Urzeit*. He writes in a Johannine vein that '[i]t is because [God] loves the Son that he becomes the Creator'.⁶⁰ This is no mere sentiment; what Moltmann means is that the Father's 'self-communicating love for the one like himself' (i.e. the Son) necessarily 'opens itself to the Other' (i.e. the creation).⁶¹ In addition, everything is created with an orientation *towards* the Son and his incarnation in time and space. What, then, of the active *agency* of the Messiah in primal creation? Moltmann does not go into as much detail here, but the following passage is suggestive:

Can we say that, since the Son is destined to be the Logos, he is the divinely immanent archetype of the idea of the world? This can be said in the sense of eternal love, since the Son is in eternity the complete response to the self-communicating love of the Father, so that in the Son the Father arrives at blissful love. If the Father creates the world by virtue of his love for the Son, then by virtue of the Son's answering love the world becomes the bliss of God the Father and the Son.⁶²

⁵⁸ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 102.

⁵⁹ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 103.

⁶⁰ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 112.

⁶¹ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 112; cf. his discussion on pp. 105–8, where the Son's relationship to the Father on the one hand and to the world on the other is nicely summarized: 'The Son is *the Logos* in relation to the world. The Logos is *the Son* in relation to the Father. The Father utters the eternal Word in the Spirit and breathes out the Spirit in the eternal utterance of the Word. Through the eternal Son/Logos the Father creates the world' (p. 108).

⁶² Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 112–13.

This is an admirably balanced statement. Moltmann wants to preserve some connection with the philosophical dimensions of the λόγος, yet he reframes the question in terms of Trinitarian love. The Father desires to communicate himself to something other than himself, and he does so through the Son. Yet the Son is no mere instrument or mediating principle: it is his 'answering love' for the Father that issues in the creation and thus allows the Father to arrive at 'blissful love'.

In Moltmann's view, this 'blissful love' must find its home via the Incarnation. God does not simply put the Messiah into the world as a remedial measure. Rather, the Incarnation is a necessity for a God who desires to love the Other to the uttermost: 'But if God's world is designed for men and women, and if the incarnation of the Son fulfills this design of creation, then in intention the incarnation precedes the creation of the world. The fact that the eternal Son of the Father becomes God's created ikon then belongs to his eternal destiny'.⁶³

Barth

We have reserved Barth for the final place in our discussion because no exegete or theologian I have read presents the scholarly issues surrounding Christ and primal creation with such force and clarity. Indeed, the parallels between Barth's perspective and the one espoused in this book are often so close one might imagine that this whole enterprise has been a covert Barthian apologetic. For that reason, I must point out that I did not encounter Barth's views on the matter until the historical and exegetical material in this book was already in more or less its final form.

What distinguishes Barth's treatment from nearly everyone else's is not so much the historical data with which he begins, but rather how he situates the New Testament texts against that background. Like the majority of scholars we have surveyed, Barth acknowledges that the idea of mediation between the divine realm and the human realm was a widespread concern in the ancient world. Indeed, he goes well

⁶³ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 117.

beyond Philo's *λόγος* and says that a 'second divine being assisting in the work of creation' was ascribed 'to Hermes, to death, to Athene, to the Wohu-Manu, to the Mithra of Zoroastrianism and to the Man-dean Hibil-Ziva'.⁶⁴ Whether any of these figures actually were seen as agents of creation in the New Testament era is open to serious question, but that is almost inconsequential for Barth. While these pagan ideas might constitute the 'prepared ground' of the New Testament, a more likely literary source lay close to hand—the by-now familiar Jewish Wisdom tradition. Thus far, Barth only affirms the scholarly consensus.

Where he departs from the norm is in his assertion that none of this had a particularly noticeable effect on the substance of the New Testament's teaching on Jesus and creation. In terms of backgrounds, he argues convincingly that the Old Testament figure of Wisdom was no intermediate being, even if later Jewish interpretation (we presume he is referring *inter alia* to the Wisdom of Solomon) moved in that direction.⁶⁵ Furthermore, Barth recognizes the crucial distinction to be made between a Christ who *is* God's wisdom and a Christ who *has* God's wisdom: 'the creative wisdom and power of God were in the beginning specifically the wisdom and power of Jesus Christ'.⁶⁶

But Barth's real point is that the proffered backgrounds are not where we should look to discern the heart of the matter:

There is thus no trace in any of the New Testament passages quoted of the suggestion that the participation of Jesus Christ in creation is significant for these writers because they too had been affected by the general shattering of the consciousness of God and the world, or because they had been seeking an intermediate principle and had given to this postulate the name of Jesus Christ . . . They, the apostles, on the other hand, were the bearers of the objective, shattering message of the kingdom of God drawn near, and the consequent end of all mediating philosophy, theosophy, and cosmology.⁶⁷

The passage clearly exhibits the distinctive themes of Barth's theology, with its 'no' to worldly wisdom and its raw dependence on God's

⁶⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III. 1, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: Clark, 1958), 52.

⁶⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.1. 52–3.

⁶⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.1. 55.

⁶⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.1. 53.

self-revelation. The burden of our argument, however, is that Barth's assertions are well grounded in the New Testament texts themselves.⁶⁸ The texts give little hint of concern with questions of philosophical principle, and thus it is not surprising that conceptual difficulties arise when one tries to equate Jesus with the figure in Proverbs 8, or the λόγος of Philo. The writers have an entirely different point of departure.

Barth is equally insightful in dealing with the Christological content of the New Testament creation texts. He first confirms, with ample support from ancient and modern theologians, that 'no other meaning can be read into the passages adduced than that they refer to Jesus the Christ, who is certainly very God, but who is also very man'.⁶⁹ The problem of preexistence cannot be dodged by recourse to Wisdom or Word. Barth admits that the idea of the λόγος ἄσαρκος has certain theological uses, but goes on to say that the New Testament itself never divorces the pre-incarnate Messiah from the Jesus who appeared in the flesh. With respect to John 1, for instance, this means that 'we shall misunderstand the entire Johannine Prologue if we fail to see that the sentence οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν (Jn. 1: 2)—which otherwise would be a wholly unnecessary repetition—points to the person who is the theme of the whole ensuing Gospel, and of whom it is said in v.14: "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us"'.⁷⁰ The problem remains as to how one is to conceptualize a Word who is personal but is not yet Jesus of Nazareth. At this point Barth draws on his Reformed heritage: Christ is always spoken of 'with a view to the concrete content of the eternal divine will and decree'; he is 'the One who in the eternal sight of God has already taken upon Himself our human nature'.⁷¹ This

⁶⁸ Barth, not surprisingly, shows a keen eye for exegetical details in his brief treatment; see e.g. his discussions of the uses of *διά* and *ἐν* on pp. 51–2.

⁶⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.1. 55. For a defense of Barth's essentially Chalcedonian Christology see chapter 6 of George Hunsinger's *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000).

⁷⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.1. 54; he notes the same dynamic in Heb. 1: 2, 3.

⁷¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.1. 54. For a detailed discussion of Barth's view that Jesus Christ was both the electing God and the elect human see Bruce McCormack, 'Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology', in John Webster (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92–110. Cf. his quote on p. 95: 'In part, at least, Barth's claim that Jesus Christ is the Subject of election was motivated by

incarnate destiny has particular ramifications for the idea that the world is made *for* the Son: 'The fact that God has regard to His Son—the Son of Man, the Word made flesh—is the true and genuine basis of creation.'

The nature of the Messiah's preexistence is a thorny question, and one can argue that the invocation of the decrees does not entirely remove the sting from it.⁷² But Barth's willingness to let the texts themselves, and not the alleged background, dictate the terms of discussion enables him to build creatively on the creation formulas of the New Testament. Thus Barth eloquently expresses the idea that Christ is God's consummate self-communication:

In the same freedom and love in which God is not alone in Himself but is the eternal begetter of the Son, who is the eternally begotten of the Father, he also turns as Creator *ad extra* in order that absolutely and outwardly He may not be alone but the One who loves in freedom. In other words, as God in Himself is neither deaf nor dumb but speaks and hears His Word from all eternity, so outside His eternity he does not wish to be without hearing and echo, that is, without the ears and voices of the creature.⁷³

SUMMARY

A single swallow does not a summer make, nor does a survey of six theologians warrant sweeping conclusions about the use or abuse of the New Testament texts on Christ and creation in the history of the Church. Theology has its own operating principles, and rigorous

worries over speculation. If we were to posit the existence of a *Logos asarkos* above and prior to the eternal decision to become incarnate in time, Barth feared that we would be inviting speculation about the being and existence of the Logos in such a state or mode of being'. McCormack's larger project of re-visioning Barth's view of the Trinity and election has been critiqued by Hunsinger ('Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth', *Modern Theology*, 24 (2008), 179–98).

⁷² See e.g. Dan L. Deegan, 'Barth's Theology of Creation', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 14 (1961), 119–35, on how Barth faces the perpetual challenge of maintaining a balance between the eternal or absolute nature of Christ and the reality of the Incarnation.

⁷³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.1. 50.

adherence to the deliverances of historical criticism is not its central concern. But we may pick up at least a few threads across the centuries.

First, it would appear that there has been a tendency among theologians to depersonalize the work of the Messiah in creation. In the early Church this can be attributed to the irresistible lure of the λόγος. John 1 seemed to offer a straight path towards intellectual respectability in the Hellenistic milieu, yet with the heavy cost of adopting an alien set of 'philosophical question patterns'. Based on our admittedly small sample, however, the depth of the problem may have been overstated. Thinkers like Justin and Athanasius did indeed draw heavily upon the λόγος in the Prologue to John, but they also tended to read the Prologue in light of the remainder of the Gospel. Thus creation remains a work of the Son; the λόγος ἄσαρκος is understood by reference to the λόγος ἐνσάρκος. Furthermore, the λόγος was only one way the Fathers adumbrated Christ's pre-incarnate work. More personal figures like the Angel of the Lord could also be invoked, as could the inner-Trinitarian dialogue posited in Genesis 1.⁷⁴

In the modern world this tendency has been aided by the intrusion of the figure of Wisdom into the understanding of the New Testament texts. Unlike John's λόγος, Wisdom is not tethered to its context, but rather floats in the dim regions behind the text, and has thus been more subject to the whims of theological imagination. In the case of Pannenberg's account in *Jesus—God and Man*, this seems to have contributed to his relegation of Christ's creative work to the eschaton. Moltmann, likewise, obscures the role of Christ in creation when he sets his sight on the activity of Wisdom. Furthermore, since Wisdom is assumed to hold the key to passages like Colossians 1, theologian and exegetes alike tend to assume that a discourse on God's creative Wisdom is tantamount to an explanation of Christ's role in creation. It is interesting to note that when Pannenberg and Moltmann eschew the Wisdom background and work from the Johannine template they not only resonate with the biblical tradition, they are able to push the doctrine of Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*

⁷⁴ As we noted in Chapter 4, the Fathers were also quite willing to do what the New Testament writers were not: directly identify Christ with the figure of Wisdom in Proverbs 8. What they gained in Old Testament support, however, they lost in inevitable Arian exploitations of Prov. 8: 22: κύριος ἐκτίσέν με κτλ.

forward in invigorating ways. I would only add that if John has typically pulled theologians back to a personal view of God in creation, our study has shown that Colossians 1 does not provide a back door through which one can escape the personal agency of the Son. Both the parallels with his work in redemption and the use of messianic imagery in the Colossians hymn display the same the active agency as the Son in the Johannine account.

Moltmann and Pannenberg demonstrate that an emphasis on the personal action of Christ in creation does not cut off all engagement with philosophical questions. As we noted above, Moltmann's discussion of the Word as differentiator is quite stimulating as an exegesis of Genesis 1, even if he leaves its relationship to the Son somewhat unclear. The same could be said of Athanasius' extensive treatment in *Contra Gentes*. Even Hegel's idea that the Son is the 'principle of otherness' in the Trinity—which threatens to reduce the Messiah not only to the Idea of the World, but to a single Platonic 'Idea of Difference'—can be developed in theologically fruitful ways, as we saw in Pannenberg's systematic theology. The self-distinction of the Son is the first step in God's opening up to realities beyond himself (even if the relationships between Father and Son, and between God and the world, are hardly symmetrical). We might go on to discuss how Christ uses God's Word to order the creation, and what relationship that might have to Stoic or Platonic concepts. But rooting the discussion in Jesus' personal action as Messiah, rather than in an amorphous Wisdom or principle of mediation, will eliminate the conceptual confusion engendered by trying to imagine how Jesus Christ could be the blueprint of creation or the glue of the cosmos. The further question of how the Messiah can act personally prior to his incarnation is likewise an area where theologians might provide a rationale for what is simply assumed by the New Testament writers.

If we might draw out just one of the conclusions of our study which would repay further theological investigation, it would be this: The Messiah, as the image of God, creates the world he rules. The words of John's Prologue, 'He came unto his own' (John 1: 11, *εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν*) seem to refer, strictly speaking, to Jesus' countrymen who largely reject him in the remainder of the Gospel (*καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον*); yet in light of the universal scope of the Word's creative activity (1: 3), from a theological standpoint we may

legitimately extend τὰ ἴδια to include all of created reality.⁷⁵ As Moltmann points out, this fact suggests the answer to the question *cur deus homo?* Christ did not simply come into the world to save it; he came into the world because it is his. He *belongs* here in the fullest sense of the word. Furthermore, if humanity is created precisely in the image of the Messiah, then we are ultimately not strangers in the world, either, even if we are now estranged from both the world and from God. There is a fitness to human life on earth that derives from its creation by the hands of the Son of Man.

Rather than prolong these musings, we may conclude by returning to Barth. The chief lesson in his discussion in *Church Dogmatics* III.1, I believe, is to let the New Testament texts on Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* speak for themselves. This is not simply a theological imperative, but an exegetical one; the passages make best sense as expositions of the extent of Jesus' messianic dominion, which begins in creation and continues through to the eschaton. The background materials, to the extent that they invoke categories from Wisdom tradition or Greek philosophy, are thoroughly subsumed under the creative activity of the Son, and are lifted in to elucidate what the writers in some sense already knew. We end, then, with Barth's words, which summarize so eloquently what we have been urging throughout this book:

It is not God or the world and their relation which is the problem of these passages but the lordship of Jesus Christ. The starting point is not that deity is so exalted and holy or that the world is so dark; nor is it the affirmation that there is something like a mediation between the two which bears the name Jesus Christ. What they have in view is the kingdom of God drawn near; the turning point of the times, revealed in the name of Jesus Christ . . . To give to the Bearer of this name the honour due to him, or rather to bear witness to the honour which He has, they venture the tremendous assertion that the world was created through Him and in Him as through God, and in God, in God's eternal will and purpose.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ As Pannenberg does: *Systematic Theology*, ii. 25.

⁷⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1. 53–4.

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