

SCIENCE AND SCRIPTURE HAVE KISSED EACH OTHER:
READING THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

What we believe the Bible is determines how we think we should read it. Put in theological terms, our doctrine of inspiration determines our method of interpretation.

Christians, particularly in the stream of Protestant Evangelicalism, have tended to think about biblical inspiration this way: if Scripture is inspired by God, then that must mean x , y , and z , and we can then find evidence for x , y , and z in Scripture. We start with certain ideas about God, about how God reveals himself, about the way the Spirit works, and then from those ideas we deduce a doctrine of inspiration which we then project upon the text of Scripture. There is certainly value in framing a doctrine of inspiration in terms of theology, revelation, and pneumatology, even Christology and ecclesiology. But if we come up with something that cannot take into account what we actually have in the Bible, its human dimension, its antiquity, its textuality—the phenomena of the biblical writings—then our doctrine of inspiration is simply wrong.

The same holds true for our approach to Scripture's interpretation: we must read Scripture not simply in light of what we think it must be, but in light of what we actually have in Scripture—the basic phenomena of the biblical writings. Scripture is not a kind of timeless handbook of all human knowledge, so that we can look up the answers to any question we might

have in a kind of infallible Google search. It is not a transcultural collection of theological and ethical propositions that we can lift off the page and insert into our systems of thought and practice. It is not a mine of theological and ethical data that we can dig up and then rearrange into a coherent whole called Calvinism, Dispensationalism, Anabaptism, Progressive Catholicism, or whatever.

In general terms, much of the basic phenomena of Scripture that must be taken into account in our ideas of Scripture's inspiration and interpretation can be summarized with a simple statement: *the Bible is an anthology of ancient literature*. It may be a *divinely inspired* anthology of ancient literature, it may be a *theologically and ethically authoritative* anthology of ancient literature—and I believe these things to be true—but it is still an anthology of ancient literature. It is an *anthology*—an intentional collection of diverse writings from many different human authors writing in diverse time periods and culture and languages. It is *ancient*—these diverse writings are between roughly two and three thousand years old. And it is *literature*—these ancient writings are stories and poems, proverbs and oracles, law and apocalypse, biography and letter, and more.

The Bible is an anthology of ancient literature. Taking this seriously—not just paying it lip service—is vital in developing a robust doctrine of Scripture's inspiration and an appropriate approach to Scripture's interpretation. It is also, I want to suggest, important for finding some measure of peace in the ongoing science-religion wars.

In this presentation I want to try out this suggestion by taking two critical methods that read the Christian Scriptures as ancient literature—genre criticism and narrative criticism—

and using them to sketch out what I call a "literary-theological reading" of Genesis 1.¹ I will further suggest that this kind of reading approximates the way at least some later biblical authors read Genesis 1, at least more closely than grammatical-historical, historical-critical, or "scientific" readings of Genesis do. I will conclude with some brief summary reflections on the implications of this literary-theological approach to reading Scripture for the question of this conference, the relationship between science and faith.

GENRE CRITICISM AND GENESIS 1

Genre criticism, or genre analysis, is a crucial tool for the literary critic.² Forget the literary critic; the ability to discern genre is a crucial tool for any good reader of anything, from cookbooks to op-eds to historical fiction to slam poetry.

For as long as humans have been thinking about writing and reading we have also been identifying and describing different kinds of writing, or genres. Modern genre theory, like any critical enterprise, has become a world of its own, with its own underlying philosophical framework and technical vocabulary, and it might seem far removed from the world of ancient Near Eastern literature. But good genre analysis attempts to understand literature on its own terms, in its own cultural milieu, even if it uses theoretical constructs from outside that literature

¹ Other approaches could be fruitfully explored: reader-response criticism, reception history, speech-act theory, and so on. Not all of these are normally called "literary criticism," but they are all helpful in making us better readers of texts, understanding how texts work and how we can and should derive meaning from them.

² On genre and genre criticism generally, see e.g. Heather Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982); Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); David Duff, ed. *Modern Genre Theory* (Harlow, U.K.: Longman, 2000). On genre criticism and the biblical writings, see e.g. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 335–350; John B. Gabel et al, *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Roland Boer, ed., *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); James L. Bailey, "Genre Analysis," in Joel B. Green, ed., *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 140–165.

and culture. This is, as one might expect, a narrow path to walk, but it is necessary. Often, perhaps most often, authors and readers work with genres intuitively, having subconsciously picked up the nuances of various genres simply by living and reading within the particular culture. Thus, while there is value in studying the genres of one's native cultural literature, when we attempt to read the literature of another culture from another time—such as Genesis—this genre analysis becomes imperative.

We can think of a genre as an implied contract, an unwritten agreement, between the author and the reader of a text; James Bailey calls them "well-worn grooves of expectation."³ The genre establishes a framework, certain conventional guidelines or constraints, for creating and understanding the text. The author of a text works within the conventions of that particular genre, perhaps stretching those conventions in some new directions, but still in a way that is recognizably that genre. Authors indicate the genre through a variety of means: sometimes explicit, but most often implicit, through characteristic words or phrases or topics or themes, or through such features as the piece's style or length or structure. In other words, both content and form are important for indicating a text's genre.

And so, we read a historical monograph differently than we read historical fiction, even if they are describing the same persons and events. We read a cookbook differently than we read a chemistry textbook, even if the same chemical processes are at work. We read an op-ed differently than we read a news report, even if both pieces appear side by side in a newspaper, discussing the same issue. For our purposes, here is the important point: *we discern truth differently in each case, depending on the genre.* We determine *what* is significant in what we read, and *how* it is significant, based in large part on what the genre is.

³ Bailey, "Genre Analysis," 140.

But what is the genre of Genesis?⁴ While there is no consensus on what to *call* Genesis generally or its first chapter in particular, there is some consensus on where Genesis 1 fits in the literary landscape of the ancient Near East. I have elsewhere called Genesis as a whole a *narrative etiology*; certainly it serves an etiological function, providing for a particular group—in this case, the ancient Israelites—an account of why things in their world are the way they are.⁵ Where did we as a people come from? Why is YHWH Elohim our God, and not another? Why do we live in this land, and not somewhere else? Why are there other peoples in the world, why do they live where and how they live, and who are their gods? These are the sorts of etiological questions Genesis was intended to answer for the Israelites of the ancient Near East.

The creation story of Genesis 1, actually Genesis 1:1—2:3, is a *cosmology* or *cosmogony*, a story of cosmic origins and order that serves that larger etiological purpose. In this, Genesis 1 is akin to ancient Near Eastern origins stories such as the relevant utterances of the Egyptian Pyramid Texts, the Mesopotamian Enuma Elish story and Atrahasis narrative, and the Canaanite creation accounts. That Genesis 1 fits within this genre of ancient Near Eastern “origins stories” is evident from both form and content, but especially content. These stories involve similar themes: the gods and their primeval actions, the dawn of the known world, a description of the first humans. There are even more specific details shared among some or most of these stories: the move from primeval chaos to order by divine action, for instance, or a liturgical mode that focuses on proper worship of the deity, or humans created by mixing earth

⁴ On the genre(s) of Genesis, see e.g. George W. Coats, *Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (Forms of the Old Testament Literature 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context* (Library of Biblical Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 19–68; John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 33–73; John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 179–199.

⁵ Michael W. Pahl, *The Beginning and the End: Rereading Genesis's Stories and Revelation's Visions* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade, 2011).

and divine essence. The specific form varies among these origins stories, but they could all be described as "poetic narrative," presenting a highly stylized and structured story.⁶

The purpose of these ancient Near Eastern origins stories is, again, etiological, explaining why things are the way they are. More specifically, they help answer the big etiological questions by focusing on some fundamental questions about the world for the particular society: Who are the gods? Who are humans, and why are we here? What is the natural world? How do the gods relate to humans and the world? What is wrong in the world, if anything, and how can it be made right, if at all?

So if we discern truth differently depending on the genre, what truth should we look for in this first creation story of Genesis? Genre analysis suggests we should focus on these most fundamental questions of origins stories, and not be distracted by others. Who is God? In Genesis 1 Elohim alone is God, and not the Sea or the Sky or the Land, or Marduk, or Baal, or any other so-called god. Who are humans? We are creatures in the image of Elohim, representing God as his vassal-kings and priests and children. What is the natural world? The creation of Elohim, made to reflect God's glory, to be the proper setting for worship of God, but not as divine in itself, nor even as capricious forces of chaos. How does God relate to humans and the world? As a king relates to his kingdom and vassal-kings, as a deity relates to his temple and priests, as a father relates to his children. What is wrong, and how can it be made right? Creation began in chaos, and may descend there again; God has ordered and filled the world, and has created humans to continue this creative, sustaining work of ordering and filling, on his behalf.

⁶ See Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature*.

NARRATIVE CRITICISM AND GENESIS 1

For as long as humans have been attempting to create and convey “meaning”—developing identity and purpose and values, discerning truth and beauty and goodness—they have been telling stories. Stories are pervasive in human cultures, regardless of their geographical or historical location. Stories make up the very fabric of our discourse, from national stories (think “founding fathers”) to community stories (“the Wright brothers”) to family stories (told and re-told around dinner tables or at family reunions) to those private stories we tell our daily companions (“How was your day?”) or ones we maybe only think to ourselves (“If only *x* hadn’t happened...”). Indeed, our most basic sense-making is narrative in shape: our brains seem to be wired to create order out of the chaos of our sense perceptions, an order that plots out significant moments in a change-over-time and cause-and-effect and resolution-of-conflict kinds of patterns.

It is natural, then, that humans as self-reflective beings would want to understand this story-telling better, to make sense of our narrative sense-making. Enter narrative criticism, another vital tool in the toolkit of the literary critic.⁷

Narrative criticism analyzes the form and content of stories, the various elements of narrative, in order to better discern and appreciate the truth and beauty and goodness—the “meaning-making”—of a given narrative. There is a danger, of course, of so analyzing a story

⁷ On narrative and narrative criticism generally, see e.g. David Herman, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). On narrative criticism and the biblical writings, see e.g. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Bible and Literature; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 3; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 75–100; Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 65–80; Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009); David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012).

that we actually miss the story's point, much as an autopsy necessitates the death of its subject. But narrative criticism done well can open up the nuances and layers of a well-told story and bring a greater appreciation of its goodness and beauty and truth. Simply put, *we need to understand stories as stories*—not as position papers, or as lyric poems, or anything else, but as stories—and narrative criticism done well can help us do that.

All compelling stories, whether about historical figures or fictional persons, whether ancient or modern and regardless of geography, have some common elements. Stories need *characters*: persons, whether human or otherwise, who act humanly enough for readers to recognize, to relate to, to empathize with. Stories also need *setting*: a world for these characters to inhabit, believable enough for readers to imagine for themselves. And stories need *plot*: a natural sequence of events, a narrative arc, most commonly in which a prominent character or characters are presented with some obstacle that must be overcome, a conflict to be resolved.

Genesis 1:1—2:3 is just such a story.⁸ It opens with Elohim, the protagonist, creating all things. But there is a problem, even a conflict: creation is formless and empty, it is in the grip of chaos. So Elohim our protagonist combats the chaos of the primordial creation, he brings form to this formless creation and fills this empty world. Through six days—paralleling the workweek of ancient Israel—Elohim labors through commanding will to bring order and structure out of the chaos, then to fill this ordered world with flourishing, abundant life. In a surprise move, humans are created as God's priest-kings and priestess-queens, male and female, representing God in the world and representing the world to God, charged with continuing God's creative tasks of bringing order out of chaos and abundant life out of emptiness. The order and abundance

⁸ On the narrative(s) of Genesis, see e.g. Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*; Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982); Coats, *Genesis*.

described in the story are reinforced by the very structure of the narrative, six parallel days moving forward with purpose toward the seventh day. The narrative arc of the story, then, is bent toward this, the seventh, Sabbath day: chaos is dispelled, creation is formed and filled, God's fitting temple is finished, and he sits on his throne receiving the worship of his creation.

How does recognizing this narrative help us to determine what is most significant in Genesis 1? It highlights God's role as protagonist. God is the leading actor in the world, not other gods, not the natural elements, not even us. A narrative reading highlights humans as key characters in God's story, important actors in the world through whom God accomplishes God's purposes. It highlights the problem or conflict posed by chaos within creation, the importance of the proper ordering and flourishing of creation. A narrative reading highlights the point of the story, the goal of the narrative, its *telos*, not focused on the six days of labor but on the concluding seventh day of Sabbath-rest. This emphasizes creation as God's temple in which God is worshiped, and humans as God's priestly and royal children continuing this worship of God and mediating God's ordered and life-giving rule throughout creation.

In sum, this kind of literary-theological reading of Genesis 1, sensitive to both genre and narrative, can help us interpret the story well, to determine appropriate meaning from the story, what identity and purpose and values, what truth and beauty and goodness we should discern in Genesis 1. This literary-theological approach is not opposed to historical concerns; indeed, it attempts to read Scripture as much as possible within its ancient historical setting, and it is open to the possibility that the genre may demand the underlying historicity of the narrative, as is the case with the ancient biographical genre of the canonical Gospels, for example. However, in the case of Genesis 1, a literary-theological reading suggests that the concern of this first creation story is not in answering questions of precisely "when" or exactly "how" all things

came to be, but much more in answering questions of “who” and “why”: who God is, who we are, why God created us and everything else that exists.

LATER BIBLICAL AUTHORS AND GENESIS 1

This all sounds well and good, but how can we be sure that such a literary-theological approach is in fact an appropriate way to read Genesis? One answer is to explore how its early readers read Genesis, especially subsequent biblical authors.

The human authors of Scripture were not passive conduits for some timeless divine revelation. They were actively doing theology in their particular contexts; they were attempting to produce reasonable and compelling answers to urgent questions for themselves and their readers by drawing on their faith traditions, their personal and collective experiences—and their reading of prior Scripture. We are fortunate to have a rich intertextual witness in Scripture not just to creation themes and the notion of God as creator, but actually to the specific creation stories of Genesis themselves—we can observe the way these later biblical authors read prior Scripture. And I would suggest these later biblical authors read Genesis in a broadly literary-theological way that has at least some parallels with the kind of approach I have been proposing.

Let me quickly walk through a few examples. First, the book of Hebrews provides at least two extensive interactions with Genesis, including Genesis 1. In Hebrews 7 we have a fascinating comparison between Melchizedek and Jesus. Melchizedek appears in the Abraham stories, in Genesis 14, where he is described as “King of Salem” and “Priest of God Most High.” His name is not found in any of the genealogies of Genesis. He pops out of nowhere in the middle of that story, and he disappears just as suddenly as soon as his part is played. He is a priest-king whose only role in the story is to welcome and bless Abram, receive Abram’s tithes,

and thus serve as a righteous foil for the wicked King of Sodom, which in turn highlights Abram's righteousness over against Lot's slide into Sodom.

In Hebrews 7 the author notes Melchizedek's lack of genealogy, the way he appears suddenly in the story and disappears just as quickly, how "King of Salem" means "King of Peace" and "Melchizedek" means "King of Righteousness." These are literary, not historical, observations; they are notes about the Genesis 14 narrative as it appears in the text. And these literary observations about Melchizedek provide the basis for his comparison with Jesus: "Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling (*aphōmoiōmenos*, showing comparison) the Son of God, he remains a priest forever" (Heb 7:3). It is only as a literary character in the standing narrative of Genesis 14 that Melchizedek can be said to "remain a priest forever." Thus the author of Hebrews makes a series of observations of Melchizedek *as a character in a narrative*, and applies these observations to Jesus *as an actual person*: literary observations become ontological assertions. Or, one might say that what Melchizedek is literarily, Jesus is literally.

A similar kind of reading of Genesis is found earlier in Hebrews in the author's interaction with the opening creation story of Genesis. In Hebrews 4:4 he quotes the end of that creation story, Genesis 2:2: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work." The author then asserts that God has appointed another day like this seventh day, another Sabbath day of rest, the eschatological day of salvation. This "second seventh day" is, in fact, "Today," he says, drawing on the language of Psalm 95 that controls this whole section: that future day of salvation-rest is in fact a present reality.

Perhaps he is thinking of this "second seventh day" as an "eighth day" much like some later Church Fathers did: the day of Jesus' resurrection, a day of new creation, a day of deliverance from the powers of this present age, a day that inaugurates an eternal Sabbath.⁹ Nevertheless, for our purposes it is important to note that *the author has no difficulty paralleling a present "day" of indefinite length, this present eschatological day of salvation, with the seventh "day" of the first creation story of Genesis*. For the author of Hebrews, the length of the Genesis creation "days" is entirely beside the point: the point of the Genesis account is the way creation moves toward the seventh day, the time of Sabbath-rest. In other words, the author has grasped the narrative trajectory of Genesis 1.

Another example is found in the Gospel of John. It really is amazing how we as Christians read the opening verses of John's Gospel without even blinking. But consider what John does. He is clearly reading Genesis 1, as the opening "in the beginning," the focus on creation, and the themes of "light" and "darkness" and "life" attest. But he unapologetically inserts Christ into the creation narrative as the "Word" by which God speaks creation into being, and he casts the themes of "light" and "darkness" and "life" in spiritual, not literal, hues. In particular, these deep structural themes—"light" and "darkness" and "life"—are themes which are underscored in the literary-theological reading I have just proposed, crucial elements of the Genesis narrative set within its genre as an ancient Near Eastern origins story. In other words, John is providing a kind of midrash on Genesis 1, an interpretive reading of Genesis 1 in light of the coming of Jesus—but *it is a midrash that is sensitive to the literary-theological dynamics of the original creation story*.

⁹ E.g. *Epistle of Barnabas* 15:8–9.

Hebrews and John provide some relatively straightforward indications of a kind of literary-theological reading of Genesis. But what about Paul, especially Paul's "Adam" language in Romans 5? For many people, this is a crucial biblical text in the supposed tension between science and theology.

Romans 5 is more related to Genesis 2–3 than Genesis 1, but Romans as a whole offers an important window on how Paul reads the opening chapters of Genesis. In Romans 3 we hear Paul's summary assessment of the whole human race, that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). The phrase "glory of God" was a synonym of "image of God" in Jewish thinking at the time (cf. e.g. 1 Cor 11:7; 2 Cor 4:4; Heb 1:3), and it makes good sense here to see Paul as saying that all humans "fall short of God's image," that is, because of sin we come up short on fulfilling the promise and responsibility of being in the image of God. In Romans 5:2, then, when Paul refers to the "hope of glory of God" for us, this is the "hope of God's image" being restored. All this makes Romans 8 much clearer: those who are in Christ, who share in Christ's Spirit, follow in Christ's path of suffering in order to "share in his glory," to be "glorified," that is, to be "conformed to the image of God's Son" (Rom 8:14–32). At the heart of Paul's gospel is this restoration of God's image in humanity, with a renewed humanity fulfilling the promise and responsibility of the image of God in Christ. No wonder even creation groans in anticipation of this revelation of God's true image-bearers, fulfilling their intended purpose within the created order (Rom 8:18–22).

Romans 5:12–21 must be read within this broad narrative sweep of creation and new creation, within this larger movement from the first image-bearer to the second, from Adam to Christ. When we do that, I would suggest we see Paul reading Genesis 2–3 as an etiological narrative. Paul discerns "sin" and "death" as deep structural themes: "sin" is both a single act of

disobedience to God's command (cf. Gen 2:17) and a larger power that holds sway over all humanity (cf. Gen 4:7); "death" is both the cessation of physical life (cf. Gen 3:19) and a wide-ranging experience of accursedness, of "anti-life," a reversion from order and abundance to chaos and emptiness (cf. Gen 3:14–19). Adam's story is thus bigger than simply a story about a first human committing a first sin. Every person confirms their own involvement in Adam's story of "sin" leading to "death," and this tragic narrative is in fact the story of Israel as a people and the human race as a whole, always repeated by every human person, within every human society, Jew first and then Gentile. In Christ, however, we are offered a new narrative, a new story we can participate in by the Spirit of God: Christ's story of obedient "righteousness" leading to a full and flourishing "life."¹⁰

Thus, Paul has discerned both the overarching narrative and the deep structure of the early Genesis stories. For Paul here, the question of whether or not Adam was a historical person is irrelevant—he may or may not have been, and Paul may or may not have believed he was.¹¹ Far more important for Paul is the way Adam functions in the narrative of Genesis 2–3 in light of Genesis 1, as an archetype of individual persons, of Israel as a people, and of humanity as a whole. In other words, I would suggest, Paul was reading Genesis 1–3 with literary-theological sensibilities, and not in historical or "scientific" terms.

So how might we summarize the way these New Testament authors read Genesis?

On the one hand, they are clearly not employing modern historical criticism, trying to get behind

¹⁰ This, by the way, will set the stage for Rom 7, where Adam/individuals/Israel/humanity disobeys the divine command and so dies, followed by Rom 8, where Christ is obedient even unto death and so lives, and thus all who walk by Christ's Spirit share in his obedient suffering and resurrection life.

¹¹ Indeed, if the author of Hebrews can draw a parallel between Melchizedek as literary figure and Jesus as historical person, as I have suggested above, then it is at least possible that Paul could be doing the same thing here: Adam as literary figure may be compared with Christ as historical person.

the text to “what really happened” or “how the texts originated.” They are not even employing what we might call “grammatical-historical exegesis,” carefully interpreting the words of Genesis within their linguistic and historical contexts. They are also entirely unconcerned with the questions that concern modern science, about precisely how and when all things came to be.

On the other hand, these later biblical authors are just as clearly not employing modern literary criticism: there is no careful genre comparison or narrative analysis.

Nevertheless—and here is the key point—*they are careful readers of the narratives of Genesis as stories, and even as etiological narratives that shape their identity, their purpose, and their values.* In other words, they are reading Genesis in a broadly literary-theological way.¹²

CONCLUSION

There are ways to read the Bible that take it seriously as divinely inspired and authoritative Scripture—but that do not create conflict with the consensus claims of modern science. There are ways to read the Bible that are concerned to understand Scripture appropriately within its ancient setting with a view to shaping our faith and life today—but that do not force us into a state of cognitive dissonance between science and faith. There are ways to read the Bible that follow the biblical text carefully, where the very words of Scripture matter—but that do not create a false dichotomy between science and faith.

In this paper I have proposed one such way of reading Scripture. If a literary-theological reading of Scripture along the lines of what I have described is an appropriate way to

¹² Time does not permit me to extend this survey of readings of Genesis to elsewhere in Scripture or beyond the canon into early post-biblical readers, but I would suggest that this trajectory of a broadly literary-theological interpretation of Genesis continues at least through the early Church Fathers.

read Scripture, perhaps even a better way than others, it can certainly help alleviate the tension many Christians feel between science and faith.

It is not that the Bible does not speak of matters that concern science; in fact, the Bible reflects the perspectives on the natural world that were common in the various historical eras represented by the biblical authors, with semi-permeable firmaments and underground, shadowy worlds. Nor is it that the Bible does not speak of matters that concern history; it most certainly does, and at times it is really rather important for Christian theology that certain events actually happened in time and space, such as *that* God created all things, or *that* God raised Jesus from the dead.

Rather, I am saying that the *point* of the biblical texts—their intention, their goal, their *telos*—is not to be found in a historical-critical or “scientific” reading that answers our modern questions about “what really happened” or “when did it happen.” These are interesting questions, sometimes even important questions, but they simply are not the concerns of Scripture; they are not the *point* of Scripture, its *telos*. Instead, with the Apostle Paul I believe the *telos* of Scripture is Christ, the crucified and resurrected Jesus, the one in whom “mercy and truth are met together,” in whom “justice and peace have kissed each other” (Ps 85:10). And I believe this *telos* is better discerned by becoming better readers of the Bible as it is: an anthology of ancient literature, an inspired collection of texts from a much older time and a much different place.