

Introducing the Bible Study

In one of his well-known sonnets, John Keats tells how in reading Chapman's translation of Homer he experienced the elation of a new discovery:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or, like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

In our time, many have had a similar experience in encountering the Bible. Bible study, of the kind you are about to engage in, can have the result of opening your eyes to a startling new vista, of giving you a new perspective upon the meaning of your life and your place in the whole historical drama.

There are two ways to approach the study of the Bible. The first is appropriate to classroom or academic study. Using this approach, one *looks at* the Bible from the outside as a spectator. One learns many interesting things about the Bible, such as the literary process that brought it to its final shape as a canon of sacred Scripture or the cultural, archaeological, and historical background of the various books. One is curious about the ideas of the Bible, even the “idea of God,” and perhaps masters these ideas well enough to pass the course with flying colors. This descriptive approach has its place, but it is not the one we shall follow in these studies.

The second approach is one in which together we shall attempt to *stand within* the Bible and to look out at the world through the window of biblical faith. Like actors who put themselves into the script of a play, we shall read the Bible with personal involvement, realizing that it is not a textbook but a “letter from God with your personal address on it,” as Søren Kierkegaard once put it. We shall read it as a story that is not just about other people of long ago but that is about us in the places where we are living. The language of the Bible, when it is truly heard, can be an event, a happening, such as it was with biblical witnesses, like Moses, who first were addressed personally by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 3:4-6).

GOD’S MANIFESTO

The distinctiveness of this Bible study, which emphasizes the reader’s identification with the plot of the story, arises from the uniqueness of the Bible itself. It is the Christian claim that the perspective set forth in the Bible has been provided by God’s own self-revelation. This is what puts the Bible in a class by itself. The Bible is written not in a secret code, but in living human language that reveals the dramatic involvement of God in our personal lives and in our history. Christians affirm that the Bible contains the Word of God. Just as in our everyday experience, when a “word” is an event of communication between persons, so God’s Word is an event of communication, an act of participation in the reality of our history (as we read in John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”). This dynamic power of God’s Word is a far cry from the notion that the Bible contains the literal, static words of God taken down by human stenographers. The Bible is not divine dictation, but divine drama whose language poetically exposes the meaning of human life in relation to the God who has condescended to dwell among us, in our human language and history. The Bible is, to use a familiar Christian formulation, the “Word of God in human

words.” This conviction underlies the practice in many churches of prefacing or concluding the reading of a Scripture selection with the phrase “The Word of God.”

The Bible may be described as God’s Manifesto. The dictionary defines a manifesto as “a public declaration, usually of a sovereign or political group, showing intentions and motives.” So, for instance, the revolutionary *Communist Manifesto* of the twentieth century defines economic struggle in terms of a predetermined movement of the historical process toward fulfillment in a classless society. Even today, to be a Communist is to understand one’s existence in this context.

In a more special sense, the Bible is, for the Christian community, God’s Manifesto. God is the Sovereign who declares the inner meaning of a historical crisis and discloses the direction of the whole human drama. God’s revelation is given in the events of which the Bible is the record and the witness, events that come to climax and fulfillment in Jesus Christ. And to be a Christian is to understand one’s existence in this dramatic context.

Now, this does not mean one must be a convinced Christian before anything can be gotten out of the study of the Bible. As Paul Lehmann once observed, “The Bible has a curious slant in favor of the unbeliever; the unbeliever, that is, who is really honest about his unbelief, and really curious about the full diversity and complexity of the world in which he lives.”¹

The only condition for fruitful Bible study is that you come with an open mind and an unbounded interest in the question, “What is the meaning of my life and the historical crisis in which I and my community are involved?” This means:

- You must be willing to let the past—this biblical past—speak to you where you are living, to make a claim upon you in the present.
- You must meet others in the group as persons, respecting their individuality and being willing to learn from the conversation.

- You must come with the intention of wrestling seriously and honestly with the meaning of a biblical passage—not to air your private opinions or prejudices.
- You must be ready to hear what the great teachers of the church have had to say in their commentaries—Augustine, Calvin, Luther, and others, including those of our own period.
- You must expect to be questioned by the Bible, even as you bring your own questions to the Bible.

It may be that in this give-and-take experience you will discover an entirely new dimension of life, as you find yourself drawn into the history that God is making.

THE BIBLE AS A WHOLE

In this book we shall tackle the whole Bible. This may seem as foolish as American tourists who breeze through the Louvre as though they are trying to establish a new track record. It is admitted at the outset that this approach runs the risk of superficiality. It is hoped that you will have time enough to stake your claims so that later you can come back to sink your shafts more deeply, aided perhaps by the “Suggestions for Further Reading” given at the end of each study unit.

Many people, however, lack any awareness of the Bible as a whole. They know a few snatches of Scripture here and there, like the twenty-third Psalm or the Sermon on the Mount, but are very hazy—if not completely ignorant—about the larger dramatic context within which these favorite passages have meaning. We all need to stand back from the trees so that we may see the woods. That is the justification for this study of the Bible in eight units.

In the following pages we shall consider the Bible as presenting a historical drama.² To be sure, this figure of speech is not found anywhere in the Bible itself, but it is a convenient and appropriate way to view the Bible as a whole. Several characteristics of a drama

immediately spring to mind. For one thing, a drama has a beginning and an end—it starts somewhere and goes somewhere. Also, it has a cast of persons, and the story deals with the whole range of human experience, from triumph to tragedy. Furthermore, a drama has a plot that moves forward through several acts toward a denouement (or climax) in which the episodes that took place at the beginning are understood in their larger meaning. In a drama there is a great deal of diversity: different personalities, different attitudes toward life, different episodes that take place at different times and in various settings. But underlying all this variety is the movement of the plot toward its resolution.

The Bible, too, has a unity like that of a great drama. It moves from beginning to end, from creation to new creation. The story deals with people's hopes and fears, their joy and anguish, their ambitions and failures. There is a great deal of diversity in the Bible: different authors, different historical situations, different kinds of theological expression. But underlying all this great variety is the dynamic movement, similar to the plot of a drama, that binds the whole together.

The biblical drama, however, is unique in that God appears in the cast. Not only is God the Author who stands behind the scenes prompting and directing the drama, but God also enters onto the stage of history as the Chief Actor—the protagonist. The biblical plot is the working out of God's purpose for the creation in spite of all efforts to oppose it. The denouement is reached, according to the conviction of the Christian community, when the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth are proclaimed as the sign of God's decisive victory. In the light of this climactic event, the earlier stages of the story are understood with a deeper and larger meaning.

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

Our series of eight studies will follow this dramatic scheme:

Prologue	STUDY I: In the Beginning
ACT I	THE FORMATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE
<i>Scene 1</i>	STUDY II: A Way into the Future
<i>Scene 2</i>	STUDY III: The Discipline of Disaster
ACT II	THE RE-FORMATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE
<i>Scene 1</i>	STUDY IV: The New Exodus
<i>Scene 2</i>	STUDY V: The People of the Torah
ACT III	THE TRANSFORMATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE
<i>Scene 1</i>	STUDY VI: Victory through Defeat
<i>Scene 2</i>	STUDY VII: The Church in the World
Epilogue	STUDY VIII: In the End

It ought to become clear that each of the acts in the dramatic scheme interprets a decisive historical event that is proclaimed as a “mighty act” of God. The three crucial moments in the biblical drama are:

1. The exodus of oppressed Israelites from Egypt and the opening of a way into the future out of a no-exit situation;
2. The exile of conquered Israelites into Babylonia and their miraculous liberation for a new beginning in their homeland;
3. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, which reconstituted the people of God as God's task force in the world.

The selection of passages for the study of these three major “acts” of God has to be somewhat arbitrary, for obviously we can deal with only a small fraction of the relevant biblical material.³ Our purpose is not to make an exhaustive study of the Bible but to enter into the meaning of these three crucial stages of the biblical drama.

GETTING INTO THE ACT

One final word: Do not suppose that this is the kind of drama one can view from a grandstand seat. We are not to be spectators of something that happened once upon a time. The Bible is not a book of ancient history. It is more like the *commedia dell'arte*, a dramatic form that flourished in sixteenth-century Italy.⁴ In this kind of drama, the players were asked to improvise, to put themselves into the story. To be sure, it was not a free improvisation, for there were some given elements: there was the director, there was a company of actors, and there was a story plot that was given to them in broad outline. With these given elements they were told to improvise—that is, to fill in the gaps on their own.

In this Bible study we are called upon to improvise—that is, to put ourselves into the story and to fill in the gaps with our own experience. We must be ready to get onto the biblical stage and participate personally—along with the “company,” the community of faith—in the dramatic movement of the plot, act by act. Perhaps this warning is unnecessary, for it is the testimony of many generations that when the Bible is read in the community of faith the Holy Spirit enhances the human words of Scripture with new meaning and power. As a result, people become actors in what Amos Wilder calls “the great story and plot of all time and space” and are drawn into relation with God, the Great Dramatist.⁵

Thus, realizing that the Great Dramatist is apt to lure us from the spectator’s balcony and put us into the act, we begin our study.

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Anderson, Bernhard W. “The Contemporaneity of the Bible.” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 62 (1969): 38–50.
- . *The Living Word of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979.

- . *Understanding the Old Testament*. 5th ed. (with S. Bishop and J. Newman). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006. See the Introduction, especially “The Story of the Bible.” The 5th edition is cited throughout this book.
- Brown, Robert McAfee. *The Bible Speaks to You*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955.
- Fackre, Gabriel. *A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine*, vol. 1, and *Authority: Scripture in the Church for the World Today*, vol. 2 of *The Christian Story*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978–87. A Christian theologian maintains that doctrine gives expression to the story that unfolds in the Bible and gives it authority.
- Gomes, Peter J. *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart*. New York: William Morrow, 1996.
- Herberg, Will. “Biblical Faith as *Heilsgeschichte*: The Meaning of Redemptive History in Human Existence.” In *Faith Enacted as History: Essays in Biblical Theology*. Edited by B. W. Anderson. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976.
- Holladay, William L. *Long Ago God Spoke: How Christians May Hear the Old Testament Today*. Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995. Addresses problems modern Christians find in appropriating the Old Testament as sacred scripture.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *The Meaning of Revelation*. New York: Macmillan, 1941. See chapter 2, “The Story of Our Life.”
- Sanders, James A. *Torah and Canon*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972.
- Schneiders, Sandra. *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.

Commentaries and Other Study Aids

HarperCollins Bible Dictionary. Edited by Paul J. Achtemeier. Rev. and updated ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996. Excellent maps and commentary.

HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books. Edited by Wayne Meeks. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997. Compiled under the direction of the Society of Biblical Literature, with generous annotations and particular attention to historical context.

New English Bible with the Apocrypha: Oxford Study Edition. Edited by Samuel Sandmel. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

New Interpreter's Study Bible. Edited by Walter J. Harrelson. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2003. An edition of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, with commentary and notes by an ecumenical team of scholars.

New Jerome Bible Commentary. Edited by Raymond E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990. A fine commentary by Roman Catholic scholars.

New Oxford Annotated Bible: NRSV with the Apocrypha. 3rd ed. Edited by Michael D. Coogan. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Oxford Bible Commentary. Edited by John Barton and John Muddiman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

STUDY I

Prologue: In the Beginning

Study Passages

1. Genesis 1:1—2:3
The Creation of the Universe
2. Psalm 8
The Human Role in God's Creation
3. Psalm 104
The Wonderful Order of Creation
4. Genesis 2:4b—3:24
Paradise Lost

One of the daringly original themes of the biblical drama is expressed in the majestic announcement found in the first words of Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” We are so used to speaking of God as Creator that we scarcely realize the revolutionary implications of this belief. According to the religions of ancient Egypt and Babylonia, the gods were in nature, for nature with its creative powers (symbolized, for instance, by the sun and moon) was regarded as a manifestation of the divine. In Babylonia, creation was seen to be caught up in a natural process that moves in a great circle toward the new creation at the turn of the year, the time of the New Year’s festival.

Likewise, for the ancient Greeks, the gods were immanent, or “inside” nature, and since the cosmos was regarded as eternal, there was no place in their thought for creation. The Bible stands in flat contradiction to these views. God is not immanent in nature; God is not a natural process. Rather, God is “over against” nature or, to use a philosophical term, is *transcendent*. Nature is

not divine but displays the handiwork of its creator (Ps 19:1) in the same way a painting displays the artistry of the painter. Heaven and earth (that is, everything that is) are seen to be part of the majestic purpose of God, which moves in a vast sweep from beginning to end, from creation to consummation.¹

LIFE'S DIMENSION OF DEPTH

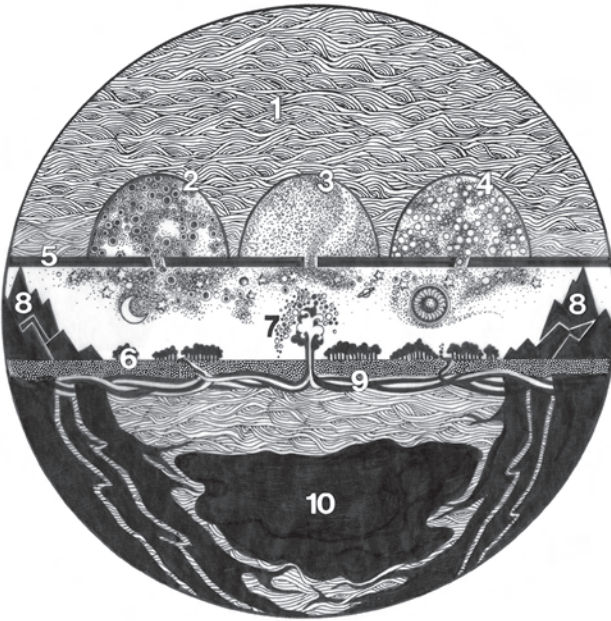
A roadblock for our approach to Genesis 1–3 is our bondage to the scientific attitude. Too many people try to modernize these chapters into a scientific account and to harmonize the narrative with modern scientific theories. Some have argued, for instance, that the “days” mentioned in Genesis 1 correspond to geological periods, or that the doctrine of evolution is implicit in the whole account (note that the emergence of biological life is associated with the waters in 1:20-23). But this is to confuse biblical language, which is poetic and imaginative, with scientific language, which is descriptive and analytical.² The central issue here is that of the *ultimate meaning* of human life in the natural sphere, and this is not a scientific question, properly speaking. The Bible asks—and answers—the question about human existence (the so-called existential question): “What is the origin, meaning, and destiny of human life?” One must be on guard against reading into the biblical narrative the presuppositions of our scientific age. It would be advisable to read the creation account in Genesis 1 in the context of some psalms, especially Psalms 8 and 104. This is poetic language that intends to praise the God whose purpose enfolds all things and upon whom every creature, human and nonhuman, is radically dependent for existence (see Ps 104:27-30).³

It is now generally known that we have two creation stories in Genesis, the first running from Gen 1:1 to Gen 2:3, and the second beginning with the last half of Gen 2:4 (after a transitional editorial statement, “These are the generations of . . .”). The first of these accounts received its final literary formulation in the period of the Exile, the period we are symbolizing as

Act II (about 550 BCE), although it was probably used liturgically in temple services long before its final composition. The second account, on the other hand, comes from the period of Act I, perhaps as early as the era of Solomon (about 950 BCE), though it probably circulated in oral tradition long before this. Each story expresses the viewpoint of the theological circle in which it was composed, just as it reflects the language and culture of its period.⁴ The important thing to notice, however, is that despite the differences in style and content, both accounts affirm that the ultimate meaning of human life is disclosed not in the processes of nature but in relationship to the God who transcends the whole realm of nature. God is the Author, Sustainer, and Finisher of all that is. These stories are really word pictures that portray life's deepest dimension.⁵

It would be helpful if in English we had words corresponding to the German words *Weltbild*, "world picture," and *Weltanschauung*, "world perspective." The world picture of Genesis 1 is the naive one of antiquity—a picture of the earth as a flat surface, resting on the primeval "waters beneath the earth" and separated from the "waters above the earth" by a blue firmament (Gen 2:6-7). Were it not for the Creator's sustaining power, the waters would return to their original place and engulf the world in chaos, as almost happened once upon a time, according to the Flood story (Gen 6:5—9:17; see especially 7:11-24).

The world perspective, however, concerns the meaning of the human drama enacted on the stage of nature and in relation to the natural environment. Notice that humans and animals are created on the same day (Gen 1:24-28)—a fine poetic indication of humanity's involvement in, and dependence upon, the world of nature. But human beings are not just animals who live in, and adjust to, their natural environment. They are able to survey and control nature, to search for the good, the true, and the beautiful, to remember the past, to hope for the future, and to decide in the present. Elevated to a royal position "a little lower than God," as a Hebrew poet exclaimed, they are given dominion over God's earthly estate (Ps 8:5-8). The same view is expressed



The Ancient Pictorial View of the Universe

1. The waters above (and below) the earth
- 2–4. Chambers of hail, rain, snow
5. The firmament with its “sluices”
6. The surface of the earth
7. The navel of the earth: “fountain of the great deep”
8. The mountain pillars supporting the firmament
9. Sweet waters (rivers, lakes, seas) on which the earth floats
10. Sheol, the realm of death (the “pit”)

(Illustration © Joan Anderson. All rights reserved.)

in Gen 1:26-28, where at the climax of God's creation 'adam (an inclusive Hebrew word meaning "human being," "human-kind") is made "in the image of God." 'Adam consists of equal partners, "male and female," who are to "image" or represent God on earth by ruling wisely and benevolently over the non-human creation.⁶

The story in Genesis 2 is written from a similar point of view. Like the animals, the human being ('adam) is made from the dust and returns to the dust (2:7; 3:19), but this creature's ability to name the animals indicates human superiority and dominion (2:19-20). Today we know about the chemical constituents of this dust, and we have a completely different cosmology or world picture corresponding to the dimensions of our Space Age. But have we gone beyond the biblical perspective on the meaning of human life in relation to its natural environment?

This question perhaps gains in significance when we turn from biology to other fields of human endeavor, such as art, philosophy, and history. For example, the historian Herbert Butterfield, once a professor of modern history at the University of Cambridge, observed that the historian does not treat humanity "as essentially a part of nature or consider [it] primarily in this aspect," as the biologist usually does. Rather, the historian "picks up the other end of the stick and envisages a world of human relations standing, so to speak, over against nature," and this leads to a study of the "new kind of life" that human beings have "superimposed on the jungle, the forest and the waste." He goes on to say: "Since this world of human relations is the historian's universe, we may say that history is a human drama of personalities, taking place as it were on the stage of nature, and amid its imposing scenery."⁷

Thus we speak of the human drama, although often in purely humanistic terms. The creation story underscores the conviction that the drama is not just about human beings; rather, it is a "cosmic journey" that has its beginning and end in the purpose of God. Hence the whole drama is enacted within the horizons of "In the beginning God . . ." and "In the end God . . ."

PARADISE LOST

Much attention can be devoted to the narrative of paradise lost in Genesis 2 and 3, for here are to be found the most profound insights into the human situation. Don't be disturbed by the picturesque and naive narrative style, as though this marked the story as inferior to the elevated prose of Genesis 1. Notice that the story has all the features of a good story: It has a beginning and an end, a cast of characters who act in relation to one another, and a plot that dynamically moves toward a denouement or resolution. And most interesting, God, the Creator, appears as the main Actor in the story and enters into personal relationship with the man and the woman, even asking searching questions: "Where are you?" "Who told you that you were naked?" "What is this that you have done?" Reflect on the meaning of some of the symbols in the story: "one flesh," "the subtle serpent," "the tree of life," "the tree of knowledge of good and evil," nakedness, banishment from the garden, and so forth.

This is not just a story of something that happened once upon a time but is a profound description of the human situation in any historical time. The human actors—the first man and woman—represent everybody. Surely there is in human experience a melancholy awareness that life is not what it ought to be, that somehow or somewhere human beings have lost the "peace" (wholeness, well-being) and the humanness that the Creator intended. Conflict, anxiety, insecurity, exploitation, injustice, suffering, guilt—these are not intended to be normal, even though they are life's daily realities. Why is this? Unlike Marxism, which traces the problem to economic factors, and unlike Oriental religions (Hinduism, Buddhism), which advocate liberation from the illusory realm of sensory desire, the Bible traces the problem to something in human nature: to the human will, to human freedom. The temptation to be independent or even to be "like God" (3:5)—that is, to live life in our own way and on our own terms—leads to estrangement at all levels: from God, from others, and from the earth itself.

Notice that the paradise story falls into three episodes:

1. In the first episode, the narrator portrays peace in God's beautiful garden ("paradise" is an old Persian word meaning an "enclosed park"). The human being has a God-given task: to care for ("dress and keep") God's garden. Work, when performed with responsibility and dignity, is intended to be creative and fulfilling. Above all, the human being is enjoined to take care of God's garden, not to violate and pollute nature. The God-given task, however, cannot be performed alone; in fact, to quote a German proverb, *Ein Mensch ist kein Mensch* ("One human being is no human being at all"). So the narrator portrays the moving scene of God's creation of a woman so that the two companions may stand vis-à-vis, face-to-face, and even be joined in the most intimate relationship as "one flesh." The story of God's creation is not complete until 'adam is differentiated into "the man" and "the woman," the two beings who correspond to each other and who are equally responsible in caring for God's estate.⁸
2. In the second episode, the narrator portrays rebellion in the garden. The freedom that God has given the human companions places them in a situation of decision. Why be content with creaturely limitations? Why not reach out for forbidden fruit? The "theological" argument of the serpent is subtle and seductive, and the couple cannot resist the tempting possibilities of life on their own terms. The meaning of the phrase "knowing good and evil" is not altogether clear, but it seems to be a Hebrew expression for the mature and even divine wisdom required for making difficult decisions (see 2 Sam 14:17; 1 Kgs 3:9). Sin, then, is the presumption that human beings can grasp such wide and penetrating knowledge that they can live on their own resources, without dependence upon God. Sin is a declaration of independence from God; it is the refusal to "let God be God." Above all, it should be understood that sin is not just a matter of doing something immoral, of being "bad." Sin is, in a profound sense, a false maturity, illustrated in Jesus' parable

of the prodigal son who independently goes off into a far country and wastes his substance in a life of abandon (Luke 15:11-24). The consequence, according to the paradise story, is alienation from God, from other human beings, and from one's truest self—an alienation that is rooted in a rebellious will that oversteps creaturely boundaries.

3. In the third episode (3:8-24), the narrator portrays judgment in the garden. "The love story," to use Phyllis Tribble's apt words, has "gone awry." Now that the nakedness of the man and woman has been exposed, they are described as fugitives running to hide behind the trees of the garden from God, who strolls in the garden in the cool of the day. Notice the severe consequences of misused creaturely freedom. Judgment falls first upon the serpent, who proved to be more than simply an animal of the field but became a symbol of the sinister power of evil. The next consequence was that the relation between the sexes was impaired: henceforth childbirth would be painful for the woman and she would be in a subordinate relationship to her husband. The final consequence was that the man's work would become tedious and he would have to fight to eke out a livelihood from the soil.

The story of paradise lost ends with the picture of the two human beings, representatives of the human race, cast out from the primeval peace of the garden into a restless historical life of insecurity and conflict. The rest of the Bible, beginning with the tragic sequence of stories portrayed in Genesis 4–11 (Cain's murder of Abel, Lamech's blood revenge, violence leading to the Flood, the Tower of Babel), bears witness to the religious truth that when human beings misuse their God-given freedom, they are estranged from God, from others, and from their deepest selves. For humans belong to God by nature and cannot find peace outside the relationship for which they were created. So Augustine began his *Confessions* with this prayer: "O Lord, thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

Questions to Think About

1. Discuss the difference between the “truth” of the biblical account of creation and the “truth” that we usually regard as scientific. What did it mean for astronauts to broadcast the opening verses of Genesis as their Christmas 1968 message from the moon?

2. In a famous essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (*Science* 155 [1967]: 1203–7; reprinted in various contexts), Lynn White Jr. maintained that the Jewish-Christian faith is largely responsible for the present “rape of nature,” because in Gen 1:26-28 human beings are commissioned to have dominion over nature. Discuss this thesis in the light of the announcement in Genesis 1 that human beings are made in the “image” of God, or the portrayal in Genesis 2 of the human being as the caretaker of the garden.

3. With the story of Genesis 2–3 before you, paraphrase the meaning of “sin” (noting that the word “sin” does not appear in that story). Can sin find expression in moral goodness as well as in immoral acts? What light, if any, does Albert Camus’s novel *The Fall* throw on the story?

4. Discuss the equality of man and woman in the light of the “image of God” passage in Genesis 1 and the portrayal of man and woman as companions in the story in Genesis 2. Do you understand the story to mean that the subordination of woman was not part of God’s creation but was a consequence of “the fall”?

5. A British writer, James Bryce, once observed that the American Constitution, with its system of checks and balances upon the exercise of power, was written by men who believed in “original sin.” Is this realistic? Compare the Marxist view that the troubles of history are traceable to economic factors, and that when these are changed human nature will be transformed. (George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* may give some food for thought.)

6. Compare the picture of creation presented in Genesis 1 with that of Psalm 104. Why is the story in Genesis 2–3 (paradise lost) a necessary supplement to the view of the human role in God’s creation as set forth in Genesis 1?

Suggestions for Further Reading

Anderson, Bernhard W. *Contours of Old Testament Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999. See especially chapter 11, “Creation and the Noachic Covenant.”

———. “Creation and Ecology.” In *Creation in the Old Testament*. Edited by B. W. Anderson. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984. See especially pp. 152–69.

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Brueggemann, Walter. *Genesis*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1982. See especially pp. 23–54. Highly recommended.

Joranson, Philip N., and Ken Butigan, eds. *Cry of the Environment: Rebuilding the Christian Creation Tradition*. Santa Fe, N.Mex.: Bear, 1984.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Genesis*. Old Testament Library. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961; rev. ed., 1972. One of the best commentaries on Genesis.

Sarna, Nahum. *Understanding Genesis*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966; New York: Schocken Books, 1970. A clear and illuminating exposition by a Jewish scholar.

Trible, Phyllis. “The Topical Clue” and “A Love Story Gone Awry.” In *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978. An exquisite and insightful interpretation.