

## Is the Creation Account in Genesis Unscientific and A-historical?

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The target audience of this essay consists of Christian university students who are exposed to secular writings that are critical of Christianity, and subsequently became skeptical of the scientific value and historicity of Genesis. Those secular authors are characterized by their rational and scientific approach in studying religion. For example, Christopher Hitchens asserted that there is not a single word of truth in Genesis.<sup>1</sup> According to Hitchens, God did not create humanity in his image. In contrast, the Biblical authors projected our image into the concept of God.<sup>2</sup> By the same token, in *Religion Explained* anthropologic psychologist Pascal Boyer maintained that the origin of religion could be explained by our natural tendency. In Boyer's view, gods are anthropomorphic in the sense that deities are construed very much like persons.<sup>3</sup> In *Breaking the Spell* prominent philosopher Daniel Dennett mocked the creation account in Genesis 2 by saying, "Few are comfortable acknowledging just how far we've come from the God of Genesis 2:21, who literally plucks a rib from Adam and closes up the flesh (with his fingers, one imagines), before sculpting Eve on the spot."<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein, the host of *Good Atheist Podcast* Jacob Fortin criticized that the Genesis account of the beginning of the universe is unscientific. In response to Genesis 1:9 "let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear," Fortin wrote, "He (God) doesn't seem to really understand how the planet is actually formed, but that's not unusual for a group of nomadic desert people living thousands of years ago to have a level of scientific knowledge comparable to

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *Unacknowledged Legislation: Writers in the Public Sphere* (New York: Verso, 2000): xvi.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007): 107.

<sup>3</sup> Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained* (New York: Basic Books, 2001): Kindle Location: 1859.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006): 210.

a 3 year old.” In reaction to the creation of the sun and the moon in Day 4, Fortin wrote, “the authors of the Bible were essentially scientifically retarded; they actually think the moon generates its own light.”<sup>5</sup>

Another common criticism against the validity of Genesis is that there is some degree of similarities between Genesis 1-3 and certain Ancient Near East (ANE) mythologies, such as *Enuma Elis*, and the Memphite creation myth of Egypt. Edward Babinski pointed out that ANE cosmological writings commonly depicted heaven and earth as the two halves of creation, and they described how the sky was stabilized above the earth. They were also concerned with setting up the boundaries between the sea and the land. In the Egyptian creation myth, creation took place through a command of the thought or the word of the deity, which mirrors “God said” in Genesis 1. Thus, Babinski concluded that there is no uniqueness in the Biblical account of creation; Genesis is nothing more than one of many ANE mythologies. And it is probable that the Biblical authors took other ANE myths as a reference while writing Genesis.<sup>6</sup>

A recent study conducted at the Campus Pastor Office of Azusa Pacific University showed that there is a downward trend among the most recent cohorts of students with respect to holding to Christian convictions while facing opposition.<sup>7</sup> Christian scientist Richard Colling found that many college students stopped attending church when they could not reconcile scientific claims and religious doctrines in regards to the origin of humans.<sup>8</sup> Further, in “You lost me”, an empirical study that aims to explain why young Christians are leaving church, David

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<sup>5</sup> Jacob Fortin, “Genesis is not Scientifically Accurate,” 31 January 2011 [cited 27 February 2013]. Online: [www.thegoodatheist.net/2011/01/31/genesis-is-not-scientifically-accurate/](http://www.thegoodatheist.net/2011/01/31/genesis-is-not-scientifically-accurate/).

<sup>6</sup> Edward Babinski, “The Cosmology of the Bible.” Pages 109-147 in *Christian Delusion*. Edited by John Loftus. (Amherst: Prometheus, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Chris Adams, “Student Life Faith Integration: Faith and Living WASC EER Report” (Azusa Pacific University, 2012), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Colling, “Evolution and the Christian Faith,” Presentation at Azusa Pacific University (April 15, 2013).

Kinnaman found that many young Christians perceive Christianity to be in opposition to modern science.<sup>9</sup> In the light of the modern scholarship of science, history, and archeology, the preceding challenges should be taken seriously by Christian apologetics; otherwise Christian college students might be very confused and eventually de-converted to secularism and atheism. Hence, the objective of this essay is to unpack and counter those seemingly compelling arguments one by one. The author will attempt to address the issue of interpreting the creation account in Genesis by demonstrating that an understanding of Ancient Near East mythologies could illuminate the biblical creation story rather than imposing our modern views on it.

### Is truth necessarily literal?

As mentioned before, in Hitchens's view there is not a single word of truth in Genesis. But what is the meaning of "truth"? Did God really create the sky, the lands, the oceans, and other natural objects in the order as outlined by Genesis 1? Did God literally create a woman out of the rib of a man? Is it fair to interpret all Biblical passages literally? Did the Biblical authors intend to write a scientific report for the Jews who had no background knowledge of modern science? To resolve this issue Johanna van Wijk-bos introduced the difference between logos and mythos. In her view, the wrong question to ask about the Bible is: "What really happened?" To ask whether the Bible accounts happened exactly as described, or to demand historical and scientific evidence to support that it is factually true is to confuse the original purpose of the authors. For the modern world, a story is not true unless all the details are as verbatim as it is

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<sup>9</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011) p. 131.

recorded. This is logos. But for the people who wrote the Old Testament, truth is not in the details or the chronology of facts, but in the meaning of the story. This is mythos.<sup>10</sup>

Some people may argue that because Christianity cannot pass the acid test of history and science, theologians use this excuse to cover up the fatal flaw of Christianity, and thus this attitude is unscientific. But does science deal with facts only? Yes, but to some extent only. Water is H<sub>2</sub>O. If someone says it is H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>, then it is factually wrong. But when science tackles the deeper structure of the world, it requires abstract modeling. A model is nothing more than a metaphor or a representation of the world, but it not corresponding to reality by one-on-one mapping. For example, Niels Bohr introduced the Bohr model in 1913 to illustrate the structure of an atom. In this model the atom has a positively charged nucleus and electrons orbits around the nucleus. Thus, the structure of an atom is compared to the solar system. The Bohr model of the atom is very useful in science, but the problem is: it isn't "true". Planets orbit the sun in predictable paths, but the electrons do not actually circle around the nucleus. Indeed, the electron "jumps" from one energy level to another. It is known as "quantum leap". Moreover, planets are distinguishable in the way that each planet has its own unique properties and characteristics, but electrons are indistinguishable from one another.<sup>11</sup> Prominent statisticians G. E. Box and R. D. Norman said: "All models are wrong but some are useful."<sup>12</sup> In order to

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<sup>10</sup> Johanna van Wijk-bos, *Making Wise the Simple: The Torah in Christian Faith and Practice* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005): 63-65.

<sup>11</sup> Keith S Taber, "When the Analogy Breaks Down: Modelling the Atom on the Solar System," *Physics Education* 36 (2001): 222-226.

<sup>12</sup> G. E. P. Box, and R. D. Norman, *Empirical Model-Building and Response Surfaces* (New York: Wiley, 1987):424.

proceed with theoretical research, we must simplify and distort the world. Simply put, science has its own mythos. These myths or “wrong” models cannot be taken literally or factually.<sup>13</sup>

### Creation as overcoming chaos by order

When Fortin analyzed the creation account by the sequence of day, nothing makes sense through the lens of modern science. However, even though the Biblical authors were not equipped with the knowledge of modern science, could they be capable of realizing that there would be no light without the sun and the moon? Genesis 1: 3 says “God separated the light from the darkness.” Darkness is the absence of light, not an existing entity. How could the light be “separated” from the darkness? You don’t need a Ph.D. in physics to know that. But how could the Biblical authors make these obvious “mistakes”? It seems that the authors intended to use the sequence (by day) to express some deeper messages rather than reporting factual details. It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss whether the “day” in Genesis is referred to as a “24-hour day”, an “epoch”, or something else. Nonetheless, it is clear that the “days” were used to convey a sense of structure or order. In the beginning “the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep” (Genesis 1:2). “Formless void” signifies chaos whereas “darkness” conveys the idea of confusion and disorder. In many ANE mythologies the primordial deep was the site of the rebellious gods who opposed the gods of order. For example, in the Babylonian myth of creation the goddess Tiamat, who representing oceanic waters, set up an opposition force to fight against the heavenly assembly.<sup>14</sup> Further, Genesis 1: 21 mentioned that God created the great sea monsters. In ANE myths sea monsters often symbolized cosmic

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<sup>13</sup> Chong Ho Yu, “A Model Must be Wrong to be Useful: The Role of Linear Modeling and False Assumptions in Theoretical Explanation,” *Open Statistics and Probability Journal* 2 (2010): 1-8.

<sup>14</sup> John Hartley, *Genesis (Understanding the Bible Commentary Series)* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), Kindle Locations 1011-1013.

evil forces that fought against the dominating god and the existing order. For example, in a Canaanite myth Baal, *Yam*, the god of the sea, was the enemy of the god of fertility, Baal.<sup>15</sup> But in Genesis the sea and the creatures in the sea are placed under the order of God. The creative acts of God, separation or organization, had overcome chaos and disorder.

If we put on a poetic lens instead of a scientific one, we can see the beauty and the structure of the “six days”. The first three days and the second three days are symmetrical. On the first day the light was separated from the darkness whereas the two light objects were made on the fourth days, echoing the first day. On the second day the waters above and under the dome were partitioned to set the stage for fishes and birds, which were created on Day 5. On Day 3 the earth was formed by separating the lands from the waters and thus living creatures and humankind could be created to inherit the earth on Day 6.

#### Did Genesis copy ANE mythologies?

As mentioned before, Babinski pointed out that several ANE creation myths depicted similar creation sequences to the Bible and also used similar wordings, such as separating the day from the night, forming the heaven and the earth, and setting boundaries. For example, in Tablet V of the Akkadian Epic *Enuma Elish* the following passage was found:

After he [had appointed] the days [to Shamash],  
[And had established] the precincts of night and d[ay],...  
He formed the c[louds] and filled (them) with [water].  
The raising of winds, the bringing of rain (and) cold,  
Making the mist smoke, piling up her poison;...

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<sup>15</sup> Hartley, 2012, Kindle Locations 1070-1071.

(Thus) he covered [the heavens] (and) established the earth....

(So) he created heaven and earth....,

[...] their bounds...established.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, the resemblance between ANE mythologies and Genesis is only superficial. It is important to point out that ANE mythologies are concerned with theogonies, the origin or the genesis of gods. Bottero contended that no Mesopotamian creation myth addressed the issue of the origin of the entire universe, as found in Genesis.<sup>17</sup> Rather, typical ANE myths of creation are about how gods fight with each other. And the world yielded from the remains or the body parts of the dead gods. For example, the following is an excerpt of the Epic of *Enuma Elish* (Tablet IV) that describes a cosmic struggle and its aftermath:

She recites a charm, keeps casting her spell,

While the gods of battle sharpen their weapons.

Then joined issue Tiamat and Marduk, wisest of gods.

They strove in single combat, locked in battle.

The lord spread out his net to enfold her,

The Evil Wind, which followed behind, he let loose in her face.

When Tiamat opened her mouth to consume him,

He drove in the Evil Wind that she close not her lips.

As the fierce winds charged her belly,

Her body was distended and her mouth was wide open.

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<sup>16</sup> James Pritchard, ed. *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 36-37.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Bottero, *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia*. Translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 82.

He released the arrow, it tore her belly,  
It cut through her inside, splitting the heart.  
Having thus subdued her, he extinguished her life.  
He cast down her carcass to stand upon it.  
After he had slain Tamat, the leader,  
Her band was shattered, her troupe broken up;...  
The lord trod on the legs of Tiamat,  
With his unsparing mace he crushed her skull.  
When the arteries of her blood he had severed,  
The North Wind bore (it) to places undisclosed....  
That he might divide the monster and do artful works.  
He split her like a shellfish into two parts:  
Half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky,  
Pulled down the bar and posted guards.  
He bade them to allow not her waters to escape.<sup>18</sup>

Needless to say, the above creation epic that involves a war among gods is very violent and graphical. On the contrary, according to Genesis there is only one God and thus wars among gods are absent from the account. Genesis 1 is a narrative of cosmogony, the origin of the world, not theogony. As Goldingay said, Genesis focuses resolutely on the beginning of the world and of humanity.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Pritchard, 31-32.

<sup>19</sup> John Goldingay, *Genesis for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 5.

More importantly, those critics who charge that Genesis inherited and modified the ANE account of creation overlook the historical facts that the Pentateuch was compiled during the post-Babylonian exile, also known as the post-Babylonian captivity. In 538 BC the Southern Kingdom (Judah) was conquered by Babylon and since then the Jews lost their motherland. The trauma that the Jewish people went through could seem to indicate that the Babylonian gods had defeated the God of Israel.<sup>20</sup> Further, the final form of the Pentateuch, including Genesis, was not established during the brief period of the Babylonian exile. The compilation was an ongoing process spanning across the subsequent Persian period. The displaced Jews were highly aware that they were vulnerable to the oppression of foreign powers.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is questionable to say that the Jews accepted this humiliation by adopting the Babylonian and other foreign mythologies. A more plausible scenario is that the chosen people of God presented their own version of creation story as a counter-measure against the Babylonian myth and other foreign ideologies.

Consider this metaphor: Japan occupied Korea from 1905-1945 and no doubt the Korean culture was heavily influenced by the Japanese colonists. If we observe the posture and the movements of Korean Taekwondo and Japanese Karate, we might mistakenly draw the conclusion that the former “copied” the latter. Actually Taekwondo is a form of native martial art that was developed to resist the Japanese occupation. Saying Genesis is adapted from the Babylonian myth is like mistakenly identifying Karate as the template for Taekwondo.

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<sup>20</sup> Goldingay, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2003). 22.

## One sovereign God

In Genesis there are signs indicating that the creation story of Israel was portrayed as a counterbalance against the Babylonian legend. For example, the Babylonian civilization invented astrology, and heavenly bodies were said to possess divine attributes. Specifically, each Babylonian god was given a star or a constellation as his own image.<sup>22</sup> However, Genesis demystifies all natural objects and creatures, including the sun, the moon, fishes, birds, and animals. As mentioned before, it seems illogical to place the existence of the Sun and the Moon after the emergence of light. Actually the Biblical author intended to demote their cosmic status and religious significance by altering the sequence. Genesis tells us that God made “two big lights” without using the names “sun” and “moon.” A plausible explanation is that the author of Genesis did not want to associate these natural objects with any deity by naming them, because in ANE religions usually the sun god and the moon god were assigned specific names. For example, *Nanna* was the Sumerian moon god whereas *Utu* was the sun god.<sup>23</sup> Solar and lunar worship was also found in Palestine. The name of the place “Beth Shemesh” means the “Temple of the sun god” and “Jericho” means the “Shrine of the moon god”. Thus, Richard Hess asserted that the omission of the words “sun” and “moon” in Genesis expresses an anti-polytheistic polemic.<sup>24</sup> In other words, in the eyes of the Biblical authors no member of the created order should be considered a deity.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bottero, 69.

<sup>23</sup> Bottero, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 172.

<sup>25</sup> Hartley, Kindle Location 940.

Because in ANE natural objects were worshipped as gods, it is not surprising to see that polytheism was the norm in ANE.<sup>26</sup> This community of gods is known as the “pantheon”. Babylonian scholars compiled almost two thousand names that represent Babylonian gods. Usually these gods reigned a specific domain of the nature or/and a specific place. For example, *Nanna* ruled Ur; *Utu* dominated Arsa and Sippar.<sup>27</sup> As mentioned before, the Babylonian creation myth started with a cosmic war among gods. It is very common that in the ANE worldviews the cosmos was partitioned into good deities and monstrous divine powers that threaten humans. For instance, *Yamm* is responsible for the demise of Kirta’s household and *Mot* is well-known for his destructive power.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, no such division was found in Genesis. After every creative act “God saw it was good.” This phrase contains a very important theological implication: the created order is inherently good and thus there is no confrontation between God and the evil force before the fall of Adam and Eve; everything in the world came from God’s creation and is under His control.<sup>29</sup>

### Humankind is made in the image of God

The creative acts of God reached a crescendo when humankind was created on the sixth day. Previously “God saw it was good”, but on Day 6 “God saw it was very good” (Genesis

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<sup>26</sup> Some scholars, such as E. A. Knauf and B. Lang, argued that the pre-exilic Hebrew religion, like their surrounding neighbors, was also polytheistic. It was evidenced by mentioning other gods in the Bible, and thus Yahweh was just the most powerful God in the eyes of the Jews. However, mentioning is very different from recognizing. Today some Christian books discuss Islam and Buddhism, but one must look deeper into the context to find out what the naming and mentioning mean. Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger said, “the texts say nothing about whether these deities were venerated any way in Israel and Judah—whether that be carried on in a public cultic setting or else in family or even in personal and private piety. The texts do not indicate that these deities were merely concerned with and active on behalf of other peoples or groups” Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*. Translated by Thomas H. Trapp. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998): 3.

<sup>27</sup> Bottero, 45-53.

<sup>28</sup> Mark S. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2001): 31.

<sup>29</sup> Donald Gowan, *From Eden to Babel: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1-11* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988): 5.

1:31). When Genesis 1 said that God created humans in His image, it means all humankind, not Israelites only. This dignity applies to all people, not to a particular nation or the ruling class. ANE texts from Egypt and Mesopotamia also use the phrase “image of God” on some occasions. For example, some ancient Egyptian texts referred to the Pharaoh as the image of God. The purpose is to emphasize that the Pharaoh was god incarnate and the son of the god *Re*. Some Ancient Mesopotamians also associated a monarch with the image of god, but this honor aimed to legitimize the royal status of the king and defined his role as the god’s representation in the kingdom. In Mesopotamia sometimes this title was applied to a high official, too. On the contrary, Genesis asserted that all humans are created in God’s image.<sup>30</sup>

Generally speaking, ANE cultures had a very different concept about the relationship between God and humans. Akkadians and Sumerians are two earliest people in Mesopotamia, dating back into BC 4000. Both Akkadians and Sumerians have mythologies to explain how the gods created the world and humans. According to the Atrahasis tale, there are two types of gods: superior and inferior gods. Sumerian gods Anu, Enlil, and Enki are considered superior gods. Enlil assigned inferior gods to do farm labor and maintain the rivers and canals, but after forty years the lesser gods rebelled against the superior gods and refused to work anymore. As a remedy, Enki suggested creating humans to do the work. In Enlil’s eyes, humans are nothing but expendable servants. They were brought into existence for gods’ benefits only.<sup>31</sup>

Genesis is vastly different from ANE mythologies. According to Hartley, Genesis 1 conveys several core ideas with regard to humankind. First, God commissioned humans to take care of the earth. In Genesis 2 God endowed humans with intellectual capabilities that mirror

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<sup>30</sup> Hartley, Kindle Location 1228-1232.

<sup>31</sup> Bottero, 99-103.

God's wisdom. This is manifested by granting humans that they exercise dominion over the earth and its animals (Genesis 1:26, 28), by Adam's cultivation of the garden (Genesis 2:15), and also by Adam naming the animals (Genesis 2:19-20). In Genesis 3:8, humans "heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." This suggests that humans and God were close friends. Second, in resting on the seventh day God provided a regular rhythm for humans to enjoy the created order. These notion aims to counter false worldviews, including dualism, astrology, nihilism, and any philosophy that devalues humankind.<sup>32</sup>

If Genesis is nothing more than an inheritance or modification of ANE mythologies, how could the Biblical authors acquire the idea that humans have dignity due to the image of God? Indeed, this concept has become the foundation of Western moral codes. If humans are nothing more than materials, then using humans like using tools is not inherently immoral. How can we justify the notion that we should treat humans as the end, not the means? The ultimate rationale is: We believe that humans have inalienable rights and dignity, because we are created in the image of God. Genesis 9:6 is very explicit about this point: "Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind." In addition to making murder a crime, the Bible also opposes any type of caste or slavery system.<sup>33</sup>

### A loving God

Given that humans were created for slavery, it is not surprising to see that the concept of a loving god was hardly found in the ANE texts. In contrast, God's love and providence was prevalent in Genesis. On the sixth day God created humankind. "God blessed them, and God said

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<sup>32</sup> Hartley, Kindle Location 940.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 1108-1109.

to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it’” (Genesis 1:28). The concluding remark is: “It was very good” (Genesis 1:31). In the creation account described in Genesis 2, “God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.” And then God created a helper for the man. The creation account of a partner for Adam is beautifully poetic. Dennett’s mockery of the literal meaning is missing the main point. The imagery “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” symbolizes the intimate union of the couple, which results from God’s love. In addition, even though humans sinned against God by eating the forbidden fruit, “God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21).

Conversely, many ANE religions are fear-based. The deity was viewed as some powerful being that was inaccessible and dominating. For example, in the Epic of Gilgamesh when Gilgamesh took a nap on his way to the Cedar Forest, a nightmare awoke him. He then asked his companion Enkidu: “Why am I so disturbed? Did a god pass by? Why are my muscles trembling?” Gods were fearsome beings and humans were not supposed to be close to gods or to obtain peace and happiness from them. Gods were distant masters, but not our friends. Humans could submit to them, but not to love them, and vice versa.<sup>34</sup>

To be fair, “love” is not totally absent from ANE legends. But the form of love is more associated with human lust than divine love. As mentioned before, both Hitchens and Boyer asserted that the concept of God was our projection or invention. It is true to some extent. We could find many human characteristics among ANE gods. *Istar* is a good example. *Istar* was often modeled after those women who enjoyed “free love.” In the Epic of Gilgamesh *Istar* seduced Gilgamesh by trying to attract him into her bed. In a Babylonian hymn from the

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<sup>34</sup> Bottero, 37.

beginning of the second millennium there was such a verse in the praise of the goddess: “Sixty then sixty satisfy themselves in turn upon their nakedness. Young men have tired, Istar will not tire.”<sup>35</sup> In brief, the image of God in Genesis is in a sharp contrast to the ANE gods.

Further, although blessings from God could be found in certain ANE texts, they by no means portray a loving God. For example, in some texts the gods of Ugarit were asked to bestow blessing. And also *Baal* asked *El* to confer his blessing upon King Kirta. It is common that god’s blessings were addressed to deceased royal ancestors, too. Some deities that were the patrons of a particular group or tribe might be asked to curse others. For instance, *Horon* was invoked by Kirta to smash his rebellious son.<sup>36</sup> In short, these gods were like certain deities in many folk religions. They were “used” by humans for self-serving purposes.

#### Did Genesis borrow ideas from the Memphite theology of creation?

One of the seemingly compelling arguments against the uniqueness of Genesis is the resemblance between the Memphite theology of creation and Genesis. The city of Memphis was the place where Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt were united, and the Temple of *Ptah* was situated there. According to the legend, *Ptah* created the universe with his mind (heart) and brought the world into existence by his speech (tongue). It is known as the Logos doctrine.<sup>37</sup> At first glance, the commanding speech looks like how God created the world in Genesis. But the similarity ends here. In the Memphite account *Ptah* thought and spoke together. The thought-process came first and the words came later. But in Genesis God did not go through a thought process, implying that He is Omniscient. According to Brueggemann, the phrase “God said” has a special meaning in Genesis. God calls the world into being to be his faithful world, and it is in

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, 30.

<sup>37</sup> Pritchard, 1-2.

parallel to later calling Israel to be his faithful people. This “saying” or ‘calling” has a rich theological implication: it entails a promise. God promised to take care of the created order and His people.<sup>38</sup> Whatever God says is as firm as a promise.

More importantly, there is one and only one God in the Genesis account and nothing else in the created order were said to possess divine qualities. However, in the Memphite story *Ptah* transmitted life to all gods. The gods *Horus* and *Thoth* are equated with the organs of thought and speech. It was believed that the heart and the tongue could control other parts of the body, and thus *Ptah* was in every body and in every mouth of all gods and all other creatures. The most important point is that *Ptah* assimilated all gods in Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, this creation myth might be both religious and political in nature.

## Conclusion

Genesis was not intended to be a scientific paper or a historical account in the modern sense. It is unfortunate that many Christian college students who subscribe to the literal meaning of Genesis are unable to face the challenges posed by secular writers. It is important to recognize the distinction between mythos and logos so that Genesis could be interpreted in the proper way. Additionally, the creation sequence by day should not be treated as a series of facts; rather, the hidden message is that order came from the creator. Instead of viewing Genesis as one of many ANE myths, it is logical to treat it as a countermeasure against the ANE myths. Genesis distinguishes itself from other myths by denying the divine properties of natural objects and creatures. Furthermore, the ideas that humankind is made in the image of God and the Supreme Being is a loving God are foreign to the ANE civilizations. Last, although there are some striking

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<sup>38</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*. (Louisville, John Knox, 1982), 1.

<sup>39</sup> Pritchard, 1-2.

resemblances between the Memphite creation story and Genesis, Genesis is still outstanding for lacking the concept of polytheism and a political motive.

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